Braintree District Council
Witham Town Centre Strategy

February 2014
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**Witham Town Centre Strategy - A Summary of Key Interventions**

The core purpose of the Witham Town Centre Strategy is to deliver a range of improvements that can make Witham a more attractive place to visit and spend time.

To remain a vital and viable centre Witham must evolve, refocusing its role and function to ensure it continues to provide a range of services and amenities that attracts footfall. We have to recognise that Witham will not compete with the ‘big centres’ in terms of attracting large scale retail activity or major ‘destination’ shopping. As a retail centre Witham’s future lies in its ability to provide a convenient ‘top up’ shop location alongside the unique offer independent retailers and, potentially, the market can offer. By focussing on Witham’s smaller retail and physical assets alongside an evolution of activities and other uses Witham can retain its role and vibrancy as a key centre for residents.

To achieve this the future focus will need to be upon:

- Providing a range of ‘top up’ and local shopping opportunities to meet the needs of each element of the catchment
- Growth of independent, ‘niche’ retail offer
- Increasing the leisure and dining offer
- Reinforcing the civic and events role
- Maintaining and improving accessibility and parking

At the heart of the Witham Town Centre Strategy is the desire to work with the assets the town already possesses. Whilst facing certain challenges Witham remains an attractive and relatively vibrant town centre, in seeking to improve its vitality in the future the strategy should not lose sight of what makes it successful today.

The strategy also seeks to work with the changing context within which Witham sits. The economic proposition for the town is changing with new employers occupying key office buildings close to the town. This will provide a considerable boost for the town centre.

Once combined with the potential for increased trade from new residential development on the periphery of the town centre it is clear that a new approach to the town centre can offer significant rewards.
Beyond the improving catchment there are two key assets to the town that currently do not play a full role in making Witham a shopping and leisure destination. Both the market and the recreation ground are fantastic assets but at present they do not fully integrate with the wider town centre offer and are often overlooked.

Witham has to be in a position to maximise this potential of its growing catchment, creating an attractive environment with a full range of services for workers and residents to access. The key aim of the Strategy is to bring key assets together to present a coordinated and coherent offer that improves the vitality and viability of Witham as a market town by increasing footfall and spend in the town centre through enhancement of its existing assets.

The Strategy has identified 5 key packages of projects that, together, can deliver on Witham’s potential. They provide a portfolio of interventions that seek to combine and maximise both public and private sector investment to deliver key policy aims and increased trade within the town centre. They focus on physical and non-physical interventions in order to provide a boost to the look, feel and functionality of the town centre:

**PACKAGE 1 - A New Heart for Witham**

Creation of a new ‘shared space’ at the heart of the town to provide opportunities for dining, events and market.

Key Projects

- Creation of a shared surface between Newland Street and Guithavon Street
- Revitalisation and relocation of the market
- Improved shop frontages

**PACKAGE 2 - Upgrading Newlands and The Grove Shopping Centres**

Improving the quality of public realm both within and between the two key shopping centres including enhancements to their permeability and connectivity with the wider town. This also provides a potential framework for the phased redevelopment of Newlands Shopping Centre to improve its quality and create an integrated offer with the rest of the town.

Key Projects

- Creation of a new shared surface link between the two Shopping Centres
- Redevelopment of Newlands Shopping Centre
- Upgrades to the Grove Shopping Centre
• Improved signage and wayfinding through and between the Centres

**PACKAGE 3 - Integration of the Recreation Ground**

Enhancing the visibility and attractiveness of access points to the Recreation Ground and enhancing its offer to create a better ‘asset’ within the town centre and generate an increased number of linked trips.

Key Projects:

- Redevelopment of the former Co-op site
- Enhanced gateway on Maldon Road
- New café and facilities within the Recreation Ground
- Improved pedestrian access

**PACKAGE 4 - Transport Improvements**

Coordinate existing transport infrastructure to create enhanced user experience and encourage mode shift by enhancing the pedestrian and cycle environment.

Key Projects:

- Comprehensive review of parking and development of a Car Parking Strategy
- Public Transport Strategy to identify new route, facilities and other enhancements
- Development of the cycle route network to and through the town centre
- New cycle parking facilities within the town centre
- Development of a sustainable Travel Plan for Witham Station

**PACKAGE 5 - Town Centre Promotion**

Provide bespoke promotional activities to encourage use by employees in the town and advertise the town centre offer to new residents and potential new retailers.

Key Projects:

- Promote town centre offer to existing and new employers and employees
- Coordinate events programme and existing offers (such as IndiCard) to retailers
- Develop material to promote Witham to potential new retailers, leisure operators and other target occupiers
1. **Introduction**

1.1 Working in partnership, and in response to the changing dynamics of the retail sector, the District Council, Witham Town Council and the Witham Town Team have identified the need for investment and intervention to strengthen the offer of Witham, enabling it to maximise its strengths and secure greater levels of footfall and spend in the future.

1.2 GVA, supported by Studio REAL and MVA Consultancy, have been appointed by Braintree District Council to prepare a town centre strategy and intervention plan that meets these aims. The core aim of the Strategy is to identify a range of interventions and coordinate their delivery to maximise the regeneration benefit for Witham town centre.

1.3 This Strategy is not intended to start from scratch. It builds on the feedback provided by Witham residents and users of the town centre via the “Talk of the Towns” public consultation undertaken between January and March 2011. The consultation sought to understand public views of Witham, its strengths, weaknesses and how they would like to see it change in the future. The key messages are set out in the following table and provide the starting point for the Strategy.

![Figure 1 - Talk of the Town Key Findings](image)

1.4 Given the strength and depth of the Talk of the Town exercise the Strategy development process did not include a public engagement process. However, to build the project
team’s understanding and to ensure the Strategy developed locally relevant interventions
stakeholder workshops were held at three key points in the project.

1.5 The workshops were open to all members of the Town Council, relevant District Council
members, Essex Highways, Witham Town Team and other key organisations with a stake in
the future of the town centre. The workshops, in turn, acted as a ‘sounding board’ for the
baseline analysis, emerging project ideas and draft strategy enabling local experience,
knowledge and experience of the stakeholders to be included in the final Strategy.

1.6 The approach taken to developing the Strategy has been vital to build agreement
around the key themes and secure partner ‘buy in’ to the range of interventions and
projects identified. Building this consensus throughout the process will be critical for
moving from strategy to delivery given the role the partners will play in supporting, funding
and managing the identified interventions.
2. An Appreciation of Witham

2.1 Witham is a relatively stable and well-performing market town, with an established occupier base, growing catchment and strong urban fabric. These assets provide a solid foundation for future improvement and a successful strategy for the rejuvenation of the town centre needs to work with, and enhance, these assets.

2.2 To develop an effective and locally distinctive way forward for Witham it is vital we understand its history and current context. This section sets out our understanding of Witham as a place; how it has evolved over time and the challenges and opportunities it faces in the future. This understanding underpins the Strategy and interventions set out in subsequent sections of this Report.

History and Urban Form

A brief history

2.3 Witham originates in an area of higher ground rising steeply above the river Brain to the west of the current town centre, known as Chipping Hill. In the early 13th century, in response to trading opportunities, a “new town” was established on the side of the main road between Colchester and London, away from the confines of this early settlement. This medieval out-of-town ribbon development was known as “La Neweland”.

2.4 In the period before the Industrial Revolution, Witham played its role in the cloth manufacturing industry and briefly became a fashionable spa town. However, first and foremost, Witham’s economy was based on its position as a market town and coaching post on the busy thoroughfare between Colchester and London. Many buildings on Newland Street were redeveloped or remodelled to create the impressive range of Georgian buildings and facades that can still be enjoyed today.

2.5 The arrival of the railway line in the 19th century, which roughly followed the alignment of the London to Colchester road, reinforced this position and the town expanded significantly. New streets, such as Guithavon Street, Avenue Road and Collingwood Road were built to connect Newland Street with the railway station to the west and the residential areas that developed around it.

2.6 In the 20th century, Witham housing and industry continued to grow slowly and steadily until the mid-1960’s when the Town Expansion Scheme was introduced to provide housing for London’s overspill. New residential areas and industrial estates were established to the
west and north of the town. Shops and offices were created in the centre of the town. In 1964 Witham was by-passed when the A12 was moved east. Now, in the 21st century, the town sees further growth with the development of new housing estates to the south of the town, close to its access to the A12.

**The town today - urban form**

2.7 Much of the form and structure of the town centre as we know it today can be traced back to its past.

**Historic buildings**

2.8 One of the key assets of the town is its impressive collection of surviving medieval, Georgian and Victorian buildings which greatly contribute to the town centre’s distinctive character. However, a number of unattractive and unsympathetic shop front designs distract from this inherent quality.

![Historic buildings](image1.jpg)

**Newland Street**

2.9 Newland Street follows the alignment of an old Roman Road. It is 800 metres long and straight street that climbs slightly from the river crossing at Bridge Street in the south to its junction with The Avenue in the north. The focus of town centre activities along Newland Street is between Kings Chase in the south and the library in the north, with the busiest stretch between the town hall and Collingwood Road.

2.10 Newland Street is nicely proportioned street. It is flanked by 2 to 5 storey buildings of various style and character dating from the 16th to 20th century, including a high proportion of handsome Georgian properties. For most of its length the street is broad, with space for on-street parking and spacious pavements. However, there are a number of elements that detract from the inherent quality of the street. This includes poor quality of some buildings and shop fronts, and a cluttered, fragmented public realm.
Medieval marketplace

2.11 The broadening of Newland Street near its junction with Guithavon Street marks the location of the medieval marketplace. It forms an important space in what is otherwise a very long and straight street. The space currently lacks definition, due to the clutter of street furniture and utility boxes, the access into Guithavon Street which cuts the space in half, the large bus lay-by and the incoherent approach to surface materials.
Lanes and yards

2.12 The deep, uniform burgage or halfacre plots also date back to the 15th and 16th century. The boundaries of these plots can still be recognised, especially in the southern part of Newland Street. The back of most plots have been developed over time. Access is from Newland Street by means of a series of lanes and yards. These frequent breaks in the main street frontage, offering glimpses of spaces and buildings behind the street frontage are very significant to the character of the town.

East-west focus

2.13 The two most significant “backland” development sites are The Newlands and The Grove Shopping Centres. Positioned on either side of Newland Street, directly opposite each other and with the town’s two biggest car parks behind, they have established a new east-west focus to the town.

2.14 There is a steady flow of pedestrians crossing Newland Street between the two shopping centres. Situated between Collingwood and Maldon Road junction, this is the most heavily trafficked section of Newland Street, causing conflicts between pedestrians and vehicles.
Newlands Centre

2.15 The Newlands Centre was constructed in the 1960’s. It consists of a pedestrian mall set at right angles to Newland Street, flanked by a series of single storey retail units. The frontage on Newland Street consists of a large, brutal four storey block that is at odds with its historic and fine-grained surroundings. The block spans across the pedestrian mall to provide a spacious, but dark entrance into the Centre from Newland Street. At the back of the mall are three large free-standing units with pedestrian passages on either side. These give access to a large public car park.

2.16 Buildings and the outdoor spaces appear dated and worn out. The buildings relate poorly to their surroundings. The sides and backs of the blocks are predominantly formed by blank walls. This is a particular issue for the two freestanding blocks at the back of the mall, which flank the busy pedestrian route to the car park.
The Grove

2.17 The Grove is a more recent development than Newlands Centre. It consists of a large supermarket and car park towards the back of the development, which are linked to Newland Street and Maldon Road through a series of interconnected lanes and squares. Retail units of various shapes and sizes are organised around the squares.

2.18 The Grove Centre is generally of good quality, providing appropriately sized retail units and a well maintained public realm. The main issue of the centre are its weak linkages with the surrounding streets. Due to the “zig-zag” configuration of the routes, there are no direct views in and out of the centre. Furthermore, the lanes connecting the squares with Newland Street, Maldon Road and the office development to the north are narrow and/or flanked by blank walls. The main access onto Newland Street is through a passageway underneath a historic building. It is narrow, dark, unassuming and uninviting and fails to raise the profile of the Grove on the main street.
Witham recreation ground and the river Brain

2.19 Witham town centre is in easy walking distance of attractive open spaces, including the river corridor, and in particular the recreation ground. The latter is located just 100 metres from Newland Street via Kings Chase, yet it feels remote and disconnected from the town centre.

2.20 The presence of a park near a high street can acts as a major benefit to town centres, by increasing footfall through linked trips. In Witham this doesn’t appear to be the case. This could be due to a variety of reasons, such as the limited facilities or attractions in the recreation ground, as well as the poor visual and physical links with Newland Street.
Employment areas

2.21 Just beyond Witham town centre boundaries to the north and east are a number of high density office blocks, such as Mayland House the NHS offices on Collingwood Road. Just beyond are extensive industrial estates.

The Town Centre Offer

2.22 The Talk of the Town exercise highlighted the importance of the retail offer to users of the town centre, recognising the strengths in terms of independent and niche retailers but also a number of weaknesses in the offer principally the loss of ‘multiple’ retailers and the increased number of charity and betting shops.

2.23 The town centre Health Check within the District-wide retail study update (Nathaniel Lichfield and Partners, 2012) considers Witham to be performing “reasonably well” against the vitality and viability measures, noting the limited change in multiple national retailers since the previous Retail Study. Importantly it notes that despite a dominance of ‘service’ activities (45%) footfall has remained constant, highlighting the important retail role Witham plays.

2.24 The Health Check also notes the continuing market presence and role, both in terms of the weekly market (Saturdays) and the twice monthly farmers market in the Grove Centre (Tuesdays).

2.25 The Health Check and Retail Study update highlights the retail challenges facing Witham. Based on survey data the Study estimates that only 16% of potential expenditure on comparison goods (i.e. expenditure on ‘non-food’ items such as clothes and electrical appliances) within the Witham catchment is spent within Witham itself. The majority of spending ‘leaks’ to other retail centres including Chelmsford (45%), Freeport (10%) and Braintree Town Centre (10%).

2.26 The Health Check findings support the key messages of the Talk of the Town consultation, this identified a key weakness of the town is the ability to buy comparison goods such as
clothes and shoes within it. This market share also reflects the scale of the town centre and changing retailer practices (which we consider in more detail later).

2.27 The loss of the Co-Op store from the southern end of Newland Street is likely to have had a significant impact on the retention of comparison goods expenditure given its focus on electrical goods. More widely the loss of the Co-Op has had a significant impact on the footfall to this part of Witham, where once it acted as a major draw from the car parks further north, this influence has now been removed, potentially reducing the levels of trade for other retailers along this part of Newland Street.

2.28 The retail study records a much better retention of expenditure on convenience goods such as food and newspapers, with over three quarters of all spend by residents within Witham’s catchment spent within the town. The remainder of the spend ‘leaks’ to neighbouring towns including Maldon, Braintree and Chelmsford.

2.29 This higher level of spend retention reflects the presence of two major foodstores within or outside of the town centre, namely Tesco within The Grove and Morrison on Braintree Road. This is further supported by the presence of Iceland and Farm Foods within the Newlands Centre.

2.30 These shopping patterns suggest that the role of Witham is changing, with an increased focus on smaller ‘everyday’ top up and service trips rather than for major or large purchases. This changing role is reflected in the share of retail units.

**Figure 5 - Share of Town Centre Units by Activity**

![Pie chart showing the share of town centre units by activity.](source: Experian, 2013)
2.31 As shown in Figure 5 less than half the units within the town centre are considered to be ‘retail stores’ (which include a combination of convenience and comparison retailers). Even with the inclusion of the charity shop category the proportion of retail stores remains below 50%. Within the retail mix there is a considerable presence of ‘budget’ retailers a 99p Store, Fabs, Peacocks and Select.

2.32 Almost a quarter of the units within the town centre fall within the bars, cafes and restaurants category. Whilst this suggests a potential shift in the role of the town centre and could provide a base to grow the evening economy. However, whilst there is a significant presence there are questions around the quality and range of the offer, with a significant number of units being traditional cafes and take-aways. This issue was also identified within the Talk of the Towns consultation.

2.33 However the investment by Prezzo, who are refurbishing a prominent building at the junction of Newland Street and Guithavon Street, suggests that there is scope to expand the offer and could act as a catalyst (alongside Anchovies which is opposite) to raise the standard of the evening offer.

2.34 The independent and niche retail offer of Witham was viewed as a key strength in the Talk of the Town. This importance is underlined when the share of employment is taken into account, as shown in Figure 6 below.

Figure 6 - Share of Employment by Retailer Type

2.35 Over 50% of people employed within the town centre work within independent businesses, i.e. businesses where their only outlet is in Witham or where a ‘chain’ has less than two stores nationally. Whilst this is less than for Halstead it is considerably higher than both Braintree and Chelmsford. This again reflects the differing scales of the town centres and their attractiveness to large multiple retailers.
2.36 Allied to the core retail offer is Witham market, which is located on the car park between Lockram Lane and Collingwood Road and runs on a Saturday. The market has a ‘traditional’ offer with approximately 8 stalls selling fruit and veg, hardware, pet supplies, fresh fish, plants and clothing. A further stall sells spectacles whilst a gold dealer also operates from the market.

**Figure 7 - Witham Market, Lockram Lane Car Park**

2.37 Overall, it is clear that Witham has seen a significant fall in the breadth and depth of the retail mix within the town centre, this in turn has led to further losses of large occupiers and retail ‘brands’. The impact of the recession is also evident, with a number of vacant units occurring as a result of retailers that have gone into administration in the last 2-3 years, whilst this is not a direct result of local trading conditions the empty properties impact on the perception of the town centre.

2.38 As noted in the Retail Health Check vacancy rates in the town have increased, with approximately 10% of units within the Newlands Centre vacant at the time of the Study. Whilst this strategy has not directly surveyed vacant premises within the town we would estimate that this rate is likely to apply across the whole town centre.

2.39 However, there are a number of strengths that are likely to provide opportunities in the future. Importantly the retail mix caters for the town centre catchment, enabling those on lower incomes to shop locally but also provide some higher end retail to attract more affluent residents. Maintaining this balance will be vital for the ongoing health of the town centre.
2.40 There is a reasonably strong and established independent retailer base. This, alongside a relatively stable base of ‘multiple’ retailers (including foodstores), can underpin future growth of the retail mix and ensure the offer in Witham is different from other, larger town centres.

2.41 Similarly the presence of restaurants such as Anchovies and the planned opening of Prezzo will provide a foundation for growing the evening economy and providing an additional draw for people to come into the town centre.

2.42 Whilst the current market is limited in terms of its offer and visibility it offers opportunities to introduce new retailers to the town and potentially replace some of the offer that has been lost in recent years.

**Planning Policy Context**

2.43 Given the importance of new development opportunities in creating a positive benefit for Witham town centre it is vital that the Strategy for its rejuvenation is developed in line with the wider vision and spatial strategy identified by Braintree District Council. The core principles for the future growth and development of the town are set out within the adopted Core Strategy (September 2011).

2.44 The over-arching vision which the policy base seeks “to maintain and develop vibrant and prosperous main towns of Braintree, Witham and Halstead, by encouraging new development and regeneration schemes that support their function as major service centres, with a range of good quality employment, shops, services and cultural provision” (Pg 27). The Strategy therefore needs to provide a toolkit for delivering this aim, coordinating a range of interventions (both physical and non-physical) that encourage footfall and enhance Witham’s draw for shoppers and visitors.

2.45 The “Spatial Strategy” establishes Witham as one of the Main Towns within the District, indicating that over the plan period it will be a major focus for development, both in terms of housing growth and new retail and leisure floorspace. It recognises that through its strong transport links and high levels of local employment it is capable of providing an acceptable location for future growth. Key growth identified within Witham includes:

- Up to 700 new dwellings within existing boundaries;
- Major urban extensions to the north and south west of the town centre;
- Upgrading of Newlands Shopping Centre;
- Completion of the Maltings Lane development to incorporate a new business park;
• Upgrading and replacement of health and leisure facilities, including a new swimming pool; and
• The provision of new school capacity to service population growth and enhance existing academies.

2.46 It is vital that the town centre offer is upgraded in line with these major growth proposals to ensure Witham is the destination of choice for new residents and workers. As leisure, health and retail facilities (through the Newlands Shopping Centre) are upgraded it is important to ensure these are fully integrated into the town centre offer through sustainable transport modes and links, promoting a new level of ‘linked trips’ into the town.

2.47 The Core Strategy also provides specific direction for the regeneration of the District’s key town centres, including Witham. This regeneration framework recognises the respective role each town plays both within the District and the wider North Essex retail market, with Witham being strongly influenced by both Colchester and Chelmsford as larger centres.

2.48 The priority identified for Witham is to enhance the current offer within the town, rather than seek to attract significant additional growth (Pg 66), this responds directly to the physical constraints of the town centre and the stronger offer made by larger centres.

2.49 The redevelopment of the Newlands Shopping Centre is the primary opportunity to upgrade the retail offer within the town centre. Policy CS6 directs future development to meet additional retail needs to Newlands Shopping Centre and the adjoining sites.

2.50 Integrating new growth into the existing centres is critical to their long term success. Policy CS7 seeks to secure sustainable, enhanced accessibility through coordinated transport planning. This seeks to enhance accessibility through new infrastructure linked to Witham Station, upgrading and ‘joining up’ of the cycle network and management of vehicular traffic and parking.

2.51 The Town Centre Strategy set out here develops the themes of the Core Strategy into a more detailed set of actions and interventions, ensuring that redevelopment and growth are linked with enhancements to the town centre offer, its built fabric and accessibility.

2.52 The pre-submission draft of the Site Allocation and Development Management Plan (September 2013) identifies both the Newlands Shopping Centre and former Co-Op site as opportunities for retail development under Policy ADM33. This directs future development towards retail and wider appropriate ‘town centre’ uses.

2.53 Policy ADM34 develops the principle of ADM33 in more detail identifying the specific recommendations and aspirations for the future redevelopment of the Newlands
Shopping Centre site. The policy seeks a comprehensive, mixed use development that directly delivers

- Provision of convenience and comparison retail uses;
- Refurbishment of Newland Shopping Centre;
- Provision of residential uses;
- Satisfactory service access;
- Appropriate provision for any displaced parking;
- Enhancement to the frontage to Newland Street, the conservation area and the setting of listed buildings;
- Retention of pedestrian access through Lockram's Lane;
- Public realm improvements.

2.54 The town centre strategy should seek to provide a framework within which both sites can be brought forward in a manner that ensures they integrate into the wider town centre offer and public sector intervention can complement private sector investment.

**Witham Town Transport Baseline Conditions**

2.55 **Figure 8** shows the highway network within Witham and its surrounding area.

2.56 Witham is well served with good highway links. The A12 Witham Bypass, a high quality dual carriageway road, provides the town with good access to key regional towns such as Chelmsford and Colchester and also a direct connection to London. It also provides a direct link to the UK’s wider strategic transport network through its connections to the M25 Motorway and via other highway routes (A131 and A120) to Stansted Airport. Like similar towns served by a bypass, vehicle delays can occur at local routes which access the A12 during peak times of the day.

2.57 Witham’s local highway routes include the B1389 which passes southwest to northeast through the centre and connects directly with the A12 at either end of the town. The B1018 runs north/south through the town and provides a route to Braintree in the north and the A12 in the south, before continuing towards Maldon. Currently Witham is quite car dominated with substantial on-street parking on the main routes and complex vehicle movements within the town centre contributing towards localised traffic delays. Traffic delays in Witham are quite typical for a town of its nature with a tight network of local roads which results in particular local traffic problems with congestion hotspots.
2.58 According to evidence developed from Braintree District Council’s Local Plan, the town also experiences relatively high levels of HGV movements with large vehicles using the B1018 to travel between Maldon and Braintree.

**Figure 8 - Witham Highway Network**

![Witham Highway Network](image)

2.59 Details on the location of existing on and off street car parks together with their parking supply and charging regime are included below in **Figure 9** and **Table 1**.

2.60 Anecdotal evidence from site visits made during typical weekdays and discussions with key stakeholders at the Witham Town Centre Workshop, suggests there is currently high demand for short-stay on-street parking along Newlands Street. This is understandable
given its location and visibility along the main route into the town. Parking is also free for up to an hour, making it very convenient for visitors. Compared to similar towns in the UK, Witham has a relatively high supply of such short-term parking. Furthermore, the one hour free period is also relatively long when compared to the typical 20 or 30 minutes, often in operation elsewhere. Visitors parking for over 30 minutes are likely to be undertaking a more substantial shopping or leisure activity than a simple short ‘pop in’ convenience type trip.

**Figure 9 - Witham Car Parking Details**

2.61 Further anecdotal evidence and our own spot surveys suggest the town’s short-term off-street car parks have spaces available for visitors throughout the day during a typical weekday. This suggests that even though Newlands Drive and Mayland Road car parks are physically close to the town centre, they are not as attractive as the free on-street
parking along Newland Street. This is likely to be due to a combination of factors including their location off the main High Street, the need to pay to park (although they are not particularly expensive in comparison with neighbouring towns), inadequate directional signage for drivers wishing to access them and poor walking links and wayfinding signage between them and the heart of the town.

2.62 It should also be noted that visitors using the short stay on-street parking will tend to limit their stay in the town centre to under an hour and not be encouraged to stay longer to visit shops and activities in other parts of the town.

2.63 For the Mill Lane short term car park, its distance away from the centre is likely to be making it relatively unattractive parking for town centre visitors, given that other closer options are available for free.

**Table 1 - Witham Town Car Park Information**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Car Park Type</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Parking Supply</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Short Stay on-street</td>
<td>Town Centre (Newlands Street and Collingwood Road)</td>
<td>~90 spaces</td>
<td>Between 8:00am and 6:00pm Monday to Saturday, vehicles can park free up to 1 hour with no returning within 3 hours. Parking is unrestricted outside this period.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short Stay Off-street</td>
<td>Town Centre car parks (Newlands Drive and Mayland Road)</td>
<td>~125 spaces</td>
<td>Parking tariff based on £0.70 (0-1hrs), £1.50 (1-3hrs), £3.00 (3-6hrs), £5.50 (6+hrs). Current promotional tariff reduces parking charges to 10p after 3:00pm.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short Stay Off-street</td>
<td>Edge of town car parks (Mill Lane and White Horse)</td>
<td>~ 115 spaces</td>
<td>Same parking tariff as off-street parking above.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long Stay Off-Street</td>
<td>Town centre car park (Lockram Lane)</td>
<td>~41 spaces</td>
<td>Season Tickets only. Closes every Saturday to accommodate the Market.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long Stay Off-street</td>
<td>Witham Rail Station</td>
<td>~ 406 spaces</td>
<td>Daily charges apply (£5.40 peak, £3.30 off peak)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Off-street parking</td>
<td>Grove Shopping Centre</td>
<td>~ 369 spaces</td>
<td>For Tesco Customers only. (parking is free)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2.64 Witham Rail Station to the north of the town centre also provides a pay and display long stay car park, primarily for rail travellers. This car park has a supply of around 400 spaces and experiences very high demand during a typical weekday with significant numbers of rail commuters accessing the station by car. The long stay White Horse car park, just to the north of the station also provides around 72 spaces for rail commuters and town centre workers.

2.65 Substantial parking is also provided within the Grove Shopping centre. The 369 spaces are free for three hours for customers of the centre only (store purchase is required). Given its location it is likely that some people parking at the Grove centre are also shopping in the wider town centre.

**Witham - Public Transport Services**

2.66 Figure 10 shows the current provision of public transport services in Witham.

**Figure 10 - Public Transport Services in Witham**

![Map of Witham's public transport services](image)
Rail Services

2.67 Witham benefits from a main line station and is well served by the rail network. Greater Anglia provides key commuter service on the Great Eastern Main Line to London via Liverpool Street, to Chelmsford, Colchester and other locations such as Ipswich, Norwich, Clacton-on-sea and Braintree. As shown below in Table 2, rail services from the station to key destinations are relatively fast and frequent. This makes it very popular with commuters and at around 2.2 million annual journeys; Witham is one of busiest stations in Essex.

Table 2 - Key Rail Services at Witham

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Route</th>
<th>Frequency (peak hour)</th>
<th>Typical Journey Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Witham to London Liverpool St (Direct)</td>
<td>9 trains</td>
<td>~ 45 to 50 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Witham to Colchester (Direct)</td>
<td>5 trains</td>
<td>~12 to 17 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Witham to Chelmsford (Direct)</td>
<td>6 trains</td>
<td>~ 9 to 12 minutes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.68 In 2011 the station also benefited from new infrastructure with a new foot bridge and station entrance to improve accessibility, particularly from the car park.

2.69 Given its popularity, particularly from commuters who access the station by car from neighbouring towns and villages outside Witham, there is a high level of car parking demand surrounding the station. Such demand is creating local traffic congestion within the vicinity, particularly during the weekday peak periods.

Bus services

2.70 Table 3 provides further details of the bus services which currently operate within Witham. There are a number of different routes which provide the local community with good links into the town centre. However, at only 2 buses per hour on average they are all relatively low frequency. Furthermore, in comparison to some of the key destinations such as Chelmsford and Colchester town centres, a typical journey by bus is likely to be significantly longer compared to the rail service.
### Table 3 - Witham Bus Services

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bus Service</th>
<th>Key Destination</th>
<th>Typical Frequency</th>
<th>Typical Journey Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>131 &amp; 132</td>
<td>Braintree</td>
<td>2 buses per hour</td>
<td>~ 40 minutes journey to Braintree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>342</td>
<td>Black Notley</td>
<td>2 buses per day</td>
<td>~ 20 minutes journey to Black Notley (off peak only)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38 &amp; 39</td>
<td>Within Witham</td>
<td>2 buses per hour</td>
<td>~ 15 minutes loop around the town.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90</td>
<td>Maldon</td>
<td>2 buses per hour</td>
<td>~ 50 minutes journey to Maldon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>71 (A,C,X)</td>
<td>Chelmsford &amp; Colchester</td>
<td>2 buses per hour</td>
<td>~ 40 minutes journey to Chelmsford and Colchester.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>676 &amp; 594</td>
<td>Colchester and Westcliff</td>
<td></td>
<td>School Bus</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2.71 **Figure 11** shows the cycle infrastructure within Witham and its surrounding area.

**Figure 11 - Witham Cycle Facilities**

2.72 Witham’s local environment, with its relatively flat terrain, tight catchment and pleasant surroundings suggests that cycling should be a popular mode of transport for journeys less than 5 km. However, at the moment cycle trips seem to be relatively low and not particularly encouraged with poor cycle infrastructure facilities within the area.
Currently cycle routes are provided to the west of the town centre with very limited coverage within other areas, although as shown in Figure 4, further routes are proposed around the town.

Cycle parking facilities in the town are centred around Collingwood Road and Newland Street, in the main shopping area of town and adjacent to the market. This town centre parking is relatively poor, with limited spaces, poor quality, no shelter facilities and in sub-optimal locations.

There has been a recent increase in cycle parking facilities at the rail station, which evidence from site visits suggest are well utilised by rail users.

**Figure 12** highlights the key pedestrian movements and crossing facilities within Witham town centre.

**Figure 12 - Witham Town Centre - Key Pedestrian Movements**
2.77 Similarly to cycling, given its environment, walking trips should be popular in the town especially for journeys less than a mile.

2.78 Within the town centre there does appear however to be a lack of a defined retail circuit and the wayfinding system is limited. This situation doesn’t particularly encourage people to visit shops and/or other leisure activities located within different parts of the centre, i.e. linked trips within the town.

2.79 Observations from site visits suggest that the main pedestrian movements in the town centre are focused along Newland Street and between the Newlands and Grove shopping centres. The Maltings Academy and Rail Station are also significant generators of pedestrian movements to and from the wider town centre area.

2.80 As highlighted in Figure 12, pedestrian crossing facilities are provided at certain locations along the town’s main High Street. These include signalised crossings at Newland Street’s junctions with Maldon Road and Collingwood Road, and zebra crossings on Newland Street south of Guithavon Street and north of Collingwood Road. Sections of the footway along Newland Street are also relatively narrow.

2.81 It was also observed that a significant number of pedestrians cross Newland Street along its section between the Maldon Road and Collingwood Road junctions. While this section of road has no crossing facilities, the high pedestrian levels are understandable given the desire line between the Grove and Newlands Shopping Centres which front either side of the road.

Witham - Baseline Transport Conclusions

2.82 The conclusions of the baseline review of transport conditions within Witham are presented in Table 4 below in the form of a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) analysis, which summarises the current and possible future situation for the town and associated transport risk.
Table 4 Witham - Transport SWOT Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strengths</th>
<th>Weaknesses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Good access to strategic highway network (A12/M25)</td>
<td>Localised traffic congestion during peak periods, particularly through town centre, on connections to A12 and close to the rail station.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fast and frequent rail service to London and key local towns (Chelmsford and Colchester)</td>
<td>On street parking along town centre detracts from street scene and ambience for pedestrians.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very significant on street parking along Newland Street is convenient for town centre shops</td>
<td>Existing cycle facilities relatively poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Convenient, relatively low cost off street car parking around the town with spare capacity</td>
<td>Limited bus services (low frequency)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reasonably good coverage of bus routes to the town.</td>
<td>Relatively poor wayfinding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good mix of facilities within the town. Potential to serve catchment well.</td>
<td>One hour free parking discourages longer visits to the town centre.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opportunities</th>
<th>Threats</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reduce traffic congestion through the town and at rail station by improving access to station for sustainable transport modes</td>
<td>Increasing traffic congestion in future without steps to encourage mode shift from car to sustainable modes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve connections between the existing/potential development sites and town centre for sustainable transport modes.</td>
<td>Lack of connection between town centre and potential development sites.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enhance the urban realm to create a better environment for pedestrians</td>
<td>Isolated communities not linked to town centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve cycling facilities to encourage cycling within town and surrounding area</td>
<td>Poor accessibility to the town centre likely to reduce visitor numbers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maximise efficient use of car parking in the town by re-balancing the demand between on and off street parking.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Changing Character and Role of Market Towns

2.83 The role and function of high streets within market town centres has constantly evolved since their origins as the key trading hub for the range of smaller villages and hamlets in their surrounding area. The traditional role of market towns as the principal location for shopping, whilst changing in form and nature, had remained consistent until the end of the twentieth century when both retailer and shopper habits began to change.

2.84 Major changes in how the retail sector functions are having considerable impacts on the high street offer within market towns. Increasing competition between high street and online retailers is driving the sector to seek increasing efficiencies to be able to maximise profits whilst still offering competitive prices.

2.85 For the major, multiple outlet retailers ("multiples") this has resulted in a drive for greater sales efficiencies, mainly by increasing the value of sales per square foot of retail floorspace. The multiples' strategy has been to focus on retaining highly efficient stores with large open floorplates located within a smaller number of major town centre and shopping centre locations.

2.86 This approach has been replicated across the range of major high street retailers effectively reinforcing the trend and increasing the market dominance and share of the major centre. It has also presented a dual challenge for smaller, historic market towns which a. cannot provide the scale of units major retailers require and b. do not have sufficient footfall to attract major retailers to the units available (partly because shoppers are now able to travel more easily to larger centres).

2.87 For Witham the scale, offer and accessibility of Chelmsford provides the major local draw, however given the road and rail infrastructure Lakeside regional shopping centre and Westfield Stratford also draw spend away from the traditional town centre. Similarly the different offer presented by Freeport, as a designer outlet village with associated food and leisure offer, has attracted shoppers away from Witham. These factors have driven a number of occupiers to leave Witham which, alongside recession-driven closures, have significantly affected the town’s retail offer and increased vacancy rates.

2.88 The increased influence of these major, more distant, out of town centres reflects a significant change in shopper behaviour. Until relatively recently shopping had been viewed as a ‘necessity’ however as disposable incomes have risen and a wider range of shops opened it has become a leisure and recreational activity. Major shopping centres and town centres have responded to this change by providing a much broader range of
services and amenities to complement the core retail offer such as bars, restaurants and cinemas.

2.89 Even the traditional unique selling point and draw of market towns - the market itself - has seen its role diminished considerably since the turn of the century. The rise of the discount retail sector through stores as varied as Primark, The 99p Store, Wilkinsons etc has seen the traditional market ‘niche’ become crowded, with similar goods offered at similar (if not cheaper) prices within more pleasant shopping environments, the ability to try clothes on, multiple payment methods and clear returns policies and guarantees.

2.90 As such, the role Witham plays in the future will continue to change and is likely to become increasingly focussed on providing ‘top up’ shopping, specialist retail opportunities and leisure and service provision for local residents. By working from the existing strong foundations in the town this Strategy seeks to put in place the key areas of focus to enhance the attractiveness of the town, enabling it to expand its role and continue to be a draw for footfall.
3. **The Strategy**

3.1 Having considered the nature of Witham as a town centre, its historic context and the challenges it faces in retaining a vibrant and vital centre for the surrounding communities, this section focuses on the development of a strategy that delivers a range of improvements to the town centre to make it a more attractive place to visit and spend time.

3.2 To remain a vital and viable centre, Witham must evolve, refocusing its role and function to ensure it continues to provide a range of services and amenities that attract footfall. We have to recognise that Witham will not compete with the ‘big centres’ in terms of attracting large-scale retail activity or major ‘destination’ shopping. As a retail centre, Witham’s future lies in its ability to provide a convenient ‘top up’ shop location alongside the unique offer independent retailers and, potentially, the market can offer. By focussing on Witham’s smaller retail and physical assets alongside an evolution of activities and other uses, Witham can retain its role and vibrancy as a key centre for residents.

3.3 To achieve this, the future focus will need to be upon:

- Providing a range of ‘top up’ and local shopping opportunities to meet the needs of each element of the catchment
- Growth of independent, ‘niche’ retail offer
- Increasing the leisure and dining offer
- Reinforcing the civic and events role
- Maintaining and improving accessibility and parking

**Aims and Objectives**

3.4 At the heart of the Witham Town Centre Strategy is the desire to work with the assets the town already possesses. Whilst facing certain challenges, Witham remains an attractive and relatively vibrant town centre, in seeking to improve its vitality in the future, the strategy should not lose sight of what makes it successful today.

3.5 The strategy also seeks to work with the changing context within which Witham sits. The economic proposition for the town is changing with new employers occupying key office buildings close to the town.
3.6 The occupation of Mayland House will bring 600 new employees to the town, extending the day time catchment considerably. Separately the NHS is increasing the workforce within their building on Collingwood Road.

3.7 On their own this will provide a considerable boost for the town centre; however the town has to be in a position to maximise this potential, creating an attractive environment with a full range of services for workers to access. Once combined with the potential for increased trade from new residential development on the periphery of the town centre it is clear that a new approach to the town centre can offer significant rewards.

3.8 To capture the benefit of new residents there will need to be investment in the connections to and around the town centre, particularly by increasing options for walking and cycling. This could be tied into the wider aspirations for promoting healthier lifestyles in the district and the existing or new town centre events and promotional activities.

3.9 Beyond the improving catchment there are two key assets to the town that currently do not play a full role in making Witham a shopping and leisure destination. Both the market and the recreation ground are fantastic assets but at present they do not fully integrate with the wider town centre offer and are often overlooked.

3.10 Therefore, the key aim of the Strategy is to bring these assets together to present a coordinated and coherent offer that improves the vitality and viability of Witham as a market town by increasing footfall and spend in the town centre through enhancement of its existing assets.

**Spatial Framework**

3.11 By working with the current form of the town and linking its key assets together there is the opportunity to deliver a series of investments and interventions that, whilst modest in their own right, combine to make a significant impact on the town centre. The coordination of these interventions is designed to build upon the existing spatial framework, strengthening key nodes of activity, improving permeability and accessibility, and enhancing the role each asset plays in drawing footfall to the town.

3.12 The Spatial Framework serves to highlight the strengths and weaknesses of the town and therefore suggests the location and nature of appropriate interventions that, over time, can work together to improve the town for all visitors.
3.13 **Figure 13** provides a spatial framework for the development and improvement of Witham town centre’s physical environment. It summarises the key elements of the urban fabric that any public or private sector investment in the town seeks to protect, enhance or improve. These include:

**Newland Street**

3.14 Newland Street is Witham’s main asset. Although it may no longer have the biggest or most popular shops, with its attractive proportions, historic buildings, spacious pavements and the availability of on-street parking it provides great potential as a setting for the wide variety of town centre activities a successful 21st century market town ought to offer. This not only includes shops and services, but also eating, drinking, markets and celebrations with on-street entertainment such as music, art and theatre.
3.15 Investment in Newland Street should include public realm improvements (street surfaces, street furniture and soft landscaping), shop front improvements and street and feature lighting schemes. Although the whole of Newland Street would benefit from these types of improvements, the best value for money would be achieved by concentrating efforts in the core area.

Lanes and yards

3.16 There are frequent breaks in the Newland Street frontage that give access to little lanes and yards. These lanes and yards add greatly to the character of the town and would provide great locations for small shops and cafes or small, start-up businesses. Any changes to the town’s physical environment (i.e. through redevelopment of backland sites) should seek to:

- protect existing lanes and yards, retaining their original narrow dimensions;
- retain or create public access, including through routes where possible / appropriate;
- introduce an active frontage along the lane (i.e. shop fronts, doors and windows opening out onto the lane);
- Encourage mixed-use development.

3.17 Other measures to improve access to and through the lanes, i.e. by means of signing, lighting, soft landscaping and/or art should also be realised.

The Newland and Grove Shopping Centres

3.18 The Newlands and Grove Shopping Centres and adjacent car parks form important destinations in the town centre, yet their links with the wider town centre are generally poor. A key focus for investment in the two shopping centres should be to improve its relationship with the surrounding streets and spaces, by establishing a clear and legible network of (pedestrian) routes through the centres that fit seamlessly with the surrounding streets and spaces. The aim should not be to create better shopping centres, but to create attractive, and well-connected parts of the town.

Recreation ground and river corridor

3.19 The recreation ground is a great asset at a short distance from the town centre. If an access through the land surrounding the property known as Gimson could be realised, the recreation ground together with the river corridor could become a multi-functional green space resource that from a great arc around the town centre.
3.20 Investment in the recreation ground and the routes towards it could help to encourage linked trips, in particular when the leisure aspects of the town centre (family-friendly restaurants, coffee shops, street performances) will develop. To support this improving of the link via Kings Chase would also be advantageous.

**Approach**

3.21 The Strategy and intervention approach builds upon the Spatial Framework, identifying projects across the town that would contribute to raising the quality, increasing footfall and broadening the town centre offer.

3.22 This provided a ‘long list’ of potential intervention projects, summarise in the table below.

*Table 5 - Project Long List*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ref</th>
<th>Project Description</th>
<th>Rationale</th>
<th>Timeframe</th>
<th>Outputs</th>
<th>Impacts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>W1</td>
<td>New Market Square</td>
<td>Relocation of the market to Newland Street</td>
<td>The market is currently not prominent within the town centre; as such it fails to act as a significant footfall driver for Newland Street shops. Similarly the footfall does not support a consistent and strong offer within the market</td>
<td>Long term</td>
<td>New 'heart' to the town centre, improved market trading position</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W2</td>
<td>Improve Market Offer</td>
<td>Refocus and extend existing market and to deliver higher quality produce, replace lost retailers from the town.</td>
<td>Create a more attractive and improved market to attract custom. Broaden the retail base in the town centre.</td>
<td>Short term</td>
<td>Improved market offer to create new footfall driver.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W3</td>
<td>Improved Shopping Centre Link</td>
<td>Reduce the domination of traffic between the Grove and Newlands Shopping Centres through changes to the road surface, altered crossings etc</td>
<td>Enable ease of movement between the two retail anchors to improve linked trips.</td>
<td>Medium term</td>
<td>Improved coordination of the town's main retail areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W4</td>
<td>Lanes &amp; Yards</td>
<td>Make better use of side and rear spaces within the town. Including lighting, physical</td>
<td>Bring historic character of the urban form to the fore and enable quiet spaces to be delivered away from the main Newland Street traffic thoroughfare</td>
<td>Short-Medium Term</td>
<td>Improved way finding, space utilisation and character</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W5</td>
<td>Connecting Green Spaces</td>
<td>Witham recreation ground and the river corridor are key assets that are currently disconnected from the town centre offer. Improved links will help to draw people to the town centre from the park and encourage sustainable forms of access</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Short term</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Improved park and green access</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Improved footfall, greater integration, seen as a town centre asset</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W6</td>
<td>Station Gateway</td>
<td>The station is physically separated from the town centre and presents an unattractive point of arrival for the town. Lack of signage makes navigation into the town centre difficult.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Short term</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Improved signage and public realm</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Increased footfall, positive perception of the town on arrival</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W7</td>
<td>Newland Shopping Centre</td>
<td>Upgrades to the physical environment. Initially within the shopping centre, which could be phased over time with initial action focussed on enhancing the current offer/stock through repair/maintenance and replacement of street furniture etc</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Improvements</td>
<td>Whilst trading relatively well there are clear signs of neglect in the fabric of the buildings, street furniture and play equipment which has a negative impact on the perception of the town. Enhancing the Centre through maintenance programmes and phased upgrades would enable it to be more 'in-keeping' with the quality of the rest of the town.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Short-Medium Term</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Enhanced shopping centre environment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Improved relationship and offer of the town centre</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W8</td>
<td>Grove Centre Improvements</td>
<td>Improve the façade and entrance from Newland Street and improved links, through routes to Mayland House. Improvements to the entrance to complement the wider quality of the town.</td>
<td>Currently the access through the Grove Centre is unclear to visitors hiding it from Newland Street and providing a weak link from the car park to Newland Street. Improvements will help visitors and workers access the wider town.</td>
<td>Short-Medium Term</td>
<td>Improved wayfinding and entrance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W9</td>
<td>Former Co-Op Site</td>
<td>Bring site back in to active use through temporary trading and (longer term) proactive pursuit of a new occupier. May require longer term redevelopment</td>
<td>Formerly acted as a key driver of footfall along Newland Street, therefore impact of vacant premises is greater on wider town than just the loss of the retailer. Bringing 'animation' back to this area will benefit the town centre</td>
<td>Short-Medium Term</td>
<td>Reused key town centre building</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W10</td>
<td>Shop Front Design Strategy</td>
<td>Policy and potential funding support to reinstate historic character through retail frontages. Potential to phase approach, with initial focus close to Guithavon Street</td>
<td>Enhance the key selling point of the town centre</td>
<td>Short term</td>
<td>Enhanced town centre character</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W11</td>
<td>Colour and Material Palette</td>
<td>Designation of agreed palette for future refurbishment</td>
<td>Ad hoc refurbishment can damage the overall quality and appearance of the town weakening its offer.</td>
<td>Short term</td>
<td>Enhanced town centre character</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W12</td>
<td>Illumination Strategy</td>
<td>Improve street lighting and enhance</td>
<td>Parts of the town can be uninviting at night, leaving the town looking uncared for and reducing evening</td>
<td>Short term</td>
<td>Enhanced town centre character</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>appearance of key buildings</td>
<td>activity.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W13</td>
<td>Car Parking Strategy</td>
<td>Review of car parking provision to ensure it is in the right location and meets needs.</td>
<td>Maximise the usage of car parking and reduce provision of under-utilised space to enable wider improvements</td>
<td>Short term</td>
<td>Fit for purpose parking provision (layout, location, price)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W14</td>
<td>Pedestrian Access</td>
<td>Introduce new and consistent wayfinding signage to bring the town centre together</td>
<td>Currently a lack of defined pedestrian routes limits the ability for visitors to navigate between places and thus reduces linked trips.</td>
<td>Short term</td>
<td>Improved town centre legibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W15</td>
<td>Public Transport Improvements</td>
<td>Upgrading of bus facilities and services to encourage greater use by new and existing residents</td>
<td>Currently there is a high reliance on car access in part driven by a lack of ‘viable’ alternatives for most visitors.</td>
<td>Short-Medium Term</td>
<td>Improved facilities and service frequency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W16</td>
<td>Cycle Route Network</td>
<td>Improve facilities for cycling and cyclists in the town centre through parking provision, signage and routes.</td>
<td>Whilst access via the river corridor is good, in-centre movement and facilities are poor. Enhancement will help achieve a modal shift.</td>
<td>Short Term</td>
<td>Improved access and infrastructure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W17</td>
<td>Engagement with Local Employers</td>
<td>Promote the town centre offer to all local employers to enhance daytime and early evening footfall. A coordinated programme of incentives could be delivered for local workers.</td>
<td>Within the adjoining industrial estates and Mayland House there is a considerable workforce with easy access to the town centre. Encouraging these to use the town centre will enhance the viability and vitality of the centre at key times.</td>
<td>Short term</td>
<td>Increased daytime footfall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W18</td>
<td>Promotion to Retailers</td>
<td>Directly approach retailers (particularly food/restaurants) to explain the opportunities of the town, particularly linked to investments and improvements being made, and the profile of the catchment</td>
<td>Witham has a strong catchment but weak market presence and may be ‘missed’ by some retailers. The rejuvenation of the town provides an opportunity to promote its offer and encourage new investment</td>
<td>Medium term</td>
<td>New retailers and improved market awareness</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Having identified the potential interventions these were then ‘scored’ against their deliverability and likely impact on achieving the aims for the town centre. The assessment tool and logic model are set out in the accompanying appendix, however a summary of the scoring approach is provided below.

### Table 6 - Project Assessment Approach

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project Title</th>
<th>E.g. New Market Square</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Project Description</td>
<td>E.g. Relocation of the market to Newland Street</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rationale</td>
<td>What is the rationale for this project? Where are the reasons for its suggestion?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inputs</td>
<td>How much will the project cost? What are the additional cost considerations? What is the delivery timeframe?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Deliverability Considerations | What factors may affect the feasibility of the project? Considerations are likely to include:  
  - Cost  
  - Transport  
  - Market Demand  
  - Is there a requirement for further development of the project prior to delivery?  
  - Partner/stakeholder/community engagement |
| Synergy | How does this project link to other projects? Is it dependent on others? Is it an anchor project? |
| Output | What will be the primary output from the completion of the project? |
| Impact | What is the potential wider benefit and influence (i.e. increased footfall)? |
| Deliverability | Project scored on a scale of 1 – 5 (1 is low and 5 is high) depending on the ease of which it can be timely delivered. |
| Scale of Impact | Project scored on a scale of 1 – 5 (1 is low and 5 is high) depending on the overall impact it will have. |
| Overall Score | Sum of deliverability multiplied by scale of impact |
| Scoring Summary | Summary of the scores given |

The outputs of the project scoring are shown in Table 7, further detailed analysis is contained within the appendix to this report.
### Table 7 - Project Scoring

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ref</th>
<th>Project title</th>
<th>Deliverability (1 - 5)</th>
<th>Scale of Impact (1 - 5)</th>
<th>Weighted Score I</th>
<th>Ranking</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>W1</td>
<td>New Market Square</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W17</td>
<td>Engagement with Local Employers</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W2</td>
<td>Improve Market Offer</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W3</td>
<td>Improved Shopping Centre Link</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W7</td>
<td>Newland Shopping Centre Improvements</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W8</td>
<td>Grove Centre Improvements</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W9</td>
<td>Former Co-Op Site</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>W14</td>
<td>Pedestrian Access</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W5</td>
<td>Connecting Green Spaces</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W16</td>
<td>Cycle Route Network</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W4</td>
<td>Lanes &amp; Yards</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11</td>
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<tr>
<td>W6</td>
<td>Station Gateway</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W10</td>
<td>Shop Front Design Strategy</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W12</td>
<td>Illumination Strategy</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W13</td>
<td>Car Parking Strategy</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W11</td>
<td>Colour and Material Palette</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.25 Through the project identification and scoring process it is clear that many of the projects had a close alignment to each other. When considering the projects, their inter-relationships and the Spatial Framework together distinct ‘packages’ of projects were evident that directly addressed issues in a particular geography or tackled a particular town-wide issue.

3.26 Within Table 7 these inter-relationships are shown by the different coloured shading. It is clear that projects that contribute to the reinstatement of a ‘heart’ to the town centre at Newland Street-Guithavon Street (shaded yellow) and improvements to and between the main shopping centre (shaded green) are likely to have the biggest impact.

3.27 Also evident is the value to be gained from integrating the recreation ground and bringing forward under-utilised buildings and spaces to the east of Newland Street both to
create new footfall drivers and to provide a more attractive entrance to the recreation ground.

3.28 These three areas form the core of the Town Centre Strategy, providing opportunities to raise the quality of the town centre as a destination, improve connections to and through the town centre and maximise the potential of the local workforce as a key retail catchment.
4. Intervention Plan

4.1 The Intervention Plan builds on the project identification and scoring approach outlined above to identify three geographic project packages alongside two further town-wide ‘management’ packages that aim to address particular issues across the whole town. Where relevant and possible cost estimates have been provided for key interventions.

4.2 The core aim of the Intervention Plan is to maximise the impact and value for money of investment through the combination of smaller interventions that each contribute to a single goal. This allows the pace of delivery to be tailored to budget constraints and allows different partners to take responsibility for different elements, broadening the potential resource base.

4.3 The Intervention Plan seeks to ensure projects are complementary both within the package and also between packages, ensuring that any investment in one particular area supports the wider objectives for the town and responds to the spatial framework. For example, materials used within the new ‘market square’ are suggested to be consistent with those used to improve the link between the two shopping centres.

4.4 The table overleaf provides a summary of each of the project packages, highlighting the key components, policy fit and delivery considerations. This is followed by a more detailed explanation of each.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Package Number</th>
<th>Package Title</th>
<th>Project Description</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Component Projects</th>
<th>Policy Fit</th>
<th>Timeframe</th>
<th>Indicative Costs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>New ‘Heart’ for Witham</td>
<td>Creation of a new ‘shared space’ at the heart of the town to provide opportunities for dining, events and market.</td>
<td>Newland Street</td>
<td>W1 – New Market Square W2 – Improved Market Offer W10 – Shop Front Design Strategy</td>
<td>Provision of a new market square will support the achievement of the Core Strategy aim to diversify the leisure and cultural offer of the town centre by providing a new ‘shared’ space for a variety of uses. Enhancing the public realm will help to deliver the aims of Policy CS6 by encouraging greater footfall and encouraging longer ‘dwell times’ within the town centre.</td>
<td>Short to Medium</td>
<td>Surface treatment works up to £200k</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Upgrading the Grove and Newlands Shopping Centres</td>
<td>Improving the quality of public realm both within and between the two key shopping centres. Improving the permeability and connectivity with the wider town.</td>
<td>Newlands Shopping Centre - The Grove Shopping Centre</td>
<td>W3 – Improved Shopping Centre Link W7 – Newland Shopping Centre Improvements W8 – Grove Centre Improvements W14 – Pedestrian Access</td>
<td>Delivery of this package will help deliver both Policy CS6 and ADM34 by creating an enhanced environment around the key shopping destinations and improving permeability. It also provides a framework for</td>
<td>Medium to Long</td>
<td>Improved Newland Street ‘link’ up to £300k</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Integration of the Recreation Ground

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Package</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Details</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Cost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Enhancing the visibility and attractiveness of access points to the Recreation Ground and enhancing its offer. Creating a better ‘asset’ within the town centre to generate linked trips.</td>
<td>Newland Street (south) W9 – Former Co-Op Site W5 – Connecting Green Spaces W4 – Lanes and Yards W14 – Pedestrian Access</td>
<td>Short to Medium</td>
<td>Up to £100k</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### The Co-Op site is a key site under Policy ADM33 and this package seeks to provide an approach to its future use that enhances its role in the town centre as a gateway/link to the Recreation Ground. This will help deliver a comprehensive approach to the town centre, achieving wider aims within CS6 and CS7 by encouraging accessibility and linked trips.

## Transport Intervention Plan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Package</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Details</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Cost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Coordinate existing transport infrastructure to create enhanced user experience and encourage mode shift by enhancing the pedestrian and</td>
<td>Town-wide W14 – Pedestrian Access W16 – Cycle Route Network W6 – Station Gateway W13 – Car Parking Strategy W15 – Public</td>
<td>Short to Medium</td>
<td>Initial evidence base and early wins improvements c.£60k</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
It will also help ‘tie’ new developments (residential, employment, leisure and education) to the town centre from the outset, increasing usage and footfall to support Policy CS6.

| 5 | Town Centre Promotion | Provide bespoke promotional activities to encourage use by employees in the town and advertise the town centre offer to new residents and potential new retailers. | W17 - Engagement with Local Employers | W18 – Promotion to Retailers | By promoting the town centre offer to workers and potential new retailers (or leisure operators) vitality of the town centre can be enhanced, a key aim of Policy CS6. | Short | £30k |
Package 1 - A New ‘Heart’ for Witham

4.5 Location: Newlands Street near Guithavon Street

Figure 14 - Package 1 Geographic Focus

4.6 Rationale

- To reinstate the medieval market place as the ‘heart’ of the town
- To provide a flexible, multi-functional central space with potential for pavement dining, (event) markets, celebrations, outdoor music etc – i.e. a ‘destination’ for visitors

4.7 Proposals

- Reduce the width of the bus lay-by, by pushing it out onto the carriageway and move bus shelter out towards the edge of the pavement. This will maximise the space available for pavement cafes and/or market stalls
To introduce an entry treatment on Guithavon Street i.e. reduce kerb radii as much as possible, raise the carriageway to the same level as the pavement and introduce a block paving of a similar shade and colour as the surrounding (new) paving stones. This would serve to join the two sides of the space on either side of Guithavon Street;

To reduce clutter, relocated and improve the quality of the street furniture to allow for flexible use of the new space. Key elements such as the post box and lighting point for the Christmas tree would be retained;

Introduce new street trees to help define the space and provide an attractive edge;

To introduce new high quality surface materials throughout the area.
4.8 Cross-cutting initiatives:

- Shop front improvement pilot project on the market place – i.e. the post office / newsagent;
- Introduce a high quality market in this location;
- Introduce / attract pavement café uses
- Opening of Coach House Way from the market place towards the Newlands Centre and development of the land to the west Coach House Way for a mixed use scheme with an active frontage on the lane;
4.9 Cost estimates

- Capital cost = £100,000 to 150,000. This is subject to the quality of the surface materials and further technical investigations (i.e. underground services etc)
- Likely to require an additional 15%-20% for the costs of professional fees.

4.10 Next steps:

- Engage with Highways and Bus operators to
  - Identify extent of lay by reduction
  - Agree surface treatment standards
- Engagement with Prezzo to establish opening timeframe and outside dining plans
- Audit of moveable street ‘furniture’
- Undertake highway design work to establish engineering solution and detailed costs in partnership with Essex Highways
  - Agree materials palette from existing Essex Highways stock to minimise long term maintenance costs.
- Establish shopfront design code – pilot for wider town approach

4.11 Long term potential

- Extend the public realm treatment along Newlands Street.
- Extend the market south from market place along Newlands Street using the space currently used for on-street parking

4.12 Illustrations

- A multi-functional space would introduce opportunities for pavement cafes (Berkhamsted)
Figure 16- Examples of Pavement Café, Berkhamsted

• A high quality market could draw new visitors to the town centre

Figure 17- High Quality Market Offer, Berkhamsted

Witham Market

4.13 Earlier sections of the strategy identify the challenges facing Witham Market, including its falling stallholder offer, the low quality nature of the stall infrastructure, the increased competition from budget high street retailers and the lack of visibility from the main town centre. Together these combine to reduce the number of shoppers within the market and also its role as an attraction for the wider town centre.

4.14 It is clear that action needs to be taken to improve the market itself and the role it plays within the wider town. The delivery of a new market square will provide a new, high profile location for a market, however simply moving the existing market is unlikely to have a significant impact.

4.15 Therefore the offer of the market will need to evolve alongside the location it is in. This will required a phased approach that ‘trials’ new offers, either by theme (i.e. local food, craft etc) or by day/frequency. This will help identify what sells and how often the town can support a market.
4.16 In this interim period the ‘new’ offer should operate from the new market square alongside the existing site (albeit it may be best to trial different days initially). As the new location becomes established the two markets could be integrated to provide a wide ranging offer, but only if both sets of traders can maintain similar levels of quality in terms of goods and stalls.

4.17 Next steps:

- Identify a small number of ‘trial markets’ - these should be run alongside a considerable promotional campaign to promote the offer and generate interest.
- Ensure a ‘programme’ is in place at the outset so shoppers know when they can next visit the market;
- Test potential to deliver a locally distinctive market by attracting local food producers and crafts from the wider area.

4.18 The West Norwood Feast (www.westnorwoodfeast.com) provides an excellent example of how a market can be ‘grown’ from scratch. Initially a pilot market to promote local food it has now grown into a regular market that has expanded its offer to include clothing, crafts and other niche offers that are tailored to the local area. Initially supported by a specialist company it is now run by community volunteers.
Package 2 - The Grove & Newlands Shopping Centres

4.19 This package combines a number of interventions to deliver a comprehensive approach to improving the quality of the area to the north of Newland Street and providing a more ‘shopper friendly’ link between the two shopping centres.

4.20 First we consider how to maximise the opportunity presented by any investment and redevelopment of the Newlands Shopping Centre and, secondly, we consider how the integration of both shopping centres to the town can be enhanced.

4.21 Package 2 is intended to provide a set of principles that should guide future redevelopment and investment. Whilst it provides indicative block layouts that can maximise the opportunity to better integrate Newlands Shopping Centre, the principles should be sufficiently flexible to be applied to proposals as they are brought forward by the site owners.
NEWLANDS CENTRE AND SURROUNDINGS

4.22 Location: The area bounded by Collingwood Road, Newlands car park, Newlands Street and Guithavon Street.

4.23 Rationale

- To improve access to and through the Newlands Centre, from the public car park and Collingwood Road, to Newlands Street and the proposed market place via Coach House Way;
- To create a more “outward-looking” development that looks and feels like a part of the town;
- To improve the quality of the shopping environment in Newlands Centre;
- To increase densities and introduce a wider mix of uses;
- To introduce a building style more appropriate to a historic market town.

4.24 Proposal: Introduce a staged programme of improvement for the short, medium and long term. This includes:

- **Phase 1 - Links to Newlands Street and Guithavon Street (proposed new market place)**
  - Prepare development brief for vacant site fronting Coach House Way leading to Guithavon Street. Development to include small scale units and an active edges on the historic lane;
  - Introduce new infill shop units on either side of existing entrance of Newlands Centre onto Newlands Street to reduce the width of the windswept access and provide active edges;
  - Re-connect Coach House Way with the shopping mall by opening access to the north of the lane.

- **Phase 2 - Frontage on Newlands Drive**
  - Redevelop the two blocks to the rear of the Newlands Centre on a different footprint to create new mixed-use frontage to car park and create a new, more direct pedestrian route connecting Newland Street with Newlands Drive (and the public car park);
  - Remove service road and bin stores to the back of the Centre and introduce avenue tree planting against the new frontage.
• **Phase 3 - Interface with Collingwood Road and Lockram Lane**
  - Establish a formal pedestrian route from Collingwood Road to the Newlands Centre across the council-owned car park;
  - Create development sites along the tree-lined route
  - Create an active development edge from this new development to create a pleasant pedestrian route to Newlands Street via Lockram Lane.

• **Phase 4 - Frontage on Newlands Street and the mall**
  - Redevelop the two main blocks along the mall as a three storey street
  - Ultimately, redevelop the large-scale block fronting onto Newland Street to create an open air access

**Figure 19 - Phased Redevelopment of Newlands Shopping Centre**

4.25 **Cross-cutting initiatives:**

• Public realm improvement on Newlands Street between Newlands Centre and The Grove

• Development of the market place on Newlands Street / Guithavon Place; a new location for the market needs to be found prior to Stage 3, options may include the new ‘market square’ or along Coach House Lane to link the Newlands Centre to the new heart of the town.
• Town-wide signage strategy.

4.26 Cost estimates

• The redevelopment of the Shopping Centre would be funded by the owners (New River Retail).

• However, the Council may wish to partner with New River Retail and include their land interest on Collingwood Road (currently a surface car park and home to the market) to enable Stage 3 of the project. Any receipt on the land deal could then be used to undertake a range of town centre improvements set out in this report.

• In order to deliver a new link through Coach House Lane the Council could seek to purchase the site currently marketed to the west in order to secure a sympathetic development that aligns with the wider strategy priorities.

4.27 Long term potential

• Whilst Stages 1 and 2 can be delivered in the short term, the scale of development and investment required to achieve Stages 3 and 4 indicate these are likely to be long-term proposals, particularly given they would require the relocation of the market.

Figure 20-Alternative views of final Newlands Shopping Centre Redevelopment
4.28 Best Practice example:

- The Centre in Abingdon used to look similar to the Newlands Centre
- A recent major refurbishment has completely changed the look of The Centre to be more sympathetic to the character of this historic town centre.

Figure 21-The Centre, Abingdon before (left) and after (right) refurbishment

SHOPPING CENTRE LINK – NEWLAND STREET

4.29 Location: Newlands Street between Newlands Centre and The Grove

4.30 Rationale: To create a traffic-calmed, pedestrian-friendly environment that will:

- Improve the connection between The Grove and Newlands Centre and their car park provisions (east-west);
- Create a more pleasant shopping environment along this relatively narrow, traffic dominated stretch of Newlands Street
- Improve connection to Newlands Street beyond the Collingwood junction;

4.31 Proposals

- **Option A**
  
  - Raise the carriageway to the same level as the pavement between the shopping centres including the junctions with Collingwood Road and Maldon Road junctions;
  - Introduce a block treatment on the raised carriageway similar in shade and tone as the (new) stone on adjacent pavements;
  - New paving materials along the length of the raised carriageway, including around the junction;
- New tree planting in front of the Newlands Centre (subject to underground cables and other services). Trees will help to soften the impact of the large and rather brutal Newlands centre frontage.

Figure 22-3D Illustration of Option A

4.32 Option A provides the ‘optimal’ solution in terms of achieving an environment that improves the balance between pedestrian and vehicle movements. The concept has been developed in line with accepted guidance and best practice and, in our professional opinion, would be acceptable given the nature of the road and the wider regeneration benefits it can deliver within Witham.

4.33 However Essex Highways recognise Newland Street as a strategically important alternative to the A12 when incidents occur on this major trunk road and, in this light, have some concern that the extent of Option A may impact on Newland Street’s ability to act as a ‘release valve’ for the A12 on occasions it is blocked. Whilst planning for this eventuality is important, it should not be considered the core priority over the wider ‘health’ of Witham town centre, and Option A should be investigated further to test the engineering solution and its acceptability once more a more detailed scheme is prepared.

4.34 To provide some flexibility to the Strategy, a second option has been prepared. This is likely to be sub-optimal in terms of its impact on the town centre, but does still achieve
some of the aims of Option A by providing greater priority to pedestrian movements. Option B therefore provides an alternative if the Highway Authority deems a raised carriageway unacceptable, however this would be to the detriment of the wider aims of the strategy.

- **Option B**
  - New surface treatment on Newlands Street from (and potentially including) Collingwood Road to Maldon Road junction in similar tone and shade as the (new) stone on adjacent pavements;
  - Dropped kerbs along the entire length of the block paved road surface;
  - New paving materials along the length of the resurfaced carriageway;
  - New tree planting in front of the Newlands Centre (subject to underground cables and other services). Trees will help to soften the impact of the large and rather brutal Newlands Centre frontage.

**Figure 23-3D Illustration of Option B**

4.35 Cross-cutting initiatives:

- Newlands Centre redevelopment (see above);
• Shop front improvement, removal of canopy and new sign to the entrance of The Grove;
• Improvements to lanes within The Grove Centre (i.e. landscaping or art to the blank walls; signage);
• Town-wide signage strategy.

4.36 Cost estimates for surfacing treatments for Newland Street

• Option A: £150,000 to £225,000 subject to the quality (costs) of the surface materials and further technical investigations (i.e. underground services etc).
• Option B: £75,000 to £125,000 subject to the quality (costs) of the surface materials and further technical investigations (i.e. underground services etc).
• These estimates are for the construction costs only a further 15%-20% should be allowed for professional fees.

4.37 Long term potential

• Extend the road surface and pavement treatment towards the new market place to create the same high standard public realm throughout the core of the town centre
• Removal of all traffic lights to create a genuine “shared space” environment.

4.38 Next steps:

• Continue work with New River to secure short term improvements
• Joint development framework for Newlands Shopping Centre that sets out:
  • Redevelopment site boundary and land parcels
  • Appropriate uses
  • Role and location of the market
  • Viability
• Engage with Grove Centre owners to agree entrance upgrade
• Introduce ‘wayfinding’ signage from car parks to Newland Street
• Prepare detailed engineering design for the Newland Street resurfacing in consultation with Essex Highways.
  • Agree materials palette from existing Essex Highways stock to minimise long term maintenance costs.
Engage with Town Council and partners in relation to potential loss of parking spaces.
Package 3 - Integration of the Recreation Ground

4.39 The Recreation Ground is a key asset for Witham however at present the access is poor and effectively hides it from Newland Street. The separation of the recreation ground from the town centre is exacerbated by the vacant Co-Op building at the corner of Newland Street and King’s Chase and the poor environment along King’s Chase itself.

4.40 The Co-Op site itself should be recognised as a key site within the town centre. Previously the store acted as an ‘anchor’ for the southern part of Newland Street, drawing shoppers to the area and providing passing trade for other stores. Its removal has weakened the trading environment in this area.

4.41 A new anchor is required to support the southern end of Newland Street. The main Co-Op building is of relatively poor quality and does not significantly contribute to the character of the town. Furthermore it provides a scale and type of floorspace that is unlikely to be required within Witham as retail needs change. As such it should be considered as a key redevelopment opportunity, with policies put in place to ensure any future use benefits the wider town.

4.42 The recreation ground itself could play a greater role in ‘anchoring’ this part of town. However, this requires both an improvement in the ‘offer’ of the recreation ground itself, and better access to it via King’s Chase. Any redevelopment of the Co-Op site should make provision for an improved link along King’s Chase, improving access for both vehicles and pedestrians.

4.43 Given the importance of the Co-Op site in re-connecting the recreation ground to the town centre we have focussed on its potential within this package.
4.44 Rationale

- To create an attractive connection between Newlands Street and the recreation ground
- To bring new life to a derelict building / site and create a destination at the southern end of the central shopping area;
- To provide a mixed use development within the town centre.

4.45 Proposals

- Prepare a development brief for the area that sets out key design principles and ascertains the viability of the development. This should include:
  - Achieving a new, vibrant mix of uses that respects the significant heritage value of the existing buildings;
  - Redevelop and refurbish the former Co-Op store as a mixed use building of similar scale / height.
• Introduce active uses on the return frontage - i.e. on Newland Street and Kings Chase to encourage pedestrians into the lane;

• Retain building on Newlands Street south of King’s Chase in line with its Listed Building status;

• Retain King’s Chase as a narrow lane – create high quality, shared surface environment. Introduce tree planting to create “green link” to the recreation ground;

• Develop backland sites on either side of Kings Chase and create an active development edge;

• Introduce build-outs to the pedestrian crossing south of King’s Chase and plant street trees to highlight the lane as an access into the recreation ground.

Figure 25-King’s Chase - Key Design Principles
4.46 Cross-cutting initiatives:

- Create / promote new uses / activities in the recreation ground such as a kiosk / coffee shop, adventure playground, splash park, picnic benches, skate park and/or keep-fit trail;

**Figure 27-Examples of Recreation Ground Amenities (St Albans)**

- Improved access to the recreation ground from Maldon Road, i.e. avenue planting in the area in front of the gates, and review of opportunities for a new access to north-west comer of the park;

- Ideally this package would see the Gimson’s site integrated into the Recreation Ground providing a new area for public use. The focus should be on linking the Recreation Ground to the riverside corridor to create a large, multi-functional park that forms an arc around the town centre;
• Town-wide signage strategy.

4.47 Cost estimates

• The redevelopment of the Co-Op site is likely to be delivered via the private sector, the development brief should seek to identify a mixed use proposal that achieves viability and can be taken forward by a developer.

• Limited investment may be required in terms of officer time and consultancy support to prepare a development brief. This may require a budget of £10-£15k for specific design and viability support.

• Resources will be required to upgrade the Maldon Road entrance to provide planting and move the gates, costs would need further detailed testing but could reach up to £50k depending on scale of works.

4.48 Next steps:

• Develop a Development Framework for the Co-Op site in line with the principles set out above;

• Establish design of new Maldon Road entrance;

• Agree site for in-Park café - secure funding for building;

• Begin procurement process for café operator;

• Landscape strategy for long term expansion of space.

4.49 Short-term alternatives

• Market former Co-Op store as a retail, mixed use development opportunity

• Use former Co-Op store for temporary uses/ pop-up shop etc.
Package 4 - Transport Intervention Plan

4.1 Having identified the current transport and movement issues in and around Witham we have identified a package of interventions, designed to both address these issues and support the other improvements and interventions proposed in the previous packages.

Transport Project - Improvements to car parking in Witham town

4.2 Rationale: Currently there is high demand for free short stay on-street parking while anecdotal evidence suggests off-street parking in the town’s car parks is underutilised during a typical weekday. This highlights a need to maximise efficient use of car parking by re-balancing the demand between on and off street parking.

4.3 Proposals: The District Council has recently carried out a review of off-street town centre parking, which identifies future opportunities for new capacity at Eckhard House and Bramstones Leisure Centre. In consultation with the Town Council and partners this should form the basis of a comprehensive car parking strategy which encourages efficient use of all parking across the town. This should include:

- A comprehensive usage survey to understand the current pattern of demand for car parking on weekdays and at the weekend;
- Reviewing car parking layouts/arrangements;
- Reviewing car parking signage (vehicle and pedestrian signage); and
- Reviewing car parking tariffs and free parking arrangements.

4.4 Cost estimates:

- Estimated cost of preparing the car parking strategy (including surveys) ~£8 to £15k

4.5 Next Steps:

- Consultation on recommendations included within car parking strategy. Based on the findings of this consultation, roll out proposals for improving car parking in the town.

Transport Project - Public Transport Improvements

4.6 Rationale: Residents and visitors in Witham currently have a high reliance on the private car due to relatively unattractive alternative modes. This is creating traffic pressures in the town, which could potentially increase with additional travel demand
generated from new developments. Improvements should be made to the bus services in the town to encourage mode shift from car to public transport.

4.7 Proposals: To carry out a detailed feasibility study into improving bus services in the town. The study should be undertaken in consultation with the local authority and bus operators and be designed to help promote improvements.

4.8 The study is likely to include details on potential for:

- Improving facilities at bus shelters;
- Improving service frequency;
- Providing new bus priority measures;
- Introducing new/improved services between developments and town centre; and
- Encouraging bus journeys to rail station (e.g. timetable changes which link with rail services);
- New/extending existing bus routes between new developments and the town.

4.9 Cost Estimates:

- Estimated cost of preparing the Public Transport Study (including surveys) ~£10-15k

4.10 Next Steps

- Study to be used to promote bus improvements in the town, leading to local authority and bus operators implementing studies recommendations.

Transport Project - Cycle Travel Improvements

4.11 Rationale: Local traffic congestion would be reduced if more short distance journeys (less than 5km) were carried out by active modes such as cycling. Improvements should therefore be made to the town cycling facilities to encourage sustainable mode shift to cycle travel for shorter journeys.

4.12 Proposals: Provide cycle improvements for the town. These improvements should be implemented as early as possible and prior to the completion of new developments within the surrounding area. Having facilities on the ground before development occupation would improve potential to influence travel behaviour towards cycling. These improvements should include:

- Further develop and enhance coverage of the network of cycle routes in the town and surrounding area. There are a number of cycle routes already proposed by
the Council, which should be further enhanced by filling gaps and connecting different routes (typical examples of these gaps are shown below in Figure 6). Where physical constraints reduce the ability to provide cycle routes connections, signage should be installed to provide route guidance for cyclists.

- Where appropriate routes should be extended to new developments to further encourage cycling to and from the town.
- The upgrading of cycle parking facilities within the town. This should include the reallocation of space for cycle parking within the town centre.

4.13 Cost Estimates:

- Estimated cost ~£5 to £20k depending on the extent of improvements. Also developers should be required to contribute towards the cost of cycle route extensions to their site.

4.14 Next Steps:

- Consultation with key stakeholders (local authority, cycle user groups etc.) to identify further cycle priority measures which could be implemented in the town and surrounding area.
Transport Project - Witham Rail Station Travel Plan

4.15 Rationale: High commuter car trips to Witham Rail Station are resulting in additional pressure on the road network in the town and especially surrounding the station during peak periods. To reduce car trip demand, measures should be implemented which encourage rail users to travel to the station by sustainable transport modes.

4.16 Proposals: Prepare a Travel Plan for the rail station which identifies interventions that should be brought forward to maximise opportunities to increase non-car trips to the station. The plan will need to be carried out in partnership and agreement with the Train Operating Company (Great Anglia). The plan should include:
• Carrying out baseline surveys which provide existing information on rail commuters such as their trip origin, existing mode share, inclination for modal shift, station access issues; and

• Preparing the Station Travel Plan and its recommendations which included measures to support modal shift.

4.17 Cost Estimates:

• Estimated cost for prepare a Station Travel Plan (including surveys) ~£10 to £15k.

4.18 Next Steps:

• Based on Travel Plan recommendations develop schemes to encourage modal shift.

• Roll out of Travel Plan, including its launch.
Package 5 - Town Centre Promotion

4.19 The catchment of Witham is growing, both through new major residential development within the town and through the growth of the employment base within the town centre itself through new and growing office occupiers. Allied the existing Witham residents, its wider catchment and the potential ‘passing trade’ of commuters using Witham station there is a considerable opportunity to increase town centre trade.

4.20 However, with new residents/workers in particular it is important that habits are established early, ensuring from the start Witham is a place of choice for top up shopping and other needs. Key to this will be ensuring they are aware of the full offer of the town centre. Allied to new residents any promotional activity will remind existing residents/workers of what’s on offer in the town and can reinvigorate their interest in the town.

4.21 A great deal of activity is already undertaken to promote the town centre, in the short term the focus should be on coordinating these and using any events as opportunities to promote the retail offer of the town.

4.22 A further immediate opportunity lies in direct promotion to businesses on the edge of the town centre, such as those along Pasture Road and Freebourne Road to encourage their workers to use the town centre. Longer term wayfinding improvements should ease access to the town centre to encourage usage however, in the short term uptake of the Indi Card should be promoted alongside other offers to attract shoppers.

4.23 In the medium term there is the potential to use this Strategy as a tool for promoting the town centre, highlighting the projects being delivered and how these are improving the town centre environment, its accessibility and its retail/leisure offer.

4.24 Providing ‘incentives’ is one element, however providing the activities and services that workers require will also attract them to the town centre. Therefore, continued engagement with the town’s workforce should seek to identify what they feel is ‘missing’ from the offer and seek to introduce this over time, potentially supporting a wider range of leisure activities within the town centre.

4.25 Allied to the promotion of the town to shoppers the Town Team should also actively pursue and promote the town to new occupiers. The focus should be on attracting commercial leisure occupiers to the town centre (such as Prezzo) to broaden the
food and drink offer. This will require a coordinated approach between the Town Team, landlords and the Council to ensure suitable premises are available.

4.26 Approaches should be made to target operators who do not currently have a presence within the Witham catchment. In approaching the operator the Town Team should prepare material which clearly sets out:

- The key market opportunity, including:
  - Size of catchment and its socio-economic make up;
  - Estimated spending power in the catchment;
  - Scale of change in population.
- The key other users, including
  - Scale of Station use;
  - Town centre workforce.
- Town centre regeneration efforts:
  - Physical improvements;
  - Events and promotions.
- Location and property options.

4.27 It should be recognised that this approach will be speculative and may not bear instant results, however as the elements of this Strategy are rolled out and footfall and spend in the town improves we would expect greater success.

4.28 The key resource requirements will be the time commitment of key officers and the Town Team. A budget of at least £20,000-£30,000 per annum should be retained to produce publicity material and procure any required data/catchment information.
5. Next Steps

5.1 The Strategy has been developed to deliver improvements to the town centre over time. Each intervention package identifies projects which can be delivered (even in pilot form) in the short term which contribute to longer term aspirations and opportunities.

5.2 The preparation of the Strategy is only the first step and it requires immediate action to demonstrate its role and the commitment of the project partners to its delivery. Therefore, once published, demonstrable action needs to be undertaken through a series of ‘quick win’ projects whilst the planning of the longer term larger interventions is undertaken.

5.3 Therefore, from within the project packages we have identified a basket of projects that should form the focus in the next 12-24 months. Some will deliver activity within the town whilst others prepare the ground for the larger interventions that will make a significant impact.

5.4 The approach to delivery needs to be flexible so if opportunities come forward sooner than anticipated they can be grasped and implemented in line with the overall Strategy principles. Similarly, should funding opportunities arise to deliver elements of the Strategy, these should be actively pursued using the Strategy as a key tool for evidencing why the investment is needed and the outcomes it can deliver.

Early Win Projects

5.5 Key ‘deliverable’ projects in the next 2 years will be:

- Securing improvements to the appearance of the Newlands Shopping Centre in its current form;
- Enhancing the facilities within the Recreation Ground;
- Promoting the town centre offer to new and existing employers;
- Introducing new wayfinding signage within and to/from the town centre with a focus on:
  - Key car parks
  - The Recreation Ground
  - Access to Newland Street from Mayland House
- Promoting ‘sustainable’ links from new housing developments
• Hosting a series of smaller scale event or trial markets along Newlands Street, with the potential to focus:
  • Specialist markets
  • Locally produced produce and products

5.6 In order to demonstrate the value of the Strategy, its coordinating role and how the immediate projects are part of a much larger approach to town centre revitalisation each project should reflect it is part of the Strategy approach. This should be kept simple but any promotional material could contain a ‘footer’ or strapline referencing the Strategy.

5.7 Alongside the ‘deliverable’ projects the following preparatory work should be undertaken:

• Detailed engineering design for the Market Square and Newland Street surfacing treatments agreed with Essex Highways - this should focus on the key issues of ‘strategic’ traffic impact, balancing it against local regeneration needs.

• Preparation of development briefs (or similar planning documents/policy) for both the Co-Op site and Newlands Shopping Centre to confirm and promote the potential of each location and confirm the expectations of future development.
  • The Newlands development brief should be prepared in partnership with New River Retail.

• Finalise the required improvements to cycle infrastructure to complete the ‘network’ and liaise with Essex County Highways to identify delivery mechanisms.

• Evolve the town-wide approach to car parking based on the recent off-street review.

5.8 Focussing efforts on these tasks in the next two years will prepare the ground for major intervention and improvement in the medium term. It will position the key development sites and the town centre more widely in an ideal position to exploit opportunities as the economy recovers and secure private sector investment.

**Monitoring Success**

5.9 The success of the Strategy will need to be measured in order to demonstrate its value and secure ongoing commitment from the Council, its partners and external funders. At the basic level key success criteria will be the implementation and delivery of the projects within strategy, however the understanding the impact of delivered interventions is also vital.
5.10 To provide this understanding and measurement of ‘success’ we have developed a small basket of indicators that can be collected to monitor progress over time. These tie directly back to the core aims of the Strategy, which are to increase footfall, improve town centre vitality and encourage investment in the town from a greater range of operators.

5.11 Measuring town centre performance is notoriously difficult and is often affected by wider economic and other factors, however by building up a dataset over time should allow these variables to be ‘controlled’.

5.12 Unfortunately there is limited data available for measuring town centre performance, particularly without it having significant cost or time lags. Therefore the proposed indicators focus on the most relevant datasets and a small number of measures that can be collected locally with minimal resource implications.

5.13 Measure 1 – Market Data – a review of core market indicators

- Information
  - Achieved rents;
  - Number of vacant units
  - Number of lettings

- Source
  - Estates Gazette, CoStar Focus, local agents

- Monitoring period
  - Annual

5.14 Measure 2 – Footfall – a series of footfall counts at key town centre points. Counts across the town centre will allow comparison and estimates of footfall ‘flow’.

- Locations
  - Grove Centre – outside Costa
  - Newlands Centre – between the play area and market entrance
  - Newland Street – Guithavon Street junction (on Newland Street)
  - Newland Street – King’s Chase junction

- Source
  - Town Team staff

- Monitoring period
5.15 Measure 3 - Retailer Sentiment - a short fixed question survey seeking retailer views on town centre and retail environment. Enable tracking over time of positive/negative sentiment.

- Source
  - Town Team staff coordinate
- Monitoring period
  - Quarterly

5.16 Measure 4 - Shopper Sentiment - a short fixed question survey seeking shopper views on town centre offer and environment, their shopping habits and other centres/stores they use. This will enable tracking over time of positive/negative sentiment.

- Source
  - Town Team staff coordinate
- Monitoring period
  - Annual

5.17 Measure 5 - Occupier Mix - survey of town centre units to record occupier by type. Ability to track changing offer over time, should include market traders.

- Coverage
  - Activity / product type
  - Occupiers Independent / chain
  - Vacant units
- Source
  - Town Team staff coordinate
- Monitoring period
  - Six months