



BEDFORD BOROUGH COUNCIL

July 2010

# A STRATEGY for BEDFORD HIGH STREET



# **A STRATEGY for BEDFORD HIGH STREET**

This strategy was adopted by Bedford Borough Council as a Supplementary Planning Document on 21st July 2010.  
It forms part of the Bedford Development Framework.

July 2010

If you would like a copy of this document or would like a summary of it in another language or in large print please contact the address below.

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# BACKGROUND



Bedford High Street

1.1 In October 2008, the Borough Council adopted the Bedford Town Centre Area Action Plan. This provides a planning framework for the regeneration of the town centre and proposes the creation of a number of new 'Quarters'.

1.2 A new Retail Quarter is proposed, focused on the redevelopment of the bus station site (Bedford Town Centre West) in order to significantly improve Bedford's offer as a shopping centre. In tandem with this, the plan recognises the need to counter any potential westward shift in the centre's primary retail pitch through re-investment in existing retail areas. In the case of the High Street, the plan aims to help it to reinvent itself, maximising opportunities for public realm improvements following de-trafficking.

1.3 Policy TC8 states:

***The main focus for retail reinvestment in the existing centre will be the primary and secondary shopping frontages and the High Street in particular. Within these areas, emphasis will be placed on:***

- i) The provision of high quality and distinctive shopfronts and signage;***
- ii) The refurbishment of existing buildings which contribute to the character and heritage of Bedford;***
- iii) The re-occupation of upper floors for commercial or residential use;***
- iv) The provision of improvements to the public realm.***

***The Council will prepare a strategy with the Bedford Town Centre Company and other partners for the renaissance of the High Street.***

# LOCAL POLICY AND GUIDANCE

2.1 The strategy must work within existing policy and guidance and this is contained in a number of documents.

## **CORE STRATEGY AND RURAL ISSUES PLAN (Adopted April 2008)**

2.2 Policy CP19 states that the regeneration of the town centre will involve significant structural change, infrastructure improvements and mixed use development. The town centre is the preferred location for new retail development, and other forms of development which attract a lot of people such as leisure and entertainment, offices, arts, culture and tourism.

2.3 Policy CP21 sets out the Council's aspirations for all new development to be of the highest design quality in terms of both architecture and landscape, to fully consider its context and opportunities to enhance the character and quality of an area and local distinctiveness, preserve and where appropriate enhance conservation areas, scheduled monuments (and other important archaeological remains), listed buildings and their settings.



2.4 Policy CP23 states that new development will be required to protect and where appropriate enhance the character of conservation areas, scheduled ancient monuments, listed buildings and other important historic or archaeological features.

## **BEDFORD TOWN CENTRE AREA ACTION PLAN (Adopted October 2008)**

2.5 In addition to Policy TC8 above, the plan includes a number of relevant policies. These are:

2.6 Policy TC3 defines the primary shopping frontages within which changes of use to non-retail will not be permitted. The High Street contains a small section of primary shopping frontage between Silver Street and No. 66 High Street. The remainder of the High Street is designated as a secondary shopping frontage.

2.7 Policy TC4 deals with secondary shopping frontages and lists the criteria which will be used when considering changes of use from retail to non-retail. These include the effect on the character and amenity of the area and the need to avoid the concentration of similar uses



whose cumulative impact would be to the detriment of environmental quality, amenity, parking, the street's retailing function or would increase the risk of anti-social behaviour.

2.8 Policy TC21 highlights the potential for the High Street to provide a north-south route for pedestrians and cyclists once the street has been de-trafficked.

2.9 Policy TC26 actively encourages using vacant space above shops to provide residential accommodation.

2.10 Policy TC27 is a general heritage policy. In addition to protecting and where appropriate enhancing listed buildings etc, it also includes buildings which although not listed form an integral part of the Bedford Conservation Area and its setting, along with the street pattern, historic boundaries, spaces between buildings and the public realm.

2.11 Policy TC32 refers to the creation of high quality public realm including public art and interpretation.

2.12 Policy TC33 states that the Council will expect new shopfronts and advertisements to be designed to the highest standards and that regard will be had to its published guidance.

2.13 The Area Action Plan also indicates that the de-trafficking of St Paul's Square North is a key priority.



## SHOPFRONTS AND ADVERTISEMENTS IN CONSERVATION AREAS

2.14 This was adopted by the Council as a Supplementary Planning Document on 16th November 2005. The document is a response to the growth in the number of unsympathetic shopfronts and advertisements which have resulted in a loss of quality and interest in many of Bedford's historic streets. Although it provides generic guidance for all conservation areas, its principles apply particularly to the High Street. It establishes a set of design principles and good practice relating to the provision of high quality shopfronts and advertisements.



*Supplementary Planning Document -  
Shopfronts & Advertisements in Conservation Areas*



*63 High Street*

# BACKGROUND STUDIES

3.1 In addition to plans and policies there are a number of studies which provide background evidence to support this strategy.

## **BEDFORD TOWN CENTRE TRANSPORT STUDY (April 2008)**

3.2 Published in April 2008, this study provided a recommended strategy to deal with traffic and transportation issues within the town centre. One of the elements of that strategy was the de-trafficking of the High Street to general vehicular traffic, except buses, delivery vehicles, taxis, private hire vehicles, cycles and emergency services. This change was originally envisaged once the Batts Ford Bridge, the Western Bypass and other measures had been completed.

3.3 In this context de-trafficking means the removal of unnecessary general traffic. This might mean taking certain types of vehicle off the route, or at certain times of day. The types of traffic deemed to be unnecessary will also vary over time, for example longer distance journeys through the whole urban area being removed when alternative routes are available. It is important to note that there is a need to maintain access for emergency vehicles and cyclists, with restricted access for service vehicles and taxis/private hire vehicles, and therefore de-trafficking will not mean a traffic-free or fully pedestrianised environment. It is anticipated that a de-trafficked High

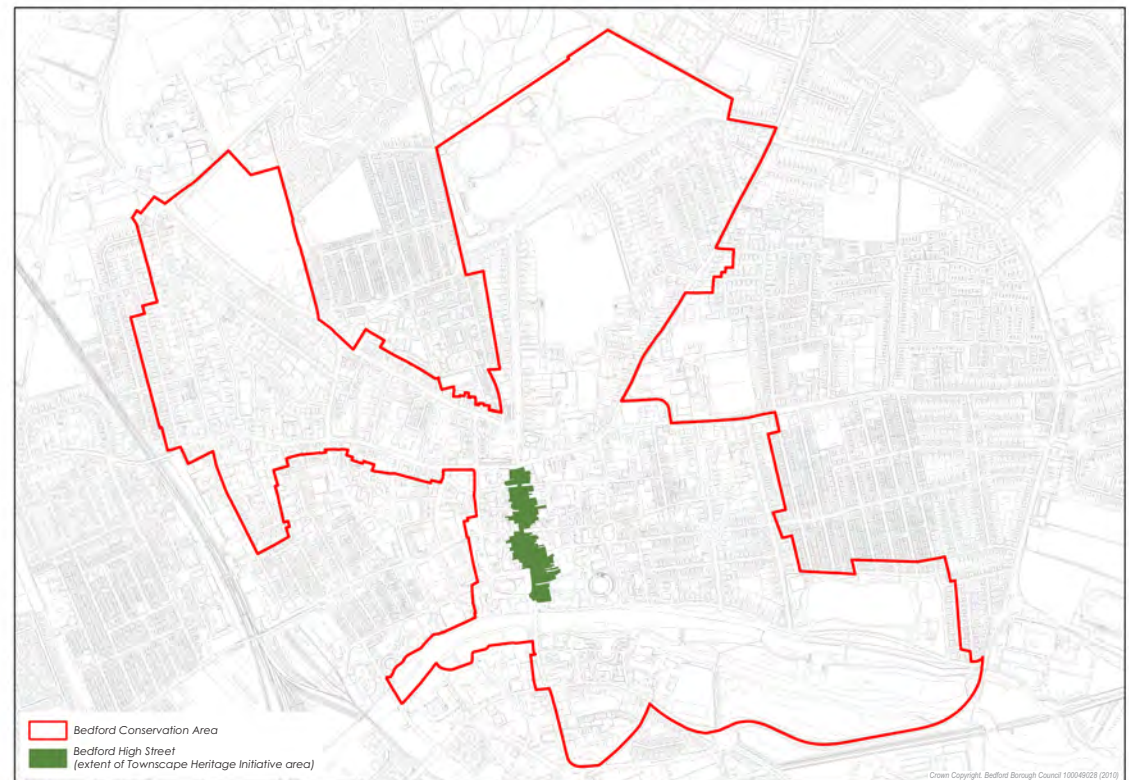
Street, as described above, will be reduced to single lane and speed restricted to 20mph, as part of a wider area limit.

3.4 This strategy builds on that work and explores whether the High Street can be made less traffic dominated in advance of further large scale infrastructure coming on stream and what physical measures can be put in place.

## **BEDFORD CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL & MANAGEMENT PLAN (Adopted March 2009)**

3.5 The Conservation Area Appraisal analyses and defines the character and appearance of the Conservation Area. The Management Plan provides a clear strategy for the management of the

*Bedford  
Conservation Area  
and the High Street*





Conservation Area in a manner that will safeguard and enhance its character and appearance. They are technical documents which provide both a sound basis for formulation of policies contributing to the Local Development Framework and inform development control decisions.

#### **VISION FOR HIGH STREET BEDFORD (January 2009)**

3.6 This report was produced for the Borough Council by Ian Parkin (Parkin Heritage and Tourism) and Carol Parr (Interpretation Consultant). It examines the historic evolution of the High Street, identifies why the High Street is so special, reviews current plans and strategies, explores the potential to use the Townscape Heritage Initiative as a catalyst for regeneration, and produces recommendations for action.

3.7 Integral to the study was the creation of a vision for the High Street and a series of objectives which flowed from this. These, in the main, have been carried forward into this strategy and are set out in Section 5.

#### **CONSERVATION AREAS AT RISK (June 2009)**

3.8 English Heritage identified a number of Conservation Areas in England which were considered to be 'at risk'. The most significant threats range from loss of historic details such as traditional doors and windows, to unattractive shopfronts and signs, to vacant and derelict buildings. However, the degraded condition of the streets between them - the clutter of street furniture and signs and intrusive traffic calming - can be just as harmful. Bedford Conservation Area is considered to be 'at risk'. High Street is central to the Conservation Area and is affected by all these threats to varying degrees.

# STATUS OF THIS DOCUMENT

4.1 The strategy was adopted by the Borough Council as a Supplementary Planning Document on 21st July 2010. It therefore forms part of the suite of planning documents which make up the Bedford Development Framework, and will be a material planning consideration when determining planning applications.

4.2 The High Street Strategy is consistent with the delivery of Bedford's Sustainable Community Strategy and is identified as a priority within Bedford's approved Infrastructure Delivery Programme.



# A STRATEGY FOR BEDFORD HIGH STREET

## VISION

*'To recreate the traditional heart of the town centre and maximise its townscape and heritage quality by the removal of all unnecessary general traffic, the creation of a high quality people friendly and safe public realm (where public art has a place), upgrading the built fabric, reintroducing attractive traditional shopfronts and regular markets, encouraging street cafés and restaurants, increasing upper floor residential and commercial use and creating life and vitality making it a destination for people of all ages at all times'.*

5.1 In order to achieve that vision, the following objectives have been identified.

1. Ensure the built fabric of the historic street is brought up to appropriate standards of repair to ensure its long term sustainability.
2. Enhance the townscape quality of the historic street with, for example, improved shopfronts and window frames, so that it becomes a street to enjoy in its own right.
3. Improve knowledge and understanding of the historic environment through interpretation, for example, through the use of plaques, interpretation boards, websites and other techniques, as appropriate.
4. Attract a range of niche shops which will improve the 'retail offer' and create an attractive destination within the town centre.
5. Stimulate a 'café culture' with street cafés and bars spilling onto the street attracting quality family and specialist restaurants creating a warm, welcoming and friendly environment for people of all ages at all times.
6. Encourage the use of the upper floors for a mixture of residential and commercial uses addressing the potential conflict with noise in relation to licensed premises and air quality issues.
7. Review the management of the night time economy, reduce opportunities for crime/anti-social behaviour, improve community safety and raise the image and reputation of the street to be accessible for all.
8. Create an attractive pedestrian piazza that can become a niche retail destination in the town centre through the removal of unnecessary general traffic.
9. Strengthen the links including pedestrian and cycle routes between High Street and other parts of the town centre.

10. Develop attractive, safe and well managed car parks in the right location which enable people to come into, and use, the High Street 24 hours a day.

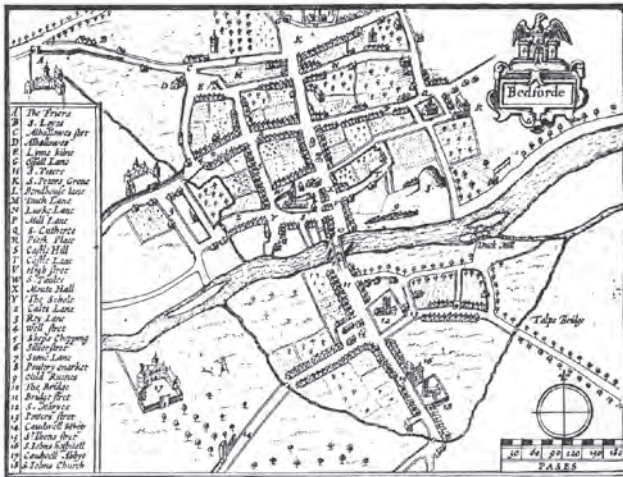


5.2 There are significant inter-relationships between the objectives that will impact on the timeframe and deliverability of the strategy and its vision.

5.3 These objectives can be grouped under the main headings of **Restoring the Existing Fabric, Uses and Activity** and **Access and Movement**.

# RESTORING THE EXISTING FABRIC

6.1 The High Street is an historic street of major significance to the town and has provided a key north – south route since Saxon times. Its alignment has not changed significantly since then and it can be seen on the earliest maps of Bedford.



John Speed's map of Bedford 1610

6.2 In addition, it is important in townscape and architectural terms and falls wholly within the Bedford Conservation Area and retains the architectural character of a prosperous market town. It is highly enclosed by a close knit range of fine, mainly C18 and C19 three storey buildings with narrow facades, an attractive irregular roofline and long burgage plots which are a reflection of their medieval origins. A detailed history of the street is set out in the Vision for High Street document.

6.3 In addition, the Bedford Conservation Area Appraisal identified that it has:

- 14 listed buildings;
- 3 which have potential for statutory listing;
- 18 which are recommended for local listing;
- 35 buildings of positive architectural merit.



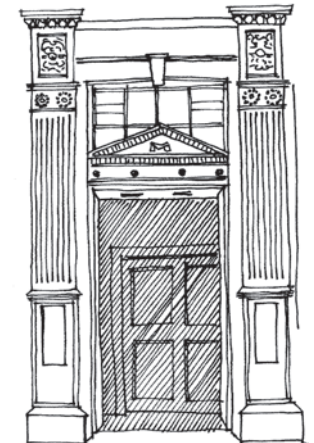
34 High Street



57 High Street



23-25 High Street



81 High Street

6.4 This underlines the significance of the historic townscape. However, many buildings are in poor condition or have been the subject of poor quality alterations and additions which do not reflect the character of the buildings. Common problems include:

- Poor quality and badly maintained shopfronts and signage.



- Vacant upper floors which raises concerns about the condition and maintenance of the historic building stock.

- Poorly maintained roofs and rainwater goods which can lead to the rapid deterioration of the building fabric.

6.5 In order to assess the extent of the problem a general condition survey has been carried out on a sample of 10 properties in order to determine the current level of occupancy, the general structural condition, and likely costs of renovation. Most properties surveyed were of considerable age, most have been altered, and many need significant basic maintenance work or refurbishment. In many cases, the deterioration has been accelerated by the lack of occupancy of the upper floors, which has delayed knowledge of maintenance defects, and in turn, minor problems have become major issues before they are detected and dealt with. The most significant work is required to improve the roofs, windows (single glazed), ceilings, chimneys, rendering/brickwork of external walls, damp proofing and heating systems.

## KEY ACTIONS

6.6 In order to address these issues, the Council will:

- Prepare a bid for funding through the Townscape Heritage Initiative (THI) administered by the Heritage Lottery Fund and investigate alternative sources of funding. If successful, the THI will cover the whole of the High Street, although funds will be targeted on key properties.
- Make provision for matched funding through the Capital Programme bidding process to support the THI bid.
- Target specific buildings in order to focus effort, resources and impact. The choice of key buildings will be informed by the results of the condition survey. By targeting these buildings, this will provide exemplar projects which can be used to stimulate interest from other property owners.
- Make links with property owners/absentee landlords with a view to working in partnership to bring about real change to management and maintenance regimes.
- Continue to apply the principles of the Shopfronts and Advertisements design guide to new development and enforce, where appropriate, breaches of planning control.
- Establish a grant scheme to encourage better quality shopfronts and advertisements. This would be subject to the availability of funding.
- Produce guidance for property owners on repairs to the historic buildings based on best practice.
- Use opportunities to introduce interpretation facilities to explain the street's heritage.
- Appoint a fixed term THI Project Manager (funded through the THI bid) to develop a round 2 THI submission and help drive the strategy forward, acting as a single point of contact.



# USES AND ACTIVITY

7.1 Historically the High Street was the prime location for the town's tradesmen, craftsmen and the most prestigious businesses which met most of the requirements of the town's population. The opening of the Harpur Centre saw a relocation of some of the town's main retailers away from the traditional High Street, and hastened its change in status from a primary to a mainly secondary shopping street.

7.2 The Council, through its Town Centre Area Action Plan recognises that there is a need to significantly improve Bedford's retail offer and provide additional floorspace which meets the needs of modern retailers and fulfils Bedford's role within the sub-region. The plan states that the focus for this new retail quarter will be the Bedford Town Centre West site. It does, however, state that urgent action is needed to regenerate the High Street as a countermeasure against a further shift in the centre of gravity to the west of the town centre.

7.3 The High Street is, however, more than just shops. It contains several banks, a building society, and a variety of pubs, restaurants and takeaways. It plays a major part in Bedford's evening and night time economy but needs to broaden its appeal throughout the day and night to a wider client base. It needs to cater for families, different ethnic groups, the gay community, the over 40's and the under 18's. In other words a wider spectrum of the community.

7.4 Whilst it is recognised that planning controls are unable to control the particular type of shop, restaurant or licensed premises, the broadening of the evening and night time economy remains an important element of the Council's vision for the High Street.

7.5 One of the objectives of this strategy is to review the management of the night time economy. The Council will work with partners including the Police to review existing practices, seeking out best practice from elsewhere, and amending any practices where appropriate.



*Bedford High Street at night*

7.6 To the rear of the High Street is the new Cultural Quarter focused on the Castle Quay redevelopment, Bedford Museum, Cecil Higgins Art Gallery, Bedford Gallery, Castle Bailey Gardens, the Castle Mound and Bunyan Museum/Church beyond. The Castle Quay



*Castle Quay development*

redevelopment provides the opportunity to provide new niche retail and restaurant facilities. There is scope to capitalise on the transformation of this part of the town centre and re-brand the High Street as the gateway to the Cultural Quarter. Improved connections between the two will therefore be crucial.

7.7 The High Street, by the nature of the size and type of units cannot provide the retail formats attractive to retail multiples - Bedford Town Centre West will fulfil that function. In the High Street rents will be less than in the primary shopping area but need to be at a level which will be attractive to small independent retailers.

7.8 A survey of usage indicated significant amounts of vacant space above the ground floor of buildings in the High Street. This has potential to provide both residential and office accommodation. The Council is actively seeking to increase the number of people living in the town centre and where appropriate will relax parking requirements in order to facilitate this. Where residential uses are proposed, consideration will be given to noise and air quality issues.

7.9 The High Street contains poor quality public spaces. The street is dominated by traffic, pavements are narrow and in parts pedestrians are corralled in by barriers at the side of the road. Surfacing is of poor quality and does little to reflect the street's character and heritage. The overall impression is of an unattractive environment to move through rather than spend any time there. The narrowness of the pavements means there are few opportunities for cafés and pubs to spill out into the street. There is a need for more of the space to be reclaimed for pedestrians and different activities. Any provision of

tables and chairs will need to meet the Council's licensing requirements including the need to consider the effective dispersal of large groups of people in any detailed design and layout for the High Street.

7.10 At the eastern end of Silver Street and in St Paul's Square the space does open out creating opportunities for more seating, kiosks etc. St Paul's Square is also the venue for the weekly market on Wednesday and Saturday and this adds to the vitality

of this space. Both of these spaces have potential to become 'activity hubs' which can add to the vitality of the street. To some extent, different activities are frustrated by the position of raised beds/planters and the layout of these spaces needs to be changed in order to support these. The Council will review the position and desirability of retaining the raised beds/planters when detailed proposals for environmental improvements are considered.



## KEY ACTIONS

7.11 In order to address these issues, the Council will:

- **Maintain and enhance the vitality of the street by using planning policy to retain the street's retailing function and avoiding concentrations of non-retail uses.**
- **Commission a concept design scheme in order to identify the issues involved in achieving independent use of the upper floors (access, means of escape, security etc) and an indication of conversion and repair costs.**
- **Work with partners to prepare a Night Time Economy Strategy and review procedures for managing the night time economy drawing on best practice.**
- **Work with the Police to reduce opportunities for crime/anti-social behaviour and improve community safety.**
- **Broaden the use of the street through the use of events and markets facilitated by temporary closure of the High Street in the short term and de-trafficking as soon as possible.**
- **Explore opportunities to redress the balance between the space given over to pedestrians and traffic by increasing pavement widths and removing/reducing barriers to movement.**
- **Improve the quality of the public spaces in terms of surfacing, street furniture and public art. Where spaces are larger at the Silver Street/Mill Street junction and St Paul's Square, these should be re-designed to support a wide range of activities. Surfacing should reinforce the role of the street as a pedestrian space rather than give the impression that traffic has priority over other users. Any detailed proposals will be the subject of separate public consultation.**
- **Make links with property owners/absentee landlords with a view to working in partnership to bring about real change to how upper floors are used.**
- **Explore funding opportunities to support Living Over the Shop schemes.**
- **Establish a marketing campaign to 're-brand' the High Street once significant improvements have been achieved.**

# ACCESS AND MOVEMENT

## TRAFFIC IN THE HIGH STREET

8.1 Throughout Bedford's history, the High Street has provided a main north-south route through the town centre, leading to and from the crossing of the River Great Ouse. Until 2003 the High Street formed part of the A6 trunk road in a southbound direction and was managed by the Highways Agency on behalf of Government. Since 2003 the High Street retained the A6 designation and remained part of the Primary Route Network (PRN), but is managed by the Borough Council as local highway authority. Since early 2010 the A6 designation has been removed. This means that the route no longer has to be available to all classes of vehicle at all times, and management of the route can take account of the needs of all users.

8.2 The High Street accommodates around 15,000 vehicles per day with associated noise and fumes, leading to poor air quality and an unattractive environment for shoppers. In addition to the presence of vehicles, conflicts with pedestrians needing to cross the road bring added risks of injury. Successful regeneration of the High Street will therefore require a change in this traffic dominated environment.

8.3 Several of the existing shops, pubs and leisure facilities do not have rear servicing facilities and have to be serviced from the High Street itself. Four lay-bys to the north and south of the Mill Street/Silver Street junction currently provide a facility for service vehicles to pull over for loading/unloading purposes. However,

despite the regulations in force the lay-bys are often used as informal drop-off points and for short stay parking. Service vehicles also continue to stop throughout the length of the High Street to carry out deliveries (often during periods when this is prohibited), adding to congestion and vehicle conflicts. Mill Street is subject to a weight limit, therefore forcing all large service vehicles to travel the length of the High Street.



8.4 The High Street is also used as an access route via St Paul's Square (South) to car parks and premises in the vicinity of Horne Lane. Should the High Street be closed or otherwise restricted, then alternative access routes via River Street would need to be considered.

8.5 There will also be an ongoing need to ensure that the High Street can always be accessed effectively by emergency vehicles. This will impact on the details of any new layouts and control mechanisms to exclude traffic, and should the route be closed, to make provision for emergency vehicles to access parts of the High Street in either direction.



8.6 When the carriageway is clear of any congestion, vehicles can increase their speed which adds to the potential for pedestrian conflict. Whilst the speed tables at Lime Street and Mill Street help manage speed at these traffic light controls, the speed at which traffic can travel is not compatible with large numbers of people in close proximity to the road.



8.7 The Bedford Town Centre Area Action Plan states that it is the Council's objective to de-traffic the High Street, significantly reducing the number of vehicles and improving it as a north-south route for pedestrians and cyclists. The transportation study for the town centre described in Section 3 suggested that in order to achieve this, other significant infrastructure would need to be in place including the new river crossing at Batts Ford and the completion of the Bedford Western Bypass between the A6 and the A421. For a definition of what is meant by de-trafficking see para. 3.3.

8.8 Achieving the maximum traffic relief in the High Street is likely to require a combination of measures. These measures could include:

- Signed diversionary routes,
- Changes across the town in how the road network is managed,
- Changes in car park signing and access arrangements,
- Changes in the existing one-way systems,
- Capacity improvements at key locations around the town centre,
- Completion of the Western Bypass (from the A428 to the A6 north), A428 to the A6 north),
- A new Town Centre river crossing at Batts Ford.

Work will be commissioned to revisit the town centre transport study to determine the potential for permanent traffic restrictions in the High Street. It is envisaged that the above changes, if justified, would be delivered over the life of this strategy.

8.9 In the meantime, it is intended to carry out a series of experimental closures at weekends linked, where possible, with specific events in the High Street. Video traffic surveys have recently taken place to assess the feasibility and practicality of doing this. Should events and markets be promoted in the High Street then these events will have their own traffic implications. These needs will need to be included in the design and implementation of any infrastructure and management arrangements.

8.10 The overall aim is for the High Street to become a place dominated by people rather than by vehicles. Whilst it may therefore be several years before most of the traffic is removed, there is a need to explore what action can be taken in the intervening period to reduce the impact of traffic in the High Street and in advance of further large scale infrastructure coming on stream. The early de-trafficking of the High Street is a priority for change as part of the strategy's proposals for the renaissance of Bedford High Street and the Council is keen to remove general traffic as soon as possible. Any

permanent arrangements involving closure to general traffic will need to be considered following a full study which in turn will be the subject of further consultation. Any such study would need to consider:

- a) Alternative routings;
- b) Access arrangements to facilities within the town centre including car parks;
- c) The implications on the existing network including side roads, taxi pick up points etc;
- d) Scope to introduce a single lane, restricted access route, with a 20mph speed limit (see para. 3.3).

In the case of temporary closure, diversion routes will be signed and use of the network will be monitored. The option of reducing part of the carriageway down to a single lane will be considered as an interim solution in advance of full de-trafficking taking place.

8.11 The Bedford Town Centre Area Action Plan identified that the de-trafficking of St Paul's Square (North) is a key priority and the scope to deliver this early should be considered as it will assist with the regeneration of the southern part of the High Street. In bringing this forward, consideration will need to be given to revised circulation arrangements around St Paul's Square including traffic movements in and out of the Embankment.



## PEDESTRIAN ROUTES

8.12 The High Street provides an important north-south route for pedestrians and is part of the John Bunyan Trail. Of equal importance are the pedestrian routes which intersect it at right angles. Some of these provide complete east-west routes such as Lime Street-Lurke Street and Silver Street-Mill Street. These routes (along with Castle Lane and the passages listed below) provide important links to the High Street and the wider town centre from car parks, the bus station and beyond. These pedestrian routes therefore act as important gateways into the town centre and provide a 'first impression' of the town.

8.13 Other routes such as the Arcade and St Paul's Square provide important linkages with the rest of the town centre. There is an opportunity to link the High Street with the "Bedford: A Town of Undiscovered Treasures" initiative (which seeks to create a network of shopping lanes – for example, linking Clair Court, Lime Street and the Arcade, the promotion of the niche, distinctive shopping experience and heritage trails – telling Bedford's story via a range of interpretation).

8.14 The eastern half of the street is connected by two passages and a lane:

8.15 The passage between 99-101 High Street connects Howard Street with the High Street and provides a direct link to the Lurke Street multi-storey car park.

8.16 The passage between 49-51 High Street which connects the High Street with Ram Yard. This is an important route to Bedford Gallery and the Cultural Quarter.

8.17 Castle Lane is a historic route which originally connected the western and northern gates of Bedford Castle. This has the potential to provide a major connection between the Cultural Quarter, the Castle Quay development and the High Street.



8.18 The passageway between 49-51 High Street is maintained highway and the other passageway is not. As part of the cleansing regime for the High Street both passageways are litter picked and swept daily by the Council and deodorised once a week. Graffiti is also removed as and when required.

8.19 The two passages are poorly lit and unattractive.

Part of the strategy is to improve the quality of these routes through the provision of grant aid to improve surfacing, lighting, and to repair the walls of the buildings which enclose them. In order to achieve this in the early stages, these could be included in the list of targeted buildings.

8.20 These pedestrian connections would be significantly enhanced through a reduction in traffic levels on the High Street.

8.21 There may be potential for the strategic acquisition of property in the High Street to influence the range of uses in order to improve and vary the retail offer as well as promote best practice in terms of urban design principles. Where such opportunities arise, consideration should be given to the potential to open up new pedestrian routes eg. between the High Street and the Cultural Quarter.

## PUBLIC TRANSPORT

8.22 Currently no bus routes use the High Street between St Peter's Street and St Paul's Square (North), although some routes have previously used Mill Street. St Paul's Square (North) is a major pick-up point for bus passengers, and buses from here route via the High Street and onto the Town Bridge or The Embankment. St Paul's Square (South) provides a drop-off point for buses coming into the centre from the Town Bridge. Buses also pass by the northern end of the High Street (using St Peter's Street and Dame Alice Street).

8.23 If the High Street is to thrive it needs to be conveniently accessible by public transport, and with the potential movement of the bus station further west as part of the Bedford Town Centre West development, it is important that access to bus services remains.



*St Paul's Square north*

8.24 It is envisaged that a major review of bus routes would be carried out as part of the opportunities arising from a new river bridge at Batts Ford. Until then it is envisaged that the Bus Station and St Paul's Square (North) will continue to provide the focus for public transport routes.

8.25 The Town Centre Transport Study recommends that St Paul's Square (North) becomes effectively bus and taxi only (making St Paul's Square (South) a two-way route for general traffic). This would mean that the High Street from St Paul's (North) to St Paul's (South) could also eventually become bus only plus carrying whatever residual traffic remains in the High Street. Beyond St Paul's Square (South) the High Street is expected to remain open to two-way general traffic.

## CYCLING

8.26 Whilst cyclists are currently permitted to use the High Street one way alongside general traffic, the route is not attractive. The current cycle network for Bedford recommends use of St Cuthbert's Street and Newnham Road as an alternative to the High Street, but these routes are not convenient for accessing the town centre and do not connect well to significant parts of the town. North-South routes for cyclists to the west of the High Street are not available at present due to the existing pedestrianised retail area. The High Street does however connect with the east-west cycle route along Lurke Street and Lime Street.

8.27 In order to provide an attractive north-south route for cyclists that connects to the overall cycle network including the main east-west routes and gives good access to and across the town centre, the High Street is proposed in the future as a general two-way route for cyclists. This will need to be a significant factor in the future layout and design of the route (alongside the issues of delivery vehicles, emergency vehicles and public transport described above).

## PARKING

8.28 The Council owns and operates a number of car parks within the town centre. A number of comments received on the draft strategy stated that public parking within the town centre should be reviewed (in terms of cost, number of spaces and opening hours) particularly in the evenings if the strategy's objective of broadening the use of the High Street is to be achieved. It is accepted that parking management arrangements will need to be reviewed as aspirations for different uses and levels of activity within the town centre change.

## THE NEEDS OF THE PARTIALLY SIGHTED/DISABLED/ DDA COMPLIANCE

8.29 The Council recognises it has a general duty, under the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 2005, to promote disability equality. This means that the Council will adopt a proactive approach towards the needs of disabled people in providing its services and carrying out its functions. This includes being mindful of the needs of people with sight or hearing impairments, and those who have limited mobility, such as wheelchair and scooter users, when providing highway and pedestrian facilities. For example, pedestrian crossings, dropped kerbs, tactile surfaces, street lighting, signage, seating and any other street furniture will need to take into account these particular

needs. The Council is also committed to consulting on such matters with local organisations of disabled people, such as Bedford and District Access Group, Sight Concern and the Disability Resource Centre.

8.30 The Borough Council offers Access Improvement Grants to assist small shops, pubs and restaurants with the provision of access for people who are less mobile, such as those who use a wheelchair, walking difficulty or have a sensory impairment. Grants may be awarded for up to 50% of the cost of eligible works, up to a maximum of £1000. Eligible works can be improvements such as ramps, level thresholds, wider doors, handrails and toilets for wheelchair-users.

8.31 For further details contact the Council's Access Officer (Tel: 01234 221762).

## DEVELOPING A TRANSPORT INVESTMENT PROGRAMME

8.32 Given all of the transport issues raised here, there are a number of initiatives and options which need to be investigated and developed further. These are:

- a. Definition and signing of diversion routes to facilitate limited experimental closure at weekends of sections of the High Street linked, where possible, with specific events and markets.
- B. Investigating ways of discouraging use of the High Street as a through route and ensuring low vehicle

speeds together with measures to increase the space available to pedestrians and improve the safety of the route for use by cyclists. These measures should not preclude further changes to achieve the eventual aim of reducing the amount of vehicular activity to a minimum.

- c. Exploring options to remove the High Street from the general highway network, making sure appropriate provision is made for pedestrians, servicing, cycling, public transport and

emergency access. This will include the question of what actions would be possible to reduce the traffic demand in the town centre and what replacement highway capacity would need to be provided.

- d. Identifying the future general management of highway space around the town centre taking account of the aims for the High Street, the Town Centre Area Action Plan and specific plans for redevelopment, implementing these changes as the opportunity arises.

## KEY ACTIONS

8.33 In order to address these issues, the Council will:

- **Actively pursue exploration of the changes necessary to enable the whole of the High Street to be de-trafficked.**
- **Develop and implement the solutions set out above in order to reduce the impact of traffic within the High Street and reclaim more space for pedestrians and cyclists.**
- **Move towards the early de-trafficking of the High Street is a key priority for change as part of the strategy's proposals for the renaissance of Bedford High Street.**
- **Seek to deliver the de-trafficking of St Paul's Square (North) as a key priority. In bringing this forward, consideration will need to be given to revised circulation arrangements around St Paul's Square including traffic movements in and out of the Embankment.**
- **Target the two pedestrian passages for improvements, providing grant aid where appropriate.**
- **Seek to improve linkages between the High Street, Castle Lane and the new Cultural Quarter. This linkage could be reinforced by the de-trafficking of the eastern side of St Paul's Square.**
- **Improve signage for pedestrians highlighting key destinations including the High Street itself.**
- **Take account of the needs of disabled people by consulting with relevant disability organisations.**





**BEDFORD HIGH STREET STRATEGY**

- Townscape Heritage Initiative (THI) boundary
- Listed Building
- Pedestrian Passageway (para 8.15)

River Great Ouse

THE EMBANKMENT

CULTURAL QUARTER

Castle Quay

ST PAUL'S SQUARE

SILVER STREET

MILL STREET

HIGH STREET

HOWARD STREET

LURKE STREET

LIME STREET

ST PETER'S STREET

# SUSTAINABILITY APPRAISAL

9.1 **Appendix A** includes a screening opinion as to whether this strategy needs to be the subject of Sustainability Appraisal. It concludes that it does not and the reasoning is set out in that Appendix.



*High Street / St Paul's Square looking north*



# IMPLEMENTATION OF THE STRATEGY

10.1 Clearly the Borough Council cannot deliver the vision and objectives alone. It needs to work with external stakeholders and partners such as the Heritage Lottery Fund, English Heritage, the relevant Government Offices, Bedford Town Centre Company Limited, Bedford BID, property owners and existing tenants.

10.2 In order to take forward the Townscape Heritage Initiative bid, the Council has formed a partnership with the Bedford BID Company, Bedford College of Further Education, the Bedford Licensees Association, the Bedford Architectural, Archaeological & Local History Society, the Bedfordshire Architectural Heritage Trust, St Paul's Church, Bedfordshire & Luton Chamber of Commerce, Bedford Creative Arts and other private businesses.

10.3 In order to implement the strategy, the Council has a number of 'sticks and carrots' which it can use. In addition to potential grant assistance, it can also review enforcement issues and implement appropriate prioritisation of enforcement action where there have been breaches of planning control. This is subject to the availability of staff resources.

## **FUNDING STREAMS**

10.4 The Council will explore a number of funding streams to deliver the strategy. Of prime importance will be the success of any bid for THI funding along with bids through the Council's own capital programme process. The English Heritage funded Conservation Area Partnership Scheme may also provide additional funding and needs to be explored further.

10.5 In addition, the heads of terms of the S106 agreement attached to the resolution to grant planning permission for the Bedford Town Centre West proposal includes a requirement for a scheme to a) carry out an assessment of the physical condition and commercial status of existing High Street premises and b) to identify the type and level of intervention/support (to include a financial contribution) that would be most appropriate to secure the future of the High Street in advance of anticipated highway improvement works. The point at which this course of action would be triggered has yet to be negotiated as the S106 agreement has yet to be concluded.

# SUSTAINABILITY APPRAISAL SCREENING

## INTRODUCTION

11.1 The purpose of this document is to assess whether the Council's High Street Strategy Supplementary Planning Document should be subject to sustainability appraisal. Sustainability appraisal is the process of ensuring that a plan or policy contributes to sustainable development. There is now an international and national commitment to achieving sustainable development and this has been incorporated into laws, guidance and advice. One of the means by which sustainable development can be achieved is through the land-use planning process.

## BACKGROUND

11.2 The Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 introduced Local Development Frameworks to be prepared by local planning authorities setting out plans, policies and guidance in relation to the type of development that can take place in an area. The Act requires that local development documents prepared as part of the Local Development Framework be subject to a process of sustainability appraisal.

11.3 In addition to the Government's requirement for a sustainability appraisal, EU Directive EC/2001/42 also requires that an assessment of the environmental effects of certain plans and policies (including planning documents) is undertaken. There is a large

amount of overlap between the EU 'strategic environmental assessment' (SEA) and the UK sustainability appraisal process, and the Government has produced guidance (*Sustainability Appraisal of Regional Spatial Strategies and Local Development Frameworks*, ODPM 2005) on how the SEA requirements can be met whilst undertaking a sustainability appraisal. Unless otherwise stated in this document it should be assumed that references to sustainability appraisal incorporate the requirements of SEA.

11.4 More recently however, the Planning Act 2008 removed the requirement to prepare a sustainability appraisal report for Supplementary Planning Documents. The reason for this is that it was felt that it involved duplication, since Supplementary Planning Documents have to be in conformity with an overarching Development Plan Document which had already been the subject of sustainability appraisal. The Town and Country Planning (Local Development) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2009 removes the blanket requirement, but advises that each Supplementary Planning Document should be screened for whether there are impacts that have not been covered in the appraisal of the parent Development Plan Document or whether an assessment is required by the SEA Directive.

## HIGH STREET STRATEGY

### SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING DOCUMENT

11.5 The High Street Strategy Supplementary Planning Document gives guidance on the implementation of Policy TC8 of the Bedford Town Centre Area Action Plan which states:

***The main focus for retail reinvestment in the existing centre will be the primary and secondary shopping frontages and the High Street in particular. Within these areas, emphasis will be placed on:***

- i) The provision of high quality and distinctive shopfronts and signage;***
- ii) The refurbishment of existing buildings which contribute to the character and heritage of Bedford;***
- iii) The re-occupation of upper floors for commercial or residential use;***
- iv) The provision of improvements to the public realm.***

***The Council will prepare a strategy with the Bedford Town Centre Company and other partners for the renaissance of the High Street.***

11.6 The objectives for the Supplementary Planning Document are as follows:

1. Ensure the built fabric of the historic street is brought up to appropriate standards of repair to ensure its long term sustainability.
2. Enhance the townscape quality of the historic street with, for example, improved shopfronts and window frames, so that it becomes a street to enjoy in its own right.
3. Improve knowledge and understanding of the historic environment through interpretation, for example, through the use of plaques, interpretation boards, websites and other techniques, as appropriate.
4. Attract a range of niche shops which will improve the 'retail offer' and create an attractive destination within the town centre.
5. Stimulate a 'café culture' with street cafés and bars spilling onto the street attracting quality family and specialist restaurants creating a warm, welcoming and friendly environment for people of all ages at all times.
6. Encourage the use of the upper floors for a mixture of residential and commercial uses addressing the potential conflict with noise in relation to licensed premises and air quality issues.

7. Review the management of the night time economy, reduce opportunities for crime/anti-social behaviour, improve community safety and raise the image and reputation of the street to be accessible for all.
8. Create an attractive pedestrian piazza that can become a niche retail destination in the town centre through the removal of unnecessary general traffic.
9. Strengthen the links including pedestrian and cycle routes between High Street and other parts of the town centre.
10. Develop attractive, safe and well managed car parks in the right location which enable people to come into, and use, the High Street 24 hours a day.

11.7 The scope of the Document includes the following matters:

#### **Restoring the existing fabric**

- Listed / key buildings / Conservation Area appraisal
- Refurbishment / enhancement of existing character / heritage
- Heritage interpretation
- Guidance on repair of the historic fabric

- Shopfronts and advertisements guidance
- Funding sources
- Powers

#### **Uses**

- Niche retail / café culture
- Managing the night time economy
- Living over the shop / residential
- Heritage and cultural quarter
- How to facilitate - grants / funding streams / acquisition / financial incentives

#### **Access and movement**

- Connections with the rest of the town centre - existing and future role
- Potential highway solutions
- Lanes
- Crossing points
- Partially sighted requirements
- Car parking

11.8 The Document does not allocate sites for new development although it identifies areas where change could occur in accordance with the overall aims of the Bedford Town Centre Area Action Plan (subject to planning permission).

## ASSESSMENT

11.9 The sustainability appraisal process examines the effect of plans, policies and proposals on environmental, economic and social objectives. When the Bedford Town Centre Area Action Plan was prepared, its policies were each individually appraised and the results published in a sustainability report. For Policy TC8 the appraisal concluded that the policy would lead to mostly uncertain or neutral environmental effects but with positive effects on the number of car journeys and air quality (because of the expected result of improved shopping facilities which would mean that fewer local people would be attracted to competing centres). The social effects were mostly neutral with a positive effect on crime. Economic effects were mostly positive. There were no negative effects.

11.10 As the purpose of the proposed High Street Strategy Supplementary Planning Document is to give guidance on matters which are in adopted policy and does not create new policy in itself or result in development that was not intended in the adopted policy, then it is reasonable to assume that the Document does not have any sustainability effects that were not envisaged in the original policy. A sustainability appraisal of the Document would identify the same effects as were identified when the Bedford Town Centre Area Action Plan policy was appraised. From the objectives and envisaged scope of the Document set out above, it appears that these are all matters which are entirely within the scope of Policy TC8. It can therefore be concluded that a sustainability appraisal of the Document is not required. It can similarly be concluded that a separate assessment to fulfil the requirements of the SEA Directive is not required.

Published by

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ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES DIRECTORATE  
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