

# Dunstable Town Centre

Draft Masterplan consultation findings

November 2010



**AECOM**

Central  
Bedfordshire

# **Contents**

1. Introduction
2. Findings from statutory stakeholders
3. Findings from the public
4. Findings from local organisations with an interest in the draft masterplan
5. Next steps

# Chapter 1

## *Introduction*

The location, heritage and community spirit in Dunstable town centre provide the area with great potential for the future. The town centre is currently in need of a level of change that will transform and showcase it to the local and wider area.

As this masterplan aims to assist in solving some of the issues that the public have identified, we have worked extensively with the community to reach the draft masterplan, and then held a public consultation for 6 weeks. We have also worked more closely with those who are more affected by the plans, including residents in (or in close proximity to) sites of suggested new developments. This Consultation Statement sets out the findings from the consultation period and identifies the proposed changes to the masterplan.

### **Why create a masterplan for Dunstable town centre?**

The town centre currently faces a number of significant issues. Vacancy rates in local shops are high, the retail offer is declining and some streets are congested with traffic, particularly the A5 (High Streets North and South). Based on robust evidence, the masterplan allows the Council to set out a vision for what the area could be like in future as well as the plans and projects needed to deliver that vision on the ground.

There are a number of significant changes in the surrounding area that should help to restore the town's former success if planned effectively. Funding for the A5-M1 Link has recently been confirmed and work is planned to start before 2015 with a public inquiry expected to take place in 2012. Similarly the Luton Dunstable Busway will provide a regular and reliable connection between the two towns and connections beyond to London by early 2012. This, along with other transport improvements should reduce the volume of through-traffic in the town centre and in particular heavy freight traffic. Furthermore, additional housing growth within and around Dunstable will boost the number of potential visitors and will support the renewal of the shopping experience.

The town's rich heritage is recognised as a key element of community identity and a key asset in town centre regeneration and future prosperity. Much of the Masterplan area is also within a designated Conservation Area, which gives formal recognition to the particular significance and special character of the town's historic environment.

During the development and refinement of this Masterplan the conservation area has been reviewed and the results of the review reported in a draft Conservation Area Appraisal document.

The vision for Dunstable builds on these challenges and opportunities. It is based on an understanding that the town sits within a hugely competitive environment and that the centre needs to find its niche to ensure the town's sustainable future. It is based on analysis by the masterplan team and feedback from public and stakeholder consultation events.

*“Dunstable will become a connected 21<sup>st</sup> century town centre. Building on its heritage and green space, it will become an affordable, attractive and accessible option for residents, employees, employers, investors and*

*visitors alike. The town will bring more to a wider range of people, offering an experience that will make it stand out from the crowd.”*

The draft masterplan summarised the Council’s preferred approach to improving the town centre in prior to this consultation period. A full copy of the masterplan is available from the dedicated masterplan website [www.dunstablemasterplan.info](http://www.dunstablemasterplan.info)

### **How this report will be used**

The masterplan will now be finalised in light of the findings set out in this document. The final version of the masterplan is likely to be considered by the Council in early 2011 and inform planning developments for the town centre thereafter.

### **A thorough approach to consultation**

This Consultation Statement has been prepared in accordance with Regulation 17(1)(b) of the Town and Country Planning Local Development (England) Regulations 2004. This is only required for Supplementary Planning Documents, but has been adopted here as a thorough approach to documenting the findings. In accordance with the regulations, the document sets out:

- Who we consulted on the draft masterplan (Appendix C);
- How we consulted them (Chapter 1);
- When we consulted them (Chapter 1);
- A summary of the main issues raised in the consultations (Chapters 2 and 3)
- How these issues have been addressed in the masterplan (Chapter 4)

The consultation process reflects the Council vision and preferred consultation approach, as set out in the Statement of Community Involvement (2006).

The Draft Dunstable Town Centre Conservation Area Appraisal was also formally consulted upon at the same time and featured at the same public exhibition events.

### **Consultation method and groups consulted**

The following public events were undertaken to help communicate the key messages of the draft masterplan, in order to obtain the views of local residents and stakeholders. This information has helped to ensure that any issues relating to the plans are fully understood before the masterplan is finalised:

Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> September 2010, Grove Theatre, 10am – 4pm  
*Manned public exhibition*

Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> September 2010, Dunstable Community Fire Station Open Day  
Manned public Exhibition

Monday 20<sup>th</sup> September 2010, Quadrant Shopping Centre, 11am – 4pm  
*Manned public exhibition*

The exhibition material was then put on display at Priory House Heritage Centre from Friday 1<sup>st</sup> October 2010 until Monday 1<sup>st</sup> November 2010.

Specific meetings were also held with those who would be directly affected by, or expressed particular concern with, some of the proposals. These groups consisted of residents of Dorchester Close and Kingscroft Avenue.

Meetings took place with elected members of the Dunstable Town Council, Dunstable Town Centre Management Committee and the Chiltern Vale Health Consortium Board.

Nearly 4,000 consultation leaflets and questionnaires were made available through the public exhibitions and were also available at Central Bedfordshire Council Dunstable offices, Dunstable Town Council offices, Dunstable Library and the Priory House Heritage Centre. The consultation leaflets were available from a number of town centre shops.

The consultation leaflet and questionnaire were available and could be completed on-line on both the Central Bedfordshire Council and the dedicated Masterplan website during the statutory consultation period.

Advertisements were placed in local newspapers prior to the statutory consultation period advising the public of the exhibition details and publicising the dedicated masterplan website.



Questionnaires were available online and at all events

## Chapter 2

### *Findings from statutory stakeholders*

A full list of all stakeholders that were informed of the draft masterplan is included within Appendix C. Responses were received from the following statutory stakeholders organisations:

- Anglian Water
- Coal Authority
- Dunstable Town Council
- Dunstable Town Centre Management Committee (1)
- East of England Development Agency
- English Heritage
- Environment Agency
- Hertfordshire County Council
  - o Hertfordshire Property
  - o Forward Planning Unit
- Highways Agency
- Homes & Communities Agency
- Milton Keynes Council
- National Grid
- Natural England

Of the above responses, Anglian Water, Environment Agency, Hertfordshire Property, Milton Keynes Council and The Coal Authority confirmed that they had no comments to make on the draft masterplan.

**All statutory stakeholders support the masterplan vision and general aspirations of the document,** although a number of statutory stakeholders had detailed comments on the plan, a summary of which are set out below by section of the draft masterplan report. Full representations from the organisations are included in Appendix D.

#### ***Part A: Introducing the draft Masterplan***

##### *The role of the town centre*

- The East of England Development Agency (EEDA) noted that the role of Dunstable town centre relative to Luton, Milton Keynes and Bedford should be more clearly set out, as this is a competitive area for town centres and the Masterplan must correctly position the town within the retail hierarchy.

##### *Town centre boundary*

- The proposal to extend the town centre boundary as shown in the masterplan is supported by EEDA.

(1) – Dunstable Town Centre Management Committee is a joint committee between Central Bedfordshire Council and Dunstable Town Council.

## ***Part B: Explaining the Detail***

### *Shopping and retail*

- Dunstable Town Centre Management Committee and Dunstable Town Council agree that a range of larger shops should be provided. The former feel that the appropriate approach is to concentrate this offer into a given area of the town centre, but they also want a wider retail offer to remain within all four existing quadrants of the town centre.
- Dunstable Town Council is keen for existing independent traders to be recognised and to have the opportunity to relocate their businesses to high footfall areas if possible.

#### **Masterplan response to identified concerns**

A variety of shops are promoted throughout the four quadrants, potentially including development facing Middle Row and on the Royal Mail sorting office site. The masterplan principles will be updated to emphasise that larger shops should focus to the north-east of the town centre, with smaller shops complementing other uses in the remaining areas.

The masterplan will also be updated to ensure emphasis is placed on highlighting the importance of independent traders in the masterplan and all businesses would have equal opportunity to relocate within the town centre should they wish to do so.

### *Medical centre*

- EEDA fully support the proposed medical centre and support the upgraded college as they provide an important connection between the retail core and Guided Busway.

### *Housing Tenure*

- The Homes & Communities Agency suggest further detail is provided on the housing tenure (proportion of private and affordable units) of proposed units.

#### **Masterplan response to identified concerns**

The proposals in the masterplan should aim to meet the housing tenure split, which is already set out in the current draft masterplan report, which indicates that that 35% of new dwellings should be affordable housing with a split of 71% social rent and 29% intermediate rent. This is based on the 2010 Central Bedfordshire Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA).

While the Council's overall policy position at 35% is supported by the SHMA and the emerging Core Strategy there is work currently underway that will be completed in March 2011 to establish the exact amount of affordable homes needed, based on Area Based Viability Studies of major sites within the south Bedfordshire area.

With likely changes in legislation regarding tenure, it is likely that the specific tenure splits indicated between rent and shared ownership sales will also change.

### *Employment uses*

- EEDA question the lack of sites designated for office space in the masterplan and feel that this omission is contrary to Objective 1 (A more focussed centre with a mix of activities to attract people throughout the day and evening). By extension, EEDA feel that the masterplan places an over-reliance on shops and housing.

#### **Masterplan response to identified concerns**

The masterplan promotes 'flexible' uses in certain locations within the town centre, which could be developed into office space if there is market demand at the point of development.



### *Transport and traffic*

- Highways Agency (HA) support the proposals and phasing of the masterplan, re-confirming that the A5 through Dunstable cannot be de-trunked until after the A5-M1 Link is finished. They also state that they will consider any proposals made before such time, providing existing capacity and journey times on the A5 through Dunstable are not compromised. They also re-confirm that a suitable diversion route for the M1 needs to be nominated by Central Bedfordshire Council that can cope with high volumes of 2-way traffic.
- Dunstable Town Centre Management Committee is particularly keen to see the development of concept of 'shared space' with regards to highways improvements.
- Hertfordshire County Council support proposals to downscale the A5 through Dunstable, as they feel this would discourage longer distance traffic from using the A5 once the Link Road is provided. They do however have a holding objection with the Highways Agency over their draft de-trunking orders. They support continued dialogue moving forward as their authority may be affected by the knock-on traffic effect of this proposal.
- The Homes & Communities Agency suggest that more thought is needed to ensure the physical link between the White Lion Retail Busway stop and town centre is as safe and sustainable as possible.
- English Heritage question whether traffic levels would ever be reduced sufficiently to allow for shared surfaces. They would support the removal of pedestrian barriers and where possible signage, traffic lights and other similar items.

#### **Masterplan response to identified concerns**

It is not within the remit of this masterplan to identify a suitable diversion route for the M1 following the proposed de-trunking of the A5 through the town centre. However, the masterplan will be updated to note the need for a route to be identified (Chapter 2).

The masterplan text and diagrams will be updated to include additional information on the potential design of the College site and its enabling land (east of the existing college buildings) – this would support better integration with the rest of the town centre and strong overlooking onto proposed walking and cycling links to/from the White Lion Retail Park Busway stop to make it as safe as possible.

The concern raised by English Heritage is noted and the masterplan will be updated to make clear that the implementation of shared surfaces would be dependent on more detailed testing before they are implemented.

## *Heritage*

- English Heritage questions the shift of retail focus of the town centre due to the location of the Market Square in the south-western quadrant. They feel that new retail should not be created at the expense of the historic core around the Market Square and crossroads.
- They would also like the report to be clearer on the definition of 'landmarks' shown in the masterplan and to see a clearer indication of building heights, as this is not shown on page 19. They would not support 'overly tall or visually aggressive' structures.
- They also request that a full copy of the draft Conservation Area Appraisal is appended to the masterplan or provided for their comment.

### **Masterplan response to identified concerns**

The market assessment and retail audit undertaken by King Sturge in stage 1 of the masterplan process identified the need for larger units as key to realising uplift in Dunstable's retail offer. The area around the Market Square is too constrained for this to be viable. The masterplan sets out the potential for retail development in the south west quadrant, supported by residential development. It is felt to be appropriate in heritage terms that a smaller unit development is the best way to celebrate the heritage of Middle Row.

The masterplan will be updated so the Urban Design Framework diagram clearly shows building heights in the final masterplan.

The Conservation Area Appraisal will be sent to English Heritage at the appropriate time by CBC. It is important to note that this remains a draft document. The final masterplan will be updated to clearly set out the status and programme of the Appraisal.

- The results of consultation in respect of the Draft Conservation Appraisal show that its key aims and objectives, including the priorities for enhancement and the proposed boundary extensions, are strongly supported. There is however, a generally expressed concern about the negative impact of 'untidiness' in the public realm – inappropriate shop signage and street lighting, signage clutter etc. – and how this contributes to the decline of the town centre.

### *Environment and Biodiversity*

- Natural England would like opportunities for improved open spaces to be clearly linked to the local Greenspace Strategy. They would also like opportunities to enhance biodiversity to be included within the masterplan principles. Stated opportunities include: green walls and roofs; native species within planting and landscaping schemes; incorporating bird and bat boxes; sustainable urban drainage systems.

#### **Masterplan response to identified concerns**

The masterplan will be updated to clearly linked opportunities for improved open spaces to the local Greenspace Strategy in the masterplan. The masterplan principles will be updated to explicitly emphasise the importance of enhanced biodiversity through proposed developments and improvements.

### ***Part C: Delivering the proposals***

#### *Delivery Strategy*

- EEDA welcome the phasing elements of the masterplan and feel they take a pragmatic view of future delivery, particularly over the next five years. They emphasise the need for further viability testing.

#### **Masterplan response to identified concerns**

The masterplan sets out indicative proposals that meet the objectives and principles. As schemes come forward it is recognised that further viability analysis will be needed to inform detailed designs. The masterplan will be updated to ensure appropriate emphasis is placed on this fact.

## ***Other feedback received***

### *Electricity Network*

- National Grid note that a high voltage overhead electricity line crosses through the north eastern part of the masterplan area. They confirm that this must remain in situ, preferably without buildings directly underneath it. They support use of the land underneath the line for uses such as nature conservation, open space or parking.

#### **Masterplan response to identified concerns**

Noted, the masterplan supports these principles and promotes development accordingly.

### *Masterplan presentation*

- Dunstable Town Council is keen to see the conceptual visualisations that were shown in the consultation brochure and masterplan report improved for the final masterplan document. They feel that they illustrate a homogenised version of many town centres existing elsewhere in the country.

#### **Masterplan response to identified concerns**

Architectural design is beyond the scope of this masterplan and will be explored at a more detailed stage. However the masterplan will recommend that high quality design is vital to all proposals. The masterplan will be updated to include photography that shows an alternative to the type of architecture shown in the consultation visualisations.

### *Consultation*

- The Dunstable Town Centre Management Committee noted the importance of ensuring that the public continue to be kept informed and consulted moving forward.

#### **Masterplan response to identified concerns**

An additional consultation section will be added to the masterplan setting out the need for continued engagement moving forward.

## Chapter 3

### *Findings from the public*

The consultation undertaken for the draft Dunstable town centre masterplan attracted a significant response from members of the public from different social and geographical backgrounds. The findings in this chapter are based on formal responses via the public questionnaires and more informal responses made by the public during the public consultation events set out in Chapter 1. Feedback from stakeholder groups and organisation is set out separately in Chapter 3. The profile (age, gender, etc.) of those who responded to the questionnaire is set out in Appendix B. The feedback has been summarised by masterplan objective to follow the format of the questionnaire.

#### **Objective 1 – A more focussed centre with a mix of activities to attract people throughout the day and evening**

The first masterplan objective is for the town centre to be more focussed on a certain area, with a greater range of things to do. Opinion on the principles below is also shown in the diagram that follows.

*1. Retail should focus on one area of the town centre and include bigger shops*

The majority (59%) of respondents felt that retail should be focussed in one area and also include some bigger shops, although a third (35%) disagreed, with some stating that retail should also be provided in the western and southern quadrants to attract people to these areas.

Most people supported bigger shops, although some respondents objected to the prospect of bigger shops, as they felt that any attempt to attract a department store would be unsuccessful given competition from nearby towns. Whilst there was also considerable support for bigger stores, many respondents preferred a focus on smaller shops. There was considerable objection to the proposed expansion of Asda, with respondents commenting that the store has already harmed smaller shops at its current size and this would only worsen based on the current plans. Some respondents suggest Asda be re-located out of the town centre.

There was support from respondents to move the market to a more central location and provide a greater range stalls and themes, such as potentially a farmer's market.

Several respondents specifically gave their support for a new pedestrianised shopping street and some of these requested that a cover be provided to attract people when it is raining.

#### **Masterplan response to identified concerns**

Asda is a key attractor to the town centre and increases the potential for linked trips. The masterplan will seek to improve the design of the store in relation to other shops and link them together more strongly. Significant retail development and proposed improvements to the public realm should provide a step change to the town centre that will significantly increase footfall and reverse the current trends of decline.

## *2. The existing town centre should be prioritised over out of town developments*

There was strong agreement (86%) that the existing town centre should be the focus of new development and regeneration, rather than providing new retail or other development outside of the centre, which may undermine the town centre further. Only 1 in 10 (11%) of respondents disagreed.

## *3. Dorchester Close will need to be redeveloped to facilitate regeneration*

There was a mixed view from the public respondents as a whole whether or not Dorchester Close would need to be redeveloped to facilitate regeneration, although the most frequent response (40%) was that it should not be redeveloped. It is important to note though that a quarter of respondents (27%) thought that it would be necessary and a third (32%) were unsure. The written comments submitted by respondents were numerous, pointing out that these proposals would cause distress to existing residents and may be unnecessary if an alternate approach is found. Many were keen to see adequate compensation for those affected. Some pointed out that it is important a decision is reached and finalised, to avoid doubt and confusion that may cause further stress and de-value the properties for those wishing to sell.

The linked proposal to build a multi-storey car park partly on the Dorchester Close site was also unpopular with many respondents, citing reasons including: noise pollution; light pollution; effect on Kingscroft Avenue properties (including restricted views, loss of sunlight and de-valuation of properties); the view that multi-storey car parks are 'ugly'; potential anti-social behaviour; increased traffic around a residential area; and, blight caused by the access road. Popular suggestions for alternate sites include fields north of the bowling alley, or greater use of spaces above new shops. There was also significant objection to the principal of demolishing homes for a car park, regardless of the wider opportunity for regeneration this creates. Some respondents suggested that only the Council-owned properties be removed and not those that are privately-owned.

### **Masterplan response to identified concerns**

During the options stage of the masterplan process car parks to the north and south of GoBowling were considered as possible sites for multi-storey car parking to support any enhanced retail offer. Commercial advice recommended that these sites were too far from the shopping area in order to be successful and acceptable to retailers and shoppers. This also discounted the inclusion of potential other sites in the wider town centre area.

The draft masterplan includes parking above some of the retail units where this could be practically achieved. Additional height for more floors of parking would have access and cost implications.

The proposed multi-storey car park would comprise two internal levels of car parking (Ground floor and first floor), with parking on the roof. The acceptable height of the facility will be made clear in the masterplan.

Commercial advice indicates that the current footprint of the site as shown is deemed necessary to allow a viable and high quality regeneration scheme to come forward and this would not be the case if only the Council-owned properties in Dorchester Close were removed. However, the masterplan proposals are indicative and should a similar scheme come forward, the detailed design would need to respond to the issues raised by respondents here and would be tested at planning application stage. The masterplan will be updated to highlight interventions (landscaped buffer areas, 'living walls', design, height restrictions, etc) that could mitigate concerns raised about the potential negative effects of the car park on neighbouring residential properties.

Whilst there was a mixed view from the public respondents as a whole whether or not Dorchester Close would need to be redeveloped to facilitate regeneration, it is important to note that the public supported the prioritisation of the town centre over out of town developments, the provision of larger shops, and the focus of retail in one area. These would be less achievable without the regeneration opportunities that this proposal creates.

*A new library, medical centre, new public toilets & housing for families & older people are priorities*

There was stronger consensus amongst respondents regarding specific priority developments, as nearly three quarters (71%) felt a new library, medical centre, public toilets and housing for families and older people are priorities. Of those respondents aged under 19, 93% felt that this would be positive for the town.

Some comments submitted supported the proposal to replace the library as long as it remained central to shops and parking but others felt that this was unnecessary, particularly as it has recently been refurbished. One respondent suggested that the Magistrate's Court, Ambulance station and Asda site be amalgamated into a new complex that includes a new library and medical centre.

There was general support for a new medical centre from those respondents who commented, although a couple were concerned that the location was too far from the centre of town.

#### **Masterplan response to identified concerns**

Dunstable Library is likely to require substantial refurbishment in the near future and Central Bedfordshire Council is putting forward the strategic proposal to provide for a new, modern library in a prominent position within the redeveloped town centre.

Commercial advice indicates that the redevelopment of Asda is not viable and it is regarded that the store is a key attractor into the town centre. The masterplan proposes improvements to the rest of the town to help it attract those who shop at Asda to also visit the rest of the town.

The proposed Medical Centre is located as shown in the Masterplan as this would help to integrate the town centre with Central Bedfordshire College, the White Lion Retail Park and the Luton-Dunstable Busway. The Primary Care Trust is also keen to deliver a new town centre facility for residents of Dunstable as soon as possible and this site is deemed the most appropriate.

### *Other comments related to Objective 1*

A considerable number of respondents commented that there are no confirmed youth facilities shown in the proposals. Suggestions included a skate park, and various sports and social groups. Comments were also made that the plans should be made available to schools and young people to encourage their input.

One respondent felt that too much emphasis had been placed on flats in the plan. There were also two comments on housing for older people, one requesting some units are Affordable Housing and the other requesting that they are all private units.

The Grove Theatre is isolated according to one respondent who wants to see it better incorporated into the town centre through the plan.

Many respondents commented that business rents in the town centre are too high and should be lowered to help regenerate the area.

#### **Masterplan response to identified concerns**

Dunstable Town Council has recently carried out refurbishment works to The Place youth facility in High Street North, to make it more attractive to young people, which forms part of a longer aspiration to completely redevelop the whole of The Place site for youth facilities. This forms part of the Town Council's Corporate Plan 2010 – 2013 and the masterplan will be updated to make reference to the Town Council's aspiration of delivering this scheme.

Houses have been promoted in the first instance, wherever suitable. Only in those sites that do not allow for houses, such as on floors above certain new shops, have flats been proposed. However, it is considered that other locations for flat development, in particular housing for older people, could include the redevelopment of the existing medical centre in Priory Gardens (once the proposed new medical centre is completed) and also small scale housing developments in Ashton Square.

The proposed linkages of Grove House Gardens and Priory Church Gardens will assist in bringing the Grove Theatre into the town centre.

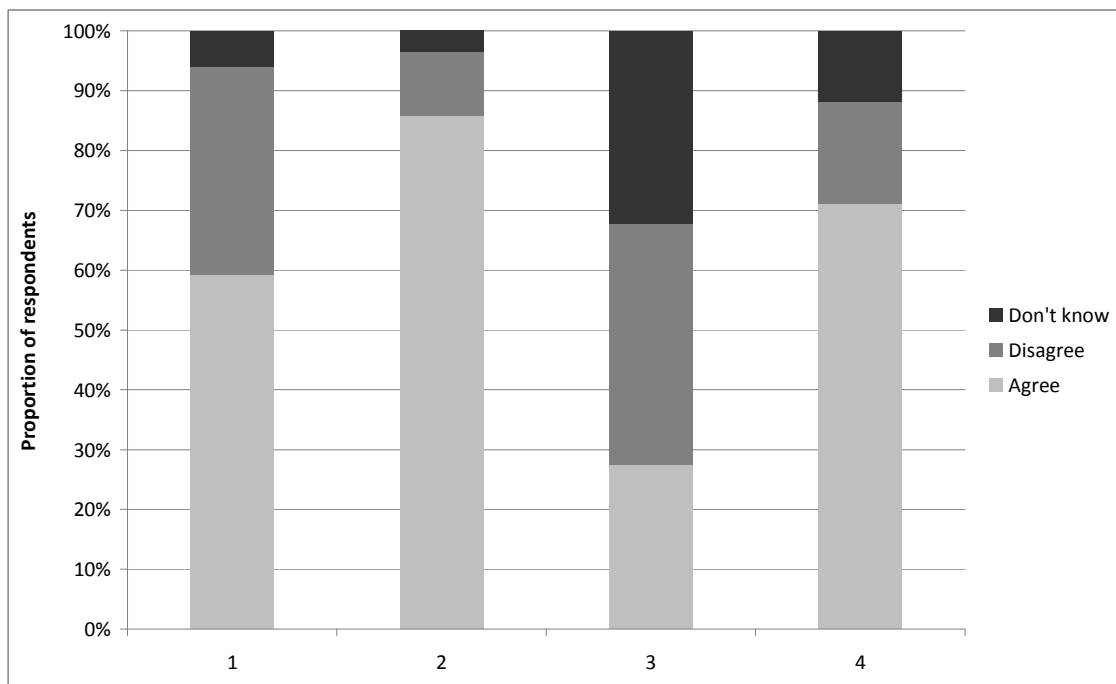
It is not within the power of Central Bedfordshire Council to relax business rates, however Central Government is considering a shift in policy that could allow for business rates to be locally controlled. CBC will need to respond to any national changes based on a considered view of the pros and cons such proposals.





Members of the public attend a public exhibition

1. Retail should focus on one area of the town centre and include bigger shops
2. The existing town centre should be prioritised over out of town developments
3. Dorchester Close will need to be redeveloped to facilitate regeneration
4. A new library, medical centre, new public toilets & housing for families & older people are priorities



## **Objective 2 – A centre with inviting landmarks, views and buildings**

### *1. Development should help create new gateways or landmarks*

The majority of those who responded via questionnaires (60%) agreed that entrance points to the town centre should be inviting with new landmarks or gateway developments. 1 in 5 (21%) felt that this would be inappropriate and some commented that funds would be better spent elsewhere.

### *2. Shop front improvements & better management of vacant units*

The overwhelming majority (98%) of respondents saw shopfront improvements and better management of empty shops as an important step. This would help to restore the heritage character of the town if improved sensitively and would help to make the town feel livelier.

### *3. New buildings & public spaces should compliment Dunstable's heritage, open spaces & nearby residential properties*

Similarly, 92% of respondents wanted new development and public spaces to complement the existing heritage of the market town as well as existing residential areas and open spaces. Written comments stressed support for the plan's aims for improvements that are in keeping with the town's heritage. There was limited concern over the example of modern style of architecture shown in the consultation material and also that the proposals would block views of Dunstable Baptist Church from the surrounding streets and paths.

One respondent felt that Middle Row was isolated by housing in the current plans, and another saw it as an 'eyesore' that should be removed.

#### **Masterplan response to identified concerns**

Development around Dunstable Baptist Church is proposed to include a new open space, from which it would be possible to relax and view the church. The development also deliberately seeks to partly enclose the area to create a focus for the church in the centre. Importantly, key views from Middle Row are protected and promoted through streetscape and lighting improvements. The masterplan will be updated to make clear that there is potential to also provide views through to West Street, although this is likely to be at the expense of the Church's setting and could result in an overly wide street.

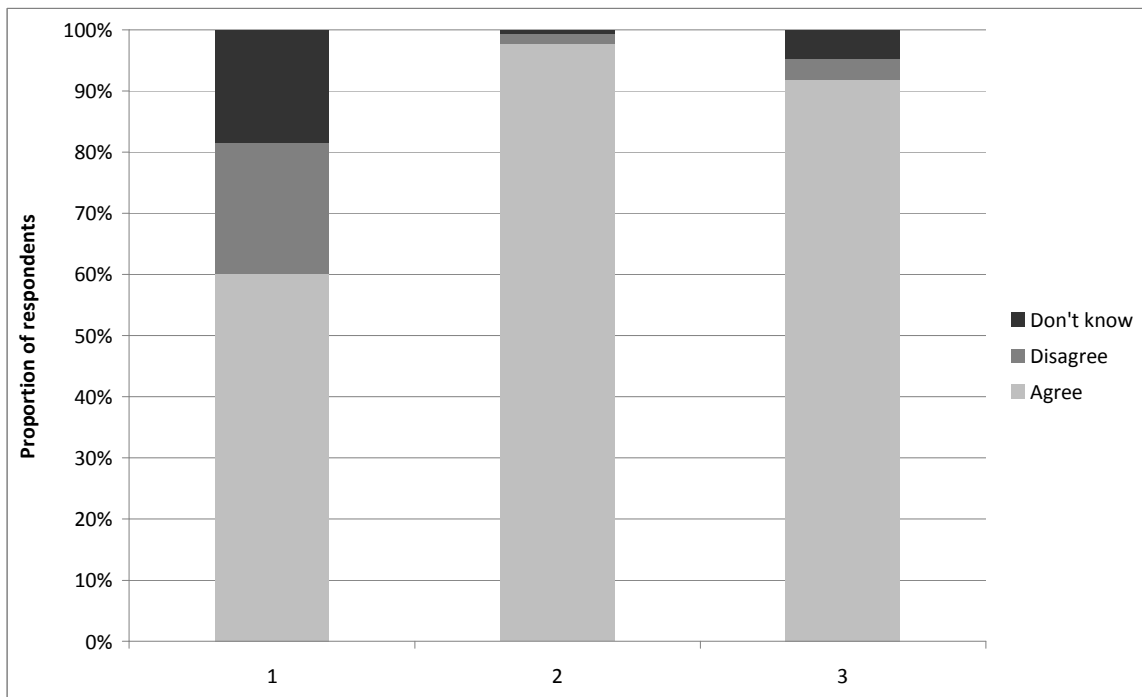
The proposals facing Middle Row have been put forward in the masterplan to correspond with the current height and uses of the site, which is deemed to be the most appropriate way of celebrating this asset.

The Draft Town Centre Conservation Area Appraisal supports opportunities for enhancement of empty shops including potential living above shops.



Members of the public attend a public exhibition

1. Development should help create new gateways or landmarks
2. Shop front improvements & better management of vacant units
3. New buildings & public spaces should compliment Dunstable's heritage, open spaces & nearby residential properties



## **Objective 3 – To create a town centre accessible by a wide range of transport modes**

### *1. The masterplan should assist in reducing congestion in the town centre*

Traffic congestion in the town centre is clearly a major issue for the public respondents, as 95% want the masterplan to help reduce it. This was confirmed by the numerous comments received.

### *2. Improvements to the A5 should be encouraged to make the town safer and more enjoyable for people to use*

The A5 (High Street North and High Street South) is also clearly in need of improvements according to respondents, as 95% agreed that such improvements should be a priority which would make the town both safer and more enjoyable. The timeframe for the A5-M1 Link Road and consequent de-trunking of the A5 is too long for some people, who feel the congestion issues must be dealt with in advance of the Link Road. Various suggestions were also submitted, such as the removal of the cross-roads, creation of a one-way system; replacement of traffic lights with roundabouts and additional pedestrian crossings.

#### **Masterplan response to identified concerns**

The importance of the A5-M1 link and consequent de-trunking is acknowledged, although it is outside of the power of this masterplan and Central Bedfordshire Council to alter these timeframes.

Detailed design as part of the proposed de-trunking of the A5 through the town centre is being assessed outside of this masterplan by Central Bedfordshire Council and the suggestions noted here will be taken into account. The emerging Local Transport Plan along with the Local Area Transport Plan for Dunstable will incorporate an implementation programme which will address some of these issues.

3. *A similar proportion of car parking spaces to shops as there is currently in the town centre should be provided*

Three quarters of respondents felt that the current ratio between parking spaces and shops was about right and supported extra spaces being provided at the same rate in the future. 1 in 6 (16%) respondents disagreed.

There was considerable concern about the car parks proposed in the plan though, particularly with regard to the consolidation of many parking spaces to the north-eastern quadrant and the proposed development of other car parks, specifically Ashton Square, caused concern for many respondents, due to the number of active churches in the southern and western areas. Two respondents estimated that approximately 800 people visit the Methodist, Dunstable Baptist, West Street Baptist, Polish Catholic and St. Mary's Catholic churches, as well as the Salvation Army, on Sundays, and that they remain active throughout the week for various clubs and other gatherings. Many visitors therefore use existing parking spaces which are proposed to be moved under the proposals. A significant proportion of visitors are reportedly elderly or disabled and the current proposals are consequently deemed not to serve their needs.

*Note: comments relating directly to the multi storey car park proposed in the north-eastern quadrant are noted above under Objective 1 as respondents felt it was directly linked to the Dorchester Close proposals.*

**Masterplan response to identified concerns**

Whilst there is a general shift in the proportion of parking spaces towards the north-eastern quadrant, the masterplan proposes to also retain public car parking spaces in the other three quadrants to allow visitors to park in a variety of places within the town centre. Church Close car park would be retained in the south-east and part of Ashton Square car park would be retained in the south-west. A new, smaller, multi-storey car park would also be provided in the south-west wrapped by retail and other development. Furthermore, Matthew Street car park is retained and public car parking spaces would be re-provided as part of the proposed Regent Street car park and the Royal Mail sorting office site redevelopment. Notwithstanding the proposed retention of car parking in Ashton Square, the masterplan will be revisited to reconsider these issues.

*Other comments related to Objective 3*

Some respondents also called for free car parking throughout the town centre to attract visitors and a small number requested additional on-street parking for short term stops.

A limited number of respondents wanted to see better improvements to bus services shown through this plan, including more regular services during evenings and weekends, and better timetabling information at improved bus stops.

Although outside the influence of this masterplan, numerous objections to the Luton Dunstable Busway were received.

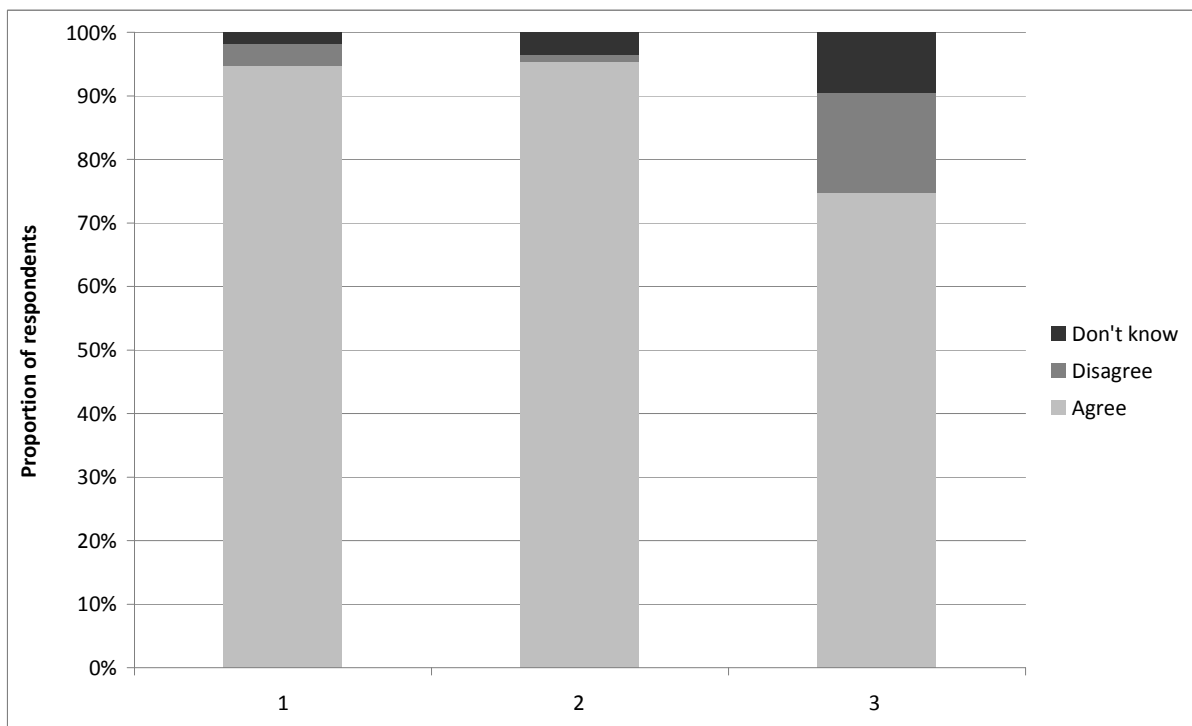
### Masterplan response to identified concerns

It is not within the scope of this Masterplan to recommend free car parking throughout the town centre and it is felt that this would not contribute to the agreed masterplan objectives.

Improved bus services are not within the scope of this Masterplan and would be demand-led. There may be potential for additional bus routes and frequency following additional housing development to the wider area as proposed in the Council's Core Strategy. The masterplan will be updated to recommend improved timetabling information at improved bus stops.

The majority of respondents agree that the current rate of car parking compared with retail floorspace is appropriate and, due to the nature of the streets in the town centre and car park availability, it is not deemed appropriate to provide on-street public car parking. However, this does not preclude additional on-street parking in future subject to further analysis from the Council.

1. The masterplan should assist in reducing congestion in the town centre
2. Improvements to the A5 should be encouraged to make the town safer and more enjoyable for people to use
3. A similar proportion of car parking spaces to shops as there is currently in the town centre should be provided



## Objective 4 – A connected network of public streets, spaces and parks

### 1. Improved pedestrian & cycle routes across the town centre

The proposal to improve walking and cycle links across the town centre was particularly popular (83% support).

### 2. Improved links between Grove House Gardens & Priory Gardens

The most common response to the proposal to improve links between the two historic gardens was to agree (47%) that it is important, which outweighs the proportion that disagree (30%). Importantly, 1 in 4 respondents (23%) were unsure of their view on this suggestion.

#### Masterplan response to identified concerns

The proposals create a clear link between the two historic gardens and open up a landmark view through to Priory Church of St. Peter. This is a key element of the regeneration scheme and it is felt that this will be an important way of connecting the history of Dunstable with the day-to-day experience of users.

### 3. Maximise trees & planting throughout the town

83% of respondents supported extra trees and plantings in the town centre where suitable.

### 4. Widening the footways along High Street North

The majority of respondents (65%) would like the footways along High Street North to be widened, although a quarter (24%) disagrees.



Members of the public at a manned public exhibition

### *Shared surfaces, where pedestrians, cyclists & vehicles share the same space*

The proposal to create shared space in certain areas, where pedestrians, cyclists and vehicles share the same space was opposed by half of the respondents (51%). Over 1 in 3 support the move (35%). This varied considerably between genders, as 42% of male respondents supported the move, compared with just 28% of females.

A significant number of respondents were supportive of plans to make the town more pedestrian friendly, although some were concerned about shared space due to potential safety issues, particularly for blind or disabled people. A small number felt that the streets were already shared as young people cycle dangerously on the pavements and would not want the plan to permit further cross-over between cyclists and pedestrians.

#### **Masterplan response to identified concerns**

The masterplan will be updated to ensure it emphasises that changes to the streets would need to be appropriate for disabled and older users. Detailed modelling will be required as part of the proposed de-trunking of the A5 and these issues will be assessed at this stage. The aim of the proposal is to make the town centre more pedestrian- and cyclist- friendly and this could be achieved in a variety of ways.

The emerging Local Transport Plan along with the Local Area Transport Plan for Dunstable will incorporate an implementation programme which will address some of these issues.

#### *5. New smaller public spaces to complement existing larger parks & gardens*

Three quarters (75%) of respondents felt that new smaller public spaces would complement existing larger parks and gardens. Approximately 1 in 7 (14%) felt this is to be unimportant.

### **Other comments received**

There were numerous other comments on the Draft Masterplan received and all feedback is set out in Appendix A of this report. The main feedback that is not captured above is set out below. These comments were each made by a small number of respondents:

- More action is required during Phase 1 of the masterplan;
- The plan must remain flexible moving forward given the current economic conditions;
- Greater consultation with residents of Kingscroft Avenue is needed;
- The plans in the consultation brochure were too small and detailed;
- Eleanor Cross shopping centre should be redeveloped;
- The Ambulance Station could be relocated within the plan area, such as behind Dunstable College.



### Masterplan response

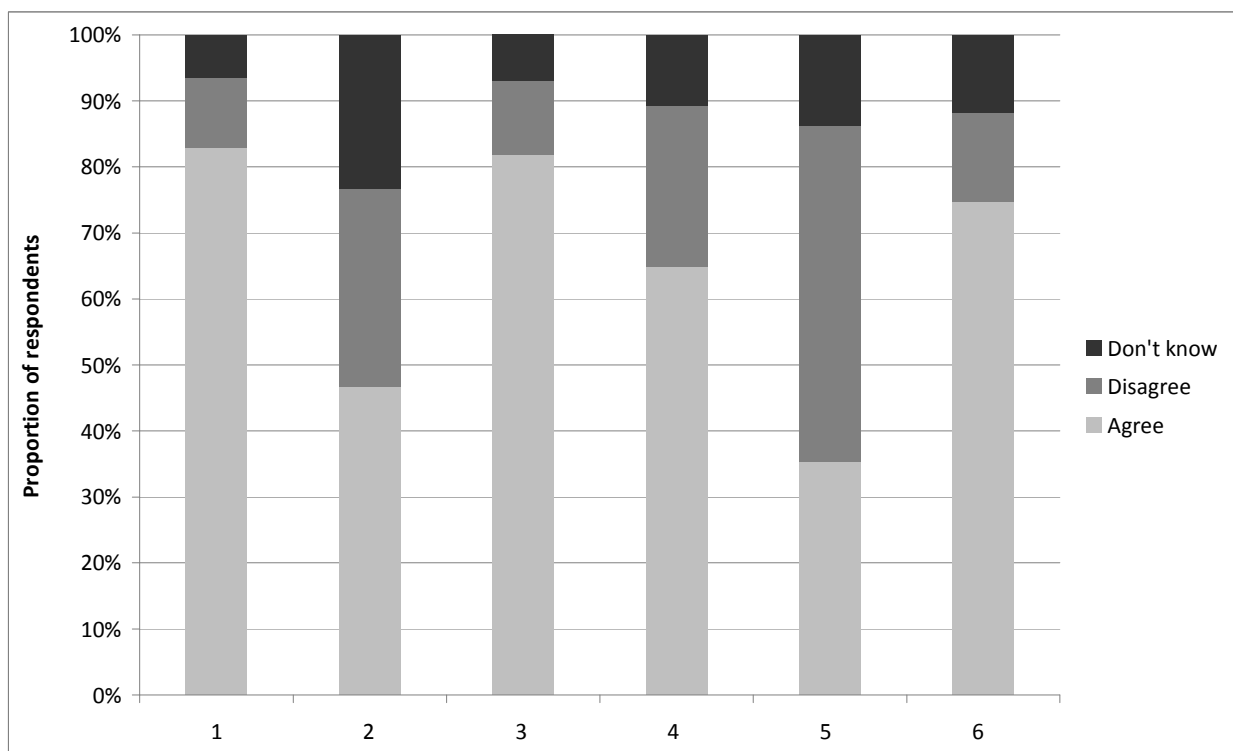
The phasing element of the masterplan is based on commercial advice and it is not considered financially realistic to bring forward more of these proposals in the short term, however, if opportunities come forward sooner than is anticipated, the masterplan has been developed to be flexible enough to consider such proposals.

As proposals come forward, consultations with residents will be carried out in respect of submitted planning applications.

It is not felt necessary to redevelop Eleanor Cross shopping centre as it is in good condition and provides a useful connection between High Street North and Matthew Street car park. It is also deemed important to retain retail space outside of the north-eastern quadrant.

**There were also numerous comments of approval from respondents, setting out support for the objectives and a belief that the plan would achieve them.**

1. Improved pedestrian & cycle routes across the town centre
2. Improved links between Grove House Gardens & Priory Gardens
3. Maximise trees & planting throughout the town
4. Widening the footways along High Street North
5. Shared surfaces, where pedestrians, cyclists & vehicles share the same space
6. New smaller public spaces to complement existing larger parks & gardens



## Chapter 4

### ***Findings from local organisations with an interest in the draft masterplan***

A full list of all local organisations that were informed of the draft masterplan is included within Appendix C. Responses were received from the following local organisations or their representatives:

- All Saints Academy
- Aragon Land and Planning UK LLP, on behalf of Central Bedfordshire College
- BNP Paribas Real Estate, on behalf of Royal Mail
- GVA Grimley Limited, on behalf of Pradera UK (owners of White Lion Retail Park)
- Indigo Planning Limited, on behalf of Sainsbury's Supermarket Limited
- Matthews & Goodman LLP, on behalf of Farrington Securities Ltd (owners of 3-7 Queensway Parade)
- Reef Estates (owners of 40 West Street)

**All local organisations who responded support the masterplan vision and general aspirations of the document**, although a number of these organisations had detailed comments on the plan, a summary of which are set out below by section of the draft masterplan report. Full representations from the organisations are included in Appendix D.

#### ***Part A: Introducing the draft Masterplan***

##### *Town centre boundary*

- Indigo Planning (Sainsbury's) consider that the town centre boundary should be extended to include Sainsbury's and the White Lion Retail Park to fully recognise the masterplan study area and the accessibility of linkages to the heart of the centre and the Busway.

#### **Masterplan response to identified concerns**

Given the town centre's current fragility, the considerable existing capacity within the town centre, and the thrust of government policy overall it is considered that the focus for development should remain within the town centre and the existing town centre boundary should not be significantly extended. Text will be added to Chapter 1 of the masterplan to support this view.

#### ***Part B: Explaining the Detail***

##### *Shopping and retail*

- Indigo Planning, (Sainsbury's) feel that the masterplan places an over-reliance on the proposed expansion of Asda and fails to recognise the importance of the contribution that Sainsbury's and the White Lion Retail Park can play in improving the town centre. They also

consider that the deliverability of the proposed Asda expansion is unacceptably uncertain as it is dependent on other schemes.

#### *Medical centre*

- Reef Estates, owners of 40 West Street, propose the redevelopment and upgrade of their property instead of the masterplan proposal to create a contemporary medical centre. They state that the property is centrally located, more sustainable (as the building already exists) and has planning permission.

#### **Masterplan response to identified concerns**

The Asda proposals represent a town centre first approach to planning (see above).

The Primary Care Trust (PCT) has advised that their preferred location is as shown in the masterplan. The inclusion of this location does not preclude another location coming forward instead should the PCT change their view.

Again, given the town centre's current fragility, the considerable existing capacity within the town centre, and the thrust of government policy overall it is considered that the focus for development should remain within the town centre and the existing town centre boundary should not be significantly extended.

#### *Central Bedfordshire College*

- Aragon Land and Planning (Central Bedfordshire College) object to the perceived lack of recognition given to the college redevelopment and the visual, cultural, educational and economic benefits it would bring to the town centre. They would like greater recognition of the College and clearer commentary on redevelopment of it and its enabling land. They see that redevelopment of the College should be a central objective of the masterplan.
- Aragon Land and Planning wish to see further advice to the decision maker, developer or college on the Planning Authority's position on the redevelopment of the college and enhancement of facilities. An amendment of Figure 4.1 is requested to reflect the college boundary.

#### **Masterplan response to identified concerns**

The potential contribution of Central Bedfordshire College is noted and the commitment to redevelopment of the site and its enabling land is welcomed. The masterplan team will liaise with the College or their representatives to better understand their delivery strategy following the withdrawal of public sector funding.

The masterplan report will be updated as appropriate throughout, including the illustrative masterplan, development schedule, character area and masterplan principles. Other masterplan

diagrams will also be updated as appropriate and, subject to further information, the college will be put forward for redevelopment during Phase 3 of the masterplan.

The masterplan will set out further advice on the redevelopment of the site, including a design layout that maximises integration with the town centre and enabling development that addresses the main road directly to improve the safety of improved walking and cycling links from the Luton Dunstable Busway stop and White Lion Retail Park.

#### *Royal Mail Sorting Office site*

- BNP Paribas Real Estate (BNPPRE), on behalf of Royal Mail, notes that whilst the Post Office unit has been vacant for a number of years, the Delivery Office is in use and plays a vital operational function. Notwithstanding this Royal Mail support redevelopment of the entire site, on condition that a suitable alternative site for the relocation/re-provision of Royal Mail's facilities is found prior to any redevelopment.
- They also request that the masterplan specifically identifies the site for a high density mixed-use development incorporating town centre uses such as retail, restaurants, and cafés together with residential uses. This is because Royal Mail would need the site to yield sufficient value to fund the purchase and fit-out of a new site and the relocation of their operations, as well as provide a surplus incentive value.
- Royal Mail would also only support development surrounding the property that is sensitive to their operations.

#### **Masterplan response to identified concerns**

The requirement for a suitable alternative site for the Royal Mail sorting office will be added to the Delivery chapter of the masterplan.

The masterplan currently allows for the specific type of development supported by Royal Mail, however this will be set out more clearly in the masterplan report. The proposed land use fronting onto High Street North will be retained as 'flexible' on the ground floor with housing above to help ensure that a viable scheme can be found.

#### *Transport and traffic*

- GVA Grimley (White Lion Retail Park) supports the aims to alleviate traffic congestion; improve linkages throughout the area; and improve public transport nodes, pedestrian routes and cycle routes. They particularly endorse the identification of the new White Lion Retail Park Busway stop as a key arrival point and the direct and visual link to the town centre.

- All Saints Academy support the proposals in the masterplan to reduce traffic and minimise congestion.

### **Part C: Delivering the proposals**

#### *Delivery Strategy*

- Indigo Planning (Sainsbury's) feel that the expansion of Sainsbury's can be delivered in the short to medium term (unlike Asda), which would deliver additional convenience retail floorspace to the area and improve linkages to the town centre. They feel this would support the vitality and viability of the town centre through facilitating and encouraging linked trips. They also predict this could help to stimulate the delivery of the rest of the Masterplan.

#### **Masterplan response to identified concerns**

Given the town centre's current fragility it is considered that the focus for development should remain within the town centre and the existing town centre boundary should not be significantly extended.

- Matthews & Goodman (3-7 Queensway Parade) and English Heritage want to see additional wording, making clearer that specific proposals are subject to amendment as they come forward to ensure that schemes are viable.

#### **Masterplan response to identified concerns**

The Delivery Strategy in the Masterplan will be updated to highlight the importance of negotiations with the owners of Queensway Parade. The strategy will also further highlight the importance of schemes to come forward that are based on tested and viable schemes.

### **Other feedback received**

#### *Young people*

- All Saints Academy feel there should be greater mention of the role that education and young people can play in the masterplan. They also state there is little mention of the input from the public that led to the masterplan in its current form.

#### **Masterplan response to identified concerns**

The masterplan has been developed based on significant public consultation to reach its current form, which is explained in detail in Appendix A of the masterplan and two Consultation Statements (not including this report), which are available at <http://www.dunstablemasterplan.info>

The benefit of redeveloping Central Bedfordshire College will be made clear in the masterplan, as will the importance of actively involving young people in the realisation of this masterplan vision. It is important to note that the indicative schemes in this masterplan would be subject to significant further analysis and engagement beyond this masterplan before they are implemented. This will be underlined in the updated masterplan.

Dunstable Town Council has recently carried out refurbishment works to The Place youth facility in High Street North, to make it more attractive to young people, which forms part of a longer aspiration to completely redevelop the whole of The Place site for youth facilities. This forms part of the Town Council's Corporate Plan 2010 – 2013 and the masterplan will be updated to make reference to the Town Council's aspiration of delivering this scheme.

### *Masterplan presentation*

- Aragon Land and Planning (Central Bedfordshire College) suggest that the final report should have paragraph numbers for ease of reference.



Members of the public at a manned public exhibition

## Chapter 5

### *Next steps*

The masterplan will now be finalised in light of the findings set out in this document.

Following consideration of the consultation responses and recommendations, it is intended that the Final Masterplan be reported to the Council's Executive Committee in early 2011 to be endorsed as Interim Planning Guidance for Development Management purposes. Whilst the Final Masterplan is unable to be adopted as formal policy at this stage, given the level of public consultation and analysis that has been undertaken, it would be a material consideration in the determination of planning applications which come forward.

The Final Masterplan will form part of the evidence base for both the Luton and South Central Beds LDF Draft Core Strategy and Draft Site Allocations DPD, with its eventual adoption as a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) after the adoption of the Core Strategy.



Numerous workshops and meetings have informed the creation of this masterplan