

## Dunstable Town Centre Final Masterplan Summary

1. The Final Masterplan which has been developed following a number of stages, proposes a more radical and intensive approach, creating a critical mass of retail space predominantly concentrated in the north east quadrant of the town centre. It is considered that this more radical approach would provide Dunstable with a step change which could attract both investors/developers and subsequent retailers to the town centre.
2. It is important to emphasise that the Final Masterplan is a vehicle to guide and promote renewal, redevelopment and improvement of the town centre. It is not a blueprint. It needs to set out important guiding principles and policies but there must be flexibility to enable private sector market-led solutions to come forward and be considered. The proposals included in the Final Masterplan are illustrative only and it may be that the eventual development that comes forward is different from what has been shown in the document. This point is emphasised throughout the Masterplan document.
3. The main proposals of the Final Masterplan can be listed as follows: -

### Retail

The Final Masterplan is based on a redevelopment and more intensive use of The Quadrant shopping centre area to provide a significant increase in retail floorspace. It is proposed to provide a new shopping 'street' which creates pedestrian links between Grove House Gardens and Priory Gardens, and also incorporate an extension to the existing ASDA store on its existing car park. The extension to the ASDA store would create a functioning anchor to the main redevelopment scheme and encourage linked shopping trips and increased footfall to other parts of the town centre. This proposal would however require the provision of replacement car parking for the ASDA store and also for the proposed increase in retail floorspace in the town centre. Two multi-storey car parks to replace lost car parking is therefore proposed. To enable the creation of this increase in retail floorspace and associated car parking it would be necessary for 20 Council owned flats and 8 privately owned houses in Dorchester Close and one house in Kingscroft Avenue to be included within the development.

4. The proposed substantial increase in retail accommodation creating a 'critical mass' of retail space to enable an improved retail provision, could provide Dunstable town centre with a 'step change' in its current poor perception with both consumers and retailers. This increase in retail floorspace would also improve its appeal to retail operators, resulting in units within the town centre being more attractive to let and establishing Dunstable as a major centre within the southern part of Central Bedfordshire.
5. It is considered that the existing town centre is fragile and that any out of town centre retail developments in the short-term could undermine the masterplan proposals. There is a need to improve the health of the existing town centre area before allowing any expansion of out of town centre retail development, however the Final Masterplan is clear that such out of town centres are not

necessary ruled out, but the priority has to be the focus on the town centre first.

6. Community & Leisure

A replacement library facility is proposed in a prominent position within the proposed redeveloped town centre, in accordance with a specified size to take into account future population growth. Further discussions however, will be needed to agree a proposed strategy for the location of any new library facility, together with the possibility of co-locating with other functions of the Council and its partners. A new cinema is also indicated to be located within the main retail core at first floor level.

7. The Final Masterplan also indicates the site of a new NHS medical centre and ambulance station facility on the existing ex-magistrate's court/ambulance station site. The new centre would accommodate a number of the existing town centre doctor's practices (6) offering a wider range of services to patients. Discussions are continuing with the NHS and the doctor's consortium (Chiltern Vale Health Consortium) as they work towards the development of a business case for this facility.

8. Housing

The Final Masterplan provides a range of housing throughout the town centre area, predominantly focusing on the housing needs as identified in the current Strategic Housing Market Assessment, i.e. family sized, social rented and accommodation for the elderly. The majority of the proposed housing would be provided on existing Council owned car parks, e.g. Ashton Square and Regent Street car parks, however, these areas would not be comprehensively redeveloped until replacement car parking provision is provided elsewhere in the town centre, in accordance with the masterplan proposals. A phased approach to both the provision of town centre car parking and housing will therefore be required.

9. The Council currently own a number of retail units in Ashton Square, which are currently occupied by Wilkinsons, Farm Foods and a number of smaller independent retailers and charity shops. The redevelopment of these units will be phased to coincide with existing lease arrangements and the possible relocation of the occupiers to the redeveloped retail core of the town centre.

10. Car Parking

It is proposed that the majority of the town centre car parking should be located adjacent to the new retail core of the town centre and would be provided by creating two separate new multi-storey car parks (MSCPs); one to serve the proposed new retail development and the other to replace the existing ASDA customer car park. The design and height of these (MSCPs) would need to be sensitive to the local historic context and substantially screened by landscaping. Access to the new development, both car parking and servicing would be from Church Street, whilst access to the replacement ASDA customer car park would be from Court Drive/College Drive junction. These new car parks would be built on part of the existing ASDA store customer car park, land to the rear of Kingsbury Close and also the area of land currently occupied by 20 Council owned flats and 8 private houses in Dorchester Close. A further house in Kingscroft Avenue would also be required to create access to the new car parks.

11. The existing car parking areas in Church Close, in front of Priory Church and also Matthew Street are to be retained but with public realm improvements. The only development proposed in the Priory Church area would be the redevelopment of the existing medical centre for housing for older people, once the new medical centre is built. It is also proposed that an element of the existing Ashton Square car park is retained adjacent to the Methodist Church fronting on to High Street South.
12. Public Realm Improvements  
The Final Masterplan indicates various public realm improvements, a number being focused on High Street North and South, following the possible detrunking of the A5 through the town centre when the A5 – M1 Link road is built. These improvements will include the relocation of pedestrian crossings to create simplified routes across the major roads, narrowing the existing highway to allow the relocation of the market and other enhancements. These proposals which are currently being worked on by the Council's highways consultants AMEY, will form part of the Local Transport Plan LTP. The Final Masterplan also indicates opportunities to assess the feasibility for 'shared space' throughout the town centre.
13. Heritage and Conservation  
A Draft Conservation Area Appraisal has been produced for the town centre which assesses the setting, character and appearance of the conservation area and also identifies opportunities for enhancing the historic environment. It is intended that the appraisal will assist an informed and consistent approach to historic environment considerations throughout development and implementation of the masterplan proposals.

### **Related Strategic Transport Interventions**

14. A5-M1 Link Road  
The Secretary of State has recently encouraged regular meetings to take place between the Department for Transport, Highways Agency, Central Bedfordshire Council and a developer in a partnership arrangement to assist fund the scheme. Subject to the statutory process and agreements that are to be in place by summer 2011, a Public Inquiry will take place in November 2011. The expected start date is likely to be 2014 with completion in 2016.
15. Woodside Connection  
A preferred option has been adopted by the Luton and South Bedfordshire Joint Planning and Transportation Committee following consultation on route options in 2009. The scheme is being developed by CBC with a potential start of works date in 2016/17. The scheme will serve the proposed growth area development to the north of Houghton Regis, enable the removal of inappropriate HGV's trips from the town centre, reduce congestion and improve air and noise in the town centre.
16. De-trunking of the A5  
The de-trunking of the A5 which could potentially take place within 12 months of the opening of the A5-M1 Link Road. This will provide the opportunity to implement more appropriate measures for a town centre type environment rather than the current one focused at a strategic road network. Such

interventions will also help reduce traffic flows and congestion, in particular heavy goods vehicles, improve air quality and allow for safer interaction between pedestrian and vehicles in the town centre. Detailed designs for the A5 High Streets are being developed by CBC for implementation following de-trunking and the Masterplan sets out the key principles, which will form the basis for these improvements.

17. Luton Dunstable Busway

The Luton Dunstable Busway is a committed scheme with work on-site already started and with a target opening date of early 2013. It is envisaged that the Busway will provide a frequent and dependable high quality bus service linking Houghton Regis, Dunstable and Luton. Whilst some of the transport and movement proposals set out in the masterplan are not contingent on the implementation of the external transport improvements, others will be harder to reach without them.

18. Local Transport Plan (LTP3) and Local Area Transport Plan

A programme of works has been developed to cover Dunstable and surrounding areas and was formulated following extensive local consultation and integration with other projects such as the Luton Dunstable Busway and the Masterplan. Each scheme has been designed to reflect the particular needs of specific communities and includes the following initiatives for Dunstable;

- Introduction of shared space (local centres, town centres)
- 20mph zones (residential areas), Lorry / HGV bans (residential area)
- Bus stop and information enhancements
- Cycle and pedestrian improvements to town centres, employment areas and the Dunstable & Luton Hospital
- Road Safety measures to enable safe crossing facilities for children

### **Delivery of the Masterplan**

19. Dunstable town centre is in a fragile state at the moment and proposals will be predominantly private sector market-led and will need to be viable within the existing challenging economic climate. Proposals coming forward will need to be considered on their merit and how they deliver against the vision, objectives and principles of the Final Masterplan, while also providing security for the town centre's long-term sustainability and a step change in the quality of the town's buildings, open space and public realm.
20. The Final Masterplan is a vehicle to guide and promote renewal, redevelopment and improvement of the town centre which sets out important guiding principles and policies. However, there must be flexibility to enable market-led solutions to come forward and be considered. The proposals included in the Final Masterplan are illustrative only and it may be that the eventual development that comes forward is different from what has been shown in the document. This point is emphasised throughout the Masterplan document.
21. The Final Masterplan indicates the delivery of the proposals over a fifteen year period, divided into 3 five year phases with the first phase focusing on key sites which could be brought forward for developed. Some of these sites could come forward as 'early wins' acting as a stimulus to change and could include the proposed NHS medical centre and the redevelopment of the ex-

Royal Mail sorting office and Regent Street car park sites. Furthermore, these 'early wins' would send out a clear signal of intent to developers/investors and also the wider community.

22. The second phase would focus on public realm improvements to Matthew Street car park and possibly along the High Street North and South if the A5 de-trunking had taken place. The redevelopment of the existing medical centre to provide a small residential scheme adjacent to Priory Gardens if the proposed replacement new medical centre had been built could also be implemented within this time-frame.
23. The final stage, being the most significant, would concentrate around the existing Quadrant Shopping Centre, creating a substantially larger retail offer together with associated car parking provision and the re-alignment of Court Drive towards High Street North. Once this redevelopment had been completed, the development of the Ashton Square car park and West Street car park can be completed, as a residential-led neighbourhood to include new green open spaces and an element of retail/mixed uses.