



Whittlesey – A Market Town fit for the Future

Final Report



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Introduction

What is Growing Fenland?

The recently published Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Independent Economic Review (CPIER) identified that within the Combined Authority there are three distinct sub-economies. There is the Greater Cambridge economy, which includes the many towns where people commute from into Cambridge. There is the Greater Peterborough economy, and its surroundings. But in an important classification, there is also the fen economy, which includes much of our district of Fenland, as well as parts of East Cambridgeshire and Huntingdonshire.

A lot of strategy has historically focused on making cities work well, and assuming the rest will follow. But because our economy is separate, and in some ways quite isolated with sub-standard transport links, this approach won't work for us. We need a strategy for each of our towns, which helps them prosper, and delivers best quality of life for people who live here. This must acknowledge where we have links to other towns or cities, while seeking to build strength in our places. The Combined Authority is committed to doubling economic output across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough by 2040 – to do this, all areas are going to have to succeed, not just the Cambridge economy.

To make this happen, following the CPIER analysis, the Combined Authority has decided to support a process of creating market town plans for each town in our district – Chatteris, March, Whittlesey, and Wisbech. These plans will be used to bid for funding from the Combined Authority and other funding providers, based on the vision for the town.

To develop these plans, each town has established a town team, consisting of representatives from business, local government, schools, and others. The town team has looked at life in the town from every angle, and has developed a vision for each town. They have also worked on ideas which could make a real difference.

The Growing Fenland project tries to capture a balance. On the one hand, each of these towns is unique, with its own particular opportunities, as well as challenges. On the other hand, there are some areas where by working together we can have more of an impact. Therefore, we are publishing four separate reports for each of the towns, but under the same banner – and if you read all four, you will see some crossover.

The process to produce this report

To produce this report, we have gone through several stages of information gathering to ensure our recommendations will work for Whittlesey. These are:

- 1) Data collection, using a variety of sources (appendices showing the full data packs created at the back)
- 2) Meetings with the Whittlesey town team, which has had representation from the town and district councils, businesses, and educational establishments.
- 3) Public meetings to allow residents to express views on the town, and ideas as they have developed
- 4) Interim reports, which set out a summary of key ideas for the town
- 5) Continued consultation and an online survey to refine and develop ideas, and

- 6) Production of final reports, to generate support for our plans and leverage in funding from the Combined Authority

We would like to thank all those who participated in producing the reports, and offer our particular gratitude the Town Team representatives from each area who were so generous in sharing their time, thoughts and insights.

Whittlesey – an overview of the town

Whittlesey is a great place to live and learn. We want to build on these strengths to make Whittlesey a market town that thrives on its heritage and is fit for the future.

Whittlesey is a town with many strengths. It is a popular and attractive place to live, with a strong community spirit. We have good and continuously improving schools. Our programme of annual events, including the Straw Bear festival, attracts people from far and wide. We have some excellent restaurants and shops that draw people into the town.

As a place we are always looking to improve and make necessary changes to thrive. Most recently, for example, the relocation of the bus station has brought new life to the centre of town and creates the opportunity to do even more with the square, the area in which it was previously located.

We also benefit from our proximity to Peterborough. As reflected in the CPIER, Whittlesey is considered much more a part of the Greater Peterborough economic geography, compared to the rest of Fenland. This creates opportunities for residents to work, study, and shop, while we still maintain a proudly independent identity and distinct local culture.

We can offer the ‘best of both worlds’ to current and future residents: the sense of community, the calm and closely to the countryside offered by a market town, alongside the benefits of proximity to a city, with everything that it has to offer.

A High Street in need of regeneration

We have some high-quality shops in Whittlesey which are popular with locals and visitors alike. However, as shown in the graph to the left, the amount of retail floorspace in the town has declined.

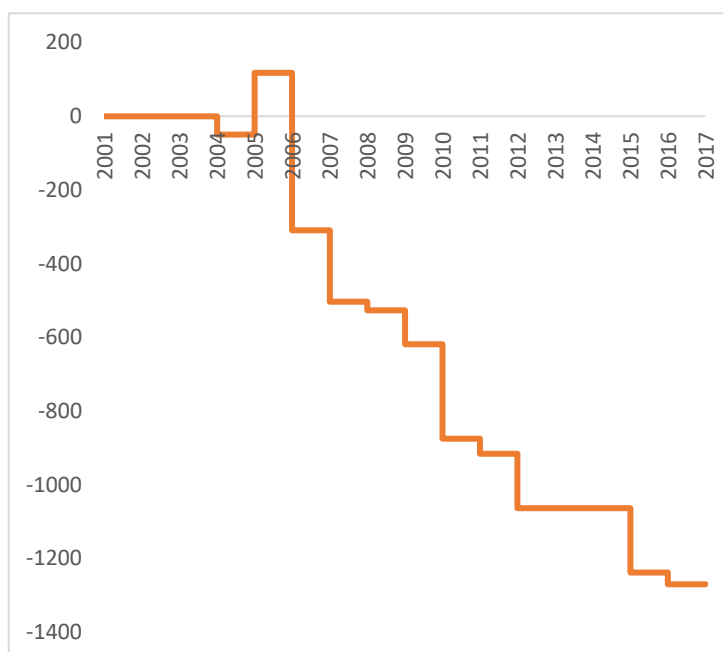


Fig. 1: A1 space (shops) in Whittlesey (m2) – change since 2001

Source: Analysis of Cambridgeshire County Council data

There are not enough shops in and around the town centre, and the overall retail offer is not diverse or distinctive enough to compete with the wider range of shops available elsewhere, particularly in Peterborough.

The decline of the traditional high street is very much a national trend. However, as a historic market town, such changes force us to think radically about what our high street and town centre is for. As a priority we want to encourage more specialist markets, such as antique fairs and famers’ markets, that will attract more people to the town.

We also need to think about how we move with the wider shift from buying things to having experiences

on the high street.

Rich heritage and culture

An aspect of the town which is attracting more and more people is our rich heritage and culture. Whittlesey is mentioned in Anglo-Saxon documents that precede the Domesday Book. At the centre of town is the 17th Century Buttercross. Must Farm, an excavation site describe by the BBC as “Britain’s Pompei” containing the “best-preserved Bronze Age dwellings ever found”, is a precious town asset.¹ Flag Fen Archaeology Park houses a perfectly preserved wooden causeway that is over 3,000 years old The Mud Walls, dotted across town, date back 200 years and were an innovative local way to avoid the unpopular Brick Tax.²

That rich history inspires a vibrant local culture, as reflected in a full calendar of events and celebrations. These include music and dance festivals including the famous Straw Bear, the annual Whittlesey festival, ‘BusFest’ vintage vehicle gathering, and our Christmas Extravaganza.

We want to share these assets with the world. We therefore make recommendations in this report for improvements to the market square and town centre that will set the stage for us to do that.

A well-educated population – but not enough jobs in the town

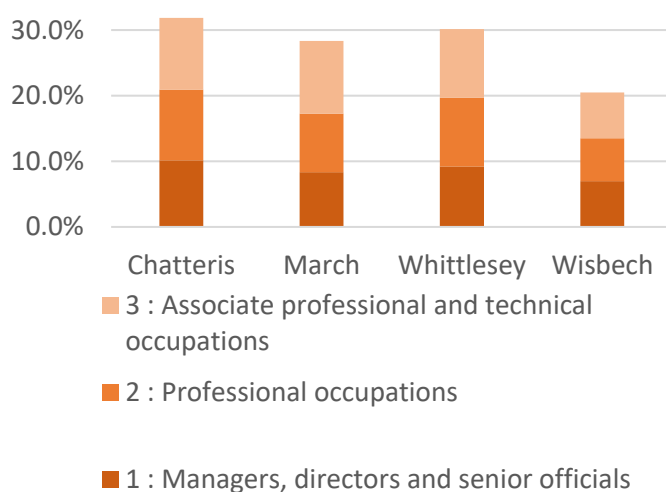
Our schools perform well. At primary level, each school has improved further in recent years, while pupils at Sir Harry Smith perform above the national average in terms of GCSE results, the Ebacc average points score and A Level completion.

“Schools in Whittlesey are regarded as among the best locally.”

Our schools’ performances have helped develop a population that is better educated than other parts of Fenland. As show in Fig. 2 below, just under one in three people in Whittlesey is in a professional, managerial or director-level job. This is a major

Fig 2: Managerial, professional and technical occupations in the Fenland towns

Source: ONS Annual Population Survey (APS)



asset for our ambition to lead the way as the market town of the future.

It is true that many of our residents live here and work in Peterborough (45.3% of workers, at the time of the last census). And, according to a 2017 survey, conducted in support of the Neighbourhood Plan, 78% of Whittlesey residents acknowledged that younger people tend to leave the town to find work.

Nonetheless, we have several important local employers such as Forterra and McCain Food.

¹ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-cambridgeshire-36778820>

² <https://historicengland.org.uk/whats-new/in-your-area/east-of-england/mud-walls/>

Furthermore, recent data also reveals a large increase in the number of professional, scientific and technical jobs in recent years³.

In future, we want even more of our young people to live and work in Whittlesey. We will do this by exploring with local partners, including new businesses, what specific, targeted measures might further spur the growth of local enterprises.

Good quality homes – a mixed picture of connectivity

As well as good schools, another reason that people move to Whittlesey is that we build a range of good quality homes. This includes family homes and affordable homes for teachers and other young professionals. The past five years have seen a strong increase in both house prices and completions; and in the past two years alone we built more homes than any other part of Fenland.

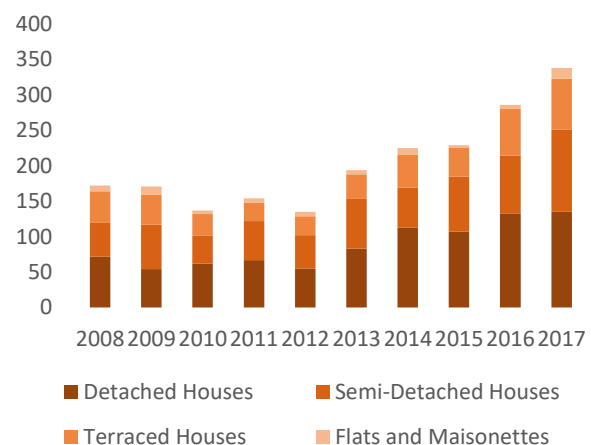
“Whittlesey is a boom town in building terms.”

People living in these homes also have access to ultra-fast broadband, as reflected in the map to the right. In a world of digital by default, households need broadband to access services and companies need it to research, trade and promote themselves. The blanket access to high speed broadband is a powerful competitive advantage.

In contrast to our online connectivity, we face some transport challenges. While this is true of many parts of Fenland, three quarters of people here rely on the car to get to work; this is higher than the Cambridgeshire and England averages.

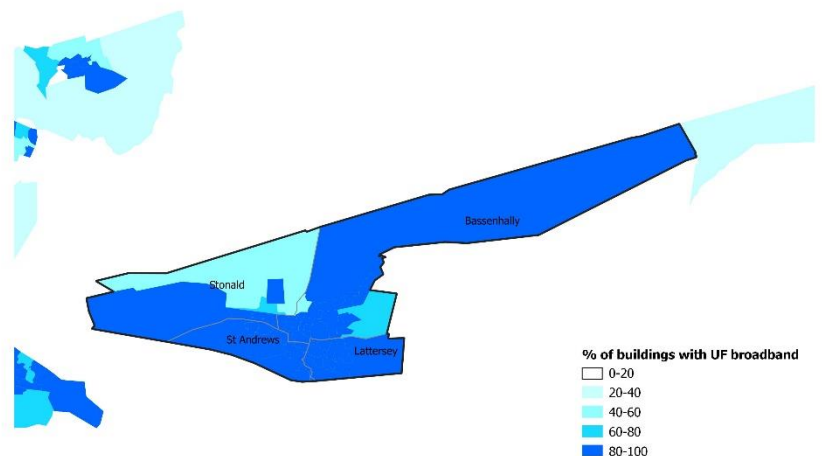
There is a train station at Whittlesey, but it is on the far edge of the town and is felt by some residents to be poorly lit and potentially unsafe at night. In the past, people using the trains have

Fig 3: Whittlesey housing sales since 2008



Source: ONS House Price Statistics for Small Areas (HPSSA)

Fig. 4: Access to Ultra-Fast Broadband



Source: Analysis of Ofcom Connected Nations Data

³ Analysis of the ONS Business Register and Employment Survey (BRES)

complained that services did not stop at Whittlesey and the overall services was unreliable. Improvements to the station are currently being implemented, but to not to the agreed timetable.

As with the other market towns in Fenland, public transport services in Whittlesey do not run frequently enough at all times, finish too early in the evening, and offer an insufficient range of travel options in and out of town. Overall, most people in Whittlesey still opt to drive above all other options.

People in Whittlesey experience somewhat worse health outcomes than the rest of the country.

Incidences of cancer, emergency hospital admissions and rates of self-harm are all above the national and Cambridgeshire averages. Healthy eating amongst adults is below national levels, while deliveries to teenage mothers are above the national averages.

It also important to note that **we have a close relationship with Peterborough**, in terms of connectivity, commuting patterns, the housing and job markets, retail options etc. This is unlikely to change, and in fact brings us many benefits; having a city so close by creates opportunities for our residents. The question is how we can further benefit from that connection while also offering something distinct as a place to visit and spend time.

***83% of respondents say they would make journeys by public transport, walking and cycling if services are improved.
(Neighbourhood Plan Scoping Report)***

Whittlesey – what residents are telling us

Our work consulting the community brought out the following key themes.

Likes

The sense of community linked to the “genuine friendliness” of local people was cited as the best things about life in Whittlesey. Respondents linked the sense of community to activities and events, especially the Straw Bear festival. Also linked to this sense of having a good community spirit, people described the place as quiet, safe and a good place to raise a family. Good quality local schools were also identified, which would fit with the feeling of Whittlesey as a good place for families. While people were positive about the small town feel of the place, they were also positive about the easy access to Peterborough.

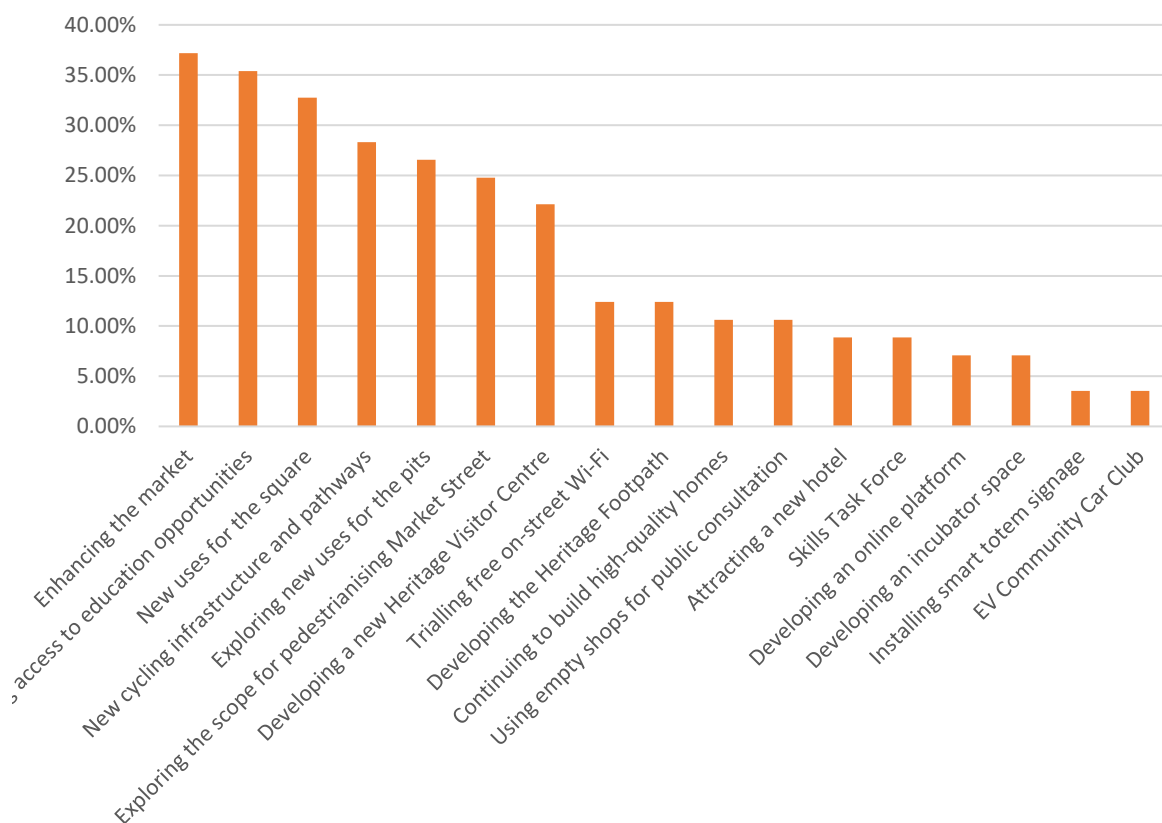
Dislikes

Residents didn’t identify many things they disliked about Whittlesey. The main issues that people referenced negatively were general transport and accessibility issues, with calls for more public transport in and out town. High school students identified a lack of things to do for their age group.

Improvements

The main aspects for improvement to emerge from resident feedback were the range of local shops, with calls for more specialised shops and large supermarket. Some residents also identified a need for additional amenities such as GP surgeries and a re-opened police station.

Favourite ideas from the interim report



Source: Analysis of Fenland District Council data. Height of bars shows the proportion of residents who chose an idea in their top three.

When asked to identify their favourite ideas, respondents opted for a fairly wide spread of preferences, with no one option emerging as the clear favourite. The three options with most preferences were: enhancing the market (37%); improving access to education opportunities (35%); and new uses for the square (33%).

The second grouping of expressed preferences, garnering around a quarter of responses were: new cycling infrastructure and pathways (28%); exploring new uses for the pits (27%); exploring the scope for pedestrianising Market Street (25%); and developing a new Heritage Visitor Centre (22%).

Whittlesey – a market town fit for the future

Whittlesey has so many assets that inspire local pride. We want to build on these and draw on our rich heritage to make Whittlesey **a market town fit for the future**.

We will do this by improving the heart of our town by bringing new life to its centre. We will do this through a programme of enhancements to the market so it becomes an even more important part of life in the town and an extra reason to come and visit. In parallel, we will work with local traders to encourage more activities and events in the square.

Future-facing market towns have a unique and distinctive reputation and 'offer' to the rest of the world. That might be connected to food, music or a famous son or daughter of the town. Whittlesey's offer is our heritage. Whittlesey is mentioned in the *Cartularium Saxonicum* of 973 A.D. and the Domesday Book. Must Farm, "Britain's Pompeii", magnificent bronze age settlement has been discovered, is precious asset of the town.

We will promote our heritage offer and the other things we have to offer through a new website for the town.

The third way we will ensure we are fit for the future is through increasing skills. We will work with partners to improve transport access to educational opportunities and develop a local skills partnership that will bring together partners to ensure local people can access the skills they need.

Eight proposals for Whittlesey

We have identified a package of eight connected interventions that will make a lasting difference Whittlesey:

1. Enhancing the market

We will explore an alternative location to the market, provide additional support to traders, and better promote the market to residents and visitors.

2. New uses for the square

We will encourage more events and activities on the square, especially in spring and summer, to create a more vibrant 'piazza' feel.

3. Heritage Visitor Centre

We will start to develop a new visitor centre that showcases local artefacts and tells the story of Whittlesey, and Fenland more generally, from the Bronze Age to the modern day.

4. Developing the Heritage Walk

Alongside the visitor centre, the Walk will provide residents with a fascinating guided tour through key landmarks in the town and beyond.

5. New town website

We will promote these new activities and assets, plus existing events like the Straw Bear festival, through a new website.

6. Access to educational opportunities

We will explore with partners short- and long-term opportunities to make it easier for people to access educational institutions in Peterborough and Alconbury Weald.

7. Local skills partnership

We will create a new forum for all those with an interest in skills in the town, including businesses, to ensure that provision matches future skills demands.

8. Transport improvement package

A coordinated set of improvements in and around the town that will facilitate greater mobility and connectivity.

We unpack each of these in detail below.

Some interventions are short term, some medium term, and some longer-term. For each intervention, we set out outline version of the strategic case, the financial case, and the management case.

In most instances, the financial case includes an estimate of costs. We see the CPCA as the primary source of funding, to provide full funding or to provide sufficient funding to enable us to make a strong case to unlock other sources of support. In the latter case, we will also be looking to national government, and its various town support funds.

While we may not attain funding for every intervention immediately, the proposals we set out are 'shovel ready' and could be used as and when further funding from different sources becomes available in future.

1. Enhancing the market

Strategic case

The market is, of course, an important part of Whittlesey's history and identity. Compared to other towns, the market does well. However, as set out in this masterplan, we are ambitious about the future and want to build on that success by further improving the market offer.

While retail patterns are changing, markets still have an important part to play in the future of small towns. They "contribute to the economic, social and political health of towns and cities" and shape the identity of a place by offering something "unique, quirky, unusual and always a bargain".⁴ The weekly market is a fixture of life in Whittlesey. It is popular with residents and brings activity and buzz to the Market Place on a Friday.

As we develop the heritage offer of Whittlesey as a whole, we want the market to be a central feature of that offer to visitors. We want to explore with the market traders and others who may be affected, ways to enhance the market. These are:

- The potential for moving the location of the market to the High Causeway. A pedestrianised high street containing shops, this could mean increased footfall as more shoppers could combine visiting the market with using other shops and facilities. A move would also facilitate our proposal to create a 'piazza' feel on the Market Place by working with local bars and cafés to put tables outside.
- Stall appearance. Successful market stalls attract people's attention with striking, appealing branding. We could work with a specialist agency in high street and market brand to develop high-quality signs and an improved visual presence for each stall.
- Attracting more specialist markets, such as antiques fairs, farmers' markets, and fine food markets. This could be done through outreach to potential traders, including local entrepreneurs, and identification of what changes to facilities (see below) might enable a wider range of uses.
- Wider marketing and online presence. As well as supporting the traders to develop better marketing for their stalls, the market as a whole needs to be branded and promoted. Currently, the market does not have its own website. As part of the development of the digital platform for the town as a whole, we could develop a stand-alone page that promoted what was on offer on the market. We would also invest in bold, high-quality signage to be used on market days.
- Customer retention schemes. One way to keep customers returning is to offer them rewards for doing so; such as buy five coffees and get the sixth for free. We would identify ways in which the traders could introduce similar incentives and provide practical assistance for doing so e.g. help with printing high-quality loyalty cards.
- Improving market infrastructure. We would review the scope for improving the practical facilities available on market days and whether they could be improved e.g. the need for more or better refrigeration if that would help stall-holders to offer a wider range of produce.
- A local 'First Pitch' scheme. As well as working with existing stallholders, we would reach out to local entrepreneurs and invite them to take an empty pitch on the market and sell what

⁴ <https://www.placemanagement.org/media/19883/markets-matter-final.pdf>

they have to offer. The National Market Traders Federation ran a national 'First Pitch' scheme between 2013 and 2014. This gave opportunities to people who, for examples, were baking cakes or making jewellery at home to get out and sell directly to the public. As well as giving local entrepreneurs a boost, a similar scheme will bring new offers to the market.

A proposal to come through the public consultation was moving market day to Saturday, on the basis that more people are free on the weekends. The potential downside of this proposal is that we may end up attracting fewer people by competing with other Saturday markets. It may be possible to attract specialist, niche market activity on a Saturday to avoid this risk.

Financial case

Based on advice from support providers, a package of support could cost between £30k - £50k including a pot of funding for things like printing business cards, improved refrigeration etc.

Management case

The most effective sequence for this proposal would be:

- Initial consultation with traders on the scope of the enhancement programme.
- Commissioning a specialist package of support from an experienced supplier.
- Delivery of the package of support over 3 – 4 months.
- Launch of new branding and marketing as part of the launch of the online platform for the town.

The market traders are the essential partner in this. Experience shows that enhancing local markets works best when traders feel they are central to the process instead of being 'done to'.

If the relocation were to go ahead, it would also be important to work with current businesses on the High Causeway including communication of how the move can increase footfall for everyone.

2. New uses for the square

Strategic case

We will make it easier for local bars and restaurants to serve food and drink outside, and work with those businesses to develop a programme of annual events. The overall purpose is to create a 'piazza' feel in the square, attracting locals and visitors alike, to eat, drink, mingle and relax, especially in the spring and summer months.

The Market Square is in many ways at the heart of life in Whittlesey. Moving the bus stop from the square has already given it a new lease of life; improving the air quality and making it more pedestrian friendly.

To the sides of the square can be found well-regarded and in some cases award winning restaurants, pubs and hotel including the Grade II listed George Hotel pub, which is part of the Wetherspoons chain. The latter does have a licensed outside drinking area.

Beyond the George's small outside licensed drinking area, the venues on and near the square do not use the whole space. This means we have created the capacity for more activity in the square, by moving the bus stop, but have yet to fully take advantage of that.

As a result, the square is an under-used asset with the exceptions of the weekly market, some monthly events, and of course the annual Straw Bear.

To make even greater use of the square, we will develop an annual programme of locally sourced events, including themed evenings and weekends, that will catalyse the kind of vibrancy described above. We would not prescribe the programme in advance. Instead, as described below, we would work with existing venues and, in parallel, source ideas for new square uses from local organisations, artists and others.

Financial case

We would look for funding of between £150k and £200k to bring in the specialist agency, deliver an extensive programme of promotion, and purchase additional equipment. This would be relatively modest amount of money for a programme that could generate significantly increased visitor numbers and footfall through the year.

Making it happen / Delivery

The sequence for making this happen would be to:

- Undertake initial consultation with local businesses
- Deliver a programme of identified improvements to enhance the square amenity, including making the surface more level and user friendly
- Commissioning an event management agency to coordinate and oversee an annual programme of events
- Through the agency, engage local organisations, artists, musicians and others on potential uses the for square
- Work with the existing businesses to ensure that they understand what they can do on the square and address any barriers they identify and to source ideas for what additional events / evenings they would like to run

- Deliver an extensive campaign of promotion locally and more widely in conjunction with local businesses
- Purchase any equipment needed to support the events programme e.g. canvassing and tents.

Throughout, we would work closely with existing square users.

The key partners will be the existing square businesses, and local organisations and individuals who could use the square.

3. Heritage visitor centre

Strategic case

Market towns in the modern day need a distinctive 'offer' to the outside world. A unique appeal that is rooted in the character and identity of the town. Our offer is our heritage. Whittlesey is mentioned in the *Cartularium Saxonicum* of 973 A.D. and the Domesday Book. On our doorstep is Must Farm, "Britain's Pompeii", where six bronze age boats have been discovered. The vessels are currently being restored and conserved outside of the town.

There is scope for doing more with our heritage. According to the 2017 Neighbourhood Plan scoping report, a majority of people felt that Bronze Age heritage should be promoted as a tourist attraction. Fenland District Council is also currently working with Arts Council England to develop a culture strategy that will have a strong heritage element.

A new Heritage Centre would be built essentially to tell the Story of Whittlesey from Bronze Age to present day. This would have the added advantage of introducing more visitors to the Kings Dyke Nature Reserve. A network of local organisations such as museums, societies and community groups would be invited to use the facilities for exhibition purposes.

The location has been identified and links with Must Farm. The site utilises land given free of charge by Forterra (formerly Hanson Brick) close to the original Must Farm location and directly adjacent to the Kings Dyke Nature Reserve on the A605 with adequate parking facilities. This project was considered in detail by Fourth Street undertaking feasibility. It is acknowledged that exhibiting Must Farm artefacts alone is not sustainable in the long term.

Financial case

A new heritage centre should bring additional income to the town. According a recent report commissioned by Historic England, England's heritage sector generated GDP of £13.1 billion in 2016, equivalent to 0.75 per cent of UK's total GVA. The sector also accounted for 196,000 jobs. Our initial assumption is a comprehensive activity plan of around 50 events per year split over small (30 - 50 attendees), medium (100 -150 attendees) or large (300 – 500 attendees) events. The plan would be coordinated by a Community Engagement Officer, supported by a part time assistant and volunteer input.

The anticipated initial expenditure costs are modest at £61,000 with a projected income of £32,000, leaving a deficit of £29,000 in the first year. As interest grows in the Heritage Centre from both a visitor and educational view through schools and colleges the project is anticipated to be financially viable and self-supporting, drawing increased visitors into both Whittlesey and Fenland beyond.

However, up-front funding of around £50k is needed for a further feasibility and options study, including outline business planning.

Management case

As above, the next step is to commission a further feasibility and option study that will:

- Articulate the amount and type of artefacts these sites could hold, including preservation requirements.

- Identify potential visitor numbers and segment the potential audience (Whittlesey resident, Fenland resident etc).
- Develop outline budgets, drawing on those visitor projections.
- Identify benchmark examples and identify ways in which the centre can complement existing Fenland museums.

We would then develop a detailed business plan, subject to the findings of this work.

We would engage national partners at an early stage in this work, including Historic England and Arts Council England to ensure our thinking fits with the emerging culture strategy.

At the local level, as already emphasised, we would work closely with local stakeholders.

4. Heritage Walk

Strategic case

As set out in the summary business case for the visitor centre, there are powerful reasons for us to expand our heritage offer:

- Market towns in the modern day need a distinctive 'offer' to the outside world.
- The economic rationale is strong, with heritage growing as a sector and more and more people visiting parts of the UK
- Fenland District Council is investing in a culture strategy which will have a strong heritage aspect.

In this context, there are several reasons why a Walk would be an effective investment:

- It would complement very well the proposed new visitor centre, offering an opportunity for visitors to see for themselves the elements of the story described in the centre.
- It will encourage healthier living amongst residents by giving them a safe and interesting route to explore.
- It will help address the issue of poor-quality pathways in parts of the town and, for routes out of town, accommodate a cycle lane.

At the moment, existing signage and general wayfinding is generic and does not direct local people or visitors to our assets.

We therefore propose to create a new Walk that would include historic landmarks in the town such as St Andrew's and St Mary's churches, the Buttercross, Portland House and the Mud Walls.

The Walk would be designed around the highest quality wayfinding standards. The route would be consistently and strikingly branded, with markings on the pavement and signage along the way. Each landmark on the way would include equally consistently branded information points.

As well as introducing new signage, the installation of the route is an opportunity to improve pavements, footpaths, railings and street furniture on the way.

We would speak to local business about ways they can benefit from the pathways e.g. placing adverts on route maps.

Funding

We are looking for £150k for the combined package of work described above.

Management case

The sequence for delivering this proposition is:

- Agreement of a final route and key landmarks, developed in consultation with local organisation and the landmarks, along with the centre to be accommodated at a later stage.
- Commissioning a wayfinding strategy.
- Delivering a combined package of wayfinding installation and improvements to pavements and street equipment.

- Promotion of the Walk, including a dedicated section on the new town website which is also recommended in this report.

The partners for this proposal are very similar to those who would be engaged in the centre. There should be an opportunity to engage partners on both proposals at the same time to avoid replication.

5. New town website and social marketing strategy

Strategic case

Successful market towns have a positive, friendly 'brand' that they communicate to world. Towns such as Skipton and Ludlow have used this approach to great effect.

The new town website will:

- Promote the brand of Whittlesey as a destination, especially to outsiders, and in relation to our heritage offer in particular.
- Provide a central repository for local information, such as forthcoming events, business opening hours, and local discounts. While this information is available, it is usually spread across different sources, such as local magazines and Facebook groups, which local residents may not be aware of or subscribe to and outside visitors are very unlikely to know about.
- Link to local organisations to raise their profile and connect them to new members, customers, users.
- Provide information to residents about how to access services online.

We therefore propose to create a new website, clearly branded in line with the vision set out in this master plan, which will provide the information described above. This could be done with a local professional web designer.

While setting up a website is technologically straightforward, with the tools to do so widely available, several factors need to be high quality:

- High quality design, including appropriate and high-quality images, well-written and accurate copy, and ease of navigation – it is vital that the site looks professional and reflects well on the town.
- Just as importantly, the site needs to be kept up to date to be of value and to avoid disappointing visitors with inaccurate information. This information would need sourcing from liaison with local group and businesses.
- Active management of any discussion boards or discussions forums, including developing a set of rules, and responding to any queries directed to the site.
- Search engine optimisation (known as SEO) so that site appears prominently in response to search terms.

As above, while it easy to set up a website, setting up and maintaining a good quality site of which the town can be proud requires effort and commitment.

We would develop a proactive social media strategy to promote the town via the website. This would involve coordinated messaging across different social media channels (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and new platforms), and the smart use of analytics to target tailored content at different audiences (such as shoppers, tourists and young people).

Financial case

A small amount of funding would be needed at the beginning to design, test and launch each site. This can be between £5k and 10k depending on functionality and whether the contractor would be required to provide the copy or if this would be provided.

Ongoing resources would be needed to maintain the site. This could be a modest cost if the site were updated on a voluntary basis, or through an existing resource, meaning the only cost would be the required licensees for the software including the Content Management System (CMS) and services such as back-up and security. This could be £500 per year.

Management case

While each site would be different and distinct, tailored to the branding and messaging of each town, Fenland District Council should play a role in ensuring there is consistency of tone and voice in relation to the Growing Fenland brand.

Each town team could then work with a local website designer(s) to develop, test and launch the site. Different skills are required at different points in this process e.g. designing the look and navigation of the site is different from ongoing management. It may be possible to find an organisation with all these skills that can enter into a single contract. Alternatively, different arrangements could be made e.g. one contract to design, test and build up to the point of launch, and another to maintain and promote on an ongoing basis.

There would also be value in engaging a small group of local stakeholders in the development and testing process. This is useful to the technical process of designing and generate buy-in to idea of the site and generate some momentum behind local organisations putting their information on the platform.

As above, there would need to clear and agreed arrangements for keeping the site regularly up to date. This could be done through as part of a contract or through a local volunteer.

The first result when searching for “Ludlow” on Google is the town’s website <https://www.ludlow.org.uk/> This presents high quality and attractive images from the town, has a single strapline – “A bustling market town”, lists for forthcoming events, and provides two short paragraphs summarising the town’s assets and appealing features. It then then provides more detail on each of these aspects – where to stay, things to do, food and drink etc.

6. Improving access to education

Strategic case

Our local schools provide a good quality education at all ages. However, some pupils at age 16 and 18 will be looking for other opportunities to further develop their education outside the town. Adults already in work may want to develop their skills and gain new qualification in order to progress in their careers.

For too many people, these opportunities are out of bounds. Whittlesea train station is on the very edge of the town, the service has a poor reputation for reliability, and the station, until recently, was felt by some to be dark and unsafe.

Residents' dissatisfaction with local bus services emerged clearly from the responses to the online consultation on the interim version of this document. There are insufficient buses out of the town in the morning and in or out of town in the evening (services out might be used for people accessing evening classes). As a result of these restrictions, we have people of all ages being frustrated from developing their full potential.

As part of the Fenland-wide strategy document, which makes recommendations across the four market towns, there is consideration of the scope for franchising bus services. This is made in reference to the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Strategic Bus Review, which noted that franchising "may be most easily applied to rural initiatives, and would probably be critical to the holistic approach identified as it gives greater control to the CPCA to integrate bus services with wider rural transport initiatives in areas where there are few (if any) commercial bus operators to partner with."⁵

As part of that discussion, we will make the case for increased bus capacity, through more regular and reliable routes, to be built in to a new and improved timetable.

While discussions are ongoing, there is scope to develop a dedicated shuttle bus service, running in the mornings and late afternoon / early evening, west to Peterborough and south to Alconbury Weald.

Given the time it takes to get to Peterborough during morning or afternoon rush hour, it makes sense to run a single service with sufficient capacity e.g. single decker bus to the city. Given the further distance, it also makes sense to run a single service to Alconbury Weald, although demand will be lower and could be accommodated through a mini-bus.

This service could be developed to demonstrate and define more precisely the level of demand and later be integrated into a new timetable.

Financial case

Funding a new service would need to be negotiated as part of any wider re-organisation of bus services, including the scope for franchising.

⁵ Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Strategic Bus Review, p65

Management case

The case for changing the current timetable will need to be made with and through the CA, which commissions local bus services. We will continue these discussions over the next few months in line with the strategic recommendations being developed through the Growing Fenland process.

Creating a new service would require the CA to procure an additional service from a registered transport supplier through a separate contract.

As above, the key partner in relation to this proposition is the CA and, through them, Stagecoach, which is the dominant supplier of bus services in Fenland.

Discussions would be held with relevant educational institutions, to ensure they supported the service and to address practical matters like appropriate drop-off and collection points. There may also be scope to explore whether the institutions had uses for the coaches in between the morning and afternoon service.

7. Skills Task Force

Strategic case

As explored in the portrait of Whittlesey above, our town generally performs well in relation to education and skills. Our schools perform well and our population is more highly skilled than some other parts of Fenland. There has also been an increase in recent years in the number of people in highly skilled professional and technical professions.

We want to build on these strengths and ensure that more residents have access to skills and development opportunities. In turn, this should ensure that businesses will have greater access to highly qualified apprentices, trainees and employees. This is vital to pursuing our ambition of making Whittlesey a hub for highly skilled companies and enterprises.

A specific issue we face is that there is currently no mechanism or structure through which partners in the area of skills development can come together. This means we have no way of ensuring, for example, that the courses on offer locally actually met employers' needs, either now or in future.

We therefore propose the formation of a voluntary grouping to provide that liaison between different stakeholders. Its purpose would be to share information and stimulate action on:

- Horizon-scanning future skills demand. This could be done through light-touch engagement, such as short surveys with local employers on their current and future skills needs.
- Facilitating conversations with providers about the suitability of current provision in light of future demand.
- Identifying work experience / placement / apprenticeship opportunities at local businesses – this element of the work would be coordinated with the Combined Authority's apprenticeship brokerage programme.
- Identifying opportunities to re-train and up-skill adult workers. This could include using local institutions to provide courses to adults and finding findings practical ways to open up existing provision to a wider range of people. This will help individuals progress and contribute to the development of a more highly-skilled and flexible workforce.

The group would not have formal power to effect change. Its role would be to convene partners to take mutually beneficial actions. For example, it is the interests of providers to provide the kinds of courses that meet demand.

The group should also feed into the proposed Education Opportunity Area (please see overarching strategic document) which will look, amongst other things, at ways to improve the linkages between different providers at key points.

This idea is very much in line with the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Local Industrial Strategy. This includes, among its strategic objectives, the goal of:

Bringing employers and skills providers together to understand the current and future skills needs, and planning provision to meet them.⁶

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https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/818886/Cambridge_SINGLE_PAGE.pdf

It equally in line with the underlying case for CPCA's emerging Skills Strategy. The independently produced Skills Strategy Evidence Base Report asserted that the CPCA's role is to "commission, to test, and to facilitate collaboration between learners, employers, providers and organisations." We want to see this kind of collaboration developed, even pioneered, here in Whittlesey.

Funding

As a voluntary partnership, the group would not require funding, but partners would need to commit resource i.e. time and attention to make the group work. If the town council is to provide active development of the group, this too would need to be resourced.

Management case

As a voluntary arrangement, making it happen would be dependent on the commitment of partners to work together. To assist this, the town council could proactively engage partners to introduce the idea and the rationale for it. It would be important for those identified partners to be able to shape a simple Terms of Reference, or equivalent, so they felt some ownership over the idea.

The group could then meet on a quarterly basis, with smaller sub-groups looking at specific issues in between meetings.

There may be value in identifying and agreeing a knowledgeable and trusted Chair, to mitigate any potential concern about the group being driven by one partner / agenda.

Potential partners include:

- Combined authority
- Cambridgeshire County Council
- District council
- Town council
- Sir Harry Smith Community College
- FE and HE institutions
- Local employers that should cover different sectors
- Skills providers including voluntary as well as commercial providers

It should be clear that partners are not participating as 'delegates' or 'representatives' from their own organisation. Instead they are there to work together as described above to improve access to high-quality skills development for Whittlesey residents.

As above, the group should be plugged in to the proposed Education Opportunity Area.

8. Transport improvement package

Strategic case

As set out in this paper, we want Whittlesey's economy to continue growing sustainably. We want more people to visit and enjoy our rich heritage and cultural offer. We want our residents, of all ages and at different stages in their career, to access opportunities to improve their CV and boost their career.

For these things to happen, we need a coherent package of improvements to make it easier to get in and out of Whittlesey, at all times of day, through an improved range of options.

We propose five interventions:

- **More frequent and reliable bus services.** The Growing Fenland strategy paper, which makes district-wide proposals, makes the case for rethinking the model of bus delivery in Fenland through franchising. As this approach is developed, we will work with our partners on the introduction of more, and more regular, services. This should include services in and out town, to the other market towns and beyond, and within town, including more service to and from the train station.
- **More train services throughout the day and later in the evening.** In parallel to improving bus services, we will work make a strong case for more train to stop at Whittlesey, especially in the evening. This would be obviously complementary to more bus services going to the station.
- **A new park and ride scheme from the town centre to Peterborough** would alleviate pressure on town centre parking spaces that are currently being taken by commuters. It would free those spaces during the day for residents to use local shops and amenities; boosting those businesses and generally contributing to a more vibrant and active feel to the centre of town in the middle of the day.
- **New bridge over the railway crossing.** The level crossing at King's Dyke is widely recognised to have been a cause of "significant delays to traffic travelling between Whittlesey and Peterborough for years". There remains a strong case for completion of a new bridge over the crossing. With a final design and price for the construction phase of the project already submitted by the chosen engineer, we will continue to work with partners on the completion of the project.
- **A new relief road** from Coates to the Morrisons / Cardea Roundabout so that Heavy Goods Vehicles (HGVs) can access industrial sites from the east rather adding to the congestion of residential routes, particularly along Inhams Road and Station Road. As well as adding to the congestion, HGVs degrade the quality of the road and street surfaces and contribute to the problem of air pollution.

Financial case

The immediate financial asks are for

- £50k for a feasibility and options study into the new relief road. This would look at options for the route and related changes e.g. the introduction of roundabout and other impacts e.g. on the national cycle way.
- £30k for a similar study into the park and ride scheme.

Management case

We recognise that these proposals are a mixture of short and long term. We will continue to work with our partners on the successful delivery of the package as a whole over time.

The Overall Strategy for Fenland

Because some of the challenges we face are common across all four towns, we have published alongside this a Fenland-wide strategy to set out what some of the real “game changers” will be for our district. The key ideas coming forward from this are:

1. Nene River Barrier
2. Opportunity for full bus franchising
3. A47 Dualling
4. Wisbech Garden Town
5. A New Deal for Education
6. A New Partnership for Skills
7. Early Years Support
8. A Health Action Area
9. The Manufacturing Launchpad
10. Cambridgeshire Jobs Compact
11. A Mayoral Implementation Taskforce

It is at this level that we hope to tackle challenges around health and education, where the opportunities from acting at a district level are much greater.

Next steps

We have set out a vision for Whittlesey, showing what interventions can make a real difference to our town, in the context of the overall strategy for Fenland.

We now look forward to working constructively with the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority (CPCA), and its Mayor, James Palmer, to implement these ideas. This will require both direct support from the Combined Authority, and the resources needed to take these ideas to key government funds such as the Stronger Towns Fund as and when they come forward.

This work will be overseen by the CPCA, FDC and other key partners working in conjunction with the Town Team which was put together for this work.