



Fenland Town Centres Hierarchy Study

May 2022

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1 Introduction

1.1 Fenland District Council is preparing a new Local Plan that once adopted will replace the 2014 Local Plan. This report has been produced to support the emerging [Local Plan](#) (August 2022) and in particular policy LP16 (Town Centres), and the identification of the Town Centre hierarchy.

1.2 Paragraph 86 of the [National Planning Policy Framework](#) (NPPF) (2021) states that ‘*Planning Policies and decisions should support the role that town centres play at the heart of the community*’ and that:

‘Planning policies should:

- a) define a network and hierarchy of town centres and promote their long-term vitality and viability – by allowing them to grow and diversify in a way that can respond to rapid changes in the retail and leisure industries, allows a suitable mix of uses (including housing) and reflects their distinctive characters;*
- b) define the extent of town centres and primary shopping areas, and make clear the range of uses permitted in such locations, as part of a positive strategy for the future of each centre; retain and enhance existing markets and, where appropriate, re-introduce or create new ones;*

1.3 This means that Local Plans are required to define a network and hierarchy of centres that is resilient to anticipated future economic changes. Once these centres are defined then there is a need to identify shopping areas depending on the size of the centre.

1.4 The NPPF at Annex 2 defines Town centre as:

‘Area defined on the local authority’s policies map, including the primary shopping area and areas predominantly occupied by main town centre uses within or adjacent to the primary shopping area. References to town centres or centres apply to city centres, town centres, district centres and local centres but exclude small parades of shops of purely neighbourhood significance. Unless they are identified as centres in the development plan, existing out-of-centre developments, comprising or including main town centre uses, do not constitute town centres’

1.5 The adopted [Fenland Local Plan](#) (2014) Policy LP6 identified the following hierarchy of centres:

- **Town Centre** – March and Wisbech
- **District Centre** – Chatteris and Whittlesey
- **Local Centres** – to follow the Settlement Hierarchy set out in Policy LP3

1.6 The current town centre boundaries are defined on the adopted [Policies Map](#), and shown at Appendix 1.

1.7 As part of the Local Plan review a survey of shops, services and facilities for the above centres has been undertaken, this is to check the position of each centre in the hierarchy and to make sure no significant changes have occurred that could alter the position.

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1.8 The boundaries of all defined centres have also been reviewed. The existing boundaries as set out in the 2014 Plan have been used as a starting point; however, the boundaries may be altered to take into account any changes that have occurred since they were designated in 2014.

1.9 The purpose of this study is to provide evidence for the Town Centre hierarchy in the district as set out in emerging policy LP16.

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2. Town Centre Hierarchy

Town Centres

- 2.1 Given the absence of any cities or large towns in Fenland, the first level in the hierarchy is Town Centre. The 2014 Local Plan identifies town centres as the highest level of centre in the hierarchy. Town Centres provide a wide range of services and facilities for a wider catchment.
- 2.2 The NPPF defines Main Town Centre uses as:
- 'Retail development (including warehouse clubs and factory outlet centres); leisure, entertainment and more intensive sport and recreation uses (including cinemas, restaurants, drive-through restaurants, bars and pubs, nightclubs, casinos, health and fitness centres, indoor bowling centres and bingo halls); offices; and arts, culture and tourism development (including theatres, museums, galleries and concert halls, hotels and conference facilities).'*
- 2.3 A Town Centre should include most of the above facilities as well as a good public transport network accessible from other parts of the district.
- 2.4 The review of services and facilities, shows March and Wisbech should remain town centres and there is no justification to change the position from the 2014 Local Plan. These are the large Towns in terms of population and also offer a wider range of town centre uses compared to the other Market Towns of Chatteris and Whittlesey.
- 2.5 As part of the Government's 'Future High Street Fund' March town centre has been awarded significant funding towards public realm improvements, activating the use of redundant buildings and floor space, and the regeneration of brownfield sites.
- 2.6 For Wisbech a master plan is being prepared to support the regeneration and renewal of the town centre. This will help support a Levelling Up Fund (LUF) bid to Government. It is proposed that the Wisbech Town Centre Master Plan will be integrated into the Proposed Submission version of the Local Plan.
- 2.7 Policies LP35 (Regeneration of Wisbech) and LP38 (March Town Centre) of the Draft Local Plan provide further policy requirements for the wider regeneration of the Town Centres.

District Centres

- 2.8 The second level in the hierarchy is district centres, which can be defined as an area, identified on the Policies Map, which usually comprises groups of shops often containing at least one supermarket or superstore, and a range of non-retail services, such as banks, building societies and restaurants, as well as local public and community facilities such as a library.
- 2.9 Following the review of services and facilities, it is recommended that Chatteris and Whittlesey remain classified as district centres, as there is no evidence to justify a change in the position from the 2014 Local Plan. Chatteris and Whittlesey offer a wide range of services and facilities which meet the definition of a district centre.

Local Centres

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- 2.10 The bottom level in the hierarchy is Local Centres, which can be defined as an area, which usually includes a range of small shops of a local nature, serving a small catchment. Typically, local centres might include, amongst other shops, a small convenience store, a newsagent, a sub-post office and a pharmacy. Other facilities could include a hot-food takeaway and laundrette. In rural areas, large villages may perform the role of a local centre.
- 2.11 Local centres provide essential services to nearby residents. These centres include a range of small shops of a local nature serving a relatively small catchment.
- 2.12 It is recommended that the Settlement Hierarchy is used to identify village centres.

Retail Parks

- 2.13 Within the district there are a number of out-of-town retail parks. These provide useful customer choice in that majority of the bulky goods are purchased from these retail parks. It is difficult to provide this provision in town, district and local centres due to limited retail floorspace. So retail parks compliment the services provided by district and local centres. Retail parks are not considered as suitable locations for town centres as they lack accessibility by public transport and absence of public and community facilities. The NPPF in its definition of Town Centres states that: *‘existing out-of-centre developments, comprising or including main town centre uses, do not constitute town centres’*.

Conclusions

- 2.14 From the survey carried out there is no need to change position of any of the town centres or district centres. The following hierarchy is recommended for inclusion in the emerging Local Plan:

Table 1: Proposed Town Centre Hierarchy

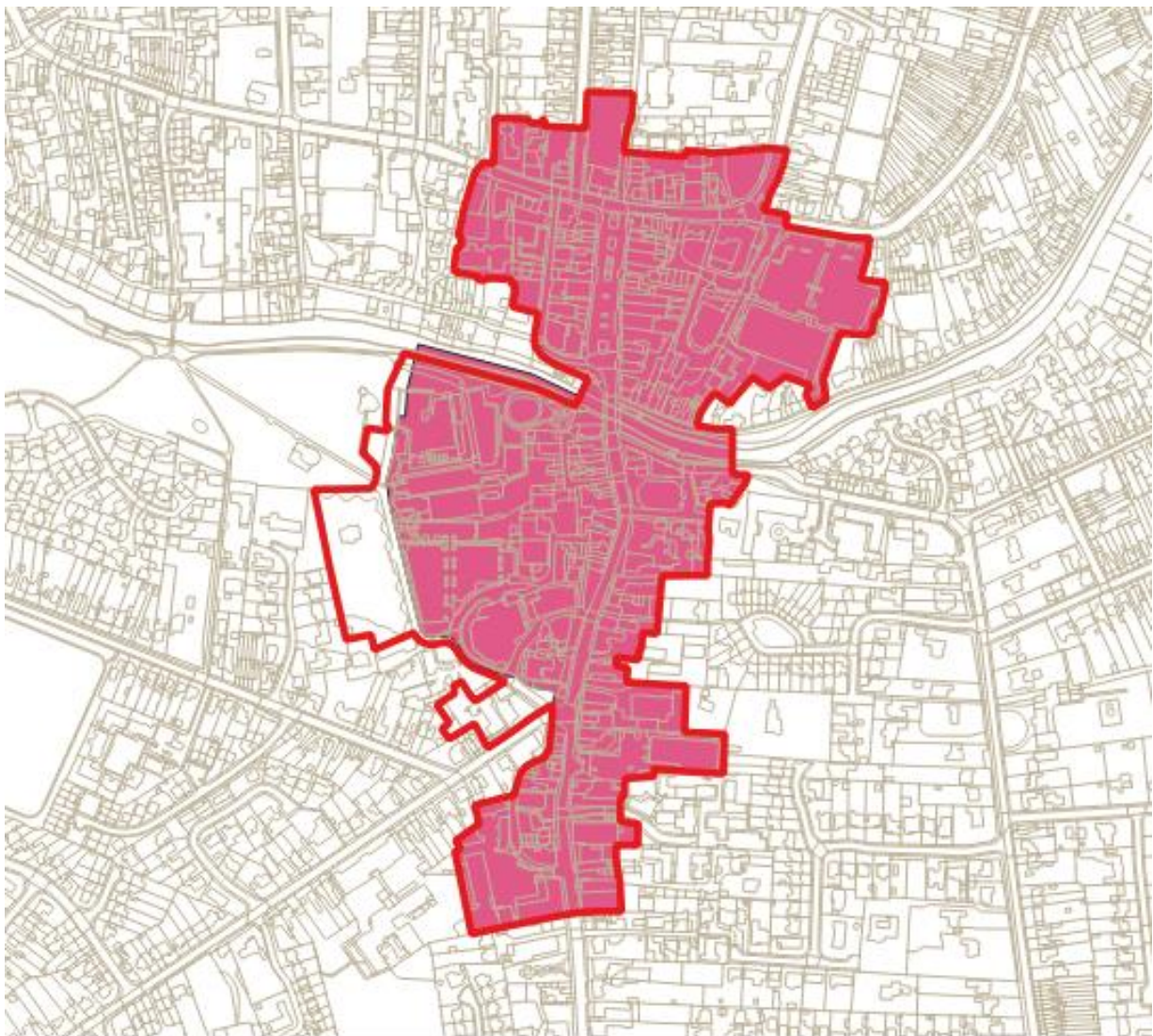
1	Town Centres	March and Wisbech	Centres providing a range of facilities and services for a wider catchment area.
2	District Centres	Chatteris and Whittlesey	Centres serving particular areas within the main settlements, typically including a range of services, restaurants, library and usually at least one supermarket.
3	Local and Village Centres	To follow the settlement hierarchy	Centres that serve their locality, typically including a convenience store and a limited range of other local shops and services such as a post office, newsagent, hot food takeaway.

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3. Town Centre Boundaries

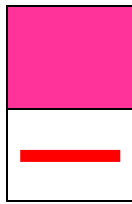
- 3.1 Following the establishment of the proposed Town Centre Hierarchy. The boundaries of all defined centres have also been reviewed. The existing boundaries of Town/ District Centres as set out in the 2014 Plan have been used as a starting point. (See Appendix 1)
- 3.2 The review identified the need to amend the March Town Centre boundary to include the March Town Centre Opportunity Area (Site LP38.01 SHELAA Ref 40262).
- 3.3 This is land located behind high street shops, and directly south of the river, that provides an 'Opportunity Area' to enable town centre regeneration. Currently the area is under-utilised and could deliver regeneration through intensification, re-development and renewal. Development should provide a mix of uses which are compatible with and enhance the vitality of the town centre. This should include an element of residential development and employment development, in addition to town centre uses.
- 3.4 The proposed changes to the March Town Centre Boundary are shown below:

Figure 1: Proposed Changes to March Town Centre



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Key:

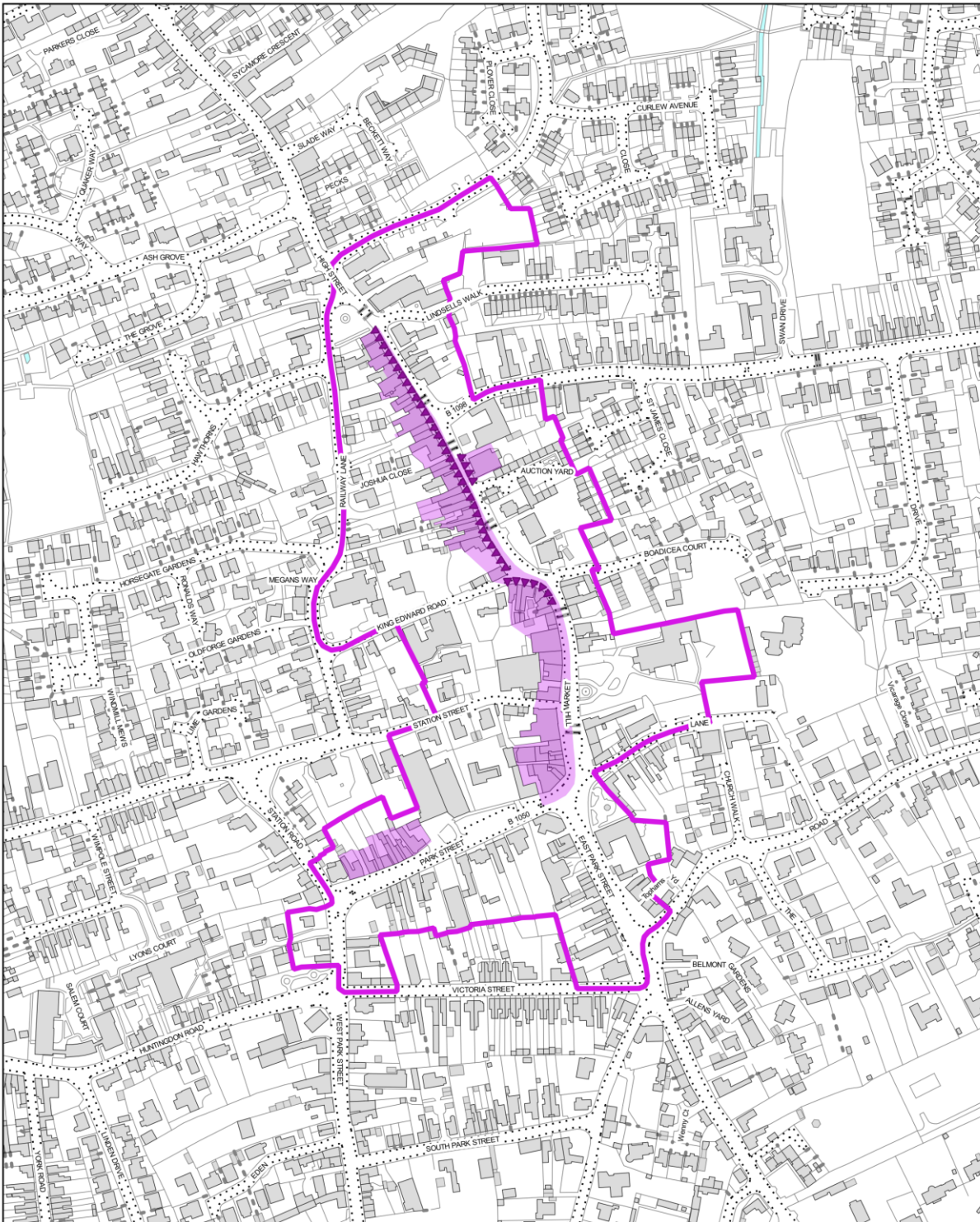


March Town Centre Adopted Local Plan 2014

Proposed March Town Centre Boundary Draft Local Plan 2022

- 3.5 There are no proposed changes to the Primary Shopping Areas.
- 3.6 The proposed Town/District Centre Boundaries and Primary Shopping Areas are defined on the [Draft Local Plan Policies Map](#) (August 2022) and [Interactive Policies Map](#) .




Appendix 1: Adopted Local Plan 2014 Town/District Centre Boundaries



Chatteris Town Centre

Map to show boundary of the town centre, primary shopping area and primary shopping frontage.

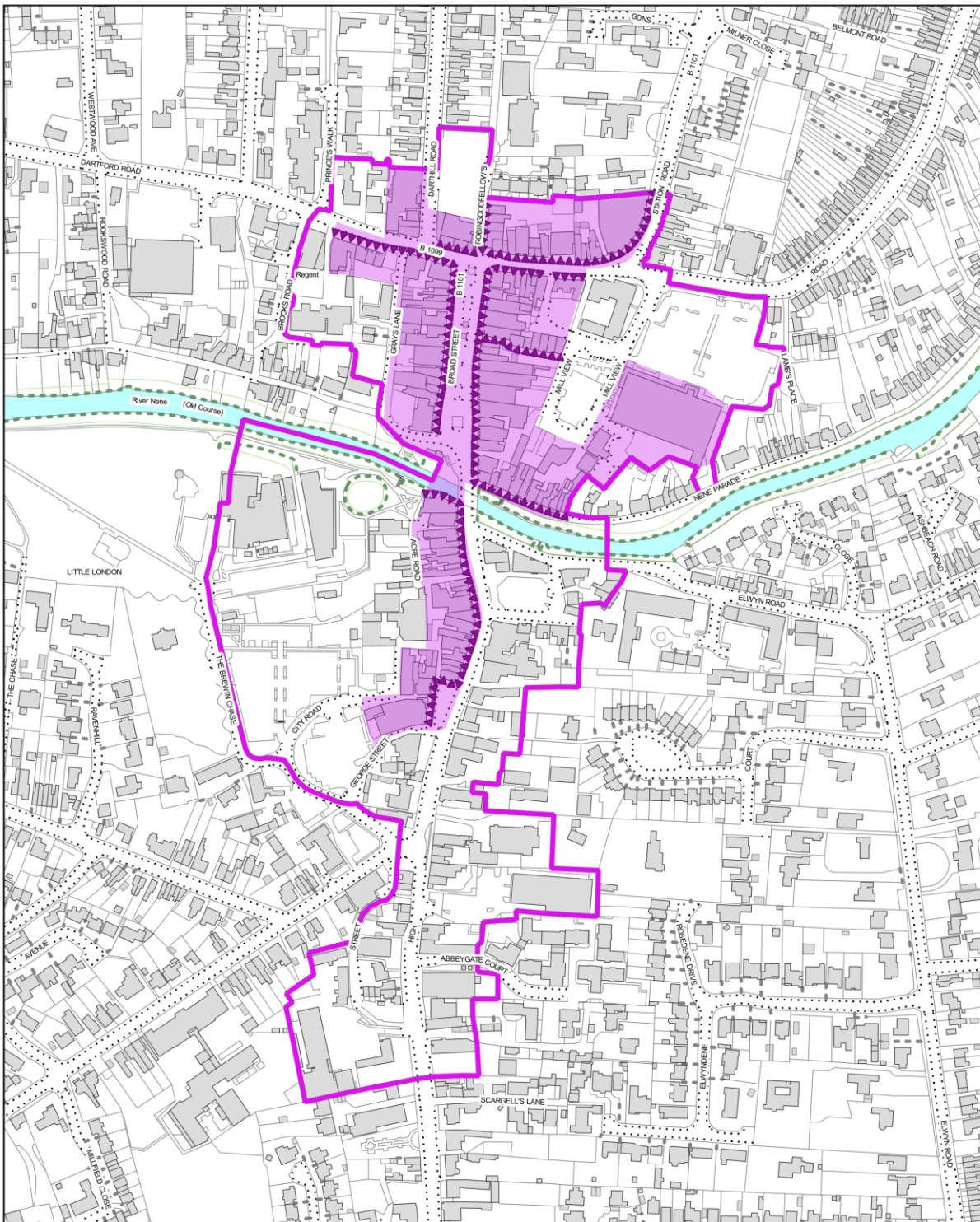
Key

-  Primary Shopping Frontage
-  Primary Shopping Area
-  Town Centre Boundary



Date: 24 Jul 2019
Scale: 1:3750




Appendix 1: Adopted Local Plan 2014 Town/District Centre Boundaries



March Town Centre

Map to show boundary of the town centre, primary shopping area and primary shopping frontage.

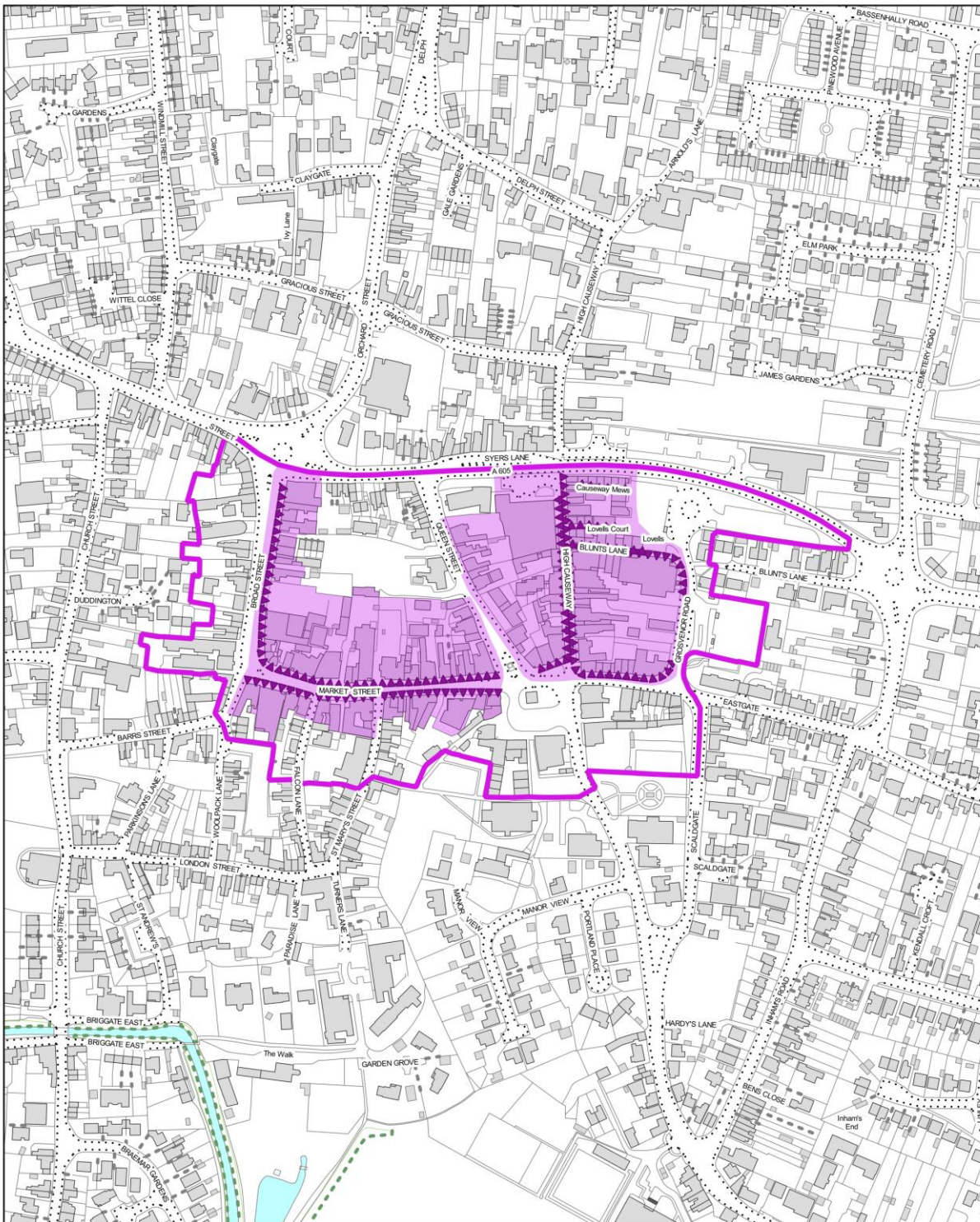
Key

-  Primary Shopping Frontage
-  Primary Shopping Area
-  Town Centre Boundary



Date: 24 Jul 2019
Scale: 1:3750

Appendix 1: Adopted Local Plan 2014 Town/District Centre Boundaries



Whittlesey Town Centre

Map to show boundary of the town centre, primary shopping area and primary shopping frontage.

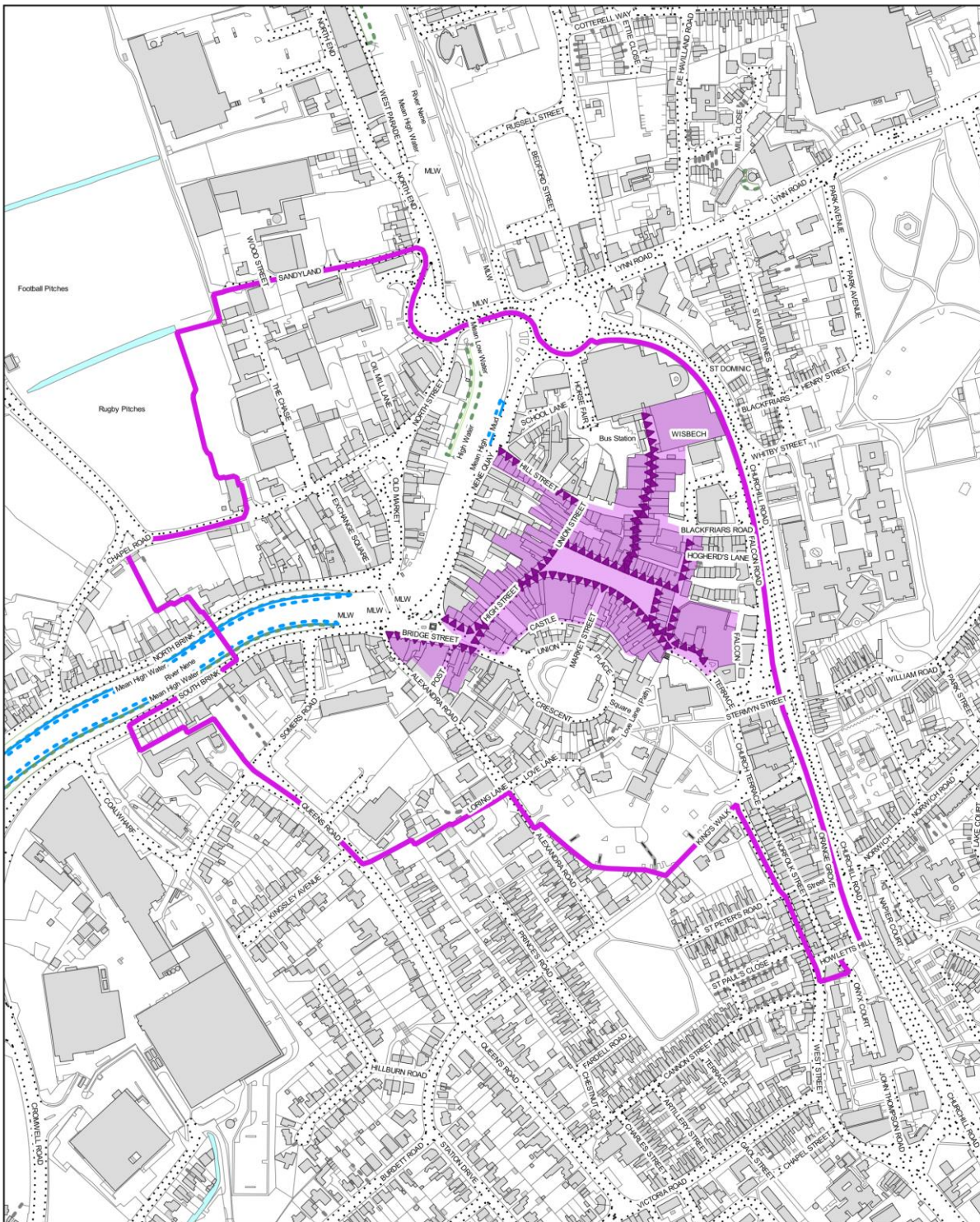
Key

-  Primary Shopping Frontage
-  Primary Shopping Area
-  Town Centre Boundary



Date: 24 Jul 2019
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Appendix 1: Adopted Local Plan 2014 Town/District Centre Boundaries



Wisbech Town Centre

Map to show boundary of the town centre, primary shopping area and primary shopping frontage.

Key

-  Primary Shopping Frontage
-  Primary Shopping Area
-  Town Centre Boundary



Date: 24 Jul 2019
Scale: 1:5000