



GROWING FENLAND

Wisbech: Market Town Masterplan



CAMBRIDGESHIRE & PETERBOROUGH
COMBINED AUTHORITY



Cambridgeshire
County Council



Wisbech Town Council



Contents

Introduction	3
Wisbech – what residents and the data is saying.....	5
Our key asks of the Combined Authority	10
1. Provide immediate connectivity to key employment centres.....	11
2. A Town Centre Improvement Initiative	13
3. Support cohesion and community shared space.....	16
5. Open up countryside access, and develop the Wisbech Country Park	18
6. Develop a workplace health award scheme	20
7. Focus on Tourism	21
8. Repair Derelict Buildings	21
9. Commercialisation of Wisbech Port	21
What happens now?	22



Introduction

This piece of work is a response to the Combined Authority's plans for Market Town Masterplans. These are being brought forward across the district.

This report is unlike the other three market town reports (Chatteris, March, Whittlesey). This is because Wisbech has done a lot of its strategic thinking already. Throughout the Wisbech 2020 Vision work, there has been extensive consultation of residents to understand the mood of the town. The Wisbech 2020 Vision work is currently being refreshed to create an action plan for the year 2019/20. The Wisbech Garden Town proposals have also been developed, and we are securing buy-in for these.

This document, then, does not represent another strategy, or a totally new set of ideas. Nor will it constitute a new workstream on top of the significant activity already going on in Wisbech.

However, we are excited about the new opportunities that the advent of the Combined Authority brings. We invite the Combined Authority to get involved in the work we are leading on to transform the town of Wisbech: focused on improving economic, social, and environmental outcomes for the benefit of all our residents. We have worked with the Wisbech 2020 Vision team to understand which of the long list of actions are the key proposals where Combined Authority support would be most helpful.

A strategy that works across Fenland

As well as this report, we are also bringing forward a set of strategy proposals for the whole district. These will move the dial on many of the big challenges experienced right across the district.

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.

A mandate to be bold

We are acting with courage to transform the town of Wisbech. This reflects our history. Thomas Clarkson was a leading abolitionist, who courageously challenged the dominant views of his day to bring about the end of the slave trade. The Peckovers were philanthropists who stood for improvements in education and pacifist causes. Octavia Hill was a pioneer in creating new models of social housing and founded the National Trust. We have never been cautious of embracing change, or speaking out against the consensus.

Now, more than ever, we need to draw on this tradition of doing things differently. There are many brilliant things about our town – but we have some serious challenges we need to work on, including education and health. And we need to think creatively about how we manage factors which are not directly under our control, such as land values, flood risk, and climate change. We want Wisbech to be a **resilient town of the future**, ready to adapt to whatever challenges come our way.

This call for resilience is in particular reflected in our longer-term ambitions for future housing growth. Our plans embrace the need to be resilient to the impacts of climate change, particularly flooding. This reflects the recommendation in the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Independent Economic Review



(CPIER) that Wisbech becomes a “UK testbed for new flood-resistant approaches to development”¹. And by being fully integrated within the Wisbech community, we can also strengthen community resilience.

Now is the time for those standing in the model of our radical past to embrace the opportunity.

¹ <https://www.cpier.org.uk/media/1672/cpier-report-151118-lowres.pdf> p92

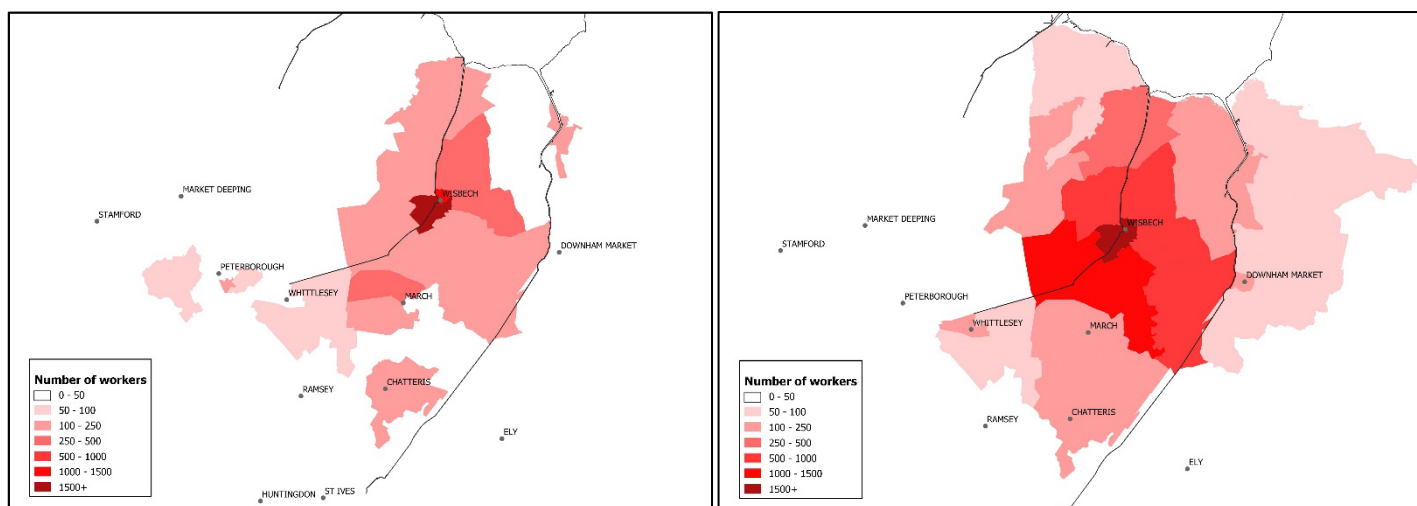
Wisbech – what residents and the data is saying

A strong local centre

Wisbech, unlike other towns in Fenland, acts as a magnet – it draws in more people than it sends out for work. We can see this by looking at commuting patterns for the town:

Commuters out....

...and commuters in



Source: Analysis of Census 2011

This is the result of a few things. Firstly, Wisbech² is by some margin the largest of the Fenland market towns. While it is still some way off city size, in the absence of another city nearby, this makes Wisbech an important local centre.

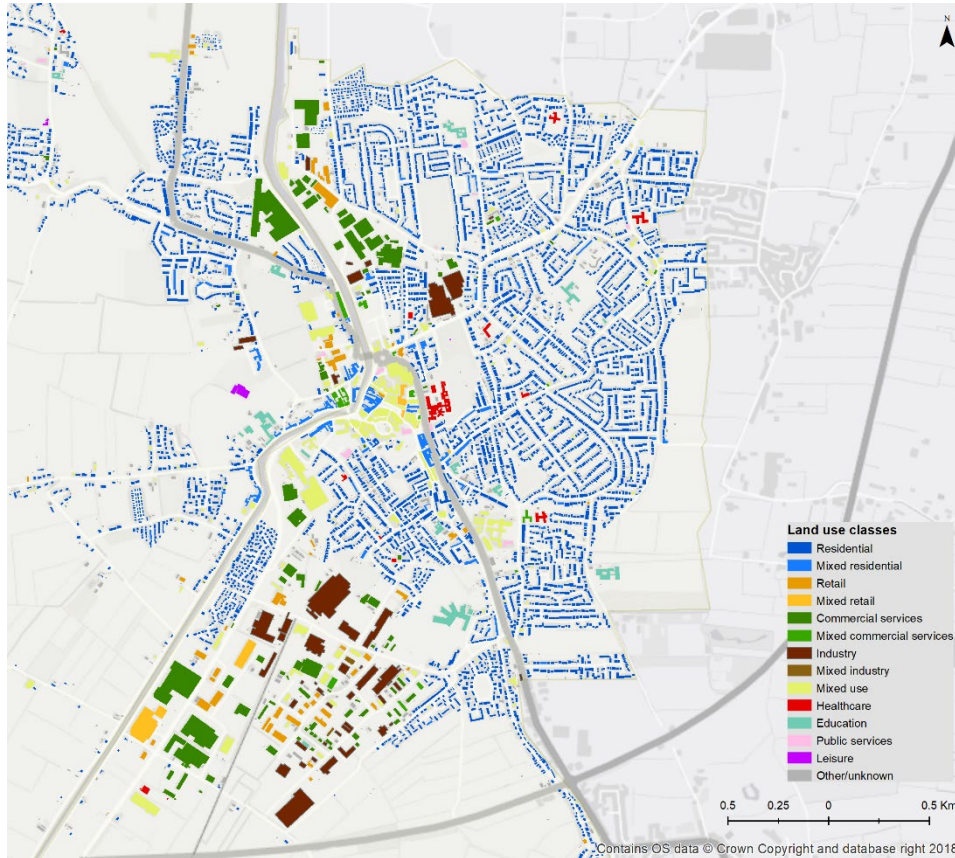
Secondly, Wisbech has high employment – with many larger firms. Total employment is 13,750 in Wisbech, and 15.2% of all business have ten or more staff – very high compared to Fenland (10.1%) and the England average (10.5%).

This can be seen in the large industrial clusters around the town. But Wisbech also offers significant retail and leisure services, as well as healthcare services at the North Cambridgeshire Hospital. The local importance of Wisbech can be seen from the variety of different land use types in the town.

“We’re a bit in-betweeny in terms of size.” – Wisbech resident

Land use in Wisbech

² Our geographical definition is based upon ward boundaries. For more details, please see Appendix



Source: Metro Dynamics analysis of Ordnance Survey Points of Interest data

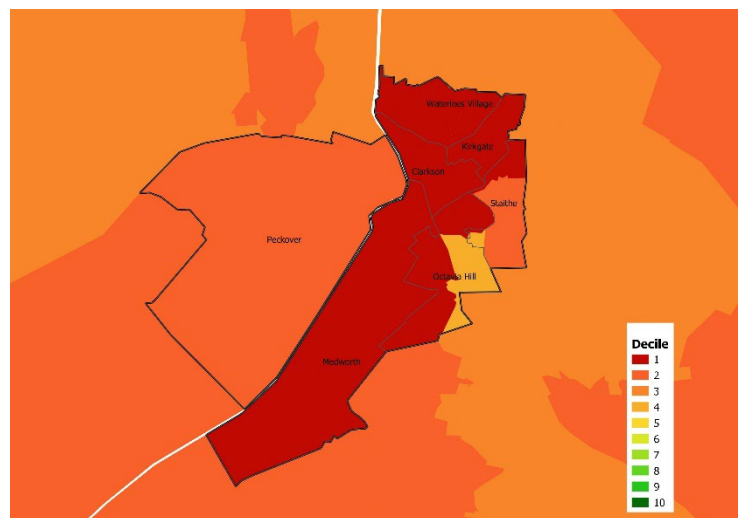
One cause for concern, though, is the lack of substantial amounts of people commuting west to Peterborough. While this may have grown since the data was recorded in 2011, Peterborough is our nearest city, which contains higher-paid employment. There is virtually no commuting south to Cambridge. Much of this comes down to issues with transport – inadequate road links which are prone to closure, and poor public transport provision.

An educational offer that needs support

While recent improvements have been seen at several schools in Wisbech, educational deprivation remains a big challenge. There are a few elements to this. Firstly, when children arrive at primary school in Wisbech, they are generally performing less well than their peers elsewhere. Phonics skills among young children are among the worst in the country.

Secondly, rates of children staying on for sixth form have historically been low – though this has not been the case at the grammar school.

Educational Deprivation in Wisbech (2015)



Thirdly, there are many different cultures in Wisbech, which brings diversity to our town, but can also put extra pressure on resources – with the need to teach children who don’t have English as a first language, and who may come from a culture where schooling starts later.

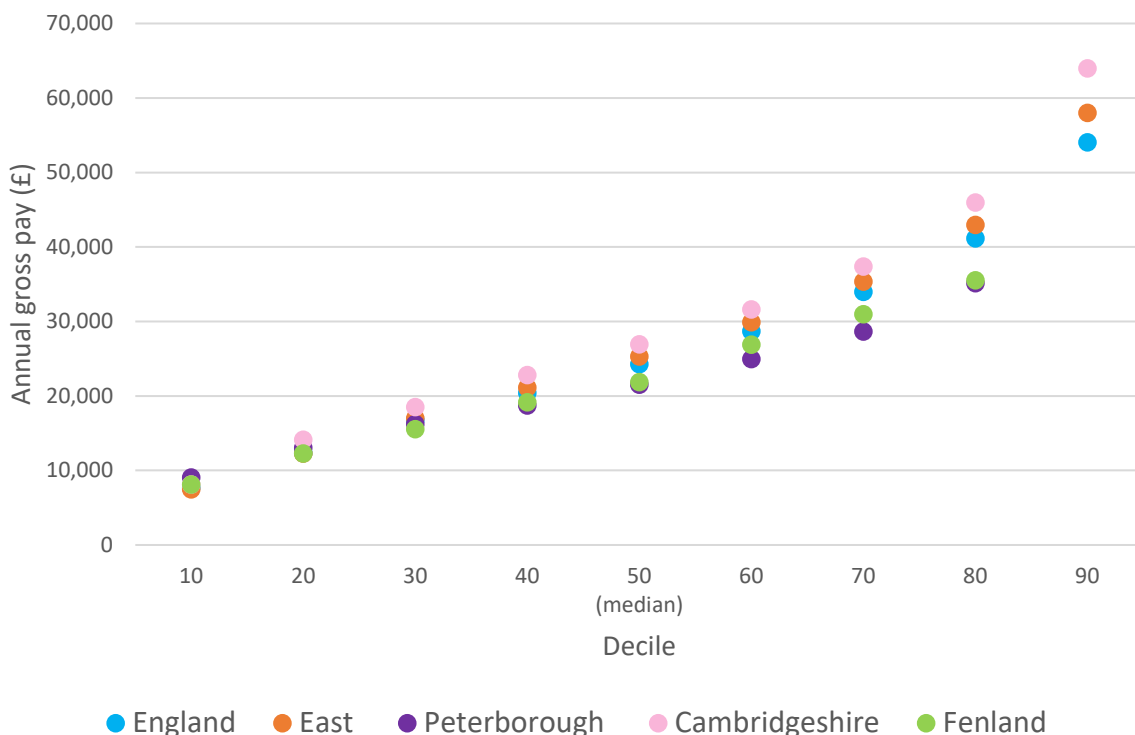
Source: Analysis of Home Office data (2015)

Low unemployment – but also low wages

Unemployment is low in Wisbech – with only 2.2% of the working age population claiming Job Seekers’ Allowance (JSA). The large industrial cluster which has grown up around the town testifies to the fact that people work hard in Wisbech, and employers recognise this.

At the same time, much of this work is in lower skilled occupations. At the time of the last census (2011) **43% of Wisbech residents were in occupations that were either “Elementary Occupations” or “Process, plant, and machine operatives”**, compared to 29% in Fenland and 18% in England³. This lower skilled work is linked to generally low wages – which lag behind Cambridgeshire across Fenland as whole.

Wages at different deciles for different areas



Source: ONS Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings. Data not available for Fenland and Peterborough at the 90th decile.

³ Analysis of ONS Annual Population Survey data

A mixed picture on the high street

Wisbech High Street has seen conversions from shops to restaurants, cafés, pubs and bars over the last fifteen years – with the amount of floorspace for shops decreasing by 2,500m² between 2002 and 2017, while the amount of floorspace for eating and drinking increased by 2,350m² over the same period⁴.

“There’s no real night time economy” – Wisbech business owner

In many ways, this is in line with national trends, where retailers have struggled with the increase in online shopping. **But the increase in cafés, restaurants and pubs has not yet translated into a busy evening economy for the town, which generally feels quiet post 7pm.** This is probably in part due to the leisure and dining facilities which exist out to the west of the town (including the Light Cinema) which may draw people away from the town centre at this time. Wisbech also suffers somewhat from not having a “flagship store” to bring footfall to the town centre.

However, the town is weathering the declining retail trend well with a busy market and few vacant units. A recent report on the market commented that “the traditional market days are Thursday and Saturday which still appear to be strong trading days as does not unsurprisingly Friday”⁵.

At the same time, the town is blessed by a wealth of brilliant architecture and cultural attractions, including Peckover House, Wisbech Castle, and the Wisbech & Fenland Museum, meaning there is plenty for visitors and residents to see and do. There is a full calendar of events, and numerous community organisations.

Some challenges with health

Health outcomes are generally worse in Wisbech than England averages (though not on every measure). Most notably, hospital stays for alcohol related harm are 46% above the England average, cancer incidence is 10.6% above the England average, and rates of emergency admissions for heart disease, heart attack, and Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) are all over 50% above England averages. As a consequence, premature mortality rates for those under 75 are 30.9% higher than in England, and for those under 65 are 43.8% higher – indicating a significant challenge here.

In terms of lifestyle factors, the available data is less detailed, but there is a notable gap with England in the rates of healthy eating adults – 22.7%, compared to 28.7% in England, and 32.4% in Cambridgeshire⁶.

A town that is taking the initiative

Wisbech is very unusual for a market town in being very proactive about its future. Through the Wisbech 2020 Vision, the town has actively engaged with the Government, which has resulted in visits

⁴ Source: Cambridgeshire County Council. Based upon change of use applications for planning categories A1, A3 and A4. Figures rounded.

⁵ NABMA: Market Health Check Report

⁶ All figures taken from Public Health England data, available through the Local Health tool



from ministers and senior civil servants, signalling support. While cities tend to have more resources for this type of activity, Wisbech has used its assets to make a strong case for investment. A recent visit from Their Royal Highnesses The Prince of Wales and The Duchess of Cornwall has raised the profile of the town still further.

The town also benefits from a strong community spirit. In recent surveys undertaken for the 'I Love Wisbech' work, the friendliness of the town was frequently referenced, as well as voluntary sector organisations such as the Ferry Project and local churches. Wisbech Town Council have also tried to be as proactive as possible in enhancing community integration through their wide range of community events.



Our key asks of the Combined Authority

We invite the Combined Authority to be a part of transforming our town. The Combined Authority has recognised, through its response to the CPIER, the importance of the Fens as a separate economic area to both the Greater Cambridge and Greater Peterborough economies. Wisbech is the largest town in the Cambridgeshire Fens – so realising the potential of this economy has to mean a prosperous and inclusive future for Wisbech.

Our key asks are:

- 1. Provide immediate connectivity to key employment centres**
- 2. A Town Centre Improvement Initiative**
- 3. Support cohesion and community shared space**
- 4. Open up countryside access, and develop the Wisbech Country Park**
- 5. Develop a workplace health award scheme**
- 6. Focus on Tourism**
- 7. Repair Derelict Buildings**
- 8. Commercialisation of Wisbech Port**

We now unpack each of these in turn.

1. Provide immediate connectivity to key employment centres

Wisbech suffers from poor transport connectivity. According to Wikipedia, it is among the twenty largest towns in England not to have a train station⁷. The fact that the A47 is single carriageway for much of its journey east and west from Wisbech makes it unsafe and slow. Cycle infrastructure to connect the town to other places is virtually non-existent. All of the above means that it is difficult to work in any of the East of England's primary employment centres – Peterborough, Cambridge, and Norwich – while living in Wisbech.

The economic impacts of this are clear. Within Wisbech there are low levels of professional employment, meaning that many who want to move on in their career feel they need to leave the town. This takes people and resources away. It is also a missed opportunity to bring more money in to flow around the town, which would help the high street immensely.

We know what the real “game-changers” are to make changes to this in the long run, which are covered in the strategy paper. The A47 needs to be fully dualled to open up employment opportunity. In the longer term a rail link to the town will mean young professionals, who are increasingly unlikely to drive, will base themselves in the town. A 45-minute link to Cambridge would increase employment and allow for people working in Cambridge to access more affordable housing. Further ahead, Wisbech may be able to become part of the Cambridge Autonomous Metro (CAM) network, which is initially being developed in the south of the county.

But, even if all goes as best as it possibly can on these projects, construction of heavy infrastructure inevitably takes a long time in both the planning and delivery. It is highly unlikely that either project will be complete before 2030. This is too long to wait – we need solutions now. Business cases for ambitious schemes will also stack up more readily if we can nurture patterns of commuting out of the town. Fenland Association for Community Transport (FACT) is working to help address this – but much more needs to be done, which goes beyond the limits of what a volunteer organisation can provide.

Some ideas which should be developed, tested, and if viable rolled out include:

- **A shuttle bus service to key transport hubs.** Both March and Watlington stations are within 25 minutes' drive from Wisbech. These enjoy quick connections to Cambridge (and Peterborough, in the case of March). A shuttle service which was designed to coincide with train departures would make public transport commuting a feasible option.
- **Testbed for the Cambridge Autonomous Metro (CAM).** The technology for the Cambridge Autonomous Metro will need to be trialled. According to the Strategic Outline Business Case, the CAM will use “high-quality, zero-emission ‘trackless metro’ vehicles, powered by electric batteries recharged overnight and at route termini throughout the day, without the need for overhead wires”. This technology could be trialled to connect Wisbech on the course of one of the old railway line connections. This would help as a proof of concept both for the CAM, and also for future connectivity to Wisbech.

⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_largest_towns_in_England_without_a_railway_station



These suggestions are fixes for the short term – but impetus must be kept up for Wisbech Rail and the dualling of the A47.

2. A Town Centre Improvement Initiative

Throughout the Growing Fenland project, among the normal rivalries between towns, one refrain has been clear from other towns that they believe Wisbech has been the focus an undue amount of resource and attention. That there has been real focus on Wisbech is clearly true. This is to a degree justified by the socio-economic and demographic statistics in the town which are particularly challenging.

In our view, a focus on Wisbech is justified over and above the proposals suggested by the town team, but the focus should be on giving the town the support it needs to capitalise on its assets and deal with its issues so that it has a momentum of its own going forward. We think it is possible and necessary to get Wisbech even more firmly on the right path. This is because the context has changed or is set to do so.

The strategy paper includes a range of transport proposals. Alongside the revenue proposals also considered for improvements to education and health, these capital proposals, if implemented, would change the potential of Wisbech Town Centre, making it both possible and necessary to improve the town's offer.

This is a project that other key stakeholders have a concern with. NPP, owners of the Horsefair Shopping Centre, have reported a marked decline in footfall and wish to work with the Town and District Council and others to develop proposals to improve footfall in the town centre. At the moment, footfall is not tracked in the Town Centre – but as this initiative is taken forward it will be important to do so.

Based on all of these factors, we propose a Wisbech Town Centre initiative.

Its aim should be to make Wisbech a venue of choice for retail, leisure and culture for the widest possible cross-section of local people as well as to a growing number and range of visitors.

The way this will be achieved is through a combination of measures designed to:

- increase footfall in the town centre, thereby embedding and sustaining the existing retail offer as well as creating new opportunities. Footfall counters to be introduced to monitor changes in footfall i.e. when events are held or if a new store is opened. It will be important to do so as anecdotal evidence suggests the market place and surrounding streets are doing better than the Horsefair shopping centre – the only place footfall is currently counted.
- improve the attractiveness of key gateways to the town centre including by potentially remodelling the Horsefair carpark
- improve the range of hotel accommodation on offer
- investigate the possibility of covering the market, or other creative approaches to maximising its potential, while exploring whether there is a case for more retail space in the town centre (or whether existing large retail space in the centre can be made more attractive for large retailers).
- develop a distinctive food and beverage offer which reflects the rich agricultural offer of the Fenland area

- develop the area around the Wisbech Castle and Museum as a cultural quarter, with space for artists to display and sell their products.
- create community owned and managed space as a home for community groups
- Fund and work with Wisbech Town Council to introduce their plans for Wisbech Market Place which includes pedestrianisation as well as visual features
- Introduce policies to encourage nightlife such as restaurants into the Town Centre

We believe that there is a valuable opportunity to take forward these proposals in a joint partnership between the Town and District Councils the owner of the Horsefair shopping centre, NPP, and potentially others including Elgood & Sons Brewery.

This approach would need to be accompanied by other policy changes, including a commitment to more effective policing of the Town Centre and a commitment on the part of the District Council to focus development on the Town Centre, curtailing further developments on the outskirts of town for activity that could reasonably find a location in the town centre.

King's Lynn was improved by a focus on a large retail offer, whilst this is difficult to do in the existing High Street, sites very close to the existing centre should be identified as possibilities to improve the shopping precinct.

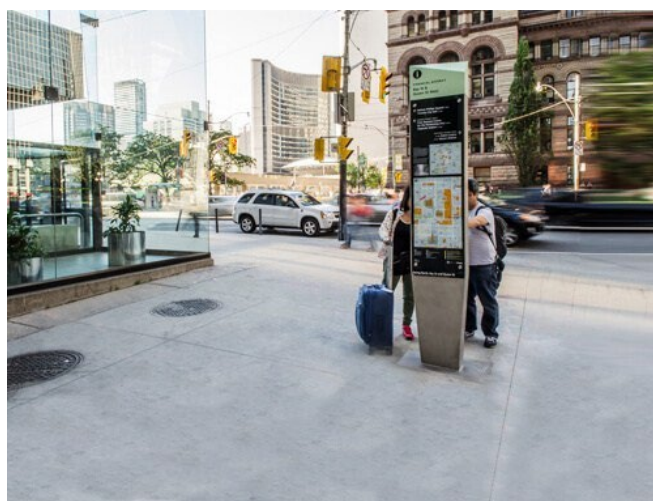
As well as improving the digital offering for the town, there is an important role for doing things around the town which will help to generally improve the “feel” of Wisbech.

But there are some smaller things we can do as well.

Attractive Totem Signage to improve legibility

Wayfinding totems are smartly presented, with well-designed maps, clean text, and attractive colour palette. These will help to improve the town centre aesthetic. They also send a clear message that the town expects visitors to come and look around – which grows a sense that the town is “on the map” and reminds locals about reasons to take pride in their town. Including historical sections on the signs about key features of the town can also help connect people to the town’s heritage.

The importance of navigability, or “legibility” of places is becoming increasingly appreciated. People will spend longer, discover more, and have a more positive experience if a place has an effective wayfinding strategy.





Support a “digitally-enabled” town centre which can thrive in the era of online shopping

Online sales as a percentage of total retail sales has grown from 3.4% to 18% between 2007 and 2018⁸. This has been blamed for the challenges we have seen on the high street in Wisbech. Retail space has fallen by 2,500m² between 2002 and 2017⁹, though much of this has been absorbed by another trend – towards café culture, pub, and restaurant space.

However, many town centres are thriving, which shows the link between growth in online shopping and high street decline is by no means cast in iron. Shops which are innovating to bring together their digital and physical offerings can continue to maintain a high street presence, where customers can continue to appreciate using the store, even if they then wait until returning home to order. **The integration of the physical and digital offering is a key trend** of the moment.

To adapt to this trend, we need to enact the following:

- **On-street Wi-Fi across the town centre.** This currently exists in Cambridge, and has recently been launched in Ely. As well as giving people a reason to be on the high street, it also increases digital inclusion, by supporting those who would be unable to afford a data-heavy phone contract. In Ely, it has also been shown to really boost the takings of local market stallholders – as it enables them to use contactless for payments, instead of having to take cash. More work needs to be undertaken to identify current Wi-Fi ‘white spots’ and provide coverage in these areas.
- Working with Wisbech Town Council, the potential for **enhancing the existing Town Council website** to be explored, using search engine optimisation to make it easier for potential visitors to see the main attractions in the town.

⁸ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/businessindustryandtrade/retailindustry/timeseries/j4mc/drsi>

⁹ Cambridgeshire County Council data on changes of use

3. Support cohesion and community shared space

A cohesion programme, drawing on the example of Peterborough

Peterborough has been chosen by the Government as one of the UK's five "integration areas". This means it has had funding to respond to some of the challenges associated with high levels of international immigration, and develop responses accordingly. The interim strategy for the programme, "Belonging Together" has been developed, which sets out four key areas of work:

1. **Economic Opportunity** – which focuses on removing barriers to the labour market through interventions such as childcare support and careers fairs
2. **Bringing Communities Together** – which focuses on improving community relations, through support for community projects, and using planning approaches to improve cohesion and control the number of Houses of Multiple Occupancy (HMOs)
3. **Young People** – which focuses on how to develop a shared sense of citizenship among the young, and understand their perspectives on integration
4. **English Language** – with tailored English for Speakers of Other Languages training (ESOL), particularly focused on allowing those with skills to put them to use where English Language is a barrier, and developing a partnership of providers

Within the Belonging Together strategy, partners state that: "we welcome the opportunity to share our learning"¹⁰. We believe Wisbech could offer a great opportunity to apply many of the lessons learnt in Peterborough to our context – where we share many of the same challenges, as well as the same ambitions to ensure our town is inclusive, welcoming, and cohesive. We are already making progress, with mandatory licencing that came into effect in October 2018 is beginning to address the issue of the overabundance of HMOs.

We also believe that **some initiatives can be trialled most successfully within a town setting**, where the scale of the challenge is lessened. We would welcome the opportunity to be involved in conversations with government about the future of Peterborough's Integration Area – and by working with Peterborough we can evidence the benefits of the Integration Area being felt beyond the city itself.

A public indoor space to bring the community together

In order to deepen a sense of community in the town, we need to create spaces where people can come to dwell together. The historic market square is one such key space, which could undergo improvements while preserving the heritage. There is also work ongoing to bring in heritage funds to this area.

Another approach which some towns are taking across the UK is to create a new indoor shared space. Altringham, Cheshire (see example) has used a food court with independent traders to bring people into the town centre, helping to bring it back to life. In Great Yarmouth, a vacant M&S store has been transformed into an art gallery for showcasing work by local talent. An initiative which helps local entrepreneurs – be they artists, craftspeople, or chefs – to display and sell their work in an attractive

¹⁰ <https://pcc-live.storage.googleapis.com/upload/www.peterborough.gov.uk/council/strategies-polices-and-plans/BelongingTogether-AConversationAboutOurCommunitiesAndFuture-May2019v2.pdf?inline=true> p16

setting would make our town centre more vibrant. We also know that in and around Wisbech there are many affluent families – testified to by the popularity of the fee-paying grammar school and presence of numerous asset management firms. We need to give these people something unique which cannot be found online to bring them into the town centre and spend their disposable income.

This event space could also be used for town events – such as the annual Wisbech beer festival. **Elgood's brewery is one of the town's foremost assets** – a beautiful Georgian brewery on the North Brink with a long history of beer making. At a time when interesting beers are in vogue, we will use our association with beer making to attract people to spend time in the town and advertise our offer.

Case Study: Reviving the town centre in Altrincham



Altrincham, in Cheshire, has managed to buck national trends by *reducing* its shop vacancy rate – from 25% in 2014 to 10% in 2018. This dramatic reversal of fortunes was sparked by a proactive market development strategy, which has looked to bring in independent “street food” suppliers, breweries, and other retailers. The market has become the new “anchor” for the town, in a way that department stores have traditionally acted in other towns.¹¹

¹¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2018/sep/16/uk-market-towns-embrace-foodie-wave-to-revive-ailing-centres>

A continuation of public events

As one of the Partners of Wisbech 2020 the Town Council was tasked with delivering community events to help cohesion. These events such as the Rock Festival and the WisBEACH Day are attended by thousands. Other organisations in the town are also putting on a number of great free events. We should aim to encourage these events to take place as frequently as possible and aim to reduce bureaucracy as much as possible to allow people to put on more events.

4. Open up countryside access, and develop the Wisbech Country Park

While Wisbech is well placed in a rural area, opportunities for access to the countryside are limited. This is due in part to the historic nature of the land – much of which was brought above water with the express purpose of farming it, and therefore doesn't have many rights of way across it (the Nene Way being the only footpath of any length that comes near the town).

Physical activity is one of the most effective ways to tackle the health problems our town faces. As a former Chief Medical Officer for the NHS has commented: "The potential benefits of physical activity to health are huge. If a medication existed which had a similar effect, it would be regarded as a 'wonder drug' or 'miracle cure'." ¹² The Active Fenland programme is working to promote physical activity in various different forms across the District, but we need to join this up with making the countryside more accessible to people.

We will work with the Department for Farming, Environment, and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) and Cambridgeshire County Council to explore where we might be able to create extra rights of way to make it easier for residents to access the countryside. This process requires new creation orders, which it is within the power of the County Council to generate. We will use our relationships with local landowners where we have them to smooth this process.

We will explore the inhibiting factors around walking and cycling in the town with the aim of helping people to walk or cycle in a town where rates are currently low compared to Cambridgeshire averages. We could be a trial area for the use of new lightweight recycled plastic bike lanes. These have been developed in the Netherlands, where the geographical terrain is identical to our landscape. They have the added benefit of being much lighter than asphalt, and more durable, so don't need repairing anything like as often.



Within the town itself, a country park is central to the Garden Town vision. Work can begin on this now, even while we wait for support to come in around transport and housing. This will bring a

¹² <http://nbhottopics.blogspot.com/2014/01/helping-gps-promote-exercise-motivate.html>



pleasant, green, shared space to the heart of Wisbech, increasing the presence of blue and green infrastructure. This will have numerous benefits:

- **The health and wellbeing of residents will be improved.** Extensive research has shown the benefits which greenery in the local environment provides for tackling stress and lifting mood. The World Health Organisation comments that: “Having access to green spaces can reduce health inequalities, improve well-being, and aid in treatment of mental illness. Some analysis suggests that physical activity in a natural environment can help remedy mild depression and reduce physiological stress indicators.”¹³
- **Social interaction will increase.** The Country Park will be a place to meet people and dwell together.
- **Attractive visitor facility.** As the town looks to become more attractive for visitors, having a Country Park will be a big part of the draw.
- **Flood attenuation.** The Country Park will serve as a basin for holding floodwater in the event that the River Nene floods. This will make construction of housing and infrastructure more viable.

¹³ <https://www.who.int/sustainable-development/cities/health-risks/urban-green-space/en/>

5. Develop a workplace health award scheme

Our big action on health is the **North Cambridgeshire Health Opportunity Area**. This is covered in the strategy paper and will hold across all four market towns.

However, one big opportunity here in Wisbech is to respond to challenges around workplace health. Many of Wisbech's biggest employers are factories where much of the labour is manual and heavy going, with long shifts. This increases health risks – therefore it is especially important here to guarantee good working conditions.

One of the most significant impacts on a person's health, both mental and physical, is their workplace. Employers need to recognise the responsibility they have for supporting the health of their workforce, and by doing so they can enjoy the benefits of more productive workers. Therefore, we propose to launch an occupational health award scheme, which employers can choose to sign up to if they want to make a priority of this issue. This has been developed successfully in Cornwall (see case study) and ties into our aim of developing the degree of networking between businesses in Wisbech. In order to support this, we will work with the health opportunity area, local Clinical Commissioning Group, and Cambridgeshire County Council to develop a clear set of health standards for the workplace.

Case Study: Occupational Health in Cornwall

Ten years ago, Cornwall Council appointed a Workplace Health Co-ordinator with the sole remit of engaging businesses on this issue. After discussions with businesses about what could help, an award scheme was launched, where businesses would be recognised as bronze, silver, or gold for their contribution to worker health and well-being. A framework and toolkit are published, which is regularly updated to reflect new public health initiatives (such as the recent National Sugar Smart Campaign). Businesses who want to participate then assess themselves against criteria relating to ten key areas, including mental well-being, back pain, smoking, alcohol and substance misuse, and healthier eating, with the Co-ordinator visiting to confirm this assessment.

Companies have really seen the benefits – a director commented: “We recognise that employees perform at their best when they are happy and healthy, and that optimal employee performance is necessary for the company to be a leader in its field.” Another smaller company managed to reduce sickness rates by 10%, saving £20,000, which was put into further worker health initiatives. These examples demonstrate that an interest in worker health can have transformational productivity benefits for business, and transformative lifestyle impacts for workers.

6. Focus on Tourism

Wisbech has a very rich heritage with a number of significant buildings which many people come to see. Our history includes Clarkson and Wilberforce fighting against slavery, The Jesuit movement which has roots to Wisbech Castle, The Peckovers who were one of the founders of Barclays Bank and Octavia Hill who founded the National Trust. It also has an extensive network of underground tunnels that have had many uses such as smuggling. This is seen most clearly on Heritage Open Day, where people always come away pleasantly surprised about the amount of heritage the town has to offer.

A focus on tourism will help the town by bringing prosperity. We can do this by:-

- Developing a Cultural quarter in Museum Square and link to the proposed FDC Cultural Strategy
- Look to reopen the tunnels under the town as a tourist attraction
- Reinvigorating the Wisbech Tourism group, using it as a forum to bring together the different visitor attractions in Wisbech to co-ordinate on
- FDC Economic Development team try to focus on attracting hotel and leisure services
- FDC Economic Development Team and Wisbech Town Council to work together to push Wisbech Tourism nationally and increase dwell time in the town by promoting 'The Wisbech Experience'

7. Repair Derelict Buildings

Wisbech has a number of derelict buildings which have been caused by neglect and/or arson. It is highly unlikely that these will ever be bought back into use due to viability issues – in particular, the Phoenix Hotel. Work has been done to draw up a list of these buildings and develop approaches to each. With the Phoenix Hotel, a strategy which may succeed is to use a CPO and build flats at the back. Other buildings would simply look better with a fresh lick of paint or cleared gutters. A small fund that was tied to owners making improvements to their properties would incentivise the town being well kept, helping to attract visitors.

8. Commercialisation of Wisbech Port

Wisbech is unique in Fenland in the fact it is a port town – a fact which has played a key role in the town's history. The port supplies timber to a local business and has the potential to be more of a commercial opportunity. The land surrounding the Port has also been earmarked for development for a number of years and to begin this could bring up that whole area which is currently not very visually appealing. Providing attractive 1- and 2-bedroom apartments would give the area a big lift. This could be the ideal place for the Combined Authority to trial its plans for the £100k home.



Regarding the commercialisation of the port, it is currently hard for larger vessels to turn in the port due to the tight circle. We also need to think about how the port relates to a possible future Nene barrage – which may require creative solutions to maximise the benefits to the town as whole from both initiatives. The capital works to enhance this are in the region of £1 million. The actions falling out of this are for CPCA to help:

- Accelerate development round the port
- Fund, or help seek funds, to enable works to increase commercialisation

What happens now?

We have set out a plan for Wisbech which, along with the Fenland-wide strategy document, can transform the town, showing which interventions can make a real difference.

We now look forward to working constructively with the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority (CPCA), and its Mayor, James Palmer, to implementing 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 Fenland District Council, working in conjunction with the town team that was put together for this work.