

Town Centre Working Group

Proposals to Neighbourhood Plan Committee

Introduction

Shaftesbury is an ancient hilltop town with an Iron Age and Saxon heritage. Its history, elevated prominence in the landscape and location at intersecting major roads mean that it acts as the main centre for much of north Dorset, both as a resource for local populations and as a tourist destination. However the town is underperforming in this respect and major investment is required to realise its potential.

Like many ancient towns Shaftesbury has suffered from years of municipal urbanisation and poor planning which has imposed an unattractive modern streetscape on an historical backdrop without addressing key issues relating to enhancing pedestrian safety (dangerous pavement width) and visitor appeal. However, there is still much optimism about the future of the town which still engenders strong feelings of loyalty, continues to attract private investment and maintains high levels of shop occupation. This group seeks to put forward policies that provide a framework to preserve the town's rich heritage whilst developing opportunities that reveal its true potential and enhance the visitor experience from parking and traffic flow to signage and pedestrian safety.

General objective

To make Shaftesbury town centre more appealing to its hinterland residents and to local, national and international tourists by focusing on the visitor experience from start to finish.

General policy

Provide plentiful parking, pedestrian friendly streets and pavements, clear signage and maps.

Reinforce conservation area policies to ensure all town centre future enhancements are in keeping with the town's heritage status.

Enhance opportunities for events and markets to create a vibrant, thriving town. Shaftesbury needs to consider itself a brand. "The way in which places are perceived is critical. Branding and the means by which that brand is promoted can be hugely important in capturing attention and securing investment." from 'A brighter future for our towns and cities' May 2015.

Closure of previous town enhancement scheme.

The group looked at placement of 'gates' which it was felt should be more attractive and equally effective as traffic calming measures if they were welcoming and constructed in heritage style. Wording might be "Heritage Centre ... 20mph". Locations were to be in line with future planning e.g. one-way road system - one near the junction of St Martins Lane and Salisbury Street and the other at the start of the Commons..

Heritage Objective

Shaftesbury's appeal to tourists and hinterland residents lies much in the charm of its historic centre. The objective is that all infrastructure alterations within the town centre must retain and enhance the heritage appeal of the historic centre.

Policy

Put into place stronger planning restrictions to ensure any new surfacing materials, lighting and signage are appropriate to a historic market town.

Pedestrian Safety - a pedestrian friendly town

Objective

To widen the narrow pavements in Shaftesbury in combination with the application of a full-width shared surface from Angel Square up the High Street. The current pavements are difficult to use for all but present a potential danger for the elderly, disabled/wheelchair users and parents with pushchairs. Wider pavements would also slow pedestrian speed thereby encouraging a more visitor friendly shopping environment.

Policies

The only way to make pavements wider is to introduce a one-way system. The Neighbourhood Plan should support proposals already submitted which include changing bus routes so the High Street is only used by cars and delivery vehicles.

Where bollards are used to demark between road and pavement it was suggested these should be in white to help guide dogs for the blind.

A subtle edge and change of material is suggested to define road and pavement with a bull-nosed 25mm raised kerb adding definition without creating a trip hazard.

Issues were expressed by Chamber of Commerce members about the damage to business caused by any works and policy should reflect to carry out any enhancement works carefully in phases in full consultation with local businesses to minimise any financial/trading impact.

Traffic Management

Objective

The town centre is still currently a traffic priority area. Efforts to reduce the volume and speed of traffic passing along the High Street, which is to become a pedestrian priority zone, must be continued in phases.

Policy

Our aim is to discourage through traffic and allow wider pavements/shared surfaces by making some roads one-way.

- a. Make Salisbury Street one way into town as far as Angel Square, where a roundabout should be introduced. Make Coppice Street one way as far as St Martins Lane. Connect St Martins Lane with Salisbury Street and make St Martins Lane one way into Salisbury Street.
- b. Make traffic one way down the High Street towards Angel Square. This will allow pavements to be widened and the introduction of shared surface throughout the High Street. Through traffic can then exit the town via Coppice Street. Wider pavements from Angel Square as far as the entrance to Swans Yard will make for a safe shopping environment whilst the shared surface approach will reduce traffic speed.
- c. Remove bus traffic from the High Street by diverting it through the Bell Street car park. Introduce loading only and half hour waiting to High

Street parking spaces, whilst adding more parking spaces where bus stop spaces used to be located.

Strategic Sites

The group has identified certain key strategic sites whose future use should be safeguarded for the town's benefit by transferring ownership to the town council.

Key sites include:

1. Cattle Market - a key area to develop much needed additional car parking and possible retail/office space.
2. Post Office/BT exchange - another possible additional space for parking and retail/office development. Protect through planning.
3. Tesco overflow car park.
4. Police station

Tourism/markets

Shaftesbury has much to offer tourists but it is under-performing as a destination town due to the loss of its individuality through urbanisation, standardised materials and poor signage.

Objective

Create a vibrant town with events all year round. Enhance the town markets

Make the town easier to navigate for visitors

Policies

Improved clarity and style of signage. Introduce finger posts in a heritage style to highlight key town assets.

Review clarity of tourist information maps including walk maps.

Review appearance of exterior of tourist information office. Review opportunity to have a clearer, larger map on the outside wall listing businesses and tourist destinations by type with grid references. New map must maintain revenues to TIC currently generated by local business advertising.

Review whether another clear map could be applied to the outside wall of the toilets.

Streamline the application process for closing roads for markets and other events. It might take some getting used to initially but would it really be so bad to have the High Street as pedestrian only on market Thursdays?

Continue with attempts to get the Super Sunday market from Frome to come to Shaftesbury.

Could Shaftesbury look to replicate Frome which pays for a specialist to raise funds for the town which are then allocated as grants for local community projects that enhance the town?

Improve co-ordination between all the different events in the town - or introduce an overall town events co-ordinator.

Proposal for signage to Gold Hill to be a heritage cast iron arch across the passageway to the left of the town hall rather than a small pavement sign.

Consider making more of the town's role in the 50 mile Thomas Hardy walks.

Parking

There are insufficient parking spaces to accommodate tourists as well as visitors from outside the town centre as a result of which the town loses trade.

Objective/policy

Identify sites for possible future additional parking and ring-fence through planning.

Future sites include the Cattle Market which it is felt should be returned to town council ownership as a vital town asset. A cut through to Barton Hill from the Tesco overflow car park, which is rarely made available for use, has been discussed at some point in the past. Could this not be looked at again?

If the Bowls Club were ever to move there would be an opportunity to extend the Bleke Street car park. Could a fund-raising effort to facilitate the move not go hand-in-hand with an agreement with NDDC to extend the car park?

Moving bus stops into car park would release more parking on High Street.

Toilets

It is understood that issues relating to the main toilets in the Co-Op car park have been addressed but these remain the main toilets available for visitors.

Objective

Look at measures to enhance toilet provision in the town centre.

Policies

Engage with the business community and look at a Community Toilet Scheme.