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1. INTRODUCTION

1.01 Wickford is a small District Shopping Centre located at the north-eastern edge of Basildon District. The Town, which has a population of approximately 30,000, has grown rapidly in recent years due to successive housing developments

1.02 Despite its growth, investment in the Town Centre has not kept pace. Its position in the national retail rankings has fallen in recent years and the centre is today in a poor physical and environmental condition. Recognising the need for a strategy to improve the Town Centre, Basildon District Council in September 2004 commissioned DTZ Pidea Consulting to prepare a Town Centre Masterplan.

1.03 The elements of the brief were as follows:

- to establish a shared vision as to the most sustainable approach to the regeneration of the Town Centre;
- a movement study to look at the way the Town Centre is used and accessed including prime data for footfall baseline and including sustainable transportation strategies;
- a public space strategy for improving the public realm in Wickford Town Centre, including hard and soft landscaping, lighting, signage and the River Crouch;
- a strategy for improving the urban design quality of Wickford Town Centre including design codes
- proposed mix of uses and for planning policies supplementary to the local plan;
- cost appraisal and funding plan for the improvement works and other interventions including risk assessment;
- phasing and implementation plan.

1.04 Responding to these requirements, DTZ prepared a detailed methodology for the study, the key stages of which are illustrated in Figure 1.1. The approach sets out a logical programme of research, consultation, and development and design work, culminating in the production of the final Masterplan in 2006.

1.05 The Masterplan document is structured as follows:

- Section 2 - Context Appraisal. This section provides baseline contextual information on the town centre area and explores the key physical, economic/socio-economic and environmental factors influencing its development.
- Section 3 - Vision and Objectives. This section sets out the key principles of the proposed vision for the town centre, including the future role and function and urban design objectives.

- Section 4 - Development Framework. The Development Framework presents the proposed development plan for Wickford Town Centre. It includes spatial options and land-uses, key development proposals, public realm and transportation proposals.
- Section 5 - Financial Appraisal. This section represents our assessment of the financial feasibility of the scheme. It highlights costs of site assembly and development and receipts gained through property disposal and developer contributions.
- Section 6 - Delivery Framework. The delivery framework provides an approach to taking the Masterplan forward, including key policy and funding issues as well as timescales and phasing. It also considers the key areas of risk and proposed management response.

2 CONTEXT

Study Area

- 2.01 Wickford is a small town of approximately 30,000 residents situated on the north-eastern edge of Basildon District, immediately north of Basildon. It is approximately 58 km from London (36 miles), and is served by the London Liverpool Street train line providing access to London, Southend-on-Sea and Southminster.
- 2.02 The town takes its form from the A132 and A129 main roads which cross from north to south and east to west respectively, intersecting in the centre. These routes provide access to the surrounding towns of Basildon, Rayleigh, Southend-on-Sea, South Woodham Ferrers, Billericay, Brentwood and Chelmsford, as well as a number of rural villages in the immediate catchment area such as Crays Hill, Downham and Battlesbridge.
- 2.03 The Masterplan study area is defined by the town centre's boundaries, as illustrated by the blue line on Figure 2.1.
- 2.04 The town centre's physical characteristics are dominated by the linear high street, around which the majority of retail and commercial activity is focused; the train line, which traverses the town centre at elevated height, bisecting the High Street; and the Golden Jubilee Way A132 Bypass, which defines the town centre to the east, creating a physical boundary.
- 2.05 The River Crouch, which meanders through the centre from south-west to north-east, is another important feature, although because it is in a culverted channel, lacks visual prominence.
- 2.06 Key access points include the train station, which is accessible from both Market Avenue to the south and Station Avenue to the north, and the roundabouts from the A132 at the northern and southern ends of the centre.
- 2.07 In terms of land-use, the study area is predominantly commercial/retail orientated, with shops and services focused on the High Street and the immediate surroundings dedicated largely to car parking. The two main shopping centres - the Ladygate and the Willows - which are perceived to be key anchors are situated at either end of the High Street. There are two freestanding supermarkets, Somerfield and Aldi, as well as Iceland and Co-op in the High Street itself. There is also a market, to the west of the High Street, which operates three to four times weekly.
- 2.08 Although the shopping 'offer' is largely convenience based, there are also a limited range of comparison and variety goods stores, such as Woolworths, and Dorothy Perkins.

- 2.09 Outside the core area of the High Street, traditional retail uses give way to a range of supporting activities including bars and restaurants, professional services, offices, public facilities and at the northern end of the High Street, garages. Key offices include BT Telephone Exchange in Market Avenue, and the Royal Mail sorting office, in Lower Southend Road.
- 2.10 The area of Market Road/Market Avenue provides a geographical focus for public facilities, with Wickford Health Centre, the municipal swimming pool, a public library and community centre all located close to each other.
- 2.11 Wickford is designated as a Principal Town Centre in the Essex and Southend Replacement Structure Plan (2001). Because of the proximity of larger centres - Basildon, Chelmsford and Brentwood - it is limited to playing a relatively minor role within the local shopping hierarchy, and its retail performance has been seen to deteriorate in recent years in the face of changing shopping patterns and growing competition. However, it has demonstrated a degree of resilience and retains an important local service function providing a range of convenience and some limited comparison goods stores.

Policy Framework

National and Regional Framework

- 2.12 The national planning policy framework for town centres has been given renewed emphasis with the recent publications of PPS1 (Planning Policy Statement 1 Delivering Sustainable Development, 2005) and PPS6 (Planning Policy Statement Planning for Town Centres, 2005). Both these publications reinforce the role of town centres as the focus for retail and mixed use development.
- 2.13 PPS6 reinforces the 'sequential approach' for selection of sites for development in town centres, relating to retail uses and including offices, thus supporting the centres as primary locations for new development and guarding against the negative impacts of further out-of-town development.
- 2.14 PPS1 encapsulates the new national planning and development agenda, particularly relating to housing growth, mixed use and sustainable communities issues. All of these aspects strengthen the case for regeneration and diversification of town centres.
- 2.15 At regional level, as a relatively small town centre, Wickford is not considered to play a strategic shopping centre function. This said, it plays a key role in the overall shopping hierarchy, serving the immediate catchment area.
- 2.16 Wickford is also on the fringes of the Thames Gateway South Essex area - a recognised Growth Area in the ODPM's Sustainable Communities Plan. Whilst not officially part of this policy, its fringe location may benefit from the general growth and development of the South Essex area, particularly in relation to Basildon.

Basildon's Adopted Local Plan (March 1998)

- 2.17 Basildon's Adopted Local Plan sets out a clear planning policy framework for Wickford. This includes comprehensive redevelopment proposals for Station Avenue and the eastern end of Lower Southend Road. It also provides clear spatial definition of the prime and secondary retail frontages, the prime area of which extends the length of the High Street.

Basildon District Replacement Local Plan Redeposit (2005)

- 2.18 The Adopted Local Plan is being replaced by the new Basildon District Replacement Local Plan, currently at Redeposit stage. Key policies and proposals of particular relevance to Wickford are as follows:

- Wickford is identified as a Principal Town Centre in the Replacement Local Plan;
- Policy TC2/L1 Wickford (along with Basildon, Billericay, Pitsea and Laindon) should be the focus for all new retail and new leisure/leisure related development, other than shopping to meet local needs;
- Primary Shopping Frontages in Wickford are: High Street, Ladygate Centre and The Willows;
- Housing - up to 2016 768 additional units are proposed for Wickford, with 688 of these in the town centre. Significant schemes elsewhere will include 457 units at the former Fryerns School and the Craylands Estate, and 534 units at Gardiners Lane South, both of which are in Basildon;
- Policy E8 planning permission for office schemes of more than 1,000 m² gross floor area will be refused permission within designated business areas unless they relate to existing business operations on either the same site or an adjoining site; and
- Employment - there are no new employment allocations in Wickford but nearby allocations include: Ford's Dunton Technical Centre (46ha business and 54ha mixed use), Gardiners Lane South (19ha), Land North of Courtauld Road (13ha).

- 2.19 Figure 2.3 illustrates the main policy allocations within the Replacement Local Plan (July 2005). It demonstrates the major activities planned along the northern periphery of Basildon to the south of Wickford, including the Gardiner's Lane South mixed use scheme.

- 2.20 There are no new employment allocations in the Wickford area. However, there is a major business estate to the south west of Wickford Town Centre, and further business estates to the far south of Wickford along the northern periphery of Basildon.

- 2.21 Gardiners Lane South is regarded as a key element in achieving the aspirations of the Thames Gateway South Essex initiative to create a major business hub.

The Festival Leisure Park lies to the south of Wickford. This is a major leisure development which includes a multi-screen cinema, 10 pin bowling, nightclubs, pubs, restaurants, hotels and two health and fitness suites.

Basildon's Housing Strategy 2004-2007

- Basildon Council's policy emphasis is on achieving greater levels of affordable housing across the District - with a plan for 1,640 by 2013 (it is currently achieving 350 per year).
- In Wickford the priority is affordable housing for families, and there is an excess of provision for the elderly.
- Planning policy indicates that affordable housing should account for up to 30% on all new developments of over 25 units or 1ha in size across the District.
- Market Avenue in the town centre is a key priority. The Council is proposing to demolish existing homes and replace with affordable housing for families, and private homes for sale.

Education

- **Primary** - the Abacus Primary School, which opened in 2002 and the recently expanded Oakfield Primary School will meet the long term requirements of The Wick, and elsewhere provision will be reviewed as necessary.
- **Secondary** - the capacity of the two secondary schools in Wickford were increased in 2003 to meet growth in pupil numbers.

Health

- 2.22 Primary care services are delivered through the Billericay, Brentwood and Wickford Primary Care Trust (PCT) in Wickford. Wickford Health Centre on Market Avenue is a key local facility in Wickford Town Centre, and includes a GP surgery and community health care provision. In line with national policy, the PCT's priorities include expanding the range of primary and community care services available in local health centres, which clearly represents an opportunity to improve Wickford Health Centre.

Community Strategy and Action Plan for the District of Basildon, August 2003

2.23 The Community Strategy describes how local organisations will work together to give the people in the Basildon District a better quality of life in the future. The strategy outlines five key themes which are as follows:

- **Feeling Safe** - a District which is safe and feels safe;
- **Lifelong Learning and Jobs** - an attractive, successful business location where local people are equipped with the skills they need to get a job through access to first class learning for life;
- **Health and Social Well-Being** - for everyone to have a variety of choices of affordable leisure and free time pursuits, a healthy lifestyle and first class healthcare;
- **Fair and Equal Life Chances** - for all local people to have fair and equal life chances by empowering individuals and communities to overcome hardship while encouraging them to become independent and productive through involvement in local support networks; and
- **Living in a Pleasant Environment** - access to an affordable home in a clean and pleasant district which is protected for the benefit of present and future generations.

2.24 The Masterplan will play an important role in taking forward both national policy objectives and local aspirations for the regeneration of Wickford.

Urban Design Analysis

Introduction

2.25 The urban design audit has explored a range of issues in the form of identifying opportunities and constraints. These issues have been simplified to six key areas of concern and are identified as:

- image and identity;
- access and movement;
- urban form - an introverted Town;
- public realm;
- mix of uses;
- townscape; and
- development opportunities.

- 2.26 The analysis of these issues has helped inform the town centre Masterplan.

Image and Identity

- 2.27 The character of Wickford Town Centre has been greatly affected by redevelopment during the 1960's/70's and as a result there is a lack of local distinctiveness with few obvious buildings of historic character or interest. There are a variety of architectural styles including Victorian brick terraces, some 1920's-30's art deco style units and the flat roofed 'box' developments of the 1960's/70's. Unfortunately many of the retail units have a neglected appearance and a tired and uncoordinated mismatch of styles and treatments.
- 2.28 The centre also has a poor reputation in terms of anti-social behaviour, particularly caused by groups of children/teenagers 'hanging around' the town. The reputation is exacerbated by the run-down nature of many of the shops, the poor quality environment: street clutter, litter, graffiti and fly posting. There are also a number of vacant units in key locations and on upper floors.

Access and Movement

Road Network

- 2.29 There is only one vehicle route in and out of the town centre and despite the relief road (A132) which provides an alternative route, traffic problems within the town centre at peak times (especially around the railway station) are still considered to be an issue. In particular, this applies to the A132 (north and south) and the A129 to the west.
- 2.30 There are a large number of car parking spaces distributed around the town centre (at the station and around the two large supermarkets). However, there is no co-ordination of parking space provision which leads to some confusion for those entering the town centre. There also seems to be a lack of clear boundaries between vehicles and pedestrians. This is particularly apparent on the northern side of Lower Southend Road where buildings are set back from the street edge to allow for parking. There are also problems of illegal parking and service vehicles, which create further conflict between pedestrians and vehicles.

Public Transport

- 2.31 The town benefits from strong rail links with a frequent service to London Liverpool Street. There is a limited bus service within the town centre and disrupted movement east-west to Lower Southend Road and north-south to Nevendon Road. There are poor connections to the local areas. There is a bus interchange at the station entrance, although the facilities are poor, with limited travel information available to passengers.

Pedestrians

- 2.32 The town centre is relatively compact with most of the study area within five minutes walk from the High Street. The A132 and A129, however, act as major barriers to pedestrian movement from surrounding residential areas. The pedestrian underpasses beneath the A132 in particular are narrow, poorly lit and uninviting.
- 2.33 The railway station is only 550m from the High Street but at present there are poor links between them. The most direct route passes through car parking areas and private owned service space to the rear of The Willows and along Market Road. The route is unclear, narrow, poorly maintained, dark, and intimidating, with a lack of natural surveillance from surrounding uses.
- 2.34 Within the town centre, pedestrian movement is impeded by poorly maintained narrow footways, street clutter and excessive use of guardrails. The High Street is dominated by vehicular traffic, which creates pedestrian 'pinch' points at key crossings and junctions (Market Road/High Street junction).
- 2.35 There are a number of narrow lanes leading off the High Street to the main parking areas to the rear. These routes are narrow, poorly lit, poorly maintained and are flanked by blank walls and inactive edges.

Cycling

- 2.36 There are similar problems within the town centre for cyclists, with the A132, A129 and the railway causing major constraints to movement. There are no designated cycle routes running through the town; the nearest reaches the Cranfield Park Road roundabout on the A132; as such, links to the town centre are poor. There is also a significant lack of cycle parking facilities in the town centre.

Urban Form - An Introverted Town

- 2.37 The majority of the town's active frontages are internal so that they are not visible until you walk into the High Street. The distinct lack of active frontages onto surrounding roads presents a very poor image for those arriving and driving past. The more recent developments such as The Willows continue this inward looking urban form, exposing service areas and surface car parks to the street frontages.
- 2.38 The pattern of development also neglects potential assets such as the River Crouch, which is currently surrounded by the 'backs' of the buildings along Runwell Road and is largely hidden from view.
- 2.39 Many of the original shop fronts across the town centre have been replaced with insensitively designed modern fronts with large signage and garish colour schemes.

- 2.40 Within the town centre, security measures in the form of solid shutters impede activity at street level. There are also large blank walls along key pedestrian routes between the town centre and the car parking areas to the rear.
- 2.41 Wickford presents a poor sense of arrival to vehicles and pedestrians. The main gateways of the town centre are at junctions that serve to channel vehicles into and out of the High Street. The buildings at these locations are inappropriate in scale and design quality to 'mark' the entrances and provide a long-lasting impression of the town. The northern gateway from Runwell Road has a poor quality visual entrance with vacant buildings and exposed car parking/hardstanding. Similarly the road network dominates the gateway from the south at the junction of London Road and the High Street.
- 2.42 For pedestrians the experience of arrival is even worse as they are 'penned-in' to accommodate traffic movement. The links between the arrival points (station, bus stops, car parks) and the town centre, pass through car parks and service areas, making for an unpleasant arrival experience. The arrival at the station is also disappointing with the station forecourt dominated by traffic and a poorly maintained, neglected environment

Public Realm

- 2.43 The quality of the streetscape is generally poor with poor quality materials and broken/damaged paving. There is a lack of design cohesion with varying styles of paving due to ad hoc repairs and improvements. The coloured patterns in the paving bear little relation to the street form and usage, and form a slightly chaotic streetscape. The footways along the High Street are relatively narrow with pedestrian movement impeded by unnecessary street clutter, including large vehicular signage, bollards, bins and excessive use of guardrails.
- 2.44 The Willows and Ladygate Centres offer a more comfortable pedestrianised environment. The Willows was refurbished in 1997. The Ladygate Centre is more rundown and the central square is poorly maintained and under-utilised.
- 2.45 The town centre lacks a central focus, with few quality spaces or opportunities for 'spill out' onto the street. The centre is dominated by the road system, surface car parking and hardstanding, making the overall environment very harsh, which is exacerbated by the lack of green spaces and street trees.

Mix of Uses

- 2.46 Wickford is identified as a Principal Town Centre, which meets primary and local shopping needs. The Primary Shopping Frontage is concentrated along the High Street and includes the pedestrian precincts of The Willows (extended in 1997) and the Ladygate Centre. There is a good representation of national multiples including Boots, WH Smiths, Woolworths, Peacocks and Mackays.
- 2.47 The secondary shopping areas are dispersed along Lower Southend Road, The Broadway and Broadway Arcade, Station Avenue, Woodlands Road, Market Road and Runwell Road. These areas are dominated by local service provision including take-aways, hairdressers, laundrettes, etc. Lower Southend

Road also contains some commercial and residential uses. There are very few vacancies within the town centre. The existing vacant units are at the edges of the secondary shopping areas along The Broadway and London Road. There are also a number of underused and vacant upper floors.

- 2.48 The town centre is well served by food shopping with three large supermarkets: Somerfield, Co-op and Aldi. The market provides an important supplement to town centre shopping, but is 'hidden' behind the High Street and fails to interact with the rest of the centre. There are a number of cafes, take-aways and pubs, which combined with the shopping offer, means that the centre is busy during the day but lacks significant night-time activity.
- 2.49 The community facilities are concentrated along Market Road and include Wickford County Infant School, swimming pool, clinic, Community Centre and Library. The Police and Ambulance Station are situated along London Road but again, there is lack of interaction between these uses and the High Street.

Townscape

- 2.50 The present townscape reveals a tight urban form along the High Street with a good sense of enclosure and intimate scale of 2-3 storeys. In some areas, however, the building line is broken due to large setbacks and 'gaps' in the built form, which is particularly apparent along London Road. There are also areas where the scale of the buildings is inappropriate to adjacent units and the design quality has not stood the test of time.
- 2.51 The centre has a long legacy of underused backland space particularly to the east and west of the High Street. These areas are characterised by a more dispersed, low-density pattern of building, dominated by vehicular access, parking and service yards. More recent infill development has generally consisted of larger blocks, which have not complemented the existing grain along the High Street and restrict accessibility, for example, around Somerfield, Aldi and The Willows.

Development Opportunities

- 2.52 There are a number of potential development opportunities within the town centre, which could have a huge impact on the appearance of the town from key gateways and entrances. These include current planning applications for residential uses in Runwell Road and Irvon Hill Road, and the station car park which is allocated for housing in the Local Plan. There are also a number of vacant, under-used and poor quality sites/buildings, which could be considered including car parking areas, the prominent corner site at the junction of The Broadway/Lower Southend Road, and the potential 'gateway' site of the former Kwik Fit Garage. In the longer term, there may be further opportunities to extend the retail offer through the rationalisation of car parking and service areas to the rear of the High Street.

Market Assessment

Socio-economic Characteristics

- 2.53 The total population of Wickford's catchment area (as illustrated in Figure 2.4), based on 2001 Census data, is 32,600. In 1991, it was 30,590, indicating growth of approximately 7% in the decade. This growth rate exceeds Basildon (2%), Essex (5%) and national (3%) population growth over the period, demonstrating Wickford's position as a growing town.
- 2.54 Benchmarking Wickford's age structure against national averages shows the town to have a relatively old and ageing population. With the exception of the 75 years + age group, Wickford has an above average proportion of its population in all age groups from 45 years and above.
- 2.55 The town has a relatively small proportion of ethnic minority groups, at 2.6% of the total population, which compares with 8% for Great Britain as a whole.
- 2.56 Benchmarking social classifications of residents shows Wickford to have a particularly strong concentration of C1 classification, which is defined as 'supervisory, clerical and junior managerial and professional'. It also shows the town to have a marginally higher proportion of the higher social classification (AB) and the skilled manual C2 Grades. The town is under-represented in the lower classifications of D (semi-skilled) and E (on state benefits).
- 2.57 These characteristics indicate that the town performs reasonably well in respect of socio-economic characteristics. Comparisons with other benchmarks (e.g. East of England, Billericay, Chelmsford), may actually provide a different perspective, but on the basis of national averages, Wickford shows itself to have a fairly strong concentration of professional and skilled workers.

Shopping Patterns

- 2.58 According to 'Map-info' based data, the average Wickford household spends approximately £10,206 per year on retail goods. 37% of this is on convenience goods and 63% on comparison goods. Goods on which Wickford residents tend to spend above average amounts are as follows:
- furniture and DIY;
 - audio and visual equipment; and
 - telephone and fax equipment
- 2.59 Using data derived from a recent household survey carried out by DTZ, it is possible to profile the shopping patterns and characteristics of Wickford residents. Figure 2.7 opposite, shows where Wickford residents do their main food shop. As the pie-chart shows, 32% of residents shop at Wickford stores, 68% at stores outside the town. Somerfield is the main convenience shopping destination in Wickford for local residents - 19% do their main shop there.

2.60 Other findings from this survey are:

- 79% of Wickford residents do their clothes shopping in Basildon; and
- only 2.8% of local residents do their clothes shopping in Wickford.

2.61 Lakeside and Basildon are the main destinations for Christmas shopping for Wickford residents. Wickford was not recognised as a destination for Christmas shopping by any of the residents surveyed.

Retail

2.62 At the beginning of the 1980's, town centres were the focus for most retail and leisure activity, and the dominance of the high street went largely unchallenged. However, there has been a profound shift in the geography of new retail and leisure development over the last 20 years, such that town centres are now no longer the first choice for a range of shopping, leisure, entertainment and employment activities.

2.63 This shift in investment and spend away from town centres to out-of-centre locations has been driven by a combination of dynamic economic, social, demographic and property market trends. Investors and occupiers responded to (and fuelled) these changes through the 'four waves' of retail decentralisation, beginning with food superstores and retail warehouses in the 1980's, followed by freestanding regional shopping centres and factory outlets during the 1990's. In the context of Wickford, this is witnessed by the development of the Pipp's Hill and Mayflower Retail Parks in nearby Basildon.

2.64 Wickford is currently ranked at 664 according to the 2003/04 Management Horizons Index of Centres. This represents a considerable fall compared to the previous ranking of 614 in 2000/01 and 659 in 1998/99. The slippage in ranking is an indication of weakening retail appeal and difficulty in attracting multiple retailers within the centre. Nevertheless, the nearby competing centres have fallen by a much larger extent, for example Billericay has fallen from 550 in 2000/01, to 685 in the current ranking; whilst Rayleigh has slipped 81 places from 484 in 2000/01 to its current rank of 565.

2.65 Wickford's primary retail frontages are within the High Street, The Broadway and Runwell Road. There are 13 comparison goods multiples in Wickford compared to 14 in Billericay, 22 in Rayleigh and 80 in Basildon. In terms of convenience goods multiples, Wickford and Rayleigh have six, Billericay five and Basildon 10.

2.66 Therefore, for a centre of its size Wickford has a fair representation of both comparison and convenience retailers, especially when compared to the other smaller competing centres such as Billericay and Rayleigh.

2.67 Key fashion retailers within the central area include Mackays, Clarks, Peacocks, Dorothy Perkins, Stead & Simpson and Burton. Other comparison multiples in the town include Woolworths, WH Smith, Boots, Savers Drugstore, and a Co-op Pharmacy.

- 2.68 On the convenience side, there is representation from Somerfield, Aldi, Co-op, Iceland, Threshers and the Bakers Oven. The current retail offer is therefore predominantly independents and some household names with almost no specialist or up-market retailers.
- 2.69 A regular market, which trades three to four times a week, also serves the town. The site from which the market operates is under the ownership of the Council, but it is understood that the market in its current trading environment is not sustainable. It is further understood that unlike in the past, it is not as popular due to its poor retail offer. Despite this fact, successful street markets enhance the vitality of towns. A smaller market with a focus on a particular type of goods (e.g. antiques) or theme (continental markets) could potentially provide the way forward.
- 2.70 According to GOAD estimates, Wickford Town Centre has a comparison goods floor space of some 11,241 sq.m (121,000 sq.ft) whilst convenience goods floor space totals 6,856 sq.m (73,800 sq.ft). This is second lowest after Billericay. The floor space details of the competing centres are detailed in Figure 2.8 opposite.
- 2.71 In terms of accessibility, Wickford serves very much a local retail role. Observing the use of the High Street, The Broadway and Runwell Road by car owning shoppers, it is seen that parking by the kerbside is frequent, especially for short-term visits to shops and services. This inevitably also contributes to the congestion that takes place. It is also seen that there is good use made of the car parks behind the Ladygate Centre.
- 2.72 Wickford Town Centre serves as a local centre. The visits are relatively short term and the town centre needs to attract and retain more shoppers. Inevitably, the critical mass and size of the competing centres are a key draw for shoppers. In the light of this, and to retain its shopper base, the centre needs to differentiate itself.
- 2.73 For a centre of its size, and bearing in mind its good commuting location, the aim should be to stem some of the leakage. The presence of a well-known multiple such as Wilkinsons or Argos would possibly assist in this process. However, bearing in mind the constraints in unit size, this is not likely to be feasible. There is scope for the centre to differentiate its retail offer through more specialisation e.g. specialist convenience (such as quality food) and comparison retailers. The aim should be to orientate the offer so that the residents of Wickford want to visit it as a place to shop.

Future Prospects

- 2.74 Analysis of the Focus retailer requirements reveals that in October 2004 there were only three retailers seeking representation in Wickford, namely:
- British Heart Foundation Charity Shop: 56 sq.m - 279 sq.m (600 sq.ft - 3,000 sq.ft);
 - Priceless Shoes Ltd: 139 sq.m - 186 sq.m (1,500 sq.ft- 2,000 sq.ft); and
 - Saks Hair Ltd: 93 sq.m (1,000 sq.ft).

- 2.75 The retailer requirements for the competing centres are detailed in the table below. This shows that Wickford has a low retailer interest in comparison to other competing centres.

Table 2.1 Retailer requirements

Retailer requirements	
Wickford	3
Billericay	17
Rayleigh	10
Basildon	50
Chelmsford	108

- 2.76 However, a large business park and residential development is allocated for land at Gardiners Lane South, Basildon.. The redevelopment of the site is expected to include a hotel, pub/restaurant, local shops, crèche or nursery. This may have an impact in the future. Nevertheless, Wickford needs to start revitalisation measures to counter current and future competition.
- 2.77 There has been little by way of transaction activity within Wickford to provide robust data. Retail agents have reported that the market has been fairly static over the last 10 years, but has started to improve over the last twelve months. By comparison, agents report that in neighbouring Billericay, retail rents started to increase in the 1990's after Waitrose located in the High Street.
- 2.78 Local agents have stated that prime Zone A rents in Wickford over the last twelve months average at £377/sq/m (£35/sq.ft). This is to be compared against 2003 rents which averaged some £323/sq.m (£30/sq.ft). The increase in rents is attributed to a shortage of supply, with very few units coming onto the market at any time. In terms of yields, local agents report that recent valuations indicate yields in the region of 8% and are very much dependant on covenant strength.

Leisure Market

Commercial Leisure

- 2.79 Commercial leisure encompasses a wide variety of uses and associated properties. The property scene encompasses the public, non-profit making and private profit-oriented leisure sectors. Examples of which include:
- private sector - e.g. hotels, cinemas, tenpin bowling, nightclubs, bingo halls, pubs/bars and restaurants;
 - quasi commercial - e.g. swimming pools, health & fitness centres, museums, theatres (some of these facilities may operate on a partial cost recovery basis); and
 - non-commercial - e.g. municipal parks.
- 2.80 These sectors do not remain static. With increasing affluence, some property types associated with the public sector have become more commercial e.g. leisure centres and some museums.
- 2.81 Commercial leisure therefore continuously changes in response to evolving consumer behaviour and requirements. Operators and investors in this sector respond to, and are driven by, these requirements thereby creating new leisure concepts and attractions.
- 2.82 A prime example of this is the out-of-centre leisure park, which comprises of a mix of leisure uses, including multiplex cinemas, bowling alleys, health & fitness clubs, nightclubs, restaurants and bars. One of the key property market changes in the 1990s was the grouping together of leisure facilities into a leisure park. These vary in size from 3,250 sq.m (34,983 sq.ft.) to 28,000 sqm (301,392 sq.ft.). Leisure parks are now seen by the property industry as a long-term change, creating economies of scale for developers. There are currently 200 leisure parks in the UK.
- 2.83 Within the context of Wickford, the principal leisure park offer is at Festival Leisure Park in Basildon. The scheme offers a cinema; nightclubs; sports and leisure centres; bowling; pubs & restaurants.
- 2.84 The scheme is large and therefore draws a large proportion of consumers from the South Essex catchment. The only competitor of the same type is Lakeside Leisure Park, however it is a smaller park with fewer tenants.
- 2.85 A large proportion of Wickford's family leisure destination offer is accommodated by Festival Leisure Park. This is primarily due to the mix of the commercial leisure offer.

Health and Fitness

- 2.86 The health and fitness industry has probably experienced the most dramatic growth over the last five years. Private clubs such as Holmes Place and Cannons have caused a doubling in UK membership levels between 1994 and 2001.
- 2.87 Within Wickford there are a number of health clubs, namely:
- Fit 4 All, at Oak Farm, Castledon Road;
 - Shapers Toning Centre, Runwell Road; and
 - Talent Dance Centre, Runwell Road
- 2.88 There is also a public swimming pool in Market Avenue. Generally, the above provides a good representation which could be enhanced with the presence of a mainstream operator such as David Lloyd or Fitness First.

Pubs and Bars

- 2.89 Changes in the Use Classes Order, the relaxation of licensing hours and the growth of drinking and eating out as a leisure activity has fuelled significant changes in the pub and restaurant sector in recent years.
- 2.90 Wickford Town Centre has a relatively low number of pubs, comprising:
- The Duke - High Street; and
 - The White Swan - The Broadway.
- 2.91 Research with local agents has indicated that there tends to be some anti-social behaviour by youths around the vicinity of the public houses which spills over into the High Street. This is an area which needs particular attention in the form of curtailing alcohol related vandalism. If the High Street area is perceived not to be safe, then local residents and commuters will by-pass Wickford and go to other centres. The overall aim for the centre should be to focus on attracting leisure spend. Creating a safe environment is essential especially in attracting families to the centre.

Restaurants and Cafes

- 2.92 Between 1998 and 2002, the national eating out market grew by 22% to reach a value of £24.4bn. Overall demand has increased; as has frequency, but has led to a decline in spend per occasion.
- 2.93 Wickford has a varied representation of restaurants/cafes. These include:
- Balti Lord - High Street;
 - Bar Plazma - High Street;
 - Brittainia Fish Bar - High Street;
 - Cafe Coppa - The Broadway;

- Coachman's Fare - The Broadway;
- Cyber Realm - High Street;
- Dominos Pizzas - High Street;
- Essex Kebab -The Broadway;
- Happy Inn - Runwell Road;
- Majik Chef - The Broadway;
- Terri's Sandwich Bar - Southend Road; and
- Wickford Tandoori - Lower Southend Road.

2.94 Additionally, Wickford has a large representation of take-aways.

2.95 Broadly observations of the restaurant and take-way offer in Wickford suggest that the majority appear to be dated. There are some new frontages (e.g. Bar Plazma) that provides modern fascia. Modernisation is needed to create an ambience and change the perception of the High Street to attract and retain spend in Wickford Town Centre.

Office

Overview

2.96 The office sector remains one of the weaker performers of the commercial property sector, although, over the past 18 months performance has improved. An encouraging sign for the UK office market is that investors are now buying on the prospect of future rental value growth. During the past few years much of the buying of offices has been on the basis of a strong income return with the possibility of capital or rental growth being ignored

2.97 According to IPD (Investment Property Database) and measured on a three months annualised basis, office returns improved to 14.7% per year in June 2004, from 9.7% three months earlier - their highest level since the end of 1999. However, performance still lags behind retails and industrials.

2.98 IPD expect that rental values are likely to show an upswing in real rental values only after vacancy levels fall below a critical 6-7%. Rental values have continued to fall in many London and South East markets over the past quarter, but importantly growth is steadily approaching zero.

Wickford in Context

2.99 Wickford's commercial property market is skewed more towards the retail rather than the office market. According to ODPM statistics, there are only 520 persons employed in the commercial office sector in Wickford town centre. By comparison, there are 840 persons employed in total in the convenience, comparison, service retail, arts, restaurants and licensed premises sector.

2.100 Additionally the centre has one of the lowest amounts of office floor space when compared with competing local centres:

- Wickford - 7,720 sq. m;
- Rayleigh - 13,110 sq. m; and
- Billericay - 17,380 sq.m

2.101 Local agents indicate that there is little office supply around the centre. To ascertain the level of supply of the office market in Basildon an analysis of current availability from Estates Gazette was undertaken. In this regard, the analysis focused on the SS11 and SS12 postcodes, which are reflective of the Wickford catchment. The assessment has highlighted availability in the SS11 postcode only, this is summarised in Table 2.2.

Table 2.2 Current office availability in Wickford

Current office availability		
Postcode	Current availability (sq.m.)	Address
SS11	1,148	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Largest amount of available floor space totalling 242 sq m at Unit 2 Bruce Grove • Unit 5 Brocks Business Park, Hodgson Way – 168 sq m gross • Unit 7 Brocks Business Park, Hodgson Way – 168 sq m gross • Unit 8 Brocks Business Park, Hodgson Way – 168 sq m gross • First floor offices 13 Lower Southend Road – 88 sq m • 5, 6 & 7 Riverside House, Lower Southend Road – 192 sq m • Unit 5 Oban Court off Hurricane Way, Wickford Business Park – 120 sq m
SS12	No data available	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No data available

Future Supply

2.102 The most significant scheme in the potential pipeline that would affect the office market in Wickford, and the surrounding centres including larger centres such as Basildon, is the 37 ha (90 acres) Gardiners Lane South site. As previously stated, the site has been recognised as a crucial element in fulfilling the aspirations of the Thames Gateway South Essex initiative to create a major business hub for the area. The site is identified in the current Adopted Basildon Local Plan as a Comprehensive Development Area. Of the developable area 16.2ha is to be used for employment to include an innovation/business centre. In the Replacement Local Plan Redeposit (2005), this area has increased to 19ha.

Residential

Wickford Context

2.103 Housing growth is planned across the South East and East of England regions as part of the ODPM's Sustainable Communities Plan. Wickford can play a key role in accommodating some of the planned expansion within the region. At present, Wickford's household tenure is essentially comprised of owner occupation, which is higher than the national average when compared to the rented sector, as shown in Figure 2.9.

2.104 The dominant dwelling types are houses and bungalows, which comprise 93% of all dwellings.

2.105 With regard to existing development activity, there are a number of small scale residential schemes 'in the pipeline' in and around Wickford. Enquiries with local agents have also revealed that the future supply of housing may be affected by proposals on two key sites, namely:

- Runwell Hospital site - located on Runwell Chase (which falls under Chelmsford Borough Council). It is understood that the site, formerly owned by the NHS and subsequently transferred to the ODPM, is earmarked for new homes. The exact scale of the proposed development is unknown at this stage; and
- Gardiners Lane South site – located in Basildon. An outline planning application, including the residential component for the development was submitted in August 2005. The development is expected to create 534 new homes including affordable and key worker housing together with local shops, leisure facilities, as well as, a variety of public open spaces and areas of ecological interest.

House Prices

2.106 The house prices shown in Figure 2.10 are derived from discussions with local agents. It shows average house price data benchmarked against other local centres derived from standard data sources.

Future Outlook

2.107 Figure 2.11 illustrates house price growth in Wickford compared with other benchmark areas since 1995.

2.108 This shows that Wickford has enjoyed significant house price growth for both periods shown, particularly in the last five years, in which it has exceeded all benchmarked areas except Billericay.

2.109 This rapid growth in house prices in recent years is not only indicative of the growing appeal of Wickford as a place to live, but is also likely to stimulate interest from developers keen to maximise returns from housing developments in the future.

2.110 This market interest in Wickford has been clearly shown in recent months by the Urban Pulse scheme and enquiries about other town centre sites.

2.111 The Urban Pulse scheme is a good example of redevelopment adjacent to a train station, within the heart of the town centre, which encourages the use of retail and services in the centre. Based on this, it is estimated that there is potential scope for three to four schemes of similar scale to the Urban Pulse development, over a medium term period of four to five years. This is of course subject to the availability of suitable sites. Further development capacity could emerge beyond that period depending on the success of the overall regeneration strategy.

Attitudes and Perceptions

2.112 A community consultation event took place in Wickford on 4th December 2004 to discuss issues and ideas for the town centre, which could inform the masterplan. The event was attended by 800 people in total and 519 people completed questionnaires. The results have been analysed and the key messages are presented below.

What people think about town centre facilities

2.113 Respondents were asked what they felt was good about Wickford town centre from a list of sixteen issues. Figure 2.12 indicates the ten most popular responses and reveals that local services (15%), food shops (11%), places to drink (10%) and eat (9%) are considered to be what is good about Wickford town centre.

Priorities for Improvement in Wickford Town Centre

2.114 Respondents were asked what their priorities for improvement are within Wickford town centre from a list of 16 potential priority areas. Figure 2.13 illustrates the ten most popular responses, indicating the areas which were felt to be the highest priorities. The graph reflects the fact that aesthetic issues such as cleanliness (10%), environmental improvements (9%), pavements and crossings (8%) were felt to be the main priorities for improvement in Wickford town centre.

How Should Wickford Develop and Improve in the Future?

2.115 The community was asked how they would like to see Wickford develop and improve over the next few years and the responses are illustrated in Figure 2.14. The highest response was received for "all of the above", which suggested that respondents would like to see a varied offer within Wickford town centre. However, the next most popular response was 'urban living' receiving 20% of the total responses. This was closely followed by a desire to see Wickford develop as a place for leisure and recreation, which received 19% of the total responses.

SWOT Framework

2.116 This section brings together our analysis of Wickford Town Centre into a SWOT framework. Synthesising our analysis into Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats helps to crystallise the implications for Wickford and informs the policy basis for the Masterplan. The SWOT has been developed not only from research and analysis, but also from stakeholder consultation events, thus incorporating both research-based evidence and local attitudes and perceptions.

2.117 Figure 2.15 provides a plan illustrating the key physical constraints facing Wickford Town Centre that will need to be addressed in taking the Masterplan forward.

SWOT analysis

	Market Assessment	Site appraisal	Transport	Policy
Strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mix of comparison and convenience shops Average to high income profile of local residents Buoyant housing market 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Compact centre Number of sites for development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Most of the study area is within 5 minutes walk of the High Street Train station providing fast access to London Liverpool Street 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Planning policy at all levels geared towards strengthening town centres Key development sites owned by public sector partners Strong community support for regeneration
Weaknesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> High leakage of spend Poor offer and mismatch to residents' requirements Low levels of retail demand/investment Poor condition of street market Over provision of take-aways 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Poor quality streetscape; street clutter, narrow footways, poorly maintained Rundown, neglected and outdated buildings Lack of quality public spaces Lack of quality gateways marking the entrance to the town Wrong uses in the wrong locations Under-used sites 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pedestrian environment is in poor condition – underpasses, illegal curb parking, High Street creates unfriendly environment Very poor provision for cycling Poor bus services along High Street and interchange facilities to station Traffic congestion on High Street at peak times Service vehicles conflict on High Street Limited parking coordination 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wickford is relatively low priority in sub-regional/regional regeneration
Opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demand for housing development Eating and drinking linked to growth of leisure based economy Development sites 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enhanced evening economy Town centre living opportunities Drawing on the River Crouch as a key environmental asset Enhanced environment through streetscape and shop front improvement schemes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improvements to pedestrian environment provide opportunity to transport environment Possibility of developing inter-modal interchange facility at rail station Car parking provision rationalised 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Potential for rationalisation of local facilities – health, swimming pool, library Potential for Wickford Masterplan to contribute to Thames Gateway South Essex
Threats	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continued growth in external competition Supermarket expansion and diversification Internet based retailing Competition for market investment from other sites 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Anti-social behaviour discouraging people from town centre Further deterioration and neglect of public realm and buildings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continued deterioration of pedestrian environment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prioritisation of other centres ahead of Wickford – e.g. Basildon PPS6 may lead to relaxation with regard to expansion of existing out of town developments

3 VISION AND OBJECTIVES

Overview

- 3.01 Analysis of the issues and problems facing Wickford provides a clear rationale for bringing about significant, if not radical, improvements to Wickford Town Centre. Among the issues most pressing are the disjointed and tired urban form, the comprehensively poor environment - particularly for pedestrians, and the continuing erosion of the centre's functionality as a shopping destination.
- 3.02 Notwithstanding these issues, the market and site analyses, together with the positive ideas and perspectives derived from stakeholder consultations, affirm Wickford's regeneration potential. The presence of the train station providing fast access to London - Liverpool Street, the buoyant housing market and several key development opportunities, provide the potential drivers of an exciting regeneration blueprint.
- 3.03 Defining an appropriate vision framework for the Masterplan is critical to ensuring that Wickford's regeneration potential is maximised. The following paragraphs set out an aspirational, yet realistically achievable future for Wickford Town Centre. This is followed by a series of urban design objectives, illustrated with plans, which will form the basis for the Masterplan.

Key Principles

- 3.04 Evidence suggests there to be a number of important trends that are likely to shape the future development of Wickford Town Centre. These are as follows:
- Changing shopping patterns - Chapter 2 outlined the impact that the 'four waves' of shopping decentralisation are likely to have had in contributing to Wickford's decline. In the future, a continuation of this trend is likely, due to developments such as the expansion and diversification of supermarkets and the growth of internet-based shopping. As a result, centres of Wickford's size will need to consider diversifying their economic base.
 - Growth in leisure/recreation - the transformation of shopping into a leisure activity and growth of recreational activities in town centres, such as eating and drinking, represent a key opportunity for Wickford. The recent changes to licensing laws will facilitate the evening economy and the potential for a '24-hour city' also represent their own set of opportunities and threats.
 - Changing socio-economic structure - changing household composition/size is creating substantial demand for housing development, particularly in the South East and especially in locations accessible to London. The ageing population is also likely to impact on composition of service requirements of local centres.

- Urban policy - the increasing emphasis on sustainability, mixed use development and good quality urban design puts a renewed focus on town centre regeneration, providing the opportunity to facilitate significant physical change in town centres.

Development Concept and Potential Uses

- 3.05 The vision acknowledges the need for the Masterplan to reposition Wickford Town Centre to meet the challenges created by these trends. It foresees a diversification and improvement in the function and offer of the Centre, one that embraces the shift in focus of shopping into a leisure activity. It involves the growth of 'urban living', brought about by significant and high quality housing developments. It foresees a complete transformation in the environment, with high quality urban design creating a distinctive and attractive location. In short, it foresees Wickford reinvented as a 'lifestyle' centre, with a high quality, vibrant urban environment and a distinctive offer.
- 3.06 Urban living will provide the catalyst for the vision, with new housing development transforming the physical, economic and social characteristics of the Town Centre. Key development sites will accommodate a combination of high value and affordable new homes, bringing more residents into the centre, creating additional demand for shops and services and generating an atmosphere of vitality and vibrancy.
- 3.07 Improving the shopping offer is a vital component of the vision. However, there is a need for a degree of realism in the light of recent trends and the future prospects set out above. The focus for improvement will be on quality and distinctiveness rather than quantity. Significant improvements will only be possible in the long term when physical and economic conditions have been improved. Wickford's shopping function will provide a range of traditional and specialist goods through a variety of independent and multiple stores. A street market forms part of this offer, although it is recognised that the existing market will need to be substantially improved in order to offer any real value to the vision for Wickford.
- 3.08 The leisure sector will represent another key element of Wickford's future economic function, building on resident demand for a range of leisure and recreational facilities. Eating and drinking in particular will be developed taking advantage of improved environmental conditions to create a cafe culture.
- 3.09 Local services will also be integrated into the 'mix', adding value to shops and facilities and providing the civic focal point for the town. The opportunity to reorganise services into new buildings, co-locating a variety of activities including health, library, learning and leisure services, is a possibility which will be explored.

- 3.10 Whilst major office development is not expected to form part of the vision, there will be opportunities to pursue business and enterprise on a more discreet basis. The high quality environment created will attract small life-style businesses, potentially those serving a variety of professional and creative niches, benefiting from close access to London. 'Live-work' will be integral to the urban living concept, with office premises being provided close to new housing developments.
- 3.11 Improving accessibility and movement is another key component which is essential to improving the convenience of the centre. Creating an improved pedestrian environment will be required through a range of measures which improve safety, connectivity and conviviality. Improving connections to surrounding neighbourhoods will be important in improving access to the Town Centre. To resist further urban dispersal and supporting intensification around transport nodes and re-use of urban land, the dispersed parking facilities should be considered as possible areas for redevelopment.
- 3.12 Finally, in delivering this vision, rationalisation and reorganisation of land uses in the Town Centre is needed. This will involve relocating 'unfriendly' uses, will bring a greater level of coherency to the structure of the centre, unlocking the potential of key development sites and creating new opportunity zones.

Urban Design Objectives

- 3.13 Urban design is a major component of the vision. The quality of the built environment and general urban fabric in Wickford Town Centre is largely poor. Good urban design will transform the environment through creating character and distinctiveness, changing perceptions, and helping to build confidence amongst prospective investors and the community.
- 3.14 Urban design principles and techniques are relevant at all levels of the corporate and physical planning process, particularly, broad principles such as improving quality, creating attractive public spaces, providing development of mixed uses and improving the town's image.
- 3.15 Chapter 2 assessed the main urban design characteristics of the town centre, based on the themes of urban form, townscape, connection and movement, public realm and streetscape, activity and mix of uses and the environmental capacity. These provide a series of constraints and opportunities, which inform the development of the vision and identify key character areas where, for example, specific types of uses should be encouraged.
- 3.16 As part of this analysis, a series of key development sites have been identified that could make a very positive contribution to the town's future. These include a number of development opportunities, which have already been discussed within the Council, and those that may in the future, be brought forward for development. It also includes areas that are presently under-used.

- 3.17 It is important to ensure that the vision is incorporated into the strategy for the town centre. Design is vital and plays a big part in deciding whether developments will work. An outstanding piece of design can create a sense of purpose or identity for an area (civic/open spaces or buildings). However, focusing on small conflicts and opportunities is also essential.
- 3.18 Urban design objectives are outlined in 'By Design' (DETR & CABE, 2000), which makes the case for a more fundamental treatment of design within policy frameworks. These are based around the characteristics common to the most successful places. Seven such mutually reinforcing objectives are:
- Sense of Place and Character;
 - Access and Movement;
 - Legibility;
 - Public Realm;
 - Diversity;
 - Layout; and
 - Continuity and Enclosure.
- 3.19 Set out below is how Wickford's vision can be taken forward under these objectives.

Sense of Place and Character

- 3.20 Wickford Town Centre is run down, relatively lacking in quality restaurants, cafes and bars and is of low visual and physical quality, and is currently unable to promote a distinctive or quality offer.
- 3.21 The redevelopment of Wickford town centre should be distinct from other parts of the town, but still respect and complement the surrounding areas:
- an integrated development of the town centre should maximise opportunities, including improving the integration of the railway station with the town centre and the surrounding retail and residential areas;
 - new buildings should enrich the surrounding fabric, both visually and physically, paying careful attention to the scale and rhythms of adjacent buildings, adjacent height and massing and local materials; and
 - the strategy should consider and react to the existing layout of buildings, streets and spaces, and ensure that buildings relate to one another; streets are connected; and spaces complement each another.

Access and Movement

- 3.22 Wickford Town Centre is, although well connected to the wider strategic transport network, dominated by vehicles and is poorly linked for pedestrians and cyclists. It also has poor linkages with surrounding neighbourhoods, which deter residents from using it.
- 3.23 Development should provide a coherent relationship between streets, buildings and the river. This should be achieved by developing a network of fine grain, high quality public streets and spaces, following the boundaries of blocks with continuous street frontages, active edges, and building entrances.
- 3.24 This can be achieved by adopting the following principles:
- introducing a 'street' character with a mix of uses and active frontages;
 - promoting higher density commercial and mixed-use developments, civic buildings and developments located within close walking distance of public transport;
 - redesigning the railway station as an integral part of the public realm and creating safe and secure pedestrian environments at all times of the day;
 - designing streets as public spaces not just in response to vehicular requirements;
 - designing public transport as an integral part of the street layout;
 - designing junctions as points of entry to help identify a place and define the routes through it;
 - controlling how parked vehicles are physically permitted to dominate space and limiting the inconvenience they can cause to pedestrians and cyclists by means of landscape design;
 - allowing for passive, rather than physical traffic calming measures e.g. the orientation of buildings, spaces and activities onto streets encouraging drivers to slow down; and
 - adopting 'pedestrian priority' to create social places in-between development.
- 3.25 The following strategy focuses on improvements for pedestrians, cyclists, public transport and roads.
- 3.26 The pedestrian strategy should aim to improve the strategic links to the town centre, as well as, create a pleasant and safe public realm on and around the High Street. The key objectives are to:

- improve pedestrian links to the surrounding area. These should focus on the links across the A132 from Lower Southend Road, across the A129 to Nevendon Road and into The Wick residential area.
- improve the pedestrian underpasses at the end of Lower Southend Road and under the railway line on the High Street by widening them, improving the lighting and surveillance conditions.
- reinforce the pedestrian link to the railway station, in particular from the south via Market Avenue; and
- enhance the pedestrian realm along the High Street by controlling traffic, widening the pavements and improving pedestrian crossings.

3.27 The cycling strategy should aim to improve the strategic links to the town centre, create a safe and pleasant environment around the High Street and improve cycle parking provision at key locations. The key strategies are to:

- improve cycle links to the surrounding area. These should focus on the links across the A132 from Lower Southend Road, across the A129 to Nevendon Road and into The Wick residential area;
- improve cycle parking provision throughout the town centre, in particular at the railway station and at key locations along the High Street;
- enhance the environment along the High Street by controlling traffic and pedestrian movement; and
- extend the cycle route from the Cranfield Park Road roundabout into the town centre.

3.28 The public transport strategy should aim to reinforce the existing services and, through minor changes, make them more attractive to potential users. The key strategies are to:

- improve interchange facilities between bus and rail services;
- potential rerouting of bus services to provide direct connections to the railway station;
- improve bus stops and availability of information along the High Street; and
- improve bus links across the A129 to Nevendon Road and across the A132 from Lower Southend Road.

3.29 The road strategy should aim to control traffic along the High Street and manage the car parking facilities throughout the town centre. The key strategies are to:

- control the volume, speed and size of vehicles along the High Street through street design and traffic calming measures;

- rework the servicing for the High Street to provide rear-service access wherever possible; and
- manage the overall car parking facilities in the town centre in order to maximize the capacity of the car parks. In addition, control the illegal car parking throughout the town centre.

3.30 Pedestrian improvement

1. Proposed Railway Station Entrance
2. Proposed Community and Health Centre
3. Proposed Town Square
4. Improved underpasses including widening and improving the lighting and surveillance conditions
5. Improved pedestrian access as part of the upgrading of the junction
6. Improved existing pedestrian crossing
7. Improved public realm by co-ordinating signage, finishes, landscape and street furniture

3.31 Cycling improvement

1. Designed cycle parking areas integrated with the proposed town square, the interchange facility and the Community and Health Centre
2. Improved cycling access as part of the upgrading of the junction

3.32 Public transport improvement

- rank
1. Proposed transport interchange facilities to include bus shelter and taxi
 2. Move existing bus stop into the High Street, so as to relate to the new Town Square
 3. Improved bus access in both direction across the junction
 4. Re-route bus services to provide direct connection to the railway station

3.33 Road improvement

1. Traffic calmed High Street by creating pinch points, chicanes or speed tables
2. Upgraded junction at High Street/A129
3. Narrowed and shortened carriage way at Lower Southend Road
4. Proposed multi-level car park facility

Legibility

- 3.34 Wickford Town Centre is cluttered, with poor gateways lacking in focal points with indirect, unpleasant routes and neglected places and spaces. Through the Masterplan, it should establish a layout that prioritises and maximises pedestrian movement between locations.

- 3.35 Improving the legibility of Wickford town centre can be achieved by ensuring that the roles and functions of different locations are decided on by the following:
- providing a 'sense of arrival' at the points of entry by emphasising those gateways with landmark buildings, statement architecture, works of art or lighting schemes;
 - connecting inner gateways visually and physically with the surrounding areas;
 - concentrating the most active uses on main routes and around focal points, which will contribute to the vitality of a place;
 - locating public buildings around public spaces to strengthen their identity and mark them as a focus for civic life; and
 - paying attention to the detailing and the quality of signage of shop fronts and building entrances.

Public Realm

- 3.36 Wickford Town Centre is a centre with poor, uninviting gateways and underused, overgrown, low quality open spaces.
- 3.37 As part of a hierarchy of open spaces, the movement network should also be considered to provide for quality open space. Public spaces and routes created should be attractive, well observed, uncluttered and work effectively for all in society, including disabled and elderly people.
- 3.38 To create a quality public realm and attractive spaces, the following should be considered:
- design public spaces that function as elements of a network of pedestrian routes;
 - streets and street junctions designed as public spaces, rather than just traffic routes;
 - using natural assets such as the river, to strengthen the local identity;
 - buildings on busy street corners that are designed to accommodate shops, restaurants and other similar activities contributing to local activity;
 - living over shops to encourage natural surveillance and evening activity; and
 - streetscapes that are designed to avoid clutter and confusion.

Diversity

- 3.39 Wickford Town Centre is dominated by secondary retail stores, with few attractive restaurants, bars or cafes and a lack of night-time entertainment. An improved selection of cafes and restaurants could attract new customers, through the growth of residential mixed uses within the town centre.
- 3.40 In general the area is dominated by low density developments. Mixed-use development can make the most of opportunities for higher densities and intensive activity at locations with good access to public transport. In the town centre, for example, housing can provide more customers for shops, make use of empty space on upper floors and generate activity when shops are closed.
- 3.41 To create a mix of compatible developments and uses, the following should be considered, subject to viability issues:
- having different people and uses occupying the same parts of a building or place at different day or night times, or in different parts of a building or space;
 - having mixes that interact with each other in a positive way;
 - subdividing large sites into smaller plots, each with direct access to public roads or spaces and adopting different approaches to design or using different architects; and
 - having narrow plot frontages which allow for small-scale shopping or commercial uses to flourish and to adapt easier to changing needs.

Layout

- 3.42 Wickford Town Centre has an inflexible 'introverted' urban form with some inward facing developments, building 'backs', parking or service areas, blank facades and poorly enclosed areas inappropriate in scale and height. The layout should promote adaptability to enable the town centre to respond to changing social, technological and economic conditions in the future.
- 3.43 This can be achieved by considering the following principles:
- form - fine-grain development, sub-divided into smaller, regularly shaped plots that are easier to adapt than large-scale structures and which will encourage a greater diversity of uses;
 - a more active street frontage and a 'walkable' and user-friendly public realm;
 - flexible layouts - well-designed public spaces that allow for different uses, events, festivals and markets, or different access arrangements that allow for different uses at different times, for example, service delivery or access to parking garages;

- designing perimeter blocks, where development directly fronts onto streets, paths and squares, to make a clear distinction between public fronts and private backs. Interiors of blocks should present an opportunity to accommodate car parking, gardens or service areas;
- creating simple, robust building forms, not designed for a particular use provides the greatest variety of possible future uses and allows for later conversions. This can be done through, for example, flexible floor-to-ceiling heights and building depths or adaptable ground floors on corners of busy streets; and
- when having larger development blocks, these must be carefully designed to contribute to the street scene. Sensitively designed multi-storey car parks, for example, can integrate with the surrounding urban fabric when they are 'wrapped' by single aspect buildings designed to incorporate ground level activities, such as shops and cafes on the street face.

Continuity and Enclosure

- 3.44 Wickford Town Centre is broken by parking areas with dark, low quality, non-surveyed routes, connecting to a retail area with interrupted building lines, major setbacks, dead frontages and poor quality entrances. The Masterplan must promote the continuity of street frontages and enclosure of spaces through development, which clearly defines private and public areas.
- 3.45 Maintaining a continuity of frontage and visual surveillance onto the street, areas of public realm and open space, is a basic requirement of creating safe places. Making these frontages 'active' adds interest, life and vitality and can be achieved with careful attention to the following elements:
- projections and setbacks from the building line, such as bays and entrances, with minimised setback distances increase the ability of a building to interact with the street;
 - continuous street frontages with a minimum of blank walls and gaps between buildings, to maximise the degree to which the street is overlooked; and
 - buildings set back from the common building line can create usable, attractive spaces for pedestrians.

4. DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK

Introduction

4.01 This section sets out the spatial development framework on which the Masterplan is based. The framework illustrates the overall pattern of development and land use and provides detailed proposals for priority sites and areas. The framework is rooted in the vision and design objectives which are set out in Section 3, and is characterised by:

- introducing new, high quality residential-led mixed use development into the town centre;
- creating a new 'heart' to the centre by the development of new public space in the High Street;
- bringing forward opportunities for new retail, leisure, commercial and local services, which enhance the offer of the centre and contribute towards the aim of promoting an enjoyable 'lifestyle' for residents;
- releasing key development opportunities as a means of unlocking the potential of the town centre; and
- improving access, movement and linkages to and from and within the centre, and improving the pedestrian environment.

4.02 The Masterplan proposes an integrated development of Wickford town centre, based on the urban design principles highlighted in the last chapter. Figure 4.1 illustrates the layout and form of the Masterplan, integrating the various urban design objectives highlighted in Chapter 3.

- It considers and responds to the existing layout of buildings, streets and spaces;
- It improves the movement network in order to become an integral part of the public realm and to create a secure environment for pedestrians;
- It provides a sense of arrival and legibility by emphasising gateways, linking main routes and creating focal points;
- Public spaces are to function as part of the network of pedestrian routes, along a mix of compatible developments that interact with each other in a positive way and through a flexible layout, allow for different uses at different times;
- Continuous street frontages and minimised setback distances allow for visual surveillance onto the street, areas of public realm and open spaces.

Spatial Framework

4.03 The Masterplan embraces a spatial approach to the regeneration of Wickford and promotes mixed-use development focusing on six key 'character' areas. These are as follows:

- **High Street - a new meeting place.** Creating new public space, enhancing the retail environment through the renewal of retail floor space and bringing the market into the street scene, and promoting urban living above shops and on the existing market site.
- **Station Gateway.** Promoting the station entrances on both sides of the railway line as key gateways to Wickford, enhancing transport interchange facilities and bringing forward the car park site on Station Road for development as a new multi-storey car park and mixed-use development.
- **Town Centre Riverside Living.** Promotion of high quality residential developments adjacent to the River Crouch. Revitalisation of the River Crouch as a public asset and promotion of new eating/drinking opportunities.
- **Public and Health Focus.** Re-organisation of existing health, library and community services into a new 'iconic' building to the east of Market Avenue as an integrated community service facility. New residential development to the west of Market Avenue.
- **Eastern Extension.** Creating a better presence and linkages to the east of the town centre by redeveloping the car park into a multi-storey development with residential and live-work uses and a new housing scheme to the east of the A132.
- **Southern Gateway.** The area surrounding London Road and the southern end of the High Street is to undergo a transition with a strong leisure and recreational theme, building on existing eating and drinking facilities and incorporating compatible residential uses.

4.04 For each of these areas a design, development and landscape strategy is proposed, which is outlined in the following sections.

Development Strategy

Table 4.1 Development proposals

Site ref	Description	Capacity
A1	Residential development with combination of flats and houses with restaurant and office uses at ground floor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -173 residential units 400m² mixed leisure/commercial floor space
A2	Residential development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 19 residential units
B	Mixed residential and commercial development. Combination of café and office/live-work with residential on upper floors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 80 residential units 400m² mixed commercial floor space
C1	Mixed residential and retail development replacing existing shop units	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 14 residential units 400m² of retail floor space
C2	New multi-storey car park with residential development and provision for café/small shop at ground floor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 41 residential units 163 car parking spaces 200m² of mixed commercial floor space
D1/D2	New mixed use development incorporating swimming pool and gym, new integrated local service centre, alongside new town house development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 86 residential units Swimming pool and gym 2,100m² integrated service centre*
E	Ground floor retail with residential units above	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 36 residential units
F1/F2	New residential development on market site and replacement retail units fronting High Street with flats on upper floors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 68 residential units 2,200m² retail floor space New public square
G1/G2	Multi-storey car park development with residential and live-work units	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 27 residential units 24 live-work units 276 parking spaces
H1/H2	Residential development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 30 residential units

* The quantity of floor space allocated to the Integrated Service Centre may need to be increased significantly to accommodate future requirements of the NHS.

4.05 Figure 4.3 illustrates the key development schemes proposed by the Masterplan. The orange blocks indicate the location of development proposals. Table 4.1 summarises the land use mix and capacity for each proposal.

4.06 The following sections provide further details of the vision, design principles and land use requirements of each key priority area together with the proposals for public realm and transport improvements.

High Street - a New Meeting Place

4.07 Vision

- A series of high quality public spaces, linked physically and visually, along the High Street;
- A major public square to provide a focal point for the High Street with opportunities for new shops and the town's weekly market;
- Lifting the quality of The Willows and Ladygate Centre and other building frontages by enhancements to their appearance;
- Reducing the dominance of the road and reclaiming the area for pedestrians, by providing more pavement space, dedicated parking bays and safer crossings to create a truly enjoyable area to be in;

4.08 Design Principles

- The High Street should provide a seamless link between the community centre and the railway station, The Willows/Ladygate Centres and Runwell Road including the area around the regenerated waterfront;
- New public spaces should be designed to the highest standards incorporating new lighting, signing and street furniture and the use of new street material to designate a 20mph zone through the town centre;
- Minor kerb re-alignment should be made to build out pavements and reduce the carriageway width;
- Pedestrian crossing points should reflect pedestrian desire lines and be redesigned in an innovative way;
- Use of a simple co-ordinated palette of high quality materials to create local character and identity;
- Improved quality of signage, including that for shops and other commercial premises.

4.09 Land Use

- Reprovision of retail units along the High Street and Market Road with residential uses above;
- Development of 1-3 bedroom apartments on the former market area, overlooking the school to the west of the site;
- Parking for new developments should be provided in the form of undercroft or underground parking to the rear of the High Street;
- Increased public space (for use as weekly market).

A Public and Health Focus

4.10 Vision

- Lively, mixed-use area linking the station and the enhanced High Street;
- Provision of a new iconic Integrated Service Centre, fronting a new public space that is linked physically and visually to the sequence of public spaces and connecting adjacent areas;
- A transformed tree-lined avenue with generous pavements, connecting the station area and creating a safe and attractive setting for a significant number of new residential units.

4.11 Design Principles

- The Integrated Service Centre should be an iconic building providing a symbol of community identity and providing a focus at the heart of the town centre;
- The Willows should interact with the newly created public space through a more permeable layout and frontage of units that open out onto the new space;
- New residential dwellings should provide natural surveillance of the street with continuity of frontage.
- Heights of new development should provide a good sense of enclosure and take into account the height of surrounding buildings.

4.12 Land Use

- The Integrated Service Centre will accommodate health, library and community facilities;
- Residential development in the form of flats and townhouses to the west of Market Avenue.
- The existing swimming pool will be expanded to include leisure and fitness facilities
- The existing community centre and library site will be redeveloped for small retail units with residential above.
- Parking for new development should be predominantly provided within the courtyard or in the form of undercroft or underground parking. On-street parking should be provided in dedicated parking bays and punctuated by street trees and lighting.
- The redevelopment of the site of the existing telephone exchange could potentially be included within this development scheme. However, due to uncertainty regarding the owner's intentions, it has been excluded at this stage. In taking the Masterplan forward, this site's inclusion within the overall scheme should be explored further with the relevant stakeholders.

The Station Gateway

4.13 Vision

- Redevelopment of the railway station and its surrounding area to create an attractive gateway into Wickford;
- Improvements to the public realm to the north of the station, the creation of interchange facilities and a new mixed-use development along Station Avenue with opportunities for residential accommodation on upper floors, active uses on the ground floor and a multi storey car park;
- The creation of a vibrant new square at the southern entrance of the station with high quality paving, lighting and street furniture adjoining the tree lined avenue, which approaches the station from the south.

4.14 Design Principles

- The station area should be designed as an integral part of the public realm creating a safe and secure pedestrian environment at all times of the day;

- The quality of building façades, street furniture and paving will be important in improving the legibility of the area and creating a positive first impression at a key gateway into town;
- New development along Station Approach should follow the boundary of the street block, with continuous street frontage to guide pedestrians into the town centre and increasing both legibility and permeability;
- A well-designed corner building at the apex of Station Gateway would give identity and a point of orientation;
- Building frontages facing the Station Gateway should be enlivened by active uses such as small convenience shops, cafes and restaurants.

4.15 Land Use

- Mixed use development along Station Approach including cafe uses at ground level and upper floor residential units;
- Re-provision of retail units on the eastern end of the site (ref. C1);
- Parking for new development, as well as for station users, should be provided in the form of a multi-storey car park.

Town Centre Riverside Living

4.16 Vision

- A focus of mixed-use activity, becoming a lively and attractive place for people to live in and enjoy, with mainly residential development and a restaurant/cafe fronting a new local space that allows uses to 'spill out' and line the southern edge of the river;
- Restricting vehicle access to the eastern end of Lower Southend Road;
- Lifting the quality of the public realm along The Broadway with improvements to frontages;
- Runwell Road will provide a high quality northern gateway with townhouses and commercial activity.

4.17 Design Principles

- An active frontage is created at the apex of the new development to attract people to a vibrant riverside;
- The new residential units should have balconies and gardens along the riverfront;

- A pedestrian friendly space at the eastern end of Lower Southend Road with a new surface for pavements and improvements to lighting of the subway to encourage movement from adjacent residential areas;
- A strong, continuous building frontage along Runwell Road to provide a positive northern gateway.
- Use of new street materials along Runwell Road to calm traffic speeds through the town centre;
- Reduced junction radii and width of carriageway will provide an enlarged area for pedestrian use.

4.18 Land Use

- 1-3 bedroom residential units on the Runwell Road site (ref. B) with some active frontages at ground floor level, provided by leisure/office uses;
- Residential development in Lower Southend Road with some active uses in the south eastern building apex;
- Parking for new development should be provided in the form of undercroft or underground parking.

The Eastern Extension and the Southern Gateway

4.19 Eastern Extension:

- The area of the Eastern Extension is currently dominated by a large surface-level car park and offers an opportunity for intensification of development;
- New development should compensate for the lost parking area and include a multi-storey car park to be flanked by live-work units.
- Local squares and landscaped footpaths should be introduced in the area to create an attractive entrance into the new development and improve permeability and connectivity between the High Street and Gibraltar Walk;
- A prominent frontage should be provided along the A132 and Gibraltar Walk to establish a strong identity and improve security;
- Existing backs of buildings should be screened through the development of single aspect live-work units at the western end of the site.
- A new, high quality residential development is proposed on part of the open space adjoining the railway line, to the east of Golden Jubilee Way. The scheme shall be designed so as to enhance the security of pedestrians using the footpath linking The Wick with the town centre.

4.20 Southern Gateway:

- The area of the Southern Gateway comprises, at present, cluttered, low-density developments to the north and south of the London Road (A129), which gives the opportunity to intensify development in the area;
- New development should provide a strong, continuous frontage along London Road;
- Good enclosure of the street should be supported by improved, light-controlled pedestrian crossings, dedicated parking and landscaped build-outs, enlarged pavements and enhanced zones for public use by pedestrians;
- Land use should be focused on the consolidation and development of this area as a location for eating and drinking. The possibility of live-work units that are complementary to this theme should also be encouraged;
- New public spaces and pedestrian-friendly places should be created to enhance links to and from the High Street;
- Corner buildings should, to provide identity and points of orientation, be treated in a way that emphasises their importance (height, use) and should avoid blank façades.

Public Realm: Creating a Hierarchy of Linked Streets and Public Spaces

4.21 Key public realm improvements are as follows:

- Southern Gateway: Reduced junction with more space to accommodate pedestrians and the addition of a dedicated pedestrian/cycle crossing; (1)
- High Street: Enhanced pedestrian environment with wider pavements, street trees and dedicated on-street parking bays, defined by build-outs in which trees are planted; (2)
- Ladygate Centre: Improved entrance to the Centre incorporating shop front improvements, decluttering of the public realm and an enhanced internal courtyard; (3)
- Gibraltar Walk: Provision of a safe, direct, tree-lined route from the High Street, screened from the parking area by a green buffer zone and the incorporation of a pocket park with opportunities to sit and relax; (4)
- Market Square: Creation of a new central location for the market encompassing a new square, High Street, the new public spaces around The Willows and community facilities; (5)

- Station Plaza: Opening up the station to the south of the tracks with the creation of a new station plaza with ticket barriers and a high quality landscaping scheme to include lighting, signage and street furniture; (6)
- Lighted Underpass: Improved underpass beneath the railway lines with concept lighting and improved paving; (7)
- Transport Interchange: Enhanced landscaped roundabout to the north of the station with an interchange facility to include bus shelter and taxi rank facilities; (8)
- Key Node (junction of The Broadway and Lower Southend Road): Improved pedestrian environment with wider pavements, reduced junction space and lower traffic speeds to accommodate the easy movement of pedestrians from the adjoining quarters; (9)
- Enhanced access to surrounding areas: Restricted vehicle access to the eastern end of Lower Southend Road and the creation of a new square, marking the entrance for those approaching from the east, incorporating a well lit, attractive subway; (10)

Movement: Highway and Transportation Improvements

4.22 Key transportation improvements are as follows:

- A town square with a pedestrian priority zone along High Street/Market Road to also accommodate the market. Erect a bus stop and introduce cycle parking facilities as part of the town square; (1)
- Use of new street materials and signage along High Street, The Broadway and Runwell Road to calm traffic through the town centre. General improvements to signage, landscaping and furniture along High Street, The Broadway and Runwell Road; (2)
- Minor kerb realignment to build out pavements and create pinch points of 3.0m at the entrance to traffic calmed area. Reduced carriageway width to 5.5m along the rest of the street, along The Broadway and Runwell Road; (3)
- Minor kerb realignment to reduce radii to 6.0m at the junction of Lower Southend Road with Runwell Road. This will provide an area for public use in front of site A2; (4)
- Restrict vehicle access to the eastern end of Lower Southend Road. Work to include the introduction of new surfaces for carriageway and pavements, new bollards and the creation of a turning head for vehicles. Realignment of the building frontage to north of Lower Southend Road to create a better relationship to street; (5)

- Improvements to lighting and surveillance of the pedestrian underpass beneath the railway line and at the end of Lower Southend Road; (6)
- Improve the pedestrian access and public realm to the north of the station. Create an interchange facility to the north of the railway station to include a bus shelter and taxi rank. Re-route bus services from the High Street/Runwell Road to provide improved connections to the station; (7)
- Improve the pedestrian access and public realm to the south of the station. Creation of a new pedestrian access route from Market Avenue to the station. Improved cycle parking facilities at the station; (8)
- Improvements to the junction of High Street with A129 (London Road) to create better pedestrian, cycle and bus access, north-south, across the junction; (9)
- Potential junction improvements to ease exit from main car park; (10)
- Creation of a new junction onto Salcott Crescent and the provision of new highway and parking within the site. (11)

4.23 In addition to these town centre improvements, as outlined in Chapter 3, enhancements to the wider transport network, to improve connections between the town centre and the surrounding neighbourhoods are also important.

Materials and Street Furniture

4.24 A palette of high quality materials will help to further establish the character and identity of the town centre. It may be appropriate to use distinctive materials to accentuate the particular areas of the town centre, but contrasting materials should be used with restraint, and will be most effective if set against a narrow palette of materials. Consideration must be given to the longevity of the materials and their robustness to ensure long-term quality. New buildings and hard landscaping should be built to last.

4.25 The quality of street furniture is important, as is consistency of style and good maintenance. Street furniture should be introduced with restraint, and its location should be carefully considered so that it reinforces, rather than confuses the sense of place. The design of individual elements of street furniture should not compete for attention, but conform to the established theme of the area.

4.26 The following general rules apply throughout the development:

- items of street furniture such as signs, cycle racks, bins and benches should be combined and aligned so as to minimise obstruction to pedestrian movement, particularly for disabled people;

- street lighting should meet the needs of pedestrians over those of motorists;
- seats need to be sturdy, resistant to vandalism and easy to maintain;
- cycle racks should be located where they are easy and convenient to use, overlooked and secure. The location of cycle parking should also be signed where appropriate;
- in order to allow for seasonal colour, hanging baskets and planters should be provided ; and
- street trees and planting should be incorporated into the overall design to soften the environment.

4.27 These elements should not hinder surveillance and perceptions of safety and therefore need to be carefully positioned.

Encouraging Shop Front Improvements

4.28 An important element of improving the town centre environment as a whole, is the promotion of consistent, high quality shop fronts. The Council will encourage local businesses to repair and renew shop fronts, particularly where they adversely affect the streetscape. Original shop fronts can be reinstated or newer, higher quality and appropriate shop-fronts can be built.

4.29 The following general rules apply throughout the development:

- new shop fronts should be of a high quality design and complement the surrounding townscape;
- good quality modern shop fronts should be sympathetic to the character of the building to which they are being added;
- new and replacement shop fronts should relate to the scale of the building and to the scale of surrounding shop fronts;
- where a shop front spans more than one building, the character of each individual building should be retained;
- inappropriate canopies should be removed; and
- projecting signs or signboards of traditional or modern design are encouraged, but should be small, neat and in materials appropriate to the shop front. They should be in line with the fascia panel and should give a minimum clearance to the footpath.

Building in Sustainability

- 4.30 The Council expects development to achieve high standards in sustainability. Consideration should be given to the following issues:
- *Materials* - ensure the use of local and sustainable materials that are hardwearing and of quality craftsmanship. Materials should also be chosen for their low embodied energy (the amount of energy expended to produce the material), the ease of maintenance and repair, and the ability to recycle and reuse the material;
 - *Adaptability* - proposals need to be flexible and adaptable particularly in relation to the longevity of buildings, both economically and physically, and the ability to accommodate change over time;
 - *Environment* - innovative technology should be used to provide an improved environment within buildings. This should encompass increases in natural lighting, improved acoustic separation, controlled ventilation and sustainable drainage and water consumption. Individual schemes should demonstrate in their submissions how they will achieve 'Excellent' ratings in the EcoHomes and BREEAM assessment methods;
 - *Building Process* - the Council will encourage a reduction in the levels of material waste during the construction process;
 - *Energy Efficiency* - the Council will look for innovative approaches to energy generation, use and conservation. Alternative forms of energy generation, such as a district heating, cooling and power systems, combined heat and power, and solar energy should be looked at.
- 4.31 A sustainability checklist has been appended with this Masterplan that should be used to help implement its proposals.

Parking

- 4.32 As part of a sustainable transportation strategy, parking provision should be controlled in order to reduce the dependency on cars and encourage the use of alternative modes of transport. This approach is in line with national policy guidance.
- 4.33 The fundamental aim of the approach to control parking provision is to make car use a less attractive option. However, these measures are only appropriate where the density and mix of uses are balanced and good access to alternative modes of transport exist.
- 4.34 In addition to the potential reduction of vehicles on the road, this approach can have benefits in reducing the dominance of cars in the street and providing more space for pedestrians.

4.35 The parking strategies should include:

- restriction of parking provision to an average of 1 space per unit with 10% visitor parking. Wherever possible, this should be provided in undercroft parking to reduce the quantity of on-street parking;
- management of residents' parking through car parking permits and visitor permits;
- coordination of existing car parking to maximise the usage of existing provision and balance the demand throughout the day.
- management of illegal car parking through fines, Controlled Parking Zones etc; and
- examples of how on-street parking can be successfully achieved are shown in *Better Places to Live* - a companion guide to PPG3; *Places, Streets and Movement* a companion guide to Design Bulletin 32 and the Urban Design Compendium.

4.36 Parking provision should be based on standards as set out in the Essex Planning Officers Association (EPOA) Vehicle Parking Standards 2001. This document provides maximum standards for vehicle parking, and minimum standards for motorcycle and bicycle parking provision.

4.37 Parking strategies for other modes include:

- provision of motorcycle parking spaces. The use of motorcycles as an alternative to the car reduces congestion; and
- cycle racks, preferably undercover and in locations where there is good natural surveillance from shops, passers-by, etc., should be provided at strategic locations.

River Crouch

4.38 The following is based on information given by the Environmental Agency (EA).

4.39 The EA is looking to do a modelled study of the Crouch beginning in 2007. There may be potential to bring this forward to mid 2006, or earlier if substantial partner funding is available. The Thames Gateway South Essex Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA) will include an assessment of the River Crouch and its drainage basin in Wickford. The SFRA final report is due for publication in April 2006.

4.40 The river channel through Wickford town centre was designed to deal with surface water run-off from the upper Crouch basin. Normal river flows are low, but as the basin includes extensive urban areas, surface water run-off reaches the river quickly. The channel has therefore been engineered to accommodate these increased flows and discharge them further downstream.

- 4.41 Unlike other systems, for example at Chelmsford, the river channel through Wickford town centre was designed to flow continuously and not hold the water back in any way. Any work which could reduce the capacity of the channel, or restrict the velocity of flows, would require a detailed model assessment of the river. This would need to consider the impacts on land drainage across the drainage basin.
- 4.42 Any works within nine metres of a main river, or affecting flows, requires the prior written consent of the EA in the form of a land drainage consent. However, the EA should be involved in the preparation of any proposals. Other operational considerations will include the effects on third parties, particularly if works would result in increased flood risk to their land.
- 4.43 The following have been identified by the EA as potential options to improve the appearance of the river channel:
- Carrying out any planting alongside the channel would clearly not require an assessment;
 - Carrying out any planting within the channel would restrict capacity, as would the holding back, and raising of, the water level, so a detailed assessment would be required;
 - The use of planted gabions might be harder to accommodate, as they would reduce capacity and quite considerably restrict flows. The channel at Wickford is usually relatively dry, so the desired effect may not be achieved. Exposed gabions could also be unsightly and encourage vandalism. In addition, the higher flows after heavy rainfall could dislodge any planting. However, this is potentially the simplest and definitely the cheapest enhancement to achieve in Wickford and could have aesthetic and biodiversity benefits, provided that it works and the flood risk issues can be resolved;
 - Replacing the concrete channel with a soft embankment could also reduce flow velocity, as vegetation would slow the water. If a soft embankment and additional area for flooding was provided, with no other measures that could reduce capacity or flows, then it may be enough to just ensure that there is no net loss of capacity (and preferably an increase in capacity over a concrete channel);
 - Pulling back the bank on the right hand side, before, and after Lower Southend Road (and possibly even further south towards the railway line) may be the most effective way of really adding value to and enhancing the area. This is a more complex and costly exercise and would require analysis to understand the flood risk implications, but should provide greater benefits and could be more achievable.
 - Bringing the proposed Local Plaza at Lower Southend Road down to the water level may be more achievable than raising the level of the water.

- 4.44 These options would need to be explored further in translating the 'Town Centre Riverside Living' proposal into detailed planning guidance.

Community Infrastructure and Utilities

- 4.45 One further dimension to the Masterplan concerns the provision of 'community infrastructure' (the buildings and facilities required to deliver public services), services and utilities.
- 4.46 During consultations with local residents and businesses, it has become clear that there is a strong perception held by many people that there are insufficient and inadequate local services in Wickford. The capacity of schools and local health surgeries, recreational provision for young people and insufficient numbers of Police Officers, are among the priorities that local people have identified.
- 4.47 The Masterplan has the following important role to play in helping to improve community infrastructure by proposing sites for community infrastructure provision.
- 4.48 With regard to land use opportunities, the Masterplan has planned for community infrastructure in the form of the Public and Health Focus character area. This proposal includes provision for an Integrated Service Centre, providing new space for health, library, community and other services. It replaces the existing facilities and dedicates a greater quantity of floor space to the health centre to take into account the growth in demand for primary care services. Although this development is at a formative stage, in working it up in more detail it may be possible to integrate other types of local services into the centre (e.g. youth and general Council services), depending on service funding availability.

With regard to addressing increased demand for local service provision, by applying person per dwelling assumptions to the housing proposals, it is possible to make a rudimentary estimate of the scale of population growth that might be generated. As displayed in the Table 4.2, on this basis, it is estimated that population growth could be approximately 1,000 persons within Wickford Town Centre.

Table 4.2 Population Growth Estimates

Dwelling type	Quantity	Assumed persons per dwelling	Population
1 bed	139	1	139
2 bed	184	2	368
3 bed	101	3	303
4 bed	22	4	88
5 bed	20	5	100
Total			998

4.49 Whilst this scale of population growth is unlikely in itself to justify new education or health facilities (population required to support a doctor is estimated at 2,500-3,000 and for a new primary school 2,500 to 4,000), it will nonetheless exert pressures on existing services, which may as a result trigger the need for expansion of existing services. Discussions with key service providers suggest that some expansion of services will be required:

- **Health services** - The Wickford Health Centre is already stretched to capacity. The Billericay, Brentwood and Wickford PCT has already identified the expansion of services in Wickford as a priority. As noted above, the proposals for the Integrated Service Centre will provide for a doubling of floor space capacity on the existing Wickford Health Centre to meet growth in demand;
- **Local school places** – It is understood that there are capacity limitations on existing school places at both primary and secondary schools serving Wickford. While it is not clear exactly what changes in capacity will be required to serve the town centre's population growth, a financial allocation has been included in the appraisal (Chapter 5) to contribute towards capacity development. Further investigation of the scale of capacity expansion that is required, associated costs and when (in terms of timescale) developments should be triggered, will be required as part of the ongoing delivery planning process.

4.50 Utilities infrastructure (water, gas, electricity, ICT) is another important factor that will need to be planned for in the delivery of the Masterplan. At this stage, discussions with the Environment Agency have suggested that there are unlikely to be any major constraints in terms of utilities infrastructure requirements. However, in taking forward individual development schemes, specific utilities infrastructure provision will need to be considered on a site by site basis.

5 FINANCIAL APPRAISAL

Approach

- 5.01 The Financial Appraisal of the Masterplan was undertaken independently by DTZ Piedad Consulting.
- 5.02 This chapter examines the financial implications of the development proposals. It examines costs, potential income and highlights key delivery scenarios. The approach taken is a relatively simplistic one and it is emphasised that the conclusions reached are broad-brush only, and that more detailed and comprehensive costing/valuation will be necessary in due course.
- 5.03 The approach provides an indication of the cost to Basildon District Council of the Masterplan. It estimates costs for those elements, which would normally fall to the public sector to provide, i.e.
- land acquisition and compulsory purchase;
 - build costs of re-provided/new public services (e.g. health centre, dining club); and
 - highways and public realm.
- 5.04 Key areas of cost that are excluded from the appraisal are:
- land remediation works;
 - construction costs for residential and other mixed use commercial development proposals.
- 5.05 An estimate has been made of the income that Basildon District Council can realistically be expected to receive through:
- capital receipts at a land value of £2.5million per hectare; and
 - S106 (developer) contributions at 20% to 25% of existing land values.
- 5.06 The difference between these cost and income estimates provides a broad-brush indication of the viability (in respect of surplus or deficit) of the Masterplan to Basildon District Council. Because this simplistic approach excludes a number of key construction costs (e.g. residential development schemes), it is stressed that more comprehensive site by site financial appraisals will be required in due course to test and verify their viability.

Phasing

- 5.07 The appraisal is based on the market assessment carried out (as summarised in Chapter 2) and takes into consideration prevailing property market values and the capacity for development in Wickford.
- 5.08 Chapter 2 concluded that at current levels of interest and take-up, the Masterplan could support approximately 25 new residential units per annum. However, this is considered to be a relatively conservative estimate based on existing patterns and trends, which, inevitably, have been constrained by

limited supply of site opportunities. It is felt that with the availability of good quality development opportunities and in the context of the strategic regeneration framework that is provided by the Masterplan, a greater quantity could potentially be supported.

- 5.09 The number of residential units proposed by the Masterplan is around 600 units. It is considered that a delivery period of 12 to 15 years, equating to a completion rate of 40-50 dwellings per annum, is an achievable target. Whilst acknowledging that this higher growth scenario creates a relatively significant degree of risk, it is considered to be achievable.

Estimated Costs

- 5.10 Relevant expenditure elements of the proposal have been split into Highways and Public Realm, Re-provision of Services and Compulsory Purchase and Land Acquisition.

Highways and Public Realm Infrastructure

- 5.11 The highways and public realm infrastructure costs relate to five key areas:

- Runwell Road;
- Town Centre Riverside Living;
- Station Gateway;
- Public and Health Focus area; and
- High Street Area.

- 5.12 The works proposed for each of these areas includes resurfacing of existing carriageways, new pavements, pedestrianisation of previously unpedestrianised areas, new street furniture and underpass improvements.

- 5.13 The total estimated cost of all the highways and public realm infrastructure works equates to in the region of £630,000.

Re-provision of Services

- 5.14 To bring all the proposed sites forward for development, a number of public sector services, as well as private services, will need to be re-provided. Sites have been identified within the Masterplan for the relocation of services and the cost of re-provision has been included in the financial appraisal. The main services which need to be relocated as a consequence of implementing the Masterplan are the:

- Community Centre;
- Library;
- Swimming Pool; and
- Health Centre.

- 5.15 In addition, a number of other buildings will need to be re-provided including a dining club, post office sorting office, a bungalow, retail units and a garage. The cost of re-providing these facilities has been included in the model.
- 5.16 An allocation of £200,000 has also been made to contribute towards primary and secondary school capacity development and expansion as discussed in Chapter 4.
- 5.17 The total cost of re-providing services has been estimated to lie in the region of £4.5 million.

Site Acquisition and Assembly

- 5.18 At least two of the sites identified for development within the Masterplan may necessitate the use of Compulsory Purchase Orders (CPO). Retail units are currently situated on sites C1 and F2. Whilst the units on site C1 are of a poor condition and are occupied by market style traders and are of low value, the units on site F2 are much larger and are occupied by large multinational retail operators including Woolworths, WH Smith and Barclays Bank. Site F2 will therefore be expensive to assemble.
- 5.19 The financial appraisal includes an estimate of the potential cost associated with the acquisition and assembly of sites C1 and F2. It has only been possible to provide approximate estimates, as current lease terms between the landlords and the occupiers are not known. Neither have internal inspections of the properties been undertaken.
- 5.20 It has been estimated that the cost of acquisition (including CPO if necessary) could be in excess of £3.5 million. This figure must be treated with caution for the reasons outlined above. An independent valuation will be required to assess the true costs of assembling sites C1 and F2.

Potential Income

- 5.21 The model calculates the potential income which could be received by the public sector, as a consequence of the development proposals detailed above being implemented. The source of the potential income is discussed in greater detail below.
- 5.22 The land value calculations are based on a residential land value of £2,500,000 per hectare. This figure will need to be verified by an independent valuation.
- 5.23 The model assumes that the public sector will retain the open market value of land in their ownership. Income is assumed to be received from private sector land in the form of Section 106 contributions. Residential land Section 106 contributions are assumed to equate to 20% to 25% of the value of the land.
- 5.24 Approximately £4.8 million of public sector income will be generated by the proposed residential land development in this regard.

Affordable Housing Assumptions

- 5.25 The model assumes an element of affordable housing in all residential development. Approximately 25% of residential development is assumed to be for affordable purposes: half for affordable sales and half for social rented accommodation. Land values have been adjusted to take the need to provide affordable accommodation into account.
- 5.26 The value of land identified for affordable sites has been calculated based on 75% of the open market value. The value of land identified for rented affordable housing has been reduced by 50%.

Scenarios

- 5.27 The assessment has highlighted the key areas of high cost to be those development proposals which require acquisition and land assembly (and potentially CPO). They are C1 (Station Gateway) and F2 (the High Street). The findings of the financial appraisal in Table 5.1 are presented below with and without C1 and F2, to demonstrate the impact that these schemes have on the Master Plan's viability. Scenario 2, increases the developer contributions (S 106) from 20% to 25% of the value of land.

Table 5.1 Summary of costs and income

	Scenario 1 (all Masterplan proposals)	Scenario 2 (excluding C1 and F2)
Costs		
Acquisition and site assembly	£3,520,000	£0
Infrastructure and public realm	£630,000	£630,000
Re-provision of services	£4,530,000	£4,530,000
Income		
Land sales	£3,990,000	£3,770,000
S106	£830,000	£850,000
Balance	-£3,860,000	-£540,000

- 5.28 The figures indicate that in commercial terms, Scenario 2, which excludes the abnormal costs of C1 and F2, is more likely to be viable (although is also likely to require some public sector funding). Therefore, if Scenario 1 (i.e. the Masterplan in its entirety) is to be pursued, then public sector funding will be required to meet these abnormal costs. Alternatively, a hybrid scenario may be possible in which the proposals for C1/F2 are refined (down-scaled) to reduce

costs, thus putting less pressure on the need for significant public sector funding contributions. Potential funding sources, as well as the key risks and sensitivities, are considered in Chapter 6.

Important Note:

- 5.29 The comments above and the associated financial appraisal provide an informal desktop overview. A financial decision should be based only on a formal valuation report. This overview is purely for guidance and no liability is accepted by DTZ under any circumstances, nor has it been prepared in contemplation of any individual or company relying upon it.
- 5.30 DTZ have not inspected the property/land nor have they undertaken full verification or research. The opinions detailed above are totally dependent on the adequacy and accuracy of the information supplied and the assumptions made. It should be noted that should these prove to be incorrect, the accuracy of this opinion may be affected.
- 5.31 The contents of the full appraisal are confidential to Basildon District Council for the specific purpose to which they refer.

6 DELIVERY FRAMEWORK

Approach

- 6.01 This section sets out a programme for the delivery of the Masterplan. It explains the key stages involved in taking the plan forward and provides an indicative timetable incorporating short, medium and long term milestones in the plan's delivery.
- 6.02 The approach is based on the fundamental principle that the Masterplan will be delivered through a partnership between Basildon District Council, development partners and other key stakeholders, including public sector agencies and land-owners. Basildon District Council, as a key land owner in the town centre and the Local Planning Authority, will play the lead role in progressing the plan, utilising its property assets and providing leadership to facilitate the overall delivery process. Development partners will bring the necessary private sector investment and property development expertise to take development proposals forward.
- 6.03 The key aspects to the delivery process addressed in this section are as follows:
- Planning Policy Framework
 - Funding Mechanisms
 - Development Process
 - Phasing and Timescales
 - Risk Management

Planning Framework

- 6.04 Adopting the Masterplan as a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) and translating the development proposals into detailed planning briefs will be key stages and will establish a robust policy framework for the plan. Before adoption of the Masterplan as a SPD is able to take place, the approved plan will be regarded as a material consideration in the determination of planning applications relating to the town centre.
- 6.05 The preparation of Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs) was introduced by the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, as part of the new Local Development Framework plan system. SPDs are a mechanism for setting out more detailed planning policies/guidelines for specific planning themes or areas which supplement policies in the main Development Plan Document. Translating the Wickford Town Centre Masterplan into a SPD will give it the necessary statutory basis to direct the pattern of development across the town centre.
- 6.06 PPS 12 (Planning Policy Statement 12: Local Development Frameworks, ODPM 2004) provides guidance on the preparation of SPDs. Two key requirements of SPD as set out in this guidance note are Sustainability Appraisal and Community Consultation. Sustainability Appraisal is a systematic and iterative means of assessing the social, environmental and economic effects of SPD.

- 6.07 With regard to Community Involvement, the preparation of the Master Plan involved significant community consultation, together with a formal 4 week consultation¹ that was carried out between 18th November and 16th December 2005.
- 6.08 684 representations were made on the Masterplan. The Council has considered these representations and has made changes in light of the comments made, as considered appropriate.
- 6.09 **Planning/development briefs** will be required for each of the key sites to be brought forward for development. The briefs will provide the necessary level of site specific detail to give prospective developers clarity on development and design requirements. They will also provide the opportunity for further consultation work with land owners and other key stakeholders. The briefs should build on the recommendations of the Masterplan, and set out:
- uses/mix of uses sought;
 - infrastructure and facility requirements;
 - layout of the development including access, parking and circulation;
 - scale, massing and height of buildings;
 - landscaping;
 - buildings to be retained;
 - design criteria; and
 - off-site requirements (i.e. S106 contribution).

Funding Sources

- 6.10 As explained in Section 5, it is envisaged that the Masterplan will be funded largely by private sector investment secured through capital receipts from public sector property assets. However, it is noted that the probability that some additional public sector funding contributions will be required.

Capital Receipts

- 6.11 Formative discussions with key public sector land owners have suggested support for the principle of using a proportion of capital receipts to fund the Masterplan, although further consideration will be required before firm commitments can be made.
- 6.12 Basildon District Council is a principal land-owner in Wickford town centre, owning the freehold of several key development opportunity sites. The Council's Capital Strategy and Asset Management Plan determines how the Council uses its capital resources, including receipts, in accordance with its Strategic Plan priorities. Whilst the regeneration of Wickford Town Centre for general public benefit is a worthy rationale for Basildon District Council, it will

¹ Regulation 17 Town & Country Planning (Local Development) (England) Regulations 2004

be important to clarify precisely what the Council's capital receipts are being used to fund, in order to ensure best value. It will also be necessary to ensure that key services such as the leisure centre, the day centre, community facilities and affordable housing are replaced.

- 6.13 Essex County Council (Wickford Library) and Billericay, Brentwood and Wickford PCT (Wickford Health Centre) also own sites which are proposed to be used in the delivery of the Masterplan. In effect, it proposes an asset swap under which these existing facilities will be replaced with new facilities. Early discussions have suggested in-principle support for this proposal, although further investigation/consideration, particularly in relation to management and ownership arrangements, is required.

Table 6.1 proposed use of capital receipts

	Capital receipts	Proposed use of receipt
Town Centre Riverside Living	BDC – Priority Club	Relocation of facility
Public and Health Focus	BDC land either side of Market Avenue <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing site • Swimming pool • Wickford Community Association 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Re-provision of local service facility • Contribution to costs of relocation of swimming pool • Affordable housing • Public realm costs
	BBW PCT – site of Wickford Health Centre	Re-provision of local service facility
	ECC – Wickford Library	Re-provision of local service facility
High Street	BDC – existing market site	Physical and public realm improvements in High Street
Eastern Extension	BDC – car park and site to east of bypass	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provision of multi-storey car park • Contribution to other Masterplan costs

Developer Contributions

- 6.14 Establishing clear policy guidance on SI06 requirements will be key to maximising developer contributions to the Masterplan. The approach taken in our financial appraisal is to assume a developer contribution equivalent to 20% of the land value on all the development schemes. This has for now been allocated against the overall costs of public realm and infrastructure works, and it will be necessary in delivery, to ring fence contributions for such uses.
- 6.15 In addition to environmental/physical improvements, social infrastructure contributions will be required from the SI06 contributions. This will help to meet the costs of increasing demands on public services arising from housing growth, such as schools and health facilities.

- 6.16 Planning obligations will need to be delivered through a combination of on-site, off-site provision and commuted sums. Whilst it will be sensible for some public realm improvements to be delivered as part of the site development process, for social infrastructure and general environmental improvements across the town centre, it will be necessary for a financial contribution to be made into a ring-fenced account.

Public Sector Funding Contributions

- 6.17 Although it has not been possible to establish the scale or timing of further public sector funding contributions that the Masterplan can attract, there are several key sources of funding that require further investigation. These are as follows:
- 6.18 **ODPM Sustainable Communities Plan** - Although Wickford is situated just outside the defined boundary of the Thames Gateway Growth Area, it is understood that there is a degree of flexibility in respect of geographical eligibility, particularly where linkages to the delivery of Sustainable Communities Plan objectives can be demonstrated. Key priorities for Thames Gateway South Essex focus on housing and job growth targets, the former of which Wickford clearly has the potential to contribute to. In order to attract Government investment, Wickford's regeneration must be developed in the context of the Basildon Renaissance Partnership's Regeneration Framework, a key prospectus for Growth Area investment.
- 6.19 **Essex Local Transport Plan** represents the main policy framework for investment in local transport systems in Wickford. Funding has already been allocated through the current Local Transport Plan to finance improvements in transport interchange facilities at Wickford Train Station. The possibility for attracting further contributions toward highway and public realm improvements should be explored.
- 6.20 **Billericay, Brentwood and Wickford PCT** has already identified investment in the redevelopment of Wickford Health Centre as a priority to both accommodate growth in demand for primary care services and to enable diversification into complementary health activities. The Strategic Service Development Plan (Draft January 2005) indicates a requirement for £1.44 million of capital investment, although the level of NHS funding, which could be attracted to support such an investment is understood to be somewhere below this level. Further investigation of PCT/NHS funding opportunities should be explored in the context of supporting the new community/health centre proposals.

Development Process and Mechanisms

- 6.21 The principle guiding the approach to the delivery of the Masterplan is that of public-private partnership, bringing together the leadership, planning powers and property assets of public sector partners, with the private sector investment potential of developers. In this broad development context, there are three key stages to the process:
- site acquisition and land assembly;
 - securing a development partner and agreeing to a development scheme (usually a 'development agreement'); and
 - detailed planning, design and construction.
- 6.22 There are several ways in which development can be taken forward in this broad context, and which the most appropriate approach is dependant, to some extent, on the nature of ownerships and other complexities facing the site in question. For Wickford town centre, because each of the schemes proposed in the Masterplan have unique ownership characteristics, it is considered that a degree of flexibility is required, which allows for variation in each site. There are three variations to the approach:
- Private-led - sites where private land owners can, under the guidance of a detailed planning brief, take forward land assembly and development process themselves. Sites in the Town Centre Riverside Living area are applicable to this approach.
 - Public asset based - sites that are in public sector ownership and can be taken forward relatively quickly through the establishment of a development agreement. The Public and Health Focus and Eastern Extension areas could be taken forward on the basis of this approach.
 - Public/private partnership led - sites where the complexities of land ownership are likely to necessitate a combined public/private approach to acquire and assemble land before development can take place. This approach could apply to the High Street and Station Gateway areas.

Private-led

- 6.23 Significant progress has already been made by private sector partners in respect of the Town Centre Riverside Living area, in terms of site acquisition, assembly and scheme planning. Because of twin-tracking the Masterplan process and site specific planning process, the key challenge will be to ensure conformity between the emerging proposals and what is proposed by the Masterplan. The early preparation of a planning brief for this area would assist in this regard.

Public Asset Based

- 6.24 Key early actions for the Public and Health Focus and Eastern Extension will be to gain the necessary public sector approvals to release property assets as proposed in the Masterplan. As noted above, agreement must be reached on the precise detail of the new Integrated Service Centre, particularly relating to ownership and management.
- 6.25 Once such approvals have been secured, the preparation of planning/development briefs and developer procurement can take place. A design competition could potentially be incorporated into this process, so as to create publicity for the scheme and ensure high design quality. It may also be expedient to market all the public sector sites together, thus making the non-income generating aspects of the development agreement (i.e. the provision of the Integrated Service Centre and public realm provisions) more feasible for development partners.

Public-Private Partnership

- 6.26 The complexity of land ownership issues for the High Street and Station Gateway are likely to necessitate a slightly different approach to delivery. For the Station Gateway, the land ownership complexity concerns the eastern part of the site, where there is a mix of freehold and leasehold arrangements concerning the arcade shop units. For the High Street, there is a fragmented pattern of land ownership on the High Street itself, although the existing market site to the rear of the shop units is owned by Basildon District Council.
- 6.27 The key challenge for these sites concerns site acquisition, assembly and site preparation, and the additional risk and cost that this creates for the development scheme. This is particularly the case for the High Street, where there are a significant number of properties that would need to be purchased and demolished. Whilst it may be possible to attract a development partner to assist in this process, perhaps as part of the overall development agreement of the public owned sites, the financial appraisal suggests that this is an area that is likely to require additional public funding. It is therefore considered that the use of Government funding, through the Sustainable Communities Plan should be explored, and that a joint venture partnership approach, including English Partnerships, Basildon District Council and developers, would be the most effective way forward for this site.

Phasing and Timescales

- 6.28 The phasing plan is broken down into four distinct stages of development, as illustrated in Figure 6.1. Key phases are as follows:
- Phase 1 - Town Centre Riverside Living. The planning and development process has already commenced on these sites and, subject to remaining acquisition and assembly issues, they are considered to represent an opportunity for early progression in the Masterplan;
 - Phase 2 - Public and Health Focus/Eastern Extension - as publicly owned sites, these developments can also be brought forward relatively quickly, subject to receipt of the necessary public sector approvals;

- Phase 3 - Station Gateway and High Street. These areas are likely to require a longer lead-in time because of site ownership complexities. The regeneration process, which will be evident in the delivery of Phases 1 and 2 will also benefit Phase 3 by generating greater levels of investor confidence;
- Phase 4 - Southern Gateway. The southern end of the High Street is a longer term phase of improvement. It is considered that with careful planning and public realm improvements, this area can organically grow and develop.

6.29 Figure 6.2 provides an indicative timetable for the delivery of the Masterplan, taking into account the phasing assumptions. It illustrates the key stages for each development site/area over a 12 year timeframe. It is emphasised that this programme is only indicative and that a degree of flexibility will ultimately be required in the delivery process.

6.30 **Early actions** required in taking forward the Masterplan are as follows:

- Establish the approach/partnership for managing the delivery process, e.g. including project groups and leaders;
- The SPD process and preparation of planning briefs for key sites;
- Development of an easy win programme of environmental/physical improvements to begin the process of regeneration and stimulate confidence. This could include lighting, street furniture and shop front improvements;
- Local service delivery review - consider how basic Council services are being delivered (e.g. refuse collection, street cleansing, etc.) and can potentially be improved;
- Investigate the possibility of town centre management options to ensure continual improvements and promotion of the centre.

Risk Management

6.31 The Masterplan has been developed with careful regard to market conditions, policy aspirations, site opportunities and constraints, and as such is considered to be realistic and deliverable.

6.32 The market assessment highlights strong demand for residential properties in Wickford and discussions with developers and commercial agents have indicated that there is significant commercial interest in investing in the centre. The scale and mix of development proposed is, whilst ambitious, considered to be realistic in the light of:

- current market conditions;
- the availability and capacity of sites that can be brought forward for such use;
- the potential for the overall improvements planned for Wickford town centre to stimulate the housing market; and
- the strategic policy rationale for new housing development.

6.33 Whilst the Masterplan is considered to be achievable, there are - as with any development framework - a number of key risks which could affect the way the Master Plan is delivered and/or the outcomes delivered. These include the market, finance, land assembly, partnership and funding risks. Table 6.2 summarises the key risks to the Wickford Town Centre Masterplan and the proposed management response.

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