



## Town Centre Strategy

## Retail Capacity Study

North Northamptonshire Council

April 2024

# 1 Introduction

- 1.1 AspinallVerdi, in partnership with Nexus Planning, have been instructed by North Northamptonshire Council to undertake an updated Retail Capacity Study across the unitary authority area. Once complete, the study will form part of the evidence base for the North Northamptonshire Local Plan (NNLP) and will also be used to support the development of local strategies and inform development management decisions.
- 1.2 AspinallVerdi have produced a separate market report which considers the national and regional property markets before focusing on the individual town centres. The assessment considers the market for retail space and other town centre uses such as office and leisure within each town centre. We also consider the market for town-centre living.
- 1.3 The market review has been undertaken to determine what opportunities there are likely to be for new development throughout the plan period (up to 2041) within these town centres. This will ensure that planned uses reflect market demand and could realistically be delivered in this timeframe. These assessments will also help to show what types of development are likely to be viable and deliverable. We will also identify any market constraints or issues which could be addressed or engaged with to ensure the future success of the town centres.
- 1.4 Our property market assessments initially rely on a review of available evidence and analysis of property data. This provides an understanding of market trends as well as transactions which have occurred in each of the town centres. It also identifies the types of space which are available for sale and leasing. We have also undertaken consultations with property agents to gain an understanding of what occupiers and purchasers are seeking in the local market and whether anything could be done to address any issues constraining the market.
- 1.5 In the following sections, we provide a summary of the property market analysis for each town centre. Subsequently, we have begun to form a commercial strategy to ensure the future success of the town centres. Initially, this involves a SWOT analysis for each of the town centres. Considering the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats ensures that the strengths of the centres can be built upon and efforts can be made to address any weaknesses and help inform the Town Centre Strategy.
- 1.6 Where available, we also refer to existing policy and masterplanning documents produced in respect of the various centres. This ensures our approach and recommendations are supported by our market analysis, consultations and the available existing evidence base.

- 1.7 The findings from our research and recommendations also seek to address the key questions / areas of interest specified in the brief. Notably, we highlight the following:
- The changing trends in town centres, both at national and local level;
  - Demand characteristics in key centres, with particular focus on unit sizes;
  - Advice on whether an increased mix of uses can be accepted in town centre locations;
  - Whether the loss of large units in retail centres is likely to cause adverse effects in the long term;
  - Whether applications to sub-divide large units should be resisted;
  - Identification of regeneration opportunities, including how to repurpose vacant stock;
- 1.8 In line with the above, we conclude the respective sections by making a series of recommendations both at a high town centre wide level and at a site-specific level. This ensures that our recommendations consider the overarching changes which may need to occur to improve perceptions of the centres and / or change the direction some of the centres are heading in, in terms of vacancies etc. As well as considering sites identified which could be significant in terms of changing perceptions, improving key entry points and better utilising heritage assets in the centres.

## 2 Larger Centre Strategies

- 2.1 The following sections set out the strategies for the larger centres. For each of the centres, we provide a summary of the property market, in addition to a SWOT analysis and commercial strategy, focussing on key interventions and potential projects which our analysis indicates could help change or improve the direction of the centres.

## 3 Corby - Property Market Summary

- 3.1 Our review of the Corby commercial market identified that there were few vacant units in comparison to other centres, with those which were vacant tending to be larger units which were previously occupied by national multiples.
- 3.2 Our transactional data identified a preference reported for smaller units, with a strong presence from independent retailers in Corby. This was consistent with our agent consultations, where it was reported there have been a number of coffee shops, local convenience and boutique retailers emerging in recent years.
- 3.3 Corby Town Centre is largely owned by a small number of landowners, which has led to joined up thinking and the ability to relocate tenants into alternative units

which better suit their needs, whilst retaining them within the town centre. A large proportion of the town centre is currently owned by Corby Town Centre S.A.R.L.

- 3.4 Our analysis identified a limited evening economy in Corby, with the presence of some pubs and restaurants. It was noted in our agent consultations that the evening economy is not particularly well perceived by consumers and that additional evening leisure facilities could improve the usage of the town centre outside of the core retail opening hours. For example, the provision of a more concentrated restaurant and bar offer.
- 3.5 The existing commercial offer appears to serve local needs well in addition to attracting consumers from the surrounding areas. Transport and access into Corby is strong and well utilised, which encourages good levels of footfall. Our consultations provided further detail on the above, suggesting that the ring road enables easy access into the town centre by car, whilst there are regular bus services which are popular with local residents and provide access directly to George Street, on the edge of the Willow Place Shopping Centre.
- 3.6 It is also of note that Corby is the farthest of the larger centres from Rushden Lakes, indicating a lesser impact on the commercial market here than in other centres. In line with this, agents were of the opinion that Corby had retained a higher proportion of consumers than other centres after the opening of Rushden Lakes. It was suggested this was, in addition to the distance from Rushden Lakes, due to customer loyalty.
- 3.7 A new sixth-form college has recently opened in the town centre, as part of a Towns Fund scheme which also includes a community hub and public realm / infrastructure improvements. This is expected to drive increased footfall and bring a different demographic into the town centre.
- 3.8 A high volume of completed or planned residential development has been identified in Corby and the surrounding areas. This indicates an increase in catchment population which could improve footfall and therefore consumer spend across the centres. However, it is unclear how much of the potential uplift will be negated by the impact of Rushden Lakes which has taken footfall away from the existing centres, albeit to a lesser extent in Corby.
- 3.9 We identified 3no. Sustainable Urban Extensions (SUE's) within the Local Plan, known as Priors Hall, Weldon Park and West Corby. The allocations will deliver c. 5,100, 1,000 and 4,500 homes respectively during and beyond the plan period (up to 2041), with all of the sites located within 30-minutes of Corby Town Centre by public transport or on foot. We note that the Council's AMR reports that

significant completions have already taken place on the Weldon Park and Priors Hall allocated sites.<sup>1</sup>

- 3.10 We identified a limited amount of new-build residential development schemes that have been delivered within Corby town centre itself. This may be due to the difficulties associated with the development of brownfield land compared to the largely greenfield sites where the majority of new-build development is located.
- 3.11 We note that our search identified five allocated sites within Corby Town Centre and immediately adjacent to the town centre boundary which will deliver over 420no. residential units. This would suggest there could be potential to deliver new-build residential development in close proximity to the existing commercial offer which could drive higher footfall in the town centre at different times throughout the day, particularly in terms of convenience retail, i.e. residents generally prefer to utilise local centres to meet their everyday needs.

## 4 Corby – Town Centre Strategy

- 4.1 Following our property market analysis for the commercial and residential markets in Corby and having undertaken site visits, we have looked to identify key opportunities and challenges in the town centre. In order to summarise a number of key considerations, we have used SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats).
- 4.2 We have also referred to the following masterplanning and evidence base work in support of our SWOT analysis and town centre strategy:
- Corby Regeneration Framework (2003)
  - Corby Town Centre Masterplan (2006)
  - Centara Heritage and Character Assessment (2015)
- 4.3 We note that a number of the documents referenced above are now dated, which has been given regard to in our analysis of the town centre and our subsequent town centre strategies.
- 4.4 On the following page, we present our SWOT analysis. We then go on to build on the key points, using these initial thoughts to form the basis for a strategy for Corby Town Centre.

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<sup>1</sup> 1North Northamptonshire Council. North Northamptonshire Authority's Monitoring Report (AMR) 2021/22. Available at: <https://www.corby.gov.uk/home/planning-and-building-control/planning-policy/plan-making/authoritys-monitoring-report>

**Table 2.1 – Corby SWOT Analysis**

Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Low vacancy rate of retail units on the high street.</li> <li>2. Good footfall through the town centre.</li> <li>3. Strong offer of comparison and convenience retail.</li> <li>4. High quality past regeneration of area including The Cube, Corby International Swimming Pool, Willow Place retail centre and the Savoy Cinema.</li> <li>5. £19.9m awarded to Corby through the Towns Fund for four projects including Sixth Form College, a multi-purpose arts and community facility and</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Gradient/ levels difference of town centre limits accessibility from the south.</li> <li>2. Limited signage and sense of arrival at key entry points to the town.</li> <li>3. Limited evening economy, with a high proportion of takeaway outlets compared to restaurants.</li> <li>4. The station is poorly connected to the town centre and feels isolated.</li> <li>5. Areas of the high street are dated.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Increased provision of new-build homes through SUEs and town centre allocations. Potential to capitalise on population growth and increase footfall / expenditure.</li> <li>2. Sixth Form College and associated projects can generate increased footfall and attract a different demographic.</li> <li>3. Former Laser Tag and Wilkinsons units are centrally located and vacant. Could be repurposed / subdivided.</li> <li>4. Revamp and improve dated retail units and frontages.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The newer elements of Willow Place retail centre may threaten the vitality of the remainder of the town centre.</li> <li>2. Elements of the town centre are now dated and some appear to be nearing the end of their lifecycle.</li> <li>3. Lack of visibility at key entry points which may deter visitors.</li> </ol>

Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
<p>additional projects to promote connectivity.</p>		<p>5. Redevelop the Oasis Retail Park which has a number of dated units and occupies a key strategic location to the north west of the town centre.</p> <p>6. Distance from Rushden Lakes.</p> <p>7. Town Centre/Station Link project as part of the Corby Town Fund could help improve connectivity.</p>	

Source: AVL, 2024.

## 5 Specific Projects

5.1 Based on the above SWOT analysis we have identified a number of projects / initiatives which could form a key part of the town centre strategy. We have identified four main strands as the basis of a Town Centre Strategy for Corby, in particular:

- Encouraging Evening Economy
- Signage / Key Gateways
- Former Laser Tag Unit
- Oasis Retail Park

### Encouraging Evening Economy

5.2 Corby Town Centre has a strong presence from national Food and Beverage (F&B) operators such as Nando's, Paletto Lounge (part of the Lounges chain), McDonald's, Burger King, Greggs and Subway. However, there are a limited number of restaurants and pubs within the town centre when compared to the number of takeaway outlets. Further, agents reported a negative perception of the town centre evening offer from consumers.

5.3 At present, the intersection of George Street and Corporation Street comprises much of the town centre offer for evening dining with the presence of a number of independent operators, including TJs Bar and Grill and La Fonte in addition to the national operators listed above. The Savoy cinema is also located adjacent to TJs Bar and Grill.

5.4 This area of the town centre has undergone significant and successful regeneration in the past 15 years and is largely a pedestrian friendly area. However, with the exception of the Paletto Lounge, Nando's and TJs Bar and Grill, the existing F&B offer does not appear well integrated with the rest of the town centre. In addition to this, the Prezzo unit located adjacent to Nando's has recently closed down, although this may be due to wider company issues rather than the location itself.

5.5 In order to improve perceptions of the existing evening economy offer, a number of key steps can be undertaken. Initially, enabling and encouraging the use of further outdoor seating spilling into the public realm may increase consumer interaction with the area by creating a welcoming atmosphere and better connecting the existing public realm on Corporation Street.

5.6 In addition to this, encouraging and targeting additional independent and national tenants should be encouraged as this may help create more of an evening hub within this area. A proactive approach to encouraging an increased F&B provision and better integration with the existing public realm will help



generate an improved perception of the town centre evening economy. We consider this in further detail below.

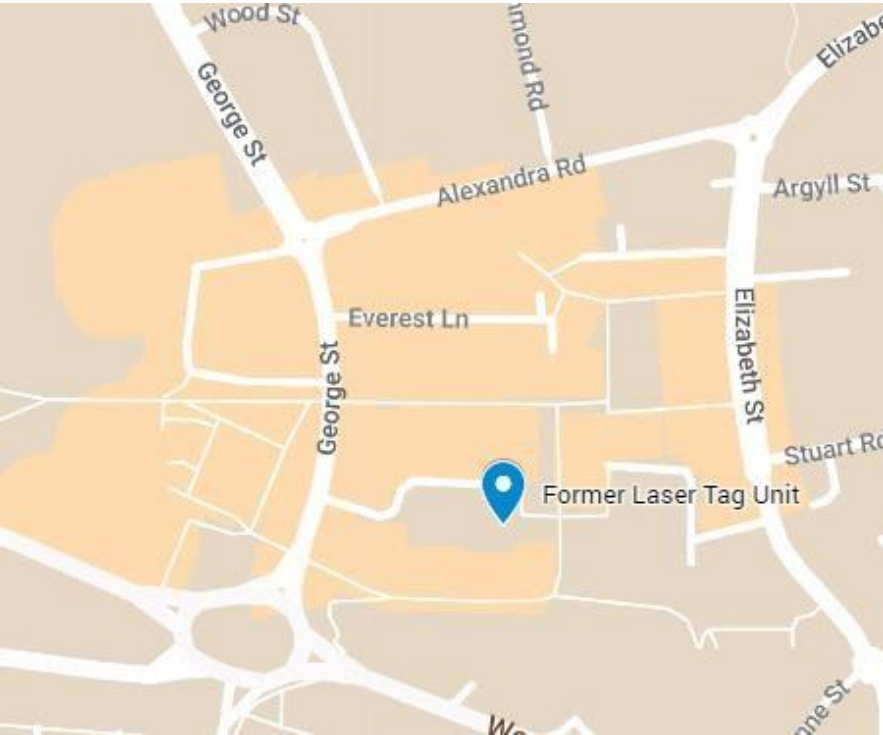
## Signage and Key Gateways

- 5.7 Our site visit and agent consultation also highlighted that the signage throughout the town centre, as well as key gateways into the town centre, are often inconsistent and reduce the sense of place / arrival in Corby town centre.
- 5.8 This is an issue which is also picked up in the Centara Heritage and Character Assessment (2015), where the following issues with town centre signage and entry points are identified:
- Uninspiring and poor-quality gateway features on Elizabeth Street could be improved to give a sense of arrival to the town centre;
  - The removal or covering over of original architectural features, materials and finishes within the town centre, which has substantially reduced the quality of architecture and sense of place;
  - The quality, consistency and condition of shop fronts and signage throughout the town centre, and within the residential areas, is generally poor, which detracts from the original architecture of the building façades.
- 5.9 In terms of addressing the issues identified, a number of key steps can be taken. In respect of the signage and frontages throughout the town centre, active engagement between the Council, landowners and operators can be undertaken to ensure that signage does not detract from the existing architecture and that, where possible, shop frontages are kept in good condition and are consistent. The Council should consider adopting an up to date Shop Front Policy / design guide.

## Former Laser Tag Unit

- 5.10 We have also identified the former Laser Tag unit within the Willow Place Shopping Centre as a potential opportunity. The site is well located, adjacent to Burger King and an independent F&B retailer. The location of the site is shown in Figure 2.1.

**Figure 2.1 - Former Laser Tag Unit Location**



Source: Google MyMaps, 2024.

5.11 We have undertaken a search on HM Land Registry to establish the ownership details for the former Laser Tag unit. Our search identified that the unit is currently owned by SDI (CORBY) LIMITED, as shown in Table 2.2.

**Table 2.2 – Former Laser Tag Unit Ownership**

Address	Owner	Title No.	Title	
Laser Tag Unit, Land at Queens Square, Corby	SDI (CORBY) LIMITED	NN368131	Freehold	

Source: HM Land Registry, 2024.

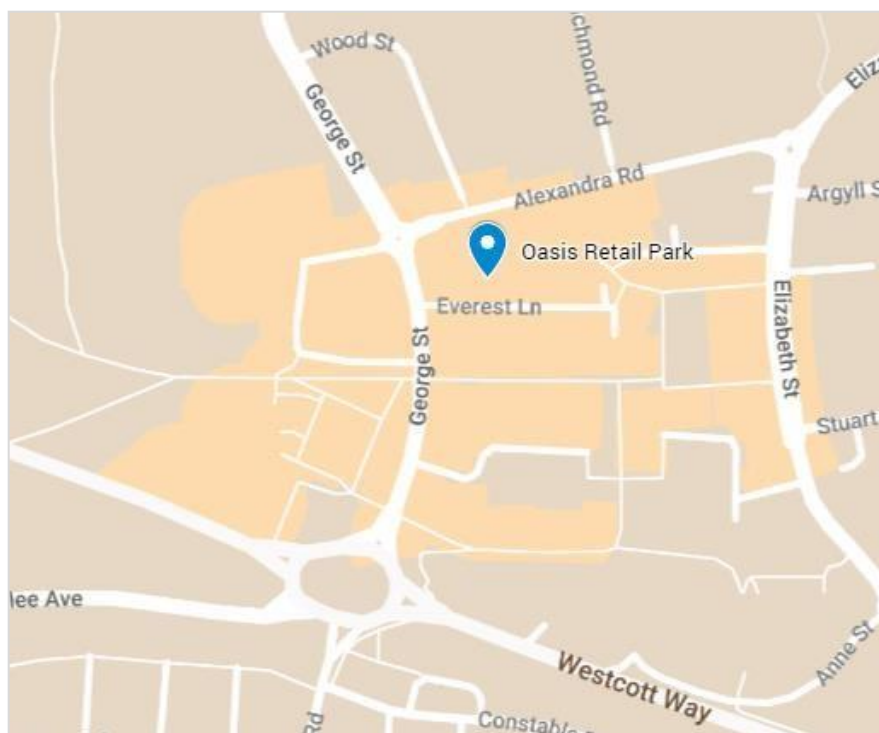
5.12 The former Laser Tag unit is a large, currently vacant, unit which opens out onto Queen Square. As such, the location may be more conducive to an F&B style unit, as is the case with the surrounding units.

- 5.13 More recently, we understand that The Wilko unit on Queens Square has also become vacant. This is situated opposite the laser tag unit and linked by the square. Incorporating both these units may present an opportunity to deliver a centrally located food and beverage hub or complementary uses.
- 5.14 We would recommend that the Council seek to engage with the landowner / operator of the shopping centre to establish what interest there has been in the unit and what potential there is to reposition the asset and ensure it is re-let. In line with the transactional evidence identified in our market report, it may also be an option to subdivide the unit, creating a number of smaller units in line with identified market demand and encouraging local businesses to take up space.

### Oasis Retail Park

- 5.15 Oasis Retail Park is situated to the north of Corby Town Centre, as shown in Figure 2.2, with images of the existing site shown in Figure 2.3. We note that this site is also allocated in the Part 2 Local Plan for mixed use town centre redevelopment.

**Figure 2.2 - Oasis Retail Park Location**



Source: Google MyMaps, 2024.

**Figure 2.3 - Oasis Retail Park Site Images**



Source: Google Maps, 2024.

- 5.16 The retail park currently appears to be fully let and we understand that the existing surface car park is well used by both customers of the retail park and the wider town centre. However, from our site visit, it was apparent that the units at this site appear dated and may therefore require consideration during the plan period. The site is in a key strategic location, to the north of Corby Town Centre.
- 5.17 We have undertaken a search on HM Land Registry to establish the ownership details for the Oasis Retail Park. Our search identified that the retail park is currently owned entirely by Corby Town Centre S.A.R.L, as shown in Table 2.3.

**Table 2.3 - Oasis Retail Park Ownership**

Address	Owner	Title No.	Title	
Oasis Retail Park	Corby Town Centre S.A.R.L	NN128981	Freehold	

Source: HM Land Registry, 2024.

- 5.18 We consider the opportunity to regenerate the Oasis Retail Park to be a longer term strategy. In the first instance, we propose that the Council undertake initial consultation with the landowner(s) of this site to establish the likelihood of this site coming forward for development during the plan period. Assuming discussions are positive, then the following analysis will be required:

- Securing vacant possession – when do the existing leases expire? Is there a possibility of securing possession early or is it more cost effective to allow leases to run down and secure units thereafter?
- Feasibility study – what level and type of development could come forward? Is there potential for residential development on the site or is it better suited to retention / refurbishment / redevelopment of the existing uses as part of mixed use scheme? What level of car parking is required and would this need to be replaced elsewhere in the centre?

## 6 Kettering - Property Market Summary

- 6.1 Kettering is the largest of the centres analysed and provides a diverse range of both comparison and convenience retail space both in the Newlands Shopping Centre and along the high street.
- 6.2 Our analysis and agent consultation indicated that Kettering has lost a number of larger operators from its town centre in the last 5-years. A number of the larger units left vacant by national operators have since struggled to be re-occupied, with landlords needing to accept reduced or minimal rents to keep some units occupied.
- 6.3 There were also a range of F&B uses identified in Kettering, with both national and independent occupiers active. However, as with our assessment of other centres, there is a significant proportion of the F&B offer which is either takeaway outlets or café type uses, which do not generally drive footfall and consumer engagement in town centres during the evening.
- 6.4 In line with the above, our analysis and consultations identified a limited evening economy in Kettering, with the exception of some pubs and a small number of restaurants. It was suggested that additional evening leisure facilities could improve perceptions of the town centre.
- 6.5 It was clear from our site visit that parts of the town centre had been subject to public realm improvements, such as the Kettering High Street Heritage Action Zone which has facilitated improvements along the High Street, Meadow Road, Lower Street and Gold Street.
- 6.6 However, there were still significant vacancies, which indicates that the centre may benefit from the repurposing or repositioning of some units to ensure it is able to benefit from the public realm improvements which have been made and therefore generate increased / more consistent footfall. This was reinforced by our agent consultations, where it was considered the repurposing of surplus retail provision could be important in order to change perceptions of the town centre and consolidate the retail offer.
- 6.7 Kettering Swimming Pool appears visibly dated and is at its end of its expected lifespan. We also understand that the Sport England Facility Planning model has identified a shortfall of pool space for Kettering.
- 6.8 Kettering appears to suffer from an oversupply of retail provision, particularly in secondary and tertiary locations. The impact of this is that entry points to the town are unappealing and the perception of the town centre is poor overall. This indicates that there could be potential for permitted development / residential development which may help to consolidate the commercial offer.

- 6.9 As with other centres, a high volume of completed or planned development was identified in the Kettering Town Centre and the surrounding areas. This indicates an increase in catchment population which could improve footfall and therefore retail spend. However, it is unclear how much of the potential uplift will be negated by the impact of Rushden Lakes, which has taken footfall away from the existing centres.
- 6.10 We identified 3no. Sustainable Urban Extensions (SUE's) within the Local Plan, known as Rothwell North, Desborough North and Hanwood Park. The allocations will deliver c. 700no. units at both Rothwell North and Desborough North, in addition to c. 5,500no. units at Hanwood Park during and following the plan period (up to 2041).
- 6.11 We identified that there has been a limited amount of town centre new-build residential development in Kettering. It is possible this is due to the difficulties associated with the development of brownfield land compared to the largely greenfield sites where the majority of new-build development was located.
- 6.12 It is possible there may be opportunities for town centre residential development, particularly in secondary or tertiary retail locations where there are high levels of vacancy. However, the volume of development happening outside of the town centre may discourage developers from delivering town centre schemes.
- 6.13 We note that our search identified four allocated sites within a c. 30-minute walk of Kettering Town Centre at Scott Road (22no. units), Glendon Ironworks, Sackville Street (33no. dwellings), Former Kettering Town Football Club, Rockingham Road (49no. units) and Factory adjacent to 52 Lawson Street (25no. units). This would suggest there is potential to deliver new-build residential development in close proximity to the existing commercial offer. This could drive higher footfall in the town centre at different times throughout the day, particularly in terms of convenience retail, i.e. residents generally prefer to utilise local centres to meet their everyday needs.

## 7 Kettering – Town Centre Strategy

- 7.1 As with Corby, we have initially undertaken a SWOT analysis to assess the challenges and weaknesses as well as the potential opportunities present in Kettering Town Centre.
- 7.2 We have also referred to the following masterplanning and evidence base reports in support of our SWOT analysis and town centre strategy:
- Town Centres and Town Centre Uses (Updated April 2018)
  - Kettering Station Quarter Report (December 2021)

7.3 We present this analysis on the following page and then go on to discuss a potential strategy for addressing these considerations.



**Table 2.4 - Kettering SWOT Analysis**

Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Strong convenience offer, with superstores including Morrisons, Sainsbury's and Lidl to the north west of town centre.</li> <li>2. Substantial comparison retail offer in town centre and shopping centre.</li> <li>3. Heritage assets are located throughout the town centre. High Street Heritage Action Zone in place to facilitate improvements to public realm and heritage assets.</li> <li>4. Recent public realm improvements around Market Square, including events / open area to the centre. E.g. Kettering by the Sea.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Limited evening economy, with a high proportion of takeaway outlets compared to restaurants. Recent closure of The Loft nightclub, Abacus and Cheers Bar.</li> <li>2. Town centre is spread out and lacks a clear focal point in which people congregate.</li> <li>3. Several large vacant units throughout the town centre, with a number of units vacant on Silver Street and at key entry points into the centre.</li> <li>4. F&amp;B offer is sporadic with small clusters around the new public realm and on the High Street.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Better utilise the Market Square public realm improvements through more intensive use of the space for events etc.</li> <li>2. Improve key gateways from north and south of Kettering into town centre.</li> <li>3. Former Police Station site and surrounding units could be re-developed as a key gateway site on the southern periphery of the town centre.</li> <li>4. Consolidation of the existing retail offer, while repositioning / repurposing surplus units.</li> <li>5. Relocation / refurbishment of existing swimming pool.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Oversupply of comparison retail.</li> <li>2. Further loss of footfall due to significant vacancies.</li> <li>3. Further loss of footfall / consumers to Rushden Lakes.</li> <li>4. Increased vacancy due to poor perceptions of town centre.</li> <li>5. Obsolescence of the existing retail parade on the corner of Lower Street and Gold Street.</li> </ol>

Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
<p>5. New units surrounding Market Square are well occupied by national F&amp;B brands.</p> <p>6. New bus station and surrounding public realm.</p> <p>7. Potential delivery of a new mixed-use scheme including a ground floor food hall style ground floor unit in the Former Bingo Hall, granted planning permission in March 2023 (REF: NK/2021/0296).</p>	<p>5. Dated leisure facilities, including the swimming pool to the south of town centre.</p> <p>6. Limited footfall identified around Market Square during site visit.</p>		

Source: AVL, 2024.

## 8 Specific Projects

8.1 Based on the above SWOT analysis, we have identified a number of projects / initiatives which could form a key part of the town centre strategy. We have identified four main opportunities as the basis of a Town Centre Strategy for Kettering.

- Connectivity and Key Gateways
- Former Police Station and Adjacent Sites
- Relocation/refurbishment of Kettering Swimming Pool
- Diversification and repurposing

### Connectivity and Key Gateways

8.2 As identified in our SWOT analysis, one of the strengths of Kettering Town Centre is the public realm improvements which have been undertaken at Market Square and the bus station on Horse Exchange.

8.3 However, it was evident from our site visit and agent consultations that the Market Square public realm area is not utilised to its full capacity and there is often limited footfall in this area of the town centre compared to the Newlands Shopping Centre and High Street. The centre of the square comprises an open events space, which we understand is used sporadically to host community-type events. However, providing more regular events in this space may encourage increased footfall and dwell time within this area and therefore improve connectivity with the High Street and the rest of the town centre.

8.4 Another area in which connectivity can be improved in the town centre is to the north / north west of the Newlands Shopping Centre, where a number of larger convenience retail units are situated and there is a dominant road network which doesn't encourage linked trips. Whilst the presence of the Newlands Shopping Centre limits the options available to open up this key gateway, efforts could be made to improve the signage and public realm on Lower Street and Newland Street to give visitors a sense of arrival when entering the town centre from the north. This may also help increase the number of linked trips, whereby customers of the large convenience retail stores to the north of Kettering are encouraged to access and spend time in the town centre.

### Former Police Station and Adjacent Sites

8.5 The former Police Station and adjacent units, to the south of the town centre are currently vacant and our analysis indicates this has been the case for a number of years. The site is located on London Road, a key gateway into the town centre, with the location shown in Figure 2.4 and images provided in Figure 2.5.

**Figure 2.4 - Former Police Station Site**



Source: Google MyMaps, 2024.

**Figure 2.5 – Former Police Station Site Images**



Source: Google Maps, 2024.

- 8.6 We have undertaken a search on HM Land Registry to establish the ownership details for the former Police Station and adjacent units. Our search identified that there are two different ownerships across the site, as shown in Table 2.5.

**Table 2.5 – Former Police Station Site Ownership**

Address	Owner	Title No.	Title	
Police Station, 19 London Road, Kettering	The Police Fire and Crime Commissioner for Northamptonshire	NN312310	Freehold	
Kettering Magistrates' Court, London Road, Kettering	North Northamptonshire Council	NN291912	Freehold	
10, London Road, Kettering	North Northamptonshire Council	NN303588	Freehold	
4, London Road, Kettering	North Northamptonshire Council	NN303587	Freehold	

Source: HM Land Registry, 2024.

- 8.7 We understand the Police Station element of the site has previously been subject to a number of residential and commercial proposals and was reported to be close to a sale in 2020. Whilst the Police Station site has not yet come forward and our analysis has shown that it is still in the ownership of the Police Fire and Crime Commissioner for Northamptonshire, we understand through further information from the Council that the site has recently been sold. As such, we would anticipate this site may now be likely to be brought forward by the private sector.

## Relocation / Refurbishment of Kettering Swimming Pool

- 8.8 Following our analysis above, there may be an opportunity to redevelop the wider site, including the Former Police Station, adjacent units, Council car park and Kettering Swimming Pool. We summarise the location of the site in Figure 2.6 and provide site images in Figure 2.7.



**Figure 2.6 - Kettering Swimming Pool Location**



Source: Google MyMaps, 2024.

**Figure 2.7 - Kettering Swimming Pool Images**



Source: Google Maps, 2024.

- 8.9 Our analysis, the images provided and discussion with Council Officers indicate that Kettering Swimming Pool is nearing the end of its lifecycle and is therefore likely to require substantial investment during the plan period. As such, in line with the potential opportunity to redevelop the wider site, we have considered the potential to relocate or refurbish Kettering Swimming Pool.
- 8.10 We would recommend the Council continue to monitor need, to ensure any redevelopment or relocation reflects a sustainable model that provides a range of facilities and services. We understand studies are currently being procured to look at a Leisure / Health hub model for future provision.

- 8.11 Alongside the above, the Council could also consider potential relocation options, thus ensuring they are able to consider the feasibility of a range of sites before a decision is made on the future of Kettering Swimming pool.

### Diversification and Repurposing

- 8.12 A key theme of our analysis and agent consultations was the number of vacant units in Kettering. It is important that the town centre strategy moving forward considers how best to ensure these units are bought back into use.
- 8.13 As with our analysis of other centres, transactional evidence pointed to a preference for smaller units, with larger units tending to remain vacant for longer periods of time. This is due to a number of factors including economic uncertainty and also, in the case of Kettering, the impact of Rushden Lakes.
- 8.14 In order to address the vacancy issues in Kettering, it is key that the Council actively engages with operators and landowners to establish the reasons for long-term vacancies and to consider potential alternative ways to ensure these units are brought back into use.
- 8.15 We would recommend that the following alternative options are considered where larger units are unable to be absorbed by the market:
- Refurbishment – In some cases, improving the quality of the units available to let may encourage market participation. This could either be funded by landowners, the Council, public funding or a combination of these.
  - Sub-division – Where units struggle to let due to their size, considering splitting these types of units into smaller units may enable smaller, independent businesses to take space in the centre. This will also assist with diversifying the existing offer and allow Kettering to offer uses which provide a point of difference from Rushden Lakes.
  - Council Led Repurposing - As with our analysis of other centres, it is also worth considering opportunities where the Council takes on the headlease of a larger unit, subsequently subletting space to small operators either in the form of workspace type units or a food hall style F&B unit. This de-risks the unit from a market perspective and reduces the barriers to entry for small, independent businesses. There is also potential to secure public funding to secure this type of scheme and we have provided studies on behalf of other Local Authorities where funding streams such as the Shared Prosperity Fund have been secured to support this type of space being brought forward.
  - Redevelopment – Our review identified a number of vacant units on the periphery of the town centre, or in secondary and tertiary retail locations. In these instances, it may be necessary to consider whether residential

development may help to consolidate the existing commercial offer, as well as increase footfall.



## 9 Rushden - Property Market Summary

- 9.1 Rushden is the smallest of the larger centres and our analysis has identified high levels of vacancy, relative to the size of the centre. There was a discernible lack of national operators, with the majority of the high street offer appearing to serve local needs.
- 9.2 Rushden is located in close proximity to Rushden Lakes and has lost key national occupiers in recent years, with the national operators remaining in the town being largely budget operators and convenience retailers.
- 9.3 As with other centres, our transactional data identified a preference reported for smaller units, with an increased presence from independent retailers in Rushden. This was consistent with our agent consultations, where it was reported there have been independent retailers taking space sporadically in recent years where appropriately sized units in good condition became available.
- 9.4 The F&B offer identified in Rushden was relatively limited, with a number of cafés and independent takeaway-style units. There is also a minimal evening economy, with a small number of restaurants and pubs situated along the High Street and adjoining roads.
- 9.5 Whilst it appears Rushden could benefit from improvements to its public realm, it is unlikely that this would be sufficient to encourage national multiples to return, given the proximity to Rushden Lakes; however, it may help to attract other uses and improve dwell times in the centre.
- 9.6 Access to the town centre is one of the key issues for Rushden, with the main point of access via a one-way system which is often subject to slow-moving heavy traffic at times. Further, pedestrian access to the town centre is also poor, with the key entry point to the north of the town centre dominated by fast-moving traffic at the intersection of Duck Street and High Street.
- 9.7 Car parking is also an issue in Rushden, with consumers struggling to access parking spaces during weekends and evenings. It was noted in our agent consultations that this contributed to the negative perception of Rushden as a centre.
- 9.8 It was considered that Rushden had seen the biggest difficulties due to the emergence of Rushden Lakes, suffering a loss in footfall and consumer spend, with many of the remaining national multiples in the town centre either relocating to Rushden Lakes or leaving due to the poor quality offer in the town centre.

- 9.9 As with other centres, a high volume of completed or planned development was identified in the areas surrounding Rushden. This indicates an increase in catchment population which could improve footfall and therefore retail spend across. However, it is unclear how much of the potential uplift will be negated by the impact of Rushden Lakes, which has taken footfall away from the existing centres. Based on the performance of Rushden Town Centre in recent years, it seems likely that a high proportion of the increase in footfall due to residential development will be lost to Rushden Lakes.
- 9.10 We identified one Sustainable Urban Extensions (SUE) within the Local Plan, known as Rushden East, which will deliver c. 2,500no. homes during and following the plan period (up to 2041). The site is located within c. 20 minutes of Rushden by foot.
- 9.11 We identified a limited amount of town centre new-build development in Rushden. This may be due to the difficulties associated with the development of brownfield land compared to the largely greenfield sites where the majority of new-build development was located.
- 9.12 There may be opportunities for town centre residential development, particularly on the fringes of the High Street where there are vacant units. However, the volume of development happening outside of the town centre may discourage developers from delivering town centre schemes. Our search did not identify any residential allocations in Rushden Town Centre.

## 10 Rushden – Town Centre Strategy

- 10.1 Following our analysis of both the commercial and residential markets in Rushden and our site visit, we have identified key strengths and weaknesses in the town centre. We have also identified potential opportunities in these sectors moving forward, as well as analysing certain threats that may impact the long-term growth of these sectors. We have used the SWOT analysis to help inform the emerging Town Centre Strategy.
- 10.2 We provide a summary of this in the form of a SWOT analysis. This summary is provided in Table 2.6.

**Table 2.6 - Rushden SWOT Analysis**

Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
<p>1. High Street serves local needs and has a reasonable convenience retail offer.</p> <p>2. Some evidence of independent retailers taking space in the town centre.</p> <p>3. Heritage assets are located to the south of the town centre and Independent Wesleyan Church is located on the High Street.</p>	<p>1. Loss of national operators due to worsening condition of high street and presence of Rushden Lakes.</p> <p>2. High vacancy levels.</p> <p>3. No real evening economy. Majority of existing F&amp;B provisions are takeaway units or cafes.</p> <p>4. Lower-quality existing retail units.</p> <p>5. Limited public realm offering.</p> <p>6. Poor access to the town centre on foot and by car.</p> <p>7. Dated leisure facilities, including the swimming pool to the north of town centre.</p>	<p>1. Improvements to car parking and vehicular movement through and around the town centre.</p> <p>2. Improvement to pedestrian access at a key northern gateway into the town centre.</p> <p>3. Improve public realm to encourage investment.</p> <p>4. Potential for infill development and repurposing of vacant units.</p> <p>5. Vacant Travis Perkins site to the north of the High Street.</p> <p>6. Relocation / refurbishment of existing swimming pool.</p>	<p>1. Rushden Lakes is likely to continue to prevent Rushden from attracting national multiples.</p> <p>2. Lack of residential development sites and minimal housing commitments currently in the town centre.</p> <p>3. Agents considered public realm investment unlikely to encourage an evening economy.</p> <p>4. Additional vacancies may further weaken perceptions of the town centre.</p>

Source: AVL, 2024.

## 11 Specific Projects

11.1 Based on the above SWOT analysis and our market analysis, it is clear that the town centre requires some level of intervention. As such, we have highlighted a number of projects / initiatives which could form a key part of the town centre strategy. We have identified four main strands as the basis of a Town Centre Strategy for Rushden, in particular:

- Access, Key Gateways and Public Realm
- Travis Perkins Site
- Rushden Splash Leisure Pool
- Diversification and Repurposing

### Access, Key Gateways and Public Realm

11.2 Our site visits and agent consultations highlighted the difficulties in accessing Rushden both by car and on foot. As such, we set out some next steps which can be undertaken to better understand the issues surrounding access to Rushden Town Centre and seek to mitigate them:

- Car Parking and Vehicular Movement Study – This would help develop an understanding of the levels of parking required by the town centre in order for it to function more efficiently. As well as considering the issues with movement around the town centre and how this could potentially be mitigated / improved.
- Traffic Calming Measures – With the exception of traffic lights, there are minimal measures in place to slow traffic at the intersection of High Street and Duck Street. This intersection is at a key gateway into the town centre and the fast-moving transport provides a barrier to entering the town centre on foot. Further, the potential for fast-moving traffic makes the pub and additional F&B uses to the north of the intersection feel detached from the rest of the town centre. Traffic measures could be implemented in order to mitigate these factors and improve perceptions of this key gateway into the town centre. We would recommend this is considered as part of the Car Parking and Vehicular Movement study referred to above.

11.3 In addition to the above, our analysis and site visits identified a lack of good quality public realm in Rushden. Whilst it is unlikely that public realm investment will cause national multiples to return to the town centre, it will help to generate a sense of place and may improve footfall and dwell times accordingly. At present, there are limited areas in which to sit on the high street, which adds to the feeling of the centre as a convenience location, where shoppers generally make short visits to purchase goods and services. As such, through some

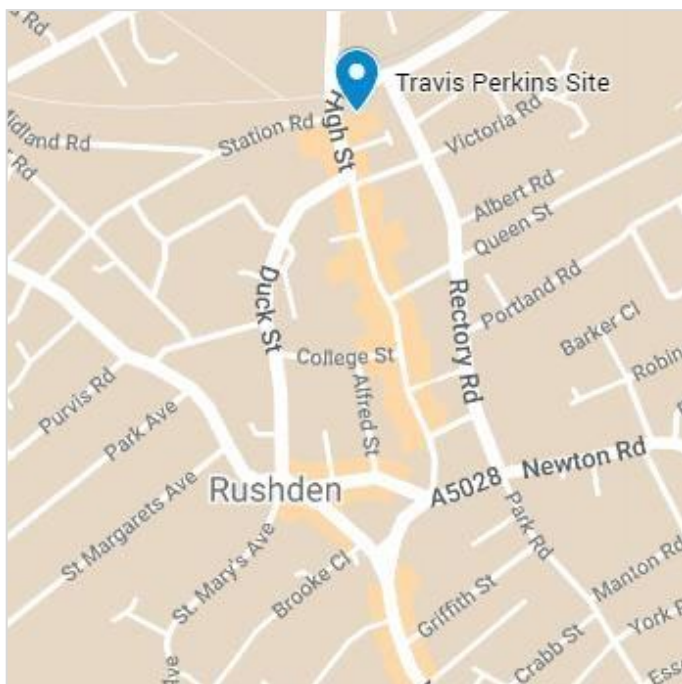
relatively small investments, there is the potential to make some meaningful changes to the street scene and increase footfall in the town centre.

### Travis Perkins Site

11.4 Our site and analysis identified the Travis Perkins site, to the north of the town centre as a potential redevelopment opportunity. This site, whilst not in the heart of the town centre, adds little to the street scene. It is also a relatively large site given its location.

11.5 The location of the site is shown in Figure 2.8, with site images provided in Figure 2.9.

**Figure 2.8 - Travis Perkins Site Location**



Source: Google MyMaps, 2024.


**Figure 2.9 - Travis Perkins Site Images**



Source: AVL, 2024.

- 11.6 We have undertaken a search on HM Land Registry to establish the ownership details for the former Travis Perkins unit. Our search identified that the unit is currently owned by TP Property Company Limited, as shown in Table 2.7.

**Table 2.7 – Travis Perkins Site Ownership**

Address	Owner	Title No.	Title	
150 High Street, Rushden, NN10 0PB	TP PROPERTY COMPANY LIMITED	NN356173	Freehold	

Source: HM Land Registry, 2024.

- 11.7 There is potential for redevelopment of this site to help encourage residential uses into the town centre whilst seeking to secure and activate ground floor frontages, potentially making more of this location along a key entry point to the town centre. Discussions will be required with the owners of the site as to whether this could come forward for development.
- 11.8 Alternatively, given that the unit does not appear particularly dated, another opportunity for the site could be the repurposing of the unit. This could encompass the Council acquiring the unit using public sector funds (i.e., Brownfield Land Fund, Levelling Up Fund etc.) and subletting it to small businesses. We discuss this in more detail in the following section.

### Relocation / Refurbishment of Rushden Splash Leisure Pool

- 11.9 Our site analysis has identified the Rushden Splash Leisure Pool as a potential opportunity site, either for the refurbishment of the existing building, or relocation to an alternative site. We summarise the location of the site in Figure 2.10 and provide site images in Figure 2.11.



**Figure 2.10 - Rushden Splash Leisure Pool Location**



Source: Google MyMaps, 2024.

**Figure 2.11 - Rushden Splash Leisure Pool Images**



Source: Google Maps, 2024.

11.10 Our analysis, the images provided and discussion with Council Officers indicate that Rushden Splash Leisure Pool is nearing the end of its lifecycle and is therefore likely to require substantial investment during the plan period. As such, we have considered the potential to relocate or refurbish Rushden Splash Leisure Pool.

11.11 We would recommend the Council continue to monitor need, to ensure any redevelopment or relocation reflects a sustainable model that provides a range

of facilities and services. We understand that a Leisure Facilities Strategy is currently being developed.

- 11.12 Alongside the above, the Council could also consider potential relocation options/sites, including sites closer to the high street so that the facility could act as a potential new anchor for the town centre, before a decision is made on the future of Rushden Splash Leisure Pool.

### Diversification and Repurposing

- 11.13 A key theme of our analysis and agent consultations was the number of vacant units in Rushden. It is important that the town centre strategy considers how best to ensure these units are brought back into use.
- 11.14 As with our analysis of other centres, transactional evidence pointed to a preference for smaller units, with larger units tending to remain vacant for longer periods. This is due to a number of factors including economic uncertainty and also, in the case of Rushden, the impact of Rushden Lakes.
- 11.15 In order to address the vacancy issues in Rushden, it is key that the Council actively engages with operators and landowners to establish the reasons for long-term vacancies and to consider potential alternative ways to ensure these units are brought back into use.
- 11.16 We would recommend that the following alternative options are considered where larger units are unable to be absorbed by the market:
- Refurbishment – In some cases, improving the quality of the units available to let may encourage market participation. This could either be funded by landowners, the Council, public funding or a combination of these. This is particularly important in Rushden, where a large number of units appear dated.
  - Sub-division – Where units struggle to let due to their size, considering splitting these types of units into smaller units may enable smaller, independent businesses to take space in the centre. This will also assist with diversifying the existing offer and allow Rushden to offer uses which provide a point of difference from Rushden Lakes.
  - Council Led Repurposing – As with our analysis of other centres, it is also worth considering ventures where the Council takes on the headlease of a larger unit, subsequently subletting space to small operators either in the form of workspace type units or a food hall style F&B unit. This de-risks the unit from a market perspective and reduces the barriers to entry for small, independent businesses. There is also potential to secure public funding to secure this type of scheme and we have provided studies on behalf of other



Local Authorities where funding streams such as the Shared Prosperity Fund have been secured to support this type of space being brought forward. As example of a site where this could be delivered is the Travis Perkins Site identified above, where there is potential to break the larger unit down into a series of smaller workspace units for independent / local businesses.

- Redevelopment – Our review identified a number of vacant units on the periphery of the town centre. In these instances, it may be necessary to consider whether residential development may help to consolidate the existing commercial offer, as well as increase footfall.

## 12 Wellingborough – Property Market Summary

- 12.1 Wellingborough is the second largest of the centres analysed and its commercial offer includes the Swansgate shopping centre, a market square and supplementary high street shopping areas.
- 12.2 Despite the presence of a number of listed buildings and attractive retail frontages, the centre suffers from high vacancy rates and has lost a number of national multiples in recent years. Similarly, to Kettering, several vacancies were identified on the periphery of the centre, indicating that repositioning of surplus floorspace could in turn create a more consolidated centre with potentially lower levels of vacancy.
- 12.3 The town has seen an increase in independent operators, with some landlords subdividing existing units to cater for demand from smaller operators looking for smaller units on more flexible lease terms. It was reported in our agent consultations that landlords have been forced to accept reduced rents on a number of town centre units.
- 12.4 Wellingborough appears to have a sufficient F&B offer, in addition to a reasonable night economy, however our analysis and agent consultation still identified a number of F&B closures in recent years.
- 12.5 Wellingborough isn't as large in terms of retail space and catchment population compared to other larger centres nearby. As such, maintaining an increased focus on independent operators and repurposing units could benefit the centre and provide a point of difference when compared to Rushden Lakes.
- 12.6 As with other centres, a high volume of completed or planned residential development was identified in the areas surrounding Wellingborough. This indicates an increase in catchment population, which could improve footfall and therefore retail spend across. However, it is unclear how much of the potential uplift will be negated by the impact of Rushden Lakes, which has taken footfall away from the existing centres.
- 12.7 We identified 2no. Sustainable Urban Extensions (SUE's) within the Local Plan, known as Wellingborough East and Wellingborough North. The allocations will deliver c. 3,650 and c. 3,000 homes respectively, with both of the sites located within 30-minutes of Wellingborough Town Centre by public transport or on foot. We note that development has begun on the initial phases of the sites, with an outline planning application approved for both sites.
- 12.8 We identified a limited amount of town centre new-build development in Wellingborough. It is possible this is due to the difficulties associated with the

development of brownfield land compared to the largely greenfield sites where the majority of new-build development was located.

- 12.9 There may be opportunities for town centre residential development, particularly in secondary or tertiary retail locations where there are high levels of vacancy. However, the volume of development happening outside of the town centre may discourage developers from delivering town centre schemes.
- 12.10 We note that our search identified three allocated sites within Wellingborough town centre and the surrounding residential fringes Alma Street (50no. units), Post Office Depot (23no. units) and Land at High Street/Jacksons Lane (113no. units). This would suggest there is potential to deliver new-build residential development in close proximity to the existing commercial offer. This could drive higher footfall in the town centre, particularly in terms of convenience retail, where local residents generally prefer to utilise local centres to meet their everyday needs.

## 13 Wellingborough – Town Centre Strategy

- 13.1 Following our analysis of both the commercial and residential markets in Wellingborough and our site visit, we have identified key strengths and weaknesses in the town centre. We have also identified potential opportunities in these sectors moving forward, as well as analysing certain threats that may impact the long-term growth of these sectors. We have used the SWOT analysis to help inform the emerging Town Centre Strategy.
- 13.2 We have also referred to the following masterplanning and evidence base documents in support of our SWOT analysis and town centre strategy:
- Wellingborough Town Centre High Level Review for Borough Council of Wellingborough (September 2018)
  - Wellingborough Town Centre Vision Plans
- 13.3 We provide a summary of this in the form of a SWOT analysis. This summary is provided in Table 2.8.

**Table 2.8 - Wellingborough SWOT Analysis**

Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Free parking at various points in and around town centre.</li> <li>2. Heritage assets located throughout the town centre.</li> <li>3. Substantial comparison and convenience retail offer in town centre and shopping centre.</li> <li>4. Good F&amp;B offer, with a number of cafés, pubs and restaurants.</li> <li>5. Existing college facility in the town centre.</li> <li>6. Good quality units located in the town centre with a number of heritage frontages.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Several large vacant units throughout the town centre, with a number of units vacant at key entry points into town.</li> <li>2. Lack of connection between existing heritage assets and the wider town centre, e.g. Market and adjacent church.</li> <li>3. Potential oversupply of car parking, subject to parking study.</li> <li>4. Town centre is spread out with no clear focal point in which people congregate.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Better utilise the Market Square and reconnect with heritage assets. As well as integrating the market better with the uses to the south of Market Square.</li> <li>2. Improve key gateways into the town centre by reducing vacancies through proactive discussions with landowners.</li> <li>3. Consolidation of the existing retail offer, while repositioning / repurposing surplus units.</li> <li>4. Consolidation of car parks and release of part of High Street/Jackson's Lane Car Park for residential uses.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Oversupply of comparison retail.</li> <li>2. Further loss of footfall due to significant vacancies.</li> <li>3. Further loss of footfall / consumers to Rushden Lakes.</li> <li>4. Increased vacancy due to poor perceptions of the town centre.</li> </ol>

Source: AVL, 2024.

## 14 Specific Projects

14.1 Based on the above SWOT analysis we have identified a number of opportunities and interventions which can support and revitalise Wellingborough Town Centre. In order to ensure these interventions can be undertaken in a coherent and integrated manner, it may be necessary for the Council to consider undertaking an overarching town centre masterplan. This could comprise the following key components:

- Car Parking Rationalisation and Development
- Market Square
- Diversification and Repurposing

### Car Parking Rationalisation and Development

14.2 A key strength in Wellingborough is the free car parking throughout the town centre, which is owned and operated by the Council. However, we understand there is currently a car parking study being undertaken to identify where there may be an oversupply of car parking provision in the town centre. At the time of our site visit, the car parks had a substantial number of available spaces, indicating that the car parks are not fully used and may therefore provide an opportunity for development.

14.3 Where possible, car parks should be rationalised. There is a potential development opportunity at the Jacksons Lane Car Park, located to the north west of the town centre. The site is allocated within the Local Plan for mixed use development. The site is in largely residential surroundings, with commercial units located along the A5193. The location of the car park in relation to the town centre is shown in Figure 2.12, with images of the site provided in Figure 2.13.

**Figure 2.12 - Jackson's Lane Car Park Location**



Source: Google MyMaps, 2024.

**Figure 2.13 - Jackson's Lane Car Park Images**



Source: Google Maps, 2024 & Northants Live, 2020.

- 14.4 We have identified that the Jackson's Lane Car Park is owned by the Council and has been the subject of two planning applications as summarised in Table 2.9.

**Table 2.9 - Jackson's Lane Car Park Planning History**

Address	Date of Application	Application No.	Description
Jacksons Lane Car Park, Wellingborough	14/03/2014	WP/14/00175/FUL	Demolition of an existing building at 48 West Street and redevelopment of part of car park on High Street, Wellingborough for 114 dwellings consisting of 85 houses, 29 apartments, roads, car parking, landscaping and boundary treatments. (Changes to layout, number of dwellings, house types and elevations, amended plans and updated documents.). Granted Permission April 2020.
Jacksons Lane Car Park, Wellingborough	01/10/2012	WP/2012/0445	Redevelopment of existing car park on High Street, Wellingborough for houses, apartments, a multi storey car park and retail. Including for the demolition of some redundant structures - Amendments including an increase in number of residential units

			from 128 to 133. Changes to design elevations and layout. Permission Refused.
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Source: North Northamptonshire Council, 2024.

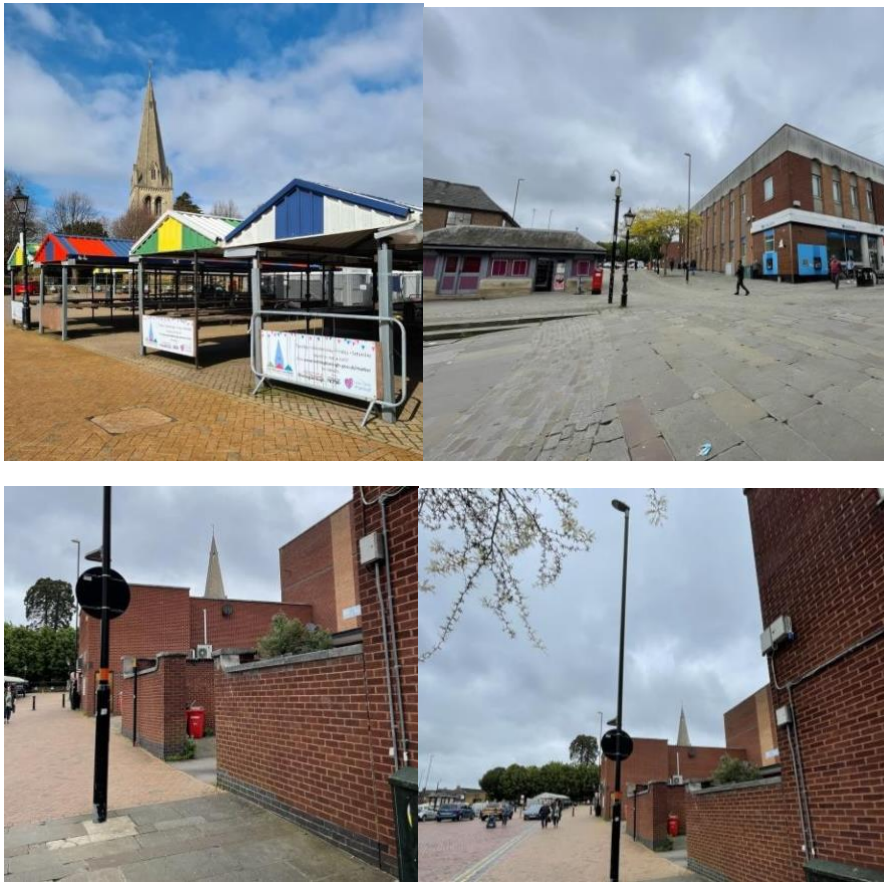
- 14.5 The most recent of the planning applications for the site was granted consent subject to a S106 in April 2020 and is therefore now lapsed. However, the consented scheme comprised the development of c. 114no. residential units and highlights the redevelopment potential for the site. We understand through further analysis that the site was almost sold to developers Keepmoat in 2020, to bring the scheme forward. However, this sale was not agreed by the Borough Council of Wellingborough and was deferred for consideration by NNC.
- 14.6 As such, we would consider this site to remain a key opportunity for residential development and one that should be considered in more detail in any overarching masterplan for the town centre. The redevelopment of this site would generate increased footfall and grow the town centre population. Given the walkability to the town centre, it is likely that residents would utilise the town centre, particularly in respect of the convenience offer, therefore strengthening the town centre economy and commercial property market.
- 14.7 As the Council owns the site and the principle of residential development has been found to be acceptable in planning terms, this opportunity can be driven forward by the Council, subject to the findings of the ongoing car parking study.

## Market Square

- 14.8 Local markets can provide a strong role in developing the economy of a town. Not only do markets provide the opportunity for traditional stall holders to trade, but they also provide start-up businesses with a way to trial their services in an affordable manner, taking limited risk before scaling their business up. In particular, we often see food-based businesses taking space at markets and once tested and proven, they take more permanent space in shop-front units, for example.
- 14.9 We understand the market is no longer operated within Market Square due to limited demand and the fixed stalls have been removed, leaving a flexible space which can be used for pop up markets or events where necessary.
- 14.10 Nonetheless, Market Square in Wellingborough is dated and feels isolated from both the All Hallows Church to the north and the F&B and retail units to the south. As such we consider this to represent one of the key opportunities which should be considered in the town centre masterplan. We provide images of the existing market and the sight lines from south to north in Figure 2.14.



**Figure 2.14 - Existing Market and Sight Lines**



Source: AVL, 2024 & Wellingborough Town Council

- 14.11 At present, the view from the south of Market Square, through to the All Hallows church is largely obstructed, with no clear sight lines through the existing market. It could be considered whether opening up Market Square by potentially removing the red brick building in the above two images would help better integrate the space into its surroundings and improve the connectivity of the town centre with a key heritage asset. We understand this has previously been considered and it was identified that the acquisition of the building would have a significant impact on the viability of any scheme that comes forward. We recommend the Council monitors the situation in respect of this building and considers the potential to open up the space as discussed, if a more cost-effective opportunity arises to acquire the site or potential to secure public sector funding (e.g. brownfield land fund or Levelling Up).
- 14.12 Creating an attractive environment in the town centre for the flexible space is likely to provide the best chance of success and it will be important that the history and vibrancy this historic space can bring to the town is not lost. It should perhaps be explored whether better quality covered areas or greater



permanence of space could help to encourage the future success of Market Square.

- 14.13 Further, In the current market, major restaurant brands are generally not seeking new space, so building strength around independent, niche businesses can help to develop the local economy and a local food offering. Food markets and pop-up space can help to develop this by offering a multi-functional space which can host events and improve community engagement. Such uses can also be held in the evening and around other events as a way of encouraging people to use the town at different times of day. As mentioned above, they can often provide low-cost ways for local people to trial businesses before taking more permanent space.

### Diversification and Repurposing

- 14.14 A key theme of our analysis and agent consultations was the number of vacant units in Wellingborough. It is important that the town centre strategy moving forward considers how best to ensure these units are bought back into use.
- 14.15 As with our analysis of other centres, transactional evidence pointed to a preference for smaller units, with larger units tending to remain vacant for longer periods of time. This is due to a number of factors including economic uncertainty and also, in the case of Wellingborough, the impact of Rushden Lakes.
- 14.16 In order to address the vacancy issues in Wellingborough, it is key that the Council actively engages with operators and landowners to establish the reasons for long-term vacancies and to consider potential alternative ways to ensure these units are brought back into use.
- 14.17 We would recommend that the following alternative options are considered where larger units are unable to be absorbed by the market:
- Refurbishment – In some cases, improving the quality of the units available to let may encourage market participation. This could either be funded by landowners, the Council, public funding or a combination of these.
  - Sub-division – Where units struggle to let due to their size, considering splitting these types of units into smaller units may enable smaller, independent businesses to take space in the centre. This will also assist with diversifying the existing offer and allow Wellingborough to offer uses which provide a point of difference from Rushden Lakes.
  - Council Led Repurposing - As with our analysis of other centres, it is also worth considering ventures where the Council takes on the headlease of a larger unit, subsequently subletting space to small operators either in the

form of workspace type units or a food hall style F&B unit. This de-risks the unit from a market perspective and reduces the barriers to entry for small, independent businesses. There is also potential to secure public funding to secure this type of scheme and we have provided studies on behalf of other Local Authorities where funding streams such as the Shared Prosperity Fund have been secured to support this type of space being brought forward.

- Redevelopment – Our review identified a number of vacant units on the periphery of the town centre, or in secondary and tertiary retail locations. In these instances, it may be necessary to consider whether residential development may help to consolidate the existing commercial offer, as well as increasing footfall.

## 15 Smaller Centre Strategies

- 15.1 The following sections set out the strategies for the smaller centres. We begin by summarising the property markets across the smaller centre. Subsequently, for all of the centres we provide a SWOT analysis and commercial strategy, focussing on key interventions and potential projects which our analysis indicates could help change or improve the direction of the centres.

## 16 Smaller Centres Summary

- 16.1 Overall, our review identified limited data in respect of the smaller centres. This is primarily due to the make-up of these types of centres, whereby they are primarily focussed on servicing local needs.
- 16.2 Due to the scarcity of transactions, it is difficult to pinpoint any trends or themes across the centres. However, our review identified limited vacancy levels, suggesting that the centres mostly have an appropriate level of commercial floorspace to meet local needs.
- 16.3 We note that the health checks undertaken by Nexus identify higher levels of vacancies than our review, which is based on online databases and resources. This is likely due to the local nature of these centres, whereby not all of the commercial units are listed on national databases.
- 16.4 The above suggests that there is no immediate opportunity for additional commercial floorspace across the smaller centres. Nevertheless, there is scope to improve the public realm and frontages across some of the smaller centres in order to maximise footfall and encourage local residents to spend more time in their local centres. This was most evident at Desborough, Irthlingborough and Raunds.
- 16.5 Our review of the residential markets in the smaller centres and surrounding areas highlighted that there has been a high level of residential development. These were generally larger schemes which have come forward or are in the process of coming forward and tend to be located on the periphery of the larger centres or on the edges of existing settlements.
- 16.6 A number of these schemes are within walking distance of the smaller centres. As such, it is possible there will be a resultant increase in footfall across some of the smaller centres due to the increased catchment population. However, we note that the proximity of the schemes to the larger centres means that the smaller centres will be competing for footfall and are therefore not guaranteed to see an increase.

- 16.7 We would advise that this is kept under review, as where there is an increase in footfall, this may generate the need for additional commercial floorspace to be provided in some of the smaller centres, particularly in respect of convenience retail which services local needs.

## 17 Burton Latimer - Town Centre Strategy

- 17.1 Following our analysis of both the commercial and residential markets in Burton Latimer and our site visit, we have identified key strengths and weaknesses in the town centre. We have also identified potential opportunities moving forward. We have used the SWOT analysis to help inform the emerging Town Centre Strategy.
- 17.2 We provide a summary of this in the form of a SWOT analysis. This summary is provided in Table 3.1.

**Table 3.1 - Burton Latimer SWOT Analysis**

Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. High Street serves local needs and has a good convenience retail offer.</li> <li>2. Limited vacancies identified.</li> <li>3. Good F&amp;B offer for the size of town centre, with a number of restaurants, cafés and takeaway style units.</li> <li>4. Central Community Square.</li> <li>5. The town centre is convenient and accessible to local residents on foot and by car.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Proximity to Kettering limits opportunities for comparison retail provision.</li> <li>2. Secondary retail parade features some dated units in need of some refurbishment.</li> <li>3. Busy main road running through the town centre with limited traffic calming measures.</li> <li>4. Community library and Harold Mason Centre appear dated.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Improvements to vehicular movement through town centre, therefore enhancing pedestrian safety.</li> <li>2. Improve public realm to encourage investment.</li> <li>3. Relocate / refurbish the existing community uses.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Loss of footfall to larger centres, particularly Kettering.</li> <li>2. Future residential development in surrounding areas could place strain on existing infrastructure.</li> <li>3. Busy and fast-moving traffic weakening perceptions of the town centre.</li> </ol>

Source: AVL, 2024.

## 18 Specific Projects

18.1 Based on the above SWOT analysis and our market analysis, it is clear that the town centre requires some level of intervention, albeit with no urgent measures needed. As such, we have highlighted two projects / initiatives which could form a key part of the town centre strategy, in particular:

- Traffic Calming Measures
- Relocation / Refurbishment of Community Uses

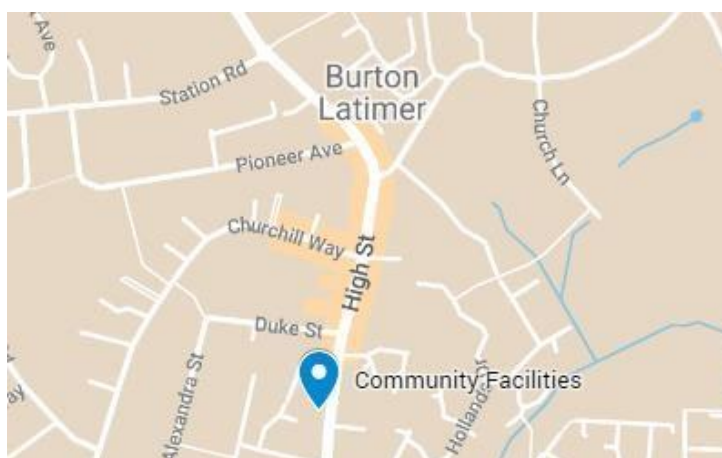
### Traffic Calming Measures

18.2 At present, the main route through Burton Latimer is through the High Street. This route is generally busy with a perception of fast-moving traffic, reducing the safety of pedestrians. In order to reduce the impact of this, it could be useful to introduce traffic mitigation measures, for example, speed bumps, speed tables and additional crossings, as well as possibly widening the pavements in places, to make it more pedestrian friendly.

### Relocation / Refurbishment of Community Uses

18.3 Our analysis and site visits identified that the existing library and adjacent Harold Mason Centre in Burton Latimer appeared dated and are therefore likely to require substantial investment over the plan period. It may therefore be worth considering the feasibility of redeveloping the current sites for these community uses for residential uses and relocating these uses into a more central location within the town centre. Alternatively, if it is identified that the uses should remain on site, refurbishment works will need to be considered. The existing location of the unit is shown in Figure 3.1, with images of the existing units provided in Figure 3.2.

**Figure 3.1 - Community Facilities Existing Location**



Source: Google MyMaps, 2024.

**Figure 3.2 - Existing Community Facilities**



Source: Google Maps, 2024.

- 18.4 Libraries and community facilities can act as a key attraction in the town centre and help to generate footfall, which in turn may encourage investment from the private sector. The current location of these facilities in Burton Latimer means that are not fully benefitting the wider town centre.
- 18.5 Both of the units are owned by Burton Latimer Town Council and as such, engagement with the Town Council will need to take place in respect of the units to establish the feasibility of relocation and development or refurbishment.

## 19 Desborough - Town Centre Strategy

- 19.1 Following our analysis of both the commercial and residential markets in Desborough and our site visit, we have identified key strengths and weaknesses in the town centre. We have used the SWOT analysis to help inform the emerging Town Centre Strategy.
- 19.2 In Desborough's case, our analysis identified limited interventions which are required to contribute to the vitality of the town centre. The centre serves local needs and is one of the smallest of the centres analysed. Our analysis and site visit highlighted the need to improve some of the dated and tired signage / frontages in the core of the high street and at key entry points, to enhance the perception of the centre and enhance the sense of place.
- 19.3 We also note the Local Plan, which sets out opportunities for environmental improvements and developments in Desborough. Most of the environmental policies set out in DES3 focus on public realm improvements and key gateways, in line with our analysis. The sites allocated for development were considered in our market report and are generally focused on mixed use or small scale commercial development.
- 19.4 We provide a summary of our analysis in the form of a SWOT analysis. This summary is provided in Table 3.2.



**Table 3.2 - Desborough SWOT Analysis**

Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. High Street serves local needs and has a good convenience retail offer, with a Co-op situated at either end.</li> <li>2. Limited vacancies identified.</li> <li>3. Good F&amp;B offer for the size of town, with evidence of restaurants, cafés, takeaway style units and a pub.</li> <li>4. Town centre is convenient and accessible to local residents on foot and by car.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Busy road running through the town centre with limited traffic calming measures. However, this appeared less of an issue than in Burton Latimer.</li> <li>2. Some evidence of dated signage and frontages to some units.</li> <li>3. Retail and services are concentrated at either end of Station Road with shops scattered with housing along the high street.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Improve signage / frontages where dated.</li> <li>2. Improve public realm to encourage investment.</li> <li>3. Enhancement of the gateways into the town centre.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Loss of footfall to other larger centres and Rushden Lakes.</li> <li>2. Busy high street traffic weakening perceptions of the town centre.</li> </ol>

Source: AVL, 2024.

## 20 Higham Ferrers - Town Centre Strategy

- 20.1 Following our analysis of both the commercial and residential markets in Higham Ferrers and our site visit, we have identified key strengths and weaknesses in the town centre. We have used the SWOT analysis to help inform the emerging Town Centre Strategy.
- 20.2 As with our analysis of Desborough, the town centre is small and generally serves local needs. Our search identified limited intervention which is required to maintain the health of this town centre. Generally, the units along the high street are in good condition, with few instances of units which require refurbishment.
- 20.3 The town centre also benefits from a number of heritage assets located throughout, which are well connected and contribute to a pleasant street scene.
- 20.4 We provide a summary of our analysis in the form of a SWOT analysis. This summary is provided in Table 3.3.

**Table 3.3 - Higham Ferrers SWOT Analysis**

Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. High Street serves local needs and has a good convenience retail and service offer.</li> <li>2. Some evidence of independent retailers taking space in the town centre.</li> <li>3. Heritage assets located throughout the town centre.</li> <li>4. Good selection of F&amp;B throughout the town centre, including café's, pubs and restaurants.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Parking in the town centre is limited.</li> <li>2. Some of the pathways along the high street are relatively narrow which restricts pedestrian movement, particularly when the Starship Robots were active.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Improvements to car parking and pedestrian movement through the town centre.</li> <li>2. Widen some of the existing footpaths.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Loss of footfall to other larger centres and Rushden Lakes.</li> </ul>

Source: AVL, 2024.

## 21 Irthlingborough - Town Centre Strategy

- 21.1 Following our analysis of both the commercial and residential markets in Irthlingborough and our site visit, we have identified key strengths and weaknesses in the town centre for Irthlingborough. We have also identified potential opportunities moving forward. We have used the SWOT analysis to help inform the emerging Town Centre Strategy.
- 21.2 We provide a summary of this in the form of a SWOT analysis. This summary is provided in Table 3.4.

**Table 3.4 - Irthlingborough SWOT Analysis**

Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
<p>1. High Street serves local needs and has a reasonable convenience retail offer.</p> <p>2. Some evidence of independent retailers taking space in the town centre.</p> <p>3. Some heritage assets are within the town centre and periphery.</p>	<p>1. High vacancy levels.</p> <p>2. A number of large, central vacant units.</p> <p>3. Lower-quality existing retail units.</p> <p>4. No real evening economy. The majority of existing F&amp;B provisions are takeaway units or cafes.</p> <p>5. Limited public realm offering.</p>	<p>1. Improve public realm and frontages to encourage investment.</p> <p>2. Potential for infill development and repurposing of vacant units.</p>	<p>1. Additional vacancies may further weaken perceptions of the town centre.</p> <p>2. Loss of footfall to other larger centres and Rushden Lakes.</p>

Source: AVL, 2024.

## 22 Specific Projects

22.1 Based on the above SWOT analysis we have identified a number of projects / initiatives which should form a key part of the town centre strategy. We have identified two key opportunities to develop and enhance perceptions of the town centre, as follows:

- Public Realm / Frontages
- 15 High Street

### Public Realm / Frontages

22.2 Overall, our analysis and site visits established that Irthlingborough suffers from a number of vacancies in the town centre, including multiple larger units. One of the potential improvements we identified was to better connect the town centre through improved public realm. Public realm improvements are considered a type of 'softer' intervention, which focuses on improving visitor experience and perceptions of the centre.

22.3 At present, the public realm is underutilised throughout the town centre, particularly at the western end of the High Street where a number of vacant units are situated. If the public realm is improved and made more integrated with the commercial units, this could add to the sense of place and better connect the town centre.

22.4 Improvements to public realm also have benefits beyond the obvious aesthetic enhancement, however. They can help to attract investment, with existing shops choosing to update their buildings on the back of changes to their surroundings. Also, this type of improvement often also attracts new businesses or occupiers into the town centre.

22.5 In line with the above, a number of the units in this area appear dated and tired, with old or non-existent signage and poor frontages. If public realm works are undertaken in this area of the town centre, this may help encourage investment from landowners and prompt them to consider improving the frontages and signage of their units.

### 15 High Street

22.6 Following on from the point above, one of the larger vacant units identified on the High Street (no. 15), appears to offer a good opportunity for residential development. The unit is substantial and currently vacant, with a poor-quality frontage and dated looking structure. In addition to the unit, there is car parking provided at the rear.

22.7 An external image of the unit is provided in Figure 3.3.

**Figure 3.3 - 15, High Street Image**



Source: Google Maps, 2024.

- 22.8 We have undertaken a review of the planning history of the site and identified that planning permission was granted in January 2023 for the development of c. 16no. residential units. In addition to this, the unit opposite (36 - 42 High Street) has also been given residential planning consent for 4no. flatted units.
- 22.9 As these sites have secured planning permission it is possible the market will deliver these sites without the need for public sector intervention. However, we would advise the Council to keep the progress of these sites under review and consider the possibility of engaging with the landowners to discuss potential public realm improvements to the area, which could potentially be funded in part by S106 contributions.
- 22.10 If discussions are productive, it is possible the Council and the private sector can work together to reinvigorate an area of the town centre which currently feels forgotten and detached from the more vibrant and well let area to the east.

## 23 Oundle - Town Centre Strategy

- 23.1 Following our analysis of both the commercial and residential markets in Oundle and our site visit, we have identified key strengths and weaknesses in the town centre. We have used the SWOT analysis to help inform the emerging Town Centre Strategy.
- 23.2 As with our analysis of some of the other smaller centres, the town centre is small and generally serves local needs. Our search identified limited intervention which is required to maintain the health of this town centre. Generally, the units along the high street are in good condition, with few instances of units which require any refurbishment.
- 23.3 The town centre also benefits from a number of heritage assets located throughout, which give a sense of place and cohesion as you walk / drive through the centre.
- 23.4 We provide a summary of this in the form of a SWOT analysis. This summary is provided in Table 3.5.



**Table 3.5 - Oundle SWOT Analysis**

Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. High Street serves local needs and has a good convenience retail and service offer.</li> <li>2. Some evidence of independent retailers taking space in the town centre.</li> <li>3. Heritage assets located throughout the town centre.</li> <li>4. Good selection of F&amp;B throughout the town centre, including café's, pubs and restaurants.</li> <li>5. Small, busy market in the town centre.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Narrow main road through the town centre which could result in traffic build up.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Capitalise on visitor economy.</li> <li>2. Build on the existing evening / restaurant provision to enhance the evening economy.</li> <li>3. Target niche / independent retailers to offer a diverse range of uses in the town centre.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Loss of footfall to other larger centres, including Peterborough.</li> </ol>

Source: AVL, 2024.

## 24 Raunds - Town Centre Strategy

- 24.1 Following our analysis of both the commercial and residential markets in Raunds and our site visit, we have identified key strengths and weaknesses in the town centre. We have also identified potential opportunities moving forward. We have used the SWOT analysis to help inform the emerging Town Centre Strategy.
- 24.2 We provide a summary of this in the form of a SWOT analysis. This summary is provided in Table 3.6.

**Table 3.6 - Raunds SWOT Analysis**

Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
<div><div>1.</div><div>High Street serves local needs and has a good convenience retail and service offer.</div></div> <div><div>2.</div><div>Some evidence of independent retailers taking space in the town centre.</div></div> <div><div>3.</div><div>Reasonable F&amp;B offer throughout the town centre, including cafés, restaurants and pubs.</div></div> <div><div>4.</div><div>Limited vacancies.</div></div>	<div><div>1.</div><div>Some of the public realm in the town centre could benefit from improvement.</div></div> <div><div>2.</div><div>Long High Street with no obvious central focal point.</div></div> <div><div>3.</div><div>Busy, yet narrow roads through the town centre.</div></div> <div><div>4.</div><div>Limited evening economy.</div></div>	<div><div>1.</div><div>Improvements to the existing public realm in the centre of High Street.</div></div>	<div><div>1.</div><div>Loss of footfall to other larger centres and Rushden Lakes.</div></div>

Source: AVL, 2024.

## Public Realm Improvements

- 24.3 Overall, our analysis and site visits established that Raunds is largely functioning well as a local centre. However, one of the potential improvements we identified was to better connect the town centre through improved public realm. Public realm improvements are considered a type of ‘softer’ intervention, which focuses on improving visitor experience and perceptions of the centre.
- 24.4 As such, we have identified the central area of the High Street, where some existing, but dated public realm is already in situ, as shown in Figure 3.4.

**Figure 3.4 - Raunds Public Realm Location**



Source: Google Maps, 2024.

- 24.5 At present, the public realm is underutilised, with cars parked on it, and adds little to the street scene at a focal point of the town centre. If the public realm is improved this could add to the sense of place and better connect the town centre.
- 24.6 Improvements to public realm also have benefits beyond the obvious aesthetic enhancement, however. They can help to attract investment, with existing shops choosing to update their buildings on the back of changes to their surroundings. Also, this type of improvement often attracts new businesses or occupiers into the town centre.

## 25 Rothwell - Town Centre Strategy

- 25.1 Following our analysis of both the commercial and residential markets in Rothwell and our site visit, we have identified key strengths and weaknesses in the town centre. We have used the SWOT analysis to help inform the emerging Town Centre Strategy.
- 25.2 As with our analysis of some of the other smaller centres, the town centre is small and generally serves local needs. Our search identified limited intervention which is required to maintain the health of this town centre. Generally, the units along the high street are in good condition, with few instances of units which require any refurbishment.
- 25.3 The town centre also benefits from a number of heritage assets located throughout, which are well connected and add to the sense of place within the centre.
- 25.4 We provide a summary of our investigation in the form of a SWOT analysis. This summary is provided in Table 3.7.

**Table 3.7 - Rothwell SWOT Analysis**

Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. High Street serves local needs and has a good convenience retail and service offer.</li> <li>2. Some evidence of independent retailers taking space in the town centre.</li> <li>3. Heritage assets located throughout the town centre.</li> <li>4. Good selection of F&amp;B throughout the town centre, including café's, pubs and restaurants.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Parking in the town centre is difficult during busy times.</li> <li>2. Some of the pathways along the high street are relatively narrow which restricts pedestrian movement.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Improvements to car parking and pedestrian movement through the town centre.</li> <li>2. Build on the existing evening / restaurant provision to enhance the evening economy.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Loss of footfall to other larger centres and Rushden Lakes.</li> </ol>

Source: AVL, 2024.

## 26 Thrapston - Town Centre Strategy

- 26.1 Following our analysis of both the commercial and residential markets in Thrapston and our site visit, we have identified key strengths and weaknesses in the town centre. We have also identified potential opportunities moving forward. We have used the SWOT analysis to help inform the emerging Town Centre Strategy.
- 26.2 We provide a summary of this in the form of a SWOT analysis. This summary is provided in Table 3.8.

**Table 3.8 - Thrapston SWOT Analysis**

Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. High Street serves local needs and has a good convenience retail and service offer.</li> <li>2. Some evidence of independent retailers taking space in the town centre.</li> <li>3. Good selection of F&amp;B throughout the town centre, including café's, restaurants and pubs.</li> <li>4. Limited vacancies.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Some of the public realm in the town centre could benefit from improvement.</li> <li>2. Long High Street with no obvious central focal point.</li> <li>3. Busy roads through the town centre.</li> <li>4. Parking in the town centre is limited.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Improvements to public realm outside high street units (no. 19 – 25).</li> <li>2. Minor alterations to the main road through the centre and potential traffic calming measures to enhance pedestrian experience.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Loss of footfall to other larger centres and Rushden Lakes.</li> </ul>

Source: AVL, 2023.



## Public Realm Improvements

- 26.3 Overall, our analysis and site visits established that Thrapston is largely functioning well as a local centre. However, one of the potential improvements we identified was to better connect the town centre through improved public realm. Public realm improvements are considered a type of ‘softer’ intervention, which focuses on improving visitor experience and perceptions of the centre.
- 26.4 As such, we identified the row of commercial units from no.19 – 25 on the High Street as a potential opportunity area, as shown in Figure 3.5.

**Figure 3.5 - Thrapston Public Realm Location**



Source: Google Maps, 2024.

- 26.5 At present, the space outside these commercial units is underutilised and adds little to the street scene at a focal point of the town centre. If the public realm is improved and made more integrated with the commercial units, this could add to the sense of place and better connect the town centre.
- 26.6 Improvements to public realm also have benefits beyond the obvious aesthetic enhancement, however. They can help to attract investment, with existing shops choosing to update their buildings on the back of changes to their surroundings. Also, this type of improvement often attracts new businesses or occupiers into the town centre.
- 26.7 The provision of pleasant outdoor space and sufficient space for cafés, bars and restaurants to spill out onto the street can be attractive for businesses considering investing in a new location. Also, once these facilities are open and trading, the bustling use of cafes and outside space creates a perception of vibrancy and vitality in a town. In turn, this can help attract further investment.

## 27 Summary

- 27.1 Trading conditions have been difficult over the last few years due to the aftermath of the pandemic and subsequent economic shocks. The town centres across North Northamptonshire have begun to undergo structural changes as a result, due to market shifts in terms of what space is popular and which types of occupiers are taking space. Our analysis identified high vacancy rates in several of the larger centres, particularly Kettering, Wellingborough and Rushden. Property market activity within the centres was generally subdued over the past 3 years, with both letting and sales data generally behind levels seen before the pandemic and the opening of Rushden Lakes.
- 27.2 Discussions with agents have helped to inform our understanding of occupier requirements and it is clear that attracting branded occupiers / national multiples will continue to be challenging in the majority of the centres. As such, a number of the strategies recommended focus on the creative repurposing and repositioning of vacant units to try and bring them back into use.
- 27.3 Rushden Lakes has had a profound effect on the larger centres in North Northamptonshire, particularly in respect of comparison retail. Rushden Lakes is dominated by larger national multiples and in line with this, we noted a decline in the presence of these retailers in other larger centres. In addition to this, there are also a number of leisure / F&B uses present at Rushden Lakes and our review identified very low vacancy levels.
- 27.4 The exception to this trend was Corby, which is located the furthest from Rushden Lakes. It was noted by agents that Corby had lost fewer national multiples to Rushden Lakes and had less of an impact on footfall compared to the other larger centres.
- 27.5 As such, our analysis indicates that rather than attempting to compete with Rushden Lakes, it is key that the other larger centres diversify their offer. An increased provision of independent occupiers would enable the other centres to provide a unique selling point and encourage a more diverse range of consumers, increasing footfall.
- 27.6 A key way in which the above can be achieved is through the repositioning / repurposing of large existing vacant units. One of the key strands of the strategies recommended for the majority of the larger centres is to consider how to bring these units back into use and enable them to be re-let. Our transactional data and consultations highlighted an increased preference for smaller units from occupiers. As such, we recommend the Council consider the opportunity to sub-divide / repurpose larger vacant units to give them the best chance of being absorbed by the market. Additionally, we have recommended the Council

consider the potential to take on the headlease of larger units and offer small units / pop-up space to independent / small businesses, reducing the barriers to entry into the market. This will consequently help to improve perceptions of the centres and reduce vacancy levels, whilst providing a more diverse town centre commercial offer.

- 27.7 The smaller centres continue to meet the needs of local people, particularly in respect of their convenience offer. On the whole, the smaller centres appear to be healthy from a commercial market perspective, with lower vacancy rates than the larger centres. Where we have identified vacancies in the smaller centres, these have tended to be larger units which are unlikely to be let in their current form and needs repurposing in order to make them attractive to the market.
- 27.8 The town centre strategies that we have put forward focus on a range of projects and interventions, including the potential for development and public realm improvements to help improve the attractiveness of the centres. The aim of the strategies is to build on the existing strengths of the centre (e.g. previous public realm improvements / heritage assets) and suggest improvements that will help to consolidate the offer but also help to attract niche / independent operators (retail and F&B) as well as specialised markets (e.g. crafts, farmers, food). The proposals put forward in the town centre strategies are focused on helping to diversify the town centre offer by creating the conditions that will help to attract investment, including the potential for town centre living.
- 27.9 The Council will have a key role to play in taking forward proposals in its capacity as planning authority and enabler of regeneration. We set below the key roles that the Council will need to consider:
- Planning – the Council will need to determine any planning applications within the town centres and therefore will need to make sure schemes that come forward help to consolidate or improve the town centre offer. Furthermore, as policy makers, the Council will need to take the lead in developing town centre policies that reflect the emerging strategies. In particular, where there is a recommendation to prepare a masterplan for Town Centre sites the Council may need to appoint a multi-disciplinary team to assist in this process.
  - Partnership – given a number of proposals include public realm improvements, the Council is advised to work with landowners and operators to take forward a number of the schemes, particularly where changes are proposed to the existing roads (e.g. Rushden).
  - Funding – given the nature of the proposed projects, it is unlikely that the private sector will take the lead in bringing the schemes forward. For example,

the Council may need to consider developing pipeline projects to take advantage of public sector grant funding opportunities to help facilitate delivery; this may involve the need to utilise capital receipts or other public funding resources to help unlock development. For example, for the proposed relocation of the library/community centre in Burton Latimer.

- Landowner – the Council owns land in a number of the centres (e.g. Kettering and Wellingborough) and may consider these assets as part of Town Centre regeneration plans.



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