

# HEMEL HEMPSTEAD TOWN CENTRE VISION





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# FOREWORD



Cllr Ron Tindall  
Leader, Dacorum Borough Council

The Council is committed to working with its partners and communities across Hemel Hempstead to bring the buzz back to our town centre. We will be working hard to attract investors to the town and we will also consider the Council's role in future development opportunities. Our first step is to set out our vision and then set to work, delivering it in partnership.

The re-imagining of our town centre is absolutely essential to us 'growing a fresh new future' for Hemel Hempstead. Our vision is to transform Hemel Hempstead Town Centre into a thriving and busy leisure and cultural quarter with a mix of uses and activities including workspaces, restaurants, bars, cultural facilities, retail and a range of quality new housing. All taking advantage of the high quality parks, gardens and the River Gade in close proximity. Our town centre should be the central heart of the town, connecting our important destinations, including Maylands Business Park, our existing and future neighbourhood centres, train stations, leisure and shopping areas. Our vision includes promoting ambitious and high quality development establishing the town centre as a desirable place to live, work and visit.



Claire Hamilton  
Chief Executive, Dacorum Borough Council

The Council operates a "One team" approach to the delivery of Council services which ensures that our neighbourhoods are well maintained and that our local community, businesses and future investors are properly supported. We are working hard to reposition Hemel Hempstead. Along with our local business community and our residents, we are enhancing civic pride and raising the level of ambition for the Town Centre. The Council is well and truly open for business and is keen to explore the 'art of the possible' to secure the brightest future for Hemel Hempstead. We have a professional and positive delivery team in place and we welcome enquiries and conversations about investment in the Town Centre. All our partners are aligned to this Town Centre Vision and we are all focussed on working in partnership to realise our ambition and attract investment.

# HEMEL HEMPSTEAD



Bob Lane  
Independent Chair, Hemel Place Board

Launched in November 2021, the Hemel Place Board is a partnership of key stakeholders from the public, private and third sectors, all of which have a strong presence in Hemel Hempstead and a passion to promote and drive change to ensure the future success of the town. Importantly, it has an independent chair.

The Board provides strategic direction for the town's growth and prosperity activities, including, Hemel Garden Communities, a programme delivering 11,000 new homes and 10,000 new jobs by 2050, Herts Innovation Quarter, the town's Enterprise Zone and Hemel Hempstead Business Improvement District. This is about being place-based and widening place leadership. It is very different from the traditional "Council knows best" approach.



# OUR PARTNERS



ELENA LEWENDON

CHIEF EXECUTIVE, THE APSLEY PAPER TRAIL:

'Hemel Hempstead and the wider Gade Valley has a fascinating and exciting past, including industrial heritage sites so significant and unique, they could contend for World Heritage Site Status. This rich history of innovation, invention and discovery has the power to not only generate civic pride, but bring together and inspire different communities, audiences and generations.'



RICHARD WHITEHEAD

CHAIR, HERTFORDSHIRE INNOVATION QUARTER

HERTFORDSHIRE LOCAL ENTERPRISE PARTNERSHIP BOARD MEMBER

'With a vibrant town centre comes fresh new opportunities for businesses, residents and visitors. This vision sets out a bright and bold future for Hemel Hempstead town centre, with flexible workspaces to suit modern day businesses, quality homes and jobs for our people, and strengthened connections to neighbouring places and the rich natural landscape already surrounding the town. We are delighted to support this strategy that will not only put Hemel Hempstead on the map but provide a blueprint for the rejuvenation of other New Towns in Hertfordshire.'



PHILLIPA ZIEBA

PROGRAMME DIRECTOR, HEMEL GARDEN COMMUNITIES

'Hemel Garden Communities was awarded Garden Town status by the Government in 2019. It is a transformative bid, going beyond the proposed 11,000 new homes and 10,000 new jobs, to ensure wider regeneration for the whole of Hemel Hempstead, focussed upon the delivery of mixed and balanced communities. This vision will play a key part in delivering against that agenda, providing a town centre that is fit for the future.'



GILL WORGAN

PRINCIPAL, WEST HERTS COLLEGE

'Students are benefiting from a state-of-the-art campus in the heart of Hemel Hempstead. The College is working with over 1000 businesses across all mainstream employment sectors to ensure the curriculum and training offered is aligned to their business needs. We are proud to provide a broad range of education services to meet the needs, interests and aspirations of the communities we serve.'



HUMPHREY MWANZA,

CHAIR HEMEL HEMPSTEAD BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT DISTRICT

GENERAL MANAGER, THE MARLOWES SHOPPING CENTRE

'It gives me and the entire team, enormous pleasure to be engaged and embedded into Hemel Place work. This helps and demonstrates our community strengths and values which directly benefits our BID members. Our recent ballot confirming another five years of HH BID is testament part to the importance of our ongoing collaboration and stronger partnership.'



COLIN HAIGH

DIRECTOR OF GROWTH AT HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

'Hertfordshire County Council has a corporate aspiration to achieve more sustainable growth. We therefore fully support the Hemel Town Centre Vision to delivery high quality homes, jobs and green spaces. These regeneration plans also present a valuable opportunity to tackle climate change by creating more sustainable transport choices, so that people have the option to walk, cycle and use public transport. We look forward to working with Dacorum Council and other partners to help bring about this bright future.'

# INTRODUCTION

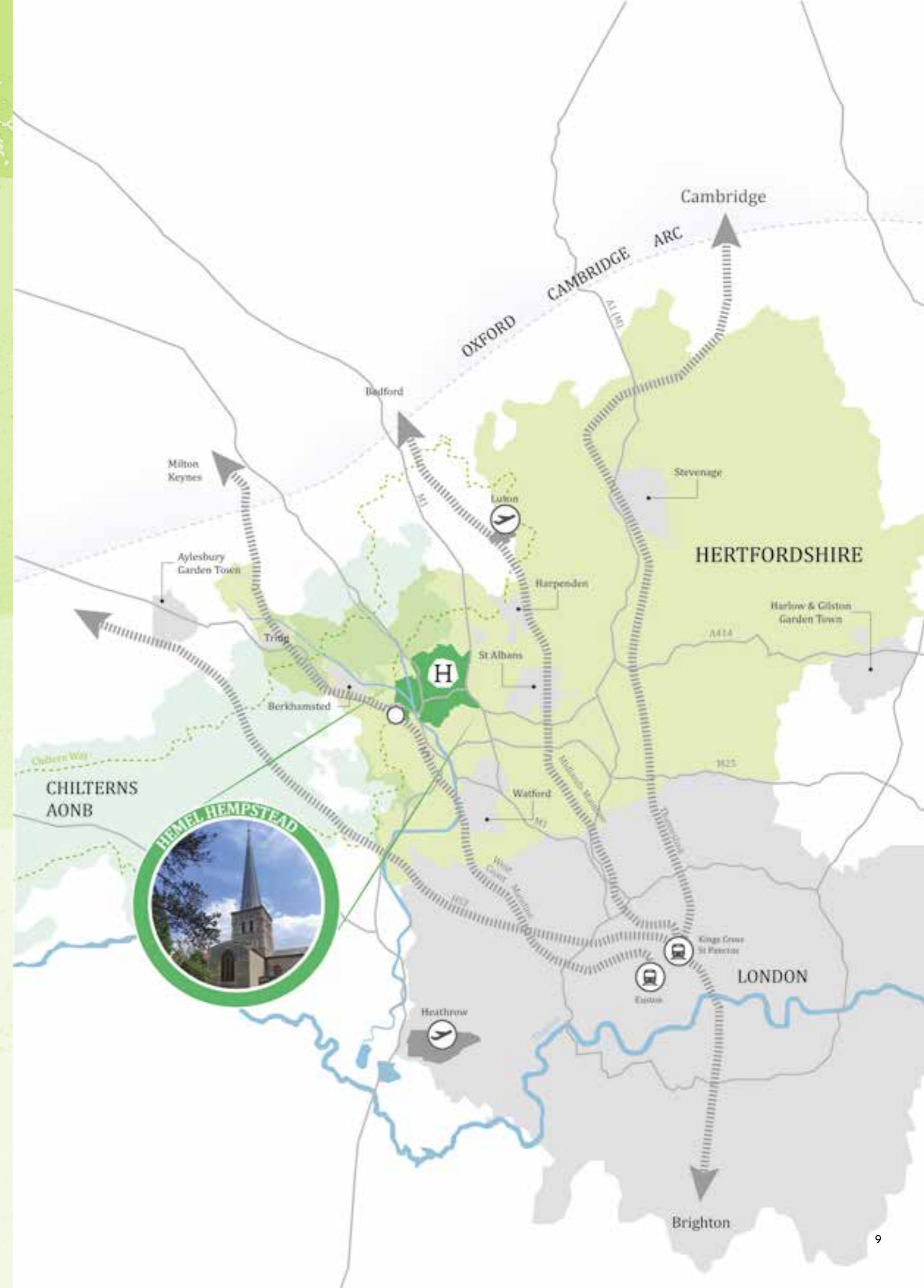
Hemel Hempstead is a town in Hertfordshire, 24 miles from London, close to the M1, M25, Luton and Heathrow airports. The railway station lies approximately 1 mile southwest of the town centre and is situated on the West Coast Main Line providing frequent links to London Euston and Birmingham. This Town Centre Vision sets an ambitious future, revitalising the area to become, once again, the beating heart of Hemel Hempstead.

We recognise that for many reasons the town centre needs intervention and support. The original design of the New Town by Geoffrey Jellicoe had a strong placemaking vision for Hemel Hempstead to be a 'city within a park'. Although some of the New Town principles no longer work for communities today, access to nature, open space, rivers and canals are an increasingly high priority. Hemel Hempstead Town Centre is incredibly lucky to have some beautiful although hidden natural treasures, including the Water Gardens and River Gade in the heart of the town centre, the Gadebridge Park and the Walled Gardens in the north, the Heath Park, the Moors and Grand Union Canal to the south, and Paradise Fields, a nature reserve, to the east. The area surrounding Hemel Hempstead includes nearly 500 acres of parkland managed by Boxmoor Trust on behalf of the citizens of Hemel Hempstead and the town is on the edge of the Chiltern Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

These diverse and beautiful places need to be celebrated as Hemel Hempstead's unique assets, helping to improve pride in the town centre and be curated as accessible and fun spaces to visit, meet, work and live. The combination of parks and rivers mixed with shops, cafes, restaurants, workspaces, cultural and leisure activities will drive the revitalisation of the town centre. Pop up events and uses will help to create a buzz in the area and will be critical to help tackle people not feeling safe and nurture an evening economy.

The Council recognises we have a role to play in attracting investment and showcase development opportunities, starting with setting this strong vision and level of ambition for the town centre. This is not solely a Council document but one that has been drafted with partners and communities across Hemel Hempstead. The Hemel Place Strategy will provide oversight to the whole development of the town, highlighting how important the town centre is. Hence, we have focused on the town centre as an early priority.

<b>26</b>		<b>25</b>	
MINUTES	EUSTON STATION	MINUTES	LUTON AIRPORT



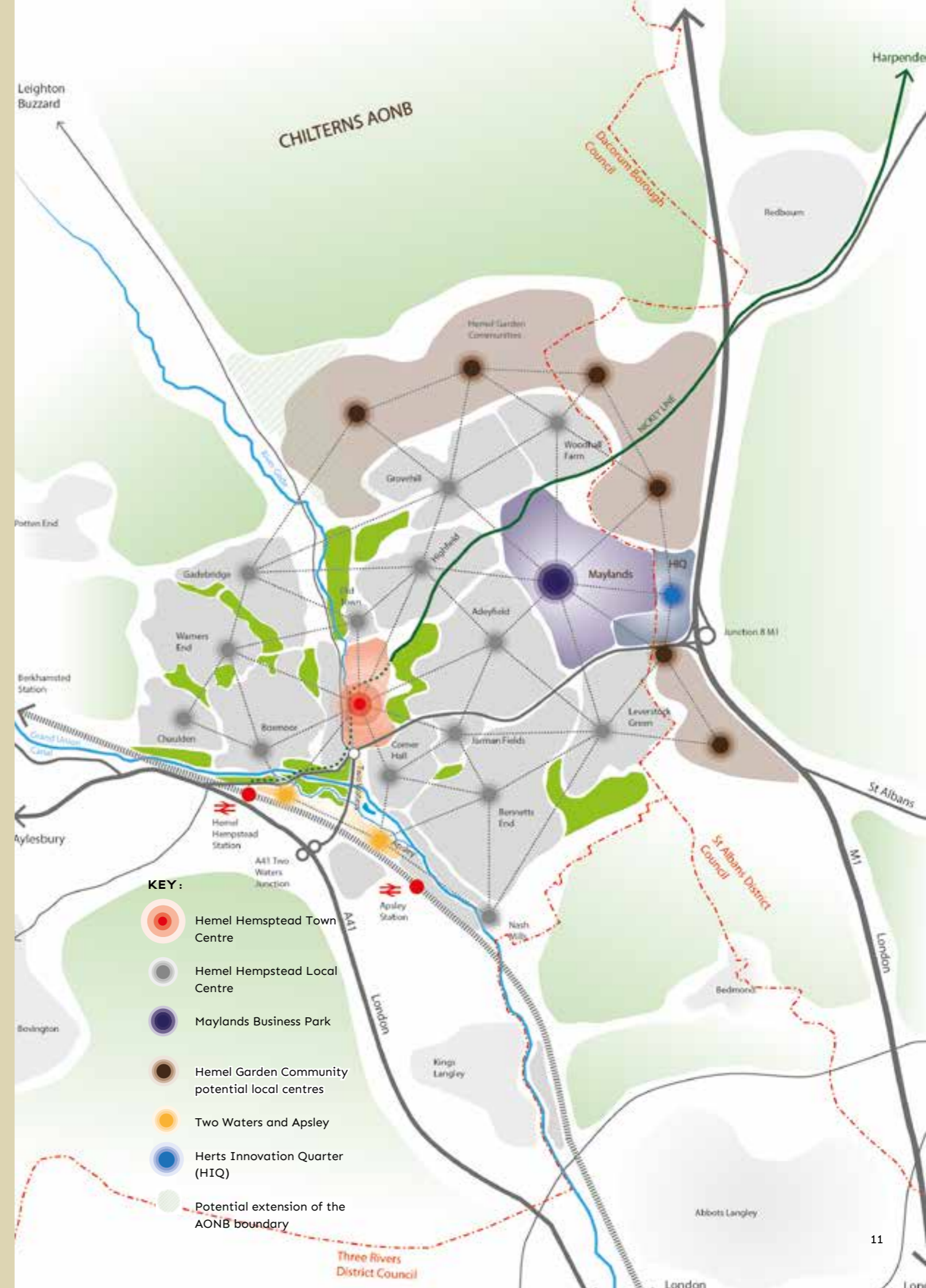
# PART OF A WIDER HEMEL PLACE STRATEGY

Hemel Hempstead is a place of opportunity and growth. Having been one of the first New Towns, it is reinventing itself for the 21st century with a series of vibrant new Garden Communities, bringing approximately 11,000 new homes and 10,000 new jobs by 2050, within new neighbourhoods, including an extension to Herts Innovation Quarter. The Spatial Vision for Hemel Garden Communities was agreed in 2020 following the designation of Hemel Hempstead as a transformational Garden Town. The vision focuses on creation of a greener, more connected town which builds on its existing strengths, and the heritage and culture of Hemel Hempstead.

The Hemel Place Strategy includes three themes, focusing on businesses, connections and wellbeing. These are chapters of the Hemel story and big elements for 'growing a fresh new future' which is the overall aim for Hemel Hempstead.

This Vision will support the three themes; businesses, connections and wellbeing, while making the most of the hidden assets in the town centre. With fewer people coming into town centres to work and shop, these locations need an alternative to attract locals and visitors from further afield and to consolidate the retail offer. The potential repurposing of development areas accompanied by a cultural renaissance aims to position the Town Centre, once again, as the heart of the town and is the centre of a sustainable transport network.

**CONNECTED AND NOT ISOLATED**  
LINKING HEMEL COMMUNITIES  
WITH SHARED RESOURCES  
TO BENEFIT ALL



# GROWING A FRESH NEW FUTURE

Civic pride - The people of Hemel Hempstead continue to show great loyalty to their town centre in spite of the difficulties and changes to the retail market. New residents and businesses which relocated to Hemel Hempstead when it was first built in the 1950's were incredibly proud to be in a New Town. The opportunity to introduce a wider mix of activities into the town centre, including a dynamic residential and commercial community must now be embraced to ensure that the town centre can once again effectively meet the needs of its population and be a unique destination regionally.

Recapturing value and stimulating development - Hemel Hempstead offers good value for money when choosing where to live or locate as a business. Many enjoy being close to nature while benefiting from excellent travel connections. Regionally, Hemel Hempstead is located in an affluent area. Success in retaining and attracting more of this spending power and seeing it spent in the town centre will stimulate investment in the retail and leisure sectors.



# BUSINESSES

## A VIBRANT DESTINATION FOR ENTERPRISE

Hemel Hempstead has always been a prime business location and homes 650 businesses employing over 20,000 people.

Its strategic location has ensured it is a destination of choice for a variety of companies, including global leaders in construction, logistics and technology.

# CONNECTIONS

## WHERE CONNECTIONS MATTER

For Hemel Hempstead, the future lies in making the most of collaborations and connections, both within and outside the town.

# WELLBEING

## ENHANCE YOUR WELLBEING IN HEMEL

Ever since its development as a New Town, leisure and space have been part of the design DNA of Hemel Hempstead and people are still benefitting from these initiatives today.

Hemel Hempstead is also incredibly green, with great parks and gardens such as Gadebridge Park and Jellicoe Water Gardens.

# THE TOWN CENTRE VISION

Our vision is for the town centre to become the beating heart of Hemel at all times, bringing communities together. It will be the place to create new opportunities for all homes, address the climate emergency, celebrate Hemel Hempstead's assets and promote cultural and leisure activities. The current pedestrianised areas and general level layout provides great accessibility. This, combined with access to shops, cafes, restaurants, leisure facilities and nature, offers an attractive and unique place to visit. Our goal is to focus on developing new ideas for how streets and public spaces can contribute towards a successful and inclusive town centre which supports the delivery of high-quality growth. The Town Centre will be the natural choice for people to live, close to buses, trains, cycle and walking routes. It will feel a safe environment, with access to nature and where resident's needs are met close to their doorstep.

A VIBRANT  
ECONOMY  
SUPPORTING  
NATURE AND  
WELLBEING FOR  
ALL







**HIGH-QUALITY,  
AFFORDABLE &  
SUSTAINABLE  
HOMES**

**CIVIC PRIDE  
IN  
HEMEL  
HEMPSTEAD**

**BUSINESS  
OPPORTUNITIES  
IN THE TOWN  
CENTRE**

**CLIMATE  
CHANGE &  
BIODIVERSITY**

**INVESTMENT &  
REGENERATION  
OPPORTUNITIES**

**CULTURAL  
& LEISURE  
OFFER**

**SUSTAINABLE  
TRANSPORT  
SYSTEM**

**VIBRANT,  
ACCESSIBLE  
& SAFE TOWN  
CENTRE**



# 8 AIMS FOR HEMEL HEMPSTEAD TOWN CENTRE

These pages illustrate the eight aims that set out the ambitions for the Hemel Hempstead Town Centre Vision.

The eight aims have been developed based on the opinions gathered during the engagement process and findings from the urban analysis (Appendix 1 and 2). A group of interventions are planned to deliver against each of these aims.



**1 INVESTMENT AND REGENERATION OPPORTUNITIES**

- Showcase the development opportunities in the town centre, promote Hemel Hempstead to the investor market and secure social value outcomes.
- Work positively with the development sector to deliver high-quality buildings and spaces which meet the needs of existing and future communities.
- The Council will review assets in our gift to help support regeneration for our communities and work with partners to get the best outcome of other public sector interventions.

**2 BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES IN THE TOWN CENTRE**

- Develop a strategy to attract businesses and start-ups to the town centre, while supporting and retaining existing businesses.
- Repurpose development sites and buildings to provide business space as well as provide space for leisure and cultural activities.
- Generate social value outcomes, identify skills' development opportunities to support education, skills and training.

**3 HIGH-QUALITY, AFFORDABLE AND SUSTAINABLE HOMES**

- Ensure that developments deliver high-quality and sustainable homes, including ambitious design proposals, making the town centre an attractive place to live and visit.
- Sustainability and mixed and balanced communities should be at the heart of developments.
- Ensure that the space between buildings is well designed to avoid any unattractive and unused land.

**4 SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORT SYSTEM**

- Create an environment that better connects the Town Centre to other areas of Hemel Hempstead (the station, the emerging Hemel Garden Communities, Apsley, Maylands, etc.).
- Support active movement and enable healthy lifestyles and improved wellbeing.
- Improve the public transport network and linking the Town Centre to destinations in the wider area.

**5 CLIMATE CHANGE & BIODIVERSITY**

- Ensure that any interventions and actions address the climate and biodiversity challenges we are facing today and in the future.
- Enhance the biodiversity offer in the town centre to create a healthier environment as well as improve the connection between people and nature.
- Reduce waste and showcase how Dacorum can innovate to generate a circular economy.

**6 CIVIC PRIDE IN HEMEL HEMPSTEAD**

- Make the most of Hemel Hempstead Town Centre's best assets through improved connections and curating space enabling people to fully enjoy and be proud.
- Promote the history of Hemel Hempstead and reconnect the Old Town with the New Town Centre.
- Promote Hemel Hempstead positively at all opportunities and break down any reputation challenges.

**7 VIBRANT, ACCESSIBLE AND SAFE TOWN CENTRE**

- Reinvigorate the town centre and create an evening economy by identifying opportunities for future investments. Provide new residential, community and employment opportunities.
- Develop the town centre so it is accessible to all, including people and communities from a range of diverse backgrounds, fostering community cohesion and celebrating diversity
- Make the Town Centre feel safer using creative changes.

**8 CULTURAL AND LEISURE OFFER**

- Develop Hemel Hempstead's cultural offer through new spaces and activities and connect to neighbouring towns.
- Maximise the market offer in Hemel Hempstead and boost spaces for smaller and independent businesses, generating creative uses of vacant premises.
- Connect the parks, river and canal to the town centre offer, allowing people to spend leisure time close to nature and nurture their health and wellbeing.

# DRIVERS FOR CHANGE

## WHY WE NEED A NEW VISION FOR THE TOWN CENTRE:

### O1

#### LACK OF SUSTAINABLE AND PUBLIC TRANSPORT LINKS

The lack of a town centre station could be seen as a barrier to attracting employment opportunities into the town centre. Sustainable and public transport investments are necessary to better connect the town centre with key destinations, Hemel Hempstead station, Maylands, Apsley, the local centres and the future Hemel Garden Communities.

### O2

#### OVERSUPPLY OF RETAIL AND LACK OF CULTURAL AND LEISURE FACILITIES

Hemel Hempstead town centre presents an oversupply of retail space and has a very weak offering of sports, culture and restaurant facilities, the third weakest out of 109 town centres<sup>2</sup>. Town centres of the future need to become multi-purpose locations, combining retail and hospitality amenities with residential, education, healthcare, cultural, technology, community and more.

### O3

#### DECREASE IN EMPLOYMENT FLOORSPACE

In recent years approximately 40,000 square feet of office space has been lost to Permitted Development, further weakening the town centre's capability to provide employment opportunities and to support retail and business services<sup>1</sup>. There is now an opportunity to capitalise on providing co-working space accommodating smaller businesses and remote working.

### O4

#### REDUCED FOOTFALL

The Future of Towns and Cities post COVID-19 report, published by KPMG in January 2021<sup>2</sup>, confirmed that the pandemic accelerated online shopping and made working from home common practice. It identified Hemel Hempstead as a town particularly impacted by a fall in commuter numbers, with 27% of jobs predicted to continue being done at home post-COVID. This highlights the need for an increased cultural and leisure offering to attract people to the town centre.

### O5

#### POCKETS OF DEPRIVATION AND FEAR OF CRIME

The 2021 census data shows pockets of deprivation in the town centre. Dacorum Strategic Crime Assessment for April 2021 to December 2021 shows that the Ward with the highest level of reported Domestic Abuse in Dacorum is Hemel Hempstead Town Centre<sup>3</sup>. It also has a higher index of acquisitive crime, particularly shoplifting. The absence of night-time activities also contributes to the perception of the town centre as an unsafe place to visit especially when the shops are closed.

### O6

#### LACK OF EVENING ECONOMY

The evening economy has a key role to play in preventing the decline of the town centre and making the area feel safer. Vitality in the town centre can be supported by better planning of evening activities, such as table and chair licenses, hosting and promotion of events, improved lighting and later opening hours. These measures could be encouraged for all types of businesses, especially those in the food, leisure and culture sectors.

### O7

#### DELIVER ON HOUSING DEMAND INCLUDING AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Hemel Hempstead is expected to grow, and the town centre is a good place for residential intensification. The town centre needs to be reconfigured to allow for urban blocks that include residential use as well as spaces for work, and for cultural and community activities, coupled with well-designed street frontages and public realm. With increased density, noise is likely to be a growing issue, therefore new developments should include good acoustic design principles.

### O8

#### CHANGING SOCIAL HABITS AND EVOLVING CONSUMER ECONOMY

Behaviours, habits and expectations have been increasingly orientated towards unique encounters and experiences<sup>4</sup>. 78% of millennials choose to spend money on experiences rather than things<sup>5</sup>. A reduction in ownership also corresponds with concepts of "rightsizing", scaling down, being more mobile and having more flexible and agile work styles and lifestyles. This opens up opportunities for the private rented sector homes, bike hire and car club schemes.

### O9

#### ADAPT TO AND MITIGATE CLIMATE CHANGE

Dacorum Borough Council has declared a climate and ecological emergency and made this one of our six corporate priorities. We have pledged to become net zero as an organisation by 2030, and for our housing stock to become net zero by 2050. Physical and economic interventions in the town centre must be built around reducing waste and moving towards a closed-loop circular economy.

1, APPENDIX 3 - Hemel Hempstead Town Centre Data Analysis, March 2021

2, The future of towns and cities post COVID-19, KPMG, Jan 2021

3, Dacorum Strategic Assessment 2022

4, Millennials; fuelling the experience economy. Harris Poll for Eventbrite, 2014

5, B, Joseph Pine II, James H. Gilmore. Welcome to the experience economy, Harvard Business Review, 1998

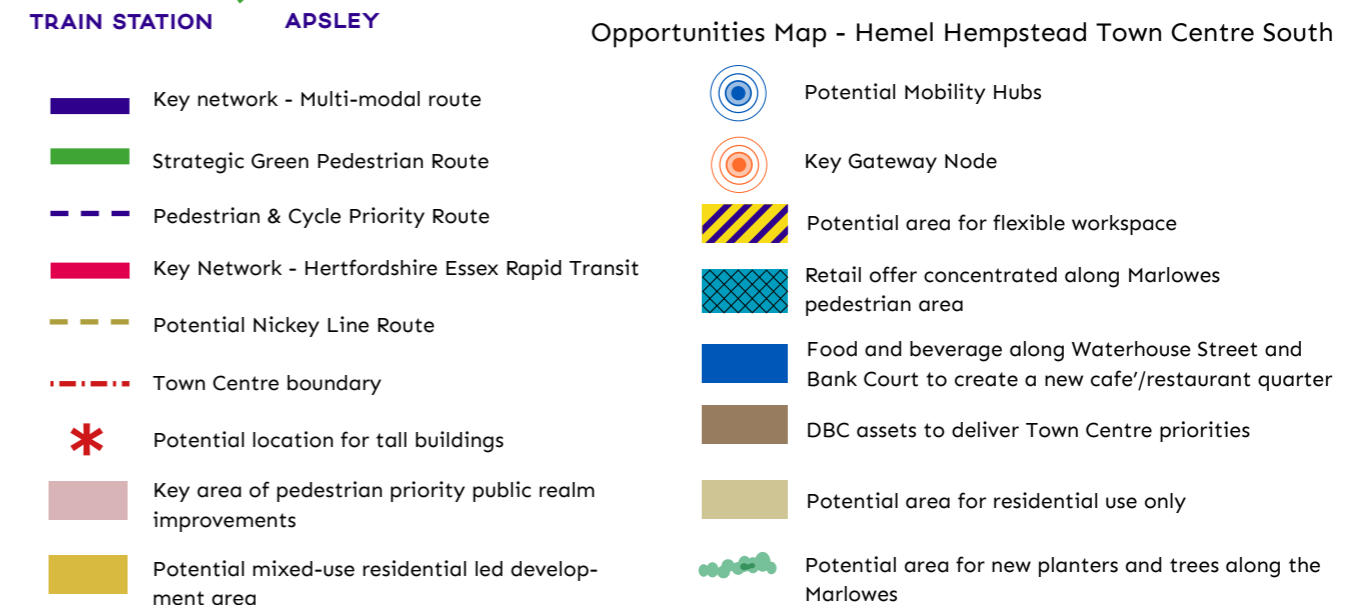
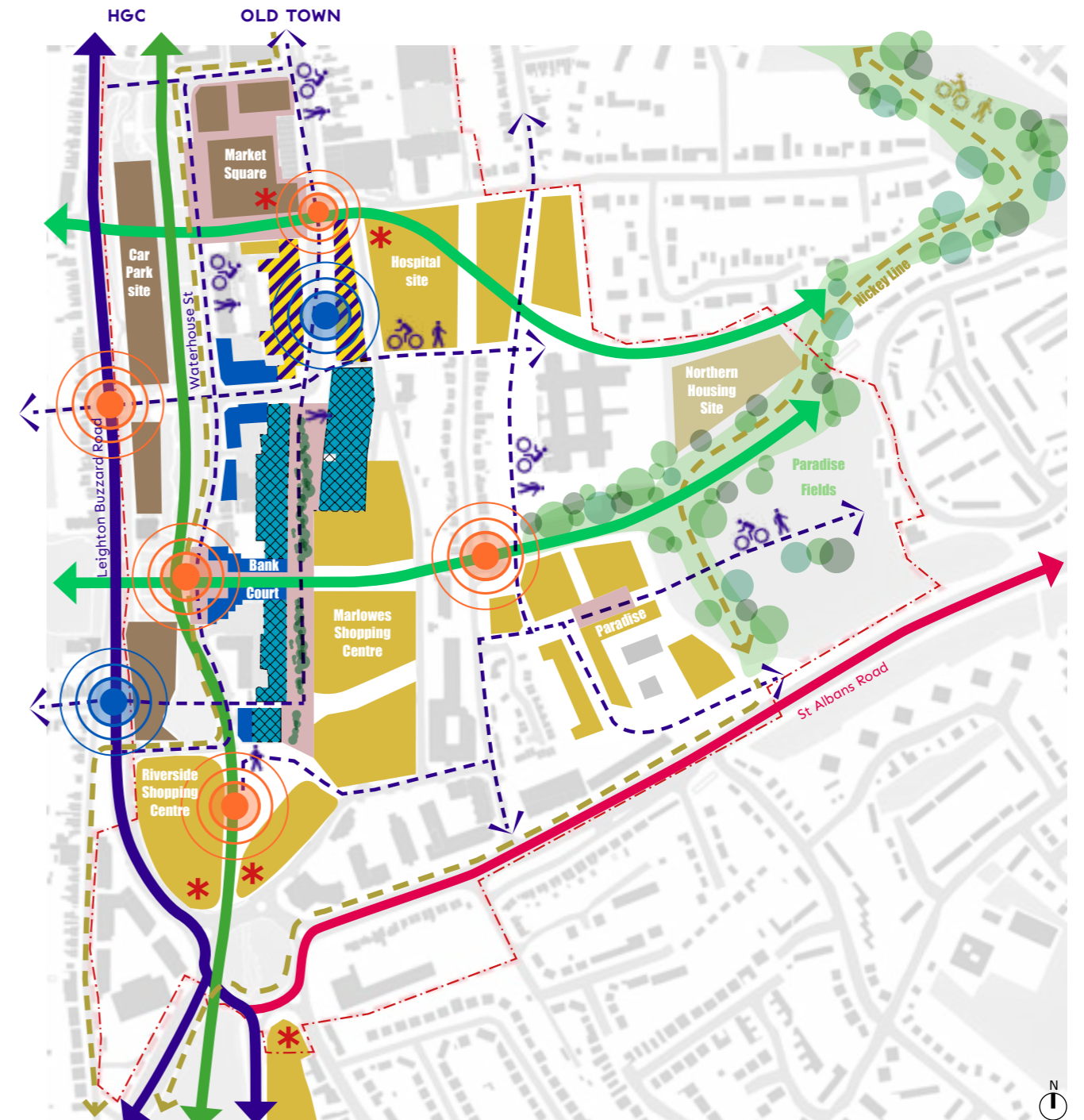
# TOWN CENTRE SOUTH VISION

Bank Court is a high-quality example of New Town architecture, it is situated opposite the strongest asset in the south area, the Jellicoe Water Gardens. The connection from the Jellicoe Water Gardens through Bank Court to the Marlowes shopping parade should be maximised and celebrated as the heart of the Town Centre.

Waterhouse Street and Bank Court should be reimagined to be an attractive destination for communities to enjoy the River Gade and Water Gardens, providing places to sit, eat, relax and play. Curating this space would redefine the Town Centre as a place to spend leisure time and be close to nature. This would enable Hemel Hempstead to compete with neighbouring towns and have a unique offer in the area.

The south area of the town centre includes some strategically important sites, including the Riverside and Marlowes shopping centres, Market Square and the Hospital site. Also important, the Paradise area has a design code to help shape the future change from light industrial to mixed-use area and provide a new entrance to the Town Centre for neighbouring communities.

The plan opposite shows possible future opportunities to deliver a new sustainable passenger network connecting Hemel Hempstead across Hertfordshire to Harlow, known as Hertfordshire Essex Rapid Transit (HERT). The future of Hemel Hempstead includes the town centre being the heart, which connects all areas with sustainable travel. Seamless end-to-end journeys contain no interchanges, a reality which can only truly be achieved through active travel. For all other journeys, Mobility Hubs can make the interchange process as comfortable and productive as possible, providing a convenient and safe space to enjoy whilst changing transport. The Mobility Hubs will be delivered across Hemel Hempstead at three levels: Metro, Local and Micro.

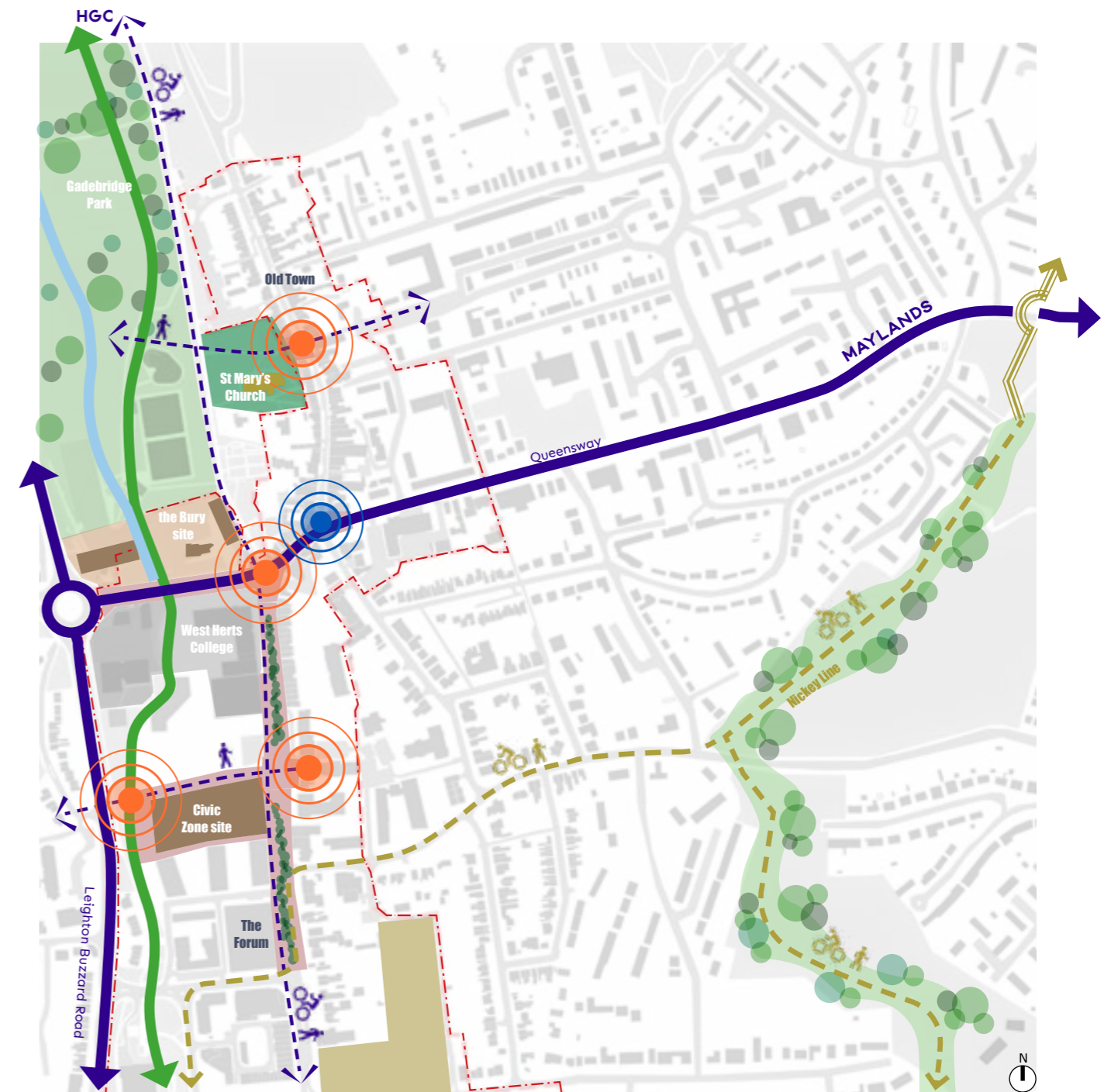


# TOWN CENTRE NORTH VISION

As the strongest assets in the north area, it is key to maximise the Gadebridge Park, the Old Town High Street and the connection between them. The aim is for the Old Town High Street to take advantage of the large footfall in Gadebridge Park. Also, key assets and destinations are The Old Town Hall Theatre and West Herts College. Visitors, students and staff help to support the vibrancy of the town centre.

Furthermore, the Environment Agency's project to realign the River Gade onto its original course (planned in 2023) will allow the river to flow through the middle of the park, enhancing the area. The Council owns The Bury and Civic Zone site, and both should be used to support this Vision. Cycleways are planned to run north-south throughout the town into The Nickey Line, a redundant railway route connected to Harpenden. Feasibility is underway for an electric bike hire scheme across the town, which would help improve connectivity across the town centre, whole of Hemel Hempstead and neighbouring towns. The north-south routes along the River Gade and The Marlowes need to be more attractive for pedestrians and cyclists to encourage connectivity between the Old Town and the New Town, in a space that should be safe, active and interesting.

The Maylands Business Park, in the east area of Hemel Hempstead, is close to the junction 8 of the M1, and its access through the road Queensway could be better improved with our vision of the town centre being well connected with all parts of Hemel. This way, employees visiting Maylands could easily visit the Old Town High Street or New Town for shopping or leisure.



Opportunities Map -Hemel Hempstead Town Centre South

- Key network - Multi-modal route
- Strategic Green Pedestrian Route
- Pedestrian & Cycle Priority Route
- Realignment of the River Gade in Gadebridge Park
- Existing Nickey Line
- Potential Nickey Line Route
- Town Centre boundary
- Potential location for tall buildings
- Key area of pedestrian priority public realm improvements
- Potential Mobility Hub
- Key Gateway Node
- Area for small public realm interventions to improve the connection between Gadebridge Park, St Mary's Church and the Old Town Square
- DBC assets to deliver Town Centre priorities
- Potential redevelopment site subject to reconsideration of existing uses
- Potential area for new planters and trees along the Marlowes

# TOWN CENTRE YESTERDAY

Although Hemel Hempstead is a “New Town”, the area has a past that goes back a long way. The origin of the word Hemel probably came from “Haemele”, the name of this district in the eighth century. Also suggested is that Haemele means the confluence of two rivers, which in this case would be the River Gade and the River Bulbourne.

The first recorded mention of the town is the grant of land at Hamaele by Offa, King of Essex, to the Saxon Bishop of London in AD 705. The Hemel Old Town is part of the story of historic settlement along the Gade Valley, which extends back to at least the Roman period, where there is extensive evidence of settlement. The area also appears to be the location of an important Saxon estate centre with a possible minster church associated with a high status manorial complex at The Bury. The medieval period, from which much of the present form of the Old Town is thought to date, sees planned development along the High Street with a number of long, deep plots retaining their historic boundaries from this period. The early 16th-century granting of a borough charter, together with the right to hold a weekly market and yearly fair, secured the continued development of the town to what is seen today.



St Mary's Church and the High Street, Hemel Hempstead, 1927

After the Second World War, in 1946, the government designated Hemel Hempstead as the site of one of its proposed new towns to house the population displaced by the London Blitz, since slums and bomb sites were being cleared in London.

Architect Geoffrey Jellicoe drew up the initial plans for the New Town. His view of Hemel Hempstead was “not a city in a garden, but a city in a park”. Jellicoe's original 1947 masterplan for Hemel Hempstead New Town was never to be fully implemented, rejected by the government as being too expensive and impractical. However, the structure of Jellicoe's town centre masterplan was largely retained by the Corporation. The relocation of the main shopping area to the Marlowes, the arrangement of a central park flanked by a road running north-south, with residential housing to the west, and shops and commerce to the east, are all key elements of Jellicoe's Masterplan seen in the Town Centre today.

The development of the town centre started in 1952, with a new centre based on Marlowes south of the old town. This was alongside a green area called the Water Gardens, designed by Jellicoe, formed by ponding back the River Gade. By 1962, the redevelopment of the new town was largely complete, though further expansion plans were then put forward. A campus of West Herts College, the library, new police station and the Cinema were all built during the 1960s.



The Marlowes in 1956



The Old Town High Street in 1957



Waterhouse Street in 1960



The new town centre in 1960s

# TOWN CENTRE TODAY

Dacorum Borough Council recognises its crucial role in supporting the town centre and adapting to changing conditions. Hemel Hempstead New Town is over 75 years old, and some areas need renewing. The Council started this renewal process with the Hemel Evolution Programme from 2010 onwards, investing £30 million into the town centre. The project delivered The Forum, a new community hub opened in January 2017 to accommodate the Council offices, voluntary sector and library.

The programme delivered high-quality public realm improvements at Bank Court and along the Old Town High Street with a new bus interchange and play on the way facilities in The Marlowes pedestrianised shopping area. This investment helped to reduce vacancy levels and secure an investment by Capital and Regional plc to acquire The Marlowes Shopping Centre.

The Water Gardens, a Grade II registered landscape, was restored in 2017 to its former glory, winning national awards. The renovation was funded by a £2.5 million Heritage Lottery Grant, match-funded by £1 million from the Council. OurTown Centre Vision looks to build on the previous interventions, which are a great foundation and continue to look forward, attracting investment where necessary to transform the town centre, once again, in the heart of the town and our communities.

There is a marked difference between the Old Town in the north and the New Town centre to the south. The Old Town contains a concentration of listed buildings and is protected as a key part of the Old Town Conservation Area. The area is popular for filming, being featured in TV and Cinema productions, *Afterlife*, *Masters of the Air*, *Granchester*, *Endeavour* and *This is Christmas*. It is a two-minute walk from Gadebridge Park, although the connection is not clearly visible.

In contrast, the fabric of the New Town centre needs to adapt to more recent trends, and is failing to reach its economic potential. There is a notable lack of community pride in the area, with a low evening economy and leisure offer, which fails to highlight and make the most of its natural and cultural assets. The rivers and parks in our Town Centre, although beautifully restored, are not celebrated or connected. They need to be curated so people can sit, meet and enjoy the views, relaxing and be close to nature. Regeneration and upgrading of key sites, together with restoration of heritage assets, is required to help secure the town centre's long-term prosperity, and to create an appealing, attractive and sustainable location with an outstanding environment.



Currently, people visiting the Marlowes shopping area do not always know that the Water Gardens are there, the views are limited and connecting routes are not attractive. Looking forward, Hemel Hempstead has a unique opportunity to capitalise on the River Gade and curate the space surrounding the pond to be a leisure attraction, providing access to green spaces and nature in the heart of the town centre.

The Riverside Shopping Centre acts as a 'book end' in the south area of the town centre sitting approximately 1 mile to the other end of the Old Town High Street. There is an opportunity to activate and curate the walking routes next to the River Gade, and along the Marlowes and Queensway with art and heritage trails, encouraging more people to visit both ends of the town centre, increasing footfall, dwell time and improving health and wellbeing.

# NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

## RIVERS, CANALS & GREEN SPACES

Jellicoe Water Gardens



River Gade



Waterhouse Street



Riverside Shopping Centre



Paradise Fields



Walled Garden



Gadebridge Park



The Skatepark



The Nickey Line



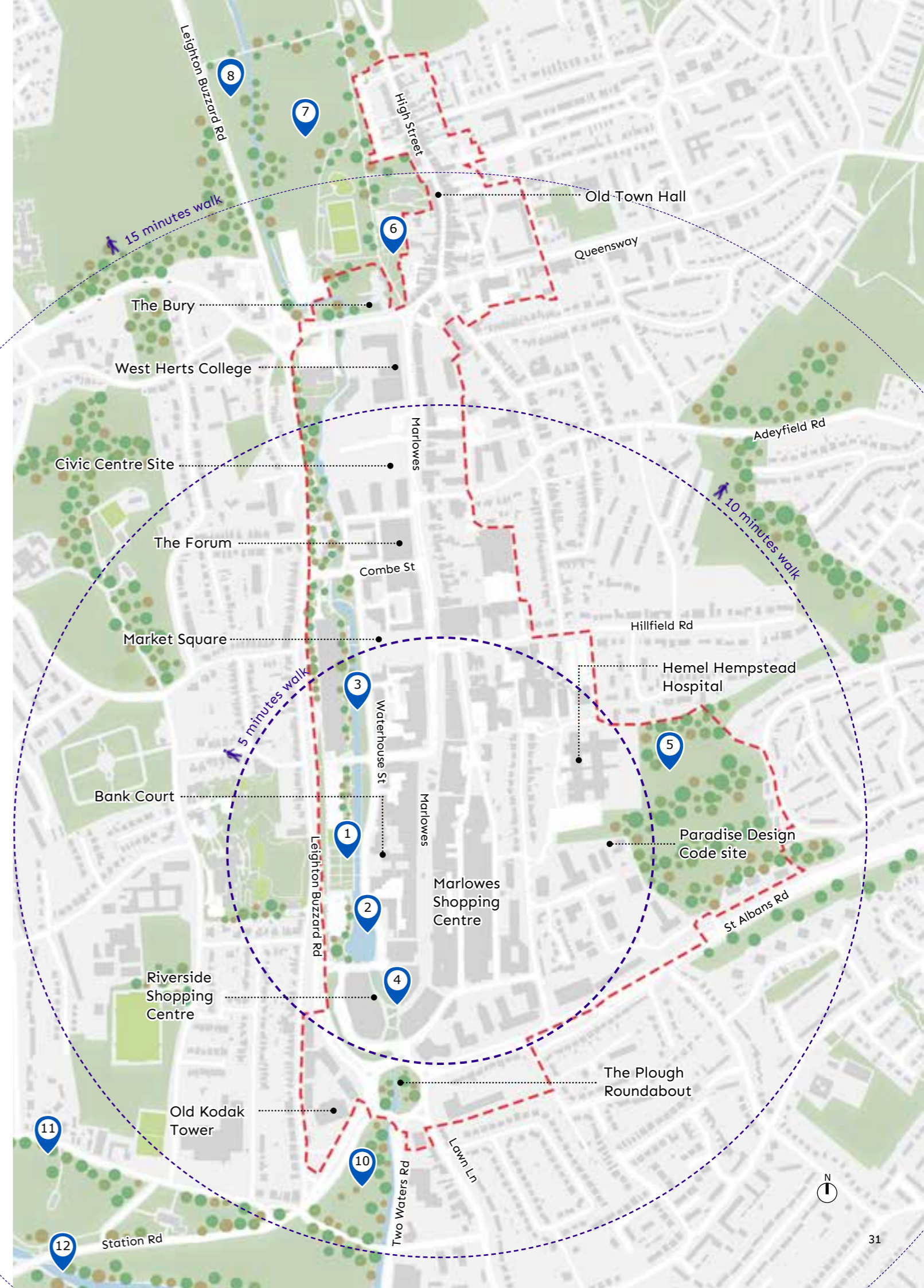
Heath Park



Boxmoor



The Grand Union Canal





# 5 PRIORITIES FOR TOWN CENTRE

5 PRIORITIES TO ACHIEVE THE 8 AIMS FOR THE TOWN CENTRE



**1. BANK COURT, HEART OF THE TOWN CENTRE**



**2. IMPROVE EAST-WEST CONNECTIONS**



**3. REIMAGINE WATERHOUSE STREET**



**4. RECONNECT THE OLD AND THE NEW TOWNS**



**5. HEMEL IMAGINARIUM**



# 1. BANK COURT, HEART OF THE TOWN CENTRE

Bank Court has the potential to be the defined heart of the town. A former financial centre, it remains the geographic centre of the New Town and displays the very best of Hemel Hempstead's New Town architecture. Utilising the sheltered outdoor space close to attractive buildings and the Water Gardens, Bank Court could be Hemel's new Restaurant and Café Quarter, offering one of the best views in the Town Centre.

The Town Centre does not have an active evening economy at present with only a handful of restaurants and gyms opened after 5pm. Generally, the footfall dramatically declines after this time and the community does not feel safe when the area is very quiet. Working with landowners to deliver improvements on lighting, seating and planting areas could deliver an attractive restaurant and cafe quarter.

LONDON, United Kingdom - St Christopher's Place



CASE STUDY



# A 'NEW' HEART TO THE TOWN CENTRE



dedicated cycle route



new western entrance to town centre



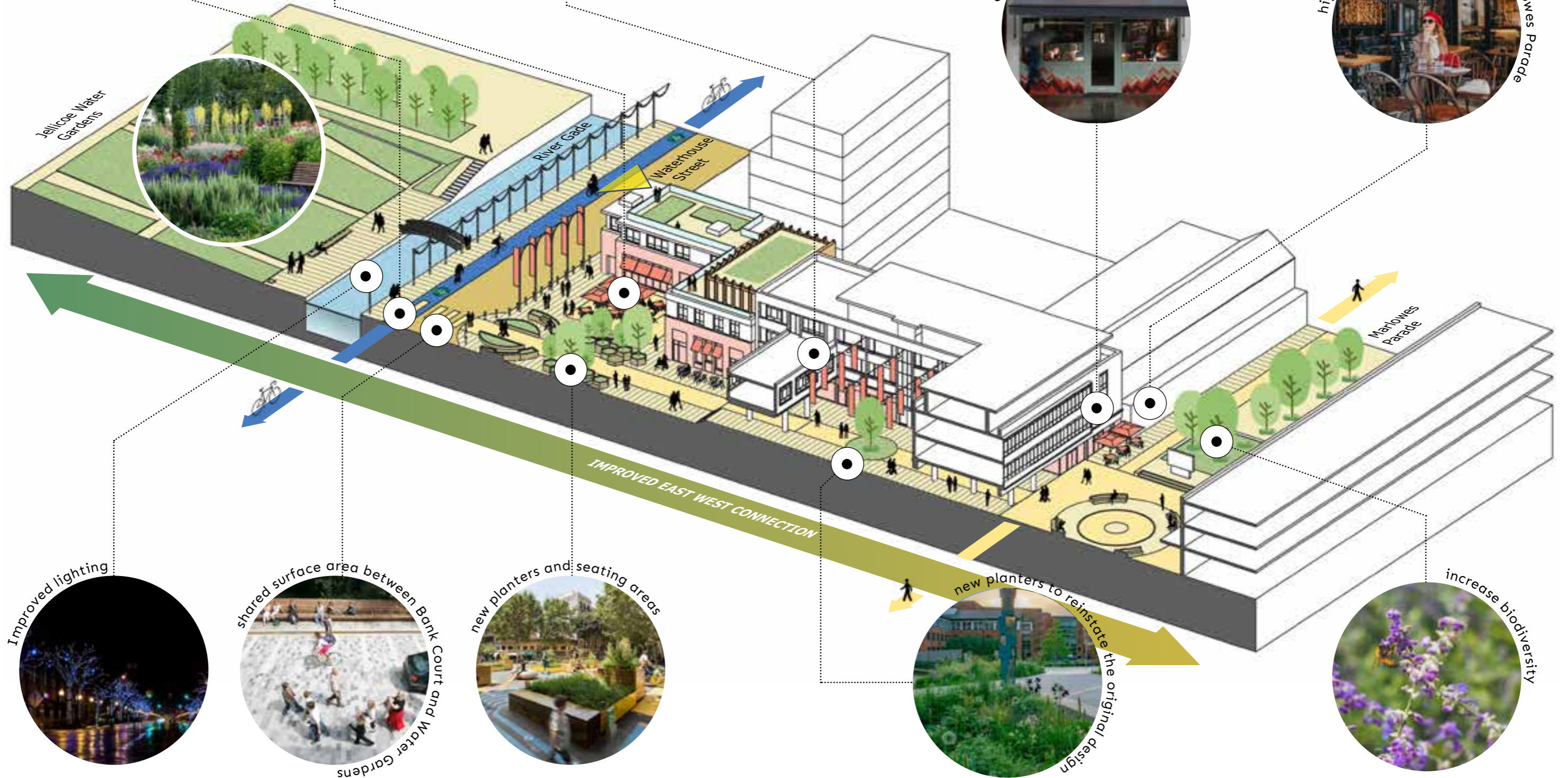
improve east-west connection using art



consistent shopfront design



high quality seating areas in the Marlowes Parade



Improved lighting



shared surface area between Bank Court and Water Gardens



new planters and seating areas



new planters to reinstate the original design



increase biodiversity

# 2. IMPROVE EAST-WEST CONNECTIONS

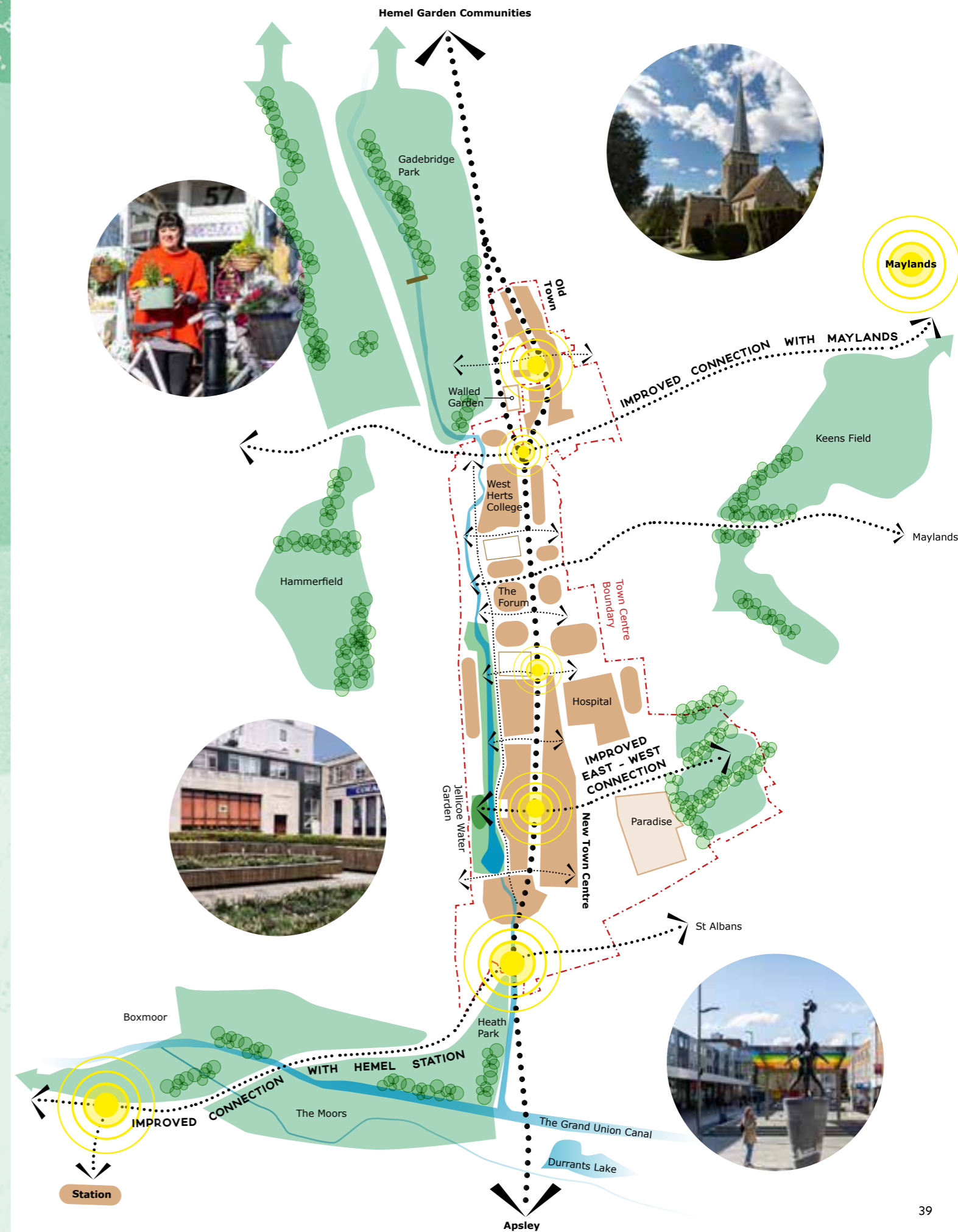
The parks, river and canal are the real strengths of the Hemel Hempstead Town Centre, but many visitors don't know that these assets exist. The Jellicoe Water Gardens, for example, is hidden from the main shopping parade, while the same happens to Gadebridge Park in relation to the Old Town High Street.

Many visitors to the park, including the splash park in the summer, do not visit the Old Town High Street, as there is no clear visibility across St Mary's Churchyard. The Moors connecting the Town Centre to the Train station, the Walled Gardens and Paradise Fields are other hidden assets. The River Gade creates a natural route that connects the Hemel Hempstead Town Centre with Gadebridge Park and the Grand Union Canal, at the south of the town centre. The Town Centre Vision focuses on how Hemel Hempstead can make the most of these assets and how to curate the spaces between buildings in order to enhance the East-West connections within the town centre.

ÁGUEDA, Portugal - Umbrella Sky Project



CASE STUDY



# 3. REIMAGINE WATERHOUSE STREET

Currently, Waterhouse Street gives priority to vehicles and on-street parking. Located parallel to the pedestrianised high street, it is a barrier between the Marlowes pedestrianised area, Bank Court and the Water Gardens. Many of the on-street parking spaces are not fully utilised, and the road is often used as a drop off point. Furthermore, its five servicing yards suffer constantly from anti-social behaviour. As Cycling is not allowed in the Marlowes pedestrianised area, this is an obvious cycle route running north-south in the Town Centre, but the road does not currently have a cycle lane. Developing enhanced connections across Waterhouse Street and slowing traffic would greatly improve accessibility to the Water Gardens, embracing Jellicoe's original New Town principles of a city in a park.

The Jellicoe Water Gardens were restored and refurbished in 2017, it is very well maintained and is loved by the community. A crucial aim of The Vision is to curate the area around the Water Gardens to allow people to sit, relax and enjoy the River Gade. Bank Court, provides the best view of the Water Gardens and River Gade. The Vision creates a new purpose for Bank Court and Waterhouse Street as the main food and beverage area of the town centre, the Bank Court area would become the heart of the Town Centre. Re-prioritising away from vehicles would provide new possibilities for people to use the area for leisure, social and cultural activities. Cycling routes can be introduced that will enhance active travel and healthier lifestyles.



art that interacts with kids



2.1

use parklet to reclaim road



2.2

new play areas along Waterhouse Street



2.3

improve east-west connection using art and lighting



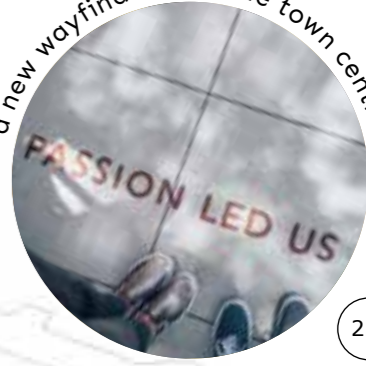
2.4

maximise active frontages along Waterhouse Street

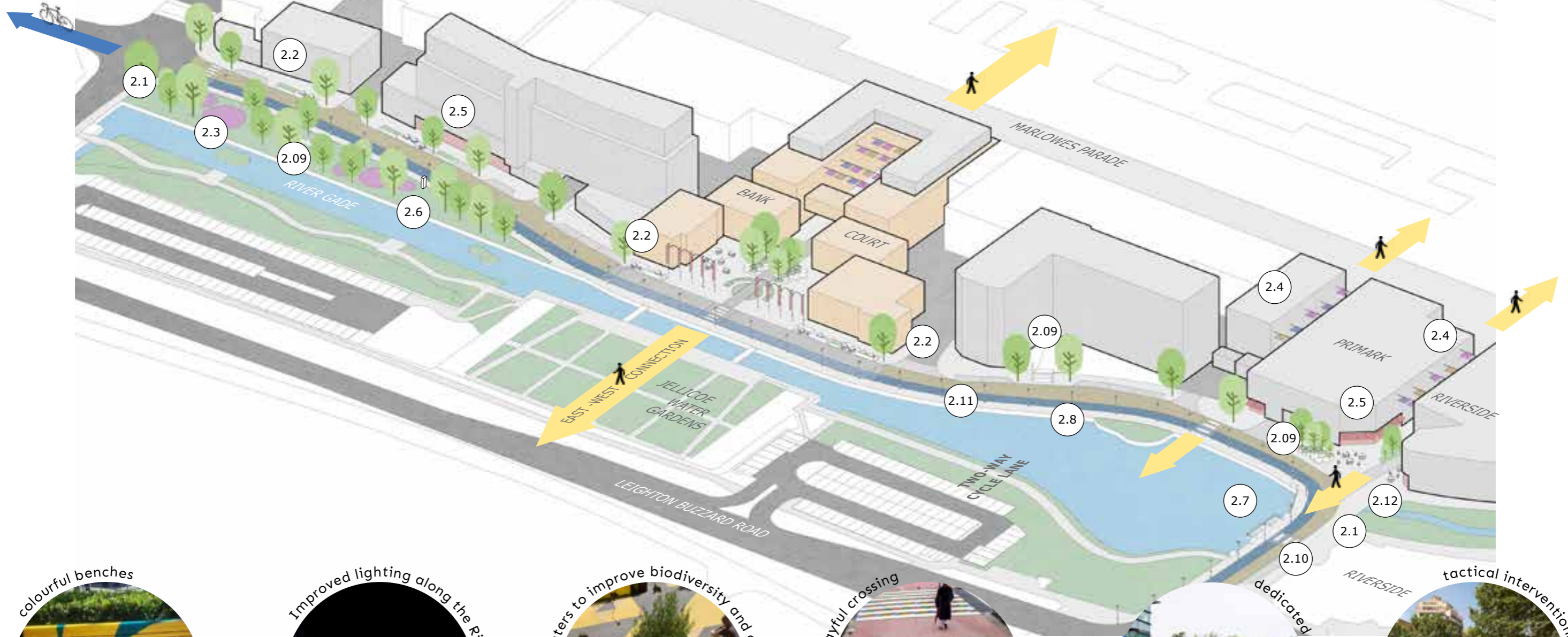


2.5

a new wayfinding for the town centre



2.6



colourful benches



2.7

Improved lighting along the River Gade



2.8

movable planters to improve biodiversity and connection with nature



2.9

playful crossing



2.10

dedicated cycle route



2.11

tactical interventions to re-claim road



2.12

# 4. RECONNECT THE OLD AND THE NEW TOWNS

A key priority for Hemel Hempstead Town Centre Vision is to reconnect the Old Town and the New Town, enhancing the public realm between the Marlowes and the Old Town High Street and breaking up the North-South orientation of the town centre with interesting activities along the way. Art and culture can play a vital role in achieving this, as they have the power to bring residents together, enrich people's lives and boost the image of a place. Art and culture are also crucial to promote civic pride and encourage healthy lifestyles. Some examples of projects already successfully delivered include:

- [The Big Hoot Hemel Art Trail](#), featuring 12 individually designed Big Hoot owls placed around Hemel Hempstead Town Centre in Feb and March 2022.
  - [The Hemel Green Walk Map](#), launched in May 2022 to promote walking and cycling in the town and encourage healthy living and lifestyles.
  - [Snowdog' sculptures](#), inspired by The Snowman and The Snowdog, and combined with the Christmas Light's activated the Town Centre throughout Christmas 2022
- Permanent history, art and sculpture trails will help curate the routes around the Town Centre, providing an interesting walking route and giving people permission to walk and cycle through the green spaces connecting the Town Centre to the wider area. These and similar interventions will reframe the area, and attract people to come and spend a day out in the Town Centre.



## SOME BEST PRACTICES:

### ART

The Orchard Art Series and Engagement project



### WAYFINDING

Green Loop & Wayfinding - Whitehill & Bordon



### TRAILS

The Big Hoot Hemel Art Trail



### URBAN GREEN

Grey to Green in Sheffield



# 5. HEMEL IMAGINARIUM

Creating a buzz in the Town Centre is important to draw people in and make them feel part of the community and proud to live, visit or work in Hemel Hempstead. People are likely to spend money during a visit, in the longer term, may consider renting or buying a home, working or opening a business in the Town Centre. Increased footfall is crucial to existing businesses and potential investors and a necessary element in creating the feeling of safety and community belonging. The Local Government Association, in their "Creating resilient and revitalised high streets in the 'new normal'" report (January 2022), observes that 'resilient high streets are experiential destinations [...] offering users experiences that go beyond purely retail or functional-oriented activities.'<sup>1</sup>

Despite recent investments in public realm upgrades, vacant premises along the high street undermine the success and coherence of the Town Centre. It is also an indicator that the town is currently ill-equipped to effectively respond to changing visitors' needs and consumer behaviour.

The Hemel Imaginarium project takes a dual approach. Firstly, the meanwhile activation project will animate key site(s) in the town centre with a creative events programme for everyone. Secondly, the meanwhile masterplan will secure the legacy of the project by providing a roadmap for a long-term programme that effectively converts high street vacancies into thriving places of business and culture and fostering diversification.

The Hemel Hempstead Meanwhile Activation Project and Masterplan will

- activate disused spaces in the town centre
- bring new audiences to the high street
- put Hemel Hempstead on the map as a destination of choice for art, events and culture
- galvanise local stakeholders to adopt a long-term strategy for the successful management of the high street offer
- celebrate Hemel Hempstead as a place and instil a sense of belonging and civic pride amongst its residents

The programme will be implemented across a two-year programme starting in 2023.

<sup>1</sup>, Creating resilient and revitalised high streets in the 'new normal', LGA, Jan 2022



RELAX

GATHER

ENJOY

PLANT

SHARE

LEARN

CREATE

COLOURFUL

PLAY

ART

DISCOVER



# TOWN CENTRE LAND USE ZONES

The future infrastructure need of the Town Centre community is being considered as part of the Dacorum Local Plan and will include education, health and sustainable transport. Co-working, employment space and residential are welcomed future land uses in the Town Centre.

The long north-south linear shape does not suit today's needs as it over-provides retail floorspace and dilutes the main retail area around the Marlowes pedestrianised area. Improving the east-west links across the Town Centre allows the southern area to function as a consolidated core retail, cultural and leisure offer, with green spaces and a river to enjoy. There will be space across the town centre, this can be repurposed or developed to provide new uses and required infrastructure.

The Vision also includes increase densities and comprehensive redevelopment of sites, allowing more homes and commercial space to support a reinvigorated town centre. A future plan for parking, servicing and sustainable transport will help deliver this Vision.

## EXISTING

--- Town Centre Boundary

Old Town area

① Jellicoe Water Gardens

② Bank Court

③ Market Square

④ West Herts College

⑤ Old Town Hall

⑥ Gadebridge Park

## OPPORTUNITIES

••• Strategic cycle route

||||| Strategic walking route

— Strategic East-West green routes

Long term delivery option depending on car park strategy

Marlowes and Riverside regeneration sites Mixed-use/Housing

Retail core area

Food and Beverage quarter

Market Square regeneration site mixed-use and cultural

Regeneration site Housing/Health/Mixed use

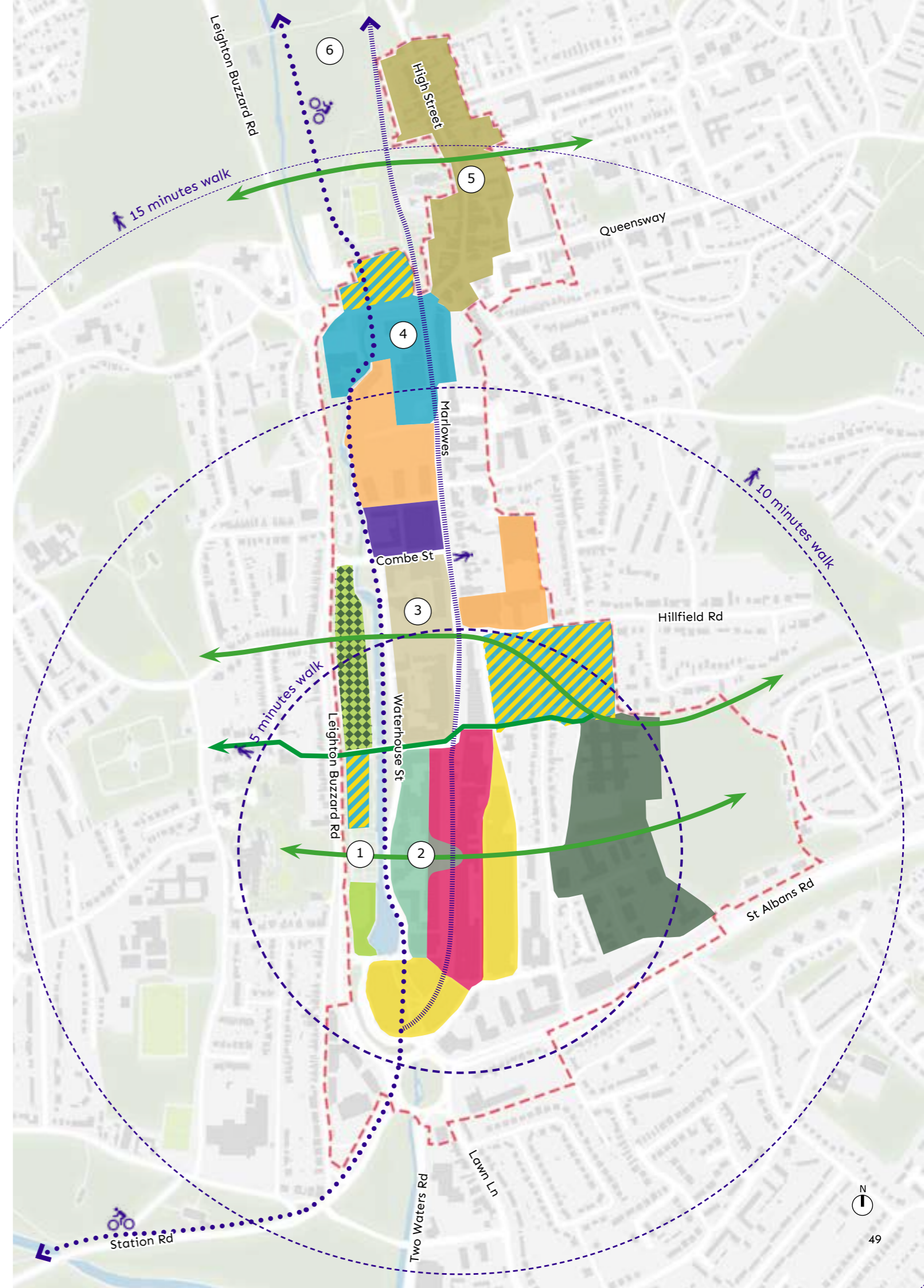
Regeneration site Housing/Mixed-use

Civic area

Regeneration site Housing

Education area

Regeneration site possible education/housing



# OPPORTUNITY SITES

Hemel Hempstead Town Centre presents several significant areas of change which can unprecedentedly transform its landscape. The opportunity is for the town centre to become a leisure and cultural hub providing access to nature, well connected with the station, Apsley, Maylands and the other neighbourhood centres around Hemel Hempstead. The area will need to respond to the changing context through the intensification of developments and activities, delivering buildings and spaces which are attractive and safe for people to work, live, visit and socialise in the area.

Water Gardens Car Park South



Moor End Car park



The Bury



NCP car park + Asda + Iceland



Marlowes Shopping Centre



Riverside Shopping Centre



Market Square



Water Gardens Car Park North



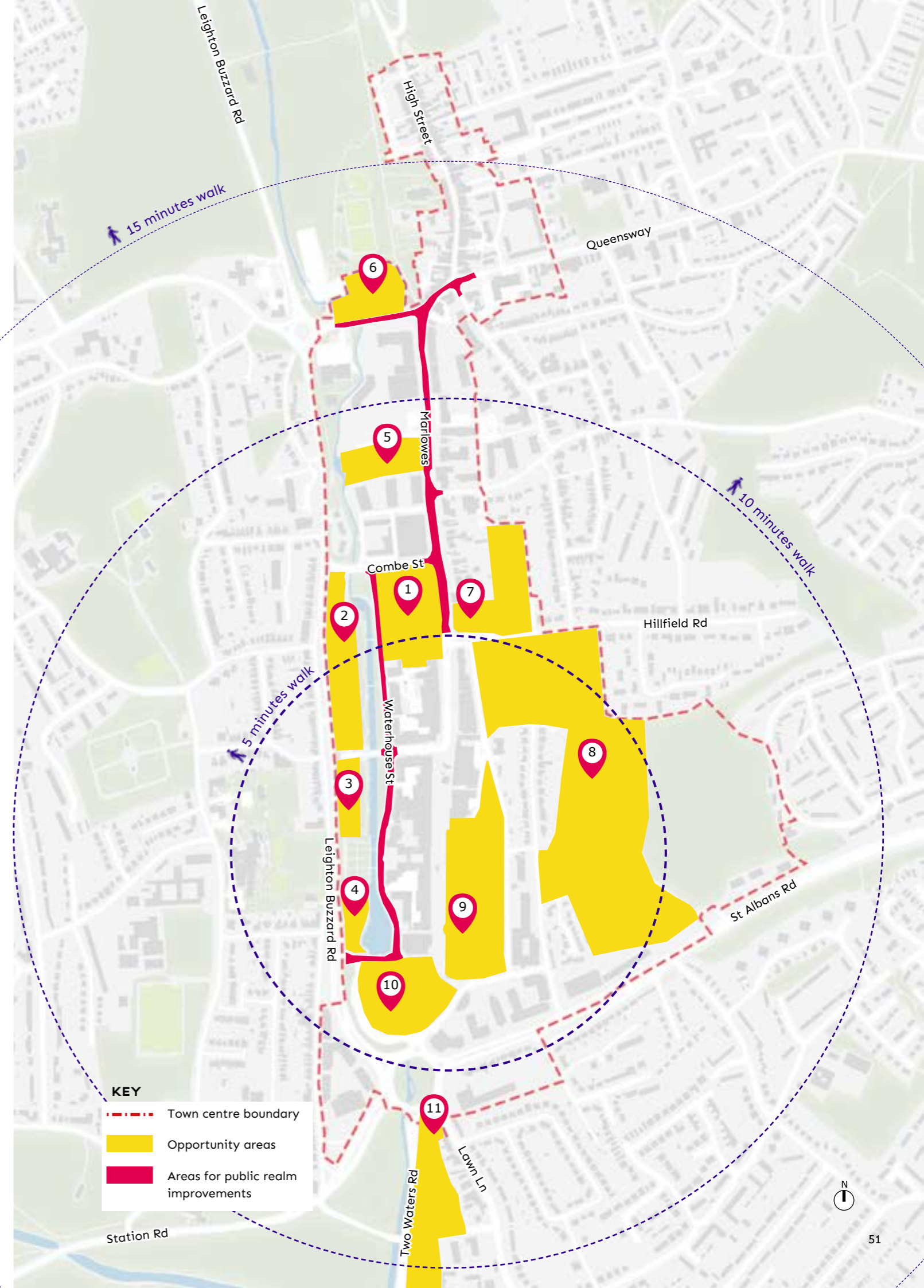
Civic Centre site



Hospital and Paradise site



Two Waters Road site



# ZONES FOR ENVIRONMENTAL IMPROVEMENTS

Zone 1 - East-West connection between Paradise Fields, Bank Court and Jellicoe Water Gardens

Zone 2 - North-South connection between West Herts College, the Bury and Gadebridge Park

Zone 3 - East-West connection between St Mary's Square and Gadebridge Park

Zone 4 - North-South connection between the Heath Park and the town centre

— - Hemel Garden Communities proposed 'green loop'



Jellicoe Water Gardens



Bank Court



Paradise Fields



West Herts College



The Bury



St Mary's Square



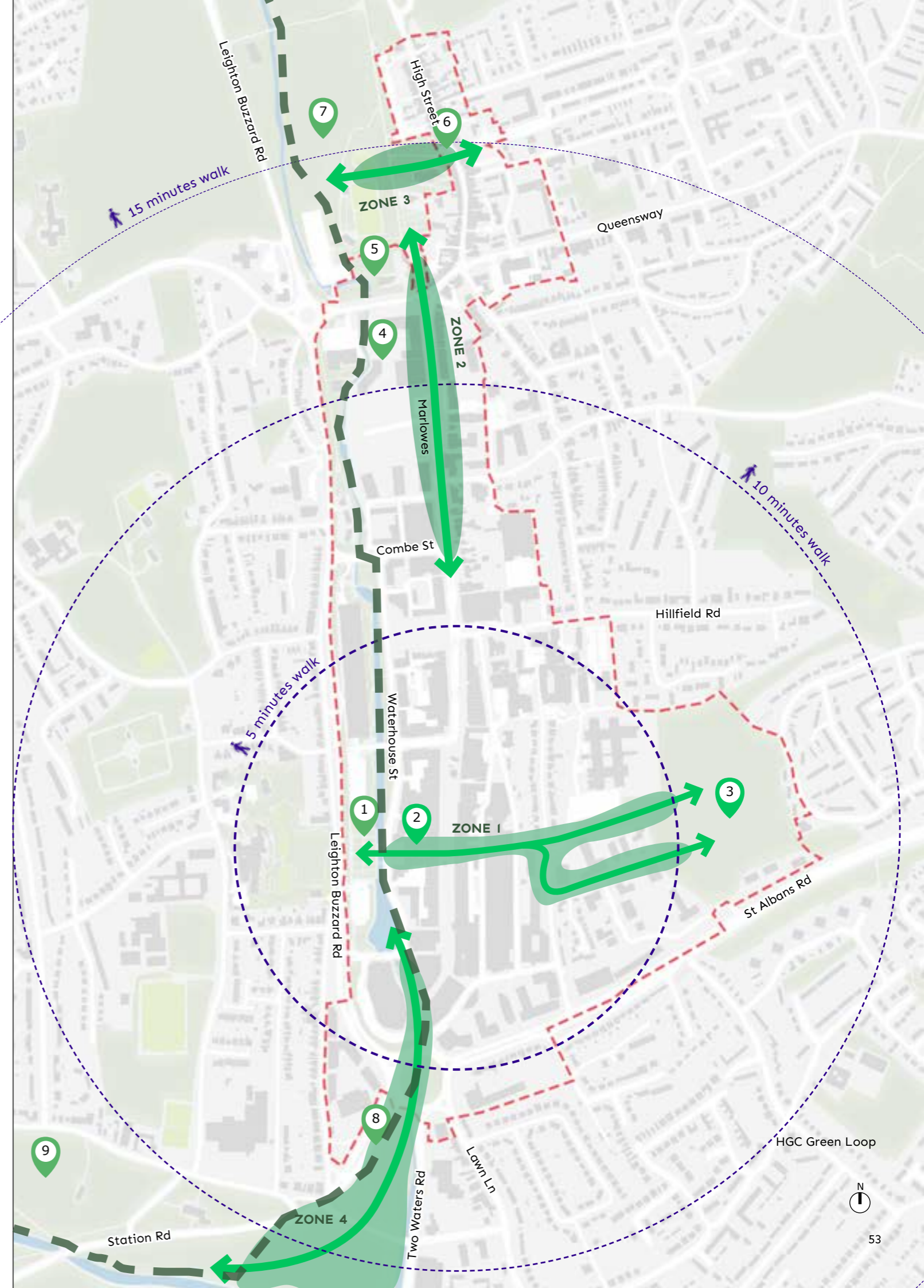
Gadebridge Park



Heath Park



Boxmoor



## HOW IT IS TODAY



BANK COURT, Hemel Hempstead, United Kingdom

## HOW IT COULD BE IN FUTURE



BANK COURT, Hemel Hempstead, United Kingdom

## HOW IT IS TODAY



WATERHOUSE STREET, Hemel Hempstead, United Kingdom

## HOW IT COULD BE IN FUTURE



WATERHOUSE STREET, Hemel Hempstead, United Kingdom

# NEXT STEPS

The Council is committed to a placeshaping approach. We will work with partners and the community on an action plan focusing on the five key priorities for delivery in the town centre. Some of these will be short-term experiments, which will improve public spaces and capitalise on the creative energy from the community to generate new uses and revenue for our town centre. We will ensure that the Vision for Hemel Hempstead Town Centre to be the heart of our town is included in our new Dacorum Local Plan and other strategic programmes.

We will work positively with landowners and investors on key opportunity sites and align our resources at the Council to deliver the Town Centre Vision in partnership. In the face of limited resources, we will seek to source additional funding from Hertfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership, Hertfordshire Innovation Quarter, Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL), Section 106 or similar development-related sources. We will also target external funding opportunities including, but not limited to; central government funds, cultural grants, heritage and conservation funds, biodiversity and community funding, and other crowd funding initiatives. Future funding streams may also emerge, and the existence of the Hemel Hempstead Town Centre Vision and partnership approach will allow swift action to secure funding support.

Please see Appendix 1 for more details on the consultation feedback, Appendix 2 for urban analysis, Appendix 3 for public realm opportunities, Appendix 4 highlighting the key opportunity sites, Appendix 5 for Hemel Spatial Vision and Appendix 6 for Our Hemel Story.



# PHOTOCREDITS

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