

Ebbw Vale Town Centre Urban Design Framework



Sterling Triangle



Elevation of pedestrian entrance to multi storey from Market Street



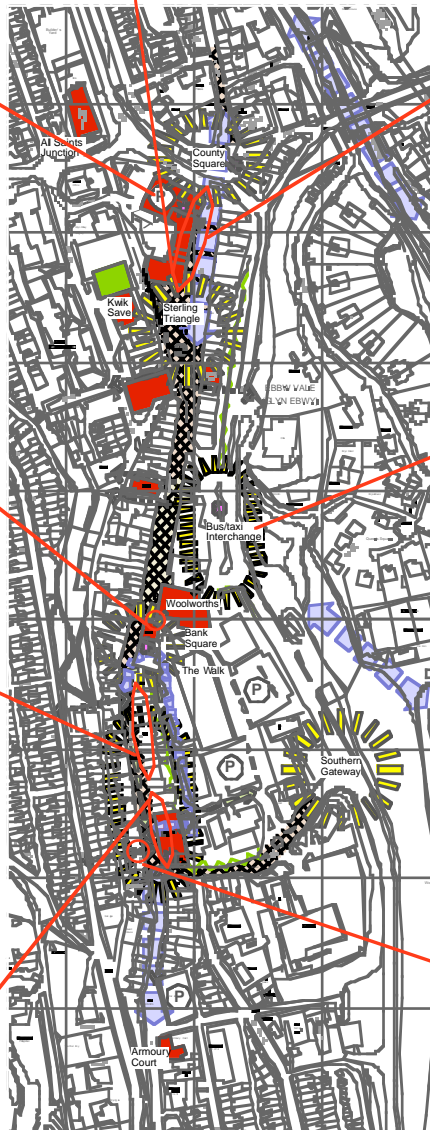
View showing new canopies to Woolworths with infill unit connect on to to HSBC bank



View of canopies and re-elevated shop fronts on Lower Bethcar Street



Elevation of re-elevated Market Hall showing canopies



Perspective of the elevated pedestrian entrance to multi storey car park from Market Street



Combined taxi rank and bus stop shelter



Example of re-elevated building facade



BLAENAU GWENT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Town Objectives - An Overview

The aim of this study is to create an urban design led decision making framework for Ebbw Vale town centre. The study focuses on the town's fundamental problems of access, environment, management, function and economy. An overview of these issues is given below.

Management

Ebbw Vale would benefit from a co-ordinated approach to town centre management. A town centre manager could integrate the Council's service areas to provide a comprehensive all-encompassing approach. Issues that need addressing include unauthorised car parking, cleansing, refuse collection, servicing arrangements, flyposters as well as paving/street furniture repairs. An individual is needed who can coordinate and channel funding and investment by helping identify problems and arranging for them to be addressed by acting as an intermediary, if necessary, between the Council and the commercial sector.

In the summer of 2001 an informal survey of retailers views on Ebbw Vale was undertaken. The survey revealed a breadth of views and opinions on the future of the Town Centre. Of a sample of 23 retailers (of whom 17 were represented in the town and 6 who were not) there was a fair degree of consensus about the issues that are likely to affect the future of the Town Centre:

- ¥ Most retailers viewed the economic future of the town with uncertainty (particularly in the context of the Corus closure);
- ¥ A number of outlets are trading on the margins of profit and loss, with over half reporting a downward trend in sales;
- ¥ There was passive support for the street market;
- ¥ Most retailers felt the multi-storey car park was under-utilised and unattractive;
- ¥ The primary weaknesses of the town centre were regarded as the lack of food retailing and the threat from competing centres;
- ¥ A significant number of retailers felt that the layout of the centre was too linear and should be more compact;
- ¥ Generally the demand for new retail space from new retailers was very limited.

Function and Economy

The main function of Ebbw Vale town centre is currently retail activity. This needs to be broadened and strengthened. This could be achieved by diversifying the attractions on offer, increasing leisure, services, amenity and residential uses. This would have the effect of widening the potential users of the town and thereby diversifying and increasing the daily activity in the town centre, both in terms of numbers of people and lengthening hours of operation. This could bring benefits such as a reduction in crime (due to increased reconnaissance) and increasing the length of viable trading time each day.

Environment

The quality of the environment is key to attracting people into the town centre, and encouraging them to return. The physical appearance of the streets and buildings, the quality and usability of the street furniture, signage, legibility and ease of orientation within the town are important attributes of an attractive environment. Creating a sense of arrival and sense of place are also vital in this respect. Public art and the use of quality materials can contribute to the perception of a quality environment and will encourage shoppers to return regularly.

Access

Ebbw Vale needs to be accessed easily on a multi-modal basis. By public transport, on foot, by bicycle and by private car. The quality and convenience of the bus interchange is a determining factor in terms of whether or not to visit the town by bus, and furthermore, unattractive and sometimes tortuous pedestrian routes from the bus station into town add to the problem. Signage could play a major role in improving the perception of accessibility. The distribution and use of car parking is a significant problem within the town centre that also needs to be addressed. Pedestrian movement throughout the centre needs to be encouraged and desire lines and pedestrian crossings should be enhanced. The lack of bicycle parking and security is a major factor in deterring access by bike.

Conclusions

Ebbw Vale's position as a sub-regional centre has been undermined in recent years. The Town Centre's appeal as a shopping destination seems to have lagged while development has forged ahead out-of-town. In its favour, however, the centre has a substantial, if understated, character and an urban fabric with much to build upon.

This document provides a decision-making framework which the Council and WDA need to encourage all other stakeholders to support. The framework highlights the need to:

- ¥ Establish a greater sense of place;
- ¥ Recognise the historical significance of key areas such as Market Street and Bethcar Street;
- ¥ Link key locations through the imaginative use of public art;
- ¥ Communicate the opportunities through a coherent and stimulating investment strategy.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Project Brief

RPS Chapman Warren was commissioned by the WDA and Blaenau Gwent C B C in April 2001 to prepare an Urban Design Framework for the Town Centre of Ebbw Vale. This will create a policy context for future projects and development studies and provide guidance in relation to proposed modifications to the pedestrian and vehicular circulation in the town centre. A principal objective of the study was to identify and develop the economic arguments for high quality design in the centre. In particular the study was to focus on the Lower Bethcar Street area of the town centre and prepare a set of architectural and urban realm guidelines for the street and the buildings on its east side (Appendix D).



Figure 1 : Lower Bethcar Street

1.2 Previous Studies

A previous study undertaken by consultants Camlin Lonsdale on behalf of the client group considered Ebbw Vale in the context of the wider Ebbw Fawr economic sub region. The study indicated that the Town was no longer fulfilling its true (and historic) function as the principal township and that urgent action was required to address its economic weaknesses. The strategy which emerged from that study, focussed heavily upon targeted public sector investment at key points in the Valley and identified Ebbw Vale as a specific target for focussed investment.

The recent announcement to close the Corus Tinsplate Works in the town reinforces the need to concentrate on attracting new investment into the town. The broad policy objectives of the Ebbw Fawr Regeneration Strategy relate specifically to:

- ¥ Retaining existing employment and commercial activity
- ¥ Creating a sustainable high quality environment
- ¥ Facilitating and supporting new investment to help diversify the town's economic base
- ¥ Maximising accessibility for all in the town.

1.3 Economic Regeneration

The Urban Design Framework for Ebbw Vale Town Centre therefore has to underpin and promote the economic regeneration of the town as a priority. The guidelines that are described below attempt to strike a balance between a high quality environment which is attractive to shoppers, traders and investors and maximising the accessibility of the town to all sectors of the community by all modes of transport.

In particular the study looks at five critical factors which affect the performance of the Town Centre. These include:

- a) Car parking
- b) Public transport facilities
- c) Quality of the public realm/environment
- d) Pedestrian movement
- e) Retail perceptions.



Figure 2 : Market Square Triangle

1.4 The Challenge

The challenge for this study has not just been about making Ebbw Vale's town centre visually and aesthetically more appealing but making it **different**: more of a **destination** where people will choose to visit in preference to other shops and centres in the region. Without visitors and hence expenditure, no amount of cosmetic treatment will make Ebbw Vale more vibrant or sustainable as a retail centre. The consultant team believe that the only way to make the Town Centre more sustainable will be to make it:

- **Convenient** (easier to access by car, foot, cycle or public transport);
- **Safe, secure** and better **managed**;
- ¥ A more **comfortable** and **enjoyable** place to visit;

The Design Framework proposed by this study is therefore based upon making Ebbw Vale Town Centre different from its competitors; by building upon its assets and resources and developing its own **identity** and **distinctiveness**.

2.0 KEY ISSUES

2.1 Economic Context

The vitality of Ebbw Vale's retail centre has inevitably been affected by the general decline of the town's economic fortunes. The high levels of unemployment and low levels of disposable income have both impacted severely on the performance of the town centre and this situation is likely to be exacerbated by the closure of the Corus Works.

Like many industrialised valley towns in South Wales, Ebbw Vale developed to meet the increasing demands of the heavy industry which burgeoned around them. The town's retail centre grew rapidly to meet these demands, however as the town's economy declined the Town Centre was left with excess retail space relative to the reduced wealth and hence retail expenditure available in the town.

The decline in Ebbw Vale's economic fortunes has left it with an overly long, unplanned, and inconvenient retail core providing too much retail space for its current needs and as a consequence it lacks any vitality and distinctiveness. This has led to a variety of circumstances including:

- ¥ Under utilisation of some retail space;
- ¥ High levels of vacancies and some decay (particularly at the margins of the town centre);
- ¥ General under-performance by retail operators.

In order to address this, the fundamental health of the town needs to be improved or, alternatively, the extent and nature of the Town's retail core needs to be modified by public sector intervention.

A key consideration for the client group therefore is whether the current size of Ebbw Vale's retail core should be reduced in order to concentrate activity and hence investment. By reducing the number of shops and the amount of retail floor space it may be possible to induce improved trading performance and increased vibrancy and vitality in a smaller area and thereby create a greater impact than trying to spread the jam too thinly over a wider area.

2.2 Leakage Retail Activity

Another major factor which has contributed to the decline of Ebbw Vale's centre, is the amount of leakage of expenditure made by residents of the town in other centres. This competition manifests itself in the form of out of town shopping centres such as supermarkets, retail parks, regional shopping facilities (e.g. Cribbs Causeway, Bristol; Cwmbran) as well as Factory Outlet Centres (F.O.C.) (such as Bridgend and Victoria Ebbw Vale).

In particular the success of the Victoria FOC on the Garden Festival site in Ebbw Vale has acted as a counter attraction to the Town Centre since it retails high street goods at discount prices, and against which the town centre can not viably compete. (This issue is being investigated at the present time in respect

of planning conditions). These out of town facilities each offer convenient transport facilities and free car parking.

Ebbw Vale does suffer trade leakage to other towns such as Merthyr Tydfil (which offers better retail facilities and good access) Cwmbran, Newport and to some extent Abergavenny which in contrast offers a market town environment.

However like all South Wales towns one of the greatest threats to Ebbw Vale is Cardiff which is among the top 10 shopping centres in the UK and dominates the region in retail terms.

2.3 Retail Objectives

It is difficult for the town to compete with such facilities as it cannot offer the competitiveness of a factory outlet mall or a critical mass, quality of retail or range of goods offered in the likes of Cardiff. **The town must concentrate, therefore, on competing within a market within which it can compete effectively. This is considered to be:**

- i) Convenience food retailing
- ii) Lower price/discount comparison retailing to that on offer in other competing centres

To be more competitive, the town centre needs to:

- ¥ Offer a multifunctional centre, providing a good **range of shops/merchandise** retailing within this market sector,
- ¥ Offer a **vibrant and attractive retail core** (redefined and reduced as suggested above). It needs to be an attractive and quality environment that is user-friendly and convenient.
- ¥ Have easy multi-modal access to the town centre, providing bicycle parking, and offer **public transport** that is competitive and convenient.
- ¥ Provide convenient, **cheap, user friendly car parking facilities** to compete with the free facilities available in out of centre locations.
- ¥ Be attractive and **actively and effectively managed**.



Figure 3 : Linear High Street

2.4 Physical Characteristics

The Town Centre suffers from its linear configuration which encourages a brisk promenade from end to end, without any points of focus where shoppers/visitors might dwell and be enticed to spend more time/money. The creation of a series of such spaces needs to be an important part of this Study, both from an economic and urban design viewpoint.

The parking regime, particularly for casual visitors of the Town, is haphazard. The two car parks which serve the Town Centre (the multi-decked car park and The Walk's surface car park) are well placed to siphon off visitors arriving by car but the random availability of on-street and illegal parking devalues their strategic importance. The arrangement also frustrates the potential for the efficient management of parking.

In addition, access to parking is confused and lacks clear signage and management. Overall, this undermines the expectation of the shopping experience to come, and deters people from visiting the town.

2.5 The Multi-storey car park

The multi-storey car park is badly underused despite it being free to users. The reasons for this are uncertain but are likely to range from the lack of signage to difficulty of access/egress to the poor standards of maintenance/repair and design, quality of environment/security, stairs only giving access to the bottom 3 floors.

Despite these drawbacks, the car park should be viewed as a major asset to the Town and the goal must be to achieve increased usage through improved quality.

In spite of these trading difficulties, the Town Centre does offer a wide range of goods and services to shoppers and is almost certainly supported by a hard-core of loyal local shoppers, as is traditionally the case in similar towns. This base loyalty must be supported at all costs if the Town is to maintain its viability.

2.6 Town Centre Management

There is no evidence of any comprehensive management of the Town Centre, although the Council is seeking funding to employ a Town Centre Manager. Issues that need to be addressed include signage, car parking standards, public realm, litter control, landscaping, trader control and visitor appeal. The town centre does not compare well with, say Abergavenny, in terms of the experience one might enjoy as a shopper. Achieving these comprehensive standards should be a primary goal.

2.7 The Walk Development (Templar Developments)

The development of The Walk in the south east of the centre provides a new retail offer in the town and indicates that the property/investor market is prepared to invest in the Town. There is, however, a concern that the development has done little to integrate into the shopping fabric of Bethcar Street. This is a disappointment, given the potential The Walk has to deliver greater urban design benefits.



Figure 4 : Entrance to The Walk development

2.8 Market Day

Market day on Fridays brings a new and vibrant life to the town although the layout of stalls in Bethcar Street appears to adversely affect the shops on the western side of the street to an unfortunate degree.

This may be easily resolved through better management of the layout of the market and the resulting pedestrian flows. It is understood that, despite early concerns from shop owners, the market is now viewed as beneficial to the Town and, certainly from the visitors perspective, this appears to be the case.

2.9 Public Realm Improvements

The recently implemented improvements to the public realm in Upper Bethcar Street are an important boost to the physical environment offered to shoppers as part of their visit to the Town. This Report suggests further packages of work to continue the improved standards already implemented.



Figure 5 : Upper Bethcar Street

2.10 Overview

This section outlines the issues that need to be confronted. Appendix B includes detailed analysis of retailer attitudes to Ebbw Vale and its catchment/loyalty base or trading viability. The views expressed are based upon a subjective but informed analysis of the issues.

The suggestion is to view the regeneration of the Town Centre from a Business Development Plan perspective, which

- ¥ Identifies the core function of the Town Centre
- ¥ Defines the projects and priorities for the physical improvements required, including traffic/car parking
- ¥ Defines the level and priority for business support
- ¥ Addresses Town Centre Management as a strategic issue.

3.0 TOWN CENTRE ANALYSIS

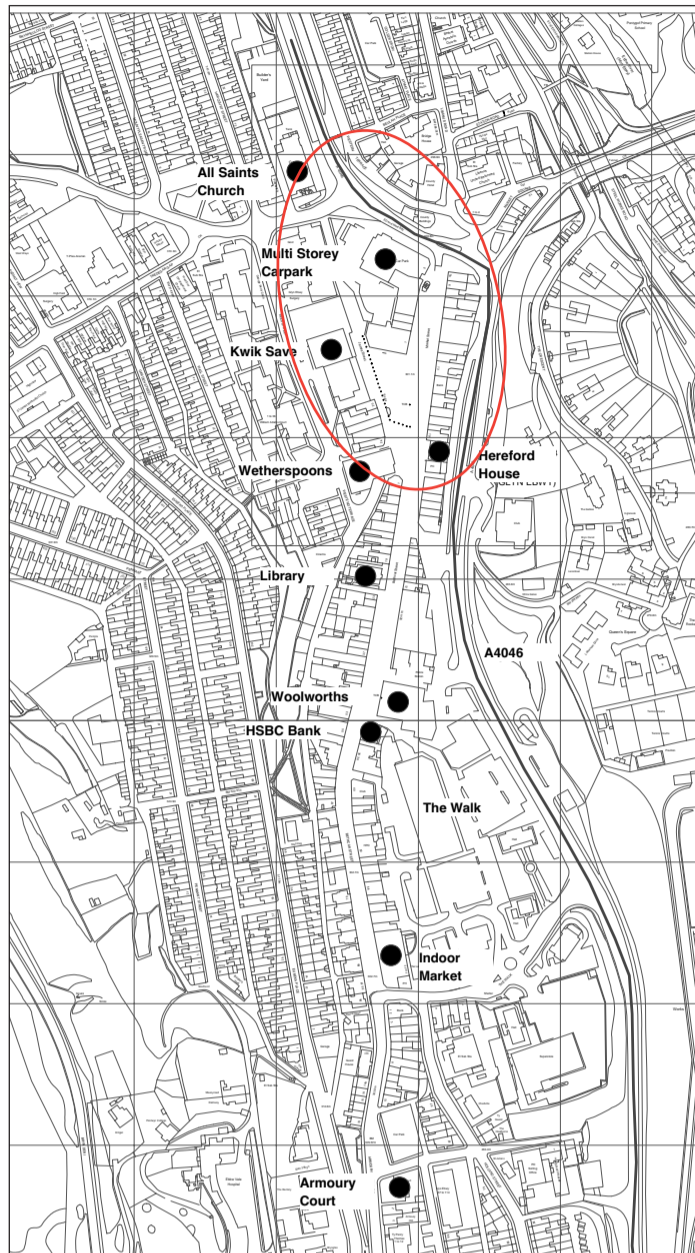


Figure 6: Northern Gateway Location

This section discusses in greater detail the character zones within Ebbw Vale town centre, covering the area's attributes, detractors, key buildings, access/circulation/conflicts and gateways/arrival points. This section should be read with the Area Analysis Plans.

Ebbw Vale town centre can be divided into four distinct character zones:

- ¥ Northern Gateway / Market Square;
- ¥ Mid Town;
- ¥ Top End ; and,
- ¥ Business District.

3.1 Northern Gateway

The entrance to the town centre from the north forms an important vista and key visual gateway into the main shopping street. The view is framed by the multi-storey car park and adjacent shop units and a blank end-of-terrace wall. The poor quality of the northern approach when viewed by passing traffic does little to entice people into the Town Centre from the northern gateway. (see figures 7 and 8)

The **Northern Gateway** zone stretches from Market Street at the northern most point of the pedestrianised area to the southern point of the open air triangle, comprising the multi-storey car park, adjacent shopping units, Kwik Save along James Street, and the traditional shopfronts on Market Street. (see figure 9) The area is dominated by the multi-storey car park and linked shopping units.

The Council-operated multi-storey car park is uninviting and underused, despite being free to users. The narrow vehicular entrance, poorly illuminated interior and uninspiring exterior cladding make it forbidding and unattractive. Car users prefer to park at an outside pay and display car park where personal security is perceived to be greater (for example at The Walk, at the southern end of the town centre), and the vacant site to the west of the multistorey car park on which parking is unregulated. (see figure 10)

The northern end of the pedestrianised area is terminated by the A4046 through-traffic route. The pedestrian crossings to Market Square, the Civic Centre and the residential area to the north are narrow and confusing, and dominated by multi-directional moving traffic and pedestrian safety railings.



Figure 7: Northern Gateway Analysis



Figure 8: View southwards into Market Street



Figure 9: View of James Street / Market Street and Sterling Triangle from first floor

The open air triangle to the south of the multistorey carpark is framed by the shopping units attached to the multi-storey car park, Market Street and James Street. Hereford House, on the eastern side of Market Street is an architecturally attractive key building within the townscape, at the southern end of the triangle.

The triangle is a hard paved area (see figure 9) that is privately owned and demarcated by concrete bollards and a few good specimen trees. Part of the weekly outdoor market is held on this area which is usually occupied during the day by parked cars. Vehicular access to the site is only available during the hours when the surrounding streets are not pedestrianised. This wide and uninspiring expanse of space is located at a key focal point at the northern end of the town centre, but provides little or no daytime activity.

Immediately south of the triangle Market Street ends and Bethcar Street begins although there is no identifiable physical delineation. East-west pedestrian linkages lead from this part of the street either side of the Wetherspoons public house to the residential area beyond. There is also

a pedestrian link on the eastern side of the street adjacent to the public toilets, giving access to the service road that runs parallel to the A4046 and to the bus station area (discussed in more detail below).

There is a more obvious pedestrian link to the south of this, adjacent to GilesSports, which provides access to the street from the disabled car parking spaces. The gap between the buildings is historic due to the route of the now dismantled industrial tramway.

The main town centre bus stops are concentrated on the A4046 to the east of Market Street. This busy road, containing a central reservation with pedestrian guard rail, provides few opportunities for pedestrians to cross. Views from this area are of the backs of the commercial properties, and pedestrian routes through are limited. There is no sense of arrival for shoppers arriving in Ebbw Vale by bus.

The area is similarly uninspiring for people leaving the town by bus, since the bus station is located adjacent to the unattractive rear of Market Street buildings. There is minimal provision of seating and shelters. The area is particularly unattractive during inclement weather due to the lack of shelter and the proximity of fast moving traffic. (see 6, figure 10)

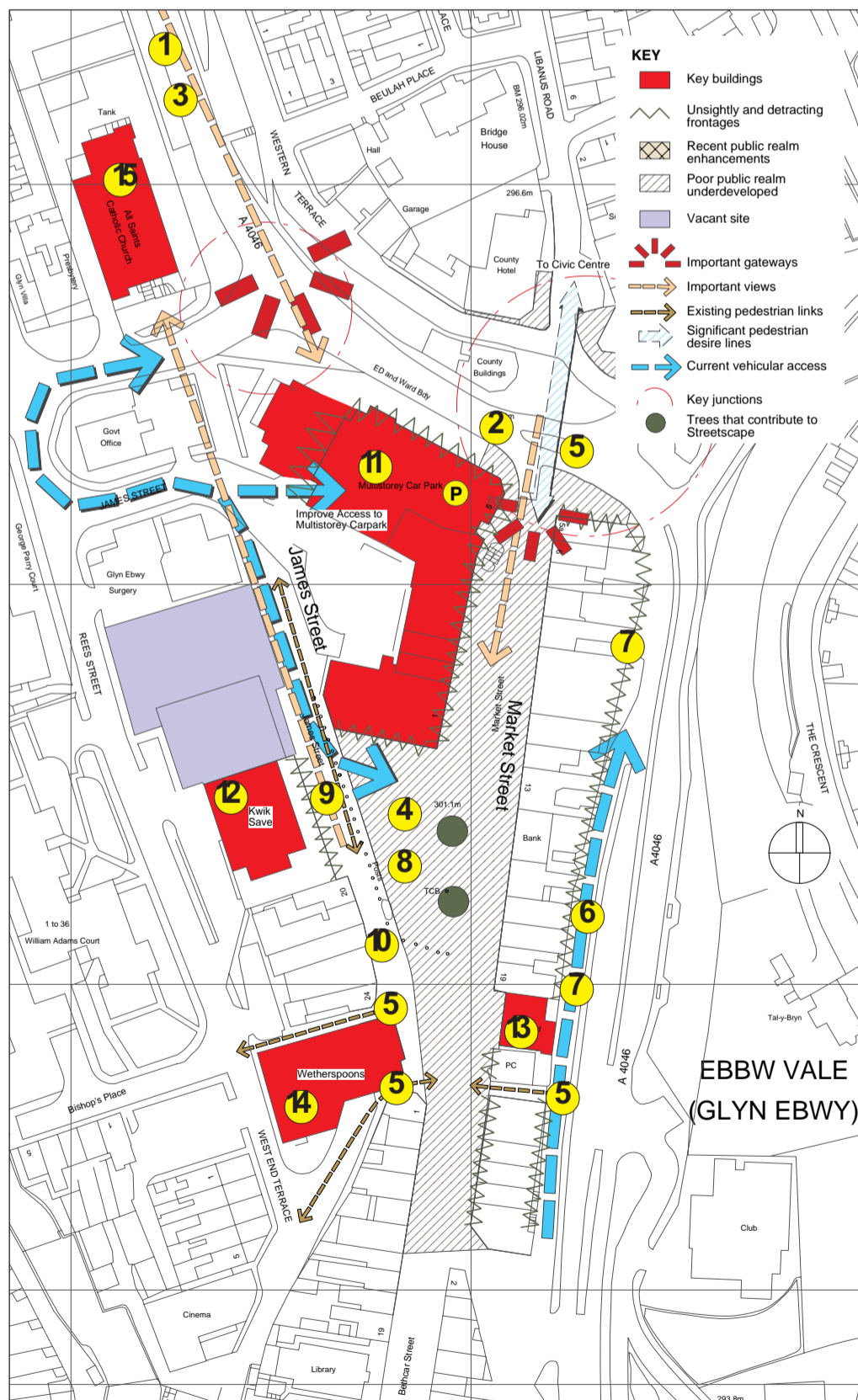


Figure 10: Northern Gateway Analysis

3.2 Northern Gateway: Analysis Key Points

- 1 Main view of uninviting multi-storey car park.
- 2 Unattractive highway/traffic dominated space splits Market Street and Libanus Road.
- 3 No views for motorists of inviting town centre destination.
- 4 Sterling Triangle underutilised as car parking.
- 5 Poor pedestrian links.
- 6 Awkward, poor and unattractive bus passenger facilities to the rear of Market Street.
- 7 Unrestricted view of visually poor rear of Market Street buildings.
- 8 Poor streetscape/pedestrian environment.
- 9 Concentration of activity in James Street, outside Kwik Save.
- 10 View of All Saints Church along James Street.

Key buildings

- 11 Multi-storey car park
- 12 Kwik Save
- 13 Hereford House
- 14 Wetherspoons
- 15 All Saints Church



Figure 11: Rear service areas and taxi rank



Figure 12: Northern bus bays and service area

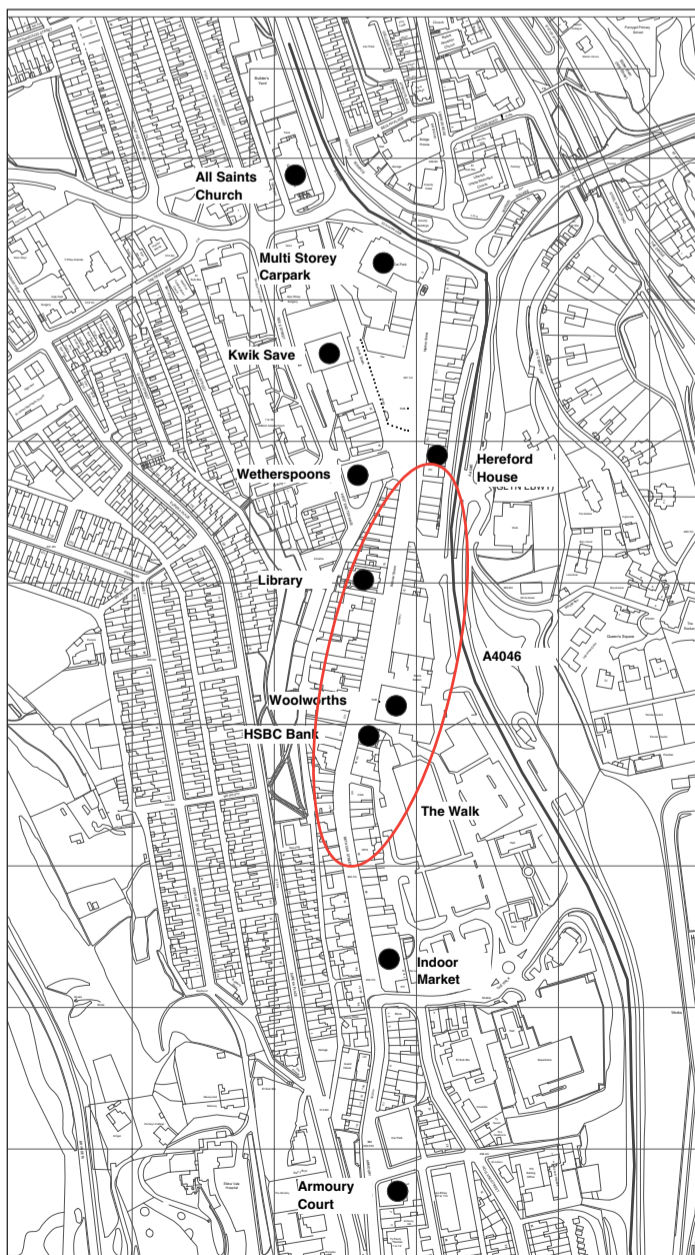


Figure 13: Mid Town Location Plan

3.3 'Mid' Town

The Mid Town zone covers that part of Bethcar Street which has already been the subject of an extensive public realm improvement scheme, between the key buildings of the HSBC bank at the southern-most end and the Library at the northern end (see figures 16,17). This area is generally the busiest part of the pedestrianised zone containing the national chain shops and providing the pedestrian link to the recently completed Walk development. (see figure 21)

The public realm improvements recently undertaken comprise re-paved footways and carriageways, new street furniture, tree planting and street lighting. The high quality components and materials of the works contrast with the surrounding building facades and more modest street environment. The quality of this area overall has been significantly improved by the public realm scheme.

The Walk development to the south east contains a number of national chain stores such as Iceland and Argos, with covered walkways providing shelter from the elements, with easily accessed car parking located immediately adjacent. There would be no need for shoppers who park in this car park to visit the main shopping street if their needs are met in the various stores in the Walk. The development is linked to Bethcar Street via a walkway, which tends to have the effect of encouraging pedestrians to move from Bethcar Street to The Walk as opposed to encouraging shoppers in The Walk to visit the rest of the town.



Figure 14: View of north bound bus layby



Figure 15: View of public conveniences, detrimental to the streetscene with poor pedestrian link adjacent



Figure 16: Potential enhanced pedestrian link adjacent to the library

The southern part of the service road that runs adjacent to the bus stop area is occupied in its entirety by the taxi rank. Arrival in the town at this location by taxi allows a more direct access by foot to the town centre than via public transport which involves crossing the busy A4046. The taxi rank area is overly wide and, as a result, has encouraged non taxi traffic parking and dropping off / picking up. The area is confusing and lacks signage.



Figure 17: Bethcar Street environmental improvements

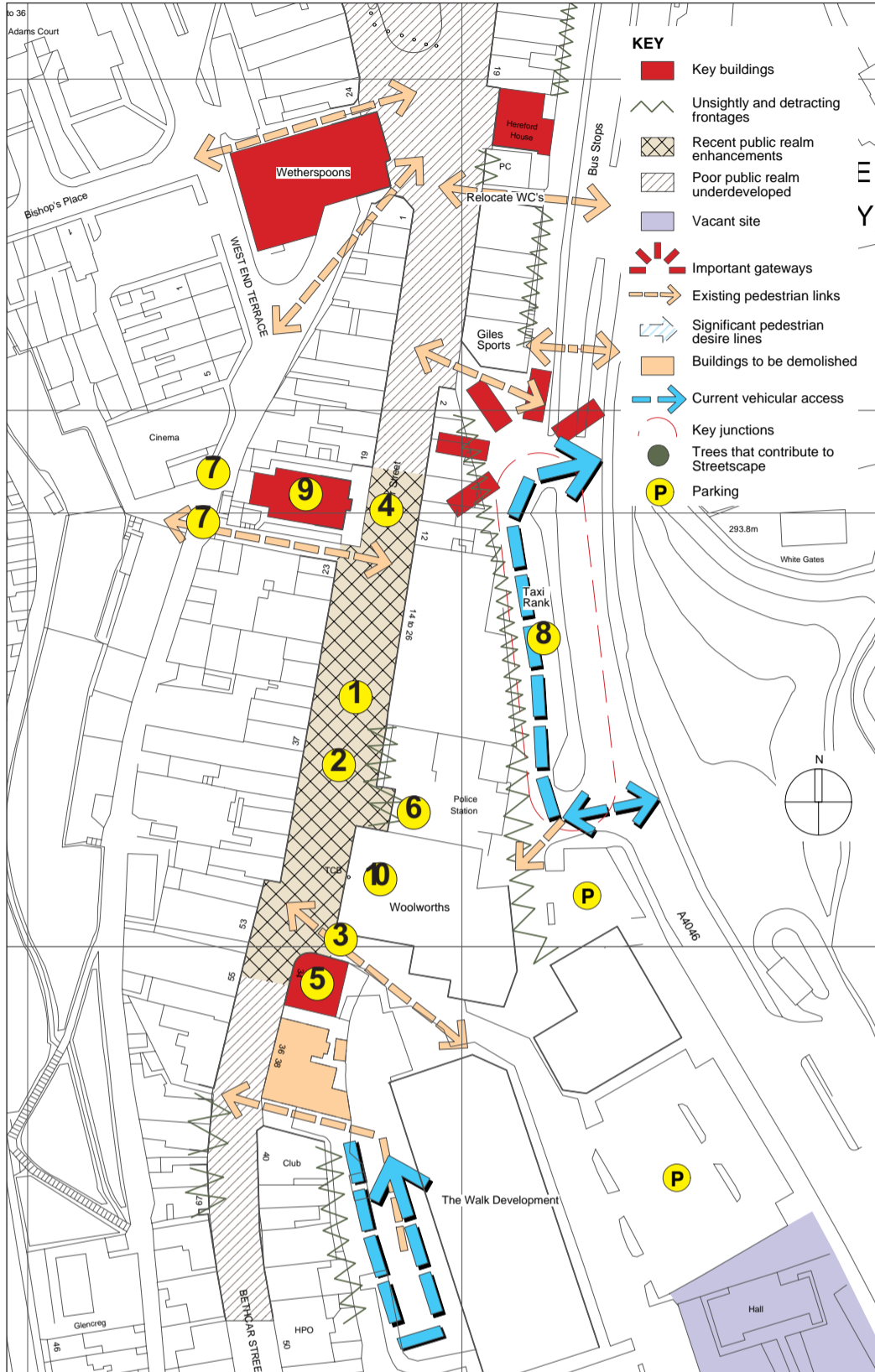


Figure 18: Mid Town Analysis

3.4 Mid Town: Analysis Key Points

- 1 Recently completed quality pedestrian environment.
- 2 Busiest pedestrian area of the town centre.
- 3 Physically strong but poor appearance of pedestrian link to The Walk and pay and display car park.
- 4 Linear space with new visual focus on Library Square .
- 5 HSBC Bank provides interesting visual full stop to the space.
- 6 Police Station building facade detracts.
- 7 Glimpses of cinema building on Westend Terrace through potential enhanced pedestrian links straddling the library.
- 8 Confusing taxi rank area.
- 9 Library
- 10 Woolworths



Figure 19: Residential properties on west of Lower Bethcar Street



Figure 21: Weak entrance feature to The Walk



Figure 20: Photo of walkway to cinema



Figure 22: Uninviting entrance to Lower Bethcar Street

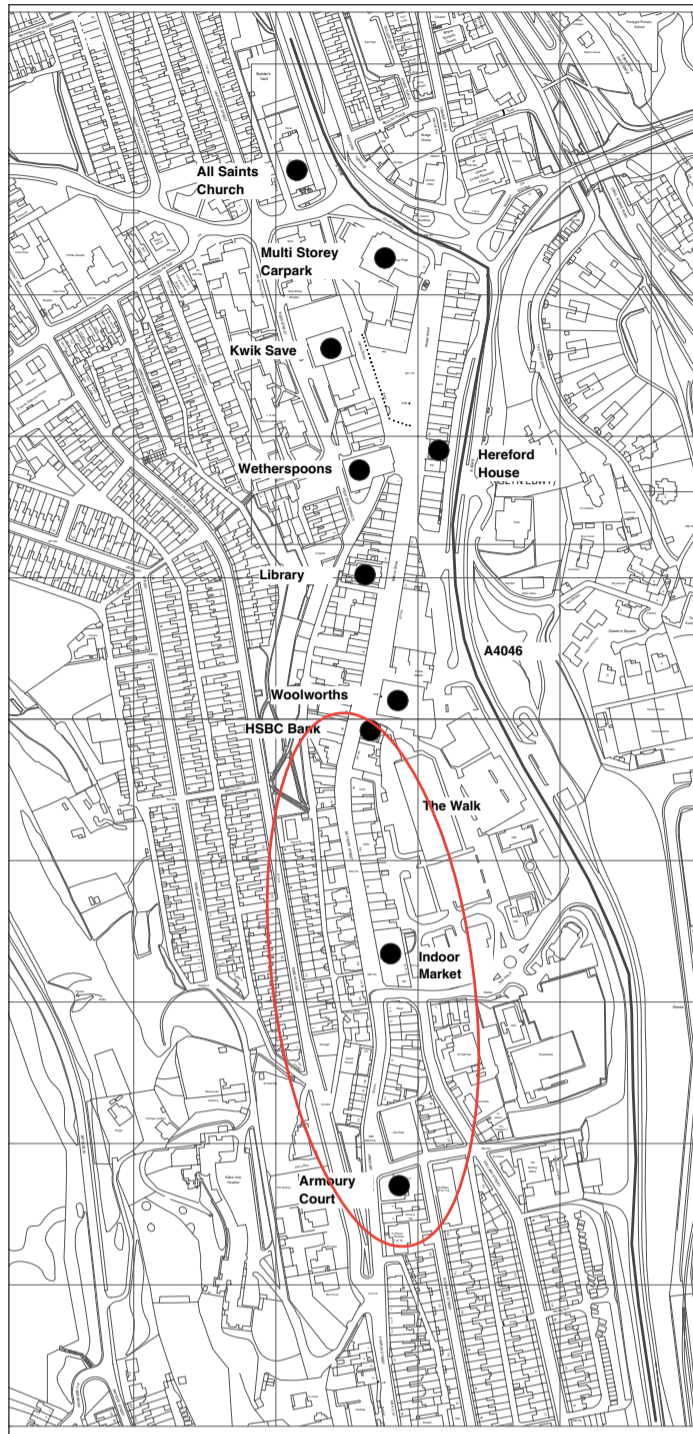


Figure 23: Lower Bethcar Street Location



Figure 24: Uninviting and typical walkway on west of Lower Bethcar Street



Figure 25: Unattractive and poorly maintained rear of Bethcar Street Buildings

3.5 Lower Bethcar Street

The Lower Bethcar Street area stretches from the HSBC bank, at the entrance to The Walk, through to the Indoor Market at the southern end of the pedestrianised area (see figures 21 and 22).

When viewed from the south, Bethcar Street is dominated by the derelict and boarded-up buildings on the western side of the Street, and the blue fascia of the Indoor Market on the eastern side. The quality of the pedestrian guard rails and utilitarian street furniture reinforce the feeling of decline at this end of the town. The limited footfall and apparent lack of vibrancy contribute to the uninviting nature of the street. The view southwards from the HSBC bank into Lower Bethcar Street is similarly uninspiring; the public realm improvement scheme ends and pedestrians are enticed into The Walk, instead of venturing along Bethcar Street.

The footfall in this part of the street is significantly less than in the Mid town zone and this, as a result, reinforces the feeling of economic decline. There are a significant number of residential premises on the western side of the street. These are accessed by steps upwards from street level to the ground floor at a level of approximately 2.5 metres above street level. This creates frequent lengths of non-active frontage (see figure 19).

The western side of Lower Bethcar Street also contains a number of ginnels, providing pedestrian access from the residential streets that are located higher up the valley side. These interesting and potentially attractive features offer scope for physical enhancement (see figure 24).

The **Indoor Market** is a key building within the street, and is clearly identifiable by the street level 1970s style blue fascia. The architecturally attractive upper floors of the building contrast with the street level fascia. The few stalls operating in the market are haberdashers, antiques, books, and clothing. There is also a laundrette and caf. Adjacent to the market is a pub with residencies on the upper floors.

The area to the rear of the market comprises car parks, with service access for The Walk and the properties on the eastern side of Bethcar Street. The space is surrounded by the unattractive backs and service entrances of the properties on Bethcar Street and The Walk. The deteriorating condition of many of the rear elevations to Lower Bethcar Street does not encourage the shoppers to investigate the shops on Bethcar Street, despite the option of direct pedestrian access via a number of the buildings, including the Indoor Market. Shoppers are, inevitably, more likely to shop in the new buildings and environment of The Walk.

3.6 Southern ‘Business District’

The small **Business District** to the south of Lower Bethcar Street comprises the southern-most area of the town centre commercial uses, essentially offering accommodation for local solicitors, estate agents and architects. This area is divorced from the other commercial uses in the town centre, and also appears to lack footfall compared to the mid town area of Bethcar Street. There is potential to improve the pedestrian linkages to this part of town as well as rationalise and improve the parking facilities in the area.

3.7 Southern Gateway

One of the most prominent aspects on entering the town from the main road from the south is MacDonaldis and The Walk development. The area is vehicle dominated, comprising access roads, car parking, and basic landscaping. The new development contrasts starkly with the OAP Centre and the Meeting Hall. Traffic leaving via the junction with the main road often forms queues due to the speed and volume of main road traffic and the lack of visibility. This junction with the A4046 is generally regarded as being dangerous and in need of improvement.

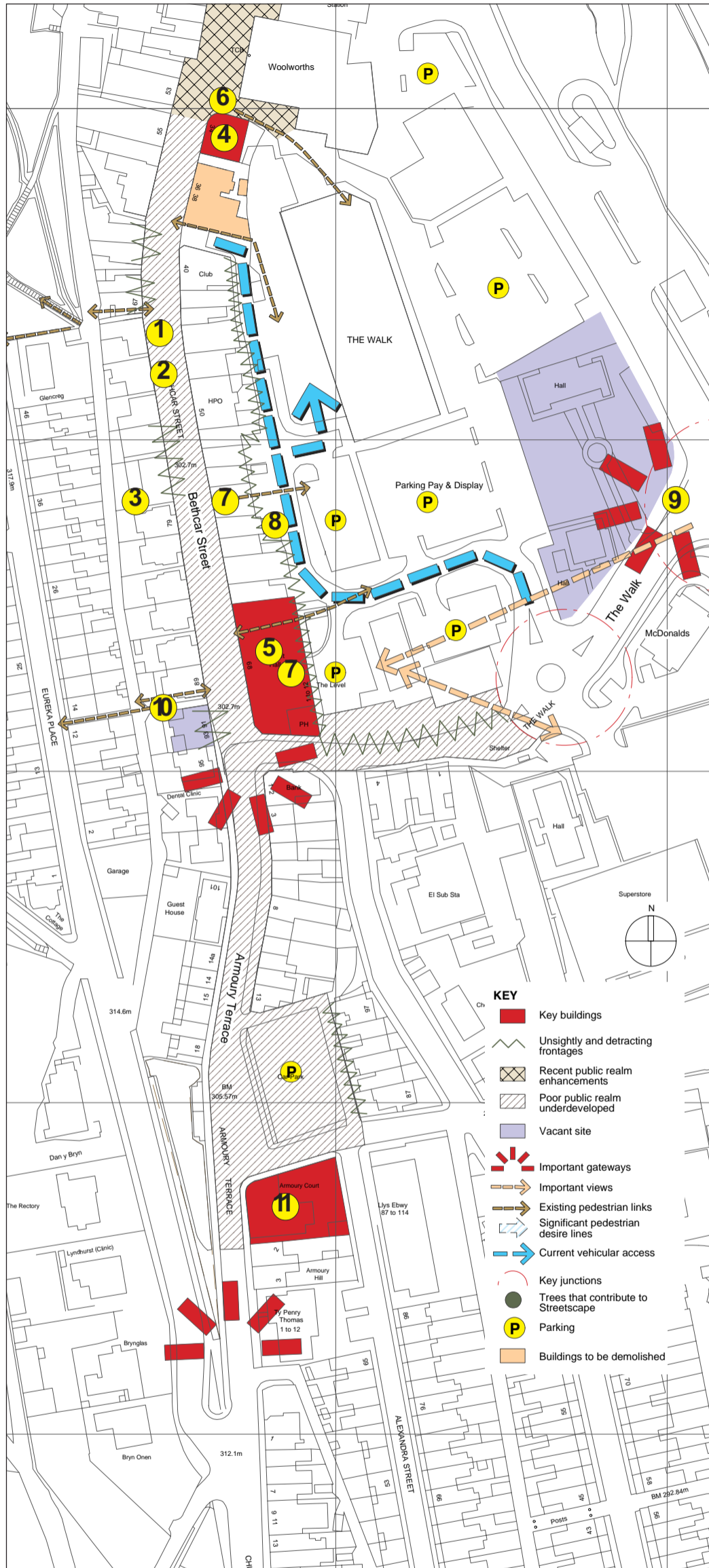


Figure 26: Southern Town Centre Analysis

3.8 Southern End: Analysis Key Points

- 1 Poor streetscape/pedestrian environment.
- 2 Narrow, linear and dark space.
- 3 Western side largely residential.
- 4 HSBC Bank faces north/west, and does not form part of the space.
- 5 Visually detracting ground floor facade of Market Hall acts as an anchor to the street.
- 6 Pedestrians siphoned off to and by The Walk therefore avoiding Bethcar Street.
- 7 No direct pedestrian links from The Walk except through unattractive rear of some commercial premises.
- 8 Poor quality rear of buildings adjacent to popular pay and display car park.
- 9 Dangerous junction onto the A4046 at MacDonalds, adjacent to underutilised Halls site.
- 10 Uninspiring pedestrian links to the west.

Key buildings

- 5 Indoor Market
- 11 Armoury Court



Figure 27: The Walk service area



Figure 28: View towards the Market Hall and Armoury Court from Armoury Terrace



Figure 29: The car park and on street parking triangle to the north of Armoury Court

4.0 OPPORTUNITIES

4.1 Introduction

This section of the report deals with opportunities identified from the analysis of the town centre. They have been derived from assessing the appearance and function of the town centre, both in a physical and regional/local context.

These opportunities have been identified as part of the long term goal of building on the town's historic building fabric and strengthening the existing client/shopper/visitor base, which includes attraction of motorists who would ordinarily pass by rather than visiting the town centre. Opportunities have been identified which will potentially enhance/expand the shopper appeal/experience of Ebbw Vale, as well as identifying new commercial opportunities within the town centre.

As part of the design strategy, a number of independent but interrelated elements have been assessed. These include:

- ¥ potential development sites
- ¥ traffic/highways
- ¥ bus and taxi provision/routing
- ¥ architectural themes
- ¥ streetscape and urban design.

Streetscape

With regard to the latter two elements, high quality environmental improvements to the public realm have already been implemented in the northern section of Bethcar Street, but few properties have upgraded their building facades. The type of materials chosen and general high quality urban design principles applied should set a precedent for ongoing and future improvements to the public realm within the town centre. Elements should include natural paving materials, lighting, street furniture, clear signs and large street trees, as well as public art both free standing and woven into the overall design. Highway information (such as waiting restrictions) should be combined, where possible, with lighting columns, to avoid unnecessary street clutter.

Canopies

It is also proposed that a number of canopies be included along the length of the town centre to provide interest and shelter for pedestrians. The main locations are shown on the projects summary key (see 5.0). The majority of these could be funded via grant schemes on a rolling programme. It is felt, however, that the replacement of existing and introduction of new canopies in three specific locations would substantially enhance the street scene. These are on the KwikSave building (see figures 9, 34 and 35), Gilesport shop complex (see figure 3) and the Indoor Market (see figures 40 and 41).

Landmark sites

Landmark opportunities have been identified in order to orientate and attract shoppers, whilst a general upgrading of the architectural stock, streetscape and the provision of defined spaces, will enhance the vitality of the environment as a visitor destination.

Orientation

In tandem with upgrading the fabric of the street, which in itself will potentially attract shoppers, the opportunity to orientate visitors will be critical. This has been tackled using a three-pronged approach, alongside physically upgrading the street fabric. The three key principles include:

1. Re-routing the buses and providing a convenient and accessible bus terminus within the town centre;
2. Upgrading the multi-storey carpark by making it safer, more attractive and more user friendly, whilst also turning it into an iconic landmark building;
3. Assisting pedestrian flows by upgrading existing walkways to residential areas, introducing a direct pedestrian route through the indoor market to Bethcar Street, and making the route across the A4046 County Square junction easier, more direct, attractive and less traffic dominated.

Following on from the analysis, the town has been divided into four character zones. The opportunities are summarised on Fig 30 and briefly described below.

4.2 Northern Gateway

On entering the town by road from the north, the view is dominated by the town's existing multi-storey carpark, swiftly followed by a cluttered and unattractive signalised junction. Signage is confusing and there are no views into the town centre. An iconic new gateway is proposed to combat these negative impressions, although the ultimate rationalisation of this intersection will be reliant upon the A4046 being de-trunked. A large giratory is proposed which will form **County Square**. This will ease traffic flows, provide comfortable and spacious pedestrian refuge between Market Street and Libanus Road, and provide an opportunity for extensive large tree planting to soften the view of the multi-storey carpark (see project sheet 7).

The **multi-storey** carpark is an asset to the town, but does not fulfil its potential. It is suggested that it be upgraded to be more user friendly and physically and visually more attractive. This can be achieved by repainting and installing a new lighting system internally, addressing the perceived narrowness of the road entrance, improving the illumination of the ground floor, extending the Market Street stairwell to the upper floors and recladding it to make it more attractive (see figure 32).

Buses, (primarily shuttle buses) are to be re-routed north into and along James Street, to offer a more convenient service for shoppers relocating the currently inconvenient and unattractive stops along the A4046. This will also stop the informal but consistent dropping off and picking up outside **KwikSave**, as private cars will not be allowed through the northern town centre. Service vehicles will also have access to the northern loop. The opportunity to replace the existing KwikSave concrete canopy should be explored in order to replace it with an attractive, modern, architecturally designed canopy which can double as a bus shelter (see figure 35).

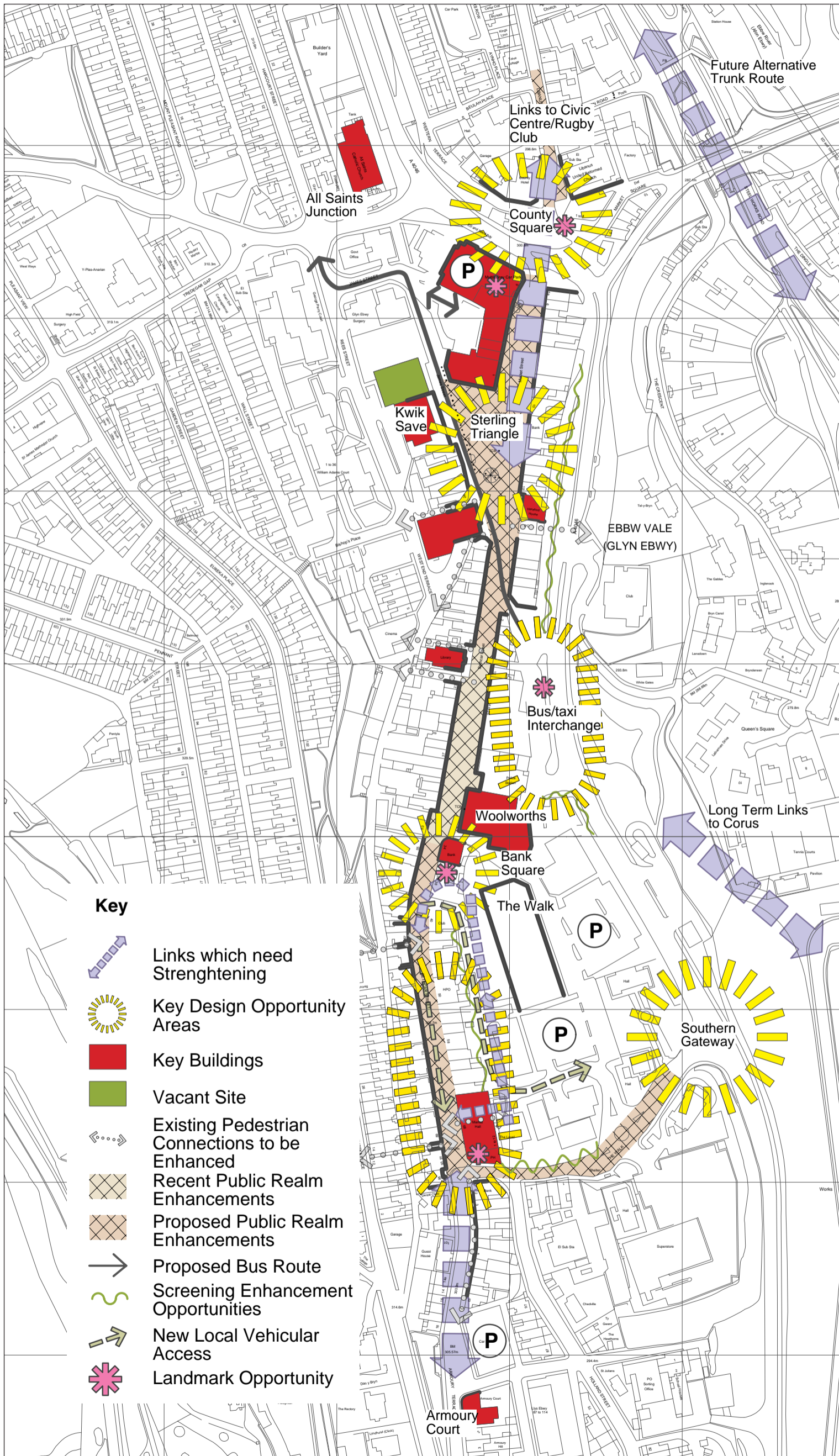
Within the wider **Market Street** context, specific opportunities include the construction of a new kiosk to mask the public toilets, which could include enhanced public conveniences and information centre as well as a coffee counter or other quality takeaway facility.

General streetscape and pedestrian link improvements can also be undertaken in the same style as the Bethcar Street scheme. These should include new paving, plane tree planting, new street furniture, public art, lighting, and new building canopies.

The proposed southerly relocation of the northbound express bus lay-by on the **A4046** will free space to allow the unsightly rears of the Market Street buildings to be screened. Screening should include specimen tree planting such as planes to soften and mask the upper floors, with a curved masonry wall to provide screening at lower levels. This will not only screen, but provide a positive and attractive feature on the A4046 corridor. New shelters of a clean and modern design should be provided for the lay-by for southbound express buses/ coaches.

The '**sterling**' triangle occupies a large, key area of the town centre, splitting James and Market Street. The overall space provides relief from the linearity of Bethcar Street and a potentially large, uncluttered and flexible pedestrian space. If development proposals are not forthcoming then the Council should be encouraged to acquire the land. This would allow the opportunity of capitalising on the unusual spatial and locational qualities of the space to provide a unique town centre piazza. A simple hard paved treatment of the space to accommodate outdoor events, and the weekly market should maintain the quality environment recently established in Upper Bethcar Street.

Figure 30: Ebbw Vale Town Centre Opportunities



- Key**
-  Links which need Strengthening
 -  Key Design Opportunity Areas
 -  Key Buildings
 -  Vacant Site
 -  Existing Pedestrian Connections to be Enhanced
 -  Recent Public Realm Enhancements
 -  Proposed Public Realm Enhancements
 -  Proposed Bus Route
 -  Screening Enhancement Opportunities
 -  New Local Vehicular Access
 -  Landmark Opportunity

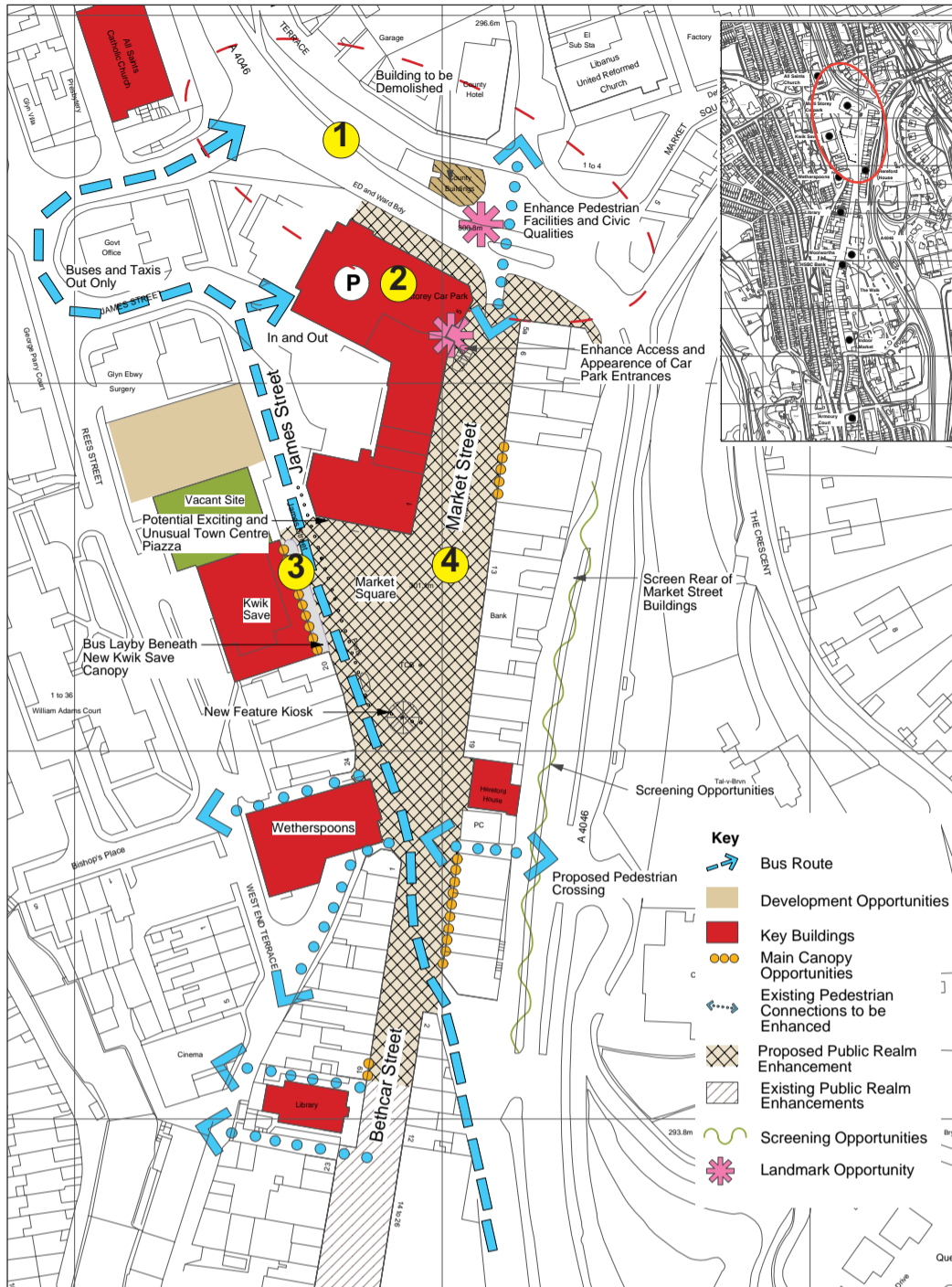


Figure 31: Northern Gateway Opportunities

4.3 Northern Gateway: Key Opportunities

1. County Square

- ¥ Simplify junction for traffic and pedestrians and provide unique landmark Gateway.
- ¥ Provide significant pedestrian friendly space and public art. Possibly introduce water within the scheme design.
- ¥ Ambitious junction scheme to counterbalance the multi-storey car park enhancements.
- ¥ Tree planting to soften view of multi-storey car park from north.

2. Multi Storey Car Park

- ¥ Enhance ground floor appearance.
- ¥ Upgrade interior (particularly lighting).
- ¥ Reduce perceived narrowness of road access.
- ¥ Provide public art to facade, and re-elevate.
- ¥ Re-elevate stairway onto Market Street and County Square/ Libanus Road by introduction of built street elements such as combined gate posts/seating.

3. Kwik Save/James Street

- ¥ Buses reintroduced northbound on James Street.
- ¥ Kwik Save re-elevated: concrete canopy removed and replaced with modern type.
- ¥ Bus lay-by introduced, with new Kwiksaver canopy doubling as bus shelter.

4. Market Street

- ¥ Re-pave, introduce coherent street furniture with judicious planting of specimen plane trees.
- ¥ Construct iconic feature kiosk on front of public conveniences to provide ticketing/ information.
- ¥ Enhance pedestrian links to west adjacent to Wetherspoons pub, through new paving, public art and lighting.
- ¥ Introduce canopies to identified buildings, via targeted grant assistance.
- ¥ Relocate north-bound bus bay to provide screening space to rear of Market Street buildings.
- ¥ Screen and soften rear of Market Street buildings with large uplit specimen plane trees and feature masonry wall.
- ¥ Provide new bus shelters to south-bound bus bay.



Figure 32: View of multistorey car park stairwell re-elevated on Market Street



Figure 33: Example of kiosk and transport interchange



Figure 34: Oblique view of Market Street / Bethcar Street from the north



Figure 35: Example of glazed canopy

4.6 Lower Bethcar Street

This part of **Bethcar Street** lies between the HSBC Bank and Indoor Market building which are two of the key buildings within the town centre. The street is pedestrianised, but a scheme to reintroduce one-way traffic and parking on a single width carriageway is currently proposed (figure 42). As part of that scheme, the two buildings to the south of the HSBC Bank are to be demolished to provide a carriageway loop back towards The Walk. The traffic flow direction and precise alignment of that road have been analysed and are addressed in a separate element of this study which proposes to construct the carriageway and parking in a curvilinear arrangement (see 5.2).

The removal of two buildings (Nos. 36-38) to make the loop will leave a significant space to the south of the HSBC Bank (see 5.3). This will create the opportunity for a pedestrian space, **Bank Square**, through which traffic will pass. It is felt that this space should form a pivotal role in the street with traffic being subservient. The carriageway could be constructed as a speed table and treated with materials sympathetic to its pedestrian priority. It is a prime objective to encourage pedestrians to continue south along Bethcar Street to explore the southern end of the town centre.

The remainder of Bank Square presents the opportunity to create a space similar to Library Square, with the inclusion of public art and uplit street tree planting. In order to contain the space, and screen the rear service yard of The Walk from Bethcar Street, a masonry wall is proposed along the eastern side of the new loop road.

In Bethcar Street itself, there are opportunities for converting buildings to offer accommodation for community enterprises. The upper floors of the **Market Hall** could be converted to apartments, with work space below providing a live-work environment which would compliment the retail opportunities of the northern part of Bethcar Street and stem the leakage of an already overly long high street. Direct pedestrian links between Bethcar Street and the pay and display carpark to the east could also be provided, which could be accommodated in tandem with the redevelopment of ground floor uses. Bethcar Street could then acquire its own identity, a different and more artisan character than the remainder of the town centre, building on its mixed-use potential. It is also felt that there is scope to encourage the conversion of one of the units on the east side of the street into a restaurant. This could be of particular relevance, in that it could fit in with the canopy concept and take advantage of the footpath widening which could arise from the new carriageway construction. It would also provide a use which would increase footfall after normal retail hours.

As a consequence of introducing additional traffic into The Walk and the reintroduction of traffic to Bethcar Street, there will be a need for coherent and systematic upgrading of the rear of the buildings on eastern Bethcar Street. This will also increase the pressure on the southern gateway from the A4046 (MacDonald s) junction, giving the added impetus to improve the safety of the

junction by providing a roundabout. Improved access would also enhance the profile and therefore development value of the Welfare/Senior Citizens Hall and St Johns Ambulance building to the north-west of the junction with the A4046. This sector of the town centre is significantly under-utilised and warrants a separate comprehensive review of its commercial development potential.



Figure 39: View of potential new canopies to Woolworths, HSBC Bank and potential infill unit



Figure 40: East (lower) Bethcar Street re-elevated with glazed canopies to shop fronts



Figure 41: Proposed elevation of Market Hall with facia removed and glazed canopies introduced

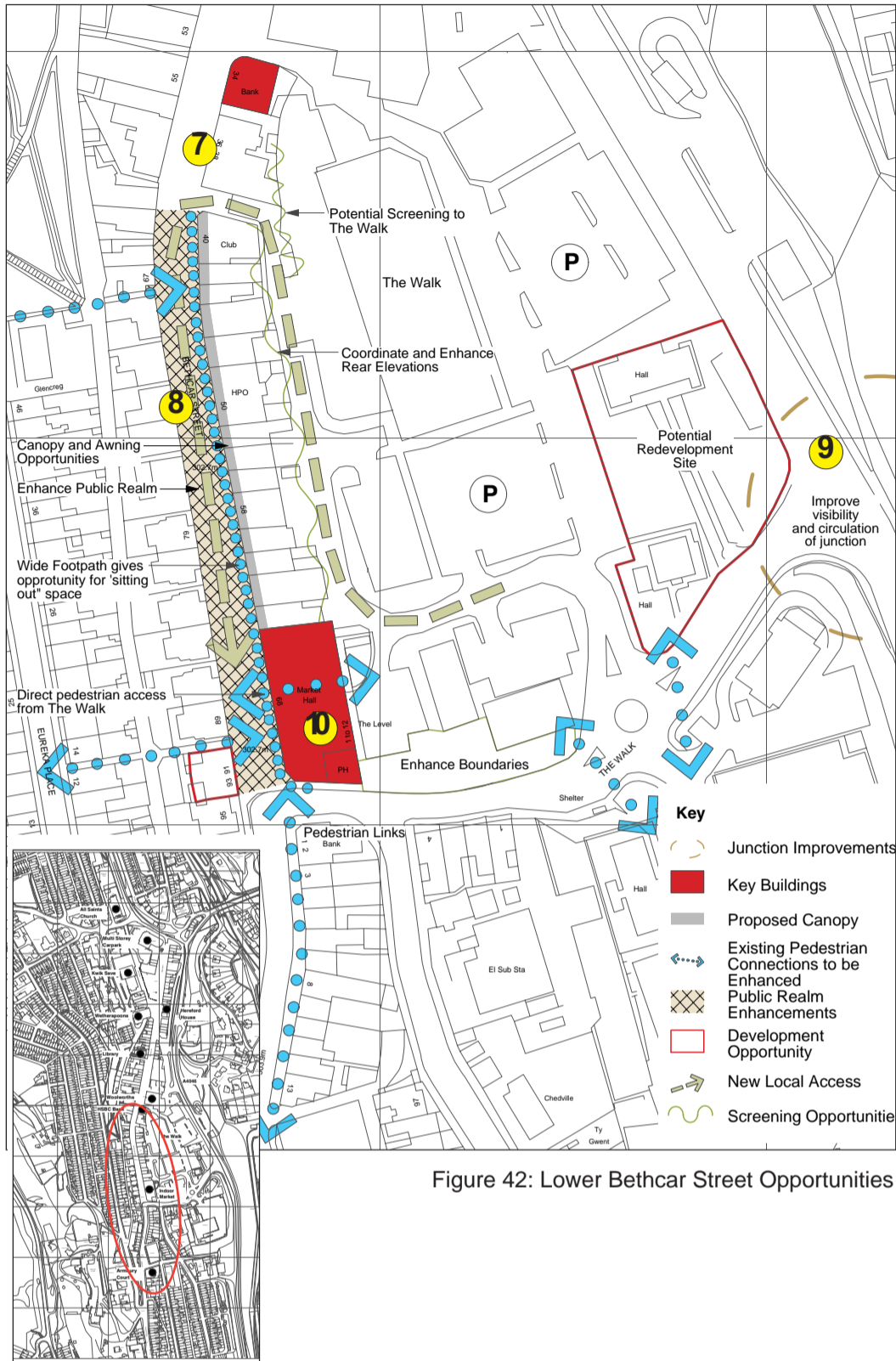


Figure 42: Lower Bethcar Street Opportunities

4.7 Lower Bethcar Street: Key Opportunities

7. Bank Square

- ¥ Introduce public space, (Bank Square), with unique identity at pivotal point south of HSBC Bank. Elements could include natural paving, railings, recladding bank s southern elevation, uplit street tree and public art.
- ¥ Introduce wall on east of Bank Square to screen rear of The Walk from public views opened up on Bethcar Street.
- ¥ Introduce direct pedestrian access from Bank Square to the rear of The Walk.

8. Bethcar Street

- ¥ Enhance pedestrian walkways to west with new paving, lighting and public art.
- ¥ Provide direct public access from The Walk, through the Indoor Market.
- ¥ Remove blue fascia to indoor market ground floor.
- ¥ Introduce canopies to selected buildings, possibly through grant schemes.
- ¥ Encourage and extend hours of use.
- ¥ Upgrade rear of buildings on Bethcar Street.

9. A4046/The Walk

- ¥ Realign/provide roundabout at Macdonalds/A4046 junction to reduce conflicts and provide a southern gateway opportunity.
- ¥ Improve northern boundaries to car parks to The Walk road, between the A4046 and Bethcar Street. Resurface the carriageway.
- ¥ Potential redevelopment of the Welfare Hall site.

10. Market Hall

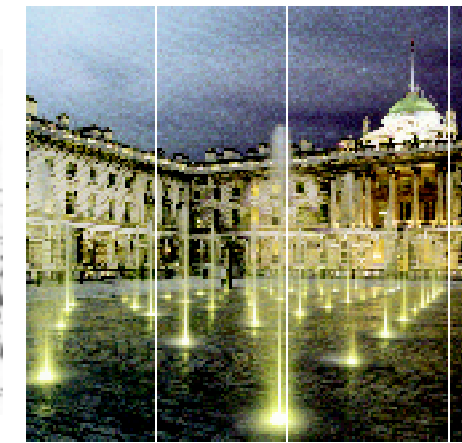
- ¥ Redevelop as multiuse living/working space, incorporating community facilities and possibly a 24 hour corner shop unit.

5.3 Bank Square



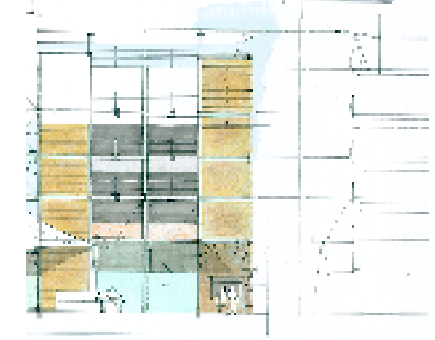
View showing new canopies to Woolworths with infill unit connection to HSBC bank

Market Square Enhancements



Uplit fountains

Perspective of kiosk, Kwik Save canopy and bus layby from first floor steps on Sterling Triangle building



Elevation of pedestrian entrance to multi storey from Market Street

5.4 TIG Guidelines

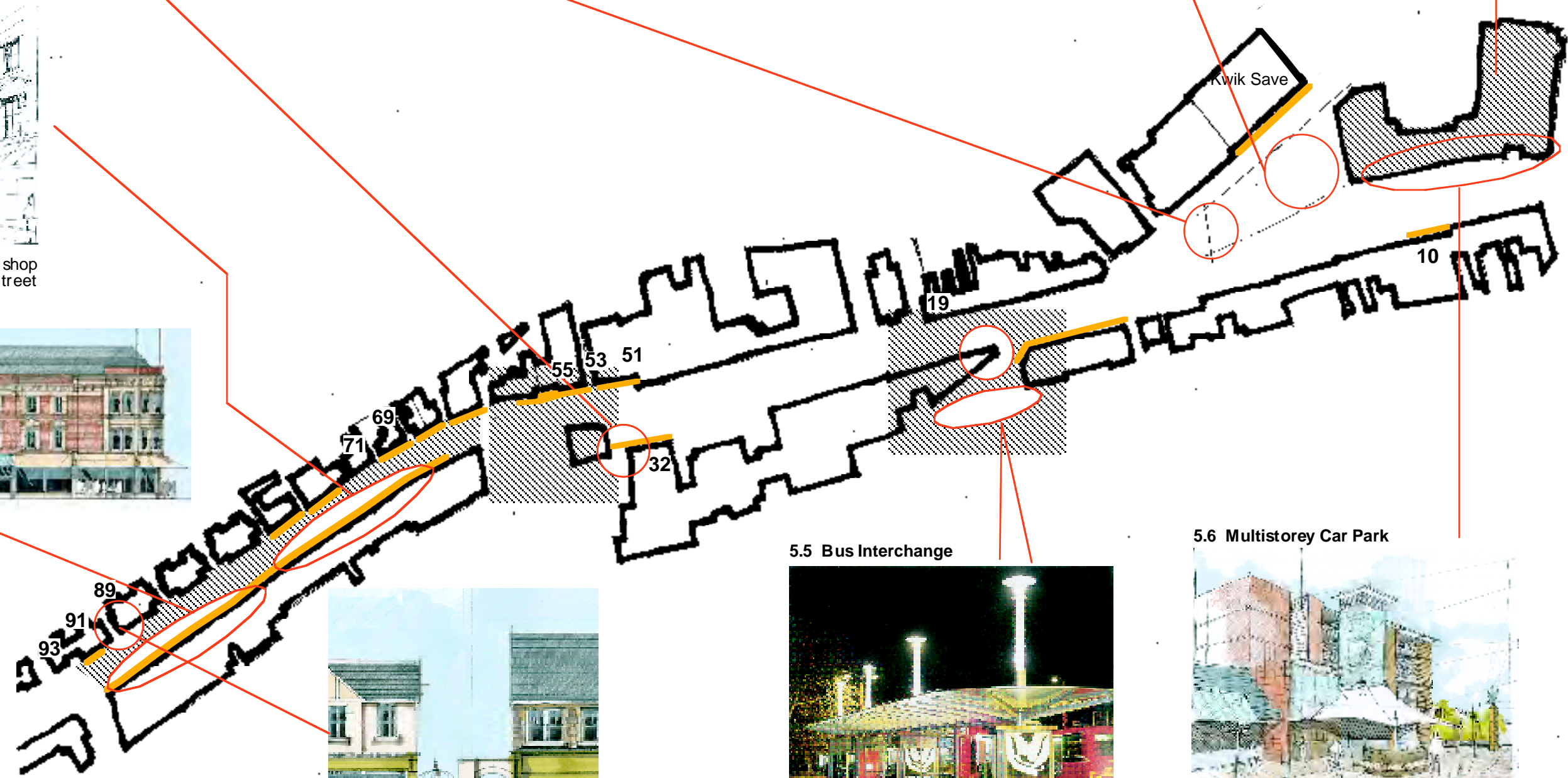


View of canopies and re-elevated shop fronts on Lower Bethcar Street

5.1 Indoor Market



Elevation of re-elevated Market Hall showing canopies



Example of re-elevated building facade

5.5 Bus Interchange



Combined taxi rank and bus stop shelter

5.6 Multistorey Car Park



Perspective of the elevated pedestrian entrance to multi storey car park from Market Street



Fig. 1: Proposed 'Rear' Perspective

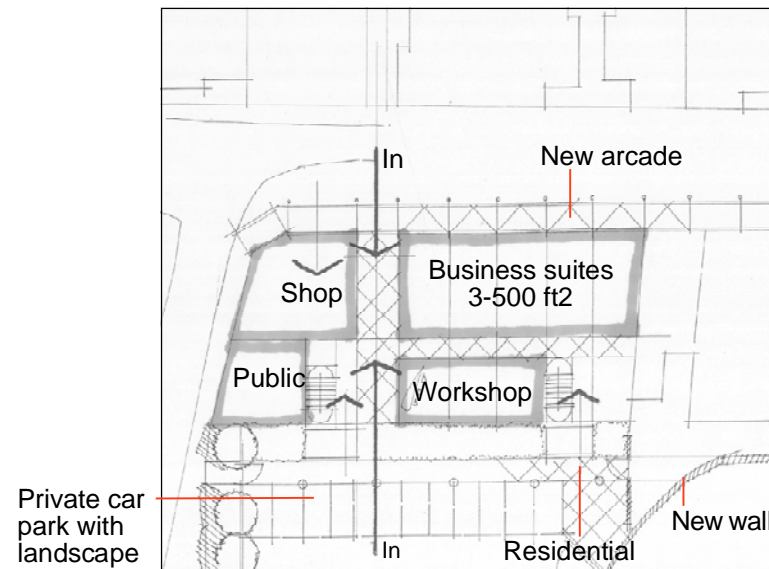


Fig. 3: Plan of Potential Ground Floor Proposals



Fig. 2: Proposed Bethcar Street Elevation

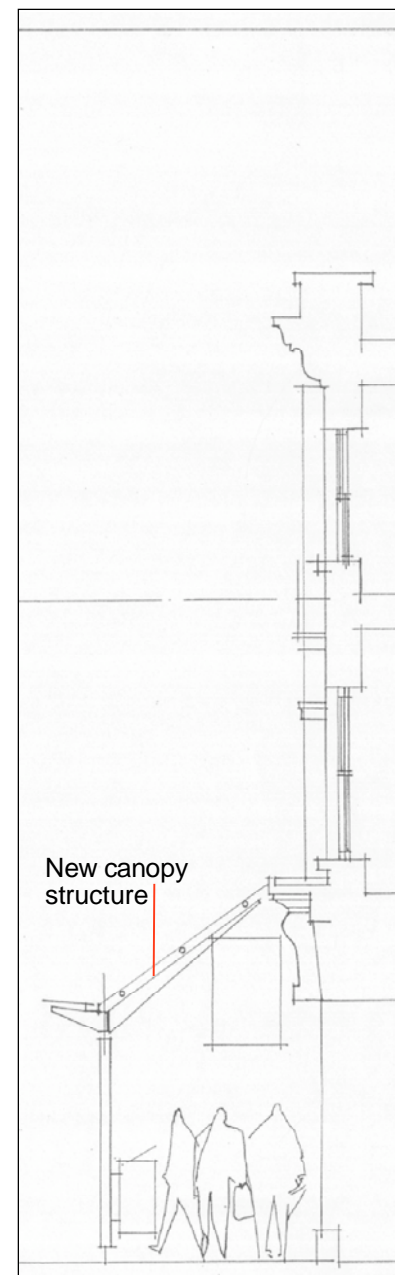


Fig. 4: Section to Bethcar Street/Canopy



Location Plan



Photo A



Photo B

Current Description

The indoor market at the southern end of Bethcar Street sits at an important gateway to the town centre (Photo A). It forms part of an attractive terrace with many fine architectural details. Its appearance is undermined by the utilitarian shopfronts on the ground floor and the deck accesses at the rear (Photo B). The building has a valuable vertical mix of uses which should be supported and promoted including "market" retail (stalls) and public house on ground floor with a combination of tenanted and owner occupied flats on the first and second floors which are deck-accessed from the rear. The building warrants public sector support in terms of its refurbishment and intensification of use.

Development Potential

It is understood that the freehold owner of the building is prepared to invest in the building's fabric and is keen to see the intensification of use of the ground floor for managed community/commercial use provided these uses can be underwritten by the public sector. Equally the owner is prepared to work with a housing agency to modernise and upgrade those flats which he owns above the market hall. The idea of introducing cultural and media related uses on the ground floor combined with living space above is an attractive idea which warrants exploration. However, it is understood that the local Development Trust has expressed an interest in managing the ground floor for business related/training/careers purposes. These would be equally appropriate.

Development Criteria

Essential Requirements

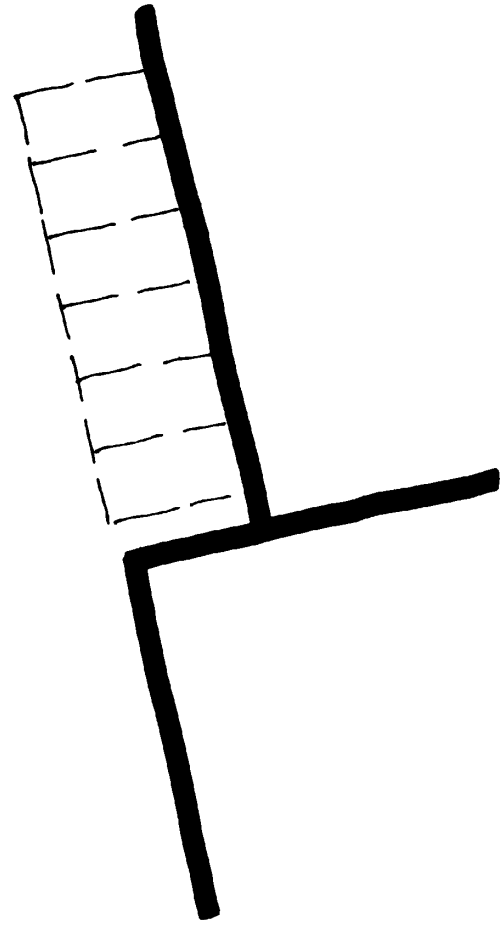
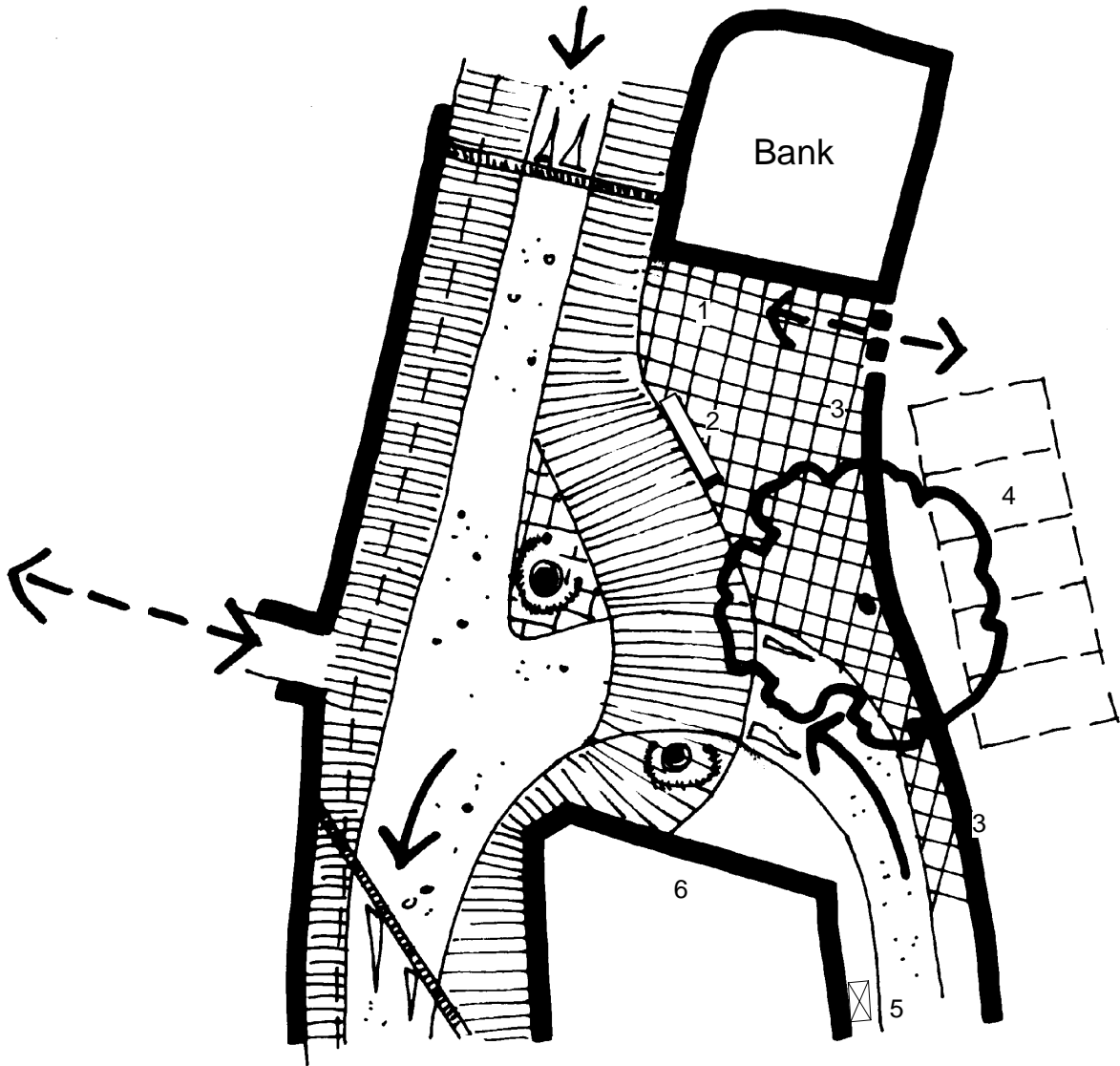
- Maintain and extend, if possible, vertical mix of uses.
- Promote refurbishment of internal and external fabric (particularly rear deck access) (Figs. 1 & 2).
- Building refurbishment must reflect and respond to quality of public realm investment in Bethcar Street (eg grant aid will demand incorporation of canopy to ground floor) (Fig. 4).
- The indoor market hall must present an accessible and active frontage to Bethcar Street.

Desirable

- The fitting out and redesign of the indoor market should incorporate a direct but secure pedestrian link through from Bethcar Street to the Walk development (Fig. 3).
- The external refurbishment should be based upon a contemporary style and design but which is flexible to allow change of use over time.
- A secure and well lit rear service area should be maintained at all times.

Negotiable

- The reintroduction of retail on the ground floor should not be ruled out particularly if it contributes to maintaining an active frontage to Bethcar Street.
- Providing the flexibility to allow uses to "spill out" on to the pavement at certain times (weather permitting) should be considered (eg street cafes, etc).
- Servicing the building should be from the rear (ie the Walk).



York/Pennant stone paving



Public art



Uplit street tree



Feature stone walling



Feature brick and tile wall



Feature stone walling



Public treatment to walkway

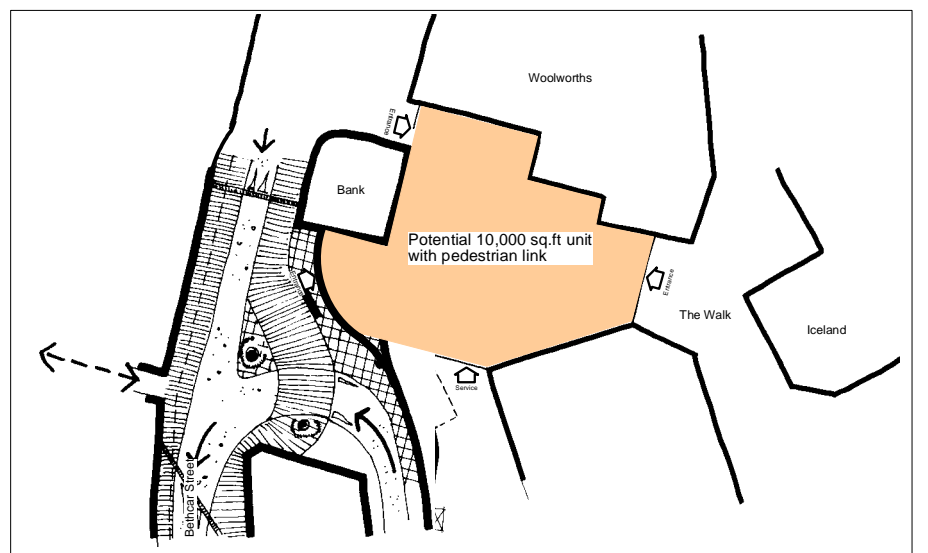


Existing public walkway

KEY

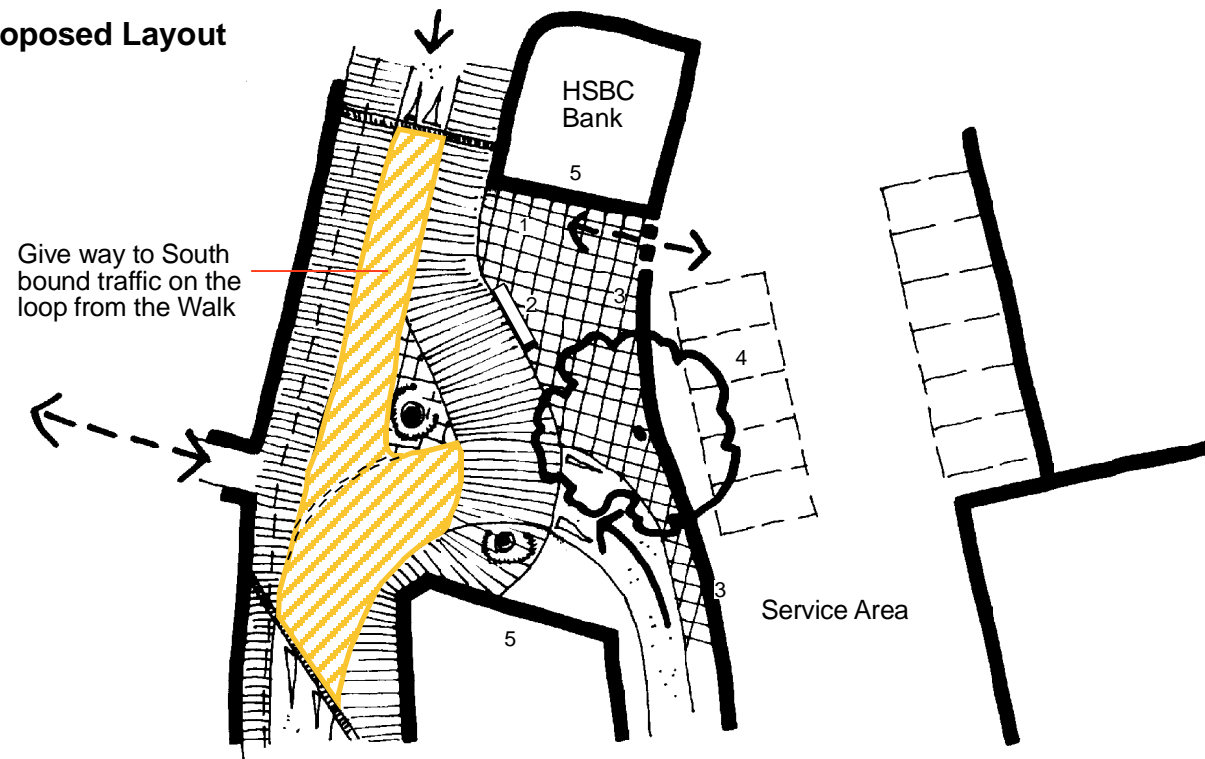
- 1. Maintain Pedestrian Access
- 2. Uplit Stone Wall Seating
- 3. 2m high Stone/Brick Wall
- 4. 5No. Relocated Carparking Spaces
- 5. Bin Compactor
- 6. Facade Upgraded - Possible Canopy

- York/Pennant Stone Sawn Paving
- Riven/Flame Textured Slate
- Clay Paviers
- Tarmaccadam
- 50mm Conservation Kerb Upstand
- Stainless Steel Public Art Railings
- Large Street Trees, Plane or Clean Lime, or to match those on Library Square



Inset - showing alternative 10,000sq.ft unit

Proposed Layout



Key

1. Maintain Pedestrian Access
 2. Uplit Stone Wall Seating
 3. Stone/ Brick Wall
 4. 5 no. Relocated Car Parking Spaces
 5. Facade Upgraded
- York/Pennant Stone Sawn Paving
 - Riven/Flame Textured Slate
 - Clay Paviers
 - Tarmacadam
 - Speed Table
 - Public Art
 - Large Street Trees, Plane or Clean Lime, or to match those on Library Square

Current Description

- Part of the 'street' rather than a defined space
- Visual leakage to north and south
- HSBC building forms visual full stop to Lower Bethcar Street by physically projecting into the street rather than forming part of the 'Square'
- Low quality pedestrian links east to the rear of The Walk and west to residential areas
- The streetscape's poor physical quality is emphasised by the adjacent high quality environmental improvements
- Some very poor quality shop fronts
- Council proposal to implement phase two of the environmental improvements which will impact upon the space by
 - Demolishing numbers 36 and 38 Bethcar Street
 - Opening up Bethcar Street to the rear service access of The Walk
 - More than doubling the size of the area and forming it into a 'space'
 - The southern wall of the HSBC building providing spatial definition
 - Bringing a new carriageway loop from The Walk south onto Bethcar Street

Development Potential

- To become a defined pedestrian focus/ gathering point
- To screen the rear of The Walk from Bethcar Street whilst providing a visual focus and enticement from The Walk
- To encourage owners to upgrade their shop fronts by enhancing their surroundings
- To strengthen and enhance pedestrian links to residential areas and The Walk

Development Criteria

Essential Requirements

- New façade to southern wall of HSBC building
- High quality materials to match those of the recently completed environmental improvements including slate and sandstone
- Screen wall at the back of the footpath between the new 'Square' and The Walk
- Speed table to alert drivers they are entering a pedestrian area
- Pedestrian space clearly defined from carriageway

Desirable

- Uplit specimen tree to visually soften buildings on The Walk
- Artist input into street furniture, wall feature and HSBC façade
- Artist input into upgrading and lighting of the western pedestrian links
- New façade with artist input to number 40 Bethcar Street (Conservative Club)

Negotiable

- Pedestrian link to parking spaces to the north of The Walk

Approximate Cost £230,000.00
(Some costs absorbed by Phase Two of Bethcar Street Loop)



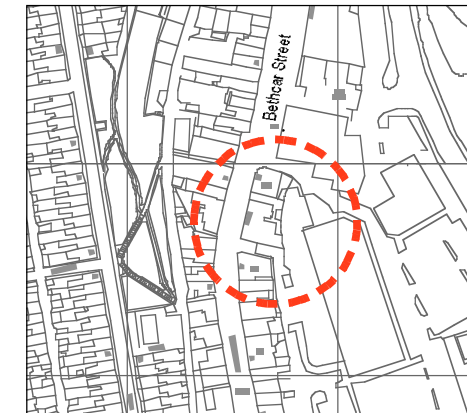
Uplit street tree



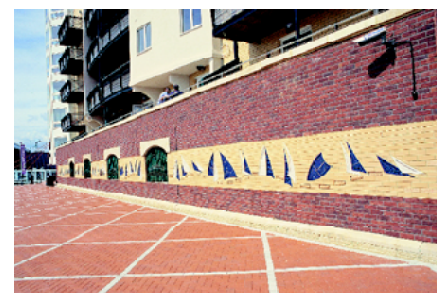
York/Pennant stone paving



Photo E



Location Plan



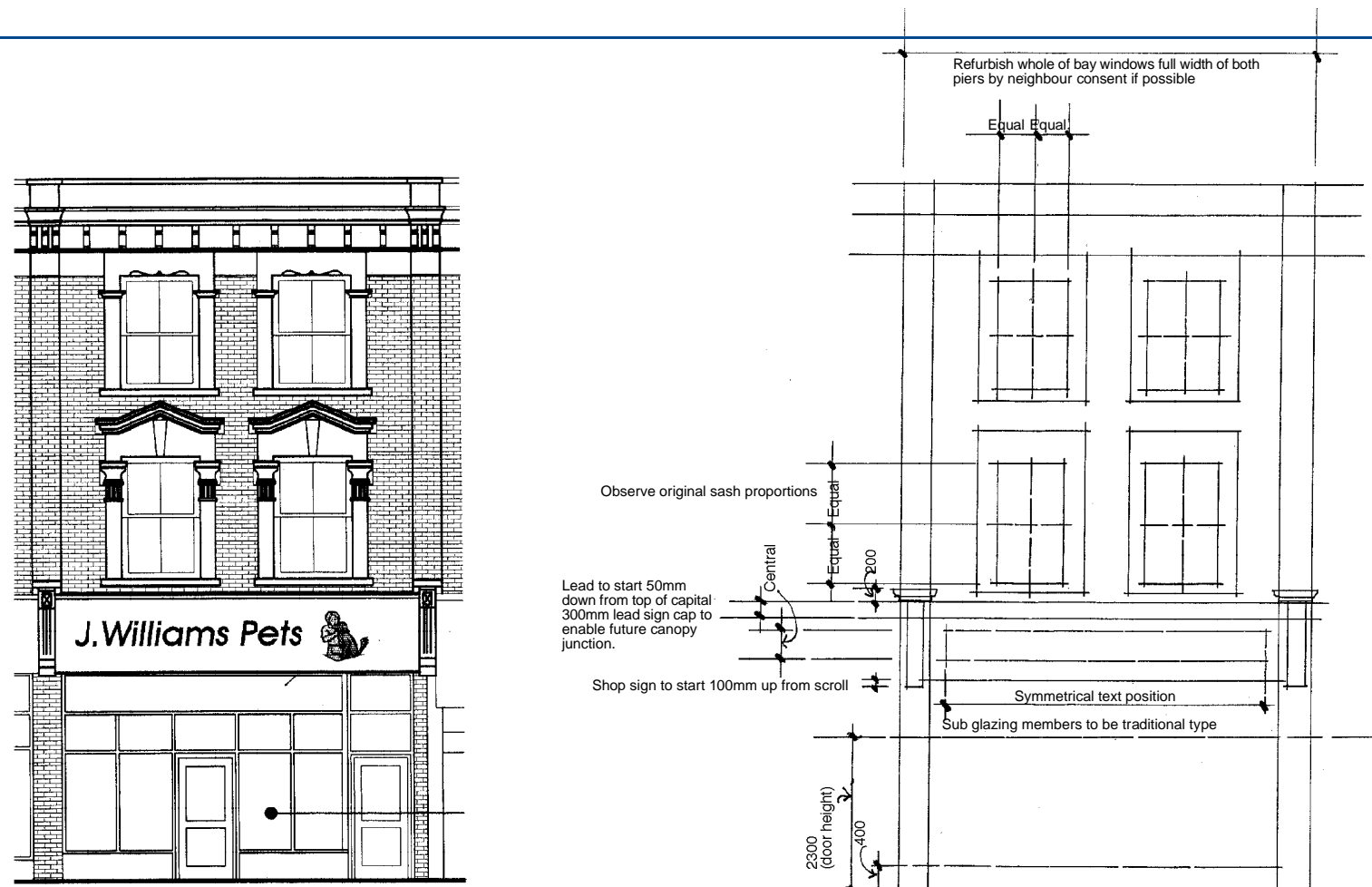
Feature brick and tile wall



Feature Pennant stone wall



Photo F

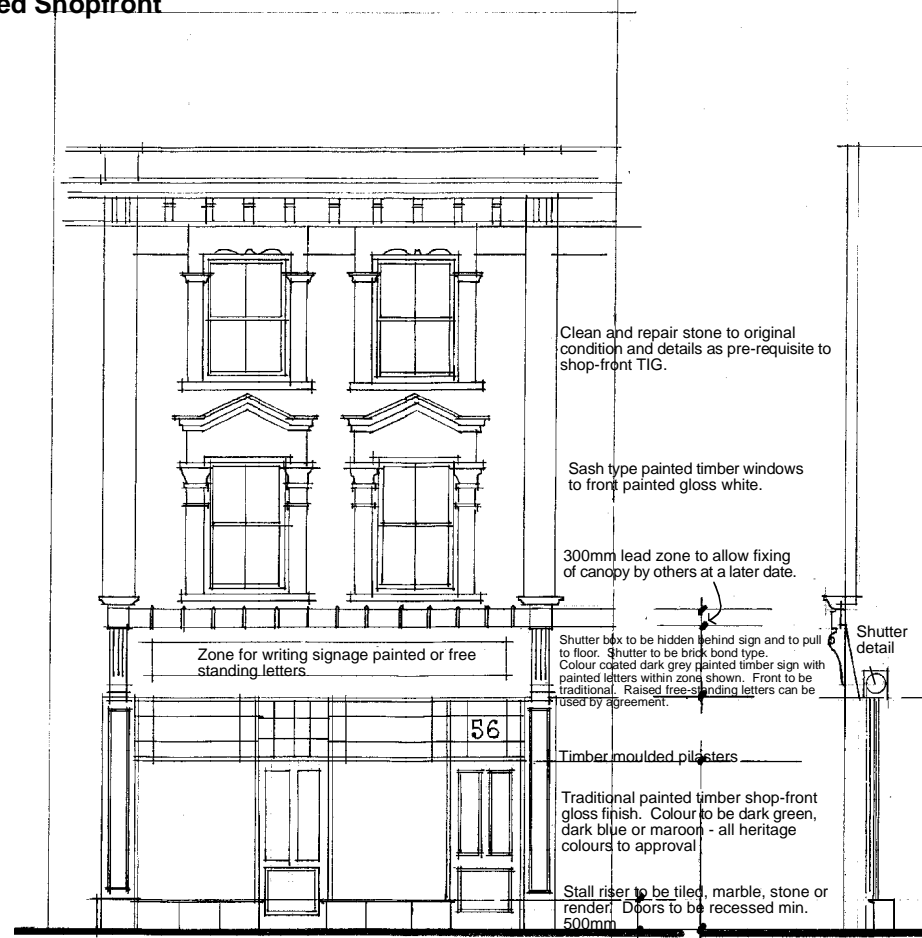


Typical Proposed Shopfront

Principle Generators

Design Principles

- The typical Victorian shopfront in Ebbw Vale exhibits strong vertical and horizontal repetitive rhythms in both solid and void features.
- Attempts should be made to strengthen this formality currently diluted by the adhoc approach to shopfronts.
- Common treatment of high level windows is a must with restrictions on stall riser height and door head heights within shopfronts to reinstate harmony at street level.
- Signage should follow a common zone and be symmetrical about the shopfront.
- A 300mm zone as shown detailed as a lead flashing should be maintained directly below the capital level to allow for canopy fixings at a later date. This must be unilaterally applied.
- Signs must be painted timber, not backlit and letters of traditional font such as Times New Roman.
- Shopfronts should be detailed in a traditional manner in timber. Glazing members are to be moulded as opposed to square edged.
- Shopfront colours should be restricted to a palette of 3 dark heritage colours within the overall block, such as Dulux heritage range maroon, dark blue and olive green. Colours are to be submitted for approval.



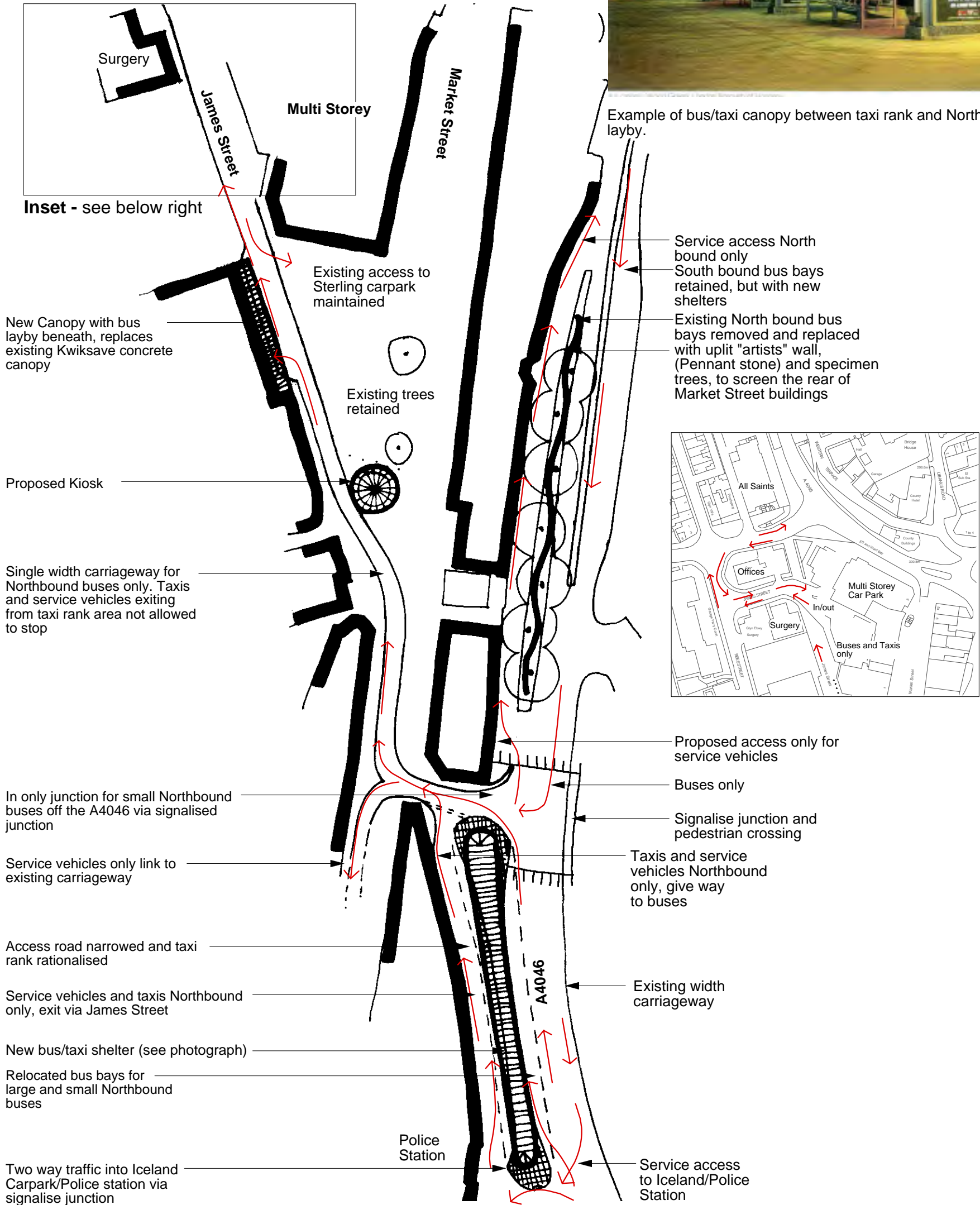
Possible Design Solution



Example of masonry wall which could screen off the rear of the buildings on Market Street.



Example of bus/taxi canopy between taxi rank and Northbound bus layby.





Photograph from the South showing the existing multi storey carpark

Appraisal

- The metal clad 1960's multi-storey car park is the first impression of the town to motorists as they approach from the North.
- High level roof form and street level surfaces and materials need to be carefully considered.
- The principal staircase in particular represents a good opportunity for an iconic art form which can be illuminated from the inside at night.
- Where the car park touches the street the careful modelling of wall materials in such form as carved local stone improve and add interest to a bland and boring facade.



Position of the car park relative to the shopping street

Location Plan

Existing Spaces and Structures : Key Opportunities

Roof

The main intensions are to take away the cold, hard feel of the existing structure. An aerofoil roof form could soften the overall impact and try to break up the scale. It is envisaged that this aerofoil will be a metal structure of lightweight construction with a light or shiny finish. A similar roof form could cap the new stair tower.

Surfaces

It is proposed that the existing staircase is extended to the upper most level. This stair core can be clad in plain or etched glass to provide views out and in, and allow vistas over the town from a high level vantage point. Lighting will also play an important part in this key vertical feature.

Stairwell

Around the base of the stair shaft the opportunity exists to create a covered canopy area. This offers an excellent opportunity for public art in terms of its spacial design and surface treatment. Opportunities also exist here for seating areas, again which can have some art-work input.

Cladding

To give more warmth to this unendearing structure it is proposed that the main re-clad materials are natural hardwood boarding and warm terracotta panelling on a metal sub-grid. Handrailing to the exposed deck edges can be painted metal and again offers the opportunity for artistic input.

Summary

This building offers a variety of opportunities for artisans to input into the architecture with great effect. These include:-

- | | |
|-----------------|-----------------------------|
| Canopy | Screen printing and imagery |
| Railings | Glazed images |
| Cladding | Metalwork |
| Glass Stair | Tower Lighting and colour |
| Stone Plinth | Carving |
| Roof edge | Metalwork |
| Timber Cladding | Carving and detailing |



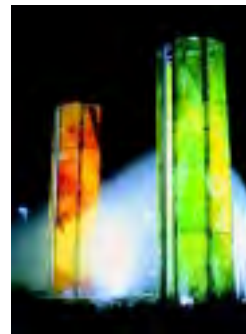
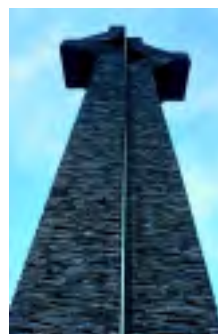
View of stairwell from Market Street with gatepost/pillars framing view to Proposed County Square



Terracotta panelling



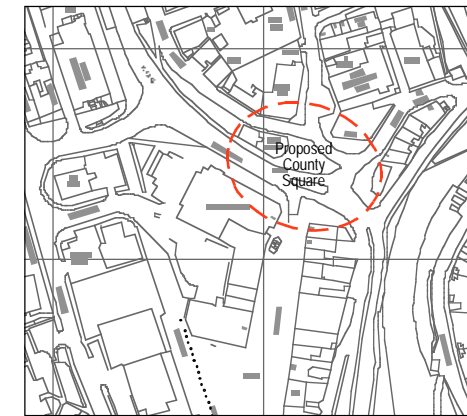
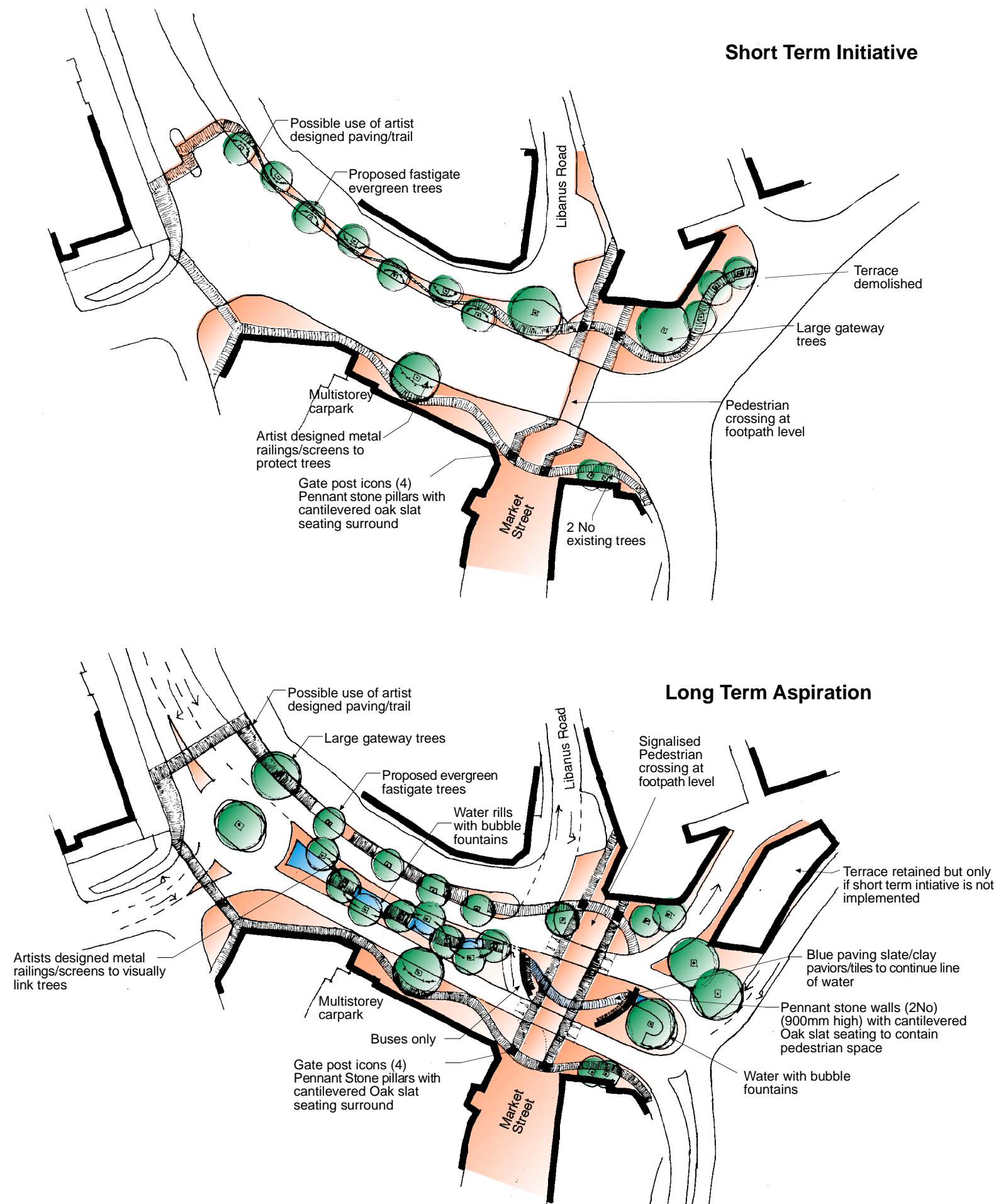
Hardwood timber cladding



Public art images of gatepost/pillars

Key Actions

- Re-clad externally
- Soften roof line with aerofoil
- Iconic tower structure to extended stairwell from Market Street to upper floors
- Incorporation of stone and timber seating under canopy
- Paint and re-illuminate interior
- Lighten ground floor appearance
- Increase apparent width at main entrance



Location Plan



Photo I



Photo J

Current Description

- Complicated and busy signalised dual carriageway junction with numerous vehicular movements (Photo I).
- Traffic dominated carriageway, very uncomfortable for pedestrians
- Isolates the town centre from the businesses and residential areas to its north
- Multiplicity of signs and poor quality metal railings create a visually unattractive and complex interchange for motorists and pedestrians
- Unattractive multi storey carpark with dark and dull public realm adjacent to the highway

Development Potential

- To create a significant visual and physical gateway to the town centre
- To aid the pedestrian flow between the town centre and the businesses and residential areas to its north
- To create a civic space with tall trees, the verticality of which will partly counterbalance the carpark scale

Development Criteria

Essential Requirements

- Pedestrian crossing at footpath level
- Continuity of paving materials to both sides of the junction
- Tall trees to counterbalance the scale of the multi-storey carpark
- Materials to reflect the recently completed street enhancement works
- Minimum width carriageways to allow maximum width central pedestrian refuge (Long Term only)
- Upgrade building facades enclosing junction including County Hotel, Bed Shop and gable ends of 5a Market Street and 5 Market Square

Desirable

- Construction of pillars/gateposts to match and provide visual reference to any constructed as part of the carpark works
- Use of timber including for street furniture, to soften the expanse of hard materials
- Artist designed railings and street furniture

Negotiable

- Single phase pedestrian crossing to obviate need for central reservation (Short Term only)

Approximate Cost Short Term £ 275,000.00

Approximate Cost Long Term £ 575,000.00

6.0 Outputs

6.1 Context

There are currently no socio economic assessment techniques for urban design and public realm works that would allow an assessment of the impact of the Ebbw Vale proposals.

As a result a set of targets have been developed based upon the numbers of people arriving from increased car park use and increased public transport for both existing users and new users. These numbers together with a target expenditure provide a monitoring framework for the development

No trend data has been accessed in terms of business units in Ebbw Vale over the past few years which would allow an estimate to be made of survival rate of businesses in the town following the proposals. Consequently the increase in turnover that has been identified as being required to support the investment relates to the increased turnover of the existing shops.

6.2 Assumptions

Table 2 sets out the businesses in Market St. and Bethcar St. for which targets have been set for increases in turnover. Although benefits would accrue to other businesses in Ebbw Vale, the assessment is based on these two streets without any multiplier effect elsewhere. While the Experian data provides information on the number of employees, turnover data for these businesses is limited and variable. Consequently turnover figures are based on the numbers of employees multiplied by an estimated £50,000 turnover per employee.

Table 1				
Ebbw Vale Business				
SIC	Units	Employees	Average Employees	Turnover est at 50k per employee
1,000	9	85	9	4.2
2,000	32	746	24	37.3
3,000	25	1,879	75	93.9
4,000	35	188	5	9.4
5,000	185	1,592	8	79.6
6,000	42	305	7	15.2
7,000	42	347	8	17.3
8,000	60	1,088	18	54.4
9,000	58	446	7	23.3

Source: Experian

Table 2				
Business in Affected Areas				
SIC	Units	Employees	Average Employees	Turnover est at 50k per employee
Bethcar St	54	207		10.3
Of which retail	23	100		5.0
Of which independents	16			
Market St	33	362		18.1
Of which retail	23	306		15.3
Of which independents	15			

Source: Experian

The total scheme cost is in the order of £8 million. At a discount rate of 10%, an annual benefit of £800,000 would create a positive net present value. Excluding the businesses in Standard Industrial Classifications which are predominantly public sector activity and based on the calculation of estimated turnover, the turnover of the existing retail businesses in the most affected areas would need to increase by 4% in order to generate the £800,000 (From Table 2 estimated turnover of retail businesses in affected areas is £20 million. 4% of this is £800,000). At £50,000 per job this would generate 16 jobs.

In order to establish some parameters it has been assumed that 90% of this increase would come from existing customers staying longer and 10% would come from new customers. On this basis the expenditure of new customers would be £80,000 per annum (as 10% of the £800,000 target).

To assess the minimum expansion in car parking required, it has been assumed that the new customers are people who instead of driving past, are now stopping and using the car park. An extra 10 cars per day would generate 3,000 visits a year. If they spend an average of £28 this would rise the required £80,000 (10% of £800,000).

Since the businesses turnover will need to increase by 4%, the existing customers will need to increase their expenditure by 4% to generate the balance of the required increase in turnover of £720,000. Changing the assumptions provides a range for the targets.

At £100,000 per employee the turnover increase would be 2% and at £25,000 per employee it would be 8%.

At a discount rate of 5% the target increase in turnover would be £1,600,000 per annum.

These are probably minimum targets as maintenance costs will also increase and these calculations are based on the capital costs. However this will be offset by any improvement in business survival rates and in inward investment in new shops.

The profit on the increase in turnover would be available to finance improvements to the property. It has been assumed that the public realm works alone will be insufficient to increase demand by £800k per annum and that some private investment would also be required. As an idea of the possible potential for this, a 10% profit margin would provide shops with £80k to invest in improvements (10% of £800,000 increase in turnover being £80,000). This only amounts to an average of £1700 for all units in the affected areas per annum although the national chains and franchises may not require this investment. This also assumes that 100% of the expected increase in profit arising from sales is invested in the first year.

6.3 Summary

It is recommended that a survey of the businesses in the area be carried out to assess the above assumptions.

Discussions with businesses in combination with scheme drawings would be needed to assess the increase in businesses

turnover. Additionally a shoppers survey in combination with scheme drawings will allow an assessment of current numbers of people shopping and possible impact of both the scheme and of the Corus closure.

With regard to the increased use of the car park, a survey of shoppers would allow those coming by car to be asked additional questions about the car park and its accessibility. However this would not allow an estimate of new people stopping who used to drive past.

Given the unknown impact of the Corus closure on Ebbw Vale, this approach provides a framework for more detailed consultation with both business and shoppers. Although these are broad estimates and will require revision, they do include the key factors for assessing the impact on existing and new shoppers and hence the viability of any redevelopment.

7.0 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 Commercial Status

Ebbw Vale has historically served a considerable catchment area. Its position as a sub-regional centre, however, has been undermined in recent years by a variety of factors not least the increase in out-of-town retail provision and more recently the announcement to close the Corus site. The Council justifiably recognises this as a major concern. The town appears to have lagged behind as new development has forged ahead out-of-town.

Closer inspection of the town centre suggests that it has certain elements with substantial character and that there is much to be capitalised upon within the urban fabric. Incoherence, poor accessibility and up until recently, an uninspiring public realm have nonetheless limited the potential for its development in recent years. While traffic management provides the key to unlock environmental improvement options it will be a **comprehensive management** approach that will contribute most towards the enhancement of the centre. It will demand commercial acumen to turn the vision into reality and to attract appropriate new investment through the Commercial Improvement Area status and targeted Town Improvement Grants.

7.2 Consensus

Ebbw Vale Town Centre needs a decision-making framework which all the major stakeholders can support. The framework outlined above is intended to:

- ¥ Establish a **greater sense of place** and **urban quality**;
- ¥ Recognise the historical significance of **key areas** such as Market Street and Bethcar Street;
- ¥ Link key locations through an imaginative use of **public art**; and
- **Communicate those opportunities** through the production of a coherent and stimulating investment strategy.

7.3 Retail Opportunities

The strategy must acknowledge the measures that will be necessary to stem retail trade leakage, identify new mechanisms to unify the town's retail core and support the objectives and the economic outputs which will be derived from increased retail activity.

This may require the **shortening and consolidation of the retail strip** and accepting that conversions to, say residential and business uses, particularly along Lower Bethcar Street may be the most realistic option.

7.4 Accessibility

The scope for improved traffic management and the possible reintroduction of buses and on-street parking (including the potential relocation of bus stops into James Street) may be a radical suggestion but one which will add significantly to the

convenience of the town centre and make it more user friendly. Pedestrian circulation as well as cycle access and accessibility for the mobility impaired all need comprehensive consideration.

7.5 Public Art (Appendix B)

A Public Art strategy can create surprising and memorable experiences often out of mundane or purely functional spaces. The public art strategy advocated for Ebbw Vale's public spaces will ensure that these spaces become distinctive, memorable and must make the difference. This transformation can encourage social and economic optimism and **increased confidence**. Public Art strategies can introduce a rich collection of distinctive features adding to the character, image and strengthen the identity and sense of place and (through the use potentially of local steel) make connections between the past and the present.

7.6 Cultural Development

The town centre must also seek to diversify to extend people's stay in terms of both daytime and evening recreational pursuits. The linkages to different parts of the town (e.g. Civic Centre, Corus site, and Rugby Club for example) need to be enhanced so that visitors can be encouraged to make more and better use of the Town Centre which they currently miss.

7.7 Recommendations

Setting the Tone

In essence Ebbw Vale needs to make a radical step change in its aspirations and expectations if it is to survive its current economic decline. It needs to make people visit and spend time and money in Ebbw Vale in preference to any other centre in the region. To achieve this Ebbw Vale must focus on making its town centre:

- a) More convenient
- b) Safer, comfortable and enjoyable
- c) More accessible.

Coordination

To do this the town must take a comprehensive approach to the management of its environment and its image. A single point of reference which can coordinate all the local authority's departmental services will be critical. A town centre manager who can channel resources and target funding opportunities within an agreed set of objectives will create a significant step forward in the Council's attitude to the Town centre's assets and their promotion.

Focused Strategy

The design-led strategy for the Town Centre outlined by this document focuses upon the following objectives:

- ¥ Seek to concentrate the retail core;

-
- ¥ Improve visitor facilities (e.g. signage, security, toilets, parking, shelter);
 - ¥ Encourage a diversification into other uses (e.g. residential, SMES, media and cultural businesses);
 - ¥ Make public transport more convenient and accessible;
 - ¥ Set the pace for other development initiatives (be proactive not reactive);
 - ¥ Market the town's assets, profile and image;

The Council and the WDA must now agree a set of long term objectives for the town centre which set the tone and aspirations for future development which should not be sacrificed or compromised for short term gains.

A1 Introduction

The retailers survey below was carried out with a total sample number of 23, comprising 17 retailers who are represented in the town and 6 who are not. This sample number is insufficient to facilitate detailed statistical analysis but nevertheless, reveals interesting views and opinions on various issues, some showing a consensus and others largely divergent views and opinions. Rather than trying to undertake a detailed statistical analysis, a more general overview is given, highlighting the more salient comments and indicating consensus or divergent views on specific issues as appropriate.

A2 Methodology

Direct telephone contact was made with a selection of retailers within various categories and types representative of those already with representation in Ebbw Vale, and others who one would normally expect to wish to be represented in a town of this size and type.

Sample

The sample is as follows:-

Those represented in Ebbw Vale	17
Those not represented	6
	23

This sample is made up of retailers in the following categories:-

Retailer Type	Number represented in town	Number not represented in town
Sports	1	1
Jewellery	1	0
News/Cards	1	0
Fashion	1	1
Health/Pharmaceuticals	2	0
Food	2	0
Household	2	1
Family Clothing	3	1
Footwear	1	1
Electrical	0	1
Financial Services	1	0

Of the above, 6 represented retailers who are either based in the town or have a strong local involvement and control. Others would normally be categorised as multiple retailers with typical central control and management outside of the area.

A3 Issues

Perception

There is an almost unanimous perception of Ebbw Vale as a town typical of many in the region that expanded in the heyday of the heavy industries and has been in decline for a number of years alongside the industries in question. Terms most commonly used to describe the town were rundown , economically challenged , declining , untidy and, more harshly decaying or dying . The most critical comment is that the process of decline and decay is ongoing.

Many retailers mentioned the perception of the town being unfriendly to shoppers by virtue of the deterioration in fabric of Bethcar Street. None mentioned the improvements brought about by recent expenditure by the Local Authority.

Trading Performance

Most of the retailers contacted were prepared to give a general indication of the factual circumstances relating to the trading performance on condition that the findings remain anonymous. Responses were generally downbeat with over 80% of retailers canvassed categorising trading performance as disappointing, below average, marginal or declining.

Over 60% reported sales declining either in real terms, or in some cases in actual terms over recent years. Many of these indicated the decline as being most evident during the last 2 to 3 years. The possible reasons for which are mentioned elsewhere herein.

Three of the retailers represented confirm that trade is marginal and that branches are under threat of closure.

A number of opinions were mentioned for this poor trading performance. The three most commonly mentioned factors were as follows:-

- a. The economy of the town. This was perceived to be poor and declining. The possible closure of CORUS is well recognised as a perceived threat by many of the retailers questioned.
- b. Tesco. A number of retailers mentioned the relocation of Tesco from the town centre to sychfoss as a watershed of the town s retailing performance.
- c. Festival Park. A number of retailers confirmed competition from the Festival Park at Victoria as contributing towards poor trading performance.

Car Parking

The issue of car parking attracted very mixed views, split roughly 50/50 between the perception that car parking is adequate/convenient, and inadequate/inconvenient. There were no discernible views regarding signage/directions to car parks and the most commonly voiced opinions and criticisms were as follows:-

- a. That car parking should be free, to compete with out of town facilities.
- b. That existing car parks lack good management. The multi-storey car park is in poor condition and need of physical improvement, and better management.
- c. That on market days too much car parking is taken up by parking for market traders.

Signage

No strong views were expressed regarding signage.

Environment

There was near unanimous opinion that the retailing environment in the town centre is reflective of the decaying economy of the town and in need of improvement. Very few were aware of recent improvements carried out by the Local Authority and even those that were aware of it made no mention of its effect.

Local Transportation

There were no specific comments of note.

Street Market

The operation of the street market generated a great divergence of opinions. 80% of those contacted felt that generally street markets are beneficial to town centres and 70% felt the existing street market to be beneficial to Ebbw Vale. The remaining 30% did not think the street market to be beneficial; these tended to include those with strong local management. Two of the most locally based retailers were vociferous in their criticism and the effect that the market has on the visibility of and accessibility of their shops to customers. The more locally based traders suggested that the market should be subject to greater management, control and regulation particularly in terms of its size, layout and method of operation.

Property Values

Of the retailers contacted, 25% confirmed benefiting from freehold ownership, and of these, several ventured the opinion that the benefit of this was such as to offer a cushion against declining performance. Many occupying on leasehold tenure suggested that the marginal nature of their trading performance rendered ongoing representation vulnerable to increases in rental level. Profitability has been aided over recent years by static rental levels, but the mechanism of upward only rent reviews, which prevents rents in most instances from falling in the short to medium term, is likely to cause difficulties should trading

performance continue to decline. The significance of this is that rental increases would be likely to make trading more marginal whereas static or falling rental values will discourage investment in the town centre with a detrimental effect on the property stock and fabric of buildings.

Threats/Weaknesses

The weaknesses most commonly quoted were as follows:-

- a. CORUS (8 times)
The proposed closure of CORUS is obviously a significant factor causing uncertainty over the future of the town.
- b. Shopping layout (6 times)
The inconvenient linear, probably overly long arrangement of the shopping centre was seen by many as a significant disbenefit. Many retailers felt that this reflected in on over provision of floor space and suggested that the consolidation of retail into a shorter but stronger pitch at the expense of properties at the margins would be beneficial.
- c. Tesco closure (5 times)
The loss of food retailing in the town centre was quoted by many as a weakness. Some accepted that the new stores for Aldi and Iceland might re-address this balance somewhat, and accepted that the beneficial effects of The Walk have not yet been felt.
- d. Festival Park (5 times)
The competition of Festival Park was quoted as a significant threat.
- e. Competition
A number of retailers reflected upon the growing strength of competing centres such as Cardiff and Merthyr Tydfil as a significant threat to the health of the town centre.

A4 Demand/Requirements

Of the 6 retailers canvassed who were not represented in the town, the following responses were received:-

- a. No requirement - 4
Four retailers indicated that they have never given serious consideration to locating in Ebbw Vale due to the limited trade potential and perceived declining economy of the town. All four indicated that they are happy that their existing branches in competing towns, such as Cardiff, Merthyr Tydfil, and Newport etc, are capable of servicing the market in Ebbw Vale.
- b. Abandoned Requirement - 1
One retailer confirmed having made serious enquiries regarding properties in Ebbw Vale but have subsequently abandoned their potential requirement because of the economy of the town and the proposed CORUS closure.

c. Potential requirement - 1

One retailer indicated that it does have a potential requirement, albeit this is tempered by nervousness as a result of the proposed CORUS closure. The requirement is dormant, and will be reviewed periodically.

d. Definite requirements - 0

A5 Conclusions

It is difficult to draw definitive conclusions due to the vagueness and limitations of the survey sample and results. However, various issues and concerns have been clearly identified:-

1. There is a clear majority view that **the long-term economic performance of the town is questionable**, the position being significantly exacerbated by the proposed CORUS closure.
2. Existing **retailer performance is poor and declining**. A number of retailers are trading on the margins of profit and loss. Over half report a clear downward trend. A number of shops are under threat of closure.
3. Retailer **profitability is somewhat cushioned by freehold ownership** and by relatively static rental levels. Increased rents would be likely to give rise to withdrawals from the town and closures. Static or fallen rental levels will deter investment in the fabric and structure of the town centre.
4. There is no clear consensus as to the benefits or disbenefits of the street market. The **majority of retailers were passively in favour of street markets generally**, but a number of more locally based traders were vociferously critical of the operation of the Ebbw Vale market and the effect that it has on their businesses.
5. There is **no clear consensus of opinion regarding the quality of car parks**, save that the condition and management of the multi-storey car park needs to be improved and that car parking generally should be provided free of charge so as to make the town centre competitive with out of town facilities.
6. The primary **threats** to the town centre are seen as being **lack of food retailing**, the proposed **CORUS closure**, and threats from **competing centres** out of town and stronger centres in South Wales.
7. A significant number of retailers pointed to the **inconvenient linear layout of the shopping centre** and suggested that the prime retail space should be shortened and consolidated.
8. The **demand** for additional retail space from new retailers **is very limited**.

A6 Recommendations

The above does not paint a very healthy picture. **Many of the problems identified are structural and are incapable of being addressed within the confines of this commission**. Those matters however which are identified and which should be given further consideration are:-

1. **Car park management/pricing policy**.
2. Improvements to **multi-storey car park**.
3. Improvements to management/**control of the existing street market**.
4. **Redefinition of retail core** and consideration of differential planning policies for core/non-core/peripheral areas.
5. **Environmental improvements** to be considered following full appraisal of improvements resulting from expenditure thus far.
6. Consideration for the potential to **reintroduce major food retailing** into the town centre.

B1 Art in the Public Realm

Summary

In many Northern European nations, the commissioning of public artworks from professional artists, within major infrastructure and construction works is the norm. In Britain we have until recent years been less well informed and confident about the skills of professional artists, and how they may be applied in major developments. A considerable shift in this position has occurred in recent years. Towns and cities such as Wolverhampton, Milton Keynes, Gateshead, Bristol and Swindon in England, Edinburgh, Glasgow and Dundee in Scotland and Cardiff, Wrexham, Swansea, Caerphilly, Newport and others in Wales, have engaged artists within development structures in the public realm. In almost every major regeneration programme the inclusion of artists and artworks is a major benefit and now viewed as the rule rather than the exception.

Benefits of a Public Art Strategy for Blaenau Gwent

A strategy for public art in Blaenau Gwent will facilitate considerable returns and a number of significant benefits, aside from assisting the establishment of local identity and distinction.

A comprehensive strategy and its properly managed delivery can provide:

- ¥ Vital factors in economic recovery
- ¥ Attract significant cultural tourism
- ¥ Contribute to local identity and economic recovery
- ¥ Improve social, physical, environmental quality
- ¥ Assist the delivery of Agenda 21 and Objective One strategies
- ¥ Deliver competitive advantage through environmental quality
- ¥ Maximise land value and investment potential
- ¥ Increase use of public open space
- ¥ Reduce potential vandalism and criminal activity
- ¥ Maximise the potential for best value in infrastructure

These are not simply indicators but established precedents.

Both in the UK and internationally these are proven regeneration factors, enhancing the potential for economic, environmental, and cultural success.

National and Regional Policy on Environment and Land Use

In 1990 the Government published its first comprehensive strategy for the environment *This Common Inheritance*. The strategy identified ways in which new developments and buildings can help create the conditions for improved quality of life and

the significant role played by art and craft in relation to such developments. The strategy set out ways in which these developments could be effected at local level through partnerships of individuals, private sector companies, and local authorities. Following this initial strategy the *UK Strategy for Sustainable Development* was published in 1994 and revised and updated in 1999 as *A Better Quality of Life*.

The Welsh Development Agency maintains policies for material and social sustainability in development as do most local authorities and the role of professional artists as catalysts to regeneration activity is widely recognised.

Public Art and the Ebbw Vale Initiative

This document sets out a framework and identifies mechanisms by which the expertise of professional artists may be procured, within the revitalisation of Ebbw Vale Town Centre. It is written to contribute to the Town Centre Urban Design Plan commissioned from RPS Chapman Warren and should be considered in the context of the Ebbw Fawr Regeneration Strategy 2000-2005 and any strategies developed by BGBC following the Corus announcement and the closure of its works in Ebbw Vale.

A major consideration is that the creative and cultural industries are among the fastest growing sectors in the Welsh economy and that an imaginative approach to the revitalisation of Ebbw Fawr and Ebbw Vale Town Centre is required.

Attracting and encouraging creative/cultural SMEs and the provision of combined work/living spaces in particular along Bethcar Street, could play a significant role in effecting a positive shift in the function and perception of Ebbw Vale Town Centre. Whilst such industries do not rely on passing trade, but sell their services and goods to a wider client base, they maintain an expectation for a quality of environment that is stimulating and comparable with most modern urbanised townscapes.

Well considered artworks in the public realm increase best value and capital expenditure to public benefit in terms of the quality of the built environment. It can also help express the aspirations toward innovation help to draw attention to Ebbw Vale, assisting positive changes in the perception of the area, from run down and inactive to innovative and exciting.

Physical and Economic Environment

Situated near the top of the scenic Ebbw Fawr, adjoining the edge of the Brecon Beacons National park and Sirhowy Valley, the context within which Ebbw Vale sits is relatively simple in its physical and geographical make up. It is however more complex in terms of land use and property ownership.

Economic forces have in recent years driven down the status of the town and its gradual loss of traditional manufacturing industries has contributed to a lessening of economic strength. Additional factors include the closure of traditional employers in nearby towns and the existence of a single major employer in Ebbw Vale — the Corus steel works site, due for closure in 2002.

Other factors affecting the vitality of the town centre include the presence of out of town retail parks, which include major stores such as Tesco, free parking facilities and regular bus services.

Ebbw Vale Town Centre has many strong aspects and its fundamental architectural infrastructure remains sound. Recent improvements at The Walk shopping area have assisted the town centre but greater momentum is needed and further intervention is required to:

- ¥ consolidate town centre interest
- ¥ diversify trade and industry
- ¥ attract and retain greater commerce.

Consultation and Aspiration

A key to successful regeneration will be close community consultation if a sense of involvement and ownership is to be achieved. Key members of the regeneration teams will need to establish regular and structured contact with the Ebbw Vale Development Trust along with the Ebbw Fach group active in Brynmawr and comprising members from both communities. Local interest groups such as the local history society, schools, colleges and older citizens should be engaged in consultation. This will help to identify active groups who will be crucial to later workshop processes.

At this stage, given the economic factors outlined above, CBAT considers the environment to be one of low hostility, open to change and one whose community members are fully aware of the need for new strategies to prepare their economy for survival in the 21st century.

The linear nature of Bethcar Street, the mix of residential, retail and business use of properties and the traffic calming and pedestrianised streetscape all present excellent scope for well integrated public art schemes. However complex lease agreements, land and property ownership place some serious constraints on how these potentials are best exploited. These will need to be addressed by the local authority.

However, despite these constraints, aspirations regarding the benefits of commissioning artists at specific sites have been clearly expressed. CBAT views this as genuine aspiration, however, it should be noted that the commissioning of artists to develop and implement schemes to change the appearance of a building or other site into a more positive one, will not in itself change its public perception, encourage its use or revitalise a part of town. It can however contribute substantially to a wider effort to revitalise and regenerate Ebbw Vale's town centre, especially if a large degree of community participation is achieved.

B2 Ebbw Vale Town Centre Public Art Strategy

The regenerated fabric of Ebbw Vale Town Centre will offer many opportunities for integrated and free-standing works commissioned from professional artists - canopies, glazing,

cladding, street furniture and paving surfaces can all be enhanced by artists or become commissions in themselves. The historical and contemporary social and economic framework of the town offers excellent opportunities for projects with great potential for community involvement, to ensure relevance of the work and to instil a sense of ownership among the residents of and visitors to Ebbw Vale.

These two approaches can be incorporated in each project however in the latter approach, the process of development of the work necessarily has a much greater emphasis. Outlined below are the opportunities identified within the development plan of Ebbw Vale Town Centre.

Existing Site Potential

Lower Bethcar Street - Street Furniture and Surfaces

There is considerable potential for bespoke street furniture (seats, lamp standards, bollards) to be used to highlight the special character of this street. Currently, Lower Bethcar Street is one of the more run down areas of the town centre and the intention of the improvements, including the reintroduction of a one way traffic flow and limited parking, is to revive the street and encourage occupancy by restaurants and service providers as well as more general retail.

One side of the street is dominated by residential properties with living rooms at first floor level, accessed via external stairs, while the other ground floor largely comprises retail premises, with some living accommodation above the shops. Residents therefore overlook the street and this interesting characteristic could be highlighted in the design of street furniture and in the differentiation of paving materials for surfaces for pedestrian or vehicle use.

The proposed meandering of the road surface creates variance in pavement width, facilitating the potential for wider sections to become restaurant or retail outlets. Crossings could be marked by special features, emphasising safe crossing points and alerting drivers to pedestrians, encouraging a more effective interface between pedestrian and vehicular traffic, without the introduction of zebra or pelican crossings and beacons.

Ebbw Vale Indoor Market

As a result of the revitalisation of Bethcar Street the Indoor Market will regain its prominence as a landmark and is likely to attract greater activity. While this in itself is mutually beneficial in encouraging greater use of Lower Bethcar Street, an imaginative, animated work, sensitive to the architectural character of the building, but prominent and unique, would entice pedestrian use of the street.

HSBC Bank and Proposed Bank Square

With the demolition of the two adjacent properties, the bank will become an interesting but nevertheless isolated feature. Although

it is proposed that it be linked to the Woolworth premises with a canopy, creating a new gateway to The Walk, the facade facing Lower Bethcar Street will become more prominent and will require sensitive and imaginative treatment. The opening created by the demolition, allowing vehicle access from the rear of the shop premises, will also expose the service yard to The Walk. This may require screening for which walling is currently proposed.

The facade, the screening wall, the pedestrian space and road surface could be the subject of a design commission, developed by an artist in collaboration with the landscape architects, highway engineers and the HSBC Bank. This will create a unique attractive space, exploiting and highlighting the seemingly isolated and pedestal nature of the bank building, rather than seeking to hide it.

HSBC have an excellent track record in imaginative sponsorship of the arts and through a well prepared and considered approach, may be encouraged to participate in the project and offer some financial support.

Bethcar Street and Market Street Canopies

Glass and canvas surfaces of proposed canopies, or the structures as a whole can be the subject of a commission to an artist or artists. Specific themes can be expressed, such as traditional and present uses of premises, anecdotal, factual and historical stories and events, changes in topography or more abstract themes may be applied. Either way, the expertise and skill offered by professional artists could be applied here to great effect.

Multi-Storey Car Park

The proposals for improvements to and treatment of the town centre multi-storey car park also presents opportunities for works commissioned by artists. Glass can be etched or enamelled to add texture and colour, timber cladding can be painted or arranged in specific patterns, ceramic cladding material can be treated with glazes.

Some time ago CBAT commissioned an artist to work with the special products department of RedBank the Claymasters, where she produced a new range of chimney pots. RedBank also manufacture and market a terracotta cladding material which has a wonderful texture on their own or treated with glazes. Similar cladding material is suggested for the treatment of sections of the car park and would provide an excellent opportunity for a project of this nature. The glazed surface would be highly durable and retain its colour indefinitely.

An imaginative lighting scheme may also be used to enhance the external appearance of the building at night, helping to change negative public perceptions and encourage greater use. This could run parallel with an internal colour scheme to aid orientation, discourage undesirable use and create an impression of greater safety and a more pleasant environment.

Pedestrian Walkways, Ginnels and Alleyways

Many town centres are characterised by alleyways and passages, often formed through historical use, chance and convenience. However, increasingly these become neglected and negative perceptions of safety and the cloaking of undesirable activity such as crime, pervade.

Whilst lane areas may be perceived as problematic they are in themselves effective traditional means of access which require relatively little attention to make them more friendly and attractive to pedestrians and residents. The ginnels and carpark provide the greatest potential for community involvement and therefore to enhance the feeling of ownership and enfranchisement through the ability to directly effect one's immediate environment.

Ebbw Vale town centre includes many alleyways and ginnels, including the stairways leading from Lower Bethcar Street to the lane behind the residential properties and onwards. Others provide pedestrian access to the taxi rank and bus station, The Walk shopping centre, the former Working Man's Club and residential properties in adjacent streets. A project commissioned from an artist or artists, which would involve the community to a large extent, could be used to develop a lighting and hard landscaping treatment and approach to these spaces that would change their appearance, perception and function.

A project of this nature could also link to the multi-storey car park and could affect street surfaces, walls, railings and lighting. Potential themes could include historical routes and maps, underground services and geology, anecdotal and factual history or traces, footprints and other markings.

The project should run parallel to a programme of community workshops and events in order to ensure involvement and to gather source material to encourage a change in perception of these passages and their future upkeep. It will also allow for a greater sense of ownership of the town centre by the Ebbw Vale community and for the expression of local distinction, individual narrative and culture. By nature, the project will be unique to Ebbw Vale, a fingerprint of its special character and could form a focus for town walks for local interest groups and visitors, encouraging visitors to follow a trail through the town.

General Streetscape

Ebbw Vale town centre benefits from a number of areas of wide-open public space. The area next to the carpark and near Wetherspoon Pub already provides a good site for the street market and with some careful restructuring could provide greater potential. A simple upgrading of the street fabric offers opportunities for works of a narrative nature integrated into the floorscape, furniture and architectural facades. Creating more obvious stopping points and a less sprawling streetscape will assist the containment of the market and street trade. A more pleasant environment will also encourage greater diversity of trade and help assist a rejuvenation of the market itself alongside the potential to encourage visitors to spend more time in the area.

Incidental works of this nature, as already demonstrated at Mermaid Quay in Cardiff, at Pontypridd Market and Swansea Marina, have great potential for attracting visitors in their own right, and can assist the development of cultural tourism in Ebbw Vale and across the valley.

Towns such as Newport have well established attractions and services attached to town centre artworks including town walks, the establishment of special interest groups and civic societies, and increased visitor interest. In turn these have been used in many towns to achieve awards such as Lord Mayor Civic Awards and other local authority initiatives.

Free-standing works

Free-standing works can be commissioned as gateway markers, to aid orientation, commemorate an event, to mark a lost historical use of a space, to provide focal points or to demonstrate a sense of civic pride and care for a particular environment.

Care and sensitivity will be needed regarding the selection of locations and themes for works of this nature. The level of involvement of the community and the aesthetic quality of the work will need specific attention. Compromising any of these could create a work, which will be perceived as problematic rather than beneficial.

Key factors in the success of any free-standing features will be the identification of suitable gateway sites at the entrances and exits to Ebbw Vale Town Centre, locations within urban parks, key buildings and civic buildings.

Materials and Themes

Themes and materials may include some which are already suggested by the historical, contemporary and newly planned developments in the town, its fabric and local materials. It is not advisable to be too prescriptive and rather to allow for creative approaches and innovation. All permanent works in the public realm will of course need to conform to the appropriate regulations and legislation and be commissioned, designed and manufactured, in accordance with correct procedure for procurement and best practice.

Parameters, constraints and expectations should be described in a detailed Brief to Artists. Designs should be procured through a competitive process and artists may be appointed on the basis of an interview, comparing track record and the appropriateness their approach to site specific constraints and characteristics.

Works may be commissioned on the basis of fixed cost, or a budget can be assessed following submission of fully costed designs, integrated into the existing development cost plan. In either event an integrated approach and the early engagement of an artist to collaborate as a full member of design teams, is more cost effective and ensures a more successful outcome.

Framework for Procurement

The process of commissioning artists and managing public art projects is a complex one. Upon adoption of the strategy by BGBC, CBAT recommends the appointment of an agency to effect delivery.

A dedicated public art commissioning agency with a proven track record will need to be appointed and such an agency should demonstrate the following:

- ¥ Substantial knowledge and understanding of contemporary visual arts and contemporary practice in the public realm
- ¥ A track record of initiating and implementing visual art projects
- ¥ A thorough understanding and knowledge of procurement mechanisms within major construction projects, including compliance with CDM regulations
- ¥ A track record in project management, including contractual, financial and technical management
- ¥ A practical knowledge of public funding mechanisms of the arts and evidence of raising partnership investment with both private and public sectors
- ¥ The ability to operate on many levels, acting as broker to productive, positive partnerships between artists, architects, engineers, developers, the public sector and both resident and visiting communities

Prospective consultants will need to demonstrate that they carry sufficient public liability and professional indemnity insurance, operate Health and Safety, Equal Opportunities and Environmental Policies and have the ability to operate and manage dedicated client accounts.

Prospective Applicants should provide

- ¥ evidence of insurance,
- ¥ name and address of insurance broker
- ¥ a letter of authorisation to their bank to communicate with WDA & BGBC, for reference purposes
- ¥ two professional references
- ¥ a full list of completed and current projects
- ¥ evidence of the legal status of their organisation and articles of association
- ¥ CVs of the relevant team members, their status and roles in the organisation,
- ¥ names and expertise of any external consultants,
- ¥ three years of audited accounts
- ¥ directors report
- ¥ a statement on CDM regulations and project Management Control
- ¥ a copy of Health and Safety, Child Protection, Equal Opportunity and Environmental Policies

The mechanisms detailed below are effective in the procurement procedure and they constitute CBAT's recommendations for delivery of this strategy, if adopted. CBAT recommends the process be split into three phases, within the framework of desk and field studies described.

Desk Study

- ¥ analysis of studies already undertaken by the council and other local bodies.
- ¥ Analysis of regional and other related arts provision strategies.
- ¥ Study of best practice in public art provision locally nationally and internationally.
- ¥ Study of arts provision in relation to economic educational and social policy both national and internationally.
- ¥ Desk based survey and analysis.
- ¥ Study of funding mechanism for arts provision with specific reference to public art, nationally and internationally.
- ¥ Assembly of material for technical appendices on management procedures and funding.

Field Work: Phase 1

Assessment and recommendations regarding suitability of proposed locations:

- ¥ Site visits and meetings with appropriate key figures,
- ¥ Detailed briefing meetings with client
- ¥ Desk study and assessment of findings
- ¥ Drafting of project briefs and report
- ¥ Presentation of findings and 1st Interim meeting

Field Work: Phase 2

Selection of artists:

- ¥ Finalise briefs and research of long-list of artists, advertisement of opportunities
- ¥ Short-listing and management of selection process
- ¥ Confirmation of artist appointments and drafting of contracts
- ¥ 2nd interim meeting

Field Work: Phase 3

- ¥ Management of commissioning process to completion of works:
- ¥ Site meeting and client meeting with artists
- ¥ Monitor and assess workshop and design processes
- ¥ Administrative support, contractual and financial management
- ¥ Final site visits, any snagging, hand over and certified completion

Mechanisms for Funding and Delivery

In the event that this strategy is adopted by BGBC, a number of funding mechanisms should be considered to assist or match fund existing public sector investments.

Existing Investment

Blaenau Gwent is within the South Wales Valley area designated by the European Commission as an Objective One, targeted regeneration area. Grassroots projects instigated at community level and demonstrating effective partnerships will be eligible to apply for Objective One funding and Agenda 21 support.

The European Social Fund may also apply where projects include the provision of training and skill building. BGBC should also investigate any community development funds they may allocate, or small improvement grants to groups or individuals.

BGBC and WDA are already making considerable investments in the regeneration of Ebbw Vale. Public art projects involving paving, lighting, street furniture or other elements of the infrastructure should be incorporated in costs for such construction. In most cases construction budgets can be identified and, where possible, enhanced to include public art provision. Such public sector investment helps considerably in attracting private sector interest.

Local Authority Policy and Leverage

Many local authorities have now adopted a strategy for public art provision, for cultural tourism and policies related to quality and sustainable development. Local authority policies including Economic Development, Culture, Leisure and Tourism, Education and Community Development, Agenda 21 and other policies addressing social exclusion, all provide supportive frameworks for the commissioning and development of projects.

Private sector expenditure on artworks in the public realm may be levered by means of supplementary planning guidance, as demonstrated by most UK local authorities. Speculative developments are increasingly subject to Section 106 agreements and this is an effective mechanism for procurement.

Arts & Business Cymru

In particular circumstances, projects may be eligible to apply for and attract matched private sector funding through Arts & Business Cymru. These additional funds if acquired may be used to enhance the profile of the project. Projects eligible for consideration will be those demonstrating innovation in terms of content or new approaches to sponsorship.

Landfill Tax Credit Scheme

In line with existing government environmental policy funds may be attracted through Landfill Operators within a certain radius of the project location. It should be noted that Local Authorities will

need to work with a recognised, registered environmental body in order to attract such funds. The Landfill Tax Credit Scheme can be complex and local authorities must demonstrate that they do not benefit directly from their own taxation. In all cases a third party sponsor is required to provide 10% of the gross project costs in order to lever the landfill tax credits. Community pocket parks, school playground improvements, urban parks, skill building and training for youth and other social groups, represent the types of initiatives eligible to apply and likely to attract funding via this scheme.

CBAT operates a company registered with ENTRUST as a recognised Environmental Body and funds a number of environmental projects in partnership with Landfill Operators and the private sector.

Lottery

Funding may be available through the National Lottery Scheme and specifically through Heritage and Arts Lottery funds. Projects in Blaenau Gwent will fit well with the strategic aims of the Lottery to provide greater access to culture in all its forms and to enhance sustainable community development partnerships. However, the application process is complex and in particular the Arts Lottery (both capital and revenue schemes) are heavily over subscribed. The application process alone can take up to 18 months with no guarantee of success. The Arts Council of Wales re-scheduled its lottery assessment panel from May to November 2001, at the earliest due to the sheer volume of applications. ACW cannot at this time guarantee that this timetable can be adhered to.

Budgetary Considerations

This strategy includes indicative costs. Infrastructure budgets and public sector investment must be identified by BGBC and WDA. It should be noted that whilst commissioning agencies are often experienced in fund raising there can be no guarantee and the most successful schemes are those procured through the mechanisms described above.

Indicative Costings for Public Art Programme

All costings in this document are indicative and depend on the scope of each project, the extent of public realm improvements as a whole, material quality, aspiration, ambition, site complexities, additional activities (workshops, consultation, research) and other variable factors.

Existing budgets for street furniture, lighting etc will need to be enhanced in order to procure work by professional artists. Animated, kinetic or free-standing features will need individual budgets to be identified.

All percentage additions have been calculated on CBAT's experience with enhanced infrastructure budgets elsewhere. All monetary figures are indicative. All figures are quoted ex-VAT

The figures below are estimates to assist the client's cost planning, but should be reviewed during detailed planning for each project.

Agency Fees

The appointment of a dedicated agency to procure and deliver the strategy will attract fees and an allowance for expenses necessarily incurred in the process of management and delivery.

Should CBAT be appointed then it should be considered that Management Fees are charged at a minimum of 12% and maximum of 15% of the overall budget for the programme of commissions. CBAT negotiates all fees, budgets and time-scales at the outset and includes them in its contracts.

B4 Indicative Costings

Lower Bethcar Street - Street Furniture and Surfaces

Seats, Bollards, Railings	+ 35% - 50%
Lamp Standards, Canopy Structures	+ 50%
Canopy Glass	+ £250 to £500 per running meter
Paving	+ 15% - 25%

Indoor Market

Animated work	£25,000 - £75,000
Lighting treatment	+ 20%

HSBC and Bank Square

Dependent on the scope of project	£40,000 - £150,000
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Canopies in Bethcar Street and Market Street

Glass	+ £250 to £500 per running meter
Print	+ 20%
Steel structure	+ 50%

Multi-Storey Carpark

Ceramic cladding treatment	+ 50%
Lighting	+ 30% - 50%
Paint colour scheme (artist fee only)	£ 7,500

Pedestrian Walkways, Ginnels and Alleyways

Workshops	£15,000 - £20,000
Project budget	£30,000 - £150,000

Free-standing Works

Depending on ambition or desired significance

Minimum budget per work	£35,000
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NB

Upon adoption of the strategy all costs should be revisited in light of the stage of development and status of potential sites.

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