Summary
This report presents the draft outcomes of the Enquiry by Design consultation for the regeneration of Rushden town centre.

Attachment(s)
Annex 1: Enquiry by Design Report - draft

1.0 Introduction

1.1 This report presents the draft outcomes of the Enquiry by Design consultation undertaken in February 2010 by the Prince’s Foundation for the Built Environment.

2.0 Background

2.1 In December 2009 the Council was allocated some funding by Northamptonshire Enterprise Limited (NEL) to undertake some master planning for the regeneration of Rushden town centre. The Council considered that the most important aspect of the master planning work was to ensure community involvement in developing the ideas for the long term future of the town centre. The work had to be completed by 31 March 2010.

2.2 The Council engaged the Prince’s Foundation for the Built Environment (PFBE) to undertake an Enquiry by Design (EbD) community consultation. This consultation ensured that local community groups, stakeholders, businesses and young people were integrated into the process.

2.3 The EbD was undertaken during the last week of February and included 2 public meetings, presentations from stakeholders, local business and landowners, work with the local school and involvement from District and Town Council members.

3.0 Discussion

3.1 The outcome of the work from the EbD has now been presented as a report to the Council from the PFBE. The full report is attached as Annex 1. The draft report has also been sent to Rushden Town Council for their comments and will be on the Council’s web site in due course for any comments from the local community.

3.2 The EbD has provided a draft programme of positive investment in the town centre based on short, medium and long term time horizons. Some of the suggestions are based on the reuse of sites (some owned by the Council) that will come forward in the medium term. There are however, suggestions of other activities and programmes that can be started in the short term to help the regeneration process.

3.3 Once the draft Plan has been consulted on and comments made, the PFBE will then present a final version of the document to the Council. Many of the longer term site specific solutions will be included in the Four Towns Development Plan Document.

4.0 Recommendation

4.1 That the draft report be considered by Members and any comments made be forwarded to the Prince’s Foundation.
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**Other:**

- Decision(s) would be outside the budget or policy framework and require full Council approval

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### Background Papers:

- Person Originating Report: Karen Britton, Planning Policy and Conservation Manager
- Date: 28 May 2010

(Committee Report Normal Rev. 21)
Rushden has been hard-hit by the recession, and earlier by the demise of its major employer, the shoe industry. Unlike many towns, Rushden has not received large investments from government or the European Union, to mitigate the loss of its industrial base.

The town centre, and especially the retail sector, has suffered badly as incomes declined among the existing population, and new arrivals looked elsewhere for shopping.

A regeneration strategy for Rushden was needed, and East Northamptonshire Council sought a partner to bring in new ideas. We chose the Prince’s Foundation for the Built Environment as our partner, and have been delighted with their work. Their internationally recognised Enquiry by Design process has brought clarity and transparency. Their enthusiasm and energy have inspired everyone involved.

Using the Enquiry by Design process, a wide range of interested people and organisations have worked to develop ideas for the future of Rushden town centre. Local people gave their views and their aspirations through a survey, workshops and presentations. During the process, it was exciting to see and feel the love and passion that local people have for their town.

The Enquiry by Design work has given us a vision for Rushden Town Centre, which acknowledges its strengths, its heritage and its character.

The town needs a more attractive retail centre that will capture the custom of shoppers who currently shop further afield. The availability of publicly-owned sites will provide the catalyst to make this happen. The cornerstones of a new look Rushden town centre include a new role for the Alfred Street school at the heart of the community, the building of more family homes rather than flats, improvements to shop frontages to encourage new retailers, and new public spaces linked to the High Street. The aim will be to build on Rushden’s rich architectural heritage and create a stronger focus and sense of identity within the town centre.

We have a once-in-a-lifetime chance to revitalise Rushden town centre. A face-lift will brighten it up and help it survive the recession. Redesign and regeneration will keep it vibrant for future generations. We who care about Rushden must work together to make Rushden’s regeneration happen. Other towns have been regenerated - now it’s Rushden’s turn!
INTRODUCTION
A Brief Introduction to Rushden's History and Current Challenges
This document sets out the strategy and action plan for Rushden town centre. Commissioned by East Northamptonshire Council, the strategy is based on community and stakeholder engagement, the pursuit of sustainable and deliverable development solutions, and achieving high quality design in built form and the public realm. Representing a comprehensive and holistic approach to the town centre, this document puts in place plans for the future revitalisation of Rushden town centre, creating a framework to guide future proposals and ensure the provision of facilities and services that the local community and the markets require. Once adopted, the Rushden Regeneration Strategy will be Council corporate policy and whilst not formally part of the local Development Plan, represents a material consideration that the Council will take into account when assessing and determining planning applications within Rushden town centre.
The Prince’s Foundation for the Built Environment (PFBE) is an educational charity which exists to improve the quality of people’s lives by teaching and practising timeless and ecological ways of planning, designing and building. Its mission over the last 10 years has been to inform a variety of built environment projects at varying scales, with a view to delivering exemplar projects. The primary reasons for East Northamptonshire Council’s (ENC) selection of PFBE in Rushden were its unique approach to diagnosing the overlooked or hidden economic, environmental and social long term challenges for a community or town along with its method of engagement through its Enquiry by Design (EbD) planning tool, a community centred public process, were the primary reasons for East Northamptonshire Council’s (ENC) selection of PFBE in Rushden.

ENC tasked PFBE to look at the Rushden town centre as a whole in order to identify potential uses and develop urban and architectural design concepts for three publicly owned sites. A key component of the regeneration strategy was the development of an Action Plan to direct public and private investment decisions over the coming years to deliver the illustrative concepts and recommendations for each of the three sites along with areas outside this remit.

PFBE’s long term approach is useful when one considers Rushden’s economic decline over the past 50 years, primarily due to the loss of the town’s main employer, the shoe industry; a challenge which has been difficult for community leaders to grapple with in the short term. Moreover, the persistent economic decline has been acutely accelerated because of the current recession which has forced some local businesses on the High Street to close. These economic challenges have additionally had a ripple effect as the town has now begun to suffer from environmental degradation, out-commuting, antisocial behaviour, and loss of distinctiveness and sense of place.

PFBE’s collaboration with the community through the EbD process played an essential role in developing this long term vision for Rushden. Ultimately, local residents should take ownership of the renewal of their town as they have the most to gain from the process. PFBE therefore acted as a facilitator and advisor in developing the regeneration strategy, which focuses on creating community spirit as the catalyst for stimulating economic capital.

For many towns, like Rushden, economic survival becomes a first priority, and the pursuit of economic development often simply takes the form of seeking to attract investment from external sources. It leaves the town vulnerable to disinvestment as external companies revise their strategies. For Rushden, whilst investment from external sources will in some cases play a vital part in the regeneration of the town to free up some of the sites, a strategy which focuses on delivering an achievable vision by the community will be paramount to the success of the town.

The strategy itself focuses on reinhabiting the town centre to promote a fuller sense of community as the facilitator of local exchange on the High Street. As the creation of jobs is crucial, PFBE encourages ENC, Rushden Town Council (RTC), Northamptonshire Enterprise Limited (NEL), and North Northants Development Company (NNDC) to promote small locally owned businesses which, in turn, will create a complementary economic role for Rushden in the context of the region. Rather than seeking to be competitive within the global economy by sponsoring extensive makeovers (e.g. the creation of pedestrian promenades, ‘carnival masks’, sports and media events, for example), the town must focus on generating community spirit which should, in turn, have the added benefit of generating tourism and inward investment into the town centre.
PFBE has implemented the EbD process in Rushden, which is PFBE’s collaborative planning tool; a process that brings key stakeholders and community members together to formulate a strategy for regeneration.

**PROCESS STAGES**

**4TH FEBRUARY 2010 - One-day Workshop**
The early learning phase consisted of a scoping workshop to understand key issues such as transport, safety, and accessibility.

**10TH FEBRUARY 2010 - Public Questionnaire**
A public questionnaire was distributed to enable residents to voice their concerns. These were collected and used to inform this report.

**24TH FEBRUARY 2010 - Three-day EbD**
This first exercise of the workshop was an accelerated scenario planning exercise. This looked at the trends and influences on Rushden’s future, using a successful technique to help identify the important issues and variables in the design process. The majority of the EbD workshop focused on understanding collaborative input and summarising that input into a single consensus-based solution. The EbD culminated in a public presentation (over 100 people showed up) on the 26th February at Alfred Street School.

**31ST MARCH 2010 - Draft Report issued to ENC**
Community input is the primary influence on this report and the designs contained within. This report has been produced as the next step in the greater process of regenerating Rushden.

**2ND JUNE 2010 - Publication of Report**
Final Report posted to the ENC website and made available to the public. From this date the initial stages of detailed design development and implementation can begin.

Further details can be found in the Appendices.
RUSHDEN’S PAST

The Thriving Spine of the High Street is the lifeblood of the local economy

Rushden is an integral part of the great industrial heritage of Northamptonshire. At its peak there were over 100 boot and shoe factories in the town. Although most of these factories were lost during the slow industrial decline, some still remain alongside historic shops, public buildings and homes. This unique physical quality endows the town centre with a sense of place and identifiable character in the region.

This is most evident on the High Street; the town centre’s ‘spine-like’ core which naturally conforms to the gentle slope of the Nene Valley. Historic shops which tightly hug the street create an intimate setting and well crafted public buildings reflect the town’s civic pride, ‘moral purpose and belief in progress’.

This report has taken into account the physical quality of Rushden’s town centre. By enhancing Rushden’s identity through the appreciation, conservation, and re-use of its historic buildings, the town will not need to ‘re-invent’ itself like so many others, but instead can build upon its past to achieve lasting progress.
The High Street ca. 1885: spine-like form also functioned as the centre of economic activity

"We want to preserve Rushden’s heritage."

-taken from the public questionnaire
An individual’s experience today of Rushden’s High Street is not one of bustling activity, but one based largely on the car. Town centres today are usually surrounded by sprawl - the result of widespread planning policy changes and the subsequent building sprees of the last 50 years. Rushden is no different. The image (left) shows Rushden’s High Street surrounded by disorganised street networks and segregated uses spread far into the surrounding landscape.

Once a major industrial centre, Rushden now plays a smaller economic role in the region. Much of the vibrancy and life that belonged to Rushden’s unique and thriving town centre has gone. Competition from large shopping centres in neighbouring towns has reduced the demand for goods from the High Street, thereby reducing vital footfall from shoppers.

“Few live or work in the town centre and it feels unsafe.”

PUBLIC QUESTIONNAIRE
Rushden is located in East Northamptonshire, 15 miles northeast of Northampton and equidistant from Bedford and Kettering. The closest major town is Wellingborough. Rushden lies in a small valley, with Sidney Brook flowing through the centre of the town.

**Facts:**

- Only 4 boot and shoe factories remain in town.
- Only 9% of Rushden residents work in the town centre.
- Of the 186 business premises on the high street 67% are independent businesses and 12% are empty. (as at March 2010).
- Only 28% of those living and working in Rushden walk to work (taken from: Four Town Plan Transport Note Northamptonshire)

- 91% of residents felt that they might visit the town centre more often if there were a wider range of shops.
- Only 6.9% of residents felt that the physical appearance/atmosphere of their town was a good aspect of Rushden Town Centre. (taken from: public questionnaire: February 2010)

Regional map showing Rushden and surrounding towns in the vicinity

![Image of Rushden and surrounding towns](image-url)
“*We want more participation.*”

“*Turn the school into an art & culture centre.*”

“*Don’t destroy Rushden’s History.*”

-Taken from the public meeting-
THE VISION AND REGENERATION OBJECTIVES

The vision for Rushden is to create a more viable, safe, and welcoming town centre capable of supporting the town and its hinterland; embracing change and opportunity, it will become a town with a dynamic heart once again.

Each strand of the strategy will be driven by well-accepted urban design and development objectives based on PFBE’s tried and tested principles (please refer to PFBE’s core Principles in Appendices) to achieve the vision for Rushden’s town centre. The Strategy will also be responsive to changing social, economic and market conditions, but will also depend on a catalytic flagship project for maximum impact. Each strand will on its own not be sufficient to bring about the gradual revival of the town centre. However, collectively they will deliver the vision.

Regeneration Objectives

A. REINFORCE RUSHDEN’S UNIQUE HIGH STREET CHARACTER OF INDEPENDENT SHOPS
The strategy encourages new development in the form of a mix of retail unit sizes and other employment uses, which should strengthen and not compete with the existing locally owned independent shops in the town centre. New space should provide opportunities for emerging entrepreneurs of all ages and provide goods and services for people of all economic means. The overall purpose is to strengthen Rushden’s role within its regional context by not trying to compete with other ‘clone’ towns.

B. REINSTATE THE DIVERSITY AND MIX OF RUSHDEN TOWN CENTRE USES
The town centre offer should include places for community uses including parks, community centres, and a museum. This will encourage routine encounters within the town centre beyond shopping activity which will stimulate civic life and community spirit.

C. REFOCUS THE TOWN CENTRE
There are two objectives in this strategic strand: Providing a focal point to the town centre in the High Street and providing a concentrated shopping precinct through a pedestrian circuit.

D. BUILD ON THE UNIQUE QUALITIES AND HISTORIC CHARACTER OF THE TOWN CENTRE
This strand relies upon two objectives: an improved public realm in the town centre in all its forms, including shop fronts, lighting, street furniture and paving and an expansion of the perceived town centre envelope beyond just the High Street.

E. REPOPULATING THE TOWN CENTRE
New family homes within Rushden town centre will improve the residential offer and will also encourage greater community and commercial activity and thereby improve safety.

F. PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES FOR PEOPLE OF ALL AGES TO PLAY A ROLE IN THE TOWN CENTRE REDEVELOPMENT
Explore education-based partnerships with local universities and encourage craft apprenticeships to offer opportunities to a new generation.

G. PROMOTE WALKABILITY AND SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORT
This would include improvement upon existing pedestrian crossings at major intersections into the town centre, creating new pedestrian and vehicular links into and through the town centre (see framework plan, opposite page), improved accessibility to the High Street for multiple transportation types, the consolidation of car park areas to free up valuable land near the centre for development, and the provision of access to green infrastructure.

H. MARKET THE TOWN CENTRE
Creative and innovative marketing and management initiatives for the town centre will attract new entrepreneurs and public investment. Various approaches may be adopted and used such as advertising and promotion through the web.
The framework diagram (below) shows the essential links (objective G shown in black) and the places where the objectives on the opposite page may be implemented into the physical structure of the town centre.

The new links should be considered as vital to the regeneration, as all further development relies on these links to have access to the High Street - both when walking and by car. By bringing shoppers and residents to and from their activities and homes directly and efficiently, a new sense of place is created which supports a walkable town centre. The pedestrian, whether resident or visitor, is first in this environment and not the passing car.

The links shown as dotted lines depict footpath access for pedestrians, while the dashed lines are vehicular routes as well. Each one of these links serves to bring a person closer to the High Street. If a connection cannot be made all the way to the High Street, then it should lead as close as possible, and provide a clear sense of place so that navigation to the High Street is easy to understand.
EXISTING TRANSPORT

The High Street is currently one-way in a northbound direction and provides vehicular access for shoppers and enables deliveries to retailers. There is a good provision of short-stay on-street parking for shoppers, which adds life, activity and movement to the High Street. However, the streetscape is cluttered with signs and street furniture, is biased towards car users and needs renewal.

Both Duck Street to the west of the High Street and Rectory Road to the east are wide, car dominated roads rather than town centre streets. As a result, they are an uncomfortable place for pedestrians, with the traffic volumes and speeds discouraging walking and cycling. For visitors to Rushden, the one-way system makes the town centre and location of the High Street hard to understand.

The town centre has about 900 surface car parking spaces within about a 3 minute walk of the High Street. Nearly all of the spaces are free and some allow all day parking rather than just short stays. The free parking provision is seen as vital to maintaining a healthy town centre.
MASTERPLAN VISION

The High Street is not sufficiently wide to allow for two-way traffic whilst still giving a comfortable pedestrian environment. No good reason for changing the direction of traffic flow was identified or suggested, so it should remain one-way northbound. Generous provision should be made for pedestrians as part of the masterplan. It would be a mistake to pedestrianise the High Street and fear that the impact of such a scheme on a fragile retail environment could be significant.

The High Street could be dramatically improved by:
- Removing / reducing street clutter such as traffic signs, road markings and bollards
- Limiting on-street parking to short-stay only by enforcing on-street parking restrictions
- Making sure that delivery vehicles do not block traffic or impede pedestrians by actively managing the High Street environment
- Improving surfacing materials

Duck Street and Rectory Road should become two-way streets. This could easily be achieved without any widening and would reduce traffic speeds. This would make them a more attractive environment for pedestrians and cyclists and improve the navigability of the town centre making it easier for visitors to understand. This proposal would require some junctions to be modified for two-way traffic including those by St Mary’s Church and where Duck Street joins the High Street. More detailed investigations of these and other junctions would be needed. In addition, the impact of changes in town centre traffic flows would need to be tested using the County Council’s traffic model. It is important to note that none of the redevelopment proposals for the three council sites described elsewhere in the report, and addressed in respect of parking below rely upon these changes to Duck Street and Rectory Road.
The Purpose of a Comprehensive Plan

In addition to the High Street, several sites have been selected for study in the following pages. Three council owned sites are included in this, as well as two privately owned sites. These site recommendations were designed during the EbD. Each of these opportunity areas is accompanied by a proposed plan which is illustrative only, and will require further consideration and preparation of development briefs in order to reach implementation stages.

Refer to the Delivery and Action Plan Section of this document to understand the implementation and timing for the delivery of each of the sites.

Objectives met

1. **High Street Improvements** ➔ A, C, D and F
   - New businesses and improved shopfronts
   - New central square
   - Better, more comfortable public realm
   - More pedestrian movement and exchange

2. **The Depot and Recycling Centre Site** ➔ E and G
   - New family housing
   - Possible aged care facility

3. **Alfred Street School and John Street Car Park Site** ➔ B, D, E and G
   - New family housing
   - New community centre
   - New community park

4. **The Splash Pool Site** ➔ B, E and G
   - New business startups
   - New park and play area
   - New public/community facilities

5. **Church Green and Peter Crisp Site** ➔ B and H
   - New hotel and restaurant
   - Improved park

6. **Palmbest Site** ➔ A, C, D, E, G and H
   - New retail opportunities
   - Central parking facility
   - Possible residential component

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**Regeneration Objectives**

A. Reinforce Rushden’s unique high street character of independent shops

B. Reinstate the diversity and mix of Rushden town centre uses

C. Refocus the town centre

D. Build on the Unique Qualities and historic character of the Town Centre

E. Repopulating the town centre

F. Provide opportunities for people of all ages to play a role in the town centre redevelopment

G. Promote walkability and sustainable transport

H. Market the Town Centre
This Illustrative plan is the comprehensive sum of design work during the EbD, and is based upon community input.
1. The High Street Improvements

New Businesses and Improved Shopfronts, New Central Square, Public Realm Improvements

Key Observations:
- The High Street is physically long and provides few public resting and gathering spaces for residents and shoppers.
- The existing shopfronts’ signage is generally too large for the scale of the street and detracts from the historic character of the town centre.
- The streetscape is cluttered with signs and traffic control devices, which are biased towards car users.

Recommendations:
- Private realm improvements to the Succoth Baptist Church court along with public realm improvements in front of the Church should be made to create a new town square. The new square will provide a much needed public space at the heart of the town centre, thereby creating a focal point in the town centre.
- Existing shopfronts should be improved through the implementation of a shopfronts design guide. Flagship refurbishments following the design guide would have a catalytic effect in signalling the beginning of regeneration. This would also encourage High Street businesses to make shopfront investments of their own.
- The streetscape should be dramatically enhanced by improving surfacing materials and removing / reducing street clutter such as traffic signs, road markings and bollards.
In the existing High Street, the shopfronts are adapted to fit company or brand standards. This detracts from the character of the town centre. Street elements are bare, and only provide for the safety of the pedestrian, for example by the use of bollards, instead of also considering their convenience.

Shopfront improvements should be finely crafted and reflect the character of the buildings they belong to, as proposed in the illustration (above). Signage takes a secondary role to the overall beauty of the shopfront. Special paving makes pedestrians feel comfortable and slows traffic. This indicates the High Street belongs to the people and not just the cars.
2. The Depot and Recycling Centre Site

New Family Homes, Potential Aged Care Facility or More Homes, Small Mixed-use Building

**Key Observations:**
- The site is close to the High Street and is centrally located on the edge of the town centre.
- It acts as a useful parking facility for residents wishing to visit the town centre. However, the presence of the large area of tarmac at an essential gateway into the town centre is unpleasant.
- The site restricts pedestrian access from the northeast, making it difficult for people to enter the town centre from Wheatcroft Gardens. It is also a barrier to access Newton Road.
- The pedestrian crossing at the Newton Road and Rectory Road intersection is not visible to cars, making it difficult to enter the town centre on foot.
- The site is located in an area of transition, with the town centre situated opposite Rectory Road to the south, while residential areas surrounds the site to the north, east and west. The presence of a car park at this location creates a physical gap in the town centre’s urban fabric and thereby acts as a physical and psychological barrier for residents accessing the town centre on foot.

**Recommendations:**
- The site’s location on the edge of the town centre and the nature of surrounding uses make this site ideal for future residential use. In light of the community’s overwhelming opposition to more flats being developed, it is recommended that the site be redeveloped for new high quality family homes. This will enable the sustainable redevelopment of existing brownfield land, will help increase footfall into the town centre, will ensure a land use
that is complementary to the surrounding area, and will provide a new residential gateway into the Town Centre.

- New development should be designed to present attractive frontages to Newton Road and Rectory Road consistent with the established character of the area. Building form and height should also be complementary to the surrounding area.
- A new vehicular/pedestrian link from Wheatcroft Gardens to Rectory Road should be built to maintain high levels of access and permeability from the residential areas located to the north and west of the site.
- A new link south from Wheatcroft Gardens will, similarly, provide better access to Newton Road.
- Surface changes should be made to the crossing at the intersection of Newton Road and Rectory Road in order to provide a safer access route for pedestrians entering the town centre.
- A new aged care facility could be built as part of any proposed scheme to provide elderly care and accommodation. The site’s location on the periphery of the town centre, along with the potential new family residences, provides a convenient and safe location for this type of facility.
- A small mixed use building at the Rectory Road and Newton Road intersection could mark the transition from the new residential area into the town.

View down Newton Road: there is potential for a beautiful gateway into the town centre

Existing Depot and Recycling Centre car park

New houses and improved streetscape bring an improved and uplifting character to this area as shown in the illustration. Good streets should be pleasant to walk along, thereby inspiring residents and visitors alike.
3. Alfred Street School Site and John Street Car Park Site

Community-based school building re-use, recreational and play park, new family homes, relocated school war memorial

Key Observations:
• With frontages to College Street, Duck Street and Alfred Street the site is centrally located and has close links to the High Street and other key areas within the town centre.
• The site is not overly constrained by buildings, with existing development primarily occupying the north-west corner of the site, while the rest of the site is characterised by open space and/or sealed parking areas.
• The site is located in the south western quadrant of the town centre, and currently represents an area of transition with the more intensive town centre uses located to the north and east, and predominantly residential uses to the south and west.
• The site provides useful parking facilities for people wishing to visit the town centre. However, the presence of the large area of tarmac is unsightly and detracts from the overall image and appearance of the area.
• The school is a long standing and valued public facility, which adds to the variety and mix of land uses within the town centre.
• The school war memorial is significant to Rushden’s history and is therefore highly valued by local residents.
• The combination of the car park and Alfred Street School site acts as a major barrier to pedestrian movement and significantly reduces the town centre’s permeability from the south west.
• Should the County Council’s proposal to stop using the building as a school go ahead, community uses are recommended.

Recommendations:
• Community uses should replace the existing use of the School. Public sector administrative facilities should also be considered for the replacement use of the building. However, it is likely that community civic uses like a shoe museum, information centre, dance hall, coffee/tea shop, etc. would fit the physical space provided by the building. An analysis/survey must be conducted to determine what community uses and administration facilities are most appropriate for the re-use of the building.
• The middle room of the school should be demolished to provide an outdoor public space to access the school war memorial. Additionally, some front and rear additions should be considered for demolition to reveal the original structure of the building thereby enhancing the historic character of the Town Centre (see plans on page 22). The analysis/study of what uses would be most appropriate for the re-use of the building will reveal how much of the building can actually be demolished. It is recommended that the remainder of the existing building should be retained as far as possible.
• The site’s location, coupled with the nature of surrounding uses, provides a good opportunity to deliver new high quality housing. With this in mind the focus for
the site should be to deliver a new family living precinct as a means of creating more footfall in the town centre as well as increasing evening activity. The plots of the new homes should include rear gardens and small front gardens along Duck Street. All parking should be on-street parking.

• Behind the existing School, the space between the existing school and new homes should be used as a semi-private court as well as outdoor gathering space for the new community facilities. Parking should be permitted during certain hours for either short-term use or for the staff of the new community facility. The space should be carefully designed so that it does not have the appearance of a car park.

• At the corner of the existing roundabout there is an opportunity to provide a small mixed use retail scheme.

• At the northwest corner of the site, green space should be retained to create a recreational and play park. The space will provide a beautiful natural gateway into the town centre from Duck Street.

As it exists now, the Alfred Street School is somewhat hidden by the high garden walls and additional structures added in recent years. It is recommended that College Street is treated as an extension of the High Street improvements. Carefully designing the public space around the existing school will establish the identity of this new centre for Rushden and emphasise the historic character of the building.

The proposed refurbishment of the school includes recommendations for the removal of perimeter boundary walls and demolition of most of the additions that were made to the building over the years.
ALFRED STREET SCHOOL SITE CONTINUED

Existing floor plan of Alfred Street School

An option for a new community centre floorplan
Duck Street facing south

Perspective of proposed family housing along Duck Street
4. The Splash Pool Site

**NEW COMMUNITY PARK, NEW CIVIC BUILDINGS, NEW ‘CLEAN START-UP’ BUSINESS PREMISES**

**Key Observations:**
- The site is located along the northwestern edge of the town centre with the northern end of the High Street situated to the east and residential areas to the west.
- The existing Splash facility is a locally valued community use in the town centre. However, the existing building is nearing the end of its life.
- The Splash building was originally constructed in the 1980’s and as such does not exhibit any architectural or heritage qualities that enhance the historic character of Town Centre.
- The site is at the low point and is subject to flooding which occurs when the underground culvert overflows onto Duck Street. This has occurred on a couple of occasions in the past decade.
- Access from Station Road to Duck Street is difficult for pedestrians and vehicles, making it hard to access the Town Centre from the northwest.

**Recommendations:**
- In light of the value placed on the Splash facility by the local community, any future redevelopment and/or reuse of the site should maintain a community focus.
- The site is largely constrained by the risk of flooding, which limits opportunities for future redevelopment. The town centre is also lacking in usable public green space and for these reasons it is considered that part of the site should be converted into a permanent community park with children’s play facilities. The new park will maintain the site’s community and recreational focus and provide a useful facility for residents in and around the town centre.
- Complementing the town park, the northern part of the site provides a good opportunity to deliver new public sector administrative facilities and/or civic uses. Examples could include a new library and/or a new multi-purpose civic building.
- Permanent Clean start-up business premises are also recommended as a potential option for the site.

---

“We feel unsafe with gangs around. We don’t go to the playing fields after dark.”

-6th Year Children at Alfred Street School

![Location plan of the Splash Pool Site](image)

[Illustrative plan of potential development at the Splash Pool site](image)
• A new access link from Duck Street to Station Road could alleviate existing traffic congestion at the intersection of Duck Street and High Street during peak hours. It would also serve as a valuable vehicular and pedestrian link from the adjacent neighbourhood northwest of the site.
• There is also space for new family terraced houses on the western edge of the site which would connect the existing neighbourhood with the new civic park and facilities.
• The site is a strategic land holding and will be integral to unlocking the town centre’s other development opportunities. Prior to the above permanent uses being established, the site would need to be converted into a temporary car park to provide parking relief in the town centre while the other sites are brought forward.

The character of the space shown above is in need of improvement as it caters to the car and not people. The large footprint of the site creates an opportunity to bring green space into the town centre. Although car parking is important, it can be provided on less valuable sites nearby.

The park and civic buildings show a quality of character for Rushden’s town centre that would continue to foster a sense of community (above). The park would be a meeting place not only for families, but for all the people of Rushden.
5. Church Green and Peter Crisp Site

Renovated multi-use green, restaurant/cafe, potential new hotel

Key Observations:
• The site is in a prominent town centre location.
• Formerly a popular department store, Peter Crisp historically anchored the town centre’s High Street. Since its closure in December 2009, the High Street has been operating without a key southern anchor. The impacts of this change in the retail landscape are yet to be known.
• The blank facade immediately adjacent to the closed Peter Crisp store de-activates the space.
• The Church Green was once an important gathering point in the town centre and is now little used outside of summer months.

Recommendations:
• As the town centre begins to revive, there will be a need for more hotel accommodation. The Peter Crisp Building should be used for this purpose as it is in a prime location. With a new marketing initiative and as the town centre begins to revive, there will be a need for more hotel accommodation. This site provides a prime location for these uses.
• The blank façade of the Peter Crisp Building should be refurbished into a restaurant/café as a means of activating the Green.
• The existing Green should be used as a multi-use public park (e.g. a new bandstand for community events).

Location plan of the Church Green and Peter Crisp site.

Illustrative plan of potential development at the Church Green and Peter Crisp site.
Church Green as it exists now has little active use at its perimeter, and a high level of traffic movement. This creates a poor environment for the pedestrian as well as discouraging the use of the green itself.

The new Church Green would be more accessible to people walking from the High Street and other parts of Rushden, and would be a fitting focal point for the southern end of the town centre. With the hotel building improvements as shown, the park feels more like an outdoor room, with the most beautiful buildings facing it.
6. The Palmbest site

New retail complementary to the High Street, new homes, multi-storey car park

**Key Observations:**
- The site is centrally located within the heart of the town centre, with good links to the High Street, Duck Street and College Street.
- The existing on-site parking facilities make a positive and significant contribution to the total parking provision in the town centre.
- The existing buildings located on the site are currently occupied by Wilkinsons and Iceland, with a number of small independent businesses also present.
- The change in ground levels between the High Street and the site presents a challenge in creating a graded pedestrian link.
- The existing buildings fail to present an active frontage to College Street. The building’s expansive blank wall along College Street is unsympathetic to the established local character and detracts from the quality of the overall streetscape.

**Recommendations**
- The site is in a highly accessible and central location in the town centre, and for this reason, a retail-led mixed use redevelopment scheme is considered to be appropriate.
- New retail is considered to be the most appropriate use for the site, it would diversify the town centre’s existing retail offer and complement the independent small business character of the town’s High Street.
- High quality connections and links from the site to College Street and High Street should be provided to enable the creation of a new retail circuit that supports an enhanced shopping environment improving...
pedestrian access and permeability throughout the town centre.

- Restaurants and cafes would help provide more daytime and evening gathering places for town residents, and offer a town centre use which complements the primary retail function of the site.
- A multi-storey car park should be built on this site to ensure the current levels of parking provision are maintained in the town centre, whilst at the same time freeing up the John Street Car Park and Depot and Recycling Centre sites for development.
- Higher density high quality residential homes should also be considered for the site. This would provide a complementary use to the site’s primary retail function, a means of re-populating the town centre.

The proposed Central Square image above is a part of the High Street. However, it is located strategically at the end of a new pedestrian street on the Palmbest site. This potentially creates a new arrival point for those using the central parking area, not only reinforcing the High Street, but also providing a gathering area that will reveal the pedestrian street.

A view down the proposed pedestrian street mentioned above shows the same quality of character as the High street, making a unified public realm for Rushden. The experience of the shopper here would be one of visiting a beautiful historic town, and not that of a shopping centre.
“We want more play space.”

“Give us more parks and trees.”

“More comfortable benches.”

“We want a nice place to put a Christmas tree.”

-6th year children at Alfred Street School
This chapter comprises the Delivery and Action Plan, which sets out a comprehensive strategy for the future regeneration of Rushden town centre.

The plan embodies the culmination of thoughts, ideas and work undertaken during a three day workshop with key stakeholders and the local community. It is also based on technical work undertaken by specialists to support the workshop process.

The ideas and proposals set out within this delivery section represent significant future investment in Rushden which, will enhance the social, economic and environmental well-being of the town centre by:

- Improving the quality of the town centre environment;
- Enhancing the quality and range of the town centre’s retail offer;
- Providing better and more integrated community and civic facilities;
- Enhancing the town centre’s food and drink offer; and
- Improving the pedestrian and cycle network within and around the centre, and reducing the dominance of vehicular traffic

Delivery of this Regeneration Strategy will also require substantial commitment and will demand effective co-ordination of the various resources, powers and responsibilities which are held in a number of public, private and voluntary sector organisations.

The town centre vision will be carried forward through a number of site specific development proposals, together with a series of environmental and management initiatives.

For regeneration to be successfully implemented, a realistic and achievable action plan needs to be set out. This should identify key priorities for early intervention and include a clear programme for the more comprehensive development proposals, highlighting delivery timeframes and identifying the key stakeholders.

This document outlines a number of proposals for the town centre, all of which will make a significant contribution to the its future regeneration. However, if Rushden is to realise its vision, emphasis needs to be on gaining “quick wins” in the short term to secure the centre’s vitality and viability and establish a solid platform on which to undertake the more comprehensive redevelopment proposals.

The following Action Plan outlines the sequencing of how proposals set out in this regeneration strategy should be implemented to ensure the greatest prospect of delivery, and provide the greatest overall regeneration benefits to the town centre.

The masterplan includes redevelopment proposals for all three of the council sites identified. The result would be a loss of about 300 spaces, or about a third of the town centre parking stock. Unless bus services in Rushden could be substantially improved (which in itself is desirable), these spaces would need to be re-provided.

**The High Street**

The primary focus in the short term should be on delivering quick wins aimed at improving the quality, image and perception of the town centre and providing a platform for the site specific proposals to come forward at a later stage. With this in mind, improving the attraction of the High Street is a key priority.
In order to improve the High Street a series of environmental improvement measures and other town centre initiatives should be undertaken in the short term, including:

- **Public realm improvements** – a public realm strategy should be developed for the town centre, identifying key priorities for improvements and providing a delivery and implementation programme to guide future works.

- **Shop front design guide** – the High Street is characterised by a mixture of poor quality shop fronts. Without any guidance or design requirements, ENC is not able to effectively regulate shop front designs to ensure they make a positive contribution to the High Street. A Supplementary Planning Document for shop fronts is currently being prepared. It will be important that this is sufficiently detailed to support the future revitalisation of Rushden’s High Street.

- **Shop Front Pilot Programme** – in concert with the shop front design guide, the District and Town Councils should implement a shop front pilot programme. This will involve identifying a group of adjacent High Street shops (i.e. 3-4) and redesigning their frontages to highlight what can be achieved through good design principles. In this instance it would be important that the example shop fronts are chosen with the intention of maximising their exposure. Following completion of the pilot project the Council should then work with the local business partnership to source additional public and private funding to roll out further shop front improvements.

**Other Town Centre Initiatives**

- **Re-energise town centre partnership** – there is currently a partnership programme in place within the town centre. However, we understand it has limited active involvement by local business owners. Re-energising this partnership is vital if Rushden is to realise its regeneration aspirations. It will play a key role in ensuring the town centre is effectively managed and will significantly enhance opportunities to capture additional public funding. The action plan set out here will be a key influence on the town centre partnership’s future business plan.

- **Heritage tourism** – Rushden has a rich heritage, and opportunities should be explored to maximise its use. An example might be the creation of a walking trail linking the various attractions within and around the town centre, including the railway station, the museum, the Alfred Street School war memorial, and shoe making factories.

- **Farmers’ market** – a local farmers’ market would assist in raising the profile of the High Street and provide a regular event that brings residents together. Such markets might include themed produce days, with food and goods sourced from the local area. This will, however, require an investigation of the historic market charters.

- **Training for young people** – The town centre business partnership, together with the public sector, should investigate the possibility of providing placement and training opportunities for young people, which will help address social regeneration issues and improve the profile and attractiveness of Rushden to younger generations. Other opportunities also include creating new links with nearby Northampton University by providing small vacant shops for students, for example fashion design students to sell their wares, as well as providing hands-on management experience in running small businesses. Implementation of such a programme could improve the opportunities for additional public funding.

- **It is likely that these new initiatives will have to be funded from the public sector in one guise or another; We understand there are some existing funds available.**
Depot and Recycling Centre Site

- The Depot and Recycling Centre site is the most likely Regeneration Strategy site to be available for redevelopment in the short term and is therefore considered the most appropriate starting point for major direct intervention aimed at ‘kick-starting’ Rushden’s regeneration.
- Following relocation of the Depot and Recycling Centre facility, this site will be available for redevelopment. This will provide an opportunity to deliver a complementary and sustainable uses for such as new high quality family housing, and will improve the overall quality of the town centre environment.
- As this site can be brought forward in the short term, its redevelopment will build on the positive momentum achieved by the High Street improvements and initiatives. The site is in the ownership of ENC so any funds generated by its development, could then be re-directed to other town centre regeneration initiatives, for example re-use of the Alfred Street School as a new community centre.
- The act of placing new homes in close proximity to the High Street and town centre increases the footfall in the town centre, while adding much needed value.
- ENC’s redevelopment of the site would result in about 90 spaces being lost. These spaces could be re-provided on the Splash Pool site once the swimming facility is relocated as the Council plans (see page 38).

**THE DEPOT AND RECYCLING CENTRE SITE: 1 HA.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LAND OWNERSHIP</th>
<th>ENC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PROPOSED USE</td>
<td>-High quality family housing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Residential institution/s (i.e. aged care facility)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Small scale office and retail fronting the Rectory Road / Newton Road intersection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEPENDENCIES</td>
<td>-Relocation of existing Depot and Recycling Centre facility, expected to occur in 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Re-provision/relocation of car parking elsewhere in the town centre – potential temporary use on Splash pool site</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POSSIBLE CONSTRAINTS</td>
<td>-Existing facilities to be relocated/demolished</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Temporary loss/ re-provision of public parking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Potential land contamination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PHASING</td>
<td>-Likely to be single development phase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TIMING</td>
<td>-Short term (0-3 years)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Timing determined by residential/residential care markets and obtaining “best consideration” for Council assets</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Alfred Street School site and John Street Car Park Site

- The redevelopment of the John Street Car Park site would contribute to the continued delivery of new high quality family housing and could generate further public funds that could then be redirected to assist with other town centre regeneration initiatives.

- In bringing forward the Depot and Recycling Centre site the John Street Car Park site will need to ensure that this doesn’t result in too much new family housing being brought to market at once. It will be important that these two sites are phased to ensure an appropriate release of residential land, which maximises both the regeneration opportunity and the financial returns to ENC.

- The Alfred Street School site provides an excellent opportunity to deliver significant community regeneration benefits to the town centre. The Alfred Street School redevelopment is dependent on the amalgamation of Alfred Street School and Tennyson Road Infant School. Redevelopment is most likely to be undertaken in the medium-term (i.e. 3-6 years). The site could then be redeveloped with the priority of retaining the Alfred Street School building for the purposes of a new community centre together with a new recreational and play park and relocated school war memorial to complete what will become the new ‘family quarter’ within the town centre.

- Redevelopment of the John Street car park would result in about 100 spaces being lost. One possibility is that the remaining 800 town centre parking spaces could be more tightly managed for short stay use so that the loss of the John Street spaces was not a significant impact. Alternatively, the redevelopment of John Street could be concurrent with the Palmbest scheme so that spaces can be re-provided there, together with the spaces lost from the Depot and Recycling Centre site and the Splash Pool site redevelopment.

| Land Ownership | ENC: John Street Car Park  
|----------------|-------------------  
|                | NCC: Alfred Street School |
| Proposed Use   | -High quality family housing  
|                | -Retained Alfred Street School Building as new community centre  
|                | -New recreational and play park and relocated school war memorial |
| Dependencies   | -Merger of Alfred Street School and Tennyson Infant School  
|                | -Creation of sufficient parking facilities and new green space - potentially on Splash Pool Site |
| Possible Constraints | -Failure to relocate Alfred Street School to Tennyson Road School  
|                    | -Temporary loss/re-provision of public parking |
| Phasing         | -Phase 1 - Redevelopment of John Street Car park for high quality housing  
|                | -Phase 2 – Reuse of the school building, etc |
| Timing          | 3-6 years |
LONGER-TERM ACTIONS

Splash Pool Site

- Subject to replacement of the Splash Pool, it is envisaged that redevelopment of this site will occur in two separate phases to achieve its desired permanent future use of being a new centrally located town park and civic hub.

- In addition to the role that the site will ultimately play, the Splash Pool site is also key to “unlocking” the town centre’s overall regeneration strategy, as it will provide a much needed location for temporary public parking, enabling the delivery of the Depot and Recycling Centre site and the John Street Car Park site.

- In addition to the temporary car parking role, it is envisaged that phase 1 redevelopment of the Splash Pool site will also provide a temporary pocket park with children’s play facilities. Once the other sites are complete and permanent parking provision is provided in the town centre (potentially on the Palmbest site –see pp 28), the pocket park can then be expanded into a larger community park together with new civic buildings and possibly some space for clean start-up business units.

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THE SPLASH POOL SITE: 1HA.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LAND OWNERSHIP</th>
<th>ENC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| PROPOSED USE   | -Temporary Car Park  
-Permanent civic buildings and facilities  
-Permanent clean start-up business units  
-Permanent community park and children’s play facilities |
| DEPENDENCIES   | -Replacement of the existing Splash Pool by the new facility at Manor Park  
-Identifying locations for additional town centre car parking |
| POSSIBLE CONSTRAINTS | -Failure to identify alternative location for public parking  
-Flooding |
| PHASING        | -Phase 1: Creation of a new pocket park and children’s play facilities and new temporary public parking facility.  
-Phase 2: Removal of the temporary car park, development of new civic buildings and expansion of pocket park to full community park. |
| TIMING         | -Phase 1: Short-term (0-3 years), see page 36  
-Phase 2: Longer term (6-10 years) |
The Palmbest site is key in Rushden’s regeneration plans. Located close to the High Street and with frontage to College Street, this site currently includes the Wilkinsons store. The site provides an opportunity to deliver a retail-led mixed-use regeneration scheme that will help enhance Rushden’s retail offer, improve the quality of the town centre environment, and offer the opportunity to link with the High Street and College Street, creating a new “retail circuit” within the centre.

- Of key importance here will be the creation of the retail circuit that effectively links into and complements the High Street, and ties in with the regeneration proposals put forward for the Alfred Street School site and Splash Pool site.
- It is important to create a new multi-storey car park in this location, which is required to maintain the town centre’s high level of accessibility.
- The site is in private ownership and there would be a need for some additional site assembly in order to create the retail circuit and maximise the regeneration benefits. An indicative programme for the proposals (see below) sets out an ambitious but likely timeframe within which to undertake the various projects. All of the proposals (some more than others) will involve further research, investigation, design, and development appraisal work before they can be implemented.

### THE PALMBEST SITE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Land Ownership</th>
<th>- Palmbest Holdings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Other small private ownerships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proposed Use</td>
<td>- Retail units</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Restaurants and cafes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- High density residential</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Commercial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Multi storey car park</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dependencies</td>
<td>- Negotiations with existing tenants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Achieving high quality link with High Street</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Timing and viability of development proposals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Ensuring that the new scheme is complementary to the High Street and creates additional footfall and expenditure for retailers in the High Street</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Possible Constraints</td>
<td>- Parking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Levels changes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phasing</td>
<td>- Single phased redevelopment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timing</td>
<td>- Longer term (6-10 years)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Implementation of these proposals will be dependent on public sector commitment, the availability of funding, and the investment decisions of landowners, developers, investors and occupiers. It is anticipated that there will be substantial change over that period, and the Action Plan should be monitored and reviewed on a regular basis and updated when necessary so that it is sufficiently flexible to adapt to that change.

Delivery of the Action Plan is a significant task, offering great opportunities but also involving many challenges to be overcome, including:

- managing and developing delivery, facilitating links between strategic organisations and liaising with local businesses and the wider community to identify needs and manage expectations;
- co-ordinating all the Action Plan proposals to phase infrastructure requirements and avoid “flooding” the market e.g. with new residential opportunities, ensuring their timely delivery, and maximising their regenerative benefits;
- sending out a clear message that Rushden town centre has an appetite for change and regeneration and has the mechanisms in place to deliver that change. This will only be achieved through effective lobbying, promotion, marketing, branding and PR. This will be vital to give the private sector the confidence to invest in Rushden.

The task of delivering the Action Plan will therefore rely on successful working partnerships between various key organisations, and will require full support and buy-in from both public and private sector bodies/organisations if Rushden is to realise its regeneration vision. Crucially this would include Northamptonshire County Council, East Northamptonshire Council, Rushden Town Council, North Northamptonshire Development Company, the local business partnership, key town centre landowners, the local community and any future development partners for the identified sites.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project</th>
<th>Lead Stakeholders</th>
<th>Other Partners</th>
<th>Timeline</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High Street Improvements</td>
<td>RTC</td>
<td>Local Business Group, ENC</td>
<td>0-3 yrs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Splash Pool (Phase 1)</td>
<td>ENC</td>
<td></td>
<td>3-6 yrs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depot and Recycling Centre site</td>
<td>ENC</td>
<td>Dev. partner</td>
<td>6-10 yrs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Street Car Park</td>
<td>NCC</td>
<td>Dev. partner</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alfred Street School</td>
<td>ENC</td>
<td>Dev. partner and community partners</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Splash Pool (Phase 2)</td>
<td>ENC</td>
<td>Dev. Partner</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Palmbest site</td>
<td>Palmbest Holdings</td>
<td>Dev. Partner, ENC</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ENC together RTC and a re-energised town centre partnership will be the key public sector and partnership organisations charged with championing the regeneration. The role that these organisations play will be pivotal and multi-faceted throughout the entire process of delivery. The key roles that ENC and RTC will play are summarised below:

**ROLE 1: PLANNING AUTHORITY**
As the Local Planning Authority, ENC will have a key role in guiding and shaping proposals for the town centre through the planning process. Not only will this include assessing planning applications for the individual sites, but more importantly will involve establishing a robust statutory planning framework at the local level to guide, regulate and positively encourage the right type of future development.

The Action Plan represents the start of this process by setting out a clear vision for the future of Rushden Town Centre. However this document in itself will not provide the necessary formal planning certainty that the market will require if Rushden is to realise its regeneration vision.

It will therefore be important that ENC progresses these Action Plan proposals to the point where they can be adopted as statutory policy in the future. In conjunction with this, ENC will also be producing more detailed proposals for each of the sites through site specific planning and development briefs.

Indeed this process is already underway, with ENC currently preparing the Four Towns Plan Development Plan Document (DPD), which once adopted will provide greater guidance and clarity on planning and development for Rushden.

**ROLE 2: LAND OWNERSHIP**
Land ownership is fundamental to the town centre’s future regeneration. Town centres are traditionally characterised by numerous and complex land ownership arrangements and land assembly can often be a timely and costly process when bringing forward development proposals, and in many cases can stifle the delivery of town centre regeneration plans.

Fortunately Rushden town centre has the benefits of relatively simple land ownership patterns in the key opportunity areas. In particular ENC has freehold ownership of the Depot and Recycling Centre site, John Street Car Park and the Splash Pool site, which affords them significant influence and control of the regeneration of Rushden. This will require ENC to have a clear regeneration and investment strategy whereby it determines the timing and means by which to dispose of key sites for “best consideration” and the degree to which it reinvests receipts in Rushden’s future regeneration.

In seeking to bring forward new developments, it will therefore be vital that ENC plays an active role in managing its property assets with a view to obtaining ‘best consideration’ for the sites’ future disposal, and maximising the regenerative benefits that can be achieved through their redevelopment.
Role 3: Funding
There will be a need for public sector funding. This could be obtained in a number of ways, including but not limited to:

a. Direct investment of public funds, for example Rushden Town Council funding public realm improvements or the shop front pilot programme.

b. Disposal of identified ENC owned sites, providing a fiscal injection to support the town centre’s broader regeneration programme, for instance helping to deliver a new community centre.

c. Applying for additional public funding and government grants through other organisations such as Northamptonshire Enterprise Limited, Northamptonshire County Council and North Northamptonshire Development Company.

Role 4: Site Assembly
As highlighted earlier, Rushden is in a fortunate position by virtue of the straightforward land ownership arrangements of key town centre sites. Whilst this is generally the case, in some instances additional land assembly may be necessary, which could require the council to use its compulsory purchase powers where there is a compelling case to do so in the public’s interest.

Role 5: Being pro-active and promotional
Government guidance requires that Local Authorities should be proactive in planning for the future of town centres. Following the success of the EbD process, both ENC and RTC should build on this positive momentum by continuing to promote the plan locally, regionally and nationally to gain maximum exposure for the town centre.

This will raise awareness of the potential opportunities for investors, developers, landowners, occupiers and the public, to demonstrate that Rushden’s aspirations can be realised with their assistance. Promotion and marketing should be fundamental activities during the implementation of the proposals, and during any future review of the Regeneration Strategy.
Equally important will be the role that the two Councils play in delivering the Regeneration Strategy sites, a fundamental principle of which will involve working in partnership with key stakeholders, landowners, the local community and the private sector to bring forward development. An example of this will be the Councils’ future relationship with Palbest Holdings Ltd to determine the best future for the site and then in helping to deliver its development.

In addition to this, the ENC has a range of other power at its disposal which it may use and roles which it may play. In particular it is likely to lead or assist in the following ways:

- Lead on the selection of a developer for the key property development schemes.
- Facilitate effective links between individual partners and coordinate delivery
- Ensure that effective links are in place with other wider public sector initiatives in economic regeneration, education, health, transport and crime
The Enquiry by Design (EbD) process is one of the Foundation’s key planning tools, and the framework by which our values are disseminated to influence future development of the built environment. A collaborative planning approach devised and promoted by The Foundation, Enquiry by Design is often used for substantial sites. A single event held over several days assesses a complex series of design requirements of a new or revived community.

The process brings key stakeholders together around the same table, where problems can be aired as they arise and every issue tested by being drawn. It can be used for the regeneration of existing communities or the planning of wholly new developments. The EbD also has an educational component, introducing the participants to the concepts of traditional urbanism and helping to ensure that the project is not only sustainable but relates locally.

Following the initial site visit The Prince's Foundation for the Built Environment (PFBE) began early stages of the Enquiry by Design (EbD) process, which is PFBE’s collaborative planning tool; a process that brings key stakeholders and community members together to formulate a strategy for regeneration. The early learning phase consisted of a one day workshop to be briefed on key issues such as transport, safety, and accessibility. In addition, a public questionnaire was distributed to enable residents to voice their concerns. These early learning stages are crucial in order to have a good understanding of key issues enabling PFBE to move forward with a more informed perspective.

The next stage of the process was a three day EbD. The first exercise of this workshop was an accelerated scenario planning exercise. This exercise looked at the trends and influences on Rushden’s future, using a successful technique to help frame the important issues and variables in the design process.

Workshop participants broke into groups to explore how the future of Rushden and its region might unfold, given different combinations of events. A combination of trends were explored then combined into two potential “stories” of Rushden’s future. These stories were then used to inform the design, ensuring it would be as flexible as possible to different scenarios.

Community input is the primary influence to this report and the designs contained within. No previous design ideas or influences have informed outputs. This report has been produced as the next step in the greater process of regenerating Rushden.
EbD final presentation
PFBE’S CORE PRINCIPLES

Three compounding factors are changing our lives: by the year 2050, the global population will have risen from six to nine billion; the average temperature will have risen by between 2 and 6°C; and, without a technological breakthrough, depletion of oil and gas will have brought an end to cheap energy. Buildings and transportation make up more than half of carbon emissions, so finding practical solutions to this global challenge through smart development is essential. The Prince’s Foundation for the Built Environment (PFBE) fundamentally believes, that by structuring towns in a logical and simple manner, many of these challenges may be overcome. This section presents PFBE’s core principles which have informed the team’s examination and diagnosis of the town centre.

PFBE Believes in Sustainable Growth

Twentieth-century cities suffer from various forms of growth composed of single uses (i.e. large housing areas, office parks, etc.). These zones are often over-expanded to become monotonous zones devoid of activities which support life. This creates chaos in terms of their structure, use and appearance. These over-expansions cause serious imbalances between town centres and outlying residential areas, forcing many to rely heavily upon the car as the major mode of transport. This is highly unsustainable. PFBE has developed an idealised town structure diagram which shows how towns can grow as self sustaining neighbourhoods (please refer to Idealised Town Structure Diagram, opposite page). This includes:

:: For a neighbourhood to be walkable, many daily needs should be supplied within a five-minute walk.
:: Towns and neighbourhoods should have clearly identifiable centres.
:: Residents of these towns should have easy access to green infrastructure.
**PFBE Believes that Towns Should Stand the Test of Time**

Nearly all traditional and sustainable urban settlements exhibit similar characteristics in terms of both their form and growth. One of the ways in which towns were formed, was at a crossroads or intersection of two principal thoroughfares - this was how Rushden was established and grew.

**Footfall and the High Street**

To capitalise on the footfall at this intersection, streets were formed by the linear arrangement of buildings on both sides of these streets which sold goods to people moving through the area; one of which became the town’s high street. At the intersection, where there was the highest level of footfall, it is usual to see a market space or square. Streets then turned corners to create blocks and logical secondary arteries for movement. Most English and other European towns follow the same evolutionary principles. Healthy towns therefore consist of a logical network of streets, squares and blocks which shape spaces to create the public realm.

However, towns need to accommodate change and growth over time while maintaining their underlying structure. From the ‘Rates of Change’ diagram (see previous page) it is important to understand that fast changing trends such as retail which might have a 10—15 year cycle should not affect the road infrastructure which might be on a longer 500-year cycle. For example, a development by a single or multiple retailers would sit on the ‘fashion frequency’ on the ‘Rates of Change’ diagram. This therefore sits on a more rapidly changing frequency than ‘infrastructure’, with the infrastructure being a town’s streets and spaces. It is therefore important to ensure that if we are to create places that are designed to stand the test of time, activities that sit on faster changing frequencies do not dictate the form of slower changing frequencies such as a town’s streets and spaces.
A Logical Network of Streets
A logical network of streets makes it easy for people to find their way through town by foot. A permeable network of streets also makes it easier for cars to move around town by dispersing traffic along alternative routes rather than focusing on a few routes with congestion. Additionally, all towns should have a variety of street types to cope with the different movement patterns in a town. A high street has traditionally been the highest receptor of movement, which is why one would find the most amount of retail activity here to capture local spending.

Clearly Defined Blocks
Clearly defined blocks create a distinction between the public and private realm. This is achieved when buildings conform to a building line which fronts onto a public space. This can be described as 'placemaking'.

Squares
A town square is an open area commonly found in the heart of a traditional town used for community gatherings. Squares may take on different functions in relation to each other. For example, some squares may act as civic hubs and other as market spaces. In all cases they should be activated by the uses of the buildings which surround them.

CONTEMPORARY SUBURBAN MODEL

SUSTAINABLE URBANISM
Sustainable Urbanism

The model of ‘Sustainable Urbanism’ is typified by places with a mix of uses, where within a short walking distance of people’s homes there are educational, employment, shopping, leisure and cultural opportunities. The PFBE has created a town where such opportunities exist at Poundbury in Dorset. The ‘Contemporary Suburban Model’ is characterised by single use areas, with residential estates geographically separated from educational, employment, shopping, leisure and cultural areas (see opposite page).

Where can I see an example of Sustainable Urbanism?

The older parts of many settlements exhibit the qualities of Sustainable Urbanism, although in many cases, the local shops, schools and public houses have closed. Rushden’s historic core is an example of Sustainable Urbanism, as are a number of towns’ and villages’ historic cores in the vicinity.

Where can I see an example of the Contemporary Suburban Model?

Rushden’s growth towards the latter half of the 20th century and early 21st century feature characteristics of the contemporary suburban model, with out of town retail developments and business parks. Crown Park is a prime example of an out of town business park. Whilst the circumstances that created such places are symptomatic of the changes in national Government planning policy over the years, it is envisioned that as cost of travel increases the principles of sustainable urbanism will become more important to people.
Throughout the EbD process PFBE has identified challenges Rushden has in the revitalisation of its town centre. Its needs can be considered in three basic categories: economic, environmental (or physical), and social. Understanding the complex issues and how they are interrelated can provide insight to inform the strategy for regeneration. In this context the needs of the community, such as more jobs near the centre, new family housing and a better High Street, can be seen as part of a greater regeneration strategy. Providing for these needs will strengthen the community and build momentum for future growth.

**Impact and Tendencies of Prosperity**

How we analyse

The proper analysis of a modern town is in itself such a complex task that often correctly understanding the problems in a holistic way can prove very difficult. A thorough look at Rushden’s physical problems as they relate to each other will uncover the bigger picture of how the town works as an organism and what steps can be taken to revitalise and regenerate life at the centre.

As each of the following pieces of analysis are presented, it is important to understand the extent of influence the information will have on the revitalisation strategy. We will be endeavouring to connect each thread of knowledge from analysis through to vision, strategy, and finally delivery.
Heritage in old towns has much more to teach us than how to make beautiful buildings. For example, the economic, social, and environmental needs of Rushden mentioned in the introduction all have their roots in what has happened to Rushden throughout the life of the town. Further, we can even point out physical changes throughout history in the town fabric that specifically relate to problems that Rushden experiences in daily life today. In order to establish and use this information to our advantage in revitalizing Rushden, we will look at a series of historic maps to determine what is happening to Rushden at that time in history.
A diagram showing Rushden’s building footprints circa 1885

THE GROWTH OF RUSHDEN

1885 - Rushden as Facilitator of Exchange

Studying early Rushden teaches about the basics of how a small town works. Looking at the map, you can see the roads leading into town, and resulting development along them. You can see where the centre is, and the bounty of countryside surrounding it. It is very clear when you are in Rushden, and when you have left. We study Rushden circa 1885, because at this time it was a functional and walkable town centre. Care was taken to provide maximum exchange with minimum movement. Towns were generally built this way, because it makes sense to do so. Important buildings were positioned carefully in the town, and other buildings served to support civic life and to provide access to these amenities. As we study later years, look back to 1885 Rushden to see how new changes affect the old town, especially as it relates to The High Street (shown in red).

'Neighbourhoods, towns and cities were invented to facilitate exchange. Exchange of material goods, culture, insights, skills and also the exchange of emotional, psychological and spiritual support. For a truly sustainable environment we must maximise this exchange while minimising the travel necessary to do it.'

- David Engwicht

A diagram showing Rushden's building footprints circa 1885
As Rushden began to facilitate new industries, notice how the method of development (or town-building) changed. Although development begins to happen slightly further from the High Street, it is still a walkable distance. More importantly new homes were built very close to the new factories, providing a comfortable commute for factory workers. Clearly one can browse the below map and identify the many shoe factories. These have not only an enormous effect on Rushden’s prosperity (providing jobs and a bustling town centre), they also have huge impact on the physical form of Rushden. At this time, factory buildings were finely crafted structures – built with pride, and adding to the town character. As we will see later on they also provide very large lots of land for redevelopment after the decline of the industrial town.

Today’s High Street is hidden amidst winding sprawl -- most of the recent development of Rushden is car dependent
How Sprawl Affects Rushden’s Town Centre

“WE NEED A BETTER QUALITY ENVIRONMENT”

“SOME PEOPLE WHO LIVE IN RUSHDEN DO NOT EVEN KNOW THAT THE HIGH STREET EXISTS”

-Taken from the public meeting input

View looking towards The High Street: what once was a functioning building, has been demolished and paved for a few parking spaces.
This diagram shows in red some buildings that existed in 1926, and whose sites today contribute to poor quality of place due to either large paved and vacant plots of land, or replacement by less valuable and unremarkable development. This directly contributes to the sense that there aren’t enough homes or businesses at the town centre, and that generally the centre needs reinvestment.

This diagram shows in blue the ‘noose’ around The High Street that is a fast moving one-way traffic circulator. This system of traffic acts like a racetrack, encouraging the circling and circumventing of The High Street, instead of encouraging people to slowly move along The High Street. The latter would not only make The High Street businesses healthier, but would change a visitors basic notions about what Rushden is. Instead of perceiving a traffic system and fast moving bypassing of the centre, it would seem Rushden is a place to slow down and see the town.

This diagram shows in orange the High Street itself, which currently has some basic problems with how it functions. Delivery vehicles dominate traffic, and poor access makes it hard to navigate into The High Street. The result is a confused High Street that many people do not even experience. The experience for people who do travel The High Street is one that is full of big vehicles, and not enough people walking to and from shops. Much of the problem with getting small businesses to survive on The High Street is that people need to be walking by the shop in order to stop in to make purchases. More foot traffic makes healthy small businesses.
Understanding The Three ELEMENTS of a Healthy Town

**ECONOMY**

The health of a successful town can be diagnosed with the amount of business that contribute to the local economy. Privately owned businesses hire local employees, and provide friendly service. Local employees may tend to walk to their work place, thereby helping to reduce the amount of traffic on the road. Local hotels, restaurants, clothing stores, and pubs all help create a more sustainable economy for the town.

**ENVIRONMENT**

A successful town needs a balance of natural and built environment. Parks, green ways, and pathways are all as valuable as paved squares, closes, or mews. Public spaces are important, as they provide the vital civic need of assembly. Young and old can gather and interact, pass down knowledge, and tend relationships. A carefully designed public space allows for the cultivation of social capital within the town.

**SOCIETY**

The integration of public space and everyday uses allows for social exchange between residents. This is key in generating what is called social capital, the intangible value of a place as it fits with the people using it. A town square, a High Street, and public garden can all be positive contributors. Buildings can also play a part, whether a civic building or just commonly walked to. Creating lots of walking destinations contributes to the economy of a place, and the social capital of a town.
Rushden's Challenges

Rushden is located close to a number of important retail centres, which by themselves continue to challenge small privately owned businesses across the UK. Rushden has a mix of uses that compete with the national chains, and some that offer something different. The more Rushden's High Street can be revitalised with small businesses and walking destinations, the more it will succeed against other centres.

Many public areas in Rushden's centre have become paved car parks very close to the High Street. Few public spaces and parks exist, because of the demand for parking spaces is so high.

Rushden's town centre is now a place where driving is easier than walking, and where few residents want to spend time at night. Not enough uses exist on the High Street that encourage diverse types of people to visit throughout the day and evenings. More and more interaction should be encouraged in Rushden through the introduction of common spaces and the co-location of a variety of new uses along the High Street.