

Shopfront Design

6.29 A shopfront design guide for the town centre is available separately from the Council.

Policy Guidance 9 Shopfront Design – Letchworth Town Centre

Shopfront designs and shop signage should have regard to the Letchworth Town Centre Shopfront Design Guide and conservation area character assessment, so that they preserve or enhance the conservation area.

The loss of original shopfront designs will be resisted.

The removal of inappropriate shopfronts and signs and restoration of original shopfronts is encouraged.

7 Retail and Change of Use Development Principles

North Hertfordshire Retail Strategy

7.1 Letchworth Town Centre does not sit alone. North Hertfordshire District has a close network of towns with no single dominant centre. The District lies within the catchment of the sub-regional centres of Luton, Cambridge, and Stevenage.

7.2 Letchworth Garden City is centrally located within the District and together with Hitchin, which has a slightly larger town centre, shares the role as the main town centre for the District. The other small market town centres at Baldock and Royston serve a more localised catchment and look



to Letchworth, Hitchin and the sub-regional centres for many functions. Many Letchworth residents also do their food shopping at Sainsburys retail park in Letchworth outside the centre and at the Tesco Extra store in Baldock.

Letchworth Garden City Town Centre

7.3 The town centre primarily serves the day to day shopping and service needs of the local residents. It has 252 ground floor retail/service units. It has a reasonable mix of comparison shops, a small range of national/regional multiples and a smaller number of medium and larger size units.

7.4 Although Letchworth Town Centre is compact and well defined, appreciated by local residents for its environment, cleanliness and spaciousness, there is concern about its performance. Despite a reasonably large and affluent catchment population - potentially able to attract customers from east and west situated as it is between two other towns - it is losing out to other centres within and outside the District. There is also concern about the extent to which its shops and facilities meets today's needs. These concerns have existed since the mid 1980- early 1990s. Then some streetscene improvements were carried out – but now appear counterproductive in detracting from the area (see public realm section). For a time the centre did not have

a major supermarket following the closure of Sainsburys, however the development of the Morrisons store on the site of North Herts College has provided a new impetus and increased visitors to the town centre. Investment has revived, particularly by the Garden City Heritage Foundation, which is the freeholder of most of the town centre.

7.5 The District's Town Centre and Retail Study (NLP 2004) indicated a substantial 'leakage' of expenditure to other centres for higher order comparison shopping – e.g. clothes, durable goods etc. This means that journeys are unnecessarily extended and investment and job opportunities in the District's town centres are forgone. In recent years the larger 'sub-regional' centres have grown considerably whilst many smaller centres have struggled. New Government planning policy – PPS6 – expressly promotes the role of smaller centres, such as Letchworth, to see a more even balance of retail investment appropriate to the size and function of each centre. This will be a particular challenge when the major redevelopment proposals in nearby Stevenage are completed. It is necessary for Letchworth Garden City Town Centre to rise to this challenge. It should be stressed however that Stevenage (for example) would be four times larger than Letchworth in terms of retail floorspace, therefore it cannot hope to ape or mimic such a centre. Rather Letchworth's role must be to expand and build on its unique

strengths and retail offer as a small town.

The Background to the Retail Strategy

7.6 The strategy for new retail development is based on an update in 2006 to the NLP study, which forecast the need for 25,000 sqm. of gross additional comparative goods floorspace districtwide by 2016. If Letchworth were to maintain its current market share it suggests that 7,000 sqm. gross of additional comparative goods floorspace may be required in this period, although this is not a target.

7.7 In addition some 4,000 sqm. gross food store convenience floorspace in total by 2016 is estimated as being needed to be distributed between Hitchin, Letchworth and Baldock town centres. Also in addition to the allowances for comparative goods floorspace there is an estimated Districtwide need for an additional 10% of floorspace on top of the comparative good floorspace, for food and drink purposes within the District.

7.8 As the principal town centres, retail investment is focused on Hitchin and Letchworth. Although Hitchin is currently more important in retail terms than Letchworth it is accepted that if opportunity sites for retailing in Letchworth are likely to come forward then it will gain more parity. Both centres are proposed to be designated

as principal town centres in the Local Development Framework, so that the same broad policy approach towards new retail development applies to them. This hierarchy and these retail need figures should not be interpreted as either targets or proposing any rigid sequencing of sites or suggest any precise amount of floorspace provided for different uses in different centres, as it is accepted that development will largely be driven by the constraints and opportunities presented by different sites in different town centres. Over the period of the Local Development Framework a balanced development of both principal town centres will be sought.

7.9 This town centre strategy broadly indicates a number of possible 'Opportunity Sites' where it is possible to foresee development in accordance with adopted local plan policies 42 (i) and 58. It is not proposing any new allocation of land for specific uses with associated restrictions on uses over and above current development plan policy.

Providing Sufficient Land for Retail Expansion in Letchworth

7.10 To put the issue into context 7,000 sqm. gross of additional floorspace of comparative goods in Letchworth Garden City would represent an increase in comparative goods floorspace in the town centre

The stakeholder group stated how they wanted better quality shops with more choice and less need to shop elsewhere – this section seeks to provide these.

that would be equivalent to that of slightly larger than the gross floorspace of the Morrisons building. Although this figure should not be interpreted as a target it does represent a baseline for investigation of potential sites capable of broadly meeting identified need. As most potential sites in the town centre are already in retail/service use provision of this amount of additional floorspace might not be possible on a single site, and some of it might be provided through shifting between services and other types of uses towards comparison goods upon redevelopment. This means that total increase in retail floorspace within the town centre might be less than 7,000 sqm. overall.

7.11 A review has been undertaken of the potential sites likely to be able to accommodate retail expansion.

These are shown on the spread on pages following this section. Only three medium-large sites are either within or next to the existing main retail area. These provide a shortlist – the advantages and disadvantages of each site are also summarised on the following pages. It is necessary to prioritise, as if all sites were put forward for retail growth then experience, supported by national planning policy, suggests that this can deter retail investment across all sites.

7.12 No one site 'ticks all of the boxes'. However the sites with the most potential, being suitable, viable and available are those of Arena Parade and the Wynd. Development of the Arena Parade and The Wynd are more likely to succeed if they are part of a wider strategy to link together sites providing a clearer pedestrian route and improved public realm for shoppers. This is dealt with under the next policy guidance (see also fig. 12).

7.13 It is also possible that increased visitors to the town centre may prompt later redevelopment in whole or part of the Garden Square shopping centre.

7.14 Further design principles and guidance for each of these sites and several smaller opportunity sites is given in Part III.



Policy Guidance 10 Priority Sites for Additional Comparative Goods Retailing – Letchworth Town Centre

Sites LTC1 and LTC2 are the priority opportunities as part of Letchworth Town Centre's contribution towards meeting the identified districtwide need for comparative goods retailing by 2016. Once these sites are developed site LTC3 may be developed.

Their development will be secured as part of a wider strategy to link up different parts of the centre and improving the shopping experience, ensuring the balanced and successful growth of the town centre as a whole (see policy guidance 12).

7.15 The future of the town centre will not be secured by isolated and inward looking development. Sites sit within the wider town centre and shoppers expect to be able to walk between shops with the same convenience they expect from the best shopping towns and centres.

7.16 Walking within a town centre is a good thing as it provides vitality and encourages impulse buying and hence improves the prospects of stores between key retail attractions. Smaller and less successful centres sometimes rely on people driving right up to individual small shops for day to day shopping and services. By contrast

at larger and more successful centres shoppers, if they can find a convenient place to park and/or ride, shoppers are well prepared to walk a short distance. In Letchworth Town Centre the walking distances from shops to parking areas are very short. Walking will be made all the more pleasurable if the route is clear, well sign posted, unhampered by traffic and attractive. These are all features of the most vital, vibrant and attractive town centres.

7.17 The overall physical approach to the retail strategy is illustrated in figure 7.

7.18 The retail strategy will require co-ordinated action on several fronts and integrated project management and delivery achieved through partnership working. Public realm improvements need to be delivered alongside new development, and parking, bus and access arrangements need to be reviewed (see Public Transport and the Public Realm Section). The individual themes set out in this strategy are explored in more detail in following sections.

Policy Guidance 11 Additional Convenience Goods Retailing - Letchworth Town Centre

A limited amount of additional convenience goods retailing will be permitted as part of site LTC2 (the Wynd) as part of the identified need for the District as a whole by 2016, and on site LTC3 (Garden Square) towards the end of this period. High quality food stores are the priority need. Additional floorspace might be justified where this results in clawback of convenience goods expenditure from outside the town centre and improves choice in this sector.

Policy Guidance 12 The Strategy for Linking up Letchworth Town Centre

The strategy for securing the future of Letchworth Town Centre is to bring forward the development of a series of retail and mixed use development sites over time, alongside substantial improvements to the public realm. The town centre as a whole should provide for a fuller range of local retail and service needs appropriate to its size and function, with a rich and varied mix of stores of different sizes, both national chains and local independent operators.

New development and existing main shopping streets should provide a seamless and high quality pedestrian experience. These should be integrated with:

- i) an improved public transport network and facilities;
- ii) improved parking at the edges of the primary shopping area;
- iii) convenience shopping next to the parking, and
- iv) shoppers walking along a radically improved, unified and largely pedestrian dominated public realm. This would consist of a linked series of new and existing shopping streets and public spaces.

Figure 7



Possible Sites for retail expansion	Advantages	Disadvantages
Arena Parade (LTC1)	<p>Directly between most active retail areas of Morrisons and Eastcheap. The core of the town centre has shifted with the development of Morrisons and the re-development of Arena Parade would complement this.</p> <p>Poor quality existing buildings making a poor use of land.</p> <p>Being promoted by Garden City Heritage Foundation – so available for development.</p>	<p>Sensitive site.</p> <p>Not large enough to accommodate all of required growth.</p>
The Wynd (LTC2)	<p>Medium size site, existing uses making a poor use of land.</p> <p>Being promoted by Garden City Heritage Foundation – so available for development.</p>	<p>Currently a peripheral backland site off main retail area.</p> <p>Access difficulties and potential lack of high street frontage.</p>
Garden Square and adjoining land (LTC3)	<p>Poor quality environment and retail offer. Large site capable, if adjoining sites included, of significant development.</p> <p>Small number of separate property interests.</p>	<p>Leaseholders have no current plans for major redevelopment.</p> <p>A scheme of such a scale would take some time and significant expansion might require relocation of civic functions from the existing council offices on Gernon Road, a process that might in itself take several years to realise.</p>

The Primary Shopping Frontage

7.19 For the first time a primary shopping frontage is defined for the town centre. The purpose of this designation is to ensure that the core of the town centre remains focused on its primary purpose for shops and that this function does not become diluted. The policy guidance accords with emerging districtwide retail policy.

7.20 As vacancy levels in the Primary Frontage are very low it is considered appropriate to apply a policy of strict control over loss of A1 (shop) units whilst recognising the need to diversify parts of the town centre, which lacks cafés and restaurants with sitting out areas, which also leads to a loss of activity in the evening. Effectively the policy guidance is seeking to secure uses with 'active frontages' - that is uses which look out onto or spill out onto the street.

7.21 Class A5 takeaways are differentiated from restaurants because they raise different environmental issues, such as litter, longer opening hours, and extra traffic and pedestrian activity from those generally raised by other food and drink uses. They are more likely to serve a purpose for one off visits by residents or delivery, rather than as part of a trip linked to other activity, and therefore are considered best located at the edges of the centre or in secondary frontages.

7.22 The definition of primary shopping frontages is based on the recommendations to the Council of Nathaniel Lichfield retail planning consultants, bar adding Morrisons, as this has shifted the focal point of the centre, and adding the adjoining Arena Parade. The designation of primary frontages should not be seen as static as they are based on shopping provision as is and will need to be reviewed following new development. Indeed the successful implementation of the strategy could see the area of primary frontage increase. (See figure 8). Government policy in PPS6 requires local authorities to expand town centres and primary shopping areas where needed and appropriate.

Policy Guidance 13 Primary Shopping Frontage - Letchworth Town Centre

Within the Letchworth Town Centre Primary Shopping Frontage, as defined on figure 20, there will be a strong presumption against the loss of ground floor street frontage A1 (shop), unless exceptionally occasional other uses are demonstrated as being acceptable, by being essential to promote the vitality and viability of that part of the town centre and which comply with the following criteria:

In such exceptional circumstances, development proposals involving the loss of (A1) in a primary shopping frontage will only be permitted where:

- i) the proposal unit has a minimum of two shops (A1) on each side, and
- ii) no more than 20% of the total frontage length of these five units (the application unit and two each side) is in non-shop (A1) use. Where the proposal unit is within the last two units in the defined primary frontage, the five units to be taken into account will be the last five units in the frontage.

Where the above criterion are met, acceptable alternative uses at ground floor level will be confined to A2 (financial and professional services), A3 (restaurant and café) and A4 (drinking establishment) uses, A5 (takeaways), D1 (non residential institutions), and D2 (assembly and leisure).



The Secondary Shopping Frontage

7.23 The definition of secondary shopping frontage is based on the recommendations to the Council of Nathaniel Litchfield retail planning consultants, bar the exclusion of primary shopping frontages (see previous para.) as well as the exclusion of 1-6 Station Road which is now entirely in non-shop use.

7.24 A4 (drinking establishment) uses are specifically excluded from the list of acceptable uses as the five current premises are currently clustered around the central part of the town centre, whilst the secondary shopping areas are closer to residential areas and almost entirely comprises small shop units, both of which make the secondary areas less suitable.

Figure 8



Policy Guidance 14 Secondary Shopping Frontage - Letchworth Town Centre

Within the Letchworth Town Centre Secondary Shopping Frontage, as defined on figure 20, the loss of ground floor street frontage A1 (shop) uses will be resisted where this would undermine the retail function of the town centre. Development proposals involving the loss of a shop (A1) unit will only be permitted if it does not undermine the retail function of the centre and where:

- i) The proposal does not result in more than two non-A1 units within the application unit and two each side, and
- ii) no more than 40% of the total frontage length of these five units (the application unit and two each side) is in non-shop (A1) use. Where the proposal unit is within the last two units in the defined secondary frontage, the five units to be taken into account will be the last five units in the frontage.

Where the above criteria have been met, acceptable alternative uses at ground floor level will be confined to A2 (financial and professional services), A3 (restaurant and café), A5 (takeaways), D1 (non-residential institutions) and D2 (assembly and leisure).

Fringe Sites and Parades

7.25 A less restrictive policy approach is to be followed for the more peripheral sites. Because of the overall shortage of units in the town centre it is considered important to provide additional units at ground floor level where opportunities arise. Town centre uses are defined in national policy PPS6 and include all of the uses listed in policy guidance 13 and 14.

Policy Guidance 15 Sites and Parades outside the Primary and Secondary Shopping Frontages - Letchworth Town Centre

Change of use within sites and parades in the town centre outside primary and secondary shopping frontages, are acceptable, subject to protection of amenity and the proposal having an acceptable transport impact - providing the ground floor frontage use is provided for non-residential town centre use(s). Special policy guidance applies to the Town Square/ Broadway Gardens (policy guidance 19 and Opportunity Sites in Part III).

Your Views...

The stakeholder group wanted more restaurants and the centre to be less dead in the evening, but with less anti-social activity. This the aim of Policy Guidance 16.

The Evening and Night Time Economy

7.26 For many years Letchworth was a teetotal town. The town centre suffers from a lack of vitality after normal shopping hours. Partly because of this lack of activity there can be some antisocial activity in the evening, and there is a lack of things for young people to do.

7.27 The approach towards drinking establishments is based on maintaining the existing broad concentration of uses in the centre of the area, which makes policing easier and keeps control of licensed activities such as drinking and dancing, well away from residential areas. This policy guidance does not imply that the town centre should mimic the level of activity and character of other nearby centres in the evening. It seeks to allow for a modest increase in evening and night-time economy uses that make a valuable contribution to the vitality of the town centre and is also acceptable in amenity terms.

Policy Guidance 16 Evening and Night-time Economy Uses - Letchworth Town Centre

Within Letchworth Town Centre a modest expansion in evening and night-time economy uses (A3/A4/A5 and nightclubs) is acceptable in principle providing these lead to a more varied town centre, are appropriate to the civil and quiet character of the town, and do not harm public amenity or community safety.

A3 (restaurant and café) uses are acceptable throughout the town centre subject to policies on primary and secondary shopping frontages.

A4 (drinking establishments) and any nightclub should be located on or close to Eastcheap, the Broadway and the western end of Leys Avenue.

A5 (takeaways) are generally less acceptable within the primary shopping frontage.



Arts and Cultural Uses

7.28 The Town Centre, and its immediate environs, comprises a surprisingly vibrant and varied range of arts and cultural locations, including: The Broadway Cinema, Plinston Hall, The Letchworth Arts Centre (formerly The Place), Mrs Howard Hall, Broadway Gardens, Howard Park, Letchworth Museum, The Garden City Museum and Letchworth Library. Overall, the town centre is well provided for in terms of arts and cultural facilities though it is accepted that some of these could be better used.

7.29 A number of agencies and organisations are involved in developing the future of arts and leisure facilities in the town, including the Heritage Foundation who own the freehold on many of the sites, the District Council, the County Council and the voluntary and community sector. The key to any future success and achievement lies in positive partnership working.

7.30 For example, during the past year the Letchworth Garden City Arts Partnership has been formed between the trustees of The Place, LGCHF and NHDC. This partnership is overseeing a major physical redevelopment of the premises while the appointment of an Arts Development Manager and a new Business Plan has set down a medium term strategy to develop arts and cultural activities therein.

7.31 This town centre strategy sets out a longer term 15 year time horizon at what opportunities for improved facilities might arise from any development. For example better coordination between different locations could create an enhanced 'arts focus' for the town centre where joint associations might enable shared foyer, bar and ticketing facilities, with associated cost savings. Adding conference facilities could also add flexibility and a cross subsidising revenue stream, especially if any facility were large enough also to include catering and conference facilities.

Policy Guidance 17 Arts, Culture and Assembly Uses – Letchworth Town Centre

The improvement of Letchworth Arts Centre and other arts, cultural and assembly uses in and around the town centre is supported, as part of opportunity or other sites.

The loss, without appropriate replacement, of arts, culture and assembly uses will be resisted.

Library, Museum and Heritage Provision

7.32 The current library at the corner of Gernon Road does not meet modern needs and has poor disabled access. The County Council has examined other potential sites but these would need to be central and cost-neutral to them seeking a new site. Modern libraries have a much wider range of facilities to help counter the dramatic decline in the use of conventional libraries. This includes lending of a wider range of media and improved reference/study facilities for students.

7.33 A recent Best Value Review of museums provision in Letchworth has recommended that there should be a rationalisation of facility provision in North Hertfordshire, which would include the closure of the Letchworth museum.

7.34 There would, however, be replacement facilities and the review concluded, amongst other things: That Officers enter into consultation with the Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation to look at the possibility of partnership working for the provision of museums, arts and storage within Letchworth Garden City.

7.35 To this end, the Heritage Foundation is proposing to convert the Town Hall building into a world class museum and educational facility primarily focused on the development of the Garden City and the history of town planning. In doing so, this new refurbished museum would house the current Garden City Museum collection and the remaining collection from Letchworth museum (essentially the collection founded by the original Garden City Limited). No feasibility work has yet been undertaken, but it is anticipated that there would be substantial works to the building. If this does not happen an alternative appropriate use for the Town Hall will be needed.

Policy Guidance 18 Library and Museum and Heritage Provision – Letchworth Town Centre

The improvement of Library and associated facilities within an accessible town centre location is supported in this strategy.

The development of a new/refurbished museum for Letchworth Garden City is supported in planning terms.

Tourism and Tourist Information

7.36 The Heritage Foundation has set up a tourist information centre at the top of the Arcade in Station Road. If more central sites became available through redevelopment, however, one of these might be a busier and better location. A centre could be combined, for example, with the possible Garden City History Centre.

Office and Business Uses

7.37 There is a strong demand for incubator and small business space in North Hertfordshire. There are existing managed workspaces at the Nexus Building, the Spirella Building (just outside the town centre) and the Pixmore Centre. Letchworth falls within the 25 mile radius of Cambridge where regional economic development strategies promote incubator space. There may well be scope for an additional incubator/managed workplace complex, and work with the Greater Cambridgeshire Partnership has commenced on this. Potential sites will include not only Letchworth, but also Royston. Spaces close to the transport and amenities in the town centre have proven popular. There are a number of potential sites. If matters progress it may be necessary to zone specifically for this use as it could become uneconomic if it had to compete with residential land values. One option in the short-medium term is to convert the Gernon Road office block if vacated by the District Council as part of its final civic accommodation strategy.

7.38 Prospects are somewhat more uncertain for inward investment of offices, although the town centre, particularly around Broadway Gardens, offers a highly attractive location, with the environment of a business park and the amenities of a town centre.

Policy Guidance 19 Office and Business Uses – Letchworth Town Centre

The development of office and business uses (B1) is permitted throughout the town centre (above ground floor level in primary and secondary shopping frontages). Sites around Broadway Gardens are suitable where these are not needed for civic and/or community uses.

The development of additional incubator/managed workspace is supported.

Policy Guidance 20 Residential Development – Letchworth Town Centre

The development/change-of use for residential uses is supported throughout the town centre (above ground floor level in primary and secondary shopping frontages).

Residential should be provided as part of mixed use schemes on upper floors on sites LTC1, LTC2, LTC3 and LTC4, with full replacement of any residential uses lost through redevelopment, as well as creation of additional units. Disposition of servicing arrangements and residential, should not result in unacceptable loss of amenity to existing and future residents.

Residential development within the town centre should provide a mix of unit types, with a bias towards smaller units.

Residential Development

7.39 There is a limited amount of residential development within the town centre and only one recent new-build development and another small development being granted permission - both housing for the elderly. There is undoubtedly the need and potential for additional residential accommodation in the centre. The location close to facilities makes the centre suitable for housing for the elderly, but to ensure a balanced population given the generally ageing nature of the town's population and declining household size and high house prices, there is a need for flats, both for younger professionals and smaller, more affordable flats suitable for first time buyers and smaller households.

Civic Accommodation

7.40 The District Council has prepared a civic accommodation strategy. Currently its offices are scattered and a number are poorly suited to purpose and present difficulties in improving disabled access. Options have been examined for locating facilities as far as practicable on a single site, which could have operational and sustainability benefits. The County Council is also developing a civic accommodation strategy, which involves centralising facilities in three

locations, one servicing the north of Hertfordshire. This will involve the closure of the current County Council offices housed within the former Grammar School and plan to relocate their services sometime after 2007/08

7.41 Although it is likely that fewer people will require office accommodation by the District Council in the future, none the less a single building would need to be larger than the existing main District office block at the eastern end of Gernon Road. The option of extending the main office block has been examined. One disadvantage is that this would cause disruption to services and make the existing building bulkier still. It would also hamper opportunities for the medium-longer term extension/redevelopment of the Garden Square shopping centre (LTC3).

7.42 Of the other possible sites investigated, that on the Southern side of Gernon Road was considered to be too small, as would extending the Town Hall. Another alternative site investigated, and which could be available in the short-medium term, would appear to be the former Grammar School site, although the existing building would be too small to accommodate a single civic centre. This would require (subject to conservation constraints) at the very least extension and refurbishment. Following agreement of its civic accommodation strategy in November

2006, the Council considers the former Grammar School site as the preferred site for the new District Council civic offices.

Policy Guidance 21 Civic Accommodation - Letchworth

The rationalisation, incorporation and improvement of civic accommodation in or close to Letchworth Town Centre will be pursued. The former Grammar School is considered the preferred site for the new District Council/Civic Offices. Any proposals would need to be considered acceptable when judged against the tests set out in national policy PPG15 (see opportunity site LTC5).

Youth and Other Community facilities

7.43 There is an acknowledged need for improved facilities for children and young people within the town centre (a survey of residents in 2003 showed this to be the top priority in the town). Opportunities may present themselves from development.

7.44 The original youth facilities developed as part of the Garden City, the Boys and Girls clubs, have been lost through development. Whilst the remaining facility the Bytes youth centre is just a small shop only open

Your Views...

Young people were very dissatisfied with facilities for them in the town and town centre, Policy Guidance 22 seeks improvements.

three nights a week. There has been an extensive and so far fruitless search for existing buildings that might prove suitable.

7.45 Lengthy discussions with young people within the town and the HCC Youth Service have shown a need for a drop in café type facility with the ability to listen to music, with amongst other things access to internet facilities, and a multi-use area large enough for a wide range of indoor activities such as a sports/dance/drama hall with stage off. This strategy therefore proposes to secure such a facility as part of one of the main opportunity sites. If such a facility cannot be secured on-site then a contribution will be sought as part of an associated planning obligation to secure an off-site location. Some non-dedicated youth facilities will be available at the refurbished Mrs Howard Hall.

7.46 Increasingly community facilities are being located together, for example in children's centres (which offer nursery provision and family support) but funding for such facilities are targeted at deprived areas. The town centre also lacks leisure facilities. Discussions are underway on improving health facilities for the town in a central location. The police are also looking for a 'one-stop-shop' type facility in the town centre. Proposals will need to come from service providers.

7.47 There are additionally local charities and community groups lacking in space, which will worsen if the sublet offices from the County are lost at the former Grammar School site. Also there is a need for improved childcare.

Policy Guidance 22 Youth and Other Community Facilities – Letchworth Town Centre

The development of improved health, children's and youth facilities within or close to the town centre is supported and will be secured where appropriate as part of large town centre developments and/or through contributions secured as part of planning obligations.

The development of an appropriate Youth Facility and office/drop in space for small charitable/community projects should be provided as part of the development of any of the main opportunity sites, either on-site or secured on an appropriate off-site location as a part of an associated planning obligation.

8 Transport and the Public Realm

Context

8.1 The context for this strategy is provided by the Hertfordshire Local Transport Plan (LTP) and the Letchworth/Baldock urban transport plan, both prepared by the County Council in partnership with the District Council and transport operators.

8.2 The Council supports the government initiative to improve the attractiveness of walking, cycling and passenger transport as alternative modes of travel. The County through its recently revised Bus and Rail Strategies (2005) and Accessibility Strategy (2005) seeks to meet the following objectives of the LTP:

- To provide a transport system which provides access to employment, shopping, education, leisure and health facilities for all, especially those without a car and those with impaired mobility;
- To work in partnership with transport providers and users to achieve an efficient, affordable and enhanced transport system, which is attractive, reliable, integrated and makes the best use of resources;
- To raise awareness and encourage the use of alternative modes of transport through effective promotion, publicity and

information.

- To improve safety for all by giving the highest priority to minimising the number of collisions and injuries occurring as a result of the transport system
- To obtain the best use of the existing network through effective design, maintenance and management.

8.3 Within the context of the overall strategy specific projects will be put forward for funding and implementation. Where it is intended to use LTP funding, schemes planned will need to make a significant contribution towards LTP outcome related targets.

8.4 This section takes an integrated approach towards transport and the public realm, based on the starting point that people shop as pedestrians. Shoppers require good access to town centres by whatever mode, but once they arrive they require a safe, easy and attractive pedestrian environment.

Overall Transport Impact

8.5 With individual development proposals likely to be put forward over a period of time it is important to consider the impact of development on the transport network of the town centre as a whole, rather than just that relating to internal circulation and immediate access (updated

guidance on the content of transport assessments and likely schemes which will qualify has been published by the Department for Transport (DfT).

8.6 Transport links, especially pedestrian and cycle links, do not stop at site boundaries and need to be linked to the rest of the network. Significant developments in the town centre area need to take account of the whole town centre transport network. Taken together development proposals and transport proposals will have a significant impact on traffic in the centre. Therefore traffic modelling, as part of a transport assessment for the affected area, is vital to enable an assessment of the performance of junctions and on all modes.

Policy Guidance 23 Transport Impact – Letchworth Town Centre

Major development proposals within the town centre will, require their impact upon transport networks (for all modes) to be acceptable, both individually and cumulatively, when considered alongside other development and transport proposals across the centre as a whole and outside it. This should be examined as part of transport assessments and any wider associated environmental assessment, where above the DfT guidance threshold, accompanying opportunity site and other planning applications.

Where it is necessary to make transport impact acceptable, measures, including travel plans and those to implement this strategy, will be secured, including through planning obligations.

Road Network

8.7 In line with best practice nationally and elsewhere in the district, there is a long standing desire to direct traffic onto roads outside of the main shopping areas of the town centre. These roads, towards which through traffic is guided, are termed 'local distributor roads' and are currently Broadway, Station Parade, Station Road, Norton Way and Pixmore Way. One possible project would be to downgrade Station Road, which would result in less traffic here but more traffic on Ickniel Way. The three reasons for this are: to reduce congestion at the Norton Way South Roundabout, secondly to allow more radical pedestrian priority measures at the western end of Station Road to allow pedestrians to cross between the station and the main shopping area more easily (see subsequent sections for details) and finally to increase bus priority. This may require improvements to the Ickniel Way/Norton Way North roundabout - possibly incorporating a small strip of land in front of the former church building here. It would also have to be part of a wider strategy for signing and routing of HGVs, including those servicing the town centre, to avoid use of Ickniel Way where this is unnecessary. Improvements to the geometry of the Pixmore Way/Norton Way South roundabout may also be desirable to reduce congestion and ease access to the Gernon Road

multi-storey from the South. These proposals could also see scope for enlargement of the current 20 mph restrictions in parts of the town centre.

8.8 Currently Gernon Road is one way west to east. This creates inconvenience to cyclists and means that the Garden Square Shopping Centre is directly served by bus in one direction only. It also means that the Garden Square Car parking is less accessible from the west leading to unnecessary traffic on Station Road. There appears to be little justification for this in traffic management terms and the road is wide enough for two way bus operation, so a proposal is put forward to return it to two way flow with bus priority and pedestrian improvements. This also allows rear servicing on site LTC4.

8.9 The current Leys Avenue/ Eastcheap circulation was conceived with a view to reducing traffic movements (the idea was to reduce parking to allow only disabled parking and loading). It is considered that this approach is still relevant and so the strategy proposes to maintain the current direction of traffic flow along Eastcheap and Leys Avenue. , In addition, the strategy seeks to increase pedestrian flow across the Broadway along with the possibility of the need for an improved crossing between Morrisons and the Arena Parade site. Furthermore, the strategy emphasises the need to reduce the incentive to

rat-run along Eastcheap and Leys Avenue, and avoid the temptation for drivers to use a circuit to search for available on-street spaces. This is not to rule out all possibilities for reversal of flow along these streets, however a criteria based approach is proposed to ensure that it does not conflict with wider priorities. A wider study is being undertaken on improvements to signage in the town and to the town centre.

Policy Guidance 24 Road Network – Letchworth Town Centre

Through and circulating traffic will be restricted in Letchworth Garden City Town Centre through guiding and restricting it to the Local Distributor Road network (as shown on figure 20). Access by vehicle for town centre activities will not be unduly restricted provided it does not conflict with the key aims of this strategy. Management of vehicle speed will be used on the approaches to the town centre, and for through and circulating traffic.

In the medium-term the following measures will be considered and if appropriate implemented:

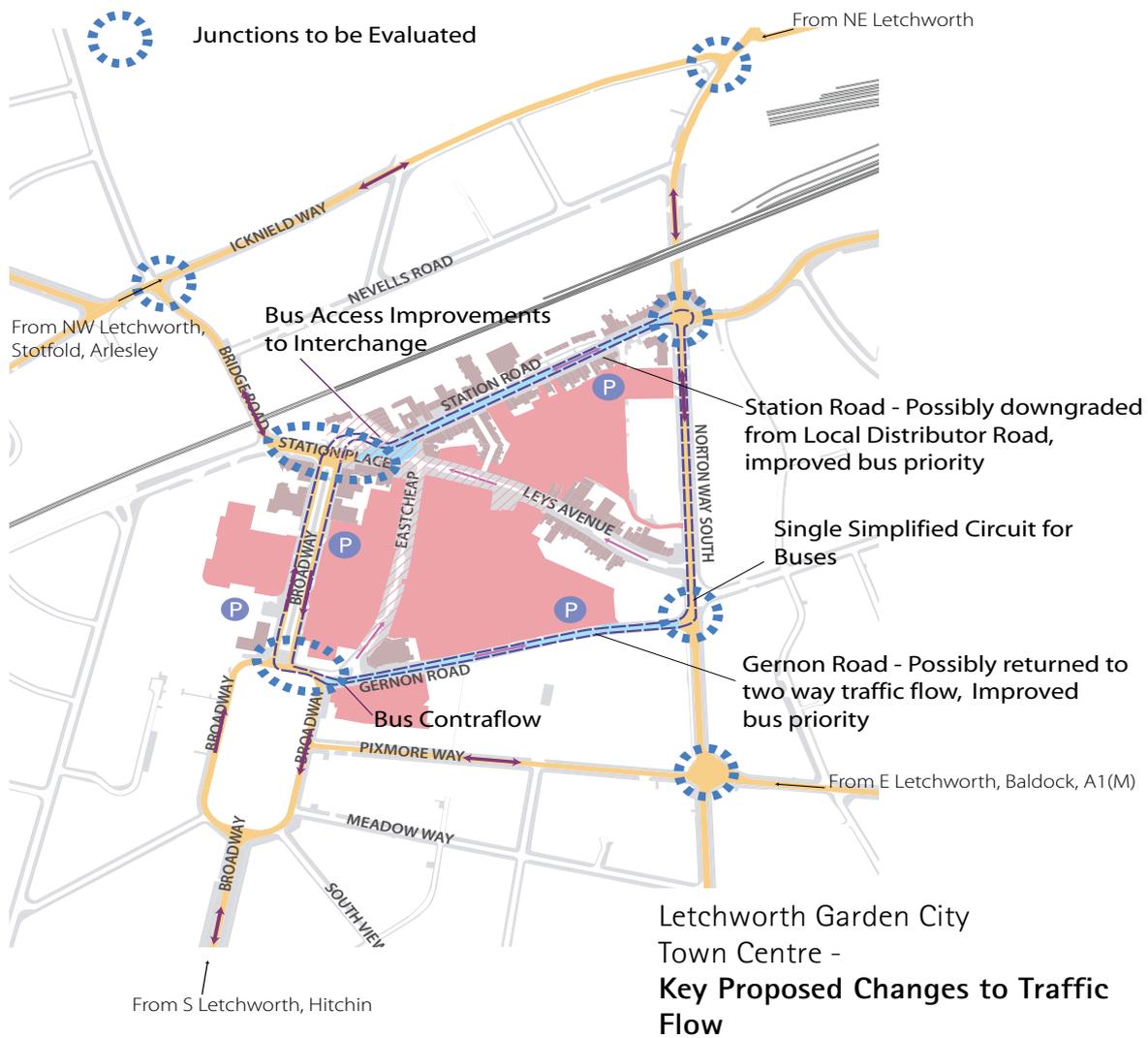
i) downgrading¹ Station Road to no longer be a local distributor road, with bus priority improvements,

ii) introducing two-way traffic and two-way bus flow on Gernon Road in order to improve access to the multi-storey car park, and potentially a complementary contra-flow bus lane between Gernon Road and Broadway, iii) the capacity and operation of the following junctions will need to be investigated and, if necessary, improved: Station Road/Norton Way South, Gernon Road/Norton Way South, Station Place/Bridge Road/Broadway, Gernon Road/Broadway. There may also be a need to assess Junctions outside the town centre if town centre related traffic growth will generate significant impact on them.

Means of access and servicing, and direction of traffic flow, should not interfere with other policies in this strategy (in particular those concerning bus priority, and pedestrian priority in the Primary Shopping Frontage area), or harm safety or proper management of the highway network.

¹ 'Downgrading' in this context is intended to mean discouraging traffic that has no business in the town centre and therefore undermines its attractiveness to town centre users and businesses.

Figure 9



Based on the Ordnance Survey 1:1250 Mastermap with permission on the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationary Office Crown Copyright reserved. OS License No. LA078794

Cycle Network

8.10 The wide roads and comparative lack of traffic in Letchworth produces a good environment for cyclists and there is a growing network of dedicated routes being implemented as part of the County's emerging cycling strategy, and the North Hertfordshire District Proposed Cycle Network for Letchworth.

8.11 One exception is the town centre where traffic management measures, including one-way arrangements makes life difficult for cyclists, who are inconvenienced in particular by the additional length of journey. There may be potential for contra-flow cycle lanes but the need for cycle routes to cross roads to reflect desire lines is important.

8.12 Experience from Cambridgeshire and elsewhere suggest that it is appropriate to allow cyclists through main shopping streets where design measures make it clear that these are places where right of way needs to be given to pedestrians. Providing pedestrian levels are high enough they can be self enforcing as cyclists will tend to dismount. Such an approach would be compatible with the overall changes proposed to give greater pedestrian priority in the main shopping area but would be difficult to implement whilst one way systems are in place.

8.13 Access to the town centre from the north by cycle is inconvenienced by the Broadway one-way arrangements. The National Cycle route 12 (Great Northern Way) now runs alongside Broadway Gardens. There will be a need to consider appropriate and safe cycle routes along Broadway, Broadway Walk and around Broadway Gardens in the future.

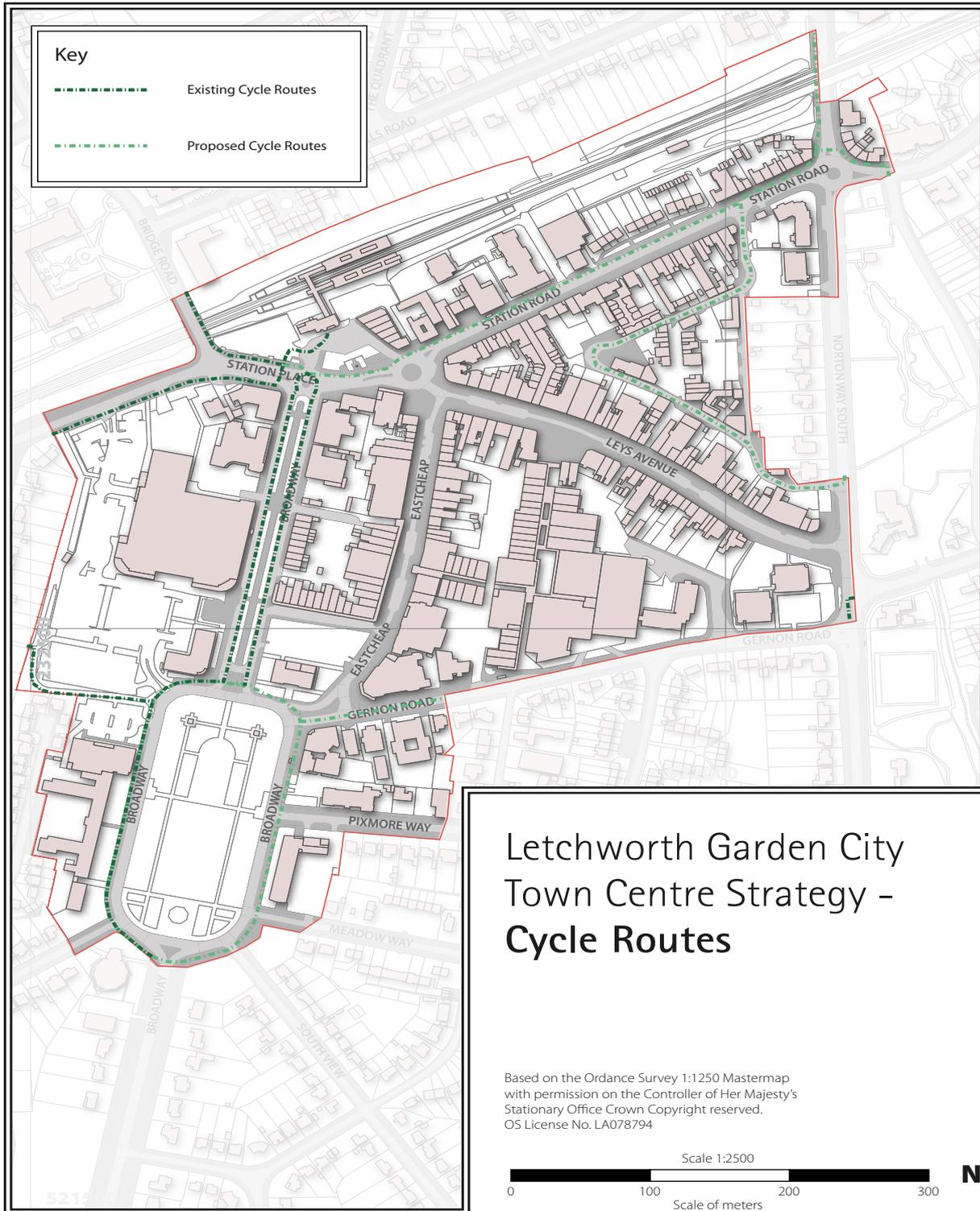
Policy Guidance 25 Cycle Network – Letchworth Town Centre

Improved routes and cycle priority will be introduced to and through Letchworth Garden City Town Centre (as shown on figure 10). In particular new east-west routes through the town centre and a cycle route around the Broadway open spaces to avoid inconvenience to cyclists caused by one-way arrangements, will be investigated.

Additional cycle parking (Sheffield stands) will be provided in secure and convenient locations so as to encourage cycling and discourage conflict between pedestrians and cyclists.



Figure 10



Public Transport & Interchange

8.14 Letchworth Garden City is one of the few towns in the northern half of the County to have a rail station right in its town centre. The advantage is eroded due to the awkward pedestrian connections between the station and the Broadway and the main shopping area. Also there is no direct bus interchange between buses and trains and the station forecourt is cluttered. The station currently has no disabled access and improvements in this sphere have been identified as a priority in the Local Transport Plan.

8.15 Bus stops are scattered around the town centre and it is unclear where to catch a bus to a specific destination. The town has a reasonable bus network but bus frequency is not as good. There is much that could be done, by the transport operators in conjunction with the County, to improve bus services. The centre is a bus destination on high frequency limited stop services to locations such as Stansted Airport and Stevenage, a service to Luton Airport is lacking. With car use in the town well above the national average poor bus services could be seen as the main area in terms of sustainability where the realisation of the Garden City ideal does not meet up to future necessities. Dial-a-ride and services for the elderly are run by the Heritage Foundation.

8.16 Provision of interchange facilities at urban stations is identified as a need within the local transport plan, but currently works at Letchworth Garden City are not prioritised. It is hoped that the focus that this strategy can bring, as well as the impetus provided by town centre developments, can see works brought forward as part of an integrated public realm treatment together with the shopping streets. This is identified as part of opportunity site LTC6, further guidance is provided in part III.

8.17 Provision of an interchange at the station forecourt with sufficient space and turning for buses of various sizes, will pose design challenges and as there is no present scheme it is not possible to say for certain how they will all be met. Space is limited and it is unlikely that all current parking can be retained. Taxi provision should be provided. The biggest constraint however is the presence of the small grassed area, war memorial and cenotaph, this may have to be moved. As the station building is listed standard functional bus station/waiting designs will be inappropriate and a high quality bespoke design will be required. Policy Guidance 26 and opportunity site LTC6 seeks to ensure that the design is carried out sensitively to ensure that the station area remains a key focal point on the Broadway and that good pedestrian access to Leys Avenue and Eastcheap is also facilitated.

Your Views...

The stakeholder group identified public transport as needing big improvements in the town. Policy Guidance 26 seeks to achieve this.

8.18 A secondary bus facility (improved facing shelters with associated pedestrian crossing) might be appropriate on Gernon Road directly servicing the Garden Square development and at the southern end of Broadway next to Morrisons and site LTC1. Together with the proposal to return Gernon Road to two-way flow this essentially allows for a single circuit which all bus routes in the town centre could take in part. Passengers could catch a bus to any location from any of these stops. To avoid unnecessary running around Broadway Gardens a contraflow lane might be possible in front of the Town Hall.

8.19 A number of private taxi services operate in the town, serving a demand for journeys both within the town and to surrounding areas. The town centre provides a focus for taxi activity and provides a service to those who choose not to use the bus or for whom suitable bus services are unavailable. Taxi services and ranks are to be retained and located in appropriate locations to service the day and evening economy in the town centre.

Policy Guidance 26 Public Transport and Interchange – Letchworth Town Centre

Improvements to Letchworth Garden City Rail Station are promoted – in particular improvements to disabled access – compatible with its listed status (see proposal LTC6).

Improvements to bus facilities and routing will be undertaken in Letchworth Town Centre, with creation of a transport hub/interchange, including taxi and drop off provision, at the frontage of Letchworth Garden City Rail Station – preserving or enhancing its setting as a listed building and improving pedestrian links across Station Place (see proposal LTC6). In addition improved bus waiting facilities are proposed on Gernon Road, including as part of any redevelopment of site LTC3, and on Broadway as part of the redevelopment of site LTC1.

Where these and other measures are required in order to make transport impact acceptable these will be secured as part of planning obligations.

Your Views...

The stakeholder group appreciated the wide pavements and suggested that better facilities for pedestrians be provided. Policy Guidance 27 & 32 seek to address this.

Pedestrian Priority

8.20 The overall strategy for the town centre is based on improving the shopping experience. This will require an improved public realm within the existing main shopping area around Eastcheap and the western part of Leys Avenue and new shopping sites and to public transport and parking areas (see Policy Guidance 13). Although car access to quality parking areas conveniently located in town centres is essential, once out of their cars shoppers will require and expect their shopping experience not to be disrupted by traffic.

8.21 This approach is one that can be introduced over time and it would be premature to suggest specific measures now. It does not imply full pedestrianisation - simply greater pedestrian priority. Possible restrictions could vary by time and day of the week (for example lessening restrictions at night), and could be controlled by a variety of design measures and/or simply by designs which make clear that cars are guests in a space, not its master. Any restrictions will also require special priority for disabled parking.

Policy Guidance 27 Pedestrian Priority – Letchworth Town Centre

Pedestrians will be given priority within Letchworth Town Centre, in particular within the box formed by the Local Distributor Network and at crossing points to key locations such as across the Broadway and to public transport.

Opportunity sites LTC1, LTC2 and LTC3 should be entirely car free within their bounds (other than access to off-street parking and for servicing). These sites should be developed to form a connected series of open streets and public spaces, with improvements to pedestrian access and signage to and between them (see fig. 11 in open space section) and at key gateways to the town centre.

Within the defined pedestrian priority area (see fig. 20) measures to progressively calm and reduce the impact of car access and parking on pedestrians will be introduced over time subject to there not being unacceptable impact on the vitality and viability of the town centre. Development proposals and street works should not conflict with this aim.

Specific measures to improve pedestrian priority will include: Improved crossing of Station Place to provide better direct access to and from the Station, and improved crossing facilities between Morrisons and the Arena Parade site (site LTC1).



Disabled Access

8.22 Although the town centre has no major impediments to disabled access it has multiple small changes in level and minor obstructions, in some cases caused by street clutter, which impede disabled people.

8.23 The ease with which disabled people can move around the town centre is important in terms of the design of buildings, pavement widths, surfacing materials, the location of street furniture, suitable crossing points across streets and access to disabled parking and passenger transport facilities. Accessibility is not just about disabled people it also assists the elderly or infirm and, those

people pushing a pram or carrying shopping.

8.24 The District Council will work together with the Disability Forum when considering and implementing future policies, practices and procedures of relevance to disabled people.

8.25 The loan of shopping buggies is currently available via the tourist information centre, however development may create sufficient critical mass to introduce a full shop mobility scheme.

Policy Guidance 28 Disabled Access – Letchworth Town Centre

All developments and streetscape measures within the town centre should give priority to disabled access – including close design integration with access measures required under the Disability Discrimination Act and the building regulations. This should be demonstrated in the design and access statements that are required to be submitted as part of planning applications.

Priority will be given to provision of sufficient, convenient and suitable parking places for Blue badge holders, with such parking permitted within or very close to pedestrian priority areas and/or shops and services as appropriate.

Off Street Parking

8.26 Government guidance encourages local authorities to adopt a more sustainable approach to car parking, and to reduce reliance on the car by promoting alternative modes of transport. The District Council adopted a Car Parking Strategy in June 2004, which sets out the approach to parking issues in North Hertfordshire over a five year period, and is set within the context of relevant national, regional

and county policies. The Council is presently undertaking a review of all on and off street car parking provision within the District and is now consulting on the general range of possible specific parking measures within Letchworth Town Centre, as part of this town centre strategy.

8.27 The Town Centre currently has the following off street public car parks:

Car Park	Spaces
Morrisons	406
NH College	100
Town Hall	96
Arena Parade	31
Gernon Road Multi-Storey	376
The Wynd	44
Station	88
Birds Hill	40
Hillshot	97
Total	1,278

8.28 Supplementary Planning Guidance on parking provision as part of development has been issued by the District Council. This emphasises that it is impossible to provide all parking to full maximum

standards if development sites are considered on an individual basis and therefore a flexible approach is needed considering what is possible. Parking provision during the process of redevelopment needs to be carefully managed to ensure that the centre does not suffer.

8.29 The strategy proposes improved management of on-street spaces (see policy guidance 29), also in the medium term redevelopment will leave scope for increased off-street parking provision. Proposed levels of parking will need to be designed to strike an appropriate balance between a range of factors, including demand, long/term short term provision, the capacity of sites and the difficulty of concealing the visual impact of multi-storey parking, ensuring that overprovision of cheap parking does not disincentivise public transport use, and that cheap or free on-street parking in pedestrian priority areas does not disincentive use of off-street car parks at the edges of the town centre.

8.30 Improvements in off-street parking provision can be secured through improvements to the rear of Station Parade and Gernon Road Car Park, such as to its management, attractiveness and security. The District will examine again the practicalities of 'pay on exit' parking, this would require sufficient spaces, staffing and separate access/egress

points and might only be possible as part of a major refurbishment or redevelopment. Such parking has considerable advantages as it encourages people to linger and spend more in centres.

Policy Guidance 29 Off Street Parking Management and Provision – Letchworth Town Centre

Parking provision in Letchworth Town Centre will be based on an integrated approach, considering the town centre as a whole, rather than site by site in isolation, and this will look at on and off street parking together. Off-street parking levels should be maintained at broadly current levels in the short-medium term with an appropriate and balanced expansion in the medium to longer term if opportunities from development arise.

The main off street car parks servicing the town centre should continue to be located around the edges of the main shopping areas with good access to a Local Distributor Road. Clear and concise directional signing with real-time information on spaces available will be introduced.

The stakeholder group identified the need for safer, better quality parking in the town centre, the sections on parking and the streetscene seek to improve matters.

At Gernon Road multi-storey improvements in terms of quantity of publicly available parking, quality, convenience and security will be sought with the introduction of pay on exit parking being examined as a goal if practical. In the longer term there is potential for redevelopment to provide a new better multi-storey as part of opportunity site LTC3.

An additional appropriately sized decked car park could be located within the Wynd redevelopment subject to the design requirements of opportunity site LTC2.

Any redevelopment of site LTC1 should provide parking, the quantum of which should be decided in line with the first part of this policy guidance.

Parking at retail and leisure developments should be available as shared short term parking available for visitors to the town centre as a whole rather than the individual development. Office premises should make their parking available to visitors to the town centre outside office hours where practical to do so.

Access to multi-storey or underground parking should not be obtrusive in the streetscene.

On Street Parking Management

8.31 Development will considerably impact upon on-street parking in the town centre. Relatively few shoppers now have the luxury of parking on Eastcheap and the top end of Leys Avenue, and of those even fewer will be able to park next to a specific shop. The area was originally proposed for pedestrianisation in the 1950s and servicing on Arena Parade allowed for it. Development and change on Eastcheap may well mean less convenience shopping services and more emphasis on comparison goods. Shoppers are likely to make more 'linked trips' rather than one-off trips – e.g. parking at Morrisons and doing other shopping as part of a combined weekly shopping trip. Whilst parking directly outside shops is a feature of local and district centres servicing the convenience market, it is not a



feature of the kind of higher order centres that Letchworth aspires to be. Additionally as the Council's Vehicle Parking Provision SPD stresses in town centres it is not necessary to provide to full maximum standards as viability can be maintained at a much lower level because of the ability to make linked trips and the choice of transport modes.

8.32 Any future proposals put forward which unacceptably reduces footway widths or hampers pedestrian flow, especially in the busiest part of the town centre on Eastcheap and the western end of Leys Avenue will be resisted.

8.33 There will be increased on-street pressure over time, which needs to be managed; it is already a problem on areas such as Norton Way South and around Broadway Gardens

where office workers park all day for free. Ideas to manage this to reduce impact on buses and residential areas are put forward in policy guidance 30. This may mean for example the need to consult on additional controls around the town centre. Sites around Broadway Gardens will need a careful balance between on and off-street provision depending on site constraints and the nature of controls.

Policy Guidance 30 On Street Parking Management – Letchworth Town Centre

On-street parking within the pedestrian priority area on Eastcheap and western Leys Avenue (see fig. 20) will gradually be reduced in line with the growth of the retail offer and pedestrian volume in the town centre.

Reallocation of spaces to provide more short term on-street parking will be undertaken outside the pedestrian priority area (see fig 21.) where this is safe and does not harm bus priority. Additional pressure for informal on-street parking will be managed with consideration of and consultation on:- firstly, controls for existing parking initially in locations around the edges of the town centre and secondly, the introduction of additional or extended controls in residential areas close to the town centre.



Pedestrian priority

Open Spaces

8.34 The open spaces in and around the Town Centre are an essential part of its character, with the strong linear green open feature of Broadway and the formal open character of Broadway Gardens, recently subject to a major improvement programme, serving as the focus of the town. A lottery bid is being made to improve Howard Gardens and links to the town centre. Both Broadway Gardens and Howard Gardens provide a buffer between the town centre and the residential areas, which is an important transition forming part of the Conservation Area. This is further enhanced at Broadway Gardens by the green open segments to the south-east on the corner of Broadway, South View and Meadow Way.

8.35 Parallel to this are the main lines of pedestrian flow with some tree lined avenues, currently unrelieved by attractive public spaces. As part of the strategy, new public spaces will be secured as part of the development of the opportunity sites along this route. These spaces, some with green features are likely to be small and intimate, similar to the small public spaces found in many Hertfordshire market towns.

8.36 While these public spaces and green features together contribute to the open space pattern and landscape character of the Garden City, they

also provide an ecological benefit to wildlife. Any enhancement of these areas should provide opportunities to positively promote biodiversity taking into consideration the North Herts Biodiversity Action Plan.

Policy Guidance 31 Open Space Network – Letchworth Town Centre

The open spaces in Letchworth Town Centre are protected as part of the broader open space pattern in Letchworth Garden City, and will be further enhanced and protected for their amenity value and biodiversity, their openness maintained, and historic importance in the master planning of the town respected.

In addition to the historic North-South axis of Broadway a network of East-West smaller hard-surfaced public spaces and squares will be required as part of development opportunity sites LTC1, LTC2 and LTC3 (see fig. 11).

Figure 11



The Public Realm and Streetscape Treatment

8.37 Public realm is space we share with other people and other functions, traffic is one of those functions.

8.38 English Heritage in its 'Streets for All' document for the East of England places emphasis on the need to retain liveliness and accessibility in town centres and sets out principles for audits of historic materials, street features and local details to be included in design schemes. Changes to the streetscene over the years have resulted in almost total removal of these features in Letchworth, although one key remaining feature are the historic street name signs. As such Letchworth does not come with a defined special palette of surfacing materials and street furniture or any original special features that survive (other than the street signs referred to). This gives scope for consideration of new design approaches but ones that can take up the challenge of responding to the garden city ethos.

8.39 In the early 1990s the town centre underwent a major programme of 'environmental improvement' and since then the approach to public realm improvements has moved forward as have the standards about how roads and footways can be designed.

8.40 The public realm within the town centre requires a new approach. Contemporary ideas are often based on the approach known as 'designing for negotiation', as set out by the Dutch designer Hans Monderman. At busy urban intersections with slow traffic, he has found that it is often safer and more effective to get road users to focus on looking at one another instead of signs and signals. Rather than a proliferation of these and rigid separation of traffic and pedestrians, the approach is to use design cues in the street to make it easier for users to see and negotiate with one another. The goal is to enhance the conspicuity and predictability of users. This approach has drawn international attention in a number of schemes in Holland, Sweden, Germany and Denmark, where monitoring of projects has

The most ambitious use of these ideas has been in the Dutch town of Drachten, noted for its innovations in town planning. In 1989 the councillors of this post-war new town, of a size similar to Letchworth, voted to begin the removal of every single traffic light; there are three left, but their time is limited. They also decided to abolish white road lines and all warning and give-way signs. Subsequent monitoring has shown dramatic reductions in both congestion and accidents.

"Pedestrians and cyclists used to avoid this place, but now...the cars look out for the cyclists, the cyclists look out for the pedestrians, and everyone looks out for each other. You can't expect traffic signs and street markings to encourage that sort of behaviour. You have to build it into the design of the road." (Hans Monderman Wired Dec 2004)

Your Views...

The stakeholder group sought better signage which sold the 'brand' of the Garden City. Policy Guidance 32 seeks to achieve this.

revealed reductions in both traffic congestion and accidents. In Britain this approach has been implemented in schemes in Kensington and Chelsea, Norfolk and Suffolk, endorsed by Research by the official Transport and Roads Research Laboratory, and underpins the philosophy of the draft new DfT guidance on Street Design 'Manual for Streets'.

8.41 Some of the key ideas of this approach are:

- Remove unnecessary signs: The architecture of the road - not signs and signals - dictates traffic flow.
- Right-of-way is negotiated by human interaction, rather than commonly ignored signs.
- Emphasise the idea of shared space, footways are denoted by texture and colour.
- Traffic lights, lane markings and signs are *only vital* on highways that are used only by vehicles.

8.40 Changes required to parking resulting from the opportunity sites provide a golden opportunity to produce an exemplar scheme of streetscape improvements in Letchworth Town Centre over the medium-long term.

Policy Guidance 32 Streetscape and Public Realm Improvements – Letchworth Town Centre

A co-ordinated series of public realm improvements will be carried out in the town centre, focused on the busiest pedestrian areas. This should adopt a bespoke design style specific to Letchworth Garden City and be of exemplar quality for the streetscape design treatment of a planned settlement. It should have a co-ordinated palette of designs and materials for lighting, public art, planting, street furniture, signage and surface treatments. Designs should draw from the garden heritage of the Garden City whilst being appropriate to an urban streetscene.

Schemes should consider the design principles of the official draft 'Manual for Streets' and any subsequent published guidance. The aim should be to create an uncluttered, accessible, safe, clean and easy to maintain streetscene, influenced by the principles of 'designing for negotiation'. Public realm design should be used to emphasise pedestrian priority and make car users slow down and uncomfortable driving through the pedestrian priority area (see fig. 20). This should emphasise a shared single surface linking the areas set out in Policy Guidance 27 on Pedestrian Priority.

Historic street name signs will be retained and restored, and this design should be replicated in new developments.

Improved signage of a 'Letchworth - world's first Garden City -' brand, will be used to emphasise direction to and entry of the town centre.

Community Safety

8.43 New development and on-going maintenance of the urban fabric create impressions about the town centre's image and people's care for it. This affects people's perception of their safety and vulnerability to crime. Environments that are perceived as safe will attract people.

8.44 North Hertfordshire has a relatively low crime rate and has no areas with severe or long-standing crime and disorder problems. There are, however, some areas in the District where some types of crime and disorder are concentrated, and this can impact on the quality of life of those that live and work there. Letchworth Garden City town centre is no exception compared to other town centres in the District in experiencing relatively high levels of anti-social behaviour.

8.45 Recognising the importance of providing a safe and secure environment, the Council together with the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership has produced a new Community Safety Strategy for North Hertfordshire for the period 2005 to 2008. The key priorities of the Community Safety Strategy are to tackle anti-social behaviour, seek to reduce crime (both acquisitive and violent crime) alcohol and drug related issues, as well as reducing fear of

crime within the district, including the town centres. This is to be achieved through partnership working and task groups have been set up to work together with the Police, schools, local businesses, residents and other organisations to tackle and solve crime and disorder issues. These initiatives aim to ensure that Letchworth Garden City town centre remains an area with relatively low crime rates and high levels of community safety.

8.46 The Council through the Anti-Social Behaviour Task Group will work closely with the Police, schools, residents and local businesses within the town to prevent and reduce incidents of anti-social behaviour within the district including the town centres. A particular concern is the large number of youths who gather, several hundred at a time, in the open spaces in and around the town centre at weekend evenings.

8.47 In addition, under the Licensing Act 2003 through the Council's Licensing Policy (adopted in January 2005), the Council is responsible for licensing functions in the district. The Council recognises that fixed and artificially early closing times may lead to peaks of disorder and disturbance on the streets when large numbers of people tend to leave licensed premises at the same time. Early indicators are that no additional problems have been experienced in the town centre as a result of these changes in legislation. Staggered

licensing hours regarding the sale of alcohol are an important factor in reducing friction at late night food outlets, taxi ranks and other sources of transport. When the Council is considering licensing applications, each application would be considered on its individual merits in accordance with the Department for Culture, Media & Sport guidance issued under the Licensing Act 2003, on hours of trading, and have to meet the four licensing objectives, which are:

- the prevention of crime and disorder;
- public safety;
- the prevention of public nuisance; and
- the protection of children from harm.

8.48 The Council, through its Licensing Policy and working in partnership with the local police will seek to develop and strengthen links with licensed premises, i.e. shops/off licences, pubs and restaurants. This will help to monitor alcohol related incidents and reduce anti-social behaviour within the town centre.

8.49 A major part of the town centre is covered by CCTV. However, certain parts of the town centre and pedestrian access ways to and within the town centre are not well

Your Views...

The stakeholder group wanted action on anti-social behaviour and certain types of crime, which are high in the town centre; such as theft from cars.

illuminated at night, such as the Wynd, the Station and Morrisons after hours, and the Bridge Road link to Spirella. Consideration of lighting levels and provision versus locating new cameras will be looked at within a review of CCTV to be carried out as part of the District's streetscene improvement plan.

8.50 The design and layout of development proposals including enhancements to the street scene and car parks are important contributors to the prevention of crime. The Council encourages the use by applicants of government guidance on Safer Places, the planning system and crime prevention.

Policy Guidance 33 Community Safety – Letchworth Town Centre

Through partnership working and implementation of the Community Safety Strategy, actions will be undertaken to ensure that the town centre remains an area with overall low crime rates with reduced levels of anti-social behaviour.

Crime and anti-social behaviour prevention measures should be designed into development.

The District Council will work with Hertfordshire Highways, The Garden City Heritage Foundation and other partners to improve lighting.

Priority will be given to reducing crime and antisocial behaviour in car parks.

CCTV will be improved/relocated where necessary as a direct part of development proposals or through planning obligations.