

RE-IMAGING HELSTON'S HIGH STREETS

Project Brief

Development of Outline Brief and Consultation Documentation

Date: 21st December 2020

Revision: 07

1. Project Objective

This project is one of the seven projects within the Helston Place Shaping Plan which complement each other and together form a coherent long-term strategy for Helston.

The overall objective of this project is to **create an attractive town centre which will encourage more people (including the local community, nearby residents and tourists) to visit Helston and spend more time in the town centre, improving its vitality, economic prosperity and community cohesion.**

The project scope covers the Helston town centre area (as defined in Appendix 1) and relates specifically to the roads, pavements and open spaces which form Helston's Public Realm. It covers vehicle and pedestrian movement, streetscape and visual appearance of the town centre.

Note that other Place Shaping projects are being developed in parallel with this project.

The Place Shaping Plan addresses the development priorities for Helston, with individual projects having strong inter-relationships in order to deliver broad improvement in the town; see 'Helston Place Shaping Strategy and Background' document included within our Town Vitality Fund submission.

These projects are complementary to the Re-imagining Helston's High Streets Project but must be progressed separately. They are therefore referenced but not described in detail in this document.

The other Place Shaping Projects include the following:-

- Helston Cultural Quarter – improvements within and around Market Place, The Museum of Cornish Life, the Drill Hall Yard and access through to the CAST building and Wendron Street car park above.
- Town Centre Homes and Workspace – utilisation of empty premises to provide more residential and live/work accommodation within the town centre
- Reconnecting Helston – examining the potential for reconnecting a rail link to Helston as well as other ways of improving Helston's accessibility
- The Penrose Trail – creating a defined walking and cycling link between Helston and Porthleven to attract visitors and support community health, well-being and travel between the towns

- Town Centre Community Hub – creating a community building within the town centre
- Promotion of Helston – already a well-developed marketing strategy for Helston

It should be noted that car parking provision is also a key issue within any thoughts relating to the town centre. However, incorporating the subject of car parking as a whole into this project would add significant complexity to the scope. Therefore, this document will only consider the on-street car parking areas within the town centre. Other car parks are included in the scope of other Place Shaping projects where appropriate.

2. Objective of this Project Stage

The aim of this document is to define proposals for improvements to the public areas of Helston town centre based upon the broad range of analysis, comment and feedback, compiled mainly during 2019 and 2020.

The objective of this project stage is to evaluate the feasibility of the proposals contained within this document and, based on this feasibility work, develop firm, achievable options into a format (drawings, reports, perspective views etc.) which will support a formal public consultation.

The summary proposals enclosed are based upon an evaluation of feedback received before, during and after the emergency Covid-19 Emergency Measures were implemented in Meneage Street. This includes:-

- Consideration of the Parsons Brinkerhoff 'Helston Traffic and Urban Realm Study 2015' - an extensive assessment of Helston's traffic flows which concluded that, from a technical perspective, there were only two possible traffic flow solutions for the town centre are 'One Way Down Coinagehall Street' or 'Do Nothing'.
- We've also used the immense amount of public feedback and discussion around pavements and kennels (one of our most important assets as per the heritage related reports) and included this in the Town Centre project, as well as all of the Covid Emergency Measure debate.
- Helston CIC public and business consultation meetings held during 2019
- E-mails and comments from Helston public and businesses to the Mayor during and after the initial Covid-19 'lockdown'
- Facebook comments throughout 2020 (Helston Community, Helston and Future Vision of Helston pages)
- Various questionnaires and face-to-face discussions
- Input and reports from Cornwall Council officers, specifically relating to traffic and public transport
- The Helston Conservation Area Assessment 2010 is extensive and identifies precious features of the town which must be preserved. Helston's kennels and pavements (subject of an immense amount of public feedback and discussion), Horse & Jockey

Lane and the visual aspect at Grylls Monument have been proposed for inclusion within this project

The data and feedback collected is included in Appendix 2.

3. Project Background

Helston is the tenth largest town in Cornwall with a growing population of around 12,000 and is one of the Duchy's oldest settlements. The town is also the gateway to the Lizard peninsula, serving approximately 118 square miles across a notable area of outstanding natural beauty. There are 16 villages within the Lizard with an estimated population today of around 15,000. A further catchment area for Helston covering nearby villages such as Porthleven, Breage and Wendron, provides close to another 15,000 inhabitants, making a total for the town and surrounding districts of approximately 42,000.

Although somewhat distant from the coast itself, Helston's location enables the town to access the additional tourist population visiting the area, however this is mostly to the benefit of large, edge of town retail and there is much to be done to enable the town centre to attract visitors and benefit from the tourist economy. The heritage and architectural attractiveness of the town centre is outstanding and must be regarded as a cornerstone for any proposals which aim for improvement.

Helston is therefore typical of many rural market towns across the UK, challenged by out of town shopping, increasing levels of empty shop premises and declining town centre footfall.

Helston's recent decline has been rapid. The town has experienced the fastest rate of increase in empty retail premises of any town in Cornwall – a 7.0% decline in the last 3 years leaving Helston at 15.5%. This is 3.5% worse than the Cornwall average of 12.6% (national average 12.9%). A November 2019 survey of town centre businesses showed that trade was worse in 2019 vs 2018 for 42% of these businesses, with 25% seeing no change. These statistics pre-date the coronavirus pandemic which has undoubtedly accelerated this decline.

As well as a deteriorating retail offer the town centre is traffic dominant, constantly accessed by heavy diesel vehicles. Walking space is difficult for pedestrians, having often narrow, poor and uneven pavements and only small areas of level, social space.

The town is keen to address these issues and a number of recent projects have achieved some notable success. The Museum of Cornish Life based in Market Place has gained much positive profile since its devolution to a community managed Trust, increasing visitor numbers year on year. The Cornubian Arts and Sciences Trust (CAST), established in the Passmore Edwards building adjacent to the Museum, has attracted international recognition for its art programmes. The thriving building provides high quality workspace for nationally recognised artists as well as café and film/performance space. Recent refurbishments of the Grylls Monument area and the devolution and refurbishment of Coronation Park close to the town centre have proved extremely successful and attractive to visitors.

To build on these early successes a Place Shaping Plan for the town has been developed, defining a number of key projects aimed at addressing the town's issues. The Plan has gained broad support locally and is gaining support and traction with Cornwall Council.

The Re-imagining Helston's High Streets project is one of these key projects. Aimed at developing the main town centre areas of the town, the project will

- Enhance the link between Grylls Monument, the Guildhall and original Market Place plus incorporate improvements to Meneage Street and surrounding roads, making the town centre a place that people want to visit
- Complement other projects within the Place Shaping Plan and help to reverse the economic and architectural decline of the town centre
- Make more space for pedestrians and improve surfaces and amenities to enable better pedestrian movement and access
- Restore town identity and civic pride to an area in decline
- Emphasise the town's cultural heritage
- Reduce through traffic whilst enabling access to all necessary areas of the town
- Improve air quality and make progress towards the objectives of the Helston Climate Action Plan
- Support links into the town for cycling and walking
- Attract footfall to the town centre

This document aims to provide the basis upon which options can be appraised and selected so that a Strategic Brief can then be developed (ie. RIBA 2020 Stage 0), however the outputs will undoubtedly start to form elements of design which will feed into a Stage 1 Design Brief.

4. Key Principles

Helston as a town centre was struggling before the coronavirus pandemic with declining footfall and increasing numbers of empty shop premises. It is widely believed that coronavirus has probably hastened that decline (as it has in many town centres) by at least 5 years.

Supporting data for this is contained within the overarching Place Shaping Plan, however it is worth repeating some key statistics here:-

- Prior to coronavirus, the rate of increase in empty premises in the town centre was more rapid than any other town in Cornwall - coronavirus has accelerated that decline
- An HCIC November 2019 retail survey showed that 42% of the remaining shops had experienced a year on year decline in trading with 25% indicating zero growth
- Although difficult to measure town centre footfall continues to decline year on year

- Several positive town centre developments, including The Museum of Cornish Life, CAST and Grylls Monument Refurbishment have individually seen visitor increases however this has not arrested the overall decline

We must therefore do as much as possible to help our town become vibrant: used by the community, appealing to visitors and attractive for traders to invest. In addressing these issues there are a number of key principle which must be accepted for us to progress from debate to action:-

- We cannot, as a town alone, change the business rates structure – this is for our MP, political structures and central Government to resolve
- We cannot change the rental charges levied by property owners – only market forces will impact rental values
- We cannot force businesses, retail chains or independent traders to invest
- We cannot legally force property owners to improve their premises (unless the property is dangerous)

However, we can create the environment which will make it attractive for investment, for visitors and for the community. If we improve the public realm we can morally demand that property owners match our ambition. If we don't do something, nobody else will.

- This must be a community led proposal, created and supported by the people of the town
- Maintaining status quo is a recipe for continued decline – change is necessary
- Our street layout must favour pedestrians above vehicles if it is to be seen as a safe and enjoyable place to visit, whilst not denying vehicle users access to the town's amenities
- With a Climate Emergency declared by the Town Council and Cornwall Council it is imperative that we use all projects to work towards the goals set under this initiative
- Through traffic must be encouraged to go around the town
- Traffic bringing trade, dropping off, delivering etc. must have clear access
- Any changes must improve inclusivity (ie. be disability friendly)
- We want to encourage residential use of the town centre and therefore must ensure suitable access provision for an increased number of residents
- More places to stand/sit/dwell safely which are attractive
- Minimise bus size and number, but maximise bus use
- Encourage active travel (cycling & walking)
- Attractive with a theme which builds upon our town's identity
- Coordinated properties (eg. shop front colour palette, matching shop canopies.. etc.)
- Deal with poorly maintained premises (refer to other Place Shaping and Helston CIC projects)
- Helston's historic nature must feature highly and form part of any proposal

5. Project Values

Helston Town Centre is an extremely important part of Helston and it is therefore essential that Project Values are defined so that all design and development works maintain a clear focus with respect to these high-level desired outcomes.

In 2014, renowned architect Stephen Witherford (winner of the 2013 Stirling Prize) visited Helston and advised on the importance of understanding the deep historical structure of a place, discovering the existing centres of sociability and enabling new ones. He referenced plans and aerial photographs, showing the development of Helston from the 1780s to the present day; how the deep building plots had formed and the way in which activity had historically centred on the crossing of Meneage, Coinagehall, Church and Wendron streets, and their meeting at the Guildhall junction.

Stephen observed that in any town – not only Helston – the centre tends to get ‘eroded and dishevelled’ as development happens on the edges. He advocated ‘working with the beautiful grain of the town’ and advised that the approach should be to make the town better for all its residents – ‘better all of the time’ – echoing the words of philanthropist John Passmore Edwards, whose motto was ‘the best for the most’.

Ideas included a concentration on Helston’s historic streetscapes, describing the original granite pavements as ‘the best in Britain’ and spoke of the beauty of the patterned granite slabs, the kennels with their lively play of babbling water, and the sculptural quality of the stones and steps used as crossings in areas such as Church Street.

He advocated respecting the contrast between the fine and uncompromising sculptural quality of the main streets and the opes and gardens behind. He also suggested the need to provide a ‘stage’ for the talent and skills that are abundantly present in the town, drawing people into using, caring for and maintaining their town centre.

A further important source of advice is the Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Strategy commissioned by Kerrier District Council and prepared by Alan Baxter - published in 2010. See Appendix 3.

Considering this important advice, this project must observe the following values:

Protecting and Promoting Helston’s Heritage

Helston is the second oldest town in Cornwall and its exceptional built heritage is of crucial importance both to the community and to the town's distinctiveness and economic potential. Proposals must respect the historic nature of the site, emphasising and promoting the heritage of the town.

Broadest possible Community Involvement and Access

The town centre is challenging in terms of access, especially for the older and less able members of our community. The project must ensure that accessibility and inclusivity are of the highest priority in any design. It is important that a broad range of community groups are involved in the development process and that the project delivers strong community ownership of the end result.

Carbon Reduction and Environmental Benefit

Helston Town Council has declared a climate emergency and the town has developed a Climate Action Plan. The project must not only respect this Plan but also find ways to assist in delivering the Climate Action goals.

6. Proposals

These proposals have been developed based upon the broad range of analysis, comment and feedback, compiled mainly during 2019 and 2020. This includes the evaluation of feedback received before, during and after the emergency Covid-19 Emergency Measures were implemented in Meneage Street in 2020.

There was significant and heated debate at the time of the Emergency Measures and it is clear that 'pedestrianisation', although supported by many, is vehemently opposed by a significant number of the business community, especially in Meneage St. This proposal therefore does not stretch to propose pedestrianisation as a solution, however it does consider the general view that the balance between pedestrians and vehicles is too highly biased towards vehicles. It intends to strike the balance between providing more and better space for people whilst allowing the necessary vehicle access to support the town centre residents and traders.

The proposals also seek to address the poor state of walkways and pavements in the town as well as the need to support the less-abled to access and enjoy all areas.

Meneage St

- Maintain traffic access (one way down) but ensure flow is slowed (persuade through traffic to go around)
- Remove some parking to create 'No Waiting' disabled pick up/drop off point in the street – take up 1 car parking space plus a few metres of existing 'no parking' space at lower end of street)
- Remove some parking in favour of built out pedestrian/trading spaces, preferably in front of café/food outlets if possible (say, 3 no. - 2 below and 1 above Horse & Jockey Lane – 3x car parking spaces each)
- Therefore parking spaces reduced from 23 to 13 (spaces added back in Coinagehall Street)
- Enhance these new spaces with seating and facility for pop-up market trading
- Include the refurbishment of Horse and Jockey Lane (see Appendix 4 for initial proposals) to enhance access from one of the main visitor car parking areas
- Traffic calming including 10mph, raised pedestrian crossing points (update current plus 1 additional), possible other measures
- Parking terms to remain as is - 30mins max and free
- Cycle racks at Parade and in a new built out area at the bottom of Horse & Jockey Lane (already planned to be implemented by CC early 2021)
- Refurbish pavements

Coinagehall St

- Traffic flow altered to one way down (reducing the heavy fuel load and emissions which come mainly from traffic travelling, stopping and starting in the up-hill direction)
- Traffic calming including 10mph, raised pedestrian crossing points (3 no.), possible other measures
- Herringbone parking with additional spaces to compensate for loss in Meneage St (net zero car parking space loss)
- Designated disabled parking (4 no. spaces)
- Parking 30mins max and free
- 'No waiting' disabled pick up/drop off points (2 no. - top and middle of the street)
- Built out pedestrian/trading spaces at intervals in front of café/food outlets if possible (say, 5 no.) with kennel bridges (need a sensitive design for kennel bridges)
- Enhance these new spaces with seating and facility for pop-up market trading
- Continued two-way access for Monument Rd with turning space and pick up/drop off at the lower end of the street (likely roundabout style)
- Ensure that parking is not possible in front of Grylls Monument in order to preserve this important visual aspect of the town
- Herringbone taxi rank at current location
- Remove upward bound bus stop, retain downward bound bus stop
- Cycle racks at Post Office (already planned to be implemented by CC early 2021)
- Refurbish kennels and pavements with traditional materials, restoring this important aspect of the town's heritage
- Ensure that the kennels continuously flow
- Recognise the need for pedestrian and also car access to the various opes and Lady St.
- The aesthetics of the Bowling Club building, which are thought by many to detract from one of the most important visual aspects of the town, should be considered. Options to relocate the club are possibly available (nearer the rugby/football clubs) leaving the opportunity for Helston to create a public 'Castle Square' community space, thereby enhancing the public realm significantly. However, the historic nature of the Bowling Club (one of the oldest in the country which has been on site for over 250 years) must also be considered and the replacement of the existing building with a structure which is more in keeping with the heritage location should be appraised as part of this consultation process. Note that planning permission for an amended structure has been granted (see <https://www.3hwarchitecture.com/helston-bowling-club-pavilion.html>), although this will likely need to be reviewed to coordinate with an overall streetscape programme.

Wendron St/Godolphin Rd

- At present traffic flowing uphill from Coinagehall Street along Wendron Street and Godolphin Road is voluminous, presents problems of noise (notably large diesel vehicles) and travels too fast, accelerating uphill. The proposed alteration of traffic flow from Meneage Street to one way down Coinagehall Street should reduce

volume in this area, providing a better environment for residents and pedestrians; therefore no change is proposed to the current 'one way up' system.

- Traffic calming including 10mph and raised pedestrian crossing points (2 no.) from Cades Parc downwards
- Cycle Racks in a new built out area above Wendron St car park entrance (already planned to be implemented by CC early 2021)

Market Place/Church Street

- Helston Cultural Quarter Project to cover refurbishment of Market Place
- Consider the closure to traffic of Church Street between Penrose Road and Coinagehall St. to increase the potential for an open public square at Market Place in front of the Museum
- Impact on public transport routes will require review

Cross Street

- Implement measures to reduce traffic – weight restriction, width restriction, 'access only' signage, traffic calming
- Consider one way down as an option to limit traffic flow and ease congestion through this narrow roadway

Upper Meneage St/Meneage Road

- Additional pedestrian crossing above Grange Road (note that the 'Spar' roundabout may receive additional traffic due to Coinagehall St changes so adding traffic slowing/calming/ pedestrian crossings would encourage traffic to take the 'by-pass' route rather than Meneage St./Trengrouse Way)
- New pedestrian refuge in Meneage Road (near old chapel school crossing patrol) to provide safer crossing (already planned to be implemented by CC before March 2021)

Longer Term Considerations

- Feedback related to traffic flows around Parc Eglos School and Helston Community College have led to suggestions that a one-way system from Cades Parc through to Church Hill would improve traffic flow around school times and allow 'pick up/drop off' space at the roadside near schools (one-way flow would free existing road width for such space). This is, however, beyond the immediate scope of the Future Town Centre project unless the consultation activity identifies this issue as a more pressing priority.

Note that a substantial amount of data and survey information is already available, including:-

- Parsons Brinkerhoff 'Helston Traffic and Urban Realm Study 2015'
- Levels surveys for the town centre area

- Transport survey and model provided by Aecom 2016 and augmented in 2019
- Helston Conservation Area Assessment 2010
- Helston Town Framework (2017) including Town Centre Strategy and Green Infrastructure Strategy

7. Project Process

It is recognised that this is a complex project and that the process of development must ensure wide and effective consultation and communication throughout Helston, including residents and businesses. It must also seek the input of visitors and potential visitors to Helston.

Additionally, it requires skilled technical input to identify exactly what elements are possible and evaluate any 'knock on' implications which will need mitigations built into the project.

To achieve this the following project process is proposed:-

Phase 1: Develop Strategic Case - Complete

Completed as part of the Place Shaping Plan and consultations

Output: This document which we can use to initiate Phase 2

Phase 2: Develop Outline Brief and Consultation Documentation

Using this document, we can source a town planning architect to provide the consultation package (drawings, visuals etc.). Our aim is to commence this activity in Q1 2021.

Additionally, this document will provide Cornwall Council with enough information to assess (via their specialists) what is and is not possible (especially relating to traffic flows).

To achieve this, we intend to allocate monies in the Town Vitality Fund to support this work.

Output: A workable first stage design documented with reports, drawings and visual representations

Phase 3: Public Consultation and Detailed Design

Formal public consultation activity, evaluation and design development

Firstly use a Community Citizens' Panel and a Business Forum (Business Citizens' Panel) to input and amend.

Secondly a wider public open consultation (following the process CC have used before in other towns)

The Place Shaping Board and Project Team evaluate all consultation feedback and agree the favoured option/design

Output: an updated design package with all consultation evaluated and included – RIBA Stage '2' and part Stage '3' – Spatially Coordinated Design

Phase 4: Live Trial

CC to fund a live trial of the design for a period of at least 3 months

Output: an evaluated real-life trail of the proposals

Phase 5: Final Consultation

Further public consultation via the Community Citizens' Panel and a Business Forum (Business Citizens' Panel), followed by a second public open consultation (again following the process CC have used before in other towns)

Output: a finalised design package with all consultation evaluated and included

Phase 6: Capital Works

In parallel with the above stages we need to source approx. £5M capital works funding

The above process will be developed along the RIBA 2020 structure as part of Stage 2 above

8. Fit with Existing Policies and Strategies

The aims and objectives of this proposal contribute towards National, Regional and Local strategies and policies as follows:

	Policy or Strategy Name	Relevance to proposals
National	Central Government 'Levelling Up' Agenda (2018)	Proposals seek to revive the fortunes of the UK's 'left-behind' towns and cities.
	'Re-imagining urban spaces to help revitalise our high streets' (2012) and 'The Future of High Streets' 2013	The Government's response to the Portas Review: 'We want to see more people being creative about how they design and use the spaces in their town centres and high streets, in a way that takes its inspiration from local characteristics and resonates with local people, boosts the local economy, and helps keep the community heart beating.'
	Clean Air Strategy (2019)	The proposals will contribute towards cleaner air by encouraging modal shift towards public transport.
	Decarbonising Transport: Setting the Challenge (2020)	This proposal seeks to utilise 'greener' fuels where possible, along with modal shift, to contribute to the de-carbonisation of transport in Cornwall.
Regional (LEP)	Draft Local Industrial Strategy (2020)	Relates specifically to Place, People and Business Environment
	10 opportunities (2018)	Relates specifically to the opportunities of 'Tourism' and 'Location'
County (Cornwall)	Cornwall Local Plan (2016)	Multiple policy impacts including:- Policy 2: Spatial Strategy Policy 4: Shopping, Services and Community Facilities Policy 5: Jobs and Skills Policy 13: Design

		Policy 24: Historic Environment.
Local (Helston)	Helston Place Shaping Plan (2020)	Strategic plan to address the vitality and future development of Helston.
	Helston Town Framework (2017)	3.3 Town Centre Strategy ‘The unique cultural heritage and attractive buildings and spaces of the town centre will be used to create a distinctive, attractive and inviting shopping experience. The development of leisure uses and events within the town will help to create a centre that people want to visit and spend more time in’
	Helston Climate Action Plan (2019)	Including the town centre aspiration: ‘to promote the heart of Helston as a place for the community to share, rather than as simply a thoroughfare for particle emitting vehicles’
	Conservation Area Assessment & Management Strategy (2010)	Identifies the importance of Helston’s historic town centre and strategies for management of town centre structures and features
	Helston Townscape Heritage Initiative - Simmons & Richards (2009)	Identifies heritage assets, management and improvement options
	Place Based Topic Paper – Helston & the Lizard (2013)	Retail & Town Centres Policy PP3 1a - The protection of the vitality and viability of Helston town centre through the promotion of retail, office and leisure uses.

DT 21st December 2020

HELSTON TOWN CENTRE COINAGEHALL STREET



PLACE SHAPING PLAN

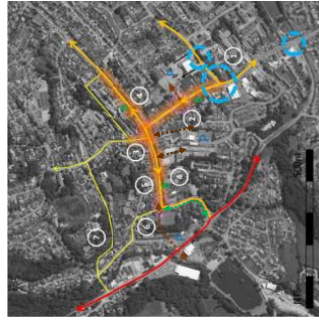
An Attractive Town Centre



- An attractive pedestrian route**
- Traffic flow down reduces pollution and Helston's carbon footprint**
- In corporate traffic calming to slow vehicles**

- Complex Project**
 - Initial study complete
 - Traffic monitoring underway – report March 2020
 - Bus Co. consultation starts January
 - Continued public consultation
 - Review status in April

Traffic and Urban Realm Study 2015 completed by Parsons Brinkerhoff



- Create space for people**
- Space to walk**
- Space to sit**
- Space to meet**
- Add some greenery**

Aim

- More people spending more time in our town**
 - Create an Attractive Town Centre
 - Join Grylls Monument with the Guildhall and Museum with a place people want to visit
 - Make more space for pedestrians
 - Reduce traffic to one way down hill
 - Improve air quality and help the environment by stopping heavy diesel traffic going up hill
 - Create space for cycle parking
 - Good surfaces, seating, planting – a space to dwell

Current State

Architecturally attractive, historic, unique
Significant community and visitor attractions at both ends
But...
Traffic dominant, difficult for pedestrians, poor pavements
Heavy diesel vehicles moving predominantly up hill
No social space
Deteriorating retails offer



Better Surfaces

Pedestrian Surfaces suitable for everyone



Surface treatments in keeping with Helston's heritage



Space for cycling and walking

One Way Traffic Flow – Down Hill



Repair the Pavements In granite

Repair the kennels

Appendices:

1. Helston Town Centre – Map
2. Data from Consultation, e-mails, Discussion and Social Media
3. Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Strategy (by Alan Baxter)
4. Helston Traffic & Urban Realm Study (by Parsons Brinkerhof)
5. Helston Public Realm Framework Document (by MeiLoc)

Appendix 1:

Helston Town Centre - Map

Area identified within the blue Town Centre Boundary line

