



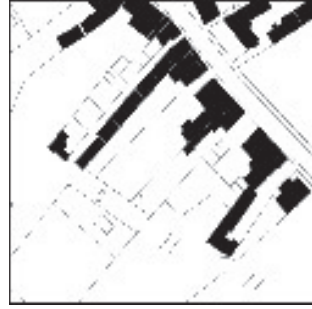
4. Western Fringes

The London Road – Uppgate line has always tended to somewhat divide the town socially – with larger town houses, often with Georgian origins, tending to be located to the west. In more recent times this has been exacerbated by the severance effect of the A16 traffic. With extraneous through-traffic now routing around the ring road, there is an opportunity to bind east and west together in a more unifying way.



5. Terraced Victorian Neighbourhoods

Several parallel residential streets mostly situated on rising ground to the south, north-west and north-east of the Town Centre define this Character Area designation. The area consists generally of typical Victorian dwellings in terraces that create a well-defined building frontage, set back from the pavement edge behind small front gardens. Side passages or characteristic archways provide access to rear of properties. These are established and almost wholly residential neighbourhoods unlikely to change significantly. There are few interconnecting pedestrian routes. Some trees are located in private gardens, but one would not describe it as having a 'leafy' character.



6. Extensive Green Lanes

An extensive area to the west of the Town Centre consisting of large, mostly detached houses set in substantial plots. The gardens often contain large mature trees that contribute significantly to the leafy skyline of this part of the town and which contrast markedly with the more urban Town Centre in particular.



7. Wider Suburban Areas

The Town Centre's wider hinterland is of varied suburban character and includes houses from the Victorian era to the present day. Although the area has some unique features, it is largely typical of its kind and located beyond the Conservation Area boundary and is of no direct relevance to the Urban Design Study. It should be noted that the Wider Suburban Area includes some large sites in other uses including the cattle market site off Newmarket, school sites and former grain store to the north-east. It also includes the historic Riverhead area, which is included within the eastern limits of the Conservation Area.

8. Large School Sites

In amongst the outlying areas, large school sites interrupt the urban fabric and with their introverted layout and institutional buildings they have a character of their own.

The Townscape Heritage Initiative

The Louth Townscape Heritage Initiative Stage 1 Bid (May 2003) provides interesting and useful characterisation analysis that is integrated into the Urban Design Study but not repeated here. It identifies the following areas in which the environmental quality of the town could be improved:

- The loss of architectural features, particularly shop fronts
- The unproductive use of upper floors ('brown floors')
- The general level of repair of historic buildings
- Corner and gap sites, which form unpleasant and unresolved breaks in the townscape
- Degraded areas on the periphery of the main commercial core

The bid also identifies the importance of materials, roofscape and sensitive signage and was accompanied by a perceptive and thorough report on the townscape of the Town Centre by The Georgian Group. Although prepared in 1993 it remains highly relevant. It identifies a number of features of the town and makes some very

useful and apposite comments about change within its historic environment. Key findings are highlighted in the box opposite.



Insensitive signage

Issues identified by The Georgian Group (1993)

- Consistent, contained height of development in the town centre. Contrasting prominence of St James' Church.
- Identifies dangers of low quality redevelopment. (Halifax Building)
- Recommends a formal conservation strategy for the future enhancement of the town and its Conservation Area. Also recommends a re-survey to ensure that buildings currently without listed building protection can be preserved and fall prey to misdirected alterations. (Article 4 Directions some help)
- Identifies problem of some fine buildings currently unused.
- Identifies the problem of inappropriate shop fronts as well as showing examples of successful restorations and contemporary hanging signs.
- Identifies lack of tree planting in [the former] Leo's car park
- Useful discussion of contextual design and new build and review (rather lenient) of recent examples.
- Discusses issue of design of modern buildings in the historic environment and the lack of quality contemporary architecture in the town. Makes reference to the town's "less polite" architectural character.
- Identifies importance of walling and, in passing, issues of paving material, detailing and maintenance.
- Commends ELDC's advisory leaflets on maintaining historic buildings and draws attention to the loss of architectural quality in creeping changes, notably UPVC windows and mass-produced stained hardwood doors. Also concrete slates and pantries and the inappropriate use of cement-based mortar for re-pointing.
- Commends initiatives to improve the streetscape through careful detailing (signage and materials)
- Identifies the problem of sign proliferation and crude pavement reinstatement after services work.
- Identifies gap and corner site issue and the proliferation of unsightly car parks.
- Importantly the report discusses new retail development on edge of town centre locations and the effect on these less protected areas.
- Identifies the need for well-defined design briefs.

Particular features of note... but also some warning signs

Some of the key urban design features that have emerged from this characterisation study are worthy of emphasis:

1. Urban Grain

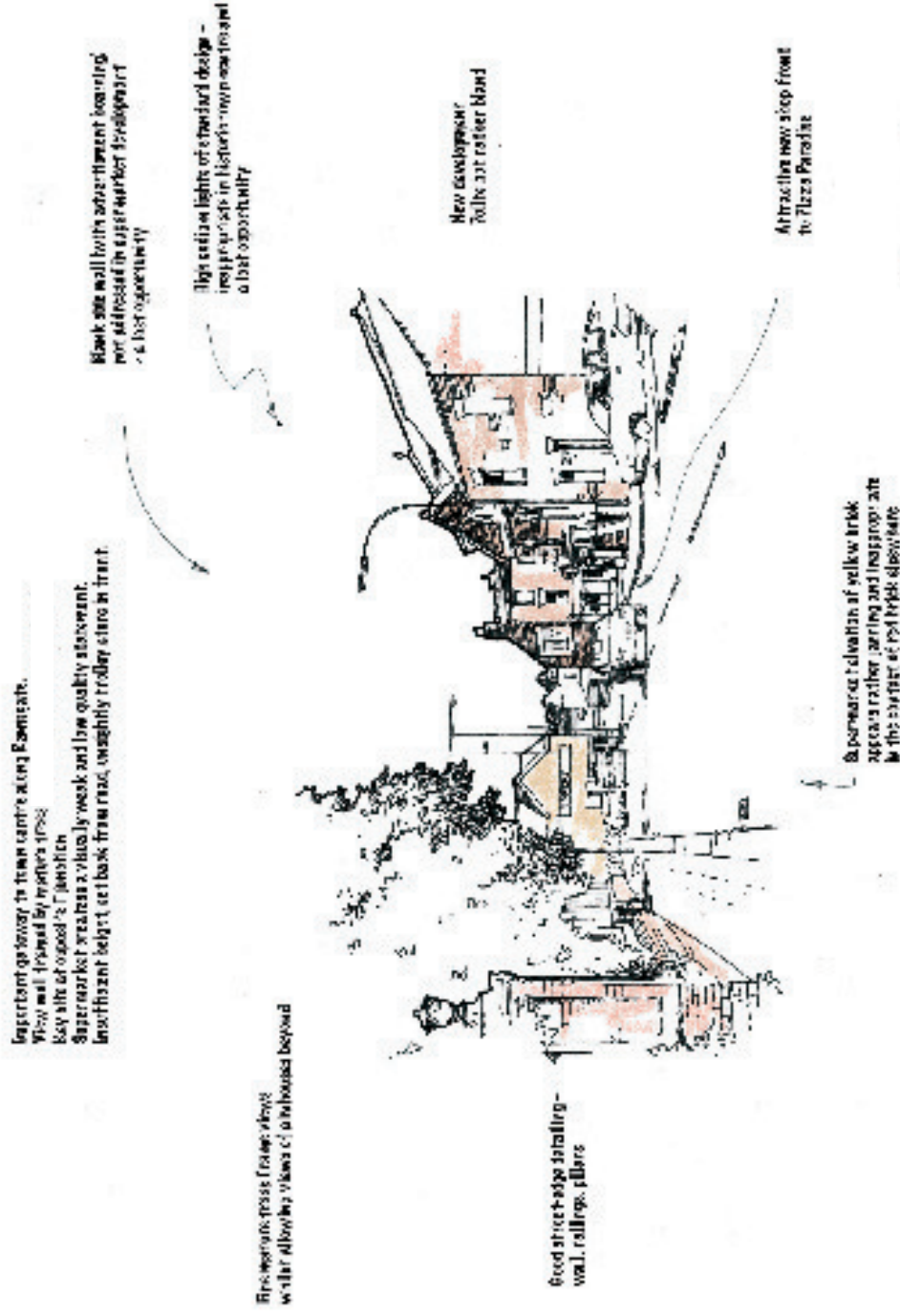
The central area of Louth has a fascinating 'graininess' – an immense diversity of building types contained within narrow burgeois plots. In looking to the future, one must be careful not to 'rationalise' this away. There will inevitably be pressures to amalgamate plots and to accommodate larger building types geared to accommodating contemporary commercial uses, but every effort must be taken to ensure that the urban grain is respected and remains largely intact.

2. Street Frontage

One of the principal unifying elements to Louth's urban structure is the consistency of street frontage. In attractive streets, buildings tend to adhere to a common building line, with frequently spaced front doors, shopfronts and bay windows facing onto the public realm. Some recent buildings have stepped back from this building line – sometimes with parking placed on forecourts – and have undermined the quality of the streetscene as a result.

3. Alleyways

Louth's alleyways – particularly traversing north-south – are one of the town centre's most interesting features. In places, the quality of these routes has deteriorated and



there have been instances whereby these public thoroughfares have been blocked up altogether by encroaching private development. This must not be allowed to happen if these special features of the town centre are to be retained.

4. 'Backlands'

Louth's quality is not just the product of the tremendously attractive street frontages, but also the 'backland' spaces that provide another dimension to the town and so much intrigue to the visitor. They often have a rather 'messy' character and yet it is this messiness that provides their intrinsic quality. Sometimes they are accessed via attractive archways to the street. There is some evidence that these backland spaces are being progressively 'sanitised' – surfaces are being re-surfaced with concrete pavers, insensitive gates are being erected around private courts and new buildings are being inappropriately inserted into rear courtyards that previously provided a 'breathing space' between townhouse dwellings or low cost workshop space. This process is being furthered by planning policy (PPG3) pressure to develop brownfield land. Design guidance could be introduced

to ensure this process doesn't sweep away Louth's backlands.

5. Architectural detailing

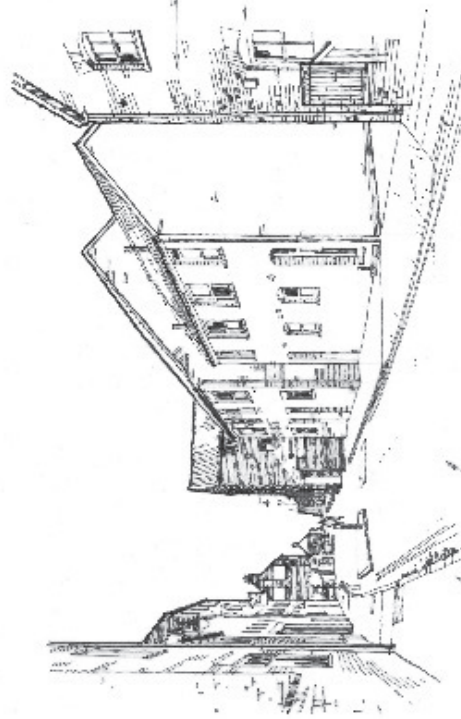
Louth has an notable concentration of listed buildings – and even the more modest Victorian and Georgian properties, for instance, have beautiful detailing. Sometimes this is made evident in the way a building gently curves around a corner, or where a gentle change in level is introduced in response to a slope. However, most of Louth's recent buildings have had very limited architectural design input. In some instances the lowest quality detailing has been used. This is a rather troubling sign.

6. Use of local materials

Although Louth's buildings have tremendous architectural richness, they are often unified by the use of the once locally manufactured red brick. Contemporary buildings have used a variety of bricks that are often quite out of place with their context. The use of yellow brick is particularly inappropriate.

The basic quality and attention to detail. Although there has been an emphasis to a fair extent on cheap, high benefit mass and redevelopment plans, the quality of the buildings is not necessarily well defined. The buildings are of a high standard and are well built.

One of the main reasons for the success of the buildings is the attention to detail. The buildings are of a high standard and are well built. The buildings are of a high standard and are well built.

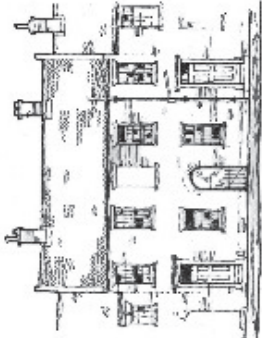


Aspects of the building are shown in the drawing, the drawing is a cross-section showing the structure of the building.

Other areas of the building are shown in the drawing, the drawing is a cross-section showing the structure of the building.

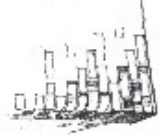
All eight cases of new buildings have been designed to meet the needs of the town. The buildings are of a high standard and are well built. The buildings are of a high standard and are well built.

Use of bricks. Recent developments around the town are of a high standard and are well built. The buildings are of a high standard and are well built.



Front elevation of a building in Louth. The drawing shows the facade and roofline of the building.

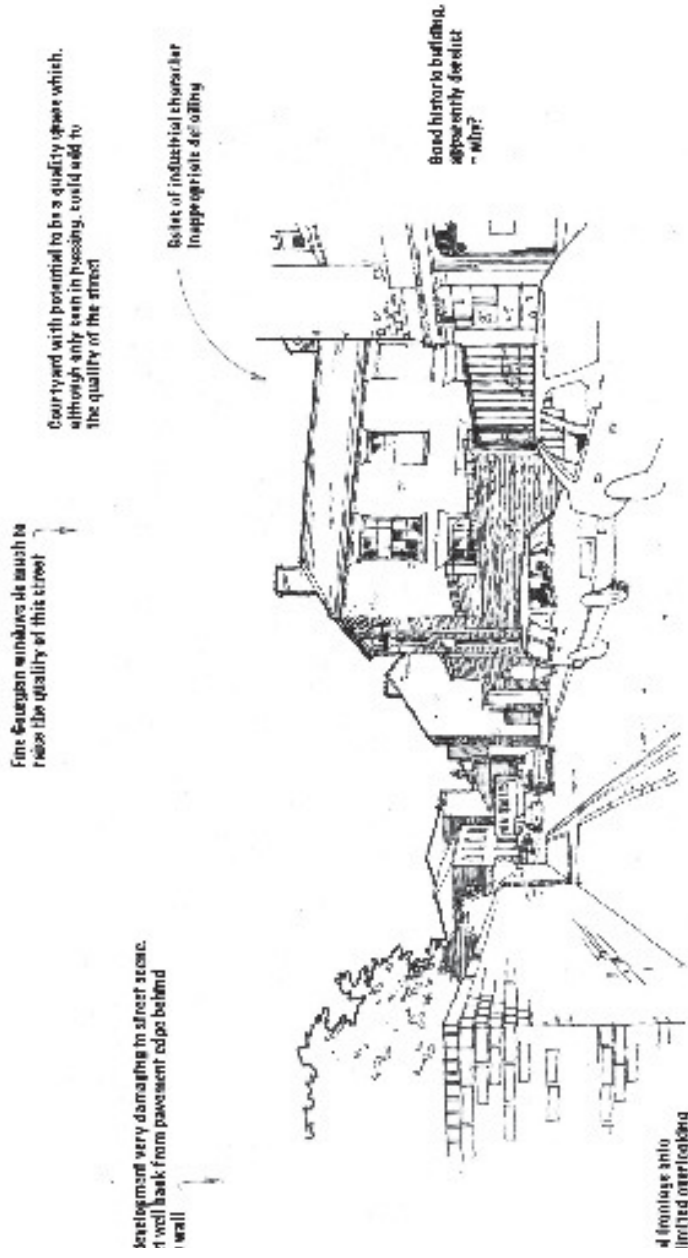
Details of the building's facade.



Details of the building's facade.

These illustrations of Chequergate facing eastwards (above) and westwards (below) convey some of the issues of concern relating to new development.

But there are of course some exceptional urban environments in Louth, such as George Street (shown opposite). Many textbook features of good environments can be found in views such as this.



More cars than people in this street - is it surprising?

Weak and uninteresting footfall end of street. Blank walls, poor skyline, 'book end' development... Buildings do not address the visual axis



Varied and well
penetrated skyline

Five street compositions
clear but a frame for tall box
visual mass and areas of place
attract the looking eye

Groups of local well expressed
in shops buildings and walls,
adding visual interest

A progression of texture along
the street will be maintained
continuity - movement discovery

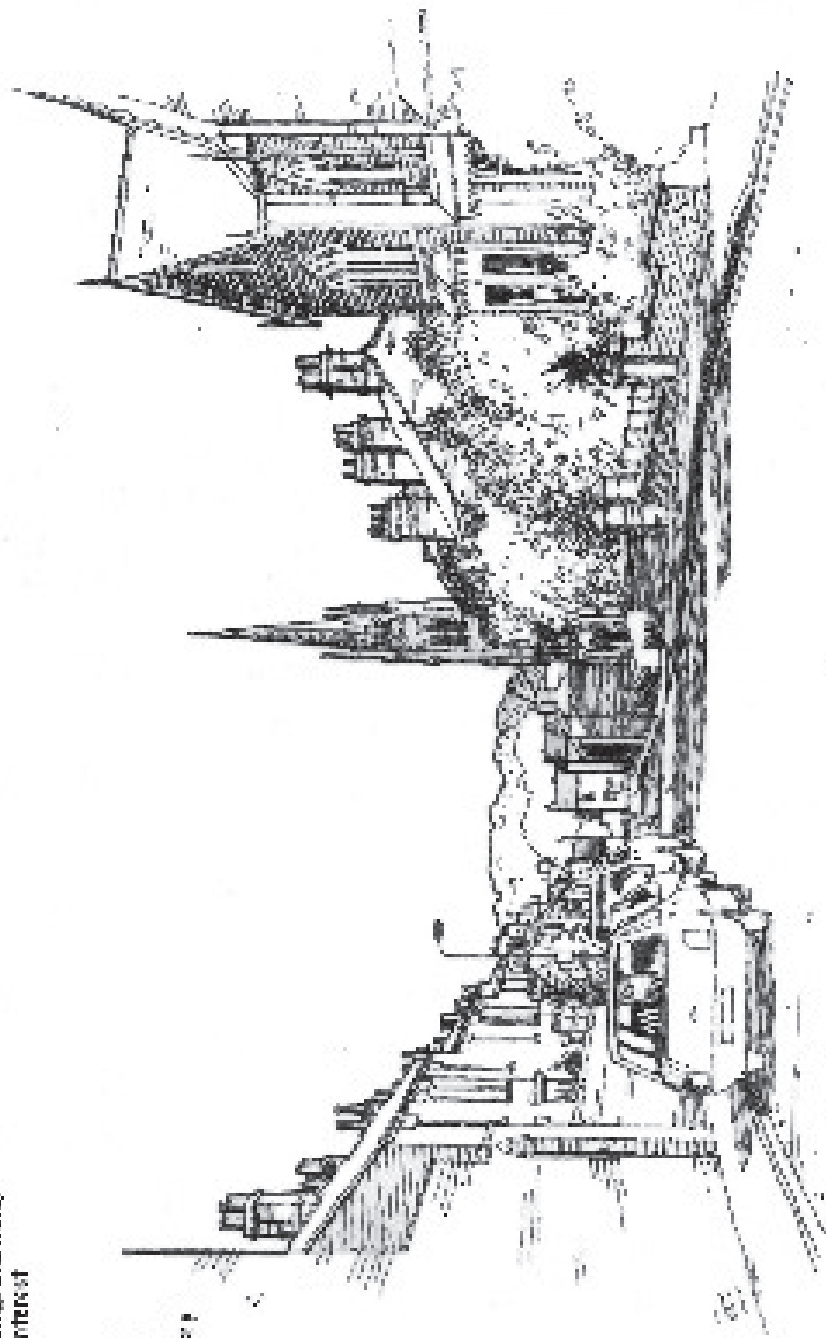
A strong visual
anchors to the street

A punctuated and sleek
points of materials
local red brick and stone

Quality architecture and
access flow to street, even
an exceptional buildings

The street well covered
along its full length

Key historic quality and
interest, address of the
street building line



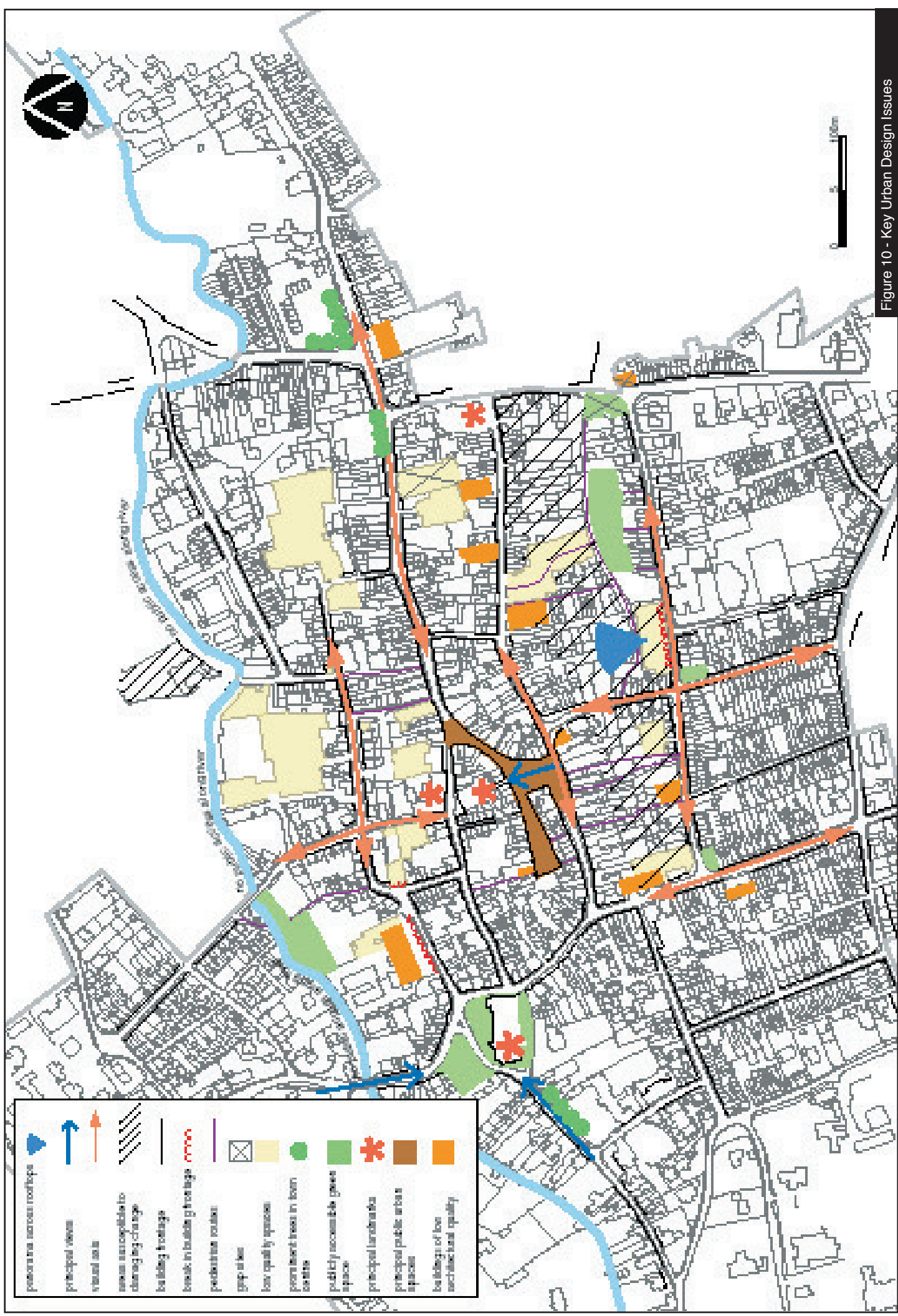


Figure 10 - Key Urban Design Issues



Strong, consistent building line

Key urban design issues

It is important that any new development is considered within its wider context. Figure 10 identifies some of the key urban design issues to be borne in mind, including:

- The panorama across the rooftops that one experiences looking northward from the Kidgate car park
- Some of the principal views, including
 - the classic of St James' Church spire from Westgate
 - the view of the market tower from Market Place
 - St James' Church spire from George Street
- The numerous 'visual axis' – the long views that one experiences along some of the principal Town Centre streets
- Much of the 'Established Edge of Town Centre Character Area' that is susceptible to potentially damaging change as backland sites are developed, sometimes insensitively
- Building frontage along the principal Town Centre streets with a strong, consistent building line

- Breaks in the building frontage that undermine the quality of the streetscape, notably the BT Exchange site and Kidgate car park
- North-south pedestrian routes (alleyways) that cut through the block structure
- Opportunity sites that provide potential for redevelopment.
- Low quality open spaces where improvement works should be considered
- Publicly accessible green space
- Principal landmarks, notably St James' Church, Town Hall, Market tower, bus station
- Principal public urban spaces that constitute the Town Centre's core – in particular the Cornmarket, Market Place, Mercer Row and western end of Eastgate
- Buildings of low architectural quality where replacement buildings should be encouraged
- The fact that along much of its length there is no public access along the river – constituting something of a missed opportunity



Central Louth's clear network of streets

Chapter 4 - Movement in and around the town centre

Street hierarchy and circulation: the existing situation

Figure 11 emphasises the significant amount of land given over to cars in central Louth. Within Louth's pattern of narrow streets, one-way operation maintains traffic flow and provides sufficient space for on-street parking and servicing. Within many of the core streets there is little alternative to one-way operation. The only existing one-way streets that could easily allow two-way operation are Northgate (between Vickers Lane and Cannon Street), Eastgate east of its junction with Market Place, and Mercer Row (which in any case is currently two-way for buses). Two way operation in any of these locations would greatly reduce space for kerbside loading or parking.

We conclude that with present levels of vehicular penetration of the Town Centre, conversion of one-way streets to two-way operation would lead to major disruption and inconvenience for drivers and would remove opportunities for improving the pedestrian environment.



Figure 11 - Space given over to cars



Mercer Row

The 'Pinch Point' through Eastgate

The town of Louth could be transformed in character if measures were taken to reduce the volume of traffic that penetrates the Town Centre. For example, a recent survey reveals that three quarters of those using Northgate Car Park pass through the Town Centre and the Eastgate Pinch Point.

Introducing these measures would involve many people changing their route patterns and parking habits, which may be unpopular. On the other hand, these same people have not so far had the opportunity to appreciate the benefits that such a change could bring. A Town Centre freed from the stranglehold of motor vehicles at certain times of the day would provide a better ambience, and would be more enjoyable and safer to visit. From a business point of view, this could encourage people to visit more often, and to stay longer when they do. This would lead to new activity and could encourage in particular a more varied range of shops, services and facilities, including evening activity.

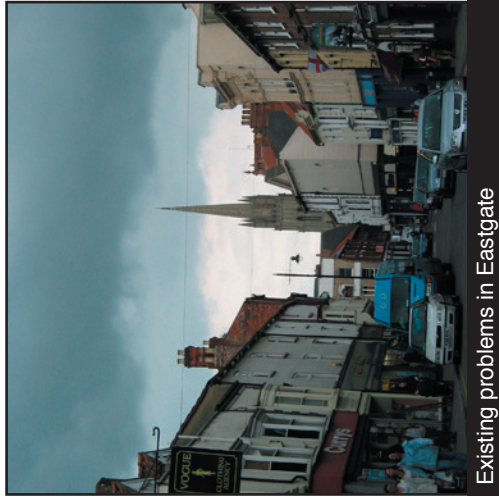
The recommendation is that Louth Town Centre should be enhanced by reclaiming space from motor vehicles and encouraging activity and conviviality. People should be able to enjoy their time in the centre, and more people should be attracted by a wider range of activity as well as a more agreeable environment. Louth has a stunning townscape and array of buildings. To the extent that the presence and dominance of traffic can be reduced, little more is necessary to

allow the town's quality to shine. Redesign of the street surfaces and less intrusive street signs and markings are all that will be necessary. The main task, then, is to reduce the dominating presence of vehicles.

It is suggested that a new traffic hierarchy will help to focus how and where action is needed. The hierarchy would have four levels:

1. Traffic priority streets and roads, within the urban limits and with 30mph speed limit and conventional street layout;
2. A 20mph zone that includes the entire Town Centre, and with streets designed to reflect the lower driving speed intentions, and to encourage calm driving. Physical measures will be designed to complement the townscape, not just to compel drivers to slow down;
3. Streets within the 20mph zone where traffic will be restricted for periods of the day or week, with the precise scope of the restrictions to be developed in consultations with local businesses and residents;
4. Streets and spaces where vehicles are to be excluded permanently to provide more space for people activity in the Town Centre.

To achieve the traffic restrictions whilst maintaining access for car users will be a difficult, but not impossible task. A comparison between the existing and proposed circulation system is shown in Figures 13 and 14 overleaf.



Existing problems in Eastgate

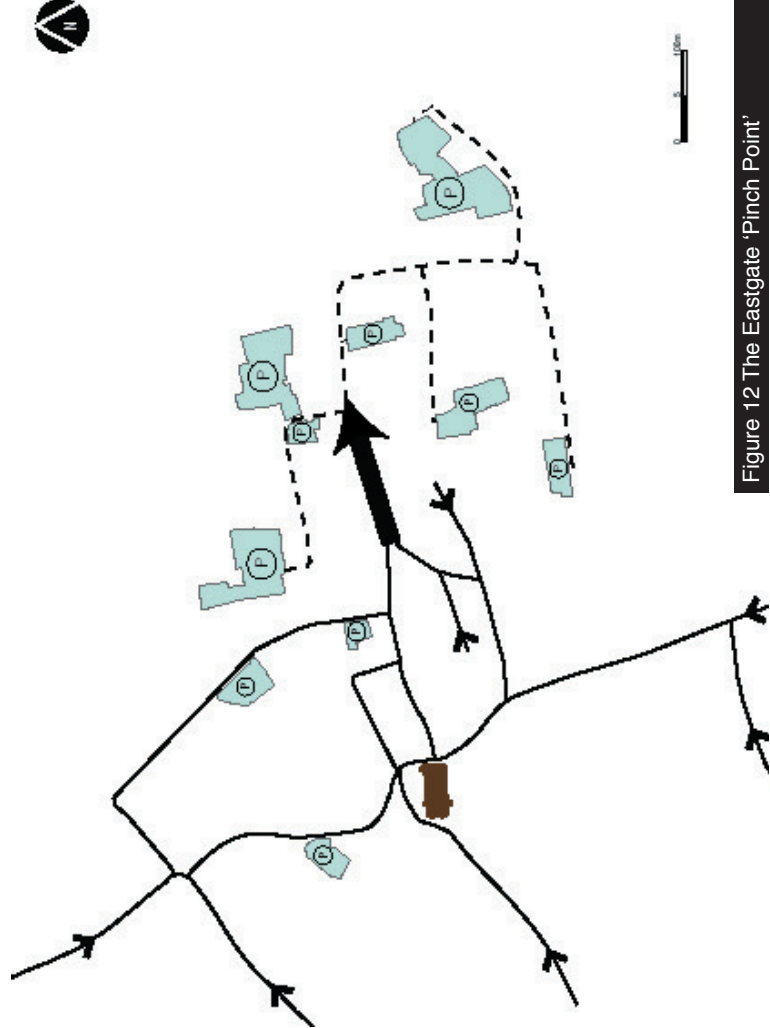


Figure 12 The Eastgate 'Pinch Point'

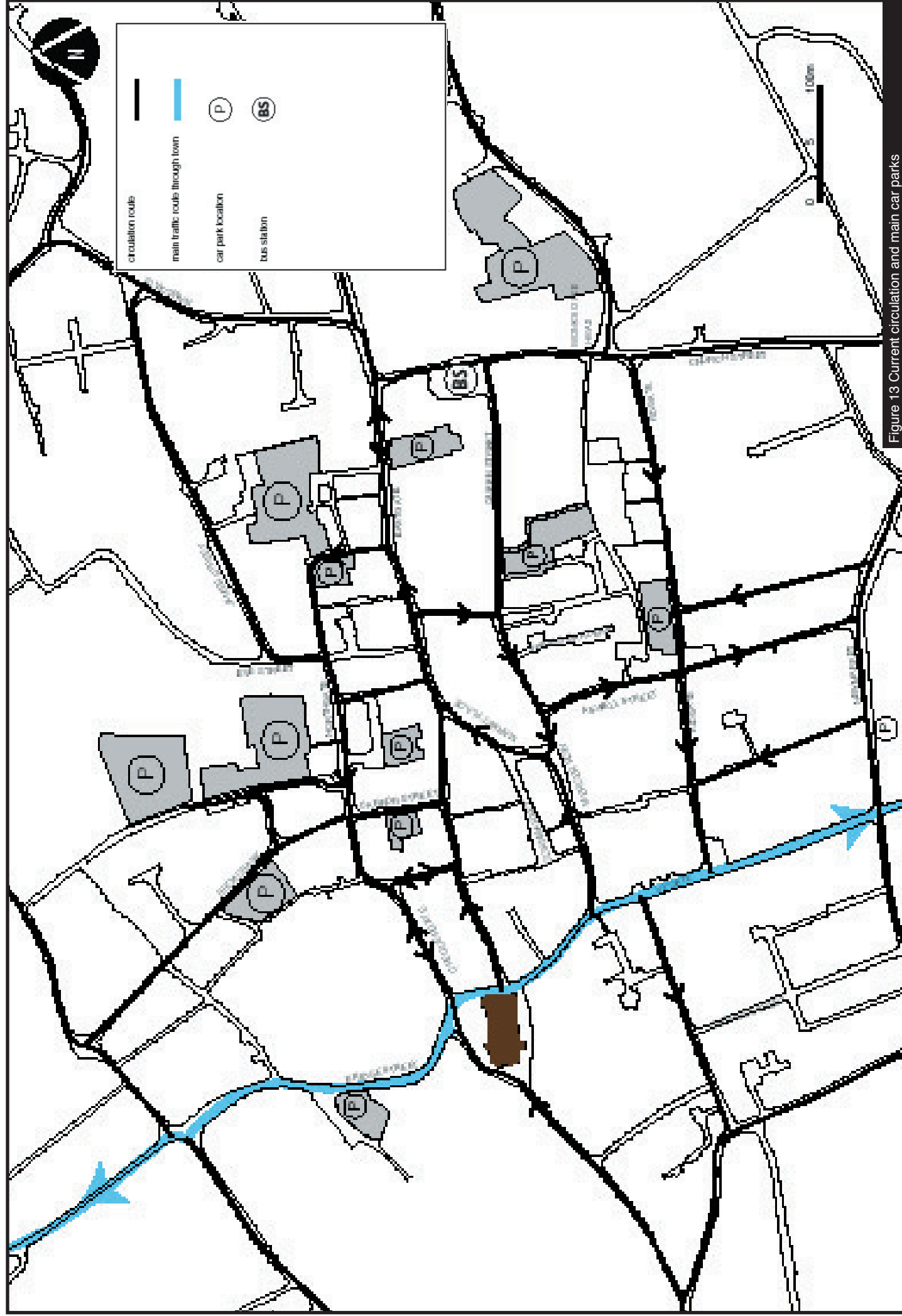


Figure 13 Current circulation and main car parks

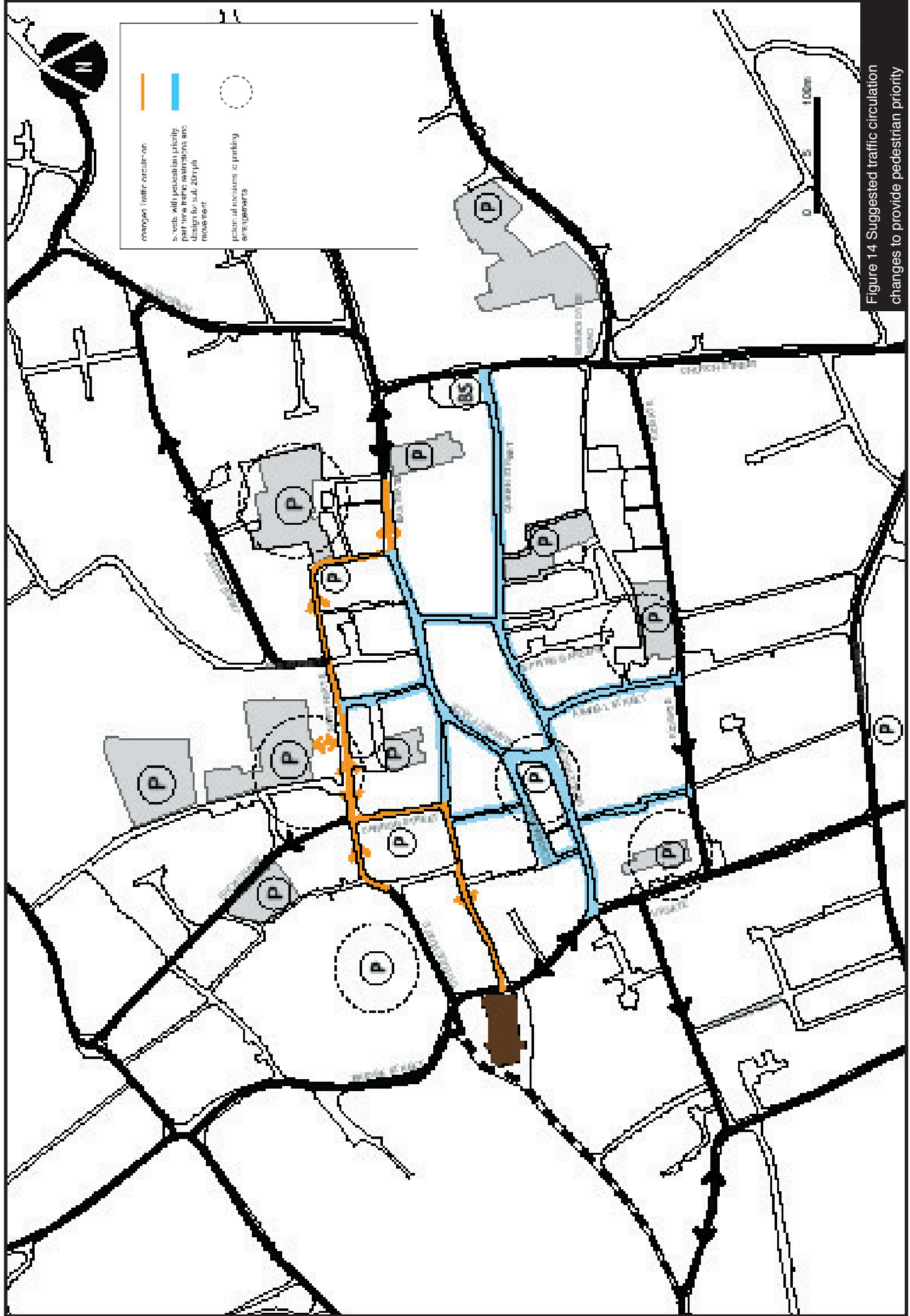


Figure 14 Suggested traffic circulation changes to provide pedestrian priority

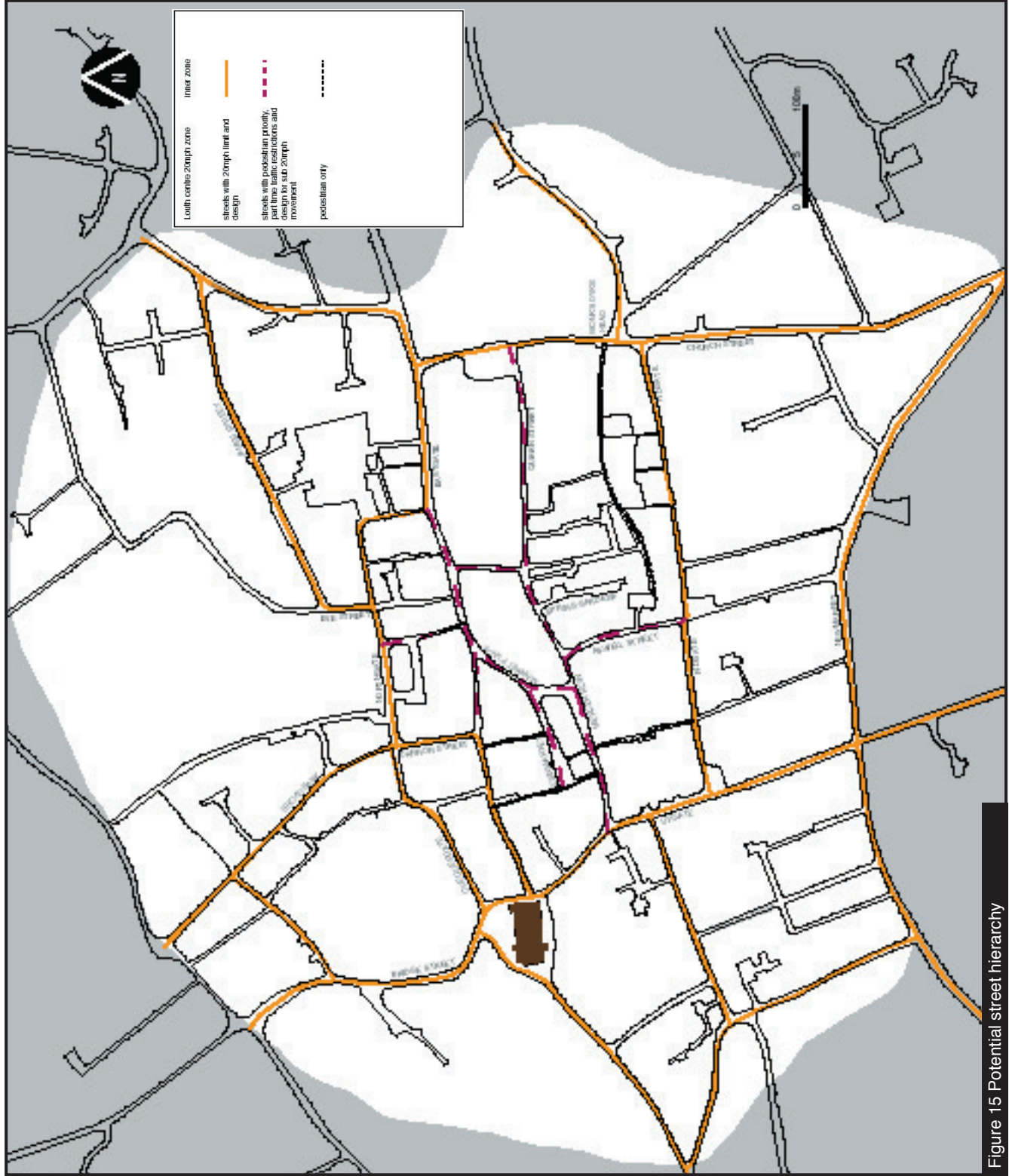


Figure 15 Potential street hierarchy

It has not been possible within the limited time and resources available for this study to subject the transport proposals to rigorous analysis or testing. It is designed to illustrate that a different circulation may be possible if environmental objectives are placed above traffic objectives (summarised in the Figure 15 potential street hierarchy diagram).

It is understood that revisions to the traffic circulation system were made in the late 1990s, involving reversing some of the one-way operation in the Town Centre, but were reversed in the face of public opposition shortly after implementation. We would recommend that any future revisions of the network should be given time to “bed in” before any decision to modify or reverse it is taken. It is well known that any change has a tendency to provoke negative public response, but that this often evaporates once people have had a chance to understand the new system.

A comprehensive change to central Louth such as outlined here cannot happen without further technical study and careful consultation. However, in the meantime there are valuable improvements that can be made without serious prejudice to more comprehensive change in the longer term.

There are two key junctions that should be improved in the short term to increase safety and to benefit pedestrians and cyclists:



Northgate/Eastgate junction facing westwards

Eastgate and Northgate junction

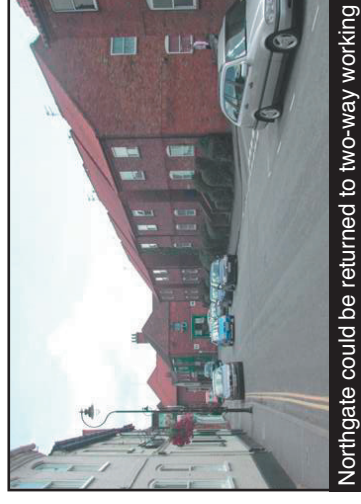
The opposing two way and one-way sections of Eastgate are dangerous, partly because of the alignment of the respective carriageways. In addition, this junction is heavily used by pedestrians walking to and from Northgate car parks and the footways at the junction are very narrow. The cycle lane in Eastgate adds to the problem.

This junction should be the subject of a detailed audit and redesign. The advisory cycle lane does not appear to function well and should be removed. Serious consideration should be given to conversion of the junction to signal operation. With or without signals, improvements could be made to the alignment of the footways, carriageways and kerbs to improve safety and pedestrian movement. This should be a top priority project.

Eastgate and Church Street

Eastgate is one of the main pedestrian routes into the Town Centre, and between the Town Centre and one of the main supermarkets (Somerfields). Yet pedestrians are forced into Church Street to use the pedestrian crossing. The crossing is not on the desire line, and moreover the view of oncoming traffic from Eastgate is obscured. The warning sign to drivers is indicative of the very unsatisfactory nature of this junction.

This junction should be converted from mini-roundabout to traffic signal operation. Full pedestrian phases should be provided, preferably with an “all green” phase for pedestrians. This should be a top priority project.



Northgate could be returned to two-way working

