

### Public transport and taxis

Public transport use is at a low level and most services have low frequencies and restricted hours of operation. While it is acknowledged that travel to and from a small town such as Louth, serving a predominantly rural hinterland will be heavily reliant on private road transport, there will still be opportunities to reduce the extent of this. Higher frequency services and high quality vehicles combined with low and simplified fares and good information and marketing can significantly boost patronage. This is difficult in the deregulated bus operating environment, but not impossible.

### Town services

The town services are of very poor quality and would be used only by people who do not have access to a car (either as a driver or passenger).

Services in the town operate as long one-way loops (as shown in diagram below), a practice



Existing Internal Bus Routes

that has been largely discredited elsewhere. In addition services are operated with large and elderly double deck vehicles that are intrusive, noisy and polluting, and inaccessible for people with physical disabilities. This is a double bind since the people who will be most tolerant of the long and tortuous routes taken by the buses are precisely those who are likely to have limited mobility.

### Longer distance services

Other services link Louth with other towns and villages in Lincolnshire, and these operate to and from the recently built bus station (as shown in Figure 16). The paucity of information as to where these buses stop (other than the bus station) or at what times makes these services almost impossible to use except for regular users who have no other choice. In several visits to the bus station, no bus was ever seen there, and no more than a few people. The scale of the bus station seems to imply a level of bus service that is far greater than that actually provided.

### Possible improvements to public transport in Louth

A number of alternative patterns of public transport provision could be considered for Louth town services, including spider-pattern or cross-town services without long loops, and demand responsive services operating core routes with “allowable” diversions to supply door to door transport. Whatever revisions are made, the services should be pitched at a level to attract a wider range of users, not just the bus-dependent minority as at present. Only in this

way can a service with reasonable critical mass be established.

A complete review of service patterns, routes, stops and information is required. Consideration should be given to creating demand responsive services to serve the town, perhaps using the Lincolnshire Call Connect service as a model.

Public transport routing allows Mercer Row to provide access to services in both directions; Market Place and Eastgate do not. This fact could be better advertised by the provision of bus stops opposite one another in Mercer Row, and information boards at all stops showing where to board for each route.

Public transport information is woeful. It is difficult for anyone other than habitual users of the bus services in and to the town to understand bus routes, times and frequencies. An electronic information display at the new bus station was not functioning at the time of survey.



### **The bus station**

Recent changes have undoubtedly improved the quality of this facility, from an urban design viewpoint it takes a large slice of important frontage at the corner of Church Street and Queen Street. Opportunities to combine the station with other uses should be fully explored in order to add vitality and improve natural surveillance.

The footway on the west side of Church Street has been interrupted, making walking on this side inconvenient and uncomfortable. This footway should be reinstated by redesign of the kerbs and parking bay alongside the bus station.

In terms of its function, the bus station is underused compared to its capacity. It is located away from the core of the Town Centre (about a 5 minute walk from Market Place), and most passengers apparently choose to alight and board in Mercer Row. Alternative methods of operation could in any case remove the need for such a lay-over facility within the town centre.

The main recommendation would be for a thorough review of public transport potential, not simply as a marginal social service (as it is

at present), but to create quality services that could provide a realistic alternative to the car for a larger number of users. Given the pattern of small operators and the lack of investment to date, such an exercise would almost certainly have to be undertaken within the context of a Statutory Quality Contract.

### **Cyclists**

The recommended street hierarchy and speed management framework would (if appropriately designed and enforced) make for safer cycling conditions in the town. As a rule streets in the town are inappropriate for the provision of dedicated cycle lanes. Separately marked lanes should be segregated from other vehicle traffic over continuous distances, should be free of parked and moving motor vehicles at all times, and should be of adequate width (minimum of 1.5 metres). Otherwise, it is usually safer for cyclists to be integrated with other vehicles within the carriageway. Speed control is the key to this, and cyclists themselves can perform a role in this in narrow streets.

County Council accident data indicate that the main streets experiencing conflict between traffic and pedestrians are also those with a significant cyclist accident rate (namely Mercer Row, Market Place, and Eastgate).

Cycling could potentially play a much larger role in the transport activity of the town. Much of the hinterland of Louth is relatively flat with a network of quiet roads and paths that could be converted

for cycling in safety. Land to the east in particular lends itself to easy cycling. The current low level of cycling therefore is presumably explained by cultural attitudes. Similar towns on the other side of the North Sea would have very much greater cycling activity. Promoting and encouraging cycling activity could produce large benefits for the town by reducing the volume of car traffic coming into the centre, and reducing the demand for car parking. Those choosing to cycle would also, of course, reap benefits in terms of health and fitness. Cycling activity can be encouraged with a combination of path provision, parking provision publicity and marketing. None of these by themselves is likely to be sufficient to bring about a switch of mode.



### Motorcyclists

Motorcycling is reasonably popular within the Louth area. Unlike cycling, motorcycling is difficult to make separate provision for. Motorised two wheelers do not share space comfortably with non-motorised modes, and so provision must largely be as part of general motor road traffic. Motorcycle parking takes up considerably less space than car parking, though still more than cycle parking. Accident rates of motorcycle riders are higher than other classes of traffic, and so although better motorcycle parking provision should be incorporated into streetscape improvements, further encouragement of this mode would require careful justification.



## Parking arrangements and usability

On-street parking is valued by drivers who pass through the centre looking out for a parking opportunity, but then will go on to an off-street car park if no on-street opportunity presents itself. This behaviour may actually encourage more traffic through the centre than would occur if no on-street provision were made. Driving in and out of Commarket in search of a parking bay is particularly disruptive to many by comparison to the few who derive a benefit from it.

Market Place currently is filled with parked cars on non-market days when, somewhat perversely, demand is lowest. This is an extremely poor use of what is the prime public space in the town. Only a tiny proportion of visitors to the Town Centre benefit from this parking provision, and yet it destroys one of the principal public assets of the town. It is acknowledged that some people will offer strong resistance to the removal of these parking spaces, but attention should be paid instead to the benefits that would accrue to everyone in the town, and the increased trade that could occur. This argument applies also in Mercer Row and other places, but in our view is incontestable in the case of the Market Place.

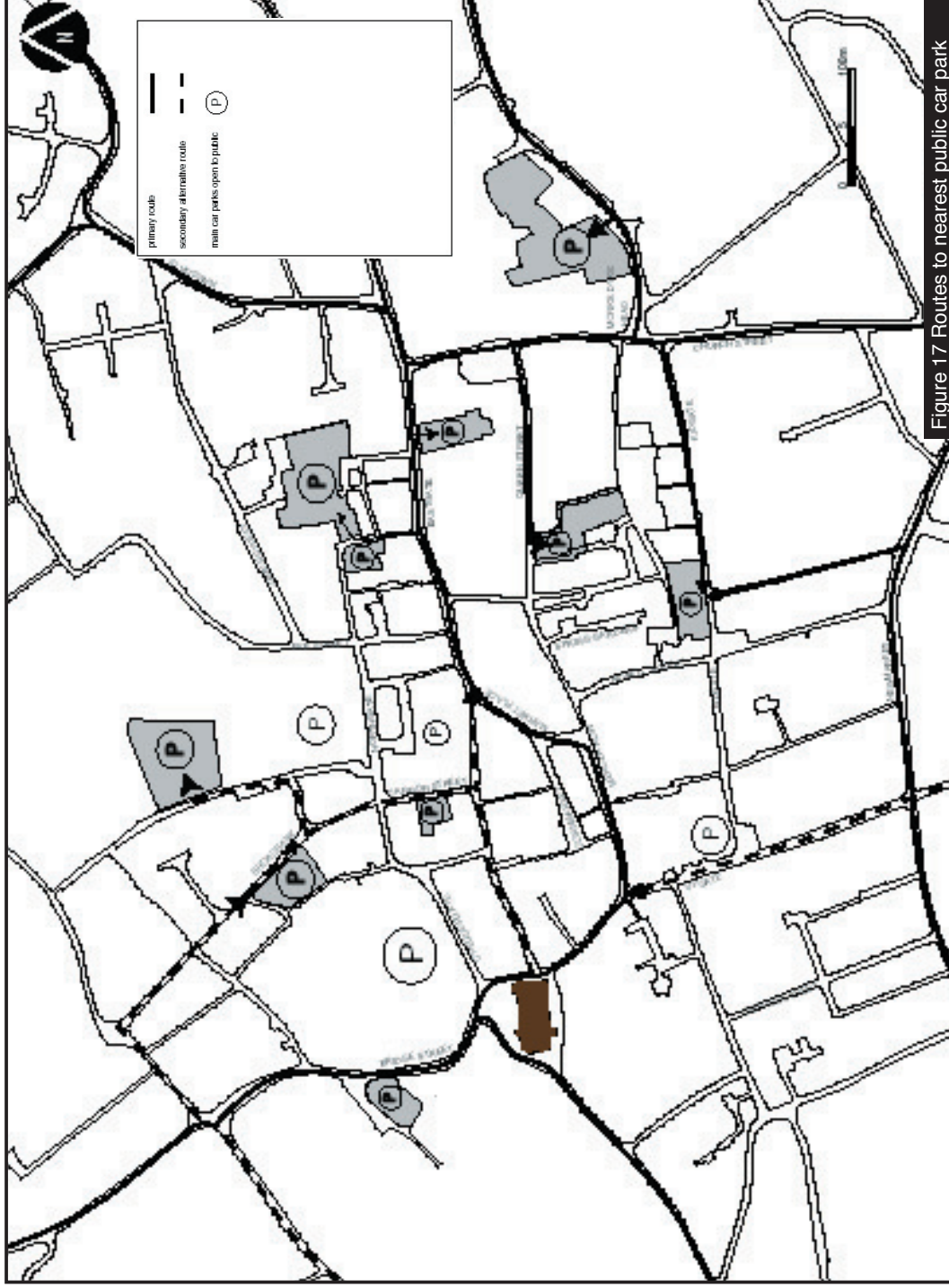


Figure 17 Routes to nearest public car park



Yellow lines are a particular visual eyesore in the historic parts of the town centre. Consideration should be given to their removal, by introducing a traffic regulation zone within which parking is prohibited except at structured bays. Notable examples include:

- Uppgate (particularly between Kidgate and Mercer Row – with and excessive carriageway width and double yellow lines that are a hangover from its former A Road status);
- Northgate (between Vickers Lane and Cannon Street);
- Potentially Westgate, north of St James' Church;
- Gospelgate;
- James Street;
- Kidgate (instead of build outs).

Off street parking provides the main parking capacity in the town. Figure 17 indicates the location of car parks and how they are accessed. Figure 18 emphasises how many of the key car parks are accessed from the west - pulling traffic through Mercer Row / Eastgate.

Surveys undertaken in the town during summer 2004 have revealed that the great majority of users of the main Northgate car park travelled in from outside Louth. This suggests limited scope for reducing parking demand through mode-switch, since this is more difficult to achieve for those from outside the town. It does, however, further reinforce one of the key findings of this study that most car park users (particularly those from out of town) are forced to pass from west to east along Eastgate, creating congestion at the Eastgate / Northgate pinch point.

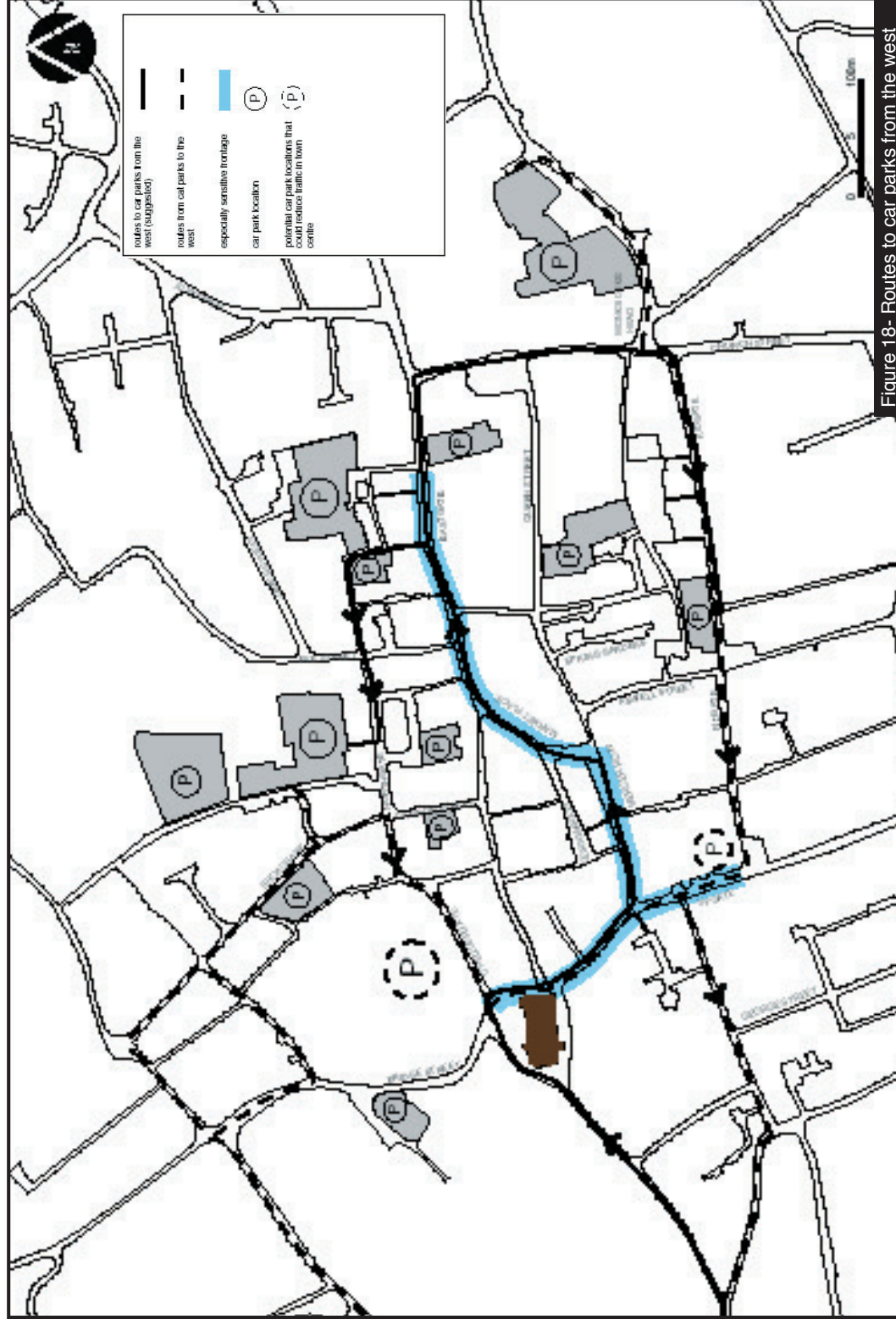
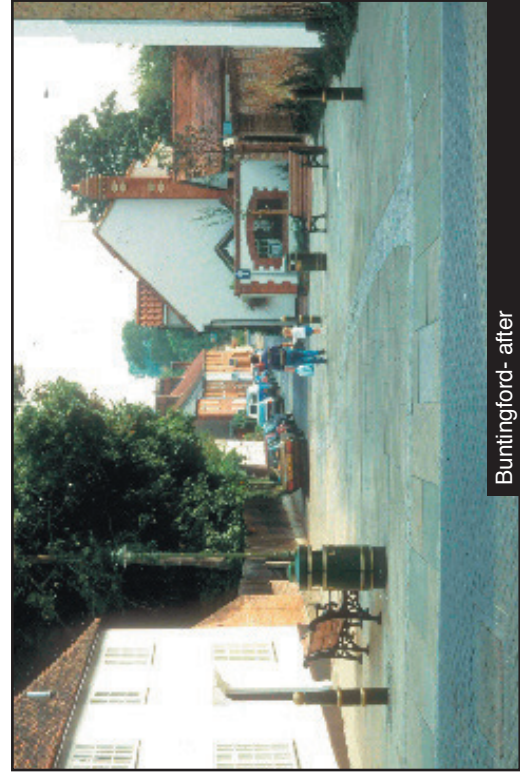


Figure 18- Routes to car parks from the west



Buntingford- before streetscape improvements



Buntingford- after

### ***Rationalising parking provision***

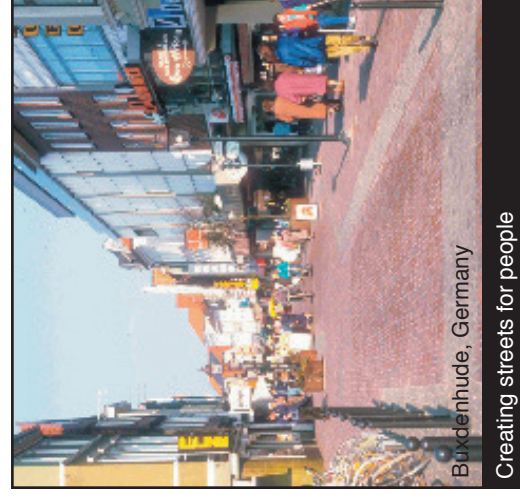
There is a balance to be struck between convenience of having car parking close to the main destinations in the town, and keeping vehicles away from those destinations in order to create a quality experience and environment.

The present car parks close to the centre could, however, be reduced in scale if one or more were to be converted to a multi storey operation. The Co-op, and large Northgate car parks might be contenders, as would the BT site should this become available. The latter would be especially valuable as a significant car park since access to it and from it could be made from the West, South and North without the need for vehicles to be driven through the Town Centre. On each of these sites there would be opportunities (and indeed a need for) associated development to shield the structure from view, and to help fund its construction.

On-street parking can also be rationalised. In some important locations where it is desirable to reclaim space for people rather than vehicles (including Mercer Row, Cornmarket and Eastgate), on-street parking could be removed or reduced, or made available for loading only. In other places, such as



Nienberg, Germany



Buxdenhude, Germany

Creating streets for people

Kidgate and parts of Upgate and Northgate, on-street provision in attractively designed parking bays can be a more productive use of space. In some instances yellow line parking restrictions are in force where there is no obvious reason for parking to be restricted. These arrangements could usefully be reviewed in consultation with frontagers.

#### Pedestrian links and spaces within the town centre

There are a number of opportunities for creating and enhancing pedestrian links within the centre. These are shown in Figure 19, which summarises the results of a walking audit. Other pedestrian improvements are also identified such as removal of kerbs which act as a barrier to movement for those with mobility difficulties.

There are two key spaces where major enhancements to improve pedestrian conditions are particularly desirable:

- The area around St James' church; and
- Market Square

The principles of potential re-landscaping are



Figure 19 Walking audit

discussed in Chapter 6.

The core area of the centre (with intensive active frontage, retail and other facilities) would benefit from a streetscape manual incorporating a public realm strategy, paving and materials code to distinguish the special character and function of streets and spaces.

### A suggested Meridian Walk

Louth already has an interesting sculpture trail. Identified walks with points of interest can be an important part of boosting tourism and visitor numbers, and also can be a useful way of involving local artists and communities in improving the town.

A new pedestrian route is suggested, which could be integrated with the Sculpture Trail, but its route is aligned to connect with the 0' (Greenwich) Meridian at various points through the town (see Figure 20). This walk could be signed and linked to other paths and routes in and around Louth. Each of the intersect points could be marked with a public art feature, each one different from the other, and perhaps reflecting the locality in which it stands. Different artists could be commissioned for each Meridian Point. The plan identifies 10 Meridian Points, by way of example.



Proposals for the Gatherums could create a new key marker on the Meridian Walk





Meridian Point Description

- 1 The disused railway track converges on the Meridian as it approaches the town from Ludborough. If the Meridian were marked with vertical posts or features, this would be visible from the railway path.
- 2 The first accessible Meridian Point in the town, and marked appropriately, it would lie to the rear of the industrial area, and a means of access from the railway path would have to be found.
- 3 River point. A marker where the route, the River and the Meridian meet. This could have a water theme
- 4 Eastgate near Northgate. This part of Eastgate is relatively wide, and there is scope to make a prominent statement of the Meridian, perhaps crossing the full width of the street, such as a permanent bright beam of light on the Meridian alignment across the street.
- 5 The existing path between Queen Street and Kidgate is underused. By tapping in the Meridian walk on a north-south alignment, this could become a route focus in the town's footpath network, giving direct access from this point into the main shopping area, and also (potentially) Kidgate car park. The proximity of schools at this point means that this location would also lend itself to an educational theme about the globe.
- 6 There is a pub called the Boar's Head where the Meridian crosses Newmarket. Here is the refreshment opportunity along the Meridian walk. Also the Livestock Market is opposite, so this provides another theme at this point.
- 7 The Meridian passes through a cemetery. Apart from the opportunity to route the path partly along the Meridian at this location, the Cemetery provides a further potential theme for a marker. The cemetery lies next to the livestock market. Upon redevelopment, the opportunity could be taken to create a path on the line of the Meridian connecting the two sites
- 8 This is the southernmost point in Louth where the Meridian is easily accessible. There is an existing path to the east, and one could be created to the west (see below). The land is rising here, and there could be views across the town. The marker here could be a vertical feature, so that it is visible from paths (9 and 10 below)
- 9 Not a marker as such, but an existing path which could be reinforced, especially where it crosses the B1200. The existing route could link to the tourist and recreation areas of Kenwick Park and Legbourne to the south east.
- 10 Not a marker as such but the opportunity to create a footpath link from Marker 8 to the west to link up with Hubbard's Hills.

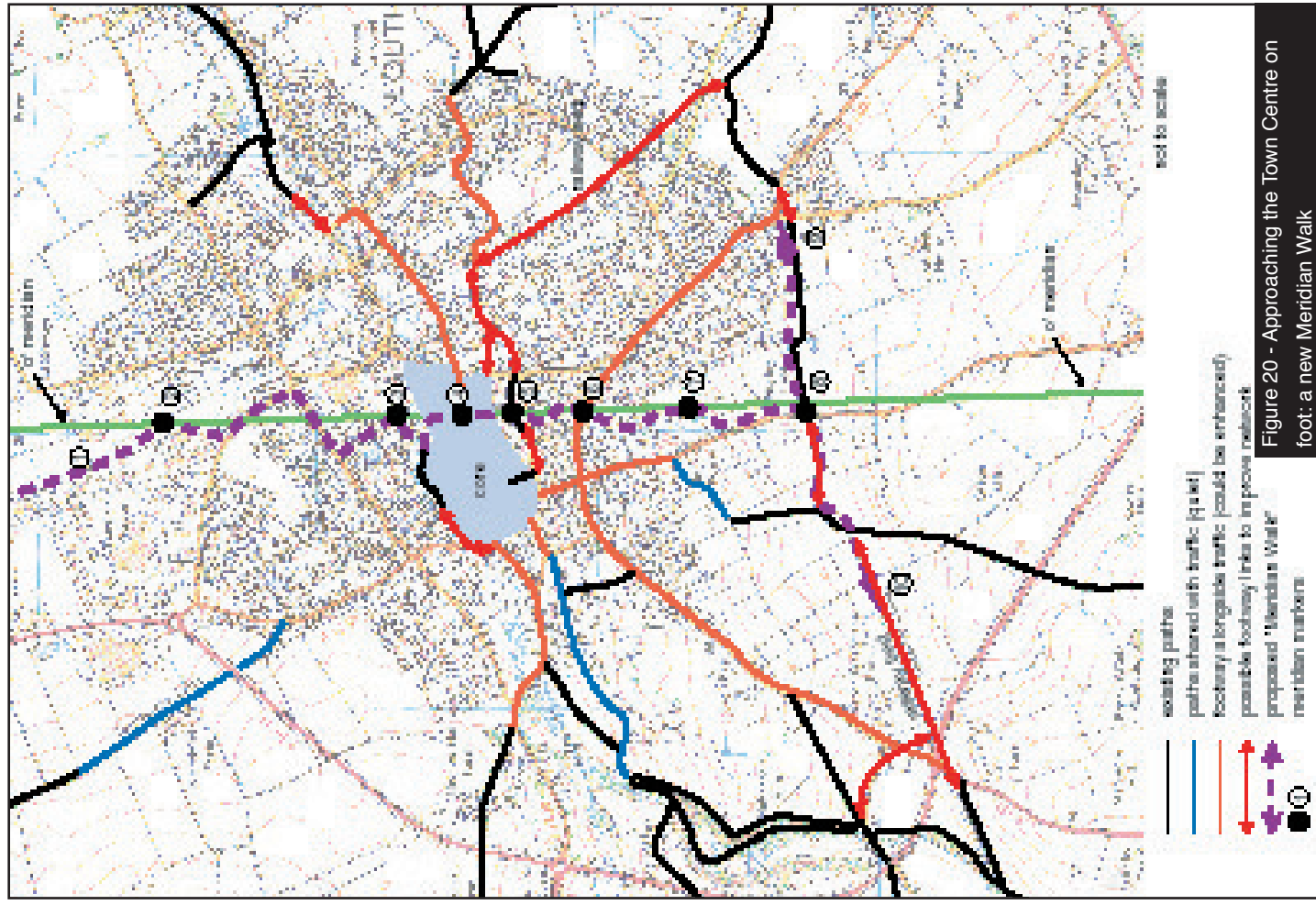


Figure 20 - Approaching the Town Centre on foot: a new Meridian Walk

## Chapter 5 – Urban design strategy

### Strategy elements

The proposed strategy has nine core elements:

#### i) *The primacy of the street*

The street network provides the lifeblood of the town. Yet in places vehicles dominate at the expense of pedestrians. Excessive tarmac, road markings, over-sized junctions and visually intrusive parking undermines the quality of the town. A range of measures is proposed for reintegrating streets more closely back into the overall fabric of the town, particularly in terms of their social functions and their appearance.

- Identify and conserve the essential historic qualities of the town as an outstanding environment in which to live and work.
- Allow opportunities for the Town Centre to remain the living commercial heart of the town, able to adapt and evolve to serve changing needs.
- Retain a sensitive balance between all activities in the town, and especially between the need for private motor access and parking and other activities including pedestrian access.

that are particularly problematic for the mobility impaired or those with pushchairs. In these instances streets lose their role as social places – with little space for interaction. This is a greater issue in Louth as there is so little calm public space for impromptu meeting and public use space - Market Place and Cornmarket are prime examples.

A key aim should therefore be to make streets more convivial. This places greater emphasis on their use as places for people. It acknowledges the need to retain streets as principal movement thoroughfares, but that there is a need to integrate streets more sympathetically, both in use and appearance, into the fabric of the town.

Proposals outlined in Chapter 4 therefore include traffic calming, claiming unused or underused or unnecessary carriageway space for the pedestrian and acknowledging principal pedestrian crossing places. Landscape detailing should seek to reintegrate road surfaces with pedestrian and other surfaces, blurring some distinctions between vehicular and pedestrian surfaces (where safe to do so) and controlling the levels of vehicular access through the Town Centre throughout the day and at certain times

during the week. Such measures need to be fully integrated with the wider vehicular management strategy to reduce traffic movements through the Town Centre by traffic routing and the strategic location of primary car parks.



Awkward kerbs for the mobility impaired and narrow footpaths require attention

**ii) Grasping opportunities for new and improved parks and squares**

Hubbard Hills provides a major amenity for the town and wider sub-region, though within the Town Centre public open space is very limited, especially green space. Opportunities should be explored for enhancing the following existing open spaces:

- The Gatherums  
This is the Town Centre's principal green space, but it is not signposted, not overlooked, and is of rather low overall quality. The Groundwork Trust is currently developing landscaping proposals. This work would ideally be developed within the context of the wider potential, discussed in Chapter 6.
- The area around St. James' Church.  
This is an attractive setting for the Church, but not a comfortable space to linger. Although traffic volumes are relatively light down Westgate, speeding can create hazardous pedestrian conditions. Carriageway widths are over-sized and the space unnecessarily dominated by junctions.
- Spout Yard  
A new riverside public open space is soon

to be established. Opportunities should be explored for enhancing connections to the Town Centre and along the riverside

- End-of-terrace gap sites.

These are generally of low quality and poorly integrated into the wider urban fabric. Opportunities for re-landscaping or potential redevelopment should be explored where this would result in improvements to the overall street environment.

- Market Place  
This in many ways is the heart of Louth and yet is completely dominated by traffic and parking on non-market days.

There are unlikely to be any significant opportunities to create new public open space in the Town Centre, not least because of the desire to maintain its tight built fabric. Small existing spaces therefore need to be used more effectively and threaded together via pedestrian routes. Creation of new spaces for people needs to be closely related to the street improvement strategy described above as regards winning new pedestrian space. It also requires a high level of design input to ensure the best use of space available.

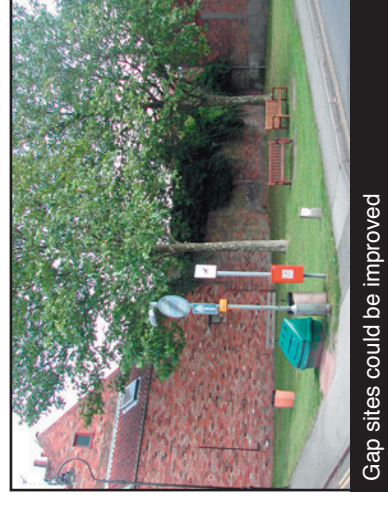
Better signposting would help to raise awareness of the spaces available. Active frontages facing onto these spaces should be encouraged to increase natural surveillance. Several of the spaces have little overlooking at present and feel unsafe after dark. Sometimes the introduction of new buildings would result in a smaller quantity of space – but with significantly better quality.

In principle such spaces should be located on through routes, avoiding dead ends and corners that can be more readily claimed by undesirables.

Some key trees make an important contribution to the Town Centre townscape, and a few new well-placed trees, in moderation, would be appropriate.



Soest, Germany



Gap sites could be improved

### **iii) Encouraging Sensitively Designed Contemporary Architecture**

There is much fine architecture in the town, but its principal quality is the overall appearance of the whole town. Central Louth has a contiguous, integrated urban fabric. It is remarkably free of insensitive or inappropriate modern developments. Legislation already exists, such as the Article 4 Direction, to conserve its historic buildings and fabric. Some excellent initiatives are already in place to restore and improve shop fronts and to encourage use of upper floors over shops, part funded by the Stage One THI programme of works.

However the assessment of the town undertaken as part of this study found that many buildings within the Conservation Area have had inappropriate details inserted in recent years, especially doors and windows. These include UPVC, fake and inappropriate leading, stained glass windows and pastiche, off-the-shelf retro doors. There appears to be a need for much tighter control and enforcement if there is not to be an increasing erosion of townscape quality in the future.

New buildings are often very disappointing. Whilst they adhere to basic principles (such as tight frontage onto roads to maintain the historic building line), new buildings often lack individuality, quality and attention to detail.

In order to address this issue higher standards of architectural treatment are required to accompany planning applications, including greater attention to details. An important aspect to raising the architectural quality of new development will be of course the appointment of architects of real skill and design flair.

In addition there seems to be a very real need to find a quality red brick for all or most new development in the town. Almost every new development in the town over the last 20 years appears to have used a different brick, much at the expense of urban quality.

Much recent architecture is something of a pastiche – generally imitating past styles. Whilst new buildings need to respect the history of the town and the context of its surroundings, there seems to be a real opportunity for a more assured use of contemporary design expression. Should not new buildings ‘speak of their own age?’ The

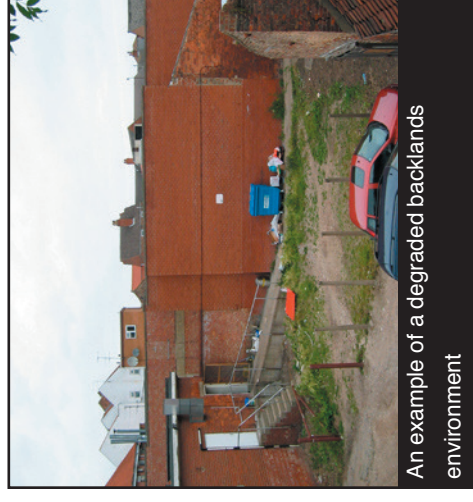
great tradition of British architecture has been just that, and should not this tradition be maintained? A range of measures can be considered for applying a more proactive urban design strategy based on a policy of anticipating change and putting forward proactive suggestions. On Council-owned land there may be opportunities for adopting a design and development procurement strategy that ensures projects are design-led, rather than builder-led to encourage high quality outcomes.

### **iv) Focusing on the ‘backlands’**

The buildings fronting onto the principal streets in Louth are of obvious value in defining the character and quality of the Town Centre, and are rightly protected. However the back elevations and spaces of these same buildings, whilst being often haphazard and largely unplanned, unlike the fronts, they are nonetheless very much an integral part of the overall fabric, quality and history of the town. They invariably appear as an almost chaotic jumble of roofs, extensions, windows, walls and courtyards; a fascinating contrast to their tightly defined and more formal frontages. Despite this variety and richness, the effect can be surprisingly cohesive in a town such as Louth that traditionally uses a limited palette of materials.



The backlands have a unique character and offer potential



An example of a degraded backlands environment



However, whilst the frontages may be well protected, the 'backlands' areas, as they might be termed, have invariably been little appreciated and consequently poorly protected from significant and often quite unsympathetic development, even though they are historically part of the immediate context of protected frontages. These areas are therefore often regarded as 'soft' sites for many kinds of development, with little planning control and little or no architectural consideration being imposed. In many towns across the UK much of the intrinsic quality of these areas has now been lost through low quality or insensitive redevelopment such as service yards, relief roads, large footprint outlets or stores and the like.

In Louth, the character and quality of the 'backlands' still remains substantially intact as well as being widely visible from many roads and footways around the town. They comprise a rich and interesting blend of small back lane and courtyard residential uses and small commercial businesses that give this area its own special quality and sense of 'busy-ness'. Many of these spaces are now used as informal car parks, some have been redeveloped as residential courtyards and others contain delightful small private town gardens, often tantalisingly glimpsed through an

archway or down a passage. To the north of the town centre the traditional linear grain of burgage plots has been swept away in developments such as the Co-op supermarket and the BT Exchange development, but to the south of the Town Centre, much remains intact. It does however appear very susceptible to significant redevelopment and change over the coming years, not least because of the rather marginal uses found in the area.

It is one of the findings of this report that the historic character and grain of the remaining 'backland' areas are retained as an integral part of the historic fabric of the town. A strong recommendation is put forward that these be conserved and that they should not be allowed to become a free-for-all to all kinds of opportunistic development. This is not to say that change should be resisted - these areas offer great potential for new activities - but it is considered important that the essential informal character, the scale of the buildings and plots, the quality of materials and the overall richness of the area generates its own potential that should be conserved and respected.

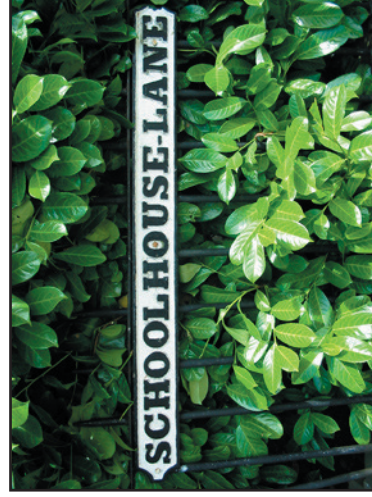
#### v) *Enhancing Legibility*

The town centre enjoys quite good 'natural' or intrinsic legibility. The spire at a distance, the market clocktower, the hierarchy of roads all create a clear overall urban structure. It is relatively obvious how to find the Town Centre by car or by foot without signs. However, parking is not obvious to the visitor and, as discussed in Chapter 4, existing signage tends to route the visitor through the town's most sensitive streets, exacerbating potential pedestrian conflict.

Where signage does exist it is generally of rather poor quality. There is very little on offer for the visitor in terms of way-finding and interpretation. The Tourist Information Centre is particularly troublesome to locate. A more appropriate location would be adjacent to the Market Place if this could be facilitated.

Whereas east-west movement on foot is relatively clear, north-south routes are rather more difficult to navigate. Louth's fascinating alleyways are particularly poorly signposted and entrances often appear as private spaces.

The Gatherums, for example, is probably rarely



found by visitors to the town, and there is a danger that this could be the case with the new Spout Yard public park.

The strategy for improving legibility should not only encompass better signposting, but also the design of public spaces. This would integrate designs for surface materials, street furniture and lighting for instance. This could also draw out particular details of individual character areas.

Lighting in Louth is a very unexploited resource and does little to express the different quarters of the town or to give it different identity. There are poor levels of light along several well-used pedestrian routes. The Town Centre warrants a particular lighting scheme that accentuates key buildings and open spaces to enhance overall attractiveness, boost legibility and enhance personal safety. Out-dated orange low-pressure sodium street lighting should be replaced with white lighting. Low-level lighting could be used to emphasise attractive street frontages and materials. The north-south alleyways also require attention. Improved lighting should enable clear through-vision, whilst avoiding over-lighting.



Better signage and lighting of Louth's alleyways would assist legibility

### ***vi) Promoting active frontages***

The variety of Louth's central area should be protected and enhanced. New development should avoid 'fortress' tendencies – with gated compounds and buildings that turn away from the street. Whereas courtyard development in back burgrave plots is to be expected, and where sensitively designed to be encouraged, opportunities should be explored for extending Louth's network of alleyways linking to principal streets through frontages and providing new pedestrian connections.

There are known to be certain commercial pressures in the town for larger superstores and DIY sheds, for instance. Although planning policy generally encourages such development in and close to town centres, in Louth's instance such development should be approached with caution as the potential impact of incorporating such large format buildings can be very damaging to the traditional fine-grained urban fabric. A large-format DIY store at Charles Street (Site R) would, for instance, be extremely damaging. The site would be much better suited to a fine-grained mixed use scheme that retained existing buildings of character and riverside frontage.

### ***vii) Rationalising parking provision***

This has been discussed extensively in Chapter 4 and includes:

- Exploiting opportunities for re-balancing the location of car parks to minimise unnecessary town centre movement
- Intensify the use of some larger parking sites (potentially including new decked structures) in order to free up one or two smaller town centre car parks for new built development.
- Providing on-street parking where carriageway dimensions allow
- Using paved surfaces to reduce the visual impact of parking bays
- Integrating car parks into the fabric of the town – ensuring they are not just treated as dead space, but wherever possible provide frontage and character, as we show on our BT Exchange proposal in Chapter 6.

### ***viii) Making more of the river***

The river provides a much under-utilised resource. Spout Yard Park is to open up new frontage and a strategy should be developed to open up further publicly accessible river frontage where there is potential – for instance between Spout Yard and Bridge Street. A new Broadbank park could be created on a through route, which could include access through the redeveloped BT Exchange site. Improved connections between the canal basin area and Town Centre could also be targeted.

### ***ix) Anticipating change***

No town can be preserved in aspic. Incremental change will continue to take place as circumstances change and demand intensifies for Town Centre housing and further commercial development. It is important that the urban design strategy seeks to anticipate change wherever possible and offer positive examples of how problems can be overcome and opportunities grasped.



The river is a much under-used resource

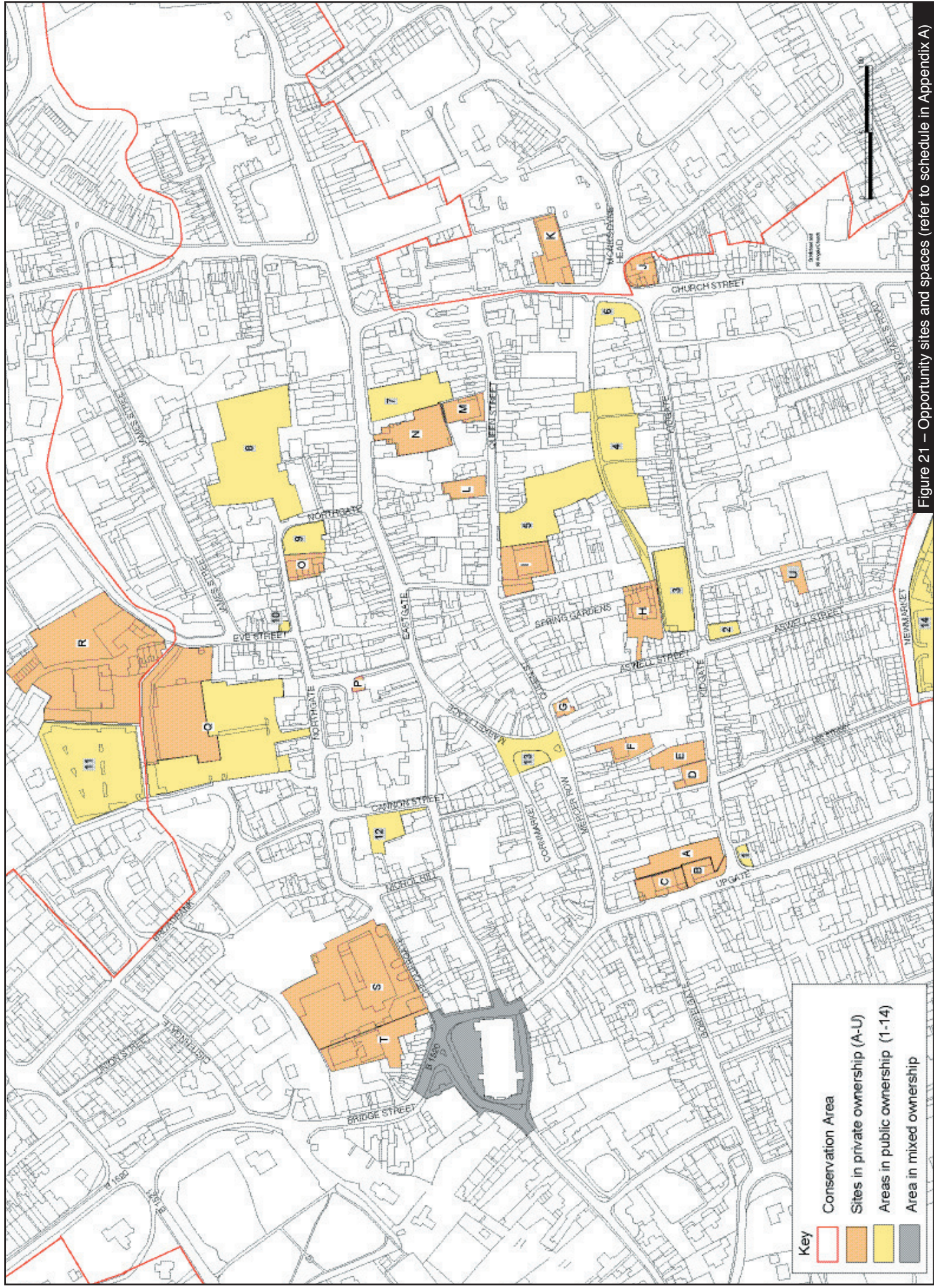


Figure 21 – Opportunity sites and spaces (refer to schedule in Appendix A)