

All-issues response

Delivering a Vision for Prosperity



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Delivering a Vision for Prosperity



Funding
Former Babytime shop, Station Rd West
Pubs
Gipping Way roundabout
Former Poundland store
Former Nat West Bank, Market Place
Cycling
Wildlife
Stowmarket Town Clock
MEAL
Gateway 14
Former Council Office at Needham Market
Dentist

Conclusion



Delivering a Vision for Prosperity

Foreword

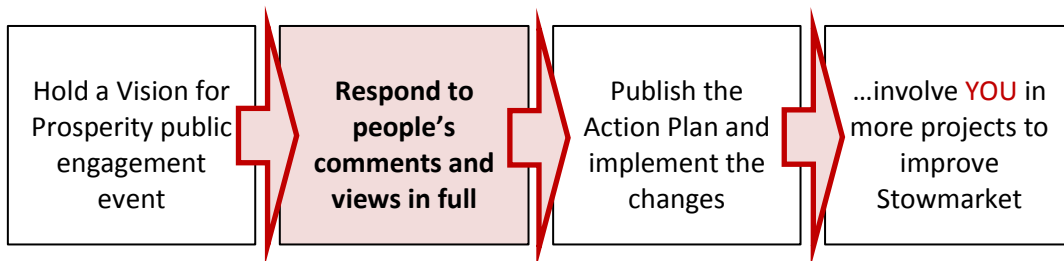
We'd like to thank everyone who took time to express their views at the drop in, online or through their letters. Our partners have shared this journey and we look to them to help us ensure that the people of Stowmarket and the surrounding villages receive the best possible service as we look to the future.

We've listened and here is the first part of the VFP response – setting the record straight, giving some information, and responding in detail to the concerns, thoughts and issues that people raised. There are many different opinions to consider in mapping out the future of the town and our starting point has been to discuss and understand the views of the local community, so that we can move forward together, on the basis of a consensus about **what matters most**.

“There is a lot to be done – but only by imagining the future can we take steps to create it!”

The lessons we have learned during the *Delivering a Vision for Prosperity* exercise are invaluable as we look for more ways to engage with residents and businesses across Mid Suffolk District. We can use these lessons in other communities as there are many common issues and similarities in how people interact the Councils and their delivery partners.

We have used the *Delivering a Vision for Prosperity* initiative to seek the views of local people about the future of the town and we have listened to what they have told us. The preparation of this response and the **Action Plan** brings together some of the key areas of work that we will undertake to achieve our goal of a sustainable town that offers a good quality of life to local people.



Success will depend upon the combined efforts of a range of partners and stakeholders that have an interest in the town. This will mean measurable targets and accountability for implementation. The public will be kept involved with regular updates and opportunities to help shape the direction we take.

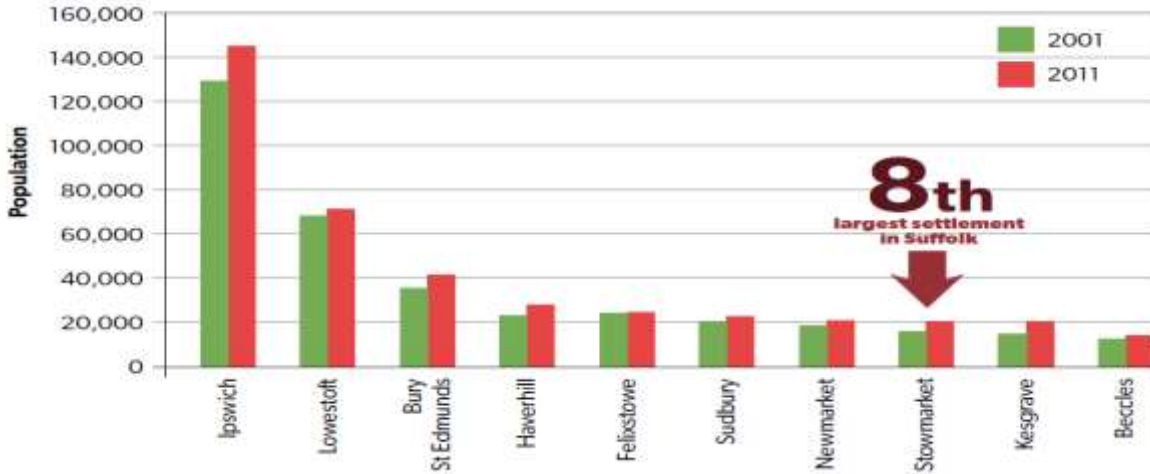
We hope you find this feedback useful and interesting – but please don't think that *“this is it”* – we look forward to keeping *Delivering a Vision for Prosperity* going and evolving as we develop more projects and ideas, and reshape our services to better meet your needs.



Introduction

Stowmarket today

Stowmarket is the main town and key driver of growth and prosperity, with a large sphere of influence as the major social and economic hub for the district. The town has a mix of positive and not so positive aspects.



Stowmarket is the **537th** largest settlement in the country



Comparable in size to **Dorchester** in Dorset, **Leek** in Staffordshire, **Harwich** in Essex

Ranked **616th** retail centre in the UK

145 shop units in the town centre

26,868m² of shop space (about 280,000sqft)



Vacancy rates just 5.5%: National average is 11.5% vacancy



Stowmarket has just **24 out of 118** of the major "High Street retailer brands"



25% fewer leisure uses than the average town centre



Just **1 in 12** think Stowmarket is an attractive place



25 weekday trains to Ipswich and London



16 weekday train services to Cambridge



Over **1MILLION** railway passengers per year use the station



8 bus services serving the town and its neighbouring settlements



60% of journeys are made by private car



Delivering a Vision for Prosperity

Growth ambition

Like every town in the country, Stowmarket is looking to improve. We can't do it alone, so there must be a framework of organisations, plans and strategies in place to deliver. We are fortunate that the Government, our regional, County, Local and Town leaders are working together to deliver growth and prosperity.

The Government's *Plan for Growth*¹ (2011) was published with the aim of achieving strong, sustainable, and balanced economic growth throughout Britain. Its four ambitions are to:

- Create a more competitive tax system;
- Make the UK one of the best places in Europe to start, finance and grow a business;
- Encourage investment and exports to make a more balanced economy;
- Create a more educated workforce.

The national *Industrial Strategy*² (2017) sets out the Government's plan to create an economy that boosts productivity and earning power throughout the UK. The white paper focuses on the 5 foundations of productivity – ideas, people, infrastructure, business environment and places – with a clear and complementary vision for each. Each foundation is supported by a range of policies designed to provide businesses with certainty and reassurance that the UK will continue to have a competitive edge.

The New Anglia LEP *Strategic Economic Plan*³ (NALEP 2017) looks ahead to 2036, but focuses on the actions we need to take over the next four years to help secure long-term success. It is a dynamic and living blueprint to guide the work and investment of many partners.

The *Suffolk Growth Strategy*⁴ (Suffolk County Council, 2013) set out the following four aims:

"First, Suffolk needs a prosperous and vibrant economy which inspires people to succeed. Second, Suffolk needs a high quality, responsive education and training system. Third, Suffolk wants to be an exemplar in tackling climate change. Finally, Suffolk needs all people to be kept safe from harm, to be able to live healthy lifestyles and to be valued."

The *Suffolk Growth Programme Board* agreed in December 2016 to:

- **lead:** the Suffolk Growth Framework at officer level, and through collaboration across the County ensure GPB outcomes are communicated to all staff and members.
- **deliver:** Suffolk's economic vision and achieve impact through the coordination of programmes and projects directly managed by the GPB and through facilitated work with partners
- **influence** (through engagement): public / private stakeholders, businesses and politicians about the priorities for growth in Suffolk and the opportunities for improving the region's competitive position and prosperity
- **manage risk:** by understanding upcoming risks / unknowns, and responding to these through a flexible & innovative approach to economic growth

*Suffolk Chamber of Commerce's Manifesto*⁵ (2018) sets out our broad aims and ambitions to maximise the positive role of businesses through promoting a 'Suffolk PLC' model, aimed at creating inclusive economic growth and improved levels of prosperity for all in Suffolk.

¹ www.gov.uk/government/publications/plan-for-growth--5

² www.gov.uk/government/publications/industrial-strategy-the-foundations

³ newanglia.co.uk/our-economic-strategy/

⁴ www.suffolk.gov.uk/assets/Jobs-careers-and-business/economic-development-and-inward-investment/Suffolk-Growth-Strategy-Summary-Booklet.PDF

⁵ www.suffolkchamber.co.uk/greater-ipswich/manifesto/



Business is at the heart of the community and is the backbone of Ipswich area’s drive for robust economic growth. As part of both the Ipswich and Bury St Edmunds catchments, Stowmarket also shares the key aims of the Chamber’s Manifesto⁶ to

- Drive forward economic development
- Make the town accessible to business
- Get the infrastructure right
- Create an attractive and vibrant town centre
- Improve procurement systems to grow local business
- Promote Stowmarket as an addition to the offer at Ipswich and Bury St Edmunds, not competition

It’s not all about the Government, District, County or Town Council: delivery of services relies on a *network of organisations*. Without the cooperation and collaboration of these bodies and initiatives – and many more besides - we wouldn’t have such a wonderful town as we do!



Delivering a Vision for Prosperity

Lastly, but **most importantly**, we have looked to you, the residents, businesses, visitors and users of Stowmarket to help us shape our town of the future.

⁶ <https://www.suffolkchamber.co.uk/greater-ipswich/manifesto/>



Review of the drop-in engagement event

On 4 October 2017, residents, businesses, visitors and users of Stowmarket and its surrounding catchment villages were invited to attend a drop-in display event at the United Reformed Church, Ipswich Street. The drop-in was run alongside the Councils' Joint Local Plan consultation display as a joined-up process.

Publicity for the event was undertaken through

- Press releases, including a front-page headline in the East Anglian Daily Times on Friday 29 September 2017.
- Erecting over 250 posters in prominent positions in Stowmarket and in the surrounding villages
- Dedicated web site
- Text included on the Joint Local Plan publicity material, including on a flyer posted to all residences and businesses in the District
- Social Media using the hashtag #VFPStowmarket
- Cross referencing from associated public sector organisations

Additional engagement

Following the drop-in event, hard copies of the material were made available at Stowmarket Library, Stowmarket Town Hall, Needham Market Library, Elmswell Library, and the new Council Office at 54 Ipswich Street, Stowmarket. Display material was also available online at www.midsuffolk.gov.uk/vfpstowmarket. Additional comments on the projects were invited before 5pm on the 10th November and are taken in to account in this analysis.

Drop in displays format

In addition to Joint Local Plan information and other partner organisations' displays, 30 VFP display boards were erected around the room that set out:

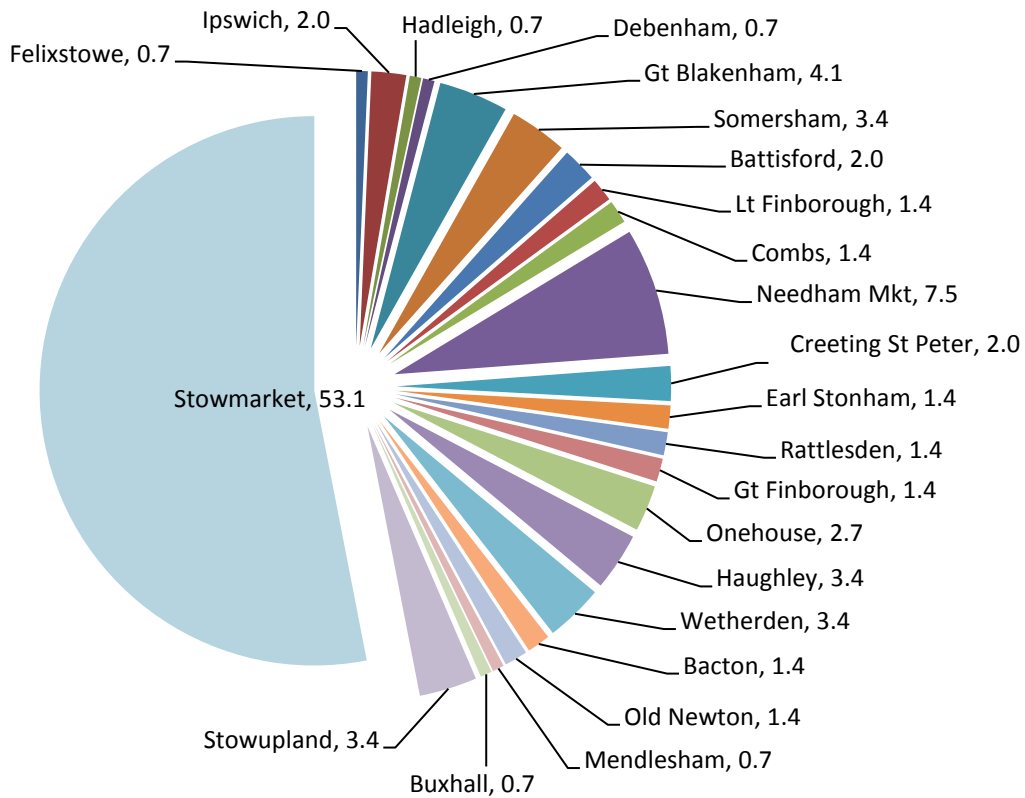
- a welcome & introduction to VFP
- an opportunity to say where you came from – for statistical analysis
- a timeline of historic growth and change for Stowmarket
- the national/regional perspective demonstrating the growth agenda
- a series of statistics and facts about the area
- a roundup of some young people's views about the area
- a series of questions about the future of Stowmarket and the area. This prompted the use of sticky dots to "vote" on some questions, and some written opinions expressed through the use of post-it notes.

Attendance

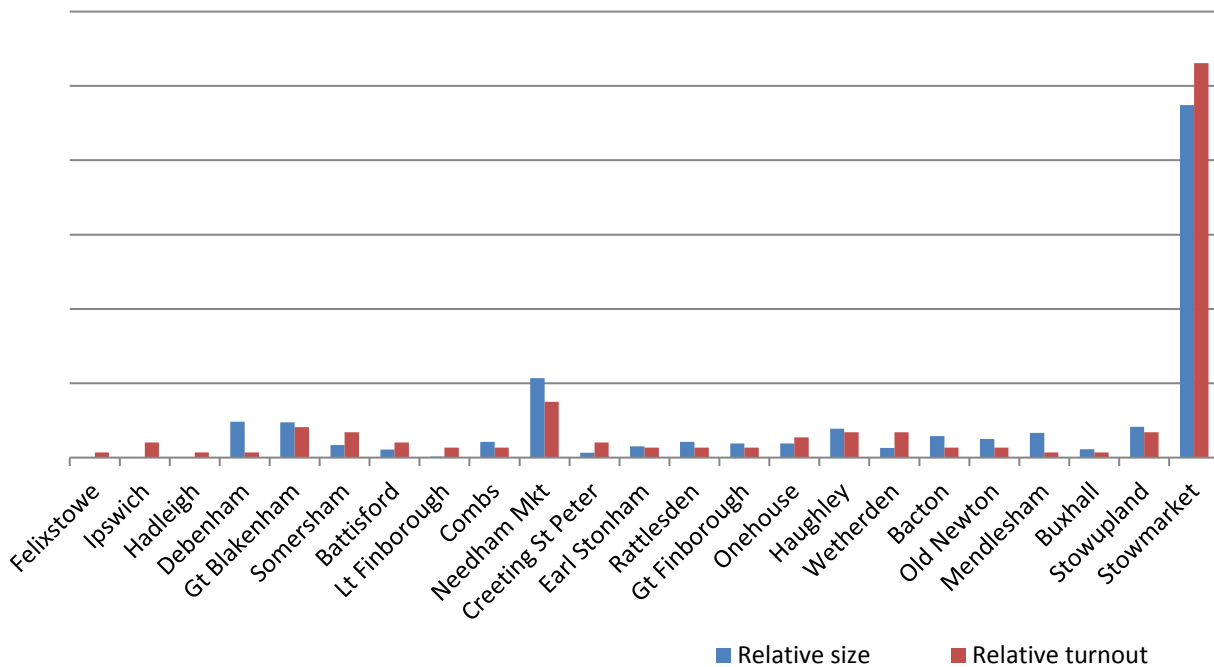
Nearly 400 people attended the drop-in event and left hundreds of comments. Of particular value was the ability for people to talk directly with Councillors, Officers and partner organisations to discuss their views openly.

The breakdown of attendees is based on the exercise that invited people to put a sticky dot on a map to show where they have come from. Not all visitors stuck dots on the map, and although it was not an O/S based map, it gave a good indication of the broad spread of people in attendance.





The response rate appears skewed towards people of Stowmarket itself, but when the size of the population in each settlement is taken into consideration (2011 Census based) the proportional representation from each place is consistent.



Responses

Many people did not respond directly to the questions, instead choosing to make more generalised comments on post-it notes. Because of this, the analysis does not always directly follow the format used in the displays. Comments may be grouped by topic/area/theme and addressed appropriately.



Responses to the young people's views

Responses to the young people's views

Although comments were not specifically invited in relation to these boards, there were a number of comments made both in support of and in reaction to, the views expressed. Some opinions were expressed that the views of the young people was not representative of *all* young people, having only been sought from a group of year 8/9/10 students at Stowmarket High School. Others noted that their own experience of working and engaging with other young people corroborates many of the views expressed.

Some attendees expressed surprise that young people had been asked for their views before older age groups, while others understood the need for young people to have a voice as they would not generally attend a drop-in display event.

Below is a roundup of the responses left in relation to the young people's views

Context (what the young people said)	Attendee's comment
STRENGTHS board. Young people say there is good public transport.	No buses up Poplar Hill now so where is the good bus service?
Students were invited to liken the town to a famous person in order to express their views about "character" and "image". They chose Donald Trump, Susan Boyle, Simon Cowell, Amy Winehouse and Phil Mitchell. Overall feedback was that Stowmarket is an older person, out of touch with young people, and with no hobbies or interests	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None of the above • You must be joking! • Could not agree more
Students designed "houses of the future", and created new "town Plans" for Stowmarket of the future.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very good idea [urban renewal] • Young people move away
THREATS: the students felt that there was not sufficient choice of houses in terms of size, type, location, or price.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support small local builders? • Poor local plot vs self-builder match making. Reactive nor proactive

Context (what the young people said)	Attendee's comment	Officer observation/ response
<p>Opportunities: students identified a number of possible projects that could be undertaken to improve Stowmarket</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listen to the young people then! • Proper cycle track needed all around town, not just painted lanes on the roads • We had perfectly good middle school that closed. The buildings have been empty for 2 years. Cost of security and recent boarding up must have been atrocious. 	<p>Young people's views will be taken into consideration alongside comments left through the <i>Delivering a Vision for Prosperity</i> engagement exercise. The second stage of the engagement will be to develop a delivery plan and work up some ideas within defined timescales.</p>
<p>Strengths. The students comment on some of the best bits of Stowmarket, but also observe that Stowmarket's best is not up to the same standard as other places' best.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What's wrong with our cinema? Its great if you take the trouble to look what is on. Give it a try you'll be pleasantly surprised • The cinema is fine • The cinema may be small and only have one screen but it makes it more affordable for everyone • Town centre is an absolute disgrace. Better quality shops and restaurants needed. • The Sinma is fine [sic] • Sort the roads out in Stow. Not all routes need to go via Gipping Way – it already cannot cope • No soul • Town dead at 5pm. It's a joke, never alive, it's dead at 2pm • Parking restrictions need to be enforced as illegal parking is a nightmare for residents in the town centre <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Cheaper parking, better promotion 	<p>This mix of short-term "quick win" and longer-term solutions is what creates confusion and uncertainty. Therefore, the <i>Delivering a Vision for Prosperity</i> work will establish what projects can take place and the timeframe that people can expect them to be delivered. The inter-dependency of projects will also be set out, so some people may not think a particular project is important, or even the "right solution", but in the overall context of the "bigger picture" for the Stowmarket area, it will be a logical element.</p>

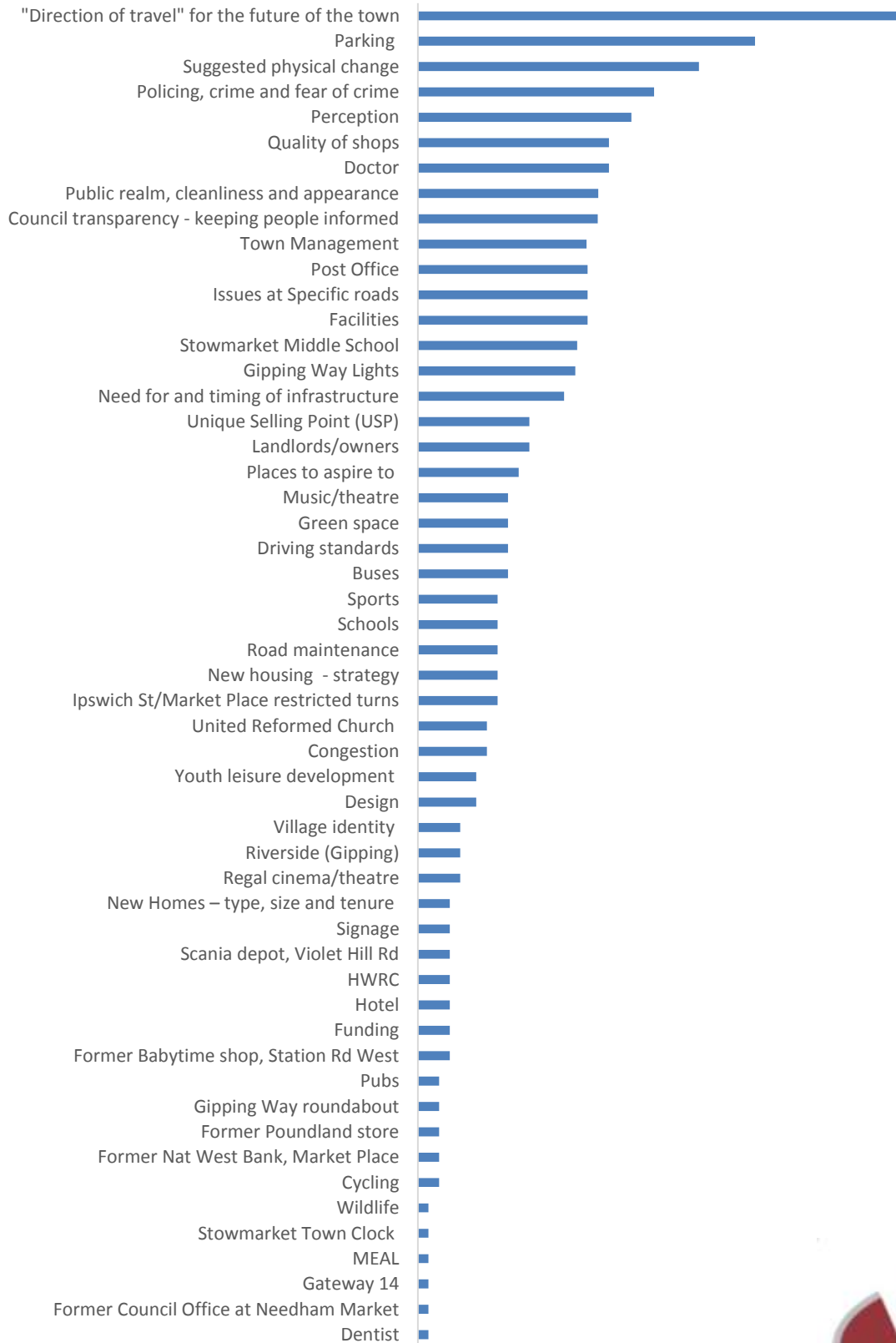
We want to do our part, so we have listened to the opinions, ideas and concerns, and prepared a document called *Delivering a Vision for Prosperity Action Plan* for Stowmarket. This identifies the intended key projects and action points, and sets out who will be responsible for their implementation, and when. As *Delivering a Vision for Prosperity* progresses, the town and its catchment area will have a clear focus for improved quality of life and confident business decisions.

We have also prepared this detailed response to the issues raised and hope that the answers to many day-to-day questions can be found. The response has been prepared with help from all of the District Council's partners, so it is up to date and accurate.



Top priority THEMES and PROJECTS

A “sticky dot exercise” asked people to say which are the most important *themes* and *projects*. The responses highlighted that there are a lot of areas that need general improvement, intervention or change. As well as the dots exercise above, many comments were left that were much more detailed, and also explored many other themes too, such as crime and the fear of crime, specific sites, and driving/parking issues. The table below shows these issues as a proportion of all responses. These issues explored in more detail below, addressing the comments that people made.



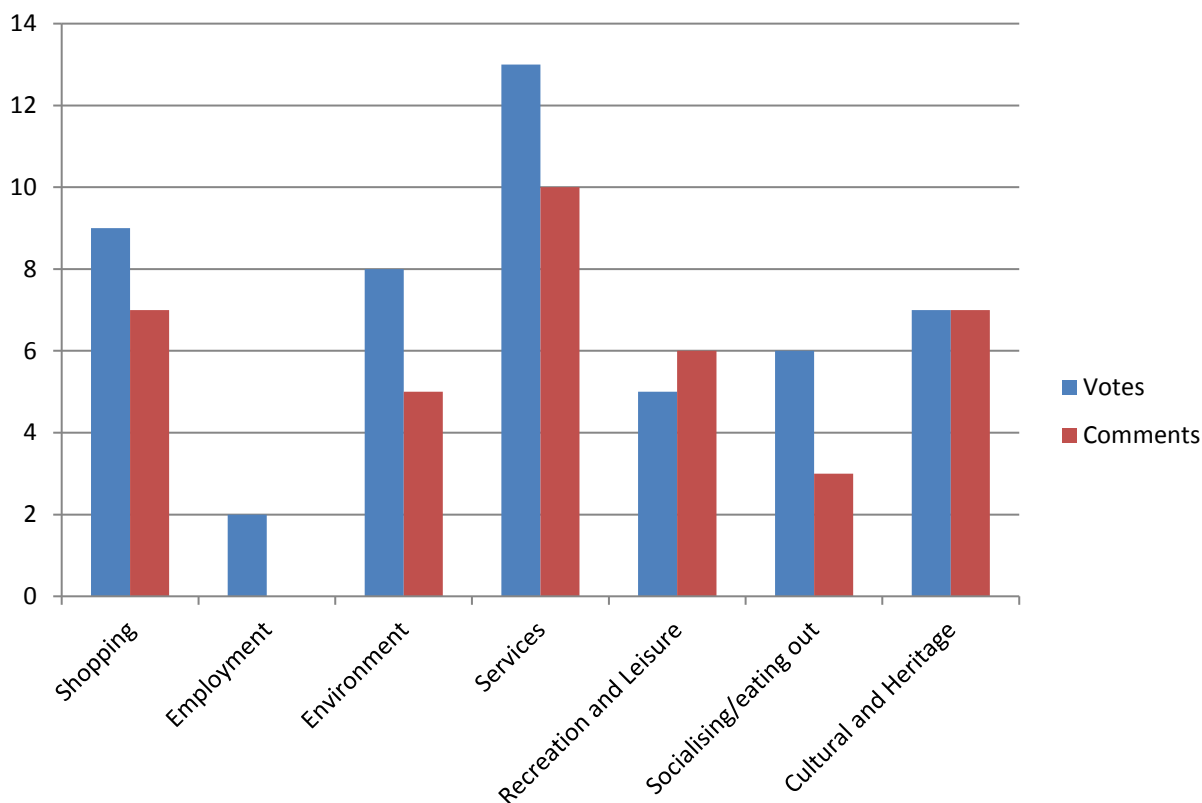
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"Direction of travel" for the future of the town

It is clear that the town centre is no longer fit for purpose, or large enough for the population of Greater Stowmarket. Indeed, it has been likened to a town with a village centre. In order to make it a destination it needs to move out of the shadow of Bury St Edmunds and Ipswich, and find its own niche. Overall, as described in the Council's retail study⁷, "The greatest challenge facing local planning authorities will be how to revitalise the fortunes of struggling small and medium sized centres and market towns that do not have the critical mass of retail, leisure and other uses to compete for more limited investment and development; including the centres in Babergh and Mid Suffolk Districts."

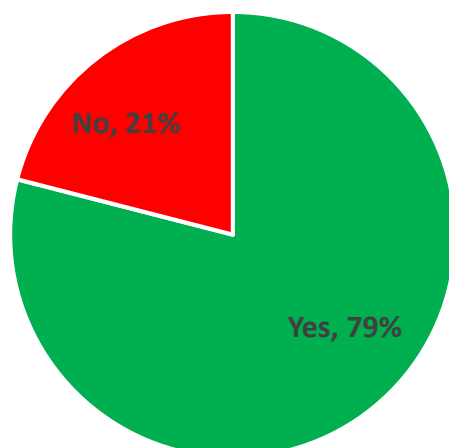
We asked what the focus of the town centre should be by voting with sticky dots. The votes are shown in blue. We also asked people to leave comments about the future role of the town centre, and counted the number of comments in each theme area, which are shown in red.



There is a consistency in the output, but what is most apparent is that people want the town centre to be all things for all people, and not focus on a particular aspect (such as retail or leisure). Within such a varied role, support was expressed or different zones or quarters to identify particular roles, rather than a mix of uses throughout the town centre. This reflects operator preferences, such as leisure operators like to be close to other leisure uses in order to create a "critical mass" that identifies it as a location for leisure – so the whole is more than the sum of its parts. This is reflected in the public's preferences, as set out below:

⁷ <http://www.midsuffolk.gov.uk/planning/planning-policy/evidence-base/current-evidence/joint-town-centre-and-retail-study-sept-2015/>

Percentage of responders who think that zones or quarters should be used to help Stowmarket create an identity



Vacant shops

The low vacancy rate of 5.5% (less than half the national average) is a very good sign of local confidence in Stowmarket, with demand from small independent retailers in the town. Vacant units tend to be in places “off circuit” such as Bury Street, which means the *centre of town* is strong but that people don’t usually use the *whole town centre* – only Market Place, Ipswich Street and the Meadow Centre. The Council’s Retail Study states “*We also recommend that the frontage along the northern part of Bury Street (from Union Street West down to the southern end of Thurlow Court) is taken out of the PSA and SSF. This will allow for the natural contraction of this end of the town where required and prevent long-term vacancies.*” However, the Council considers that instead of reducing the town centre, there should be positive improvements to encourage more footfall and growth, thus strengthening the centre rather than contracting it.

Rental values

The rental values have been criticised as the reason there are not so many “High Street shops present, however the rental values are set by the owners at a market rate – if they are too expensive, then the price will be lowered to make it attractive until someone takes out a lease. It is common also for owners to offer incentives such as rent-free periods to help get businesses established. This market stability is reflected in the low number of vacant units. Therefore, the Council does not consider it necessary to intervene in rental values.

A healthy town centre should have a mix of rents, based on a mix of unit size. A high rental value is a sign of retailer confidence in a place, which in turn means that there is demand for units because there is a strong local footfall – since people like to be there. Locally, Woodbridge experiences this high confidence, and in turn that itself attracts more people. Stowmarket must seek to garner higher rents in this way to prosper.

Business rates

Business premises have a “rateable value” which is worked out by the Government’s *Valuation Office Agency* (VOA) (part of HMRC) based upon the open market rental value of the premises at a baseline date of the 1st of April 2015. To calculate the actual business rates to be paid per year, the rateable value is then multiplied by a “multiplier” which is also set by Central Government.

Historically all properties have been revalued every five years, but the revaluation due for 2015 was pushed back to 2017 by Central Government. In this review, all “non-domestic” properties – ie commercial premises⁸ – were reviewed and the new

⁸ Non-domestic properties isn’t just commercial premises – it also includes car parks, toilet

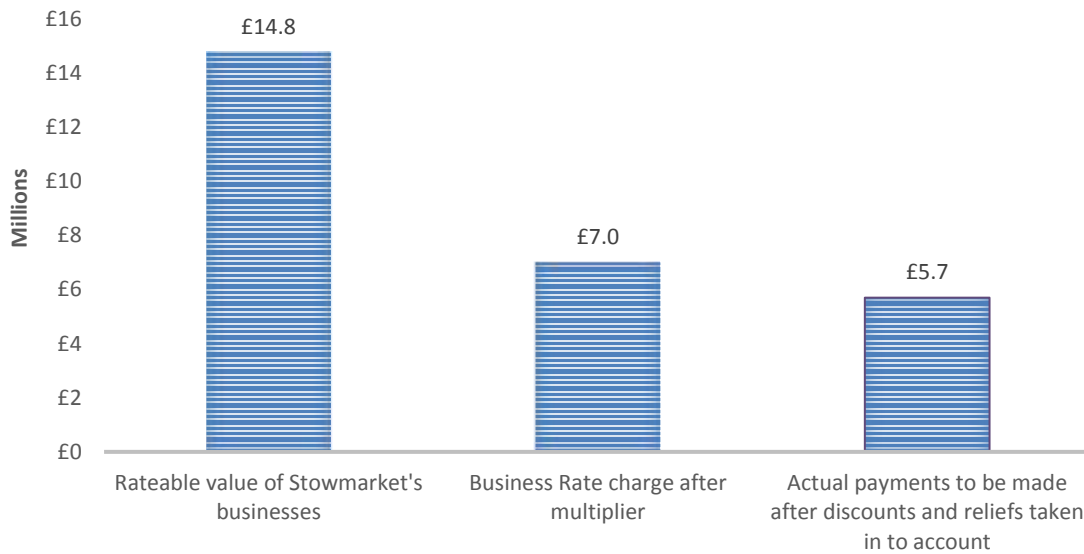
values were introduced with effect from the 1st April 2017. In the recent autumn budget the Government announced the intention to move to 3 yearly revaluations after the revaluation in 2022.

The District Council merely bills the occupier and collects the revenue based upon the information provided by the VOA. The Business Rates collected are shared 50/50 between Central and Local Government. Looking to the future the Government is considering a “100% Business Rates Retention model” so that Local Authorities keep a greater share of Business Rates instead of it being sent to Central Government, and this will replace the current core grant that they give the Council to operate its services. This scheme is still being developed but Central Government wants to give Local Authorities greater control over locally-raised resources.

Business Rates in Stowmarket for 2017/18

For 2017, the total *rateable value* for Stowmarket is £14,775,915, with a gross charge of around £7m. After various reliefs and discounts are taken into account the net rates actually collected is around £5.7m.

**BUSINESS RATES IN STOWMARKET
IN £MILLIONS**



There are 601 companies with rateable values which if they were split evenly, the mean average bill is £11,647. However, not everyone pays the same as the rateable value depends on many factors, not least the size of premises. In fact, 4% (just 25 very large companies) pay 40% of Stowmarket’s overall charge. This reduces the mean average for the rest (which are usually small local companies) to £7,291.

Retail rates

In terms of retailing in the High Street, 176 shops are registered (29% of companies liable for business rates) with a total rateable value of £4,997,130. After discounts, shops pay about £2.33million, which is 34% of the total rateable value for Stowmarket. Shops have always paid more than industrial premises.

In the 2017 review, the percentage change in total rateable values from 2010 to 2017 is shown below for the East of England and England as a whole.

blocks communication masts, sub-stations, ATM’s etc which people may not associate with commercial premises



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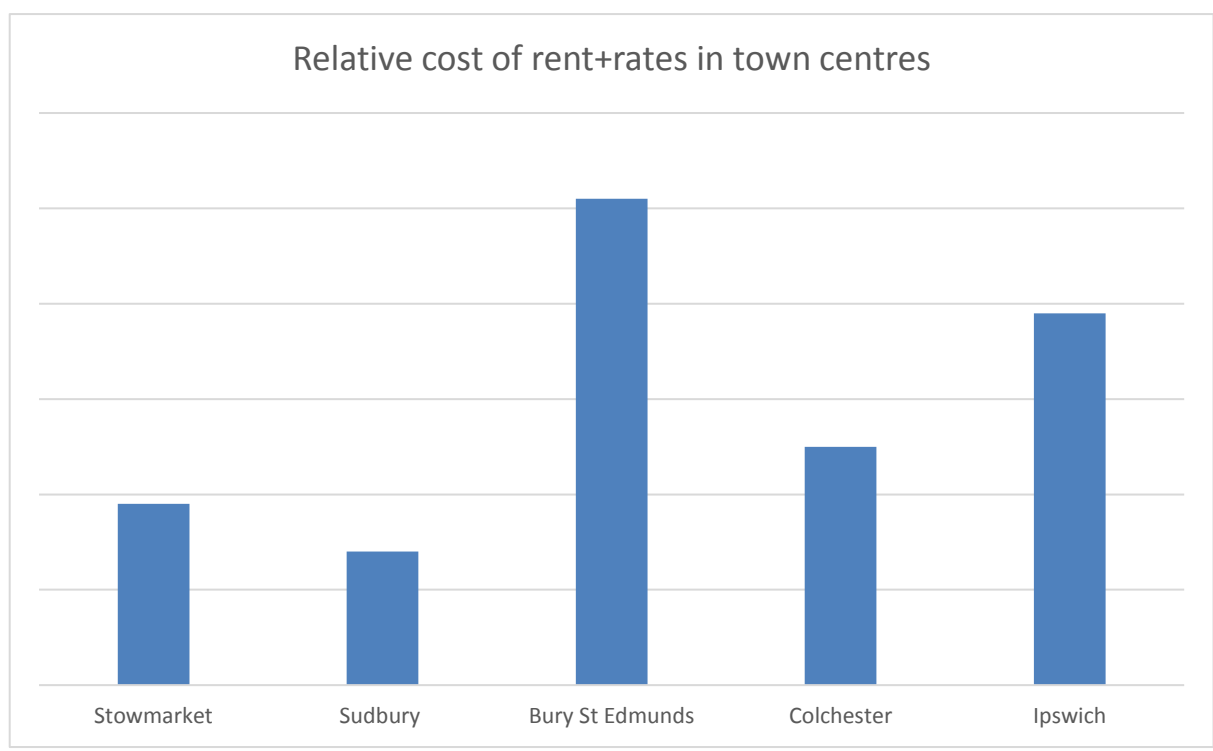
Area	% change in rateable value by Sector				
	Retail	Industry	Office	Other	All
East	-4.0%	2.3%	2.4%	13.2%	3.9%
England	4.7%	4.0%	11.3%	15.5%	9.1%

Source Valuation Office Agency data as at 1st August 2016

It is clear that overall in the eastern region the rateable value for retail premises reduced unlike all other sectors that increased. This means that overall, Business Rates are less of a burden on operators in retail in this region from 2017 onward.

Rates comparison

Although there is a view that small, local, independent shops are not opening due to Business Rates, the reality is that these operating costs are relative. It is not really possible to directly compare rent or rates between towns because there are so many factors, not least operator preference, footfall (how busy a street is), size of premises, location in the town, proximity of other similar shops and competition, quality and layout of premises, upper floors or just ground floor use etc. However, the examples below show that Stowmarket's combination of rent and rates is much lower than neighbouring towns. This means that rent and rates are not necessarily putting retailers off, as although their potential profits are lower, their actual costs are too.



As at 15/12/17 there are shops to let in the following places:

- Stowmarket – “Millpets” Ipswich Street**
 - Floorspace: 1600sqft (158sqm) (plus upper floors)
 - Rent: £22,500 (payable to the landlord)
 - Rates: rateable value is £16,500, multiplier 46.6p
actual business rates payable ($£16,500 \times £0.46.6$) = £7,689
 - Total rent+rates: £30,189
 - £/sqft p/a: about £19/sqft (£196/sqm)



2. Sudbury – North Street (former North Street Studios)
 - Floorspace: 1,659sqft (155sqm)
 - Rent: £21,500 (payable to the landlord)
 - Rates: rateable value is £21,500
multiplier 46.6p
actual business rates payable ($£10,575 \times £0.46.6$)
= £10,575
 - Total rent+rates: £22,075
 - £/sqft p/a: about £14p/sqft (£142/sqm)

3. Bury St Edmunds – 3 Cornhill (former “Betfred” unit)
 - Floorspace: 1732sqft (161sqm)
 - Rent: £65,000 (payable to the landlord)
 - Rates: rateable value is £49,250,
multiplier 46.6p (estimate)
actual business rates payable ($£49,250 \times £0.46.6$) = £22,950
 - Total rent+rates: £87,950
 - £/sqft p/a: about £51/sqft (£546/sqm)

4. Colchester – 26 Priory Walk
 - Floorspace: 2874sqft (267sqm) (+ upper floor)
 - Rent: £47,500 (payable to the landlord)
 - Rates: rateable value is £47,750,
multiplier 46.6p (estimate)
actual business rates payable ($£47,750 \times £0.46.6$) = £ 22,251
 - Total rent+rates: £70,001
 - £/sqft p/a: about £25/sqft (£262/sqm)

5. Ipswich – Carr Street (part of the former Co-Op)
 - Floorspace: 841sqft (73sqm) (plus upper floors)
 - Rent: £25,000 (payable to the landlord)
 - Rates: rateable value is £16,750,
multiplier 46.6p
actual business rates payable ($£16,750 \times £0.46.6$) = £7,805
 - Total rent+rates: £32,805
 - £/sqft p/a: about £39/sqft (£449/sqm)

Rate relief and help for small businesses

Notwithstanding the generally lower rent and rates in Stowmarket, the Council operates a *small business rate relief* scheme (not just for shops but for all types of small businesses). Under this scheme, if the rateable value is under £12,000 and it is the ratepayers only property (ie an independent not a chain store) then they do not pay any rates. For properties with a value that does not exceed £15,000, the ratepayer will receive a percentage reduction in their bill of up to a maximum of 100%.

In fact, over 200 (around a third of all businesses) pay no rates or only a proportion of the bill due to *small business rate relief*. These discounts and exemptions equate to over 19% of Stowmarket’s overall liability. In other words, the bigger companies pay a larger chunk of the overall bill, and the “small guys” pay nothing or a discounted amount.

In addition to the reliefs, additional help is offered for those businesses that have a significant increase in rates following the 2017 review. The Councils automatically apply the “supporting small business relief” which caps the annual increase to spread the cost.



Charity Relief

Charities and registered Community Amateur Sports Clubs are offered a discretionary relief from rates on any business property which is wholly or mainly used for charitable or “club”, purposes. Relief is given at 80% of the rate bill where the organisation is philanthropic, religious or concerned with education, social welfare, science, literature or the fine arts.

Pub Relief

The Government has also introduced a new relief scheme for pubs that have a 2017 rateable value of below £100,000. Under the scheme, eligible pubs will receive a £1,000 discount on their bill for 2017/18 and 2018/19. This relief is automatically awarded by the Council.

Overall business rates

Overall, the Council is required by the Government to collect Business Rates, but it does what it can to support smaller independent businesses through local reliefs. Therefore, Stowmarket’s weak retail experience is not considered to be only due to Business Rates.

“High Street Brand” shops

The selection of shops in Stowmarket has been criticised as there are not enough “High Street Brand” shops. Similarly, other people want more independent shops to create a more local-flavour and demonstrate Stowmarket’s individuality from other centres. As shown in the VFP display material, Stowmarket has fewer than 20% of the “top High Street Brands”. Of those it does have, they tend to be the more discount brands.

The brands that people named as preferred to see are:



There are three main reasons that the “big brands” are not present in Stowmarket:

1. Footfall: Stowmarket and its catchment simply doesn't have a big enough population to justify to the big operators opening a store in Stowmarket. Those that do live in Greater Stowmarket also choose to visit Ipswich or



Bury St Edmunds over Stowmarket, which However, through the new Joint Local Plan there will be a significant increase in house building over the coming 25 years which is likely to attract the attention of more big companies.

2. Image – This project has already identified the need for a branding and promotion of Stowmarket. This not just advertising to bring people in, but to raise the profile across the board and attract the attention of the big names, investors, and those who can bring in new life and new investment capital to refurbish existing, and develop new, buildings.
3. Unit availability – Most shop units in Stowmarket are older stock that are not energy efficient, and lack the servicing arrangements that modern retail needs (such as 24hr rear access for lorries). Furthermore, the average unit size of 185sqm (1,995sqft) is significantly lower than most “high street brand” shops require, and that statistic itself is skewed by the ASDA and B&M unit presence. Without these two, the average unit size is probably under 100sqm (1,076sqft). Lichfields Planning Consultancy noted in a report in 2012⁹ “High street national multiples have increasingly sought larger modern shop units (200 sq. m +) [2,153sqft]”.

A lot of units are also old and small so may have steps or tight doorways etc, so the national brand shops may not wish to locate there as they will always seek to ensure that their shops are accessible to all. In short, Stowmarket doesn’t really have the shop units that are of interest to the big high street brands.

Variety of shop type

National planning policy differentiates shop types into “Use Classes”. In the past, planning policy sought to protect and encourage “A1” shop uses: ie those where you can buy objects. Stowmarket’s high street reflects this retail-heavy approach. However, the changes in retail trends over the last 30 years (not least internet shopping and out of town developments etc) means that Stowmarket is unbalanced as a shopping *experience*. People now like to visit a place for its ambience, coffee shops, street scene, leisure and entertainment, not just to buy objects. The current dominance of A1 shops means that Stowmarket can’t offer such an experience. There needs to be more other types of uses, such as “A3” cafes/restaurants, “D-class uses” such as bingo halls, meeting rooms, entertainment venues, and other services like health centres.

Demolition

There is caution around possible demolition as it depends on which buildings, but there is support for removal of 1960s “brutalist style” buildings, particularly in Ipswich Street. Memories of previous proposals to demolish the United Reformed Church were aired, with equal support and resistance to demolition of that building. Overall, some demolition is accepted by the vast majority in order to move Stowmarket forward.

Parking

The District Council operates most of the main car parks at Iliffe Way/Meadow Centre (ASDA), Milton Street (B&M), the Ipswich Street (next to the cinema), and Union Street and Bury Street. Charges are levied to cover costs such as business rates that are payable every year on the car park, and for maintenance and upkeep of the surface. It is impractical for the Council to remove parking charges as the actual costs of providing them would have to be borne by other sources, probably through a rise in Council Tax. Relative to other places, the parking is considered to be very cheap, particularly as ASDA will refund the costs of parking at Iliffe Way upon production of the ticket and a minimum spend.

⁹ South Lakeland Retail Study 2012 Para 2.15:

<https://www.southlakeland.gov.uk/media/4430/ever04a-sldc-retail-study-2012-combined.pdf>

Other main car parks are run privately, including by NCP and RCP at the railway station, and by a contractor at the former Poundland store and they have their own terms, conditions and enforcement that is outside of the control of the Council.

However, despite being cheap, the Council could explore incentives, such as vouchers for a free coffee, or an extra hour for free which would be pleasant “rewards” that people may obtain each time they paid. Cafes and shops may be interested in this as a different kind of incentive scheme to bring people to their premises. Timing and pricing of parking could also be reviewed to ensure that when there are special events taking place, that parking costs is not a reason not to visit and take part.

In most of Suffolk, on-street parking offences are still criminal and dealt with by Suffolk Constabulary. The Constabulary deploys its resources according to threat, harm and risk, so dealing with parking offences is a lower priority and complaints of illegal parking will not automatically result in police attending them. However, officers will attend where there is a clear offence that poses a risk to public safety, and police will consider prosecution where criminal, community engagement or vulnerability issues are identified. Where there is a particular issue with a particular location which is causing community concern, the Safer Neighbourhood Team will deal with it appropriately. Parking offences include:

- parking obstructions (including skips and trailers)
- yellow lines
- loading restrictions
- zig zag lines
- waiting restrictions
- limited parking
- disabled parking
- Police no-waiting signs

Civil Parking Enforcement

A working group comprising of representatives from the Police, District and Borough Councils and the County Council is in place to progress the transition of on-street parking enforcement in Suffolk from the Police to local authorities. Such a change is known as *Civil Parking Enforcement (CPE)*. The aim is to ensure that an effective system is created, allowing all parking enforcement to be fully coordinated across the county.

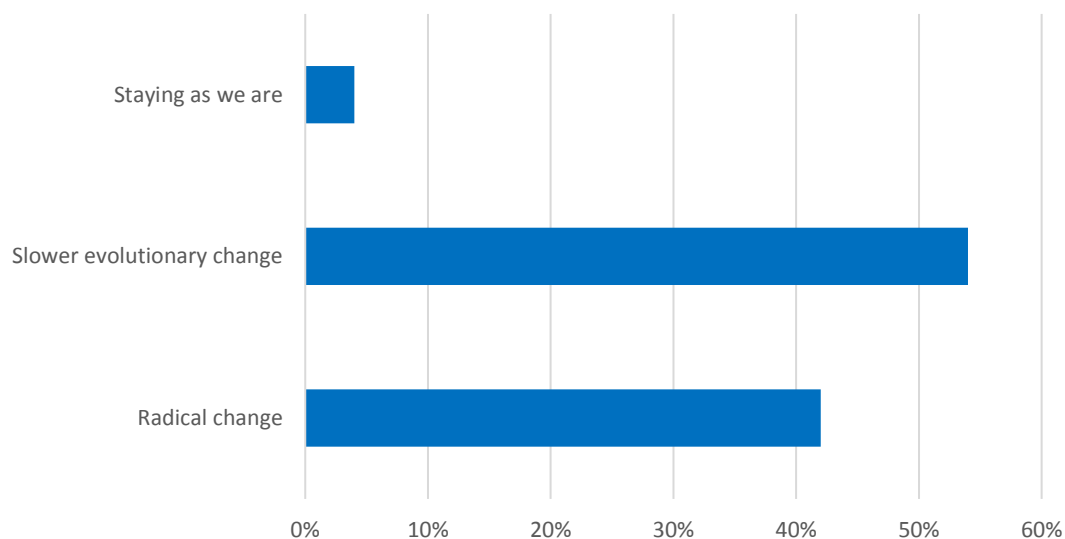
In early 2017 the District, Borough and County Councils agreed to seek powers to introduce CPE by April 2019. An application for the necessary powers was submitted to the Department for Transport in April 2018 for a start for CPE in April 2019. We are awaiting confirmation from the DfT when CPE can commence. In the meantime, the Police will continue to deal with illegal parking in Suffolk (except in Ipswich where CPE has successfully operated since 2005).

Suggested physical change

A few ideas were put forward for smaller-scale physical changes to the town, but larger-scale and strategic schemes that comprehensively changes the way the town works were not put forward.

With memories of the previous attempt to develop the south/west side of Ipswich Street still relatively fresh in people’s minds, there was some considerable support for investing in significant changes in Stowmarket through urban renewal, regeneration and/or redevelopment. 96% of responders favour such change, but it is fairly close as to whether that should be evolutionary or radical change, with evolutionary change just edging ahead.





It was suggested that the shopping function of the town could be changed through having an out-of-town development, but these are contrary to planning policy, and have significant detrimental effects on the town centre – ie they accelerate and worsen decline. Retail-only centres may appear attractive to users, but the lack of variety and choice is contradictory to what people say they want from their town centre.

It is clear that there is a need for action to improve the centre, but going out-of-town is not the answer. Moving particular users out of the town would limit the impact of large lorry deliveries. However, more control over delivery times and routes would enable the operators to remain in the town where it is best placed for shoppers, without the disruption of the delivery.

Previously-developed (brownfield) land is not abundant in Stowmarket, but areas along the Gipping corridor around Navigation Approach were highlighted as places that should be re-used. In particular, more should be made of the river, and landmark buildings of quality design and publicly accessible uses should be built in prominent positions – especially the land on the corner of Gipping Way and Navigation Approach. A planning permission already exists for retail warehouses on that corner, but the site has not been sold to an operator yet.

Pedestrianisation of Ipswich Street and Market Place was a very common request. The current layout is confusing to pedestrians, and is abused by drivers ignoring signs and parking restrictions. Pedestrianisation can only be possible if there is an alternative route, and provision for buses/taxis and loading for the retail users. The Council could investigate alternative management for the high street, such as pedestrian zone times, loading restrictions and other measures to create a safer, more attractive pedestrian experience as well as to allow cafes to operate on-street seating.

A study in 2017 by the [Mid Suffolk Disability Forum](#) highlighted a number of concerns around wheelchair access and some simple amendments that could be made to street furniture to make it more navigable to people with disabilities. This includes basic repairs and maintenance, but also things like adding a contrasting band to the black bollards, more, clearer signage and highlights on the nose of steps. Some of these recommendations are already being progressed via the Town Council, the District Council and other members of the Mid Suffolk Disability Forum. Some more significant changes can be addressed through regeneration proposals to ensure Stowmarket is fully accessible for everyone including those with disabilities.

More use of the market square for events was widely supported. Creating a layout that encourages users to dwell in the town for longer is one of the keys to a successful and prosperous town centre. An interesting option was suggested to cover over part of the high street to protect it from the weather. Although Stowmarket has one of the warmest and mildest climates in the UK, a cover could offer other benefits



such as:

- 24-hour venue space,
- a unique experience that offers something Ipswich and Bury St Edmunds do not,
- a controlled environment that will result in improved behaviours (reducing the fear of crime)
- a comprehensive change of image (branding) that will reinvigorate Stowmarket and attract new visitors and users.

Overall, a fresh look at the town centre could reap rewards without a complicated regeneration project that has vast costs and long timescales.

Policing, crime and fear of crime

A Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) is responsible for ensuring the policing needs of their communities are met as effectively as possible, bringing communities closer to the police, building confidence in the system and restoring trust. Police and Crime Commissioners will give the public a voice at the highest level, and give the public the ability to ensure their police are accountable. They will aim to cut crime and deliver an effective and efficient police service within the force area. They will do this by:

- holding the chief constable to account for the delivery of the force
- setting and updating a police and crime plan
- setting the force budget and precept
- regularly engaging with the public and communities
- appointing, and where necessary dismissing, the chief constable

Tim Passmore, The Police and Crime Commissioner for Suffolk, has published his second Police and Crime Plan, following consultation. The plan gives the Constabulary the clarity it needs to take the PCC's vision forward and gives the public a clear picture of the PCC's objectives to make the county a safer place in which to live, work, travel and invest.

Suffolk Constabulary's workforce comprises 1097.5 funded police officer posts, 107 funded PCSO posts and 923 funded members of police staff and is reinforced by specialist officers and staff in organisations such as the National Crime Agency, the Eastern Region Special Operations Unit and the Counter Terrorism and Intelligence Unit.

While 'visible' police officers and staff are important to maintaining the trust and confidence of the public, by necessity, the resources devoted to tackling 'hidden harm' such as the cyber-crime unit are not always uniformed police officers.

Police officers and specialist police staff must work covertly to identify perpetrators of hidden harm and bring them to justice. If we are to tackle hidden harm, judgements about officer numbers, efficiency and effectiveness need to move beyond the outmoded narrative of police officers numbers and 'visible police officers on the streets' to a more sophisticated one recognising the more complex policing landscape.

There also needs to be a recognition that keeping our communities safe cannot now be achieved solely by visible police officers but requires a multi-skilled, multi-agency workforce comprising police officers and specialist staff working covertly and overtly together across regional, national and global boundaries.

More locally, the *Safer Neighbourhood Team* (SNT) works with you and partner agencies in your community to identify and address local concerns. The SNT in Stowmarket covers 73 parishes in total across the Mid-Suffolk area.

Stowmarket SNT has the following priorities:

- Work with vulnerable people to minimise exposure to criminality.
- Reduce anti-social behaviour at public facilities and on school grounds.



- Reduce the risk of child sexual exploitation to children in care.

The Stowmarket Safer Neighbourhood Team (SNT) hold weekly meetings and each month appoint locations for 'High Visibility Patrols' (HVPs). These locations are selected by analysing the data and liaising with local residents.

We continue to develop intelligence and drug activity in the locality by way of foot and mobile patrol and 'street a week' questionnaires. These are designed to encourage local residents to express any concerns in their neighbourhood. If these concerns are not of a police nature, we can refer them to the appropriate agency if considered appropriate and necessary.

Stowmarket Police Cadets help to progress current policing initiatives in the local community. They assist with events including the Suffolk Show, town fairs, carnivals and charity events. They also support the important work of safer neighbourhood teams and are taught basic knowledge in a variety of policing activity. This includes law, for example: definitions of robbery, burglary, theft, public order, Police and Criminal Evidence Act, along with arrest and custody procedures. Cadets will also get an insight into how to deal with a road traffic collision, first aid, officers safety, conflict management, the caution and stop and search powers.

Suffolk Police has a big interest in teamwork within the cadets, which is why we also practice and perfect the discipline of drill. We take pride in our uniform and cadets are taught how to be disciplined and independent on how to clean and maintain high standards. Cadets also have the opportunity to visit different departments in the police service, such as Air Support Unit, Dog Section, Firearms Unit, Roads Policing and Scenes of Crime unit. The Cadets meet at Stowmarket High School on Saturdays 10:00-12:00 during term time.

Perception

The perception of Stowmarket is more than its USP and branding – it is what people think of the quality of life, especially compared with its past and with its neighbours. Overall people still consider Stowmarket to be a village that has exploded in size to become a town, but that the services haven't grown at the same rate, so Stowmarket is punching well below its weight.

The derogatory term "Stowmartian" that is sometimes used to describe residents is not welcome, and the negativity that that brings is hindering the town – overshadowing its positives. However, many people think that Stowmarket's worst enemy is its own residents who have a negative attitude towards change, growth any who choose to focus on Stowmarket's failings. Only by being positive about our town with outsiders be positive too.

There is a strong perception that standards are falling. Aside from littering and antisocial behaviour, Stowmarket's residents are becoming louder and more yobbish, with drinking on the street, selfish parking, and other nuisances being cited. More than this though, the public – particularly the young people – are not getting involved with the town's events or the running of the town. Possibly fuelled by the commuter convenience, people are not taking ownership and responsibility for Stowmarket – instead they complain that others are not doing enough to make it better.

The Council and Town Council agree that society has changed and that people's needs, behaviours and beliefs are changing so Stowmarket is not what it used to be, but then nowhere can remain the same. There are far worse places to live, work and visit – as mentioned by several responders. As the statistics used at the drop-in display show, Stowmarket is not bad, but isn't inspirational, and it is that element of perception that the *Vision for Prosperity* must seek to address.

Town Pastors continue to be present on the streets of the town on Friday evenings between 8pm and approximately midnight. This Christian presence is greatly appreciated by traders and door staff, the Police with whom we have good liaison, and indeed the young people who frequent the Town and Recreation Ground.



The Town Pastor operation comprises 3 teams: Pastors who patrol, Base prayers who from café 52 in Crowe Street support the pastors, record activity, and provide a communication conduit, and Home Prayers who for an hour each pray for the Pastors and events as they occur. We currently have: 14 active pastors, 8 active base prayers, and 19 active home prayers, drawn from Christian Churches in Stowmarket and the surrounding area.

We have an aspiration over coming years to extend the work to include Saturday nights, at a later time, to cater for the patrons of the Licensed premises which stay open into the early hours of Sundays. This aspiration will only be realised when sufficient personnel are recruited from local Churches to enable it. However we do feel that this increased presence would have a beneficial effect on the safety and wellbeing of those who may be vulnerable on a night out, and to the general atmosphere in the town at those times.

Quality of shops

Pound shops, discounter brands, the number of funeral directors and estate agents, and proliferation of charity shops are mentioned as being bad for the town. Whilst the town does have a higher than average number of charity shops, they do fill otherwise empty units, adding to the variety of choice. It should also be noted that charity shops also perform a social function. Funeral directors and estate agents are also performing a service, and are good local businesses. There may be value in considering the grouping and position of these uses within the shopping frontage so that such services do not dilute the strength of the town's offer.

Most "high street brand" companies use computer software to understand the local socio-demographic make-up of the place before they decide whether to invest. Put simply, they will only invest if there is the "right sort of customer". If there is the right sort of customer, then they will also look at which other companies are already there as they usually only like to be located next to other similar companies. None of them really want to be the first and/or only one to invest, just in case it isn't successful.

Because of the many changes in retail industry over the years, and the recent recession, big companies are reluctant to invest in small towns unless there is a major regeneration project – something they can "buy in to" and help to design to ensure it meets their needs now and in the future. Without a "big bang" development, getting big companies to invest in high streets is a very difficult task. After all, if they wanted to be here they probably would be already. This is why we need to look carefully at options for major change, which is discussed in more detail elsewhere in this document.

However Stowmarket can attract some of the big names. Prezzo opened relatively recently and now a new Costa Coffee drive through has been approved near Cedars Park, with construction scheduled to commence prior to 2020. Permission has been sought to secure the details for a McDonald's drive through on the adjacent land. A new family chain restaurant will follow thereafter.

Doctor

GPs deal with a whole range of health problems. They also provide health education, offer advice on smoking and diet, run clinics, give vaccinations and carry out simple surgical operations. GPs usually work in practices as part of a team that includes nurses, healthcare assistants, practice managers, receptionists and other staff. Practices also work closely with other healthcare professionals, such as health visitors, midwives, mental health services and social care services. If your GP cannot deal with a problem, then you'll usually be referred to a hospital for tests, treatment, or to see a consultant with specialist knowledge.



Like dental practices, GPs in England are independent contractors (working as either individuals, companies, partnerships and non-profit organisations) that provide NHS services via a contract with NHS England. GP Practices are available at

- Stowhealth in Violet Hill Road, Stowmarket
- Combs Ford Surgery in Combs Lane, Combs Ford
- Needham Market Country Practice in Barking Road, Needham Market
- Woolpit Health Centre in Heath Road, Woolpit
- Mendlesham Health Centre in Chapel Road, Mendlesham
- Manor Farm Surgery in Church Road, Bacton (a branch of the Mendlesham Health Centre)

All the above GP Practices are currently (as at April 2018) accepting new patient registrations.

There is a perception that you can't get an appointment to see a doctor in Stowmarket, but that isn't correct – it's just that sometimes they are busier than other times. Note that there is also a wealth of information and assistance available to you online. GP Practices also offer online appointment bookings or repeat prescription ordering: you can log on to online services directly from NHS Choices: each available service is listed under "Online facilities" on the "Overview" page of the GP profile.

Public realm, cleanliness and appearance

Street furniture is co-ordinated and public areas are kept in good order. Although there are inevitably instances of littering, graffiti, dog fouling and discarded chewing gum, the overall level is much lower than many places. Town Council Maintenance Staff carry out regular litter picks of certain parts of the town to supplement the work of Mid Suffolk District Council's street cleansing team who carry out the majority of the litter picking. Town Council staff also litter pick their own land, including the Recreation Ground.

The 2017 Mid Suffolk Disability Forum survey noted that there are lots of shops with products stacked outside which gives the street a livelier appearance and encourages people to come in to browse. However, sometimes this isn't appropriate because of the narrow paths that the stock narrows further. This coupled with a plethora of A-boards and hoardings can make it difficult for wheelchair users or partially-sighted users.

The appearance of individual buildings is a matter for the owner/tenant. If a building is in very bad condition – ie dangerous – then the Council can serve a notice ordering its repair. However the majority of buildings are just "tired" and in need of annual maintenance. The Council has in the past offered a grant scheme for simple maintenance of commercial buildings and will launch a similar scheme again.

There are a number of flower beds, baskets and planted areas throughout Stowmarket and the nearby villages, that add greatly to the rural charm of the area. These are mostly maintained by Parish and Town Councils with significant volunteer time and money. Stowmarket in Bloom in 2012 was a success, and it could become an annual promotion.

Council transparency - keeping people informed

Councillors have a very busy Council work schedule, however most work with their communities and if not always immediately visible, all are easily-contactable if needed. Our 'Open for Business' Team working with members are always pleased to support and speak to business and some excellent links are made, and our Communities Team is in constant liaison with community groups and organisations. Of course, whenever the opportunity arises, it is good and desirable for councillors to be able to meet and talk with people. Councillors continue to be just one of the links between people and the Council, it really is not a different world.

Councillors are answerable to the communities they serve, and all councillors, regardless of political persuasion, do their best to make transparent decisions



which benefit the District, to achieve this it may be necessary to consider also the broader picture of what is happening across Suffolk and beyond. No comment received is ever treated with contempt, it is just that any decision made will never suit everyone, balancing and arriving at the right decision can be very difficult and much thought is given to what is right in each situation, that is one of the challenges of being a Councillor.

Of course, there will be differing political views between members – That is democracy. However, although they might not actually agree with the outcome of decisions, members have respect for another member's viewpoint. This is a healthy position not a 'fighting' one, as it ensures that decisions are not made lightly.

There is a minority of the public with the perception that Councillors or Officers at Mid Suffolk District Council "Do whatever they want, and take back handers". This is simply untrue. The Council respects the views and experience of our communities, and recognises that projects can be enhanced by developing the public input. Processes exist where recommendations received are duly considered and weighted, those that are considered to provide real value to the project and the wider community can be taken account of.

Better communication is a challenge to many organisations, and Mid Suffolk District Council is no exception. The Councils have over recent months developed several different ways to make it easier for people to communicate with the Council. From a single telephone number going to our call centre in Stowmarket, an improved web site designed to enable even poor signal strength and mobile phone connectivity, and Customer Access points in Stowmarket where one to one support is available. For those who are unable to use these methods there remains the option of a letter to the council's new office at Endeavour House in Ipswich.

Better communication and listening is really part of what this *Vision for Prosperity* consultation is striving to achieve; we endeavour to encourage our communities to take ownership through the consultation process, and Members are keen to see that any consultation is followed by a phased delivery plan so that our communities will know that there will be a result. Both Officers and Members realised the importance of looking at 'Greater Stowmarket' in developing this Consultation and considerable weight was given to ensuring that those who looked to the town as a service centre should have their voice heard. We intend the consultation should be successful in developing the needs of this 'greater' area while taking account of the needs of Mid Suffolk's principal Market Town.

Considerable Officer time was spent in the preparation and delivery of this consultation. Historically consultations in Stowmarket have not produced a large public attendance and certainly not into the evening period. In the run up to the consultation day Officers worked with Stowmarket High School to receive some views of young people as to how a future Stowmarket should look. The open day drop in event itself had a very good attendance with a differing range of views received from quite a diverse number of people. We considered that students and those commuting and working at a distance, receipt of whose views we certainly valued were still able to undertake part in the online consultation if they so wished.

Town Management

Stowmarket has a rich history of being a market town. Edward III granted the town a market charter in July 1347 and the market continues to serve local people every Thursday and Saturday in the Market Place. The market features a wide range of stalls selling quality goods at competitive prices including meat, fish, fruit & vegetables, greetings cards, flowers, eggs – and even vacuum cleaners! The vibrant market takes place in the town centre throughout the day and is full of local hustle and bustle.

The first Friday of the month boasts a local Farmers' Market in the Market Place which features speciality traders selling products sourced from within 30 miles of



Stowmarket – keeping food miles very low. The Town Council is keen to attract new traders to the Farmers’ Market which usually takes place on the first Friday of every month in the Market Place. The current charge is just £10 per stall to trade on the market.

Basic services like grass cutting, cleaning etc are undertaken by different agencies so sometimes places receive different levels or frequency of care. For example: sometimes grass cutting can be done on one side of the road but not the other as it is a different organisation with the responsibility for the maintenance. The three tiers of Council (Town, District and County) do work together to try to deliver services, but if there are specific examples then please report them to the Council office.

Some responders have suggested weekly town meetings get local people involved, however this has been tried in the past and nobody turned up to the meetings. This does not mean that a forum could not be trialled again. However, people are encouraged to attend the regular existing Town and District Council meetings, in order to take part in local decisions.

Similarly, some people suggested a youth forum to reflect views of young people. There are several youth groups including at The Mix who are active in local matters and anyone interested in these matters should explore what is already available.

Post Office

At the time of the *Delivering a Vision for Prosperity* consultation, there was some public concern regarding the potential closure of Stowmarket Post Office located in the *One Stop Shop* in Ipswich Street. The Post Office is a private company, often but not exclusively run as a franchise, and as such decisions made about its presence are commercial, and outside of the Council’s influence.

In November 2016 the Council became aware that the owners of the *One Stop Shop* had given the Post Office one year’s notice to close the Post Office service, as they intended to sell the business. The Council contacted the Post Office offering support to keep the Post Office in the town centre and giving suggestions for potential alternative premises. In February 2018 it was announced that the Post Office would remain in-situ and that the Nisa brand operator would take over from One Stop.

Issues at specific roads

People have raised individual concerns about several roads in the town, particularly relating to congestion, lorries, road works and parking, and have given their views about how things could be made better. The opportunity to address some of these issues, such as a need for more car parking, can be addressed as new development comes forward.

In respect of ‘rat running’, it is difficult to prevent drivers choosing routes that they perceive as being better for them as individuals. Being close to the A14 means that it is difficult to prevent some through traffic filtering through nearby communities, but the County Council is working with *Highways England* to improve the A14, and the Suffolk Chamber of Commerce is leading a partnership campaign called “*No More Delays on the A14*” which has already resulted in some works around Ipswich and Cambridge. We have a designated lorry route network (including roads such as Finborough Road), to keep HGV traffic off smaller routes. Ultimately, much of the HGV traffic in and around Stowmarket will be accessing Stowmarket and the villages itself, rather than passing through.

As part of long-term growth plans, new routes into Stowmarket will be explored making greater use of the northern and southern roads such as Junction 49 off the A14.



Facilities

Stowmarket has a suite of leisure facilities and local services including a Cinema, The Mix youth centre, John Peel Centre, Museum of East Anglian Life, a mainline railway station with first class links to London, a market twice a week, many shops, a good library, sports & leisure centre, regular bus services, and many pubs and clubs, schools and churches. This is linked by a network of green routes, cycle paths and open spaces. There is an excellent Doctor's surgery and several dental clinics, charity support organisations with premises for hire and walk-in support as well as longer term support.

It is difficult to imagine what additional facilities are NEEDED to make a successful town, but there are options to explore around developing facilities to meet local people's ASPIRATIONS. Suggestions include an Ice Rink – which would put Stowmarket on the Regional Map as the nearest such facility is in Chelmsford. There is also demand for cemetery space in Stowmarket.

Stowmarket Middle School

Both Stowmarket and Needham Market Middle Schools closed in 2015 in the County Council's School Organisational Review. Since then, both sites have been bought by Mid Suffolk District Council in 2017, and boarded up to prevent break-ins and vandalism.

Planning application are being prepared for submission late in 2018 for residential development. Icenl will be the development partner as the Council plans to develop the sites itself rather than sell them on the open market to a builder. Work is ongoing looking at viability and working up designs. Full public engagement will be undertaken before the submission so there will be a chance to influence the plans in due course.

Gipping Way Lights

People have raised concerns about the use of traffic lights at Gipping Way. Many of these comments suggest that a roundabout would have been a better choice. This was considered when the relief road scheme was being designed but there was not sufficient land available for a roundabout. Traffic signals can be fitted into a smaller space and are often more effective than roundabouts for managing traffic. An additional benefit of traffic signals is that they include crossings for people walking or cycling. With roundabout control, separate crossings would be needed and these would make the junction less efficient.

Need for and timing of infrastructure

"Infrastructure" normally refers to the provision of public services and utilities, including:

- Education – early years and childcare, primary and secondary, and further and higher education
- Healthcare – means the physical infrastructure of surgeries, dental practices, preventative care clinics and hospitals, not the doctors themselves
- Transport – highways, cycle and pedestrian facilities, rail, bus, travel management and car parking
- Water and drainage – water supply, waste water, flood risk management and resilience, and water quality
- Energy – electricity, gas, and renewable energy
- Communications – telephone, mobile and broadband coverage
- Leisure and Green infrastructure – sport, open space, and community facilities



Infrastructure is important because the delivery of new homes and employment needs to be supported by necessary infrastructure to make it work. Without improvements in infrastructure existing services are strained and there can be problems such as congestion on our roads, slow download speeds in broadband, long waiting times at doctor's surgeries, "brownouts" in electricity supply, flooding and other problems. The Councils are prioritising investment into strategic services and infrastructure in order both alleviate existing issues as well as to enable new growth.

Addressing Infrastructure needs is undertaken both at the Local Plan preparation stage, and on a site-by-site basis.

- For the Local Plan the Council liaises with infrastructure providers and bodies and then considers where development needs can be met by existing infrastructure networks. Where existing capacity does not exist, then an assessment is made to establish what needs to be done, or sometimes that the scale/cost of accommodating additional development is too much so development cannot be permitted. The Local Plan is accompanied by an *Infrastructure Delivery Plan* which contains all the information about *strategic* infrastructure necessary to deliver the Local Plan aims and objectives.
- Individual planning applications are also scrutinised by infrastructure providers as part of the normal consultation process. This may occur up-front in a "pre-application discussion", but is always considered in any formal planning application. Infrastructure is always planned as part of a development proposal and if the infrastructure meets the three tests in the CIL Regulations¹⁰ then it should be an important part of the Councils considerations before weighing up all the issues and then recommending whether to grant planning permission or not. Not having the required infrastructure can mean that the resultant development is unsustainable so cannot be granted permission.

The funding of infrastructure varies depending on which service is being improved. Some items are paid for from the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) – a mandatory charge placed on the building of most new homes that is put in a "general strategic pot" to address schools places, leisure centre and library, waste handling etc. Where there are site-specific needs, infrastructure is paid for through a Section 106 agreement on top of the CIL. However, some other infrastructure is paid for through normal taxation and budgets. Usually this will be a reaction to the building rather than put in advance; this is because the Government cannot give money to improve networks "just in case development takes place" – it will have to be bid for retrospectively. However, where growth is known about – such as through land allocation in Local Plans and assessments in Infrastructure Delivery Plans – budgets can be fixed up-front. This is why it is so important to have a good Local Plan and not have to rely on occasional "windfall" planning applications. Large developments will have their own infrastructure plan which sets out the milestones and quantities of houses built before payments for infrastructure must be made.

Landlords/owners

Buildings in Stowmarket town centre are privately owned and usually rented by the business operating there. Accordingly, the Council is not able to direct landlords to undertake repairs, or force businesses to take on apprentices or other staff, and outside of planning controls cannot get involved in which operator rents premises.

The Council can however help to deliver the conditions that help the town to grow, and investigate regeneration projects that could raise the bar when it comes to which operators are in the town and how they manage their premises. An injection of quality and some interest from major high street

¹⁰ *In accordance with the Community Infrastructure Levy Regulations, 2010, the obligations recommended to be secured by way of a planning obligation deed must be (a) necessary to make the Development acceptable in planning terms (b) directly related to the Development and (c) fairly and reasonably relate in scale and kind to the Development.*



operators could be the catalyst for more widespread repairs and maintenance taking place throughout the High Street.

Unique Selling Point (USP)

While many people recognise the need for a USP and a brand image for the Stowmarket area, few suggestions were put forward for what that could be. However, the town's geographic position and links to London Liverpool Street Station means it is physically the centre - or the heart - of Suffolk. This together with its existing assets such as MEAL and the John Peel Centre make it unique. While this is true, there is not enough to make a brand out of because many other places also have good links with London, and have museums/music halls. While we should support our assets such as these, it is not a branding. Some people suggested that our industrial and agricultural heritage could be the basis of a promotional and advertising campaign.

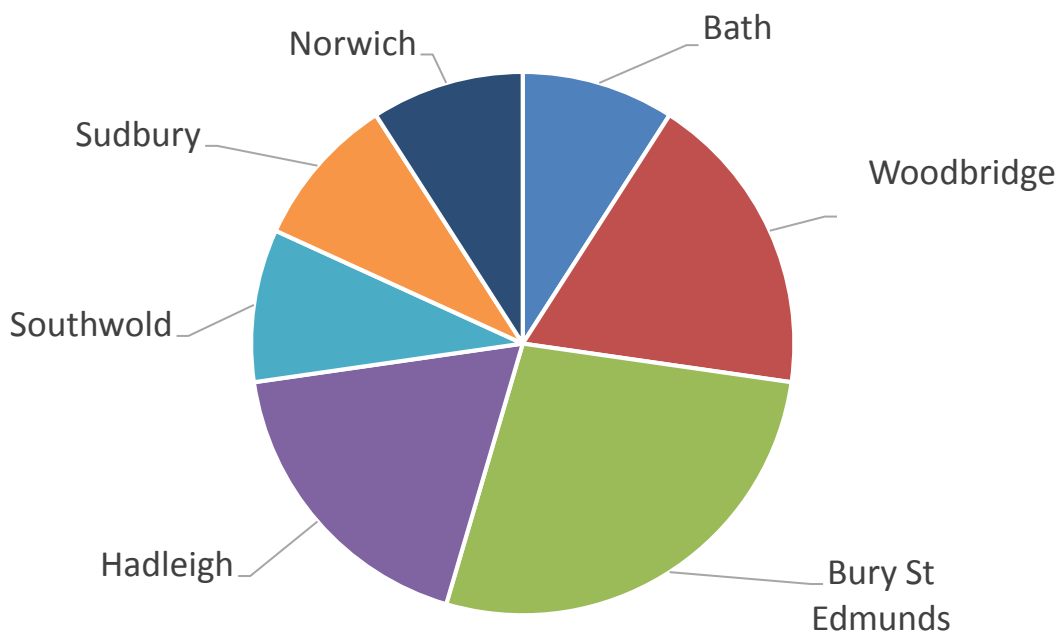
Our branding can develop a more attractive street scene, try to bring in the "right" operators, and start to promote Stowmarket as a leisure and cultural destination. This would enable us to grow and be economically prosperous, without having to compete with neighbouring Bury St Edmunds or Ipswich = an alternative experience.

We will explore possible ideas over the coming year.

Places to aspire to

People mentioned other places that Stowmarket could copy because they have traditional architecture and attractive buildings that Stowmarket lacks. There is also the perception of independent retailers making the experience, with green spaces, and better quality [branded] shops.

Interestingly, none of the criticisms levelled at Stowmarket such as parking charges, congestion, litter/run down places etc were associated with any of these places.



It is also interesting that none of the suggested places to aspire to are located outside of East Anglia. Many of the great shopping experiences such as Birmingham's Bull Ring, York's Shambles, Regent Street in London or the Royal Mile in Edinburgh were mentioned.



Delivering a Vision for Prosperity

Music/theatre

Several responders suggested that there should be more music and theatre opportunities in Stowmarket, with venues aimed at all ages rather than separating them. Additional music-based cultural “boho” cafes and bars with more live entertainment were suggested, complemented by street theatre and festivals.

However, Stowmarket already has a fantastic music and creative arts venue in the form of the John Peel Centre. The Regal theatre too has international events programme as well as doubling as a cinema, and The Mix has an auditorium with regular events.

The town is also regularly closed to traffic for festivals and events including the Carnival, StowFest music weekend, Snowfiesta, Christmas lights switch on, and many parades. The Christmas tree festival is the largest in the UK, and the Recreation Ground has regular travelling fairs, circuses and events including outdoor cinema. The Museum also has regular events including the beer festival, blues festival and the Cider & Song to name but a few.

Overall Stowmarket is very well served for music/theatre cultural events that attract a wide range of local and regional interest. However, there is always room for more, so the Council will consider how theatre and arts can be incorporated into any regeneration plans.

Green space

There is a lot of publicly-accessible green space in Stowmarket, from grass edged roads to regional facilities like the large parks at the Recreation Ground and Pikes Meadow in Combsor the nearby Needham Lake. Responders to the VFP didn't say that there isn't enough green space, but that the quality and type of green space should be improved.

In particular, the amount of tree coverage was criticised across the town, but mostly in the town centre. This, together with the “regulation standard mowing” of grassed areas creates a plainer looking town. Responders consider that open areas should have more variety of shrubs, flowers, trees and habitat to attract wildlife and to provide aesthetic variety. Coupled with hanging baskets on the town and on main approach roads, the town could be made to look much “happier”.

Stowmarket Town Council provides hanging baskets and large planters throughout the town centre which add a great deal of colour and interest during the summer months. New style hanging baskets, which incorporate a water reservoir, have successfully reduced the water consumption and the time involved in maintaining the hanging baskets. Over 20 additional trees were added to the trees planted on Gipping Way in 2013-14 which were installed to commemorate Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth's Diamond Jubilee. The work was carried out in partnership with Mid Suffolk District Council. Stowmarket Town Council will commission a study of tree planting and growth in the town in 2018, working with partners to assess the contribution that trees can make to the townscape and areas for further planting in the future.

A further 3,000 bulbs were planted on the Recreation Ground by the Town Council adding to the planting scheme to commemorate the Centenary of the Start of the First World War. This has significantly enhanced the visual appeal of the area. More crocus and daffodil bulbs will be planted each year, up to and including 2018, as part of the commemoration of the First World War.

To help improve the local environment, air quality and natural habitat, a new tree policy will be adopted that reflects the District Council's endorsement of the Woodland Trust Charter and the newly introduced 'Trees for Life' initiative. This ensures that in future a tree will be planted to mark the birth of every new baby born in Mid Suffolk.



To help families enjoy their experience of Needham Lake, the District Council is considering developing a new café facility, and will be undertaking feasibility work later this summer.

Driving standards

Excess speed for the conditions or the limit is one of the main reasons for accidental deaths and injuries on our roads. Speed limits are there to protect road users, warning them of the dangers of the road and if caught speeding you could instantly face a minimum of a £100 penalty and three points on your licence or attend court. The Safety Camera Team operates a number of mobile enforcement vehicles, which are deployed across the county of Suffolk.

Proactive speed enforcement only takes place in Suffolk at locations where there is an on-going risk of collisions, where a number of fatal or serious injury road traffic collisions have occurred or where there have been substantiated complaints from local people. Locations where proactive speed enforcement takes place will be reviewed regularly by senior officers.

There are various courses for drivers and riders to help reduce the number of deaths and serious injuries on our roads.

- Suffolk County Council offers a scheme for older drivers (60+) to have their driving skills assessed. In Suffolk this is called *Grand Driver Scheme*.
- *Safe Rider* is a joint initiative between Suffolk and Norfolk Constabularies which aims to reduce motorcycle casualties. Workshops are run over two days and are aimed at all fully qualified riders from post-test novices to experienced riders who want to improve their skills to become better and safer riders. The underlying message of our workshops is that education is the key, not enforcement. In a conflict free environment, riders will be introduced to the police roadcraft system - the corner stone of police riding. The workshop provides individuals with professional advice and confirms their strengths and identifies their weaknesses as a rider. During the road session participants will receive a demonstration ride by a police rider and there will be an opportunity to have their riding assessed with written feedback.
- *DriveWise* is a road safety presentation aimed at young drivers in Suffolk. The aim of the presentation, which includes videos, slides and interactive voting, is to make people aware of the consequences of dangerous driving. 1 in 3 of all people killed on Suffolk roads in 2015 were aged between 16 and 24. Suffolk police would like to hold DriveWise sessions for young people across Suffolk and deliver this important message to as many people as possible. The sessions have been run in schools throughout the county – with a lot of positive feedback from those involved.

S.59 Police Reform Act 2002

Where there are persistent problems with anti-social driving actions, some offences can now be dealt with by Section 59 of the Police Reform Act. This will apply if someone is:

- driving in a careless or inconsiderate manner
- driving on common land, a footpath or bridle way or any land which is not part of a road
- driving in a manner which is causing, or is likely to cause alarm, distress or annoyance to members of the public.

Then a *Section 59* warning can be issued against both the driver and the vehicle and lasts for 12 months. If the driver of the vehicle or the vehicle with the warning issued to it is then seen driving in any of those conditions again in the next 12 months the vehicle can be seized and, if not collected after paying for recovery and storage costs, it could be sold on or crushed. This is in addition to the penalties that can be received for the actual offence committed i.e. penalty points, fines and disqualifications.

Buses/trains

Buses form an important part of the transport system, and help to reduce congestion by offering an alternative to the private vehicle.

Bus services need to be financially viable, hence routes and times are determined by operators. The majority of bus services in Stowmarket are operated on a commercial basis – including the 88/88a (Stowmarket – Ipswich) and 384/385 (Stowmarket – Bury St Edmunds).

The County Council provides financial support to the 386 (Stowmarket – Bury St Edmunds) and 462 (Stowmarket – Hadleigh). The County Council is also in the process of redesigning and replacing the 387 and 459, to create a new service to Diss. Our priority for funding in this case is to maintain a service to Stowupland, and to improve access for residents in Poplar Hill.

Stowmarket does not have a large enough population to make an internal bus network financially viable. Within Suffolk, towns such as Lowestoft and Ipswich can sustain a town network, and Bury St Edmunds has a smaller service. In each case there is no public funding for these and they are self-sustaining.

New development is assessed for its relationship with the public transport network and wherever possible, contributions are sought to improve the network.

The railway network is undergoing changes locally too, and these services offer longer-distance public transport. Under the “*Norwich in 90*” and “*Ipswich in 60*” by 2022 campaigns, we will also promote “*Stowmarket in 75*”, and welcome a fleet of brand new trains.

Sports

High quality sport and leisure provision can enhance the quality of life, health and well-being of the local community. Our aims include the following:

- Promoting sporting/physical activity programmes and activities.
- Supporting Disability Sport.
- Club and Coach Development.
- Facility Development.
- Funding.
- Health & Well-being.

The Suffolk Sport website www.suffolksport.com contains lots of information about where you can access sports facilities and related services, funding for sports, volunteering opportunities, clubs and jobs in sport.

Locally, most sports facilities are available at the Mid Suffolk Leisure Centre in Gainsborough Road. The leisure centre will gradually be redeveloped with brand new facilities starting after 2020.

Playgrounds may be found at

- The Recreation Ground.
- Brambling Close.
- Chilton Fields trim trail.
- Creting Road.
- Lindsey Way MUGA.
- Maltsters Walk.
- Partridge Close.
- Peregrine Drive
- Pikes Meadow.
- Wren Close.

The Stowmarket area has hundreds of professional and amateur clubs, venues and facilities across all sorts of sports, including some high-profile and very successful ones. We have successful teams and opportunities to try new sports in more unusual sports, such as:

- Mid Suffolk Cobras Basketball Club.
 - Scorpion Martial Arts Academy.
 - Somersham Tennis Club.
 - Norton Badminton Club.
 - Gipping Valley Archers Archery Club.
 - Grasshopper Ladies Hockey Club.
 - Stowmarket Disabled Angling Club.
 - Anglia Gliding Club.
 - Rougham Table Tennis Club.
 - Ipswich Cycle Speedway Club.
- ...to name but a few!

Visit the [Suffolk Sport](#) website or pop in to the Leisure Centre to find clubs and teams, and to see what you can try yourself. All of the clubs and facilities are welcoming of new members, supporters, and people who would just like to know more about the sport or the club. Age, sex, race or disability is not a barrier!

It is also very exciting to announce that the [Suffolk Football Association](#) is working with partners to fulfil its ambition to open a new Headquarters building in Violet Hill Road in 2020, bringing a high quality artificial pitch to the town. The new HQ would include a state-of-the-art pitch, changing facilities and a football training school. Suffolk is the only County where the local Football Association is based outside of the County Town, so this is a real boon for Stowmarket! The other great benefit of this development is that there would be a lot of additional parking for use at the Doctor's surgery.

Schools

There are 17 primary schools in the Stowmarket cluster, 13 of which are good and 4 require improvement. The number of schools depends on the population of the town – at the moment, we have sufficient schools in Stowmarket, but future needs will be determined according to the level of housing growth. Schools can cooperate, collaborate and compete to drive up standards, but there needs to be sufficient pupils for additional schools to be sustainable.

School forecasts are regularly monitored to ensure that the high % of 1st preferences that Suffolk has achieved in recent years continues (just under 94% of applications made on time). The primary school age population of Stowmarket is forecast to decline slightly in the next few years and as such the schools in the Stowmarket area are not expected to be full. However, there will be demand for new school places due to new housing development and families moving into the area. Suffolk County Council works with Mid-Suffolk District Council to ensure appropriate education contributions are acquired from these developments to ensure places are provided to offset the demand, for example, there is a new school being established on the Chilton Leys development that will be funded through Section 106 contributions.

The decision as to whether we expand a school or build a new one is based on the forecast pupil population. Where the population is growing by enough to justify a new school – such as Chilton Leys in the west of Stowmarket – we will establish new schools.



In the Stowmarket area there are 23 nursery or pre-school play groups. Currently, 15 have Ofsted judgements of good with 8 either exempt or not yet inspected by Ofsted. All childminders in Stowmarket are judged good by Ofsted.

Two secondary schools serve Stowmarket, one is an academy and is currently judged as good. Stowmarket High will soon convert to academy status; the most recent HMI monitoring letter, published on the Ofsted web site, explains that senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement, identified at the recent section 5 inspection, in order to become a good school.

The local authority has recently launched the new phase of its Raising the Bar Strategy to achieve the aims that every child, including those who are vulnerable or need extra help, has a good start in life and the best opportunities to thrive, develop and achieve. Every young person is given the support they need to achieve their full potential and ambitions, and become a confident and successful adult. This strategy includes close working with the regional schools commissioner so that all leaders of academies and local authority maintained schools receive the appropriate support and challenge as well as contribute to the development of a strong school to school support partnership

There is major investment in education in Stowmarket, as part of the Taylor Wimpey *Section 106 agreement* at Chilton Leys, the Education & Skills Funding Agency is seeking to deliver a new primary school with early years setting by September 2020. Then, a brand-new, state-of the art building will replace the existing Stowmarket High School facility – with construction scheduled to being in late 2018, and the first occupation in 2020.

Road maintenance

Road works, particularly those carried out by gas, water, telecoms and electricity operators can result in delays and frustration to all road users. The county council works with operators to minimise disruption but some delay is inevitable and everyone in the town does need these services to be kept in good order, which means the highway does have to be dug up sometimes.

The County Council works with Kier as Suffolk Highways to maintain public highways. You can find all about how Suffolk County Council maintains the roads and how to notify defects or to raise specific complaints at: <https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/roads-and-transport/highway-maintenance/>

New Housing - Strategy

The comments from residents reflect some of the social issues identified in our area causing issues for the local housing market, and they reflect central Government's thinking that the 'housing market is broken'.

We know that it is much more difficult across the Eastern region, where Mid Suffolk is located, for people to afford to buy or rent a home compared to other regions such as the Northwest or Central England. Twenty years ago, the cost of a home here was about 3X a local wage, but now this ratio is more usually about 9X a local wage – putting home ownership out of reach for many, especially single person or single waged households and first-time buyers. This lack of housing to buy at the right price forces many households to rent in the private sector, and as this demand for private rent homes increases so often, do the rents.



Some of the underlying causes and the inevitable effects on the housing market are:

- A growing population as people are living longer. This means a higher number of additional new homes are required because right now demand for homes is far outstripping new supply
- By 2036 it is anticipated 1 in 3 people will be aged 65+ means we need to provide both more, and a wider range of, suitable housing options for 65+ year olds
- Fewer younger people in the area as birth rate decreases proportionately to average age, means their housing needs (for example starter homes, more affordable homes as 1st-time households generally earn less) may get less priority
- House prices locally are on average around 9 times the average earnings of residents and even more so in some of the more desirable areas. This means buying a home is not an option for many households, especially single people and/or those on limited incomes – these people will look to renting a home, or may choose to opt for discount market home sales under the ‘Help to Buy’ scheme.
- The global economic downturn of 2008 left many individual households in severe financial difficulty, so new financial regulation means households can mainly only borrow 3 times earnings, in permanent employment. This could mean that there will be an increase in homelessness affecting single people and families, as well as preventing older children ‘flying the nest’ to set up their own home – many still live with parents in their 30s and 40s.

The Council is aware of these factors and is intervening where it can, but the Council does not CONTROL the delivery of housing – it is predominantly market-led. However, we can influence and seek to steer housing delivery through evidence-based policies. Some of our actions include:

- Undertaking a study called the Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) to fully understand the local housing market needs¹¹.
- Developing the *Joint Housing Strategy 2050* – the strategy and the action plan show how we will address the difficulties many households face because of their housing situation. This will include
 - Making sure new homes are of the ‘right type, right tenure and in the right places’;
 - Re-generating tired housing estates fit for 21st century living;
 - Making sure resources are available for housing adaptations ensuring residents can stay in their own homes for longer;
 - Creating a new generation of fully accessible homes for people who need them;
 - Ensuring Mid Suffolk has only the highest quality private rented homes
- The creation of a new Joint Local Plan 2036 that will guide the development of new homes to 2036 through planning policies that steer developers as to where and what to build to best deliver the strategy.

The SHMA establishes a *starting point number of how many homes* should be built each year across the whole of the district: at present it is around 452 in Mid Suffolk. It also gives us a steer to understand what *types of homes* by number of bedrooms may be ‘missing’ from the housing stock. Finally - and perhaps most importantly for many financially stretched households - *what sort of tenures*. By tenure we mean if the property could be owned outright (open market homes), rented through the private sector by private landlords or, rented/part owned–part rented through the social sector via the Councils or another registered social housing provider operating in our districts.

However, our duties as the Local Housing Authority don’t simply stop at delivering new homes. There are already about 40,000 homes in each district, so whilst new homes delivery is very important, we must focus too on making the most of all the homes already here. Our housing duties require us to demonstrate responsibility for people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness; we must regulate and enforce standards in the private rented sector; commission housing stock surveys; getting empty homes back in to use; administer grants for home adaptations and, administer Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support. BMSDC also have many very

¹¹ Ipswich and Waveney area Strategic Housing Market Assessment
<http://www.midsuffolk.gov.uk/planning/planning-policy/evidence-base/current-evidence/>



technical duties as a responsible social housing landlord for about 7,000 households across the two districts.

Ipswich St/Market Place restricted turns

Ipswich Street/Market Place is a one-way system that allows vehicles some restricted use of the “High Street”. A full pedestrianisation scheme was not possible because of the needs of retailers around deliveries, and also due to the bus routes. There are also residential properties with parking that need service access. Instead of pedestrianisation, Ipswich Street was re-paved and had limited access through the use of restricted right and left turns. This was to ensure it was not used as a shortcut in the interests of pedestrian/shopper safety; instead all vehicles should use the Gipping Way/Station Road West route.

It is not appropriate to remove the restrictions on left and right turns, as the circumstances of their original use have not changed. If anything, the Council is even more keen to make a better “High Street” environment and reduce further the presence of vehicles. There are some drivers who ignore the restrictions and the Council will work with the Police to establish the most appropriate method of monitoring and enforcing the rules.

United Reformed Church (URC)

In 2010, the Government rejected a Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO) being put forward by the District Council to demolish the URC and the shops on the south west side of Ipswich Street. This scheme would have been a retail-led regeneration scheme in partnership with developers ISG Southern. The demolition would have enabled a range of larger-format shops to be built with rear servicing – the kind that would be more attractive to high street brand shops. For economies of scale, the scheme couldn’t go ahead without the inclusion of the land occupied by the current URC. The URC would have relocated to a new building elsewhere, but none was found suitable, and so the CPO couldn’t be carried out as “all other options had not been explored”.

Several people commented that the scheme should be revived, whilst others said that the URC should be part of the High Street and should not be relocated/demolished. The Council has already committed to working with specialists to explore finance options and possible schemes. The needs of the market and financial packages are very different today than they were even 5 years ago, and the Stowmarket population is set to grow even bigger, so the same scheme might not be the best solution this time. The advice from the consultants will be used to inform any decision, and the public will have an opportunity to shape any regeneration plans. It is too early to say it will be the same scheme or something different.

Congestion

Congestion at some locations is likely to get worse over time if traffic demand continues to increase. It is not feasible to provide significant additional road capacity in the town, nor is it feasible to prevent all future development, so we must make more sensible use of what we have.

Part of the congestion issue is the pollution caused by standing traffic. Recognising the technological shift in modern cars, Mid Suffolk District Council is investing in a vehicle recharging point which will be installed at Needham Lake later in 2018.

Part of the solution is for people to take responsibility for how they choose to travel and how this impacts on others. Greater use of walking and cycling for short trips and of buses for longer trips would remove some traffic from the road and hence reduce congestion. It would also lead to better health outcomes for people. The County Council seeks to enhance existing cycle routes and to promote new facilities including safe routes and cycle parking.



Youth leisure development

Facilities for young people in Stowmarket and the area are plentiful, but are potentially underused. This could be because service providers are not keeping up with social changes or what the young people want.

The Town Council-led development of a skate park on the Recreation Ground together with the café offers a local gathering place for young people. In 2017 Stowmarket Town Council also refreshed the children's play areas at the Recreation Ground and at Pikes Meadow giving new play options including some equipment for those with disabilities.

The Mix in Stowmarket is a youth club run mainly by young people for young people. The vision is for every young person, everywhere, to be empowered and enabled to change their world and ours. Driven by the mission of 'giving every young person a voice', the Mix is a way for all young people to be valued, heard and empowered. The Open Project has 5 strands:

- **Open Doors** is a physical Hub for Young People, Parents, Professionals and the wider community. A place and a face for people to go to and talk to with any issues, questions, challenges, worries or needs that they are facing.
- **Open Up** is taking the 'youth club' to a new level. With the vision and commitment to raise the quality and quantity of access young people have to support, services, leisure time activities and a safe community.
- **Open Space** is a unique partnership with schools that enables young people access to the support they need at a time that works for them. With most young people at school 8 hour a day and most services only open during that time, providing services to Young People requires a new approach.
- **Open Out** is our detached approach to reducing barriers. Ignoring buildings all together and engaging with Young People in a time and space that they feel comfortable and may be of increased need for access to services.
- **Open Source** is our digital approach to reducing physical barriers. An app, you tube channel & webpage, with up to date, relevant and local support, when and where it's needed. The true beauty of Open Source is found in your hand... literally.

Other youth clubs operate in Stowmarket and the area including Girl Guides and Scouts, Boys/Girls Brigade, dance/stage clubs, Church clubs and many sports clubs from archery to zumba. These offer a diverse range of activities for young people to take part in, and provide them with skills and experience that will help them later in life.

Most comments that people submitted around young people's facilities were more about paid-for activities such as karting, bowling and ice skating. These facilities are suitable for all ages, but like the big brand high street shops, there simply isn't sufficient local population to make this type of facility profitable. As with the shops, if they were profitable then they would already be here.

As Stowmarket develops over the coming decades, the population will grow and activities such as these may become viable. However, as part of the Council's commitment to investigating the reality of a major town centre intervention, and based on the responses about what people want their town to become, a leisure-led scheme will also be investigated.

Design

House building is mostly done by large national volume house builders who have a portfolio of designs that they can adapt to local circumstances – eg change the window design from Victorian to Georgian style, or change the facing material to suit local brick types. However, the basic design remains constant across the country which leads to accusations of monoculture and "toytown" developments.



The quality of houses has risen considerably in recent years as the minimum Building Regulation standards have risen, particularly around energy efficiency. Although planning policy cannot always impose particular standards, they are always encouraged to be above the bare minimum, and many developers are happy to oblige because there is a market for such homes.

The “traditional” Suffolk pink render and thatched roof on a low, wide building is a relevant consideration. But buildings were built like that because that was what the materials and technology allowed at the time. Today we do not have such constraints and can be more varied. The trick is to ensure that new buildings are not a pastiche of the old, but respect the location. That could mean it simply uses the traditional materials in a new way, or to observe the basic shapes and positions of old buildings with a modern design. Good design does not copy the past, but it respects it. The Local Planning Authority is constantly seeking to work with developers of all scales to encourage more innovation in aesthetic issues of design, but also in usability and quality of construction terms. What we will confirm is that bland, monoculture design is not acceptable in this area – we will strive for better architecture and planning.

In recent years, the national planning policy of restricting the level of parking provision, particularly in new residential developments, has tried to promote less reliance on the motor vehicle and a move to more sustainable and healthy methods of travel, particularly for shorter journeys. This approach has had some success in city and town centres across England, but in our rural area public transport is not always a viable option and a car is a necessity rather than a luxury. Therefore, Suffolk County Council’s parking standards were changed in 2015 from MAXIMUM standard (to discourage car ownership and promote other means of transport) to MINIMUM standards.

Village identity

Stowmarket is more than just the town: it is the centre of a network of villages and communities that collectively make up the catchment area. This “Greater Stowmarket” area is growing steadily and so the linkages between the settlements must be addressed to ensure that service delivery is consistent and efficient.

How do we connect the villages and the town better?

Most comments are about the attractiveness of Stowmarket to promote association with the town. Currently it is not a place to be particularly proud of or fond of, so the outlying villages do not feel that they are particularly part of anything. This is one of the key objectives of *Delivering a Vision for Prosperity* – to give Stowmarket an identity, role and status so that people can love their town and feel part of something good.

Physical access and linkages (transport issues) also featured in the comments, as although Stowmarket provides all the basic needs, it is frequently inaccessible to villages, particularly those without a car. Even those with cars feel that as they MUST drive, it is not much further to go to Ipswich or Bury St Edmunds where through economies of scale there is more value in making the journey.

We must do more to keep people informed about what is happening in the area – in terms of events, but also in terms of decisions that are made.

What does the village need/want, and in balance what is the village willing to accept to obtain it?

It is clear that people agree with us that villages should not be “swallowed up” by the continued expansion of Stowmarket and/or their own growth. Villages should be separated by both clear *physical* and *perceived* boundaries/markers.

Villages stated that business promotion, a living wage, education and training opportunities are things that we should promote and make more of in order to ensure they have a stable and growing economy. Villages should not depend on Stowmarket for basic services – they should be self-sufficient, with the choice to visit Stowmarket for other services and facilities. Similarly, access to jobs within communities should be available.

There is universal consensus that transport links – cycling/walking routes, public transport and road capacity all need improvements to enable people to get to and from Stowmarket.

Recognition of the narrow, winding roads without footpaths and the resulting safety issues, together with “rat running”, speeding and other anti-social car use mean that villagers are forced to use cars by more factors than simply the distance to travel.

Balancing the needs of a young population and of an ageing population

Responders stated that there needs to be greater interaction between age groups, such as through shared classes where all ages can share their skills and experience. Mutual understanding and opportunities for social interaction within the communities requires more venues and activities. There are many clubs, organisations and events held each year across the Stowmarket area, and it is considered that the difficulty is in keeping up with the sheer number.

Riverside (Gipping)

The River Gipping is a shallow, slow flowing river that drains the rural areas north of Stowmarket. In 1790, an Act of Parliament was obtained to improve the navigability from Ipswich to Stowmarket. 15 locks were built, and the river became known as the *Ipswich and Stowmarket Navigation*. The navigation was opened in 1793 and was successful until the 1840s when the railways arrived in the area which led to the closure of the navigation. After a period of decay, the River Gipping Trust is leading restoration work, and several of the lock chambers have been restored, while the Gipping Valley River Path had been established along the towpath.

The River Gipping Trust has established its vision¹² to

- Maintain and improve for the benefit of the public the navigation of the River Gipping;
- Advance the education of the public in the history, industrial archaeology and natural history of the Stowmarket Navigation;
- Promote and develop the recreational opportunities along the river;
- Promote and develop the natural environment of the Gipping Valley.

A number of projects have been developed and delivered by the Trust, including repairs to the river bank, wildlife habitat creation, restoration of lock gates, flood water management, new bridges and footpath maintenance, improved boating conditions etc. With additional fundraising the Trust is hoping to bring more people to the River to enjoy it.

Local environmental initiative **The Pickerel Project** has been strimming and toiling in preparation to build a brand new path along the River Gipping. Thanks to the generosity of Buildbase and their hired digger the path is now well underway. The tangles of weeds and natural debris was completely removed to make space for a brand new, much wider path all the way up to Iron Foundry Road. Though the path is currently in a raw state, the group has plans to surface the path so you will be able to fully enjoy strolls along the bank as soon as possible and make it more accessible to those with disabilities. The second stage of work will see completion of the path up to ICI.

¹² <https://rivergippingtrust.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/RGTVision.pdf>



Nearer the town centre, the previous Local Plan¹³ (1997) and the 2013 Stowmarket Area Action Plan¹⁴ (AAP) identified the area around the railway station and what is now Travis Perkins as the “Station Quarter mixed-use regeneration area”. The AAP said:

The Station Quarter has been specifically identified for transport improvements, notably the need for a bus/rail interchange and linkages to the town centre. At the same time the area has also been allocated for mixed use purposes, which must include appropriately located and proportional: residential, retail and employment uses. Open space, car parking provision and hotel use must also be fully and properly explored. Any proposed development within the area affected by flood risk must comply with the sequential and exception tests in the Technical Guidance to the National Planning Policy Framework

The image below is an extract from the Stowmarket Area Action plan.



Map 5.2 Illustrative layout for the Station Quarter (extract from Stowmarket Masterplan Phase 2 - Station Quarter Concept Statement - see glossary for details)

The land is very difficult to build upon due to the wet soil conditions, so there hasn't been much built apart from Navigation Approach bridge (itself built on large polystyrene “rafts”), some apartments and the car dealership. The towpath has had some intervention, but the whole area still lacks coordination and hasn't really been “lifted”. The Council will ask the consultants to include this area in their recommendations for regeneration projects, including delivery mechanisms and funding options so that any grand vision can actually be delivered.

¹³ <http://www.midsuffolk.gov.uk/planning/planning-policy/adopted-documents/mid-suffolk-district-council/mid-suffolk-local-plan/>

¹⁴ <http://www.midsuffolk.gov.uk/assets/Strategic-Planning/Mid-Suffolk-SAAP/Stowmarket-AAP-Adopted-21.02.13.pdf>

The Regal Theatre

The Regal Theatre and Cinema (managed by Stowmarket Town Council) is a single auditorium venue within the town centre which shows new release films and stage productions. The venue is profitable and well supported with a wide catchment area across MSDC district. Stowmarket Town Council intends to modify and extend the existing building to provide improved single auditorium for shared cinema and theatre use, add 2 new cinema auditoria, and deliver improvements to the foyer, café bar, and toilets so they are more attractive and accessible to all. Stowmarket Town Council is seeking financial support towards the re-development and has already commissioned a site options appraisal that was conducted by Burrell Foley Fischer LLP and which identified a preferred option involving the extension of the theatre.

On the 5th February 2018, Mid Suffolk District Council's Cabinet voted to invest £2.56 million in the Regal Theatre Stowmarket Improvement Project, consisting of £1.56m in capital grant from Mid Suffolk District Council, and £1million in a loan to Stowmarket Town Council.

These new 87 and 57 seat screens, plus the renovation of the existing auditorium and foyer area, are predicted to increase attendance at the Regal Theatre by approximately 40% from around 63,000 people a year to 114,800. The increase in visitor numbers are expected to generate between an extra £500,000 and £1m annually for the local economy. The project is also expected to create between 10 and 20 new jobs. The Mid Suffolk District Council-owned Ipswich Street Car Park, which is next to the Regal Theatre, will be rearranged to improve its layout.

The Regal Theatre Stowmarket Improvement Project has been identified as an investment project in Mid Suffolk District Council's Stowmarket Area Action Plan, which was also supported by the community at the *Vision for Prosperity* events.

The Leader of Mid Suffolk District Council and Cabinet Member for Assets and Investment, Cllr Nick Gowrley, said: "The Regal Theatre is a truly loved institution in Stowmarket, offering the community a place to come together and stage their own productions as well as screening the latest films. The extra cinema screens will attract new audiences and enable us to show more newly released films and a wider variety of other movies.

"The Regal has been at the heart of Stowmarket for a long time, not only thanks to its cinema screens but due to it's hard work with community theatre groups, Dementia Friendly Screenings and hosting touring performances from across the country for residents of our town to enjoy.

"However, this funding is not just about the Regal: it is about investing in the future of Stowmarket by increasing visitor spending in our town by up to £1million a year and creating up to a score of new jobs. Improving the layout of Ipswich Street Car Park will also make it easier for visitors to support the businesses that drive our local economy."

Stowmarket Town Councillor Barry Salmon said: "We are delighted that the District Council is supporting this project. The Regal Theatre is hugely popular and it is great news for the town that both the District and Town Councils are willing to invest in its continuing success. We wish to see a modern entertainment venue at the south-eastern gateway to the town centre which can be used for civic and community purposes, cinema and theatre."

New Homes – type, size and tenure

As set out above, the Housing Strategy and the Local Plan are being developed to reflect the needs of people in the local community. However, this is a cross-District study that looks at a high-level sample and statistical data, and while it is accurate enough to establish a strategic policy, it does make a number of assumptions about a place where actual delivery takes place. This means that new building will address a general need that is satisfactory for most households, but to ensure development is truly in the best interests of the village or Parish, a more detailed survey can be carried out.



A local housing need survey in a Parish or village can be undertaken to identify very specific needs that are too fine (ie small scale) to be addressed in the broader District study. A Local study can find “hidden households” or address the needs of “hard to reach” people – particularly young people whose needs may not be apparent for several years yet. Many Parish Councils in the Districts have started a **Local Needs Assessment** (often to inform a Neighbourhood Plan), and this is a very important part of the town planning process that the Councils take very seriously.

The outcome of a local study can be used to ensure that the very specific needs in a village are addressed through development proposals – mainly to ensure that people who live in that community are able to access a reasonable home – as opposed to development mainly being composed of 4-bed detached houses that are far beyond the reasonable mortgage availability of villagers. By addressing the specific local needs, it means that community life can be maintained and enhanced. For example, young people often have to leave the community – not just the family home as there are no smaller, cheaper homes to rent. This removes the local young labour supply, and can affect the operational ability of businesses such as shops, schools and pubs – leading to closures. It can also mean that older people are forced to stay in large homes (although of course some may choose to do so) as there are no smaller homes to downsize to once the family has grown up and moved out. By taking up a family home, there is one less option for a new family to occupy and they may be forced to accept the wrong house, or forced to move elsewhere.

The key here is CHOICE, VARIETY, SUITABILITY and ACCESSIBILITY – and the Councils are working towards delivering that over the coming Local Plan period. The housing is needed, so making sure they build the right housing is important. New house building should not be viewed as “a fight between developers and villagers”, but an opportunity to build a balanced and healthy community for the community’s needs.

Signage

New signs have been installed at the main road entrances to the town. The signs feature the town crest, and have been installed as part of a town-wide project by the Town Council to enhance and improve the carriageways and gateways throughout the town. The Town, District and County Councils will work together to commission a design project to enhance areas of public space at key locations in the town. This may include art, sculpture, paving, planting and other physical works to make the local area more attractive.



Stowmarket Town Council will continue to work on town identity and orientation through the delivery of more “finger posts and information panels in town by early 2019. These will highlight some of the key venues, as well as promote Bury Street from the Market Place for those who may not be aware of what is available there. These signs will follow the same design theme as the welcome signs for a more coordinated overall aesthetic. Along with the continuation of its free, town centre Wi-Fi initiative, Stowmarket will be a welcoming place for visitors and residents alike.

Scania depot, Violet Hill Rd

The Scania depot has been in Violet Hill Road for decades and provides an internationally-significant service that supports many local businesses and provides numerous local jobs. In fact, TruckEast is one of Suffolk’s biggest companies and we are proud to have them in Stowmarket.

However, as lorries have got bigger and roads have got busier, Violet Hill Road has proven itself to be less and less suitable for HGV traffic, particularly with the adjacent primary school drop off/collection traffic and the busy surgery junction. Although there is no push for the company to relocate, there could be significant traffic improvement in Violet Hill Road if they moved.



The District Council will work with TruckEast to see if there is any assistance that the Council can offer to the business, and in particular discuss the possibility of finding suitable alternative location for the business operation (and a suitable alternative use of the site if they vacate it).

HWRC

Suffolk County Council continually reviews the pressures on its HWRC service across the county and the suitability of all sites to deliver these needs both now and in the future. Stowmarket has been identified as a site for redevelopment or replacing. It is recognised that the current site is restricted in terms of space and traffic management and that development in the town and nearby villages will continue to increase this pressure. The County Council would like to identify possible alternatives but potential sites which meet the essential criteria for an HWRC are difficult to find. This site remains a priority and the County Council is working with Mid Suffolk District Council on viable options for the future.

We are pleased to hear that staff at our HWRCs are appreciated – it is our policy that all staff should help the public where needed. We keep staffing resources under review.

The disposal of hardcore, rubble, soil and plasterboard at Suffolk Recycling Centres is not a statutory duty and the County Council chooses to deliver this service for a modest charge, in response to public demand. This policy for charging is in line with a number of other councils. It is much better if residents can reduce and reuse where possible and residents are urged to donate hardcore and rubble for reuse online via www.suffolkfreecycle.org or www.freecycle.org

Residents can also retain excess soil for planting and potting, or ask neighbours, friends or relatives if they have any use for it. There are also alternative options for dealing with these types of waste including hiring a skip or tonne bag. Further information is available at www.suffolkrecycling.org.uk

Hotel

Stowmarket's visitor accommodation offer is weak, but there are several developments that are collectively improving the offer. The Cedars Hotel has recently been bought and is undergoing a refurbishment as part of the Best Western Group to bring it up to date as well as improving operational practices. At the other end of the scale, the Museum of East Anglian Life is seeking to bring "glamping" to the site – an interesting alternative that can enable more visitors to spend time in the town centre itself.

The Council will also ask the town centre consultants to work on including a hotel in the feasibility/deliverability work. This will enable the Council to build in a hotel as part of any proposal, knowing that it is actually what the market wants and that there can be a suitable operator to make it happen.

Funding

The Council is facing a significant change in the way its budget is worked out. The Government is constantly reducing the operational budget and so the Council must seek to reduce costs, and at the same time increase its revenue streams from alternative sources. The "general fund" total funding has dropped from just under £12m to just under £10m between 2015/16 and 2016/17 year. This is likely to continue, so the allocation of funds is an increasingly difficult topic to address.



The Leader of the Council Cllr Nick Gowrley said

“We at Mid Suffolk District Council are committed to getting value for money and during the last year we have delivered a combination of savings and investments which, together with our healthy reserves and careful use of the New Homes Bonus, have kept our financial position strong.

However, as core funding from the Government decreases again this financial year and reduces to zero by 2019/20, we have made the difficult decision to increase our slice of the council tax by 0.5%.

It is important to remember that Mid Suffolk District Council only receives approximately 10% of your total council tax bill – most of it goes to fund other public services including the county council, police, town and parish councils, which we just collect on their behalf. Messages from them are enclosed. Mid Suffolk’s own share of the rise in council tax is equivalent to just 81p a year for a band D property. This means that the largest properties in the district will pay £1.62 more to Mid Suffolk and the smallest homes will pay an extra 54p per annum.

You have a right to know what we are doing with this money, and how we are approaching the challenges our district faces.

I want to start by assuring you that housing is one of our top priorities: we successfully bid for £226,476 from the Government to develop community-led housing projects in partnership with local groups, while we plan to directly deliver 98 new homes by 2021. This last year also saw residents move into the first shared ownership homes offered for 25 years.

Supporting and growing the local economy is another priority area. We are working to develop key sites the council owns, as well as embracing the opportunities that Enterprise Zones can offer local businesses along the key A14 corridor through our district. Stowmarket is one of the key economic focal points of our district, so last summer, with local residents and stakeholders, we started to develop a vision for revitalising the town centre. We are also investing £2.56million in the Regal Theatre Improvement Project, which is set to generate between £500,000 and £1million annually for the local economy.

We are working hard to provide high quality services in all areas for which we as a council are responsible. In recognition of this work, Mid Suffolk Leisure Centre was recently rated excellent by Quest, the national quality scheme for sports and leisure.

But our work isn’t just about strategic priorities, however important those are, but also about you, our residents. We have worked hard over the last year to make it quicker, easier and more convenient for people to contact us at a time of their choosing via our new website, a new single telephone number and a new customer access point which opened in Ipswich Street, Stowmarket.

We have also moved our back-office staff into the same building as Suffolk County Council and the Clinical Commissioning Groups (Health) in order to better join up everything we do together for the benefit of our residents. This will also save £5.8m in running costs over the next 10 years. By saving your money we will be able to reinvest it into other services for our residents.

... Please remember, our council tax reduction scheme remains unchanged, ensuring the most vulnerable households only pay five per cent of their council tax bill.”



Delivering a Vision for Prosperity

Business Rates Retention spending

As the Council's grant from Central Government fades away, the Government wants Local Authorities to be self-funding through Council Tax and Business Rates. This means that as future changes to the level of business rates that are paid will directly impact on the Council's funding levels. When business rates grow we will have more income and when they contract there will be less funding. There is therefore an incentive to enable growth and prosperity in order to continue to provide services to residents.

In order to help manage this risk, and to maximise the potential amount of business rates that are retained within Suffolk, Suffolk County Council and all the district/borough Councils responded to the Department for Communities and Local Government's *Invitation to Local Authorities in England to pilot 100% Business Rates Retention in 2018/19 and to pioneer new pooling and tier-split models*.

There are 10 winning areas, and we are delighted that Suffolk is one that has successfully secured *100% business rate pilot status*. The financial benefits are shared between Councils and a proportion used to support collaborative ventures that will achieve sustainable economic growth in the region. As a Suffolk system we have agreed that this will equate to approximately £1m for Mid Suffolk District Council to spend on projects that facilitate growth in 2018/19. The Council is considering how it could invest the money and will announce its intentions later this year.

CIL and S106 – developer contributions

There are two mechanisms available to the Council to seek contributions from developers when they build new homes, shops and other buildings. The two mechanisms work side by side to enable development to pay a contribution towards the provision of infrastructure for the wider community.

The first is the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL): a fixed-rate payment that councils can charge on new buildings in their area to off-set the impacts of additional homes and businesses on facilities such as roads, schools, open space and health centres (infrastructure) and to enable sustainable growth. Mid Suffolk District Council brought its Charging Schedule in to force on the 21st of January 2016 and has raised nearly £1m already. The Council has a list of projects¹⁵ to spend the CIL money on, which includes

- Public transport improvements
- Provision of library facilities
- Provision of additional pre-school places at existing establishments
- Provision of primary school places at existing schools
- Provision of secondary, sixth form and further education places
- Provision of health facilities
- Provision of leisure and community facilities
- Provision of 'off site' open space
- Strategic green infrastructure (excluding suitable alternative natural greenspace)
- Maintenance of new and existing open space and strategic green infrastructure
- Strategic flooding
- Provision of waste infrastructure

On the 5th February 2018, MSDC Cabinet resolved "That the current thinking around a framework for CIL expenditure be noted and used as a basis for development of a detailed CIL expenditure framework. That the creation of a Panel comprising of three Members from each Council to shape the development of a detailed CIL expenditure framework be approved. That the framework be returned to Cabinet for consideration and agreement before being presented to Full Council as a key decision for both Councils."

¹⁵ <http://www.midsuffolk.gov.uk/assets/CIL-and-S106-Documents/Pre-Adoption-Documents-Mid-Suffolk/MSDC-123-list-.pdf>

The second is *Section 106 legal agreements* which will be used alongside CIL to secure on-site infrastructure (as opposed to general community-wide issues) and things that are “not infrastructure”, such as affordable housing agreements.

The two mechanisms are separate, but they cannot be used to seek contributions for the same thing (no “double-dipping”). These agreements are not intended to take out of the developer profit, but are made to ensure that each development pays its way to offset the additional burden it will put on existing infrastructure networks.

Funding for regeneration

As set out above, the Council intends to work with consultants to establish the most suitable method of funding regeneration projects.

Community funding

Mid Suffolk District Council has a dedicated Community Grants Team who can advise on the Council’s Community Grants as well as other sources of funding that may be available to community groups who fulfil eligibility criteria bmsdcgrants@babberghmidsuffolk.gov.uk.

In addition, for the year 2018/19, each Mid Suffolk Councillor has their own *Locality Award Fund* that can be used to award projects or organisations that have a direct impact on Mid Suffolk Communities. Any community group wishing to apply for a share of this funding can do so by contacting their District Councillor directly. Details of District Councillors are available online¹⁶.

Former Babytime shop, Station Rd West

The former “Babytime” shop in Station Road West has been vacant and boarded up for several years. As it lies at the head of the road, almost all visitors to Stowmarket see it in the prominent location, and this brings the perception of the town down. Although vacancy rates are low, this unit has not been re-let.

The District Council has therefore agreed to develop and implement a £250,000 shop front grant scheme in Eye, Needham Market and Stowmarket Town Centres. Money will be available for cosmetic works such as painting window frames, and for structural repairs. There will also be money available for restoration and repair of heritage features such as restoring traditional shop fronts in historic buildings and reinstating lost architectural features. An additional £100,000 grant scheme also be available to improve access arrangements for disabled people to give them a better experience of Stowmarket. Grants may be paid for the installation of ramps, handles, signage and other hardware that will ensure our shops are accessible to all.

Full details and eligibility criteria will be published in due course when the scheme is launched. Once the grant is available, it will be up to the owners and occupiers of properties to apply – the Council cannot force them to undertake any work.

Pubs

The pubs in Stowmarket cater for a range of budgets and tastes. There remains a market for evening visits to the town, but more can be done to make eating out a more common occurrence and strengthen the role of pubs throughout the day. While the Council can influence the attractiveness of the town, it is down to the operators to decide how best to manage their premises.

The Council’s local ‘*Statement of Licensing Policy*’¹⁷ endeavours to strike the right balance between supporting growth and diversification, in all licensed sectors, with proportionate controls and protections which are appropriate to promote the licensing objectives. It is in everybody’s interests

¹⁶ <http://babberghmidsuffolk.moderngov.co.uk/mgFindMember.aspx>

¹⁷ <http://www.midsuffolk.gov.uk/business/licensing/>

for leisure businesses and events to be well managed, successful and sustainable. The Licensing Authority is focused on the promotion of the four licensing objectives, which are:

1. The prevention of crime and disorder
2. Public safety
3. The prevention of public nuisance
4. The protection of children from harm.

As a result of recent economic pressures many licensed premises in the district are seeking to diversify and offer more flexibility and greater choice to the consumer. Many traditional public houses now offer both food and entertainment to improve their economic viability, and more so in the surrounding village halls and community facilities that are seeking additional flexibility in their relevant licences in order to provide their local communities with a greater choice in how to spend their leisure time.

As of November 2015, Mid Suffolk District Council has issued 364 premises licences, 49 club premises certificates, 984 personal licences and authorises approximately 500 Temporary Event Notices per annum. Since 2005 the Licensing Authority has arranged in excess of 100 licensing hearings to determine contested applications, and helped facilitate mediated agreements for many more. The result is an effective and efficient service that maintains the balance of needs within the town centre as a lively, yet safe experience.

Gipping Way roundabout

The roundabout and the roads approaching Gipping Way Roundabout have been made safer through the introduction of parking controls, and the County Council appreciates the positive feedback that this has generated.

Similarly, the Town Council spends a lot of time ensuring the roundabouts and verges are neat and well kept, that trees and hedges are pruned, and that our public realm is kept attractive. The positive comments that people have made are very welcome.

Former Poundland store

The former Poundland Store in Gipping Way was originally built by ALDI and opened in 2006, but closed in 2009. It reopened as a discount store which was later bought out by Poundland. In 2016 Poundland restructured and closed its lowest-performing stores, including the Stowmarket branch. Since then the shop has remained vacant. It is on the market for £2,250,000, or can be rented at £170,000 per annum, so it is likely to be attractive to a “national multiple” (a high street brand operator).

The Council is considering how it could assist a faster occupation of the building in order to strengthen the Town Centre offer, such as in partnering with an end-user. The Council will also consider proposals for alternative uses of the building that offer something different in the town – such as leisure or community uses.



Former Nat West Bank, Market Place

The Former Nat West Bank is an attractive Listed Building that fronts on to the Market Place right in the middle of the town centre. The building was the original entrance to the Corn Exchange prior to the transformation into the John Peel Centre. The Nat West first reduced its presence, then pulled out of Stowmarket completely in 2017.

The Council considered it essential that the building's new use should be a high-quality use in order to improve the overall offer in the town.

Accordingly, to control the end use, the Council purchased the premises in Spring 2018 and will act as landlord.

The Council needs to ensure that the building is a financial asset, so it won't be giving it away. However, the Council could subsidise any rent if the user is a community organisation or would bring other significant benefits to the town. One possible use is to expand the John Peel Centre offer, but this is not a *fait accompli* and will be subject to detailed negotiation.

“There are lots of opportunities from Mid Suffolk's strategic purchase and we're looking forward to sharing ideas about how to maximise the economic and community benefits from this building.”

The Council wants to maximise both the economic and community benefits for the town, so it is certain that the building will be refurbished and repaired this Summer, and won't remain empty very long.

Cycling

Greater use of walking and cycling for short trips and of buses for longer trips would remove some traffic from the road and hence reduce congestion. It would also lead to better health outcomes for people. The County Council seeks to enhance existing cycle routes and to promote new facilities including safe routes and cycle parking. New developments are encouraged to install secure cycle parking facilities, and new housing developments are asked to cater for cycling with new cycle paths.

Cyclists often visit the town centre for shopping, but the National Cycle Route Number 51 also passes through the town centre. Route 51 is a long-distance route that connects major cities in the south of England. It links Milton Keynes, Bedford, Bury St Edmunds and Ipswich on its way and also links the University Cities of Oxford and Cambridge with the coast at Felixstowe before continuing to Harwich and Colchester.

Within Stowmarket, the route passes the Leisure Centre, across the Recreation Ground then through the Meadow Centre car park, down Crowe Street to the Market Place and then along Ipswich Street before heading along to Combs. As well as Route 51, Stowmarket has a number of shared pathways where cyclists are permitted to ride instead of in the carriageway. Accordingly, there can sometimes be a large number of bicycles in Ipswich Street in both directions which can conflict with shoppers and pedestrians. However, most cyclists are courteous and will give way to pedestrians.

Wildlife

There is concern that the amount of wildlife in the town is falling due to increased traffic and road collisions. Initiatives exist¹⁸ to increase the amount of wildlife habitats across Suffolk, from domestic gardens to new wildlife protected areas as part of development sites.

¹⁸ <https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/planning-waste-and-environment/suffolks-countryside-and-wildlife/protecting-the-environment/>



Suffolk's Nature Strategy describes the challenges and opportunities our natural environment faces. Its purpose is to articulate what we believe are the key natural environment priorities for the county and to convey to decision-makers how the wildlife and landscapes of Suffolk are important building blocks for our own economic growth and health and wellbeing. The recommendations and actions we propose within this document are both forward-looking and challenging. Their delivery will enhance the environment of Suffolk itself, as well as our ability to derive both economic and social benefits from it. The messages are equally relevant to businesses, health professionals and community representatives. The strategy is set out in three broad sections: natural environment, economic growth, and health and wellbeing; each containing a number of sub-sections for issues of particular importance to the delivery of our vision.

Wildlife improvements must be a big part of the Stowmarket *Vision for Prosperity* to ensure that our finely balanced environment can continue to prosper.

Stowmarket Town Clock

On Sunday the 9th November 2014, following a parade through the town of personnel from Wattisham Flying Station, the Stowmarket Memorial Clock was officially unveiled and dedicated. The clock, which serves as a memorial to all those who lost their lives in conflict, was designed, manufactured and installed by the Town Council.

The clock is the centrepiece of the Market Place. Any potential regeneration project that takes place in the future must consider the clock and ensure that this important memorial is respected.

Museum of East Anglian Life (MEAL)

The Museum of East Anglian Life¹⁹ is a leading regional visitor attraction and the largest independent museum in Suffolk. The museum is located within the boundaries of the town centre, just off the main shopping street. It sits at the centre of the town's cultural offer, within easy walking distance of the John Peel Centre, the Regal Cinema and The Mix. The museum is a community asset and a key plank in any strategy to give the town a strong and vibrant USP.

The museum is an educational charity. It opened in 1967 and has grown up over a 50-year period, from a volunteer-run organisation to increasing professionalism. The museum's assets include 20 buildings open to the public (including 17 historic buildings), 75 acres of land and 40,000 objects. The historic Abbot's Hall estate lies at the heart of the museum. The original buildings are listed at Grade II or Grade II*. Other historic buildings have been brought to the museum and re-erected.

Alongside its permanent exhibits, the museum runs a lively public programme ranging from the annual Festival of Beer and Brewing to the town's Bonfire Night celebrations, and has recognised strengths in training and volunteering. The museum has a strong track record of engaging hard-to-reach audiences through targeted programmes to build confidence and skills – working with unemployed people, mental health service users, ex-offenders and people with learning difficulties. The District Council's 2016 independent assessment concluded that *'MEAL is much more than a museum. It has an impact across the local community of Stowmarket, Mid Suffolk and indeed East Anglia as a whole.'*

The museum has a long-term vision for development, encapsulated in its masterplan. The masterplan will transform the Museum of East Anglian Life into one of the leading independent museums in the country. The plans reflect a desire to take advantage of the tremendous potential of the site – its size, its location – and to make the most of the impressive assets – collection, buildings, people, landscape – to meaningfully engage with people. The museum has

¹⁹ <http://eastanglianlife.org.uk/>



significant potential to develop into a magnet for tourism, bringing economic benefits to the area and consolidating the local cultural offer. It will play a substantial role in East Anglia's economy and society: a must-see attraction for visitors and a source of pride for local people.

The masterplan sets out how the museum will transform into a gateway for understanding the food inheritance of the region: a museum of food. It will incorporate working-class stories of agricultural labourers and artisans alongside the stories of internationally-significant innovations and invention in farming, to cover the role of the market town and also the day-to-day experience of cooking and eating in the home. It will look back at a horse-powered economy and forward to the challenges that face us now and in the future. It will show what East Anglian agriculture and food industries – past and present – have contributed to the world and also look to how future challenges are being addressed. The museum will work with individuals, businesses and organisations working in East Anglian food production industries to showcase the region's current food heritage and explore what the past can tell us about sustainability.

There is no museum of food in the UK. The museum's collection is well placed to tell the story of food production, processing and consumption. Food is the common thread which runs through the medieval barn, the watermill and the farmhouse; it encompasses carts, milk floats and machinery as well as it does the museum's animals and domestic interiors. The museum's aim is that people understand where their food comes from, its impact on the landscape and on themselves. To deliver this vision, the museum will re-zone its site and develop exhibits to accommodate new stories and an innovative activity programme.

The first focus of the masterplan is a new Heritage Farm which will be delivered over the winter of 2018-19. It will be a family-focused exhibit and will include a new orchard and animal area, showcasing East Anglian breeds and varieties.

For more information, visit the museum and talk to staff.

Gateway 14 – Mill Lane

Mill Lane site is the town's major employment land allocation on the eastern side of the A1120. It has recently been renamed Gateway 14. A new access will be built off the roundabout at Cedars Park opening up land for new factories, offices and jobs.

The Chancellor announced in 2015 that New Anglia LEP and its local authority partners had secured one of the Government's prestigious new Enterprise Zones for Norfolk and Suffolk. Under the theme *Space to Innovate*, the new, multi-site zone will help create 18,500 jobs over its 25 year lifetime, including 5,000 by 2021.

The zone includes Stowmarket Enterprise Park, Suffolk - a 17 hectare Enterprise Zone which includes the existing Food Enterprise Zone, located on the edge of town. The main theme of the park will be agri-tech, food and health sectors as well as digital and media based business. Businesses relocating to either site could receive business rates discount of up to £275,000 over five years, simplified planning and access to Superfast broadband.

Food and Drink Processing business could also qualify for grants between £60,000 up to £1 million if they establish themselves in the Food Enterprise Zone in Stowmarket. The Councils are producing Local Development Orders (LDO) which will enable some types of development to be quickly built without the need to apply for planning permission. This will give Food & Drink related businesses such as food production, packing, logistics and marketing the opportunity to expand and grow at a faster rate.



Locating on an Enterprise Zone site in Mid Suffolk District gives businesses certain benefits including:

- Discretionary Business Rates Relief (currently in draft awaiting Member approval) – available to businesses locating to an EZ site on or before 31 March 2021, subject to State Aid thresholds.
- Additional business marketing and promotion support via Councils, New Anglia LEP and other agencies.
- Potential to access other funding/preferential finance aimed at employment growth.
- Streamlined planning e.g. Local Development Orders, Outline Planning Permissions.
- Potential to access other areas of expertise via Districts/New Anglia LEP e.g. education and health sectors, ICT operators, local Chambers of Commerce and other business advice agencies.
- Stowmarket EZ site – potential cluster of food related business operators.
- Fully serviced employment land located close to main junctions (50 and 54) on A14.
- Close proximity to rail network including London mainline stations.
- high capacity, high speed broadband connectivity.
- modern office accommodation.

The Council priorities were established in March 2018 and the Council is investigating how to bring the site forward quickly. This includes consideration for buying some land, assisting the delivery of infrastructure and/or buildings, and ensuring that jobs are created.

The Council is also developing the new Local Plan which will have up to date policies for businesses to develop premises and grow. The Council is considering how it can speed up planning decisions and simplify processes so that businesses can move quickly as markets change.

Former Council Office at Needham Market

In 2016 Mid Suffolk District Councillors made the decision to relocate from these buildings to Endeavour House in Ipswich, creating a single HQ sharing space with other public sector bodies, while continuing to deliver services within the district, including at a new public access point in Stowmarket.

The decision was in part a result of appraisals of the Needham Market site, which showed that the buildings were no longer fit for purpose to fulfil local government functions. The reasons for this included barriers to redesign, such as listed building status, and poor connections to vital utilities. The cost of mitigating this and bringing the buildings up to modern office standards would have been prohibitive.

Instead, as a result of the move to Endeavour House, Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils will save an estimated £5.8 million over the next decade in HQ costs, allowing that money to be reinvested in council services.

With the offices vacant a design and planning team has focused on the regeneration and redevelopment of the site, informed by soft market testing to identify suitable uses and options. This work has confirmed that demand for commercial office space at this location is extremely limited, with no demand from providers of care homes for this location.

The proposals the Council are considering would see much of the existing offices – the non-listed buildings in particular – demolished and a new development built in their place and on the former office car park. This would comprise:

- 99 houses and apartments, with a mix of 1, 2 and 3 bedroom apartments and 2, 3 and 4 bedroom houses.
- Public car parking.
- High quality landscaping.
- Cycle storage.



- Waste management facilities, either located on the site or elsewhere within the town if not accommodated on the site.

The exact mix of houses and apartments is unknown, as there are also plans being considered to include a retail unit on the site, on the west of Hurstlea Road. Whether this option was developed, or a purely residential option instead, would determine the total number of dwellings.

Over the coming months work will begin on deciding how the development can be delivered. The next stage, once this work is complete, will be for Planning and Listed Building Applications to be submitted for the site: this is expected to be in late summer 2018.

Dentist

Like Doctors' surgeries, dental practices in England are independent contractors (individuals, companies, partnerships and non-profit organisations) that undertake work for the NHS on a contractor basis. This means that in some remote rural places there isn't enough work to sustain a business and so there is no dentist service locally. However, in Stowmarket there is a range of dental surgeries available, and Stowmarket acts as the hub for the greater catchment too. Dentist services in Stowmarket are provided at

- Tavern Street Dental Practice.
- The Dental Design Studio.
- Bury House.
- Wedgewood House Dental practice.
- Community Dental Services CIC .

Additional local services can be found at Needham Market Tooth Booth and Needham Market Dental Practice. Most dental practices are open Monday to Friday 9 – 5, with some practice open outside these hours. Most dental practices are not open on a weekend. An out of hours dental service provides urgent dental care on Saturdays, Sundays and Bank Holidays.

NHS England is the commissioning organisation for all dental services including both primary (high street dentist), secondary dental care (hospital services) as well as community dental services (special care patients) and includes services such as orthodontics (straightening teeth), minor oral surgery, endodontics (root canal treatment) and periodontics (gum treatments), urgent dental care and out of hours urgent dental care. In our area, this has been the responsibility of *NHS England (Midlands and East – East)* since April 2013.

There is no formal patient registration with dental practices and patients are able to seek dental care from any dental practice that is taking on patients. Patients can find information about dental practice using NHS Choices website www.nhs.uk or by contacting 111. New adult and child NHS patients can seek dental care with Tavern Street, Tooth Booth and Bury House, while Dental Design Studio can see new child NHS patients. Unlike medical practices, dental practices are able to open and close their lists as and when they need to. Each practice will have their own process of managing this and lists may close and open during the course of any year.

The majority of the dental provision that is currently in place is based on historic arrangements, when dental practices could be set up by a dentist anywhere they liked. A new contract was introduced in 2006 which resulted in contracts being issued to current dental practices and them only being able to secure contracts moving forward if the commissioning organisation determined a need by basing commissioning decisions on the Oral Health Needs assessment and if a need determined, following a procurement process.

General dental practices are commissioned to provide a number of units of dental activity for a fixed payment and have to deliver at least 96% of this activity during the course of the year. Delivery of the units of activity is monitored by NHS England, practices that do not deliver their activity will be in breach of their contracts and NHS England looks to right size contracts based on what the practice can deliver.



The premises that NHS dental services are delivered from are in the main the responsibility of the dental provider. NHS England contributes towards the non-domestic rates of eligible dental practices.

Delivering a Vision for Prosperity



Conclusion

Actually, Stowmarket is quite a nice place to live in and to visit!

Stowmarket is also only around an hour from London, Norwich and Cambridge by train, with high speed links across the country, so we're very well connected. With the exception of a few hotspots, traffic congestion is also very low. We also live in a great climate - fresh, clean air, and the mildest, warmest and driest climate in the UK. Average rainfall is low and temperatures are higher than any other county. This accounts for our beautiful countryside, river valleys, heathlands, woodland, wildlife and acres of attractive landscapes.

We are recognised as being in the top 50 rural places to live in terms of wellbeing and satisfaction with quality of life: the Halifax Rural Areas Quality of Life Survey identifies Mid Suffolk as 25th best place! So overall we have it rather good really!

House prices are on average 20% lower than in neighbouring Essex and 15% lower than in neighbouring Cambridge. Although still affordable, Suffolk is experiencing some of the fastest-rising prices in the country ensuring that buying homes in BMS is a sound investment. We have homes of all shapes, sizes and price brackets for workers, managers and company directors.

Your three tiers of local Government have a programme of interventions that keep the area working, from obvious things like waste and recycling collections, street lighting, and the general maintenance of your public areas. As well as these overt things, there is a vast array of behind-the-scenes support such as business support, social care for vulnerable people, and political promotion of the area to ensure that we get a good deal from the Government.

As well as local government, a swathe of organisations maintain our quality of life – Suffolk Constabulary ensures we live in one of the lowest crime rate areas in the country, while Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service has one of the best track records of any such service. Our local NHS Clinical Commissioning Service ensures that we have a standard of medical care far higher than most rural communities experience.

As well as these services, there is a raft of charity, community and social organisations that work tirelessly to support our primary services and do so much to make sure that the quality of life in the Stowmarket area is very high.

We must also acknowledge our local businesses and employers. The international conglomerates choose to locate here because they recognise the good conditions and the quality workforce that are more attractive than anywhere else on the planet – otherwise they'd move production! We also have thousands of small businesses that are the backbone of our local economy.

Of course, there is always room for improvement – and that is what the *Vision for Prosperity* is all about. We are working together to address small scale issues that affect the way people perceive their local environment. We are working on plans and strategies such as the Joint Local Plan, Housing Strategy, Economic Strategy, Open Space and Recreation Strategy, Gateways to the Town Strategy and other documents that establish the way we want to develop in the future, setting the standards for quality, design and inclusivity so that everyone can benefit from changes that will naturally occur.

But we're also looking to bring about major interventions in the town centre to make it a place to suit the needs of the town and its surrounding villages, and also to attract tourists and shoppers from further afield to ensure it is a prosperous, sustainable place that is accessible to all, where you and your family can live, work and play.



Delivering a Vision for Prosperity

Overall, *Vision for Prosperity* is about bringing organisations, companies and **you** the residents together to get behind improvements and support projects. If we believe in Stowmarket, others will too – and that will bring about prosperity.

The *Vision for Prosperity 5-Year Action Plan* is available alongside this response in a stand-alone document. The Action Plan considers all of the points raised and set out some immediate actions to address them. The Action Plan is not about talk – it is about doing things. Some are small, some are setting the groundwork for longer-term projects, but all of them are going to happen and make Stowmarket a better place. After that, we'll look to do more Action Plans and keep the momentum of positive change going.

Let's get started!

Delivering a Vision for Prosperity



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