

APPENDIX 4: ASSESSMENT OF ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS AT PREFERRED OPTIONS STAGE (EXTRACT FROM PREFERRED OPTIONS SUSTAINABILITY APPRAISAL REPORT)

7.0 Assessment of Alternatives

An assessment of alternative means of achieving the objectives of the Kingston Town Centre Area Action Plan

7.1 The sustainability appraisal requires that consideration be given to alternative means of achieving the objectives sought through the development and implementation of the Kingston Town Centre Area Action Plan. An evaluation of each potential alternative method is required to see what social, environmental and economic effect they will have on the existing and future environmental baseline compared to the implementation of an Area Action Plan. The following options have been considered, and the reasons for and against each of the options provided.

The General Approach

7.2 The town centre vision is to maintain a relatively compact town centre, building on the remaining vacant sites, conserving and enhancing the historic areas and redeveloping and intensifying the use of less sensitive parts of the centre.

7.3 A **'do nothing' policy** has been rejected as it scores particularly poorly in terms of:

- enhancing the area as a business location and encouraging sustained economic growth
- ensuring that an efficient, competitive retail sector is maintained and allowing development that sustains and enhances the vitality and viability of the town centre
- conserving and enhancing the quality of landscapes and townscapes and the historic environment
- encouraging sustainable tourism.

It would also fail to contribute to providing decent homes and health and other services and facilities, or provide a sense of community identity and welfare.

7.4 Without considerable continuing investment the centre is likely to decline in the services it provides to local communities and visitors. Already several areas have been identified as shabby and run down with sites that are underused or vacant. Competing centres are being regenerated and Kingston would lose its metropolitan status and vitality.

- 7.5 The only significantly positive factor would be the potential limitation on growth of greenhouse gases and pollution if fewer visitors resulted in fewer car trips. However the lack of investment available for new transport services and infrastructure could prevent improvements in non-car modes and not therefore result in a commensurate reduction in the adverse effect of traffic on the environment.
- 7.6 A **higher growth strategy** would be difficult to achieve without requiring much larger scale development or pushing out into surrounding areas. This would be likely to result in some loss of homes or open space on the fringes of the town centre and require development out of scale with the historic core and riverside. It could thus conflict with objectives of maintaining biodiversity and enhancing the character of the conservation areas and better areas of townscape.
- 7.7 It may also unbalance the mix of town centre uses, weaken community identity, and lead to more car use and pressures for significantly more car parking. This would offset the advantages of increased vitality and economic attraction of the extra commercial development.
- 7.8 The **preferred option** would allow investment in developing a balanced centre through intensification within existing boundaries and replacement of vacant, unattractive or outmoded development. This allows access to health and other services and facilities, provision of decent homes, and attraction for sustainable tourism, alongside a vital, commercially viable and economically buoyant centre. Townscape and the historic environment can be enhanced without overbearing development and without the unsustainable effects of undue car growth and parking.

The Preferred Mix of Uses

(a) Retailing

- 7.9 A significant increase in shopping floorspace of about 50,000 square metres is proposed. This is based on studies carried out for the council by Roger Tym and Partners. They looked at both the potential demand for additional floorspace from operators and the increase in available expenditure from Kingston's catchment area to support new shops. They also looked at the quality and size of units required for modern retailing operations.
- 7.10 The consultants took a cautious approach, which assumed some reduction in the expenditure drawn from more distant areas and allowed for growth in competing centres. They also considered physical capacity of the centre. Both assessments support the order of growth being proposed.

- 7.11 A **'do nothing'** option is likely to result in decline in Kingston's status as a metropolitan centre and a reduction in its range and quality of shopping. Retailing is one of the most dynamic areas of the economy and expenditure is increasing. There have been no major additions to the stock of shops since completion of John Lewis and the Bentall Centre in the early 1990s. Competitor centres such as Croydon, Guildford and Bluewater are providing new facilities. Already there are signs of slippage in Kingston's place in the town centre rankings.
- 7.12 Nil or minimal growth would score poorly on the following sustainability objectives:
- Ensuring an efficient, competitive retailing sector is maintained
 - Enhancing the image of the area as a business location
 - Sustaining and enhancing the vitality and viability of the centre
 - Encouraging sustained economic growth
- It would also discourage sustainable tourism for which Kingston's shopping quality is a significant draw. The loss of investment could hamper redevelopment of unattractive parts of the town centre, resulting in declining townscapes and landscape, and failure to upgrade the historic fabric. Access to essential services for local people may also decline.
- 7.13 Positive outcomes would be less competition for sites for other uses such as decent homes and community or leisure facilities. Transport impacts would be mixed. The declining attraction of the centre would result in fewer visitors and less demand for car travel and parking, resulting in reduced greenhouse gas emissions and pollution and better health. On the other hand the likely longer trips made by residents to access better shopping centres further afield would add to congestion, pollution and greenhouse gas emissions elsewhere.
- 7.14 Failure to provide additional or more efficient floorspace, against a backdrop of increasing expenditure, would also add to the pressure for out-of-centre retailing which would be more car-orientated and contrary to the above objectives.
- 7.15 A **higher quantum of growth** would score positively in terms of creating an efficient, competitive retailing sector, enhancing the image of the area as a business location, sustaining and enhancing the vitality and viability of the centre and encouraging sustained economic growth. It could encourage tourism but only if the character of the centre also retains its appeal.
- 7.16 Problems would be similar to those identified above with the general issue of growth: pressure to push the boundaries out or increase height and massing of buildings, with possible harm to the historic environment and townscape. It would tend to draw in more shoppers from a wider catchment, adding to journey length and car use with

attendant problems of congestion, pollution, parking and emissions. It could harm the viability of other centres by taking an undue share of available expenditure. Other uses could be squeezed out of Kingston, harming its character and access for the local communities to other services and facilities. More shopping would generate more waste but arguably this would only be transferred to other locations if not allowed here.

- 7.17 The **preferred option** is considered to strike the right balance between commercial growth and capacity, resulting in investment to fund improvements in facilities and the historic and modern environment and not generating significant additional car use.

(b) New Housing

- 7.18 The **preferred option** is to provide up to 1500 additional dwellings, mainly flats. This is derived from a 'bottom-up' assessment of proposals with planning permission, current applications and sites with housing potential. An increasing proportion of affordable units will be sought in line with UDP policy proposals. Some student and other special needs housing is also sought. Much of the potential will be as part of mixed developments where highly profitable private housing also acts as enabling development for less profitable activities. In the core of the centre the new housing will be largely in the air space above street level commercial uses.
- 7.19 The sustainability benefits are seen as providing decent homes in a highly accessible location for public transport, reducing the need for unsustainable car use; adding to town centre vitality and surveillance, thereby reducing anti-social behaviour; and providing accommodation for workers and students to boost the economy and higher education.
- 7.20 A **do nothing** scenario would mean that the town centre would not make a further contribution to meeting local or strategic housing needs so that more people would lack a decent home. It would therefore fail to reduce poverty and social exclusion. It would also make less economic use of sites if other less profitable uses did not replace it. The enabling effect of profitable housing in subsidising other community facilities would be lost.
- 7.21 A **higher level of house building** would add to the provision of homes, counter social exclusion and provide additional local labour but would lead to either exclusion of other uses of value to the local community or ever higher densities, conflicting with preservation of the character and historic environment of the centre and its attraction for tourists.

(b) Employment Uses

- 7.22 The **preferred option** is for an increase from around 17,500 jobs to about 20,000. The mix of employment would include a range of service and office jobs, including in the 'knowledge' economy and creative industries which are strong in the area. This would be achieved by supporting mixed developments, the growth of the University and Kingston College, encouraging offices close to the rail station or on upper floors, and provision of a centre for creative industries. There is very little industrial or warehousing remaining and replacement in a prime centre with high land values is unlikely.
- 7.23 This approach would score highly in terms of enhancing the image of Kingston as a business centre and, by locating in a highly accessible location, would allow reduced car use with less congestion, pollution and greenhouse gas emissions.
- 7.24 An issue not yet fully resolved is the future of much poor quality office space with high vacancy levels and little demand from businesses seeking better quality space or higher car parking. Although its refurbishment or redevelopment would be beneficial for the reasons given above, there are issues of viability because of the relatively low rental levels and competing provision in other centres in London and in Surrey. On some sites mixed development with more profitable housing may deliver.
- 7.25 A **higher level of employment provision** is problematic, but in terms of viability of uses and competition from other uses rather than because of sustainability factors. It would add further to the local economy, help reduce poverty and social exclusion and reduce commuting out of the borough. However, a large quantum of additional floorspace would begin to produce the over-development considered above.
- 7.26 **No further employment** would make the centre less economically vibrant and not help reduce poverty or social exclusion. It would potentially reduce car use but would be likely to increase work trips out of the borough to more distant locations.

(c) Leisure, Arts, Cultural and Entertainment Facilities

- 7.27 Priorities for the **preferred option** are provision of more restaurants, a quality hotel and conference facilities, completion of the Rose Theatre, a new library and learning centre, an extended museum and local studies centre and exhibition/meeting space. The emphasis is on securing a more varied mix of activities appealing to a wider range of age groups and interests.
- 7.28 Their provision would have significant sustainability benefits in terms of accessibility to services and facilities for local people and visitors and possibly a reduction in anti-social behaviour. They would encourage community identity, add to the vitality of the town centre and support a

variety of additional jobs. They would also add to the tourist attraction of the centre and in some cases utilise historic buildings.

- 7.29 A **do nothing option** would produce an unbalanced centre yielding none of the above benefits and reducing the attraction of the centre for local and borough residents, visitors and tourists. The lack of variety of uses would harm the character of the centre.
- 7.30 **Additional facilities** may be encouraged if there is demand and they are viable. In general they would reinforce the sustainability benefits outlined above. However, in a few cases they may have adverse effects, for example a further influx of large pubs and bars (in the new A4 use class) would tend to further increase antisocial behaviour and discourage many people from using the centre. This would reduce overall use of services and facilities and result in a form of social exclusion.

(d) Community Uses

- 7.31 The **preferred option** is to encourage some further expansion of Kingston University and College, provide better facilities for the voluntary sector and support new medical facilities serving the increased population stemming from the housing under construction or planned. The sustainability benefits are seen as reducing social exclusion, increasing access to essential services and facilities, improving health and community welfare, and with spin-off for the economy and local employment and some reuse of historic buildings.
- 7.32 A **do nothing** approach would produce none of these benefits, with adverse effects on welfare, exclusion and the local and wider economy.
- 7.33 Although some **additional facilities** could be provided with benefit, there will be increasing tensions if some community uses continue to grow at past rates. The University has rapidly expanded in recent years with immense benefits for the borough but also intense pressure for ever more space for academic and administrative space and student housing. No estimate of future growth and capacity in the longer term has been provided. This is producing competition for scarce sites and could lead to fewer affordable housing units being provided and more imbalance in the age groups around which the evening economy already concentrates. Student facilities and accommodation do however present the opportunity for car free developments and more patronage of entertainment and cultural facilities.

Environmental Quality

(a) Historic Environment and Heritage

- 7.34 The main elements of the **preferred option** are:

- to enhance the Old Town and Riverside North Conservation Areas, carry out major refurbishment of the Market Place, churchyard, Memorial Square and Gardens, and various passageways;
- to safeguard and enhance Listed Buildings and Buildings of Townscape Merit;
- adopt and implement an archaeological strategy.

7.35 The approach scores highly in terms of conserving and enhancing the historic environment, maintaining and enhancing the quality of townscapes and landscapes and protecting and enhancing public open spaces. Retention of existing fabric minimises the need for additional resource use but could have adverse effects in terms of energy efficiency.

7.36 The effects on the image and efficiency of the town centre for business and on vitality and viability are two-edged. There could be conflicts with the provision of new floorspace and intensification. However, this leaves large swathes of the town centre where these constraints would not apply and where new investment to bring about positive environmental improvements is desirable. Any loss of potential growth and modernisation would be offset by enhancing the image of Kingston as an attractive place in which to shop, enjoy leisure pursuits, work and live and as a tourist destination. Environment and image are likely to become increasingly important as customer mobility and competition between centres intensifies.

7.37 A **do nothing** option would minimise the advantages set out above but would allow even greater intensification of new development.

7.38 Overall there are strong reasons for supporting the preferred option.

(b) The Public realm

7.39 The **preferred option** entails:

- upgrading the public realm with new and enhanced public spaces and green spaces;
- riverside improvements including the riverside walk, related sites and open spaces, links to the core of the town centre and improved moorings;
- improved gateways to the town centre and upgraded approach routes and links from public transport and car parks.

7.40 All these proposals are beneficial in terms of enhancing the image of the area for business and economic growth, increasing the vitality and viability of the town centre and its retailing performance, and encouraging sustainable tourism. They would also enhance the quality of townscape and landscaping, the historic environment and public

open space, and have potential to improve biodiversity at the river margins.

- 7.41 The improved pedestrian environment will help reduce car use, pollution and emissions and by making the centre more accessible to people with limited mobility will reduce social exclusion. The improved routes will assist in accessing services and facilities from the surrounding area and increase a feeling of community identity. The improved environment may have a knock-on effect on reducing anti-social behaviour.
- 7.42 A **do nothing** policy would mean that all the above sustainability benefits would be foregone. No beneficial effects have been identified.

(c) Design Principles

- 7.43 The main features of the **preferred option** are:
- redeveloping vacant and underused sites;
 - high quality design including landmark contemporary buildings in suitable locations and buildings of appropriate height and scale;
 - inclusive design making buildings and spaces accessible to all;
 - more trees and landscaping, including on 'green routes';
 - improved provision of public art.
- 7.44 This approach scores highly through making better use of scarce land and improving the quality of townscapes and landscaping and enhancing public open spaces. There will also be benefits in terms of accessibility to services, reducing social exclusion through removing mobility barriers, improving the attraction for tourists and enhancing the image and vitality of the town centre for retailing and business. No adverse sustainability effects have been identified. A **do nothing** option would not deliver these benefits or yield others.

(e) Sustainable Development

- 7.45 Key facets of the **preferred option** are
- enhancing the natural environment and biodiversity on the riverside and in open spaces;
 - embedding principles of sustainable design and construction;
 - preparation and adoption of a flood risk strategy;
 - implementing the Air Quality Action Plan;
 - implementing measures to reduce waste and increase recycling.

- 7.46 All these have a straightforward positive correlation with the sustainability objectives, reducing contributions to climate change, making efficient use of resources, minimising waste, reducing pollution and improving health. No adverse effects have been identified. A **do nothing** policy would not yield these benefits.

Transport and Access

(a) Improving Public Transport Facilities and Access

- 7.47 The main elements of the **preferred option** sought are
- improved accessibility from the south and west, including developing park-and-ride services and bus/rail integration to make Surbiton station a second gateway to the town centre;
 - a new or improved Kingston rail station and surroundings;
 - improved frequency of train services and late night services;
 - better taxi and minicab provision and facilities;
 - a new bus station accessible from the relief road and an enhanced Fairfield bus station, taking buses out of Eden Street;
 - improved provision of community transport.
- 7.48 Beneficial sustainability effects will be a reduction in car dependency and use with reduced greenhouse gas emissions and pollution, resulting in better health. There will also be reduced social exclusion, improved access to essential services and facilities, and an improved sense of community welfare. Better public transport will bolster Kingston's image and attraction as a business and retailing centre and will encourage sustainable tourism.
- 7.49 No adverse effects are identified though the effectiveness of the proposed new or enhanced bus stations will depend on being well keyed in to the core of the town centre to maximise their use and offset the loss of closer in stops in Eden Street. A **do nothing** scenario would fail to deliver these benefits and no positive advantages are identified.

(b) Improved access for pedestrians and cyclists and better signing

- 7.50 The **preferred option** proposes improved access for pedestrians both into the town centre, with easier crossing of the relief road, and within the centre. Enhanced safety, convenience and comfort will encourage walking. Improved cycle routes and more secure cycle parking will help promote cycle use. Clear and comprehensive signing of routes and attractions will further support walking and cycling.
- 7.51 The proposals score positively in terms of potential for reducing car use and pollution and greenhouse gas emissions, with health benefits. Walking and cycling are themselves healthy travel modes. Other

benefits are the contribution to the image and vitality of the centre with benefits for the economy, retailing and sustainable tourism. These are free modes of travel, helping counter poverty and social exclusion, promote community identity and welfare and improve access to services and facilities.

- 7.52 The **do nothing** option would neither deliver these benefits nor make any other positive contribution to sustainability.

(c) Car Parking

- 7.53 The assessment of the car parking proposals in the **preferred option** is a mixed one. The proposals are for replacement of some existing parking with a possible increase of up to 700 spaces, depending on the scale of additional development which takes place in the town centre (significant increases in retailing and other uses are proposed). A re-balancing of the off-street parking is also proposed so that more incoming cars use the nearest interceptor car park rather than many travelling round the relief road to the popular north-west sector parks adding to congestion and causing longer journeys. New parking is proposed at Ashdown Road/Ladybooth Road and at the Cattle Market with Eden Walk being phased out. This process would be helped by new signing and naming of car parks and an improved variable message signing system.
- 7.54 To the extent that there is any increase (up to 10%) in the car parking provision, there would be some encouragement for car use. The percentage increase would be considerably lower than the increase in commercial and other floorspace so that in relative terms the modal shift would be towards non-car use. Any absolute increase would however have an adverse impact in terms of pollution and generation of greenhouse gases and conflict with health improvement. The town centre is already one of the areas with the poorest air quality in the borough.
- 7.55 Offsetting factors would be the re-balancing of provision and improved signage which could shorten car journeys on the relief road and reduce peak period congestion. There is also the likelihood that the extra shopping and leisure development in the town could lengthen stay, with less turnover of spaces and traffic movements. Better provision for disabled people would reduce social exclusion.
- 7.56 Beneficial effects would be in maintaining the economy and the vitality and viability of the town. The London Plan accepts that outer south-west London will remain car-dependent for some time and shoppers benefit particularly from the convenience of being able to carry their purchases home by car. Some of the principal competitor centres are outside London in areas of high car ownership. Bluewater in particular offers extensive free car parking.

- 7.57 A **do nothing** option would have the opposite effects. There would be no extra car use but economic effects would be adverse. The opportunity to rebalance the parking - and the use of the centre generally, with attractive new facilities in the currently underused south-east sector - would be lost. This would not relieve congestion on the relief road caused by queueing for the oversubscribed Bentalls and John Lewis car parks. Nor would the pedestrian environment of the core of the centre be improved by taking out the Eden Walk multi-storey car park.
- 7.58 On balance the proposals are considered beneficial though significant extra car parking provision would have adverse effects.
- 7.59 It should be borne in mind that many of the sustainability benefits or dis-benefits can be reinforced by packages of supporting measures. For example the transport measures can reinforce each other and can combine with development to give added value.

