

chapter **3** characteristics
and key issues

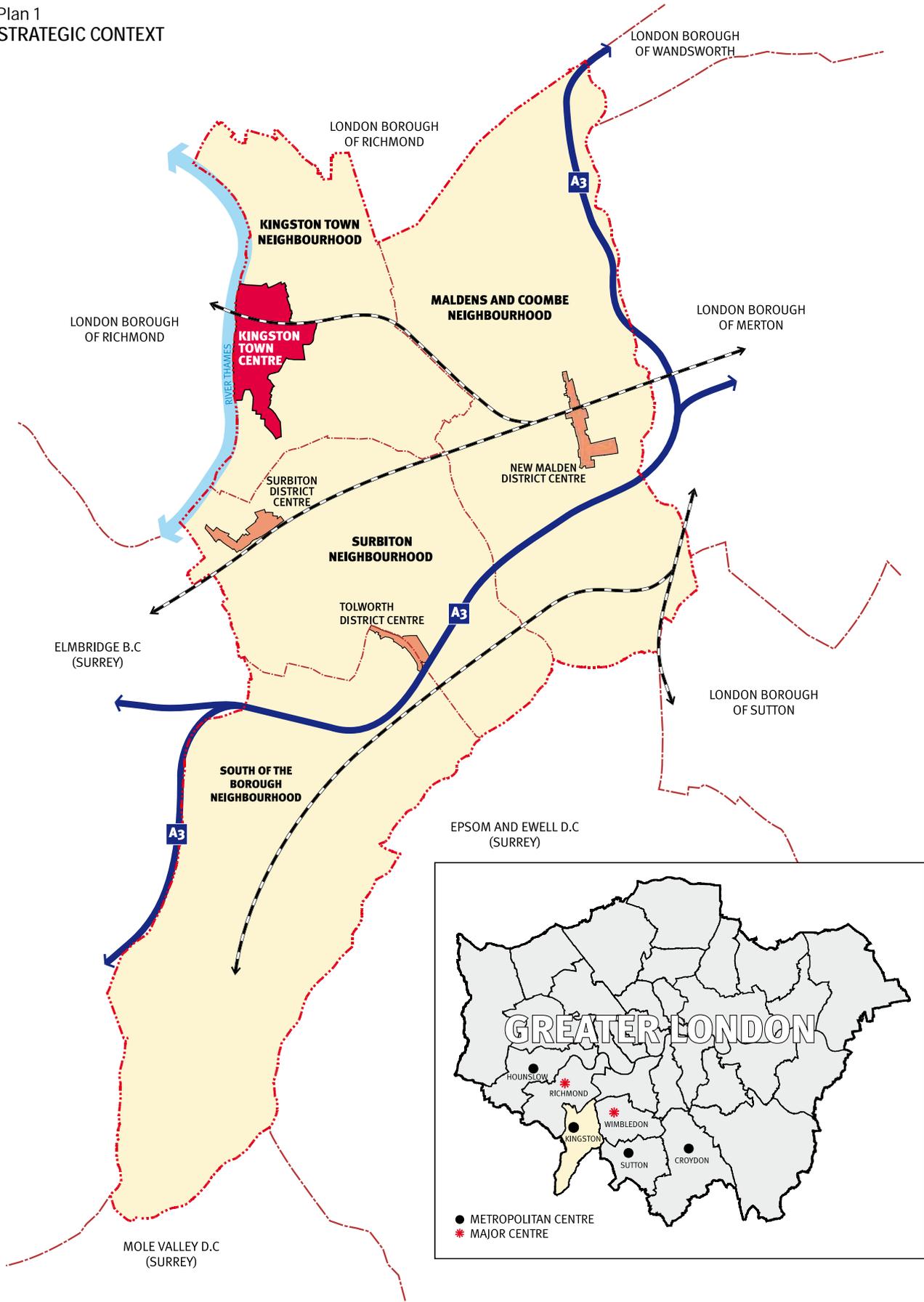




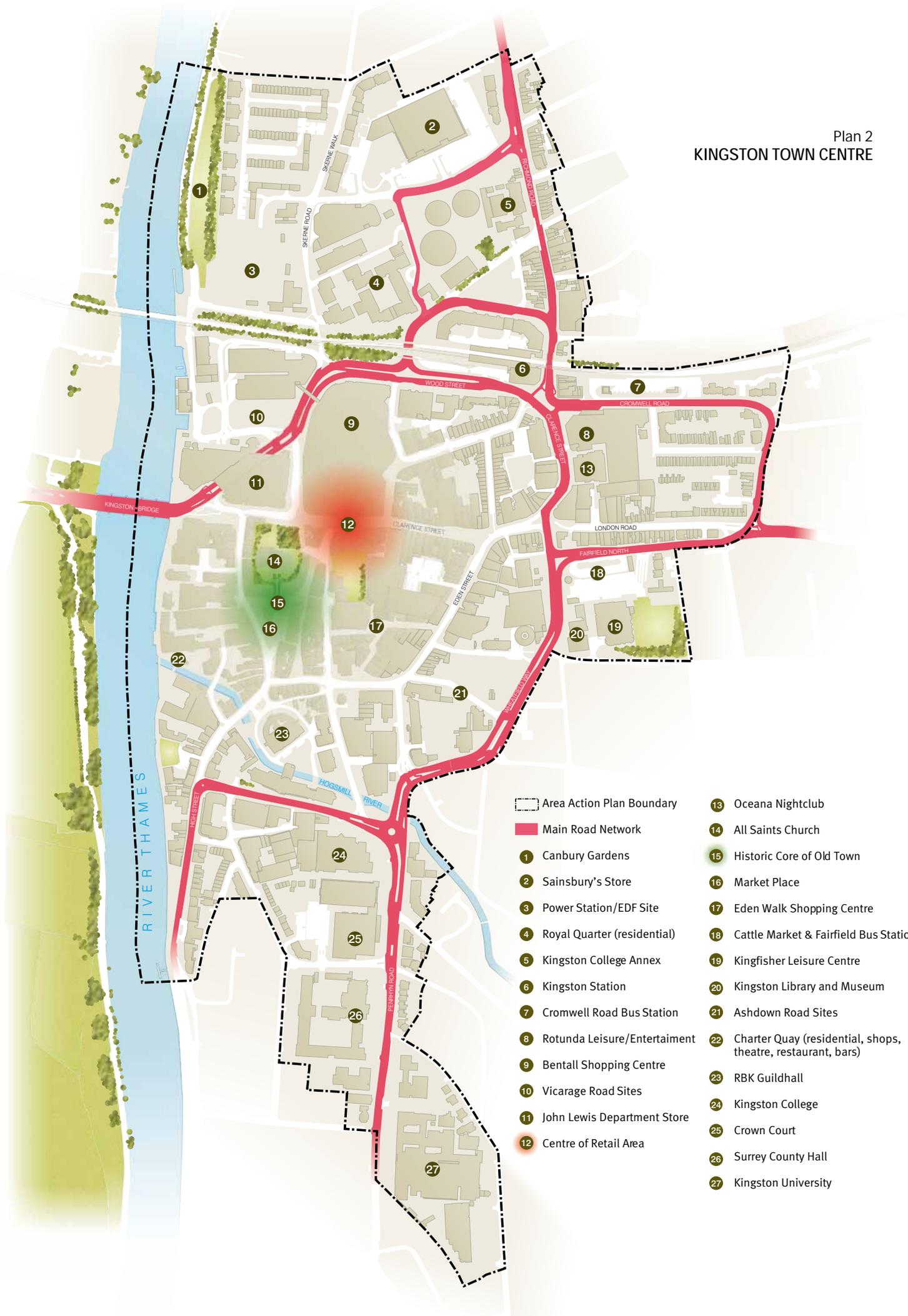
3.0 CHARACTERISTICS AND KEY ISSUES

- 3.1 Kingston is a successful Metropolitan town centre, one of ten in Greater London, which attracts over 18 million visitors per year. It is the main centre in the borough (Plan 1) and a sub-regional shopping centre. It is also a significant leisure destination, especially in the evenings; a centre for legal (Crown, County and Magistrates Courts), business and public services; and a higher and further education centre (Kingston University and Kingston College), serving southwest London and northeast Surrey.
- 3.2 Kingston has an attractive and distinctive character stemming from its riverside location and rich blend of old and new attractions. It grew up around a crossing point on the River Thames and its name derives from “King’s Tun” meaning a royal estate. By medieval times it had developed into a thriving market town. The 1086 Domesday Survey records that it had five mills and three salmon fisheries and the latter is now reflected in the borough’s official emblem of three salmon. The first bridge across the Thames and the Clattern bridge across the Hogsmill were built around 1200. Royal Charters in 1200, 1208 and 1481 recognised Kingston as a town and granted it independent status. The historic Old Town, focused on the Market Place is one of the best preserved examples of a medieval street pattern in southeast England.
- 3.3 Local industries developed and inns and public houses flourished when Kingston was a stopping-off point on the London to Portsmouth coach route. In the 19th Century there was rapid expansion following the construction of a new bridge across the Thames in 1828 and the completion of the railway in 1838. During the 20th Century industry declined and the town’s role as a retail and public administration centre developed. In the late 1980’s and early 1990s, substantial office and retail development followed the construction of the relief road system, whilst more recently there has been significant housing and leisure development.

Plan 1
STRATEGIC CONTEXT



characteristics and key issues



- Area Action Plan Boundary
- Main Road Network
- 1 Canbury Gardens
- 2 Sainsbury's Store
- 3 Power Station/EDF Site
- 4 Royal Quarter (residential)
- 5 Kingston College Annex
- 6 Kingston Station
- 7 Cromwell Road Bus Station
- 8 Rotunda Leisure/Entertainment
- 9 Bentall Shopping Centre
- 10 Vicarage Road Sites
- 11 John Lewis Department Store
- 12 Centre of Retail Area
- 13 Oceana Nightclub
- 14 All Saints Church
- 15 Historic Core of Old Town
- 16 Market Place
- 17 Eden Walk Shopping Centre
- 18 Cattle Market & Fairfield Bus Station
- 19 Kingfisher Leisure Centre
- 20 Kingston Library and Museum
- 21 Ashdown Road Sites
- 22 Charter Quay (residential, shops, theatre, restaurant, bars)
- 23 RBK Guildhall
- 24 Kingston College
- 25 Crown Court
- 26 Surrey County Hall
- 27 Kingston University

Local Economy, Employment and Range of Functions

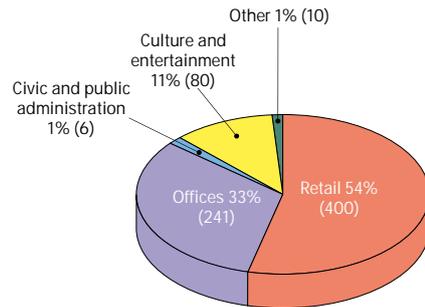
- 3.4 There is a diverse economy with around 700 employers providing 17,500 jobs across a range of sectors (see Figure 3). Retail dominates, with just over half the businesses and nearly half the jobs, but there is a significant private office sector, as well as public sector administration, entertainment and leisure, higher and further education. Retaining this diversity is key to maintaining a balanced economy with a range of job opportunities.
- 3.5 Kingston is one of the top retail centres in the southeast (ranked 17th nationally in 2005) with around 400 shops, two department stores and two markets (the Ancient daily market in the Market Place and a Monday Market on the Cattle Market car park). A loss of shoppers to other centres and the lack of new retail facilities have raised concerns. The 2003 Retail Studies, updated in 2006, found that Kingston serves a wide area for comparison shopping, has a shortage of large shop units and a range of retailers seeking accommodation. They identify significant need, demand and capacity for new shopping facilities and conclude that Kingston needs to enhance its retail offer in order to strengthen its role as a metropolitan and sub-regional shopping centre and maintain its attraction to catchment area shoppers, retailers and

investors. The conclusions of these studies in terms of capacity for new retail floorspace were confirmed by the Greater London Authority's own studies.

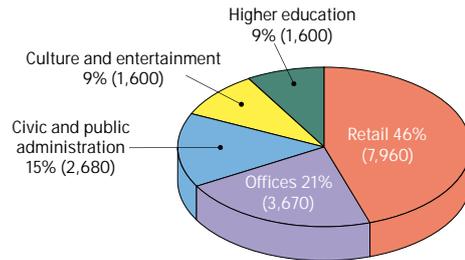
- 3.6 Since 2003, the Council has been working in partnership to identify opportunities for new shopping facilities, as part of mixed-use development within the primary shopping area and by extending it and these proposals form a key element of this AAP.

Figure 2
Employment and businesses by sector

Number of businesses by sector



Employment within each sector





3.7 Outside the town centre, the borough's three district centres (Surbiton, New Malden and Tolworth) (Plan 1) and shopping parades provide for more local needs.

3.8 Kingston's status as an office centre is weak, much of its office stock is poor quality and its rail services and connections are comparatively poor, which has led to low demand and low office rents. Measures are needed to enhance its attractiveness to commercial office based businesses, especially in the growing creative, knowledge, and information sectors. The vibrant and growing University (see para.3.13) is seen as a positive factor in helping to enhance the image sought for Kingston.

3.9 The range of entertainment and leisure attractions has increased significantly and now includes: the Rotunda leisure development with its flagship 14 screen Odeon cinema in the listed Bentall's Depository; three nightclubs; plus cafes, pubs, bars and restaurants, some focussed on the riverside Charter Quay; bingo, health and fitness clubs, the Working Men's Institute, Kingfisher leisure centre, Kingston College sports hall, sailing clubs and Sea Cadets. Arts and cultural facilities include: Kingston Library, Kingston Museum and Art Gallery; the Penny School Gallery; the 'Toilet' Gallery; the College's Arthur Cotterell Theatre, Kingston University facilities and All Saint's Church, which provides a venue for performance music. There is only one hotel, of budget quality without restaurant facilities. A Feasibility Study has assessed the centre's prospects for a quality full service hotel.



- 3.10 The vibrant facilities attract large numbers of young people in the evenings, which results in some disturbance, crime and anti-social behaviour late at night. There is support for an increased range of attractions to appeal to a wider cross section of the community, especially in the early evening and at weekends, to promote Kingston as a leisure destination drawing upon its heritage and riverside assets and to implement a strategy to better manage the town centre at night, so that it is as pleasant and attractive to visit in the evenings, as it is in the daytime. The opening of the Rose Theatre and the provision of a quality hotel will help to achieve this. The AAP also seeks to provide a better spread of daytime and evening attractions across the centre.
- 3.11 Faith, Community and Voluntary Sector facilities include the five churches and the Friends Meeting House. The sector adds to the centre's vitality and diversity by providing a range of activities and services for the local community, but requires improved facilities to meet local service needs.
- 3.12 There has been a substantial increase in the number of people living in the town centre, with 1400 homes completed since 1995, the majority in four high-density schemes (Charter Quay, Royal Quarter, Skerne Walk and Avante). Due to other UDP requirements (eg. theatre and hotel), affordable housing provision has been limited to 170 homes. Some concerns have been raised about increasing densities, lack of amenity space, compatibility of housing and other uses, lack of family and affordable housing and the availability of supporting facilities such as schools and GP surgeries. There is scope for more housing, including affordable, family and student housing, as part of mixed-use development, to address some of the concerns and a new GP surgery is planned.
- 3.13 Kingston University and Kingston College with 19,000 and 9,000 (3,900 full-time) students respectively, play a very important role in the local economy providing education, training, employment, plus a range of facilities and events. The University is continuing to expand and this has raised some concerns, which are being addressed through improved liaison with the local community. They had planned to acquire Surrey County Hall to enhance their facilities, but with Surrey County Council now due to remain in Kingston, other options for the expansion/enhancement of its facilities are being considered. Kingston College have new facilities in Kingston Hall Road and plan further improvements there and at their Richmond Road Annex.
- 3.14 Central and local government services, the Police and the Courts (Crown, County and Magistrates) are all located in the southern part of the town centre. A range of improved facilities is required to meet changing service needs, including Courts.



Environmental Quality

- 3.15 Kingston has an attractive character overall, with its riverside setting and distinctive historic core. Outside these areas, a large swathe of the town centre was affected by development in the 1960s, 70s and 80s, which cut across its historic grain. There are few high quality modern buildings and the quality of the environment and public spaces needs upgrading. There is potential for high quality contemporary architecture in key locations and improvements to the public realm, especially on approach routes.
- 3.16 Protecting and enhancing the historic environment is key to maintaining Kingston's attractive character and distinctiveness, especially in the Old Town Conservation Area around the Market Place. There are four peripheral conservation areas; 50 listed buildings, including two Grade I and five Grade II*; and 34 Buildings of Townscape Merit. The Clattern Bridge is a Scheduled Ancient Monument and the whole of the town centre is an Area of Archaeological Significance.
- 3.17 Kingston has a stunning riverside setting beside the listed Kingston Bridge. Recent development has completed the riverside walk and improved riverside access and facilities. There is potential to further improve riverside attractions to increase use and enjoyment of the river and to enhance biodiversity.



Transport and Access

- 3.18 Traffic, access and parking are key issues. The town centre relief road system carries high levels of traffic, much of it through traffic using Kingston Bridge, as well as local traffic resulting in some congestion in peak periods. Within the relief road, a large part of the centre is free of traffic with pedestrian and cycle priority.
- 3.19 The quality and distribution of the 7,000 parking spaces results in queuing for popular car parks at peak shopping periods, which causes congestion, when other car parks have spaces. The aim is to make better use of existing parking capacity and reduce queuing.
- 3.20 The town centre has a comprehensive and frequent network of bus services, which has led to increased bus use. Rail services are less satisfactory with a half hour frequency on both the Waterloo to Richmond loop and Shepperton lines. The main issues are the need to improve: rail services, Kingston Station, public transport from the west and southwest parts of Kingston's catchment area and bus facilities. Permanent Park and Ride facilities would improve access to the town centre, but potential sites are outside the borough and will be difficult to deliver. A Rapid Transit Study was unable to identify any feasible tram scheme on the transport corridors studied and bus based alternatives were too marginal to pursue.
- 3.21 The flat topography, proximity to surrounding residential areas and network of cycle routes, mean that many people can choose to walk or cycle into the town centre. Cycle theft is a particular issue which needs to be addressed. Further improving public transport, walking and cycle routes and providing secure cycle parking will help to reduce car use, improve sustainability and enable growth and new development to take place without increasing congestion.

Kingston Town Centre Management and Kingston First Business Improvement District

- 3.22 There is an active Kingston Town Centre Management (KTCM), which promoted and established Kingston as the UK's first Business Improvement District, Kingston First, in January 2005, in partnership with the Council and supported by the London Development Agency. The BID addresses short term operational and management issues and aims to promote the town centre to attract more visitors; secure a safer, cleaner environment with added security; better transport and access; and support for small independent businesses in the commercial sector. It is the role of this AAP to provide the longer term strategy for the town centre.

Flood Risk

- 3.23 Flood risk is a serious issue as most of the town centre is within zones identified by the Environment Agency as being liable to flooding from the Thames and the Hogsmill. A Strategic Flood Risk Assessment has been prepared for the town centre, in association with the Environment Agency, to complement PPS25 and set out measures to manage and reduce flood risk, especially on major development sites.

Accommodating new development and rebalancing the town centre

- 3.24 The town centre's spatial characteristics provide constraints and opportunities, which affected the selection of the Preferred Option in 2005 and its range of sub-options for town centre uses; transport, access and environmental improvements. These are set out more fully in the Sustainability Appraisal.



3.25 The town centre covers a compact area between the River Thames and surrounding housing, open space and schools. There is no potential to extend outwards beyond existing boundaries to provide land for new development. Within the town centre, the Old Town Conservation Area, peripheral conservation areas, areas with special character, open spaces and listed buildings, need to be safeguarded and enhanced and are not suitable for redevelopment. Substantial areas of the town centre were redeveloped between 1985 and 2005, in two main periods of development activity (1988-1992 and 2000-2004), which also limits the availability of land for new development in the period up to 2020. Transport infrastructure, including Kingston Bridge, the railway line which is on the embankment and the relief road system also act as constraints, which affect the way in which the town centre can develop.

3.26 There are significant opportunities to accommodate growth within the existing centre in the remaining areas, many of which would benefit from major change, such as vacant, underused and poor quality sites, which are suitable for redevelopment and intensification. Townscape analysis has found that the grouping of land uses and built fabric form a series of ten character areas, each with its own attributes (Part C of this AAP), which have shaped the policies and proposals in this AAP.

3.27 There is an uneven distribution of attractions across the town centre, with major shopping facilities concentrated at the western end of Clarence Street with associated parking, whilst parts of the centre, especially in the southeast (Ashdown Road sites) and northwest (Vicarage Road sites), are underused or vacant and lack attractions. This AAP offers the opportunity to rebalance the town centre by providing a better distribution of attractions, in particular new facilities in the south and east.

