

# **Bingley Parish Neighbourhood** **Plan**

**Town Centre, Planning and Regeneration**

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## Bingley Town Centre – our Vision

The document **Bradford Planning – Core Strategies, Sub-area policies, Section 4.2 (Airedale)** that was adopted in July 2017 describes a vision of how Airedale might look by 2030.

In respect of the town centre of Bingley it states, in short, that it has been reborn as a distinctive market town with high quality new housing, town centre residential units and office space. It is a destination for specialty retailing due to the outdoor market in the new square (formerly Jubilee Gardens), and is the place to visit for food, drink and leisure due to the redevelopment of Myrtle Walk, new anchor food and general stores, provision of improved visitor attractions (Riverside Walk, park and Visitor Centre at Five-Rise Locks), parking and bus/rail interchange.

This vision does seem a little removed from reality and is, in fact, a vision that was first promoted in the Bingley Town Centre Masterplan published in 2005 by the [Airedale Partnership](#).

The current situation is that, although the Bingley Relief Road takes a lot of traffic particularly at rush hour times, the volume of traffic going through the town remains heavy and, despite controlled pedestrian crossings at each end and in the middle of Main Street, the principal shopping street, the town remains split in two along the length of Main Street, from its junction with Harden Road/Ireland bridge to its junction with Ferncliffe Road. The main shopping and parking areas are kept separated from the main leisure and activity areas comprising the market square, the arts centre, the swimming pool and facilities, Myrtle Park and River Walk.

The market square does not seem to be fulfilling its potential, and although the Town Council continues to encourage markets to be held there, for most of any month it remains under utilised. This is felt to be exacerbated by the somewhat utilitarian and monosyllabic design of the Little Theatre/Arts Centre which forms part of the background to the square when viewed from the main retailing side of Main Street. Also, the old Market Cross building is partially hidden due to it being at a lower ground level than the square and so loses any attraction it might otherwise have.

The vision of the Masterplan of 2005 seems to have become rather lost over time. It proposed short stay parking with residential and commercial development around the Arts centre and behind Queens Court, the area in front of the railway station as public open space with a bus interchange, and a multi-storey car park where Aldi is now situated. Of course, in 2005 the HQ of the Bradford and Bingley BS still had an active role in the town centre with its several hundreds of staff, most of who would probably use the town's facilities during the day and thus give it economic strength.

Bingley could become negatively affected by the growing trend of internet shopping for goods and services that can be delivered to the home. There are reports available that confirm the trend away from high street shopping (e.g. Futurehighstreets.com, Begbies Traynor survey, research by Altus Group) and that high street shops will become more vulnerable to closure due to increasing costs, especially payment of rates, and decreasing footfall. The Business Retail Consortium calculates there will be 900,000 fewer retail jobs by 2025 (BBC news item 03/12/18). The constant rise in online shopping currently accounts for around £1 in every £5 of retail spending compared with just 20p/£5 a decade ago and is responsible for much of the pain being suffered by the more traditional “bricks

and mortar” shops. (Information from data compiled by RICS as part of the second-quarter UK Commercial Property Market Survey reported in Oct/Nov 2018 issue of RICS Property Journal).

According to Tony Hughes, CEO of Huthwaite international, a leading global provider of sales, negotiation and communications skills development, “.....The problem with much of the high street at present is an ineffective strategic approach, teamed with a changing and turbulent market. Shops now sell a great proportion (of their goods) online, (forcing) the high street (to become) more of an attraction or experience (in its own right) than a perceived necessity.”

In other words, there is a need for the high street to become a venue, a place to visit for its own sake and not just for retail purposes. This means creating an interesting and attractive area where people will feel comfortable, relaxed and have an enjoyable experience. The future of many town centres is now not just about shops, it should now be about living, learning, leisure and local services, the importance of community activity and holding lively events. This is supported by a paper published in 2018, Grimsey Review 2, giving a different future for the high street as sketched by retail expert Bill Grimsey ([vanishinghighstreet.com](http://vanishinghighstreet.com)).

Bingley Town Council has recently modernised and re-opened the public toilets in Jubilee Gardens to help the town centre to be more about living, learning, leisure and local services as mentioned above and we are, at the time of making this Plan, in the process of building a new Changing Places facility in order to make the town more socially inclusive

Bingley town centre needs to evolve a long-term strategy to combat distraction from its core purpose. It has one major positive factor compared with the usual town centre shopping streets: most of the ground floor occupiers are local businesses and a good many provide a service that cannot be obtained on the internet.

A ground floor user survey was carried out on 30th November 2018 covering the following roads: Main St. (between the traffic light junctions with Harden Rd and Ferncliffe Rd), Park Rd (from traffic light junction with Main St. to Johnson St.), 5-Rise Centre, Chapel St., Wellington St., Market St., Queens Court and Queen St.

The number of ground floor units counted was 136 (including Aldi and Lidl) of which:

- 29 are bars/cafes/pubs
- 19 are hair/beauty salons/barbers
- 8 are estate agents
- 6 are offices, and
- 9 are vacant

Thus almost half (62 units) out of the total are of a non-goods retailing type, uses that have little competition from the internet. The proportion of vacant units is felt to be gratifyingly low (6.6%).

So what does this mean for Bingley? The Council and the Chamber of Commerce need to hold on to these local businesses and traders and ensure they are encouraged to remain, or to come into town. We need to develop a new vision for the town centre that builds upon the previous one, referred to above, and encompasses updated demographics and our current thinking.

## **POLICY TC1: BINGLEY TOWN CENTRE – OUR VISION**

*Bingley Town Centre should bring together the differing elements of the town; these being the retail areas, the arts and leisure of the Arts Centre, the open spaces of Myrtle Walk & Myrtle Park and our tourist attractions, e.g. St Ives Estate and 3 Rise & 5 Rise locks and unite the town as a singular body. The Council should develop policies and strategies to connect all areas of the town together enabling visitors to arrive, park, shop and amble freely whilst enjoying the town's amenities and tourist sights.*

Our council will have this new vision in its mind and seek to achieve it over time. Current ideas include:

- offering a rates incentive (e.g., 10% discount for first year of occupation and a sliding downward scale of %age for the following 2 years, combined with say 5% rates discount for every fifth year of occupation) and innovative parking incentives. We understand that Harrogate Council is considering offering a free parking period for every 10 hours of public parking purchased over a specified time.
- to maintain a dialogue with property owners and encourage them to give incentives, for example, first 4 months of occupation rent free, rent discount say 5% for four months after 3 years of tenancy, financial support for capital improvements, perhaps timing such support at a time when the business concerned has the least level of income – quite often, Jan or Feb of the year.
- identifying and targeting “missing uses” e.g. greengrocers, bookshops, menswear etc. and try to encourage them to move into the town centre.
- giving detailed guidance on design of shopfronts and follow this through with regular checks and reports on their state and condition to both occupier and landlord. We understand that this practice is carried out by Pateley Bridge Town Council.
- reviewing the use of upper floors along our main streets. Can the Council and property owners be more relaxed in considering residential or office uses? It seems that introducing more residential use into central areas encourages a better environment due to the presence of a permanent population.
- Developing ways to encourage people to visit, to have something that would attract them other than of a purely retailing nature. For example, a better traffic environment (e.g. traffic reduction scheme along Main Street, pedestrian priority streets/areas in an appropriately paved way such as Wellington Street and station forecourt, Chapel Street, Myrtle Place) that encourage visitors to explore around in safety, and particularly across into Market Square, into Myrtle Park, River Walk and to Five-Rise locks.

- introducing interactive and sensory focal points in our Market Square and surrounding area – e.g. interactive sculptures/fountains, sensory gardens/planting, permanent play zones for kiddies. Making more use of the Market Cross building, improving the Art Centre facades and elevations for example the addition of a large side conservatory for use as a restaurant or bistro serving light meals (see Theatre By The Lake, Keswick).
- improving the access to Myrtle Park between the swimming Pool and the new LIDL store. It needs to be more attractive and intriguing, perhaps a scheme that naturally draws people along into the park – a sort of “secret garden” type entrance.
- improving the pedestrian route to 5-Rise locks as it is neither clear nor particularly well signposted. Creating parking spaces near the locks. Ensuring access routes are well marked and clearly defined. This is a national treasure and Bingley should be maximising access to this tourist attraction for all it can.

Our Council has gained external grants to generate a Design Code for the Town Centre and a Masterplan for the whole Parish. These documents have been formally adopted by the Council and form part of the Neighbourhood Plan. They build on our vision to create an award winning town centre that meets our needs of creating a vibrant and interesting town centre that provides income and interest for all types of businesses and is attractive to residents and visitors alike.

The **Design Code** document and **Masterplan** underpin the Neighbourhood Plan and can be found in the evidence library. Both of the documents should be read in conjunction with this chapter.

The specific purpose of the Design Code is to provide helpful guidance to all involved with the design and development of the Town Centre.

The Design Code will be used as an evidence base for the Neighbourhood Plan. It establishes clear design principles and uses these to set out a rationale against which future proposals will be assessed. It sets out a code to improve the appearance of the Town Centre, celebrating its shopfronts and public realm. This will help to ensure that as new development and improvements come forward, they support and enhance the Town’s character.

The Design Code is structured thematically in order to identify key principles across the Town Centre in relation to the public realm and shopfronts. This will provide mandatory guidance that supplements policies of the Bingley Neighbourhood Plan. Whilst this is not a statutory document, it is a material consideration and any proposal will be assessed against it. The Design Code should be read in conjunction with the National and Local Planning Policy.

The Masterplan is principally about making new connections across the Parish; bringing the villages and communities that together make up Bingley. The Masterplan provides a development and placemaking framework for a cohesive vision of the villages and seeks to bring people together to strengthen the already firm ties that exist in the Parish.

Our Council, through the Neighbourhood Plan Working Group has some further ideas for improvement to create interest which should lead to curiosity then exploration:

- Events in Market Square such as human statues, street performers, mini funfairs etc.;
- Interesting, perhaps quirky, Heath-Robinson type sculptures and street furniture;
- Modern electronic advertising billboards (cylindrical style?) incorporating lighting, shelter and seating, not only for commercial advertising but also for advertising local events;
- Introduce sculpted street-lighting schemes;
- Open discussions with St Ives Estate to explore the possibility of establishing mountain bike circuits zigzagging down to the river. We think this could possibly be the only mountain bike circuit in the north of England very close to an urban area and readily accessible by rail direct from a large catchment area - Leeds.
- Investigate the possibility of a funicular/ski-lift/gondola travel system from the bottom of Myrtle Park, through the trees and up to the St Ives estate for the use of walkers, bikers, and all comers.

In all cases consider the possibility of sponsorship from local firms.