

**Bingley Parish
Neighbourhood
Plan**

**Bingley Town
Centre – Our
Vision**

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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 speciality 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 (www.airedalepartnership.org).

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 the Adam Smith Institute**) 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 recently published paper (Feb 2019), Grimsey Review 2, giving a different future for the high street as sketched by retail expert Bill Grimsey (vanishinghighstreet.com).

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.

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 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.
- offering innovative parking incentives. For example, 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 is actively seeking external grants to generate a more definitive proposal that we can formally adopt that will 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.

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;
- Have defined sculpted (e.g. varied block-paving) pavement routes with route pointers actually in the paving (most people look down!) leading people to areas of interest. For example, there could be such a defined route from Station Sq. across to, and up, Foundry Hill, crossing Main St and Market Sq. where it splits, with one branch across Myrtle Place and on to Myrtle Park, with perhaps the last stretch lined with electronic

advertising billboards with lighting, shelter and seating, the other branch leading to the start of River Walk; similarly with a guided route to 5-Rise locks;

- Have a wide pelican crossing on Main St i.e. traffic lights set say 20m apart so there is a good width for pedestrians to cross (this would incorporate the block paving for the guided route);
- Introduce Saturday and Sunday motor traffic restrictions along Main St.;
- 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.

Planning policies and plans should promote choice, flexibility and competition to create an environment in which the local economy can flourish. It is not the role of the planning system to restrict competition, preserve existing commercial interests or prevent innovation. However, good design, style, materials and features are matters of concern and desirable, and for Bingley these requisites are encapsulated in the Bingley Town Centre Design Code attached to the Neighbourhood Plan as a separate document.

POLICY No.1 BNDP-Town Centre - Uses

To ensure that the quality, viability, vitality and diversity of Bingley town centre is both maintained and enhanced, development of retail, office, leisure, hospitality, cultural facilities and cultural schemes will be supported when consistent with Policy EC5: City, Town, District and Local Centres of The Bradford Local Plan Core Strategy.

Within the Primary Shopping Area (PSA) of Main Street between the junctions of Harden Road/Ireland Bridge and Ferncliffe Road, development for retail (A1) uses will be encouraged and supported. Proposals for any non-retail (A1) use on ground floors of premises in the PSA may be supported only if they do not have a significant adverse impact on the vitality and viability of the PSA and do not lead to a significant decline in its retailing nature. The clustering of uses of a non-retail (A1) nature on ground floors within the PSA is not desirable and will be resisted.

Bingley Town Council will favourably consider non-retail uses such as professional service offices, cafes and restaurants, entertainment and drinking establishments, as well as retail uses, within the town central area outside of the PSA.

Proposals to use or re-use upper floors within the town centre for retail, office, leisure, cultural facilities, business and residential uses will be supported.

Proposed temporary uses for vacant units anywhere within the town centre will be supported.

Policy No.2 BNDP - Town Centre – Design and Shopfronts

To maintain visual quality and distinctiveness of the town centre environment new shopfront and shop signwork should meet the design criteria as set down in the Bingley Town Centre Design Code. Wherever possible, alterations to existing shopfronts and shop signs should also meet the required design criteria. Reference should also be made to the City of Bradford MDC's Shopfronts Design Guide supplementary planning document and guidance for shopfront security.

Within the Conservation Area there are special rules governed by the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 regarding style, design, materials, colours used and placement, particularly in the context of the immediate surrounding area and adjoining buildings. In particular, unusual designs, styles, materials or garish or fluorescent colours are not acceptable. Reference should also be made to the City of Bradford MDC's document Conservation Area Assessment and Appraisal.

POLICY No.3 BNDP- Town Centre – Market Square

A regular and active open-air market is an attraction in its own right and provides focus and interest in what is happening in the town centre.

Bingley town council will continue to work towards supporting a viable market and aim to enhance and improve it by encouraging more and diverse traders to attend, with the aim of providing a long-term sustainable future. It will also encourage the use and enhancement of Market Square and immediately surrounding areas for temporary events and activities such as outdoor community events.

POLICY No.4 BNDP - Town Centre – Public Realm and Amenity

Publicly accessible areas and routes should provide a positive contribution to the interest and enjoyment of the local environment in and around the town centre and enhance the experience of being there. They should provide the essential linkage between the town's special features and areas and promote easy and safe accessibility to them.

Support will be given to proposals for new or replacement features such as open spaces, pedestrian and bicycle access routes, paving, seating, lighting, street furniture and sculpture, planting areas and planting facilities, and signwork, particularly of a directional nature, and should be of good quality and distinctive design. The use of quality materials, sympathetic and appropriate colours and vernacular features will be encouraged, but clutter through over-use of items such as street furniture and signage should be avoided.

Where development including public realm features takes place without the need for planning consent, agencies and developers will be encouraged to meet the requirements of this policy. Those proposing new public realm or amenity should seek to consult the local business community, Town Council and Civic Society before such proposals are finalised. Should there be any existing heritage features within the boundary of such proposed development every effort should be made to retain such features, but if not possible then they should be conserved and re-used where appropriate.

In all cases regard must be had for the provision of accessibility and parking for disabled, mobility scooter and wheelchair users.

Reminder note - not for inclusion in document!!!!

Special feature /sculpture to commemorate Fred Hoyle? – eg see Mary Rand / long jump pavement sculpture in Wells, Somerset

Policy No. 5 BNDP - Town Centre – Traffic and Car Parking

Despite the Fred Hoyle Bingley Relief Road Bingley town centre continues to be subject to heavy vehicular usage.

The town council will seek to reduce congestion and traffic flow by encouraging BMDC to introduce measures to reduce the dominance of vehicles. The town council will support pedestrian priority measures, including wider pavements and more road crossing points, and encourage designation of safe bicycle routes through the town and bicycle parking facilities. Bingley town centre has a total of 317 pay and display parking spaces (as at Sept 2019), some specifically for all-day use such as by the railway station.

The town council will support additional car parking provision wherever possible, particularly short-term (up to 2 hours) to encourage more local shopping. Proposals for new development or substantial alterations that may result in increased vehicular usage and service provision should, wherever possible, provide adequate off-street parking provision in order to avoid on-street congestion or use of car parking spaces ideally for the use of visitors to the town centre.

There will be support for improvements to infrastructure to allow for increasing use of electric vehicles and their necessary charging points.

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