

ANNEX 1

Swadlincote Town Centre

A Vision & Strategy - Five Years On

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**An Update
and Monitoring Report**

September 2005

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Purpose of the Monitoring Document

In February 2001 the District Council, in collaboration with the Civic Trust Regeneration Unit and in consultation with a wide range of groups and individuals, published 'Swadlincote Town Centre - a Vision and Strategy' (the 'Vision & Strategy'). The aim of the document was to set out an agreed framework for raising the profile of the town as a centre for retailing, service and leisure and guiding future work to enhance its vitality and viability. Equally, the Strategy was a vehicle for guiding the regeneration of the town in a way which recognised and preserved its special character and heritage.

It is now approaching five years since the document was published. Many of the short and medium term goals have been achieved, other new developments and initiatives have taken place, the economic and policy background has changed and it is now timely to review progress.

This monitoring document therefore reviews 'where we have been' and describes 'where we are now'. It is not intended to be a full review of the Vision and Strategy or to establish new actions for the future – that work can only be taken forward via a full consultation process. However, it provides a useful context for taking the regeneration of the town into the future and single point of reference for the Council, its partners and other stakeholders in devising and promoting projects etc.

Background to the Vision & Strategy

At the time of the preparation of the Vision and Strategy, Swadlincote had undergone a massive transformation over the preceding few decades. Wholesale contraction of traditional coal, clay and engineering industries had left the town with a legacy of a despoiled landscape and a weak economic base with little apparent prospect of urban renewal.

However, against a background of rising economic prosperity and the efforts of community, public and private sector organisations, Swadlincote is being transformed into a bright modern town lying at the heart of the National Forest with its own distinct character and heritage. It has an ever broadening economic, civic and cultural base and is the administrative centre for South Derbyshire. Nevertheless, it is clear that the ongoing regeneration and development of the town is essential and will rely on continuing investment and partnership action. The Vision and Strategy is an important means of marshalling and energising that regeneration process.

In view of the particular characteristics of the town, the Vision and Strategy proposed action in three broad areas:

- **Promotion and marketing**
- **Economic restructuring**
- **Design.**

... and the following eight principles were regarded as being the key to success:

- **Comprehensive:** A single project cannot regenerate a town centre;
- **Incremental:** Small projects make a difference;
- **Self-help & public/private partnership:** The town centre needs the support and expertise of the grass roots communities and both the public and private sectors;
- **Identifying and capitalising on existing assets:** Local assets provide the solid foundation of a successful town centre regeneration initiative;
- **Quality:** The local regeneration programme and the town centre must be synonymous with quality;
- **Change:** Changing community attitudes and habits is essential to bring about a town centre renaissance;
- **Action-oriented:** Frequent, visible changes in the look and activities of the town centre will reinforce the perception of positive change;

Accordingly, an Action Plan was adopted as part of the Vision and Strategy, and progress on those actions is detailed below and summarised in the table on page 12.

The following pages therefore chart the changes in legislation and national policies in relation to town centres, progress on the conservation of the heritage of the town, new retail and other developments, new research and other contributions to the knowledge base and other changes and initiatives.

Economic and Policy Background

The past five year period has been one of relative economic prosperity and growth. Falling unemployment and rising home ownership indicate a growing affluence in line with national and regional trends. Housebuilding rates in this part of the district continue to be very strong helping to expand the future purchasing power within the town's catchment area.

There have been a number of important changes in national planning policies and other guidance with respect to the planning and management of town centres. The main documents are summarised below, although the list is by no means exhaustive:

- **The Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004** has introduced wholesale changes to the planning system, including the way plans are prepared at a local level, such as action plans for town centres. There is a particular emphasis on community and public involvement in the new planning system. Also, separate amendments to the Use Classes Order has split the former A3 use class (food and drink), into three new classes: Class A3 use as a restaurant or café, Class A4, use as a public house, wine-bar or other drinking establishment; and Class A5, use as a hot food takeaway. It is expected that this will enable local authorities to better co-ordinate their local planning and licensing strategies.
- **Planning Policy Statement 6 (PPS6) Planning for Town Centres** - Government Guidance on planning for town centres was revised early in 2005. The promotion of town centres as being the focus for a wide range of development and services is continued but importantly, the following are also highlighted:
 - The need for local planning authorities to assess the retail and leisure growth potential of town centres and accordingly make site provision to meet those needs.
 - The need to proactively manage town centres
 - The need to influence the property market to achieve measures to regenerate smaller towns which have often in the past been overlooked for redevelopment.
 - The need for a high quality environment and good design.

The revised Guidance attaches even greater importance to the adoption of town centre strategies as a means of bringing about positive change in town centres. In this regard, work undertaken already on the Vision and Strategy represents good practice which pre-empted PPS6.

➤ **Planning for Town Centres: Guidance on Design and Implementation tools**

This Guidance deals specifically with design issues relating to planning for town centres and some of the main tools available to secure the implementation of town centre planning policies and proposals. It supports Planning Policy Statement 6 (see above)

➤ **How to Manage Town Centres – A practical guide towards the achievement of cleaner, safer and greener town centres.**

This is a practical guide aimed at achieving cleaner, safer and greener town centres and making local areas better places to live - especially in the evening and at night. It offers advice those involved in policing, cleaning and providing essential services such as street signs, planning and other forms of regulation.

Conservation and Heritage

- **Heritage and Arts Resource Centre** - The Sharpe's Pottery Visitor Centre opened in January 2003 in the restored 19th Century pottery works in the heart of the town. It was a key project identified in the Vision and Strategy and signals a significant milestone in the physical and cultural regeneration of the town. In total, some £2.5m (from the Single Regeneration Budget, Heritage Lottery Fund and the District Council) has been invested. The centre includes a coffee shop, a conference suite and offers a range of goods for sale. It is also home to two local community groups – People Express and the Magic Attic. This is being followed up with the development of tourist information facilities, supported by the Derby and Derbyshire Economic Partnership with ongoing revenue support from the District Council. The Sharpe's Pottery Centre has contributed significantly to the character of this part of the town and represents an outstanding community and cultural resource.
- **Heritage Economic Regeneration Scheme (HERS)** - In conjunction with English Heritage the Council has, over the last four years, offered grants for the repair and enhancement of commercial properties, civic and religious buildings in Swadlincote Conservation area, and a small number of houses on Church Street under the Heritage Economic Regeneration Scheme (HERS).

Grants are available for up to 80% of the cost and eligible works include:

- Restoration of shop fronts
- Restoration of other missing or damaged architectural features
- Repair/replacement of historic joinery
- Re-roofing and rainwater goods
- Repairs to brickwork, stonework and terra cotta

The HERS investment over five years has been almost £420,000. Total investment including match funding is approximately £625,000. These grants have transformed the appearance of many previously disfigured historic properties significantly enhancing the character of the town. The scheme is due to finish in March 2006.

- **Swadlincote Conservation Area** – In tandem with the introduction of the HERS scheme, the Conservation Area boundary was reviewed and extended in 2001.

- **Production of 'James Woodward Ltd., Swadlincote: A Study of the "Anchor Works" 1790-1978' (Philip Heath, Heritage Officer SDDC, 2003)** - This study charts the development of one of Swadlincote's oldest and largest firebrick and pipe works, and describes some of the products made there. The buildings on the site, both extant and demolished, are discussed individually to aid an understanding of their purpose. Notes from conversations with a past Managing Director and former employees are included as appendices, and the evolution of the works is charted with maps and photographs.

New retail and other developments

Swadlincote has attracted significant level of private sector investment in new shops and other uses. Specifically:

- **Preparation of a Development Brief for the former Hepworths Building Products Site** – This site identified in the Vision and Strategy document was known to be surplus to the requirements of its owners and being in one ownership was likely to come forward for development before the others. In 2001 the Council adopted a development brief to guide future development. Key themes were retention of the Listed Buildings, a building mass that reflected that of the industrial nature of the site, the use of building materials that reflected local distinctiveness and a definite link between the site and the existing retail properties on the High Street.
- **Morrisons** superstore – Site preparation began in August 2005 for the development of a 74,000 sq. ft. food superstore including car parking and a petrol filling station on the eastern end of town. This development marks the achievement of a key objective of the Vision and Strategy to secure an investor for the former 'Wraggs' site. This development has been designed to a very high standard and will provide a direct and easy pedestrian link to the High Street to enable linked trips and reinforcing the vitality and viability of the town. Its location is optimal in counterbalancing the J. Sainsbury superstore on the western edge of the town centre, providing a classic 'dumb-bell' configuration. As such, this will serve to maximise pedestrian footfall along the primary shopping frontages and enhance trade through linked shopping trips. Importantly, the start of construction has triggered the release of a total of £190,000 in developer contributions for the preparation of a town centre Study and Masterplan (details in next section below).
- **Sir Nigel Gresley public house - Wetherspoons** have refurbished and re-occupied the former derelict Granville public house on the Delph. This key development site has been designed to incorporate an expansive glass frontage which lends the building an air of brightness and accessibility and contributes strongly to the quality of this public square.
- **'The Yard'** – A modern, high quality wine bar and restaurant which opened on Belmont Street in 2003. This facility has brought with it a significant enhancement to the Conservation Area and expanded the leisure offer available and enhanced the evening economy.

- The former **Lloyds Bank** building at High Street has been re-occupied by a women's fashion retailer extending the range of shopping available within the town.
- Other new shop uses including ultra modern hair stylists and beauty salons.
- A regular **farmers market** has been established at Sharpe's Pottery

The Council has been proactive in searching out prospective retailers to the town and will continue to be so.

Knowledge Base – Local Research and other Context Information

- **Swadlincote Retail and Leisure Study** - undertaken by Donaldsons in 2004/05 and prepared in accordance with up to date Government Guidance set out in PPS6. Its key objectives were to examine existing patterns of retail and leisure expenditure flows in and around Swadlincote, and to establish the potential of the town to accommodate new retail and leisure floorspace. Broad initial advice was also offered on the town centre sites identified for redevelopment in the Vision and Strategy. The Report is based upon a household telephone survey of 800 residents together with physical site visits to the town. It contains a wealth of information including a town centre health check. The headline findings are:
 - Swadlincote provides a pleasant and accessible shopping environment serving a catchment of approximately 45,000 residents.
 - Its share of expenditure relative to other shopping locations on comparison (non food) goods is currently low. But, there is an opportunity to increase market share through the provision of new floorspace. This is needed to accommodate sectors which are currently under represented (or not represented at all) in Swadlincote.
 - There is estimated to be a need for an additional 4,645 m² of 'High Street' floorspace' and 4,180m² of 'bulky goods' floorspace by 2011 assuming a realistic increase in market share.
 - Whilst there is limited demand from mainstream retailers, there are also few units within the town centre capable of satisfying their requirements – especially for the bulky goods sector.
 - The Morrisons development will boost the local economy by stimulating employment and also increase the market share of convenience (food) spending significantly, clawing back much of that which is currently leaking out to Burton-on-Trent.
 - There are very few vacancies in the town centre which demonstrates no lack of demand. However, this is predominantly from the independent sector and recent years have seen an increase in the number of service outlets and discount and charity shops.

- Rental values are low and do not appear to have risen for some years.
 - Although new eating facilities have been developed, the town should support a wider range of provision. On the whole, the evening economy is undeveloped and the leisure base of the town centre would benefit from being broadened.
 - The Swadlincote Town Centre Study and Masterplan (see next item below) will be able to build on the findings of this study and provide an important means of moving forward the ideas set out in the Vision and Strategy.
 - More detailed feasibility studies are required to investigate the redevelopment of the town centre sites identified in the Vision and Strategy.
- **Swadlincote Town Centre Study and Masterplan** - The commencement of construction on the Morrisons superstore in August 2005 has triggered the release of £90,000 to fund the 'Swadlincote Town Centre Study and Masterplan – a study designed to produce costed proposals for new surface finishes and other environmental improvements. The Morrisons development will also yield a further £100,000 to carry out selected environmental improvements identified by it. It is likely that the total cost of works included in the Masterplan will be in the region of £3m. This piece of work will provide the first stage for a great deal of the actions identified in the original Vision and Strategy including improving the Delph, improving approaches and gateways and new paving for the town centre.
- **Swadlincote Town Centre Boundary** - The was established in the First Deposit Draft Local Plan. Although that plan has now been withdrawn, it was considered by the local plan inspector and may carry weight in guiding development control decisions.

Other Changes and Initiatives

- **West Street Partnership** – comprising local organisations including the Methodist church, local voluntary and community organisations and the district council has been formed. Along with key partners in the district, the church proposes to develop the site and buildings and the open space between them into a community led social enterprise providing a variety of facilities for the community. Proposed activities include a café, a place for worship and ceremonies, choir, band and other performances, childcare, a trading facility, arts and other exhibitions as well as general space for meetings and room hire. Phase I, essential repairs (and some restoration) of the Church and the adjoining shops has just been completed. The partnership is now fund raising to continue with the remaining proposals. This work is making a positive contribution to this part of the town centre and complements the renovation of the nearby Sharpe's Pottery Visitor Centre. Together they form the nucleus of an evolving cultural quarter for the town. The Council in partnership with various stakeholders is in the early stages of formulating a vision for further development of this area.
- **Access to the town centre** – has been improved through the commencement of the first stage of National Cycle Route 63 in South Derbyshire. This will connect Swadlincote town centre to Burton-on-Trent and Leicester and, in particular, will improve cycle access to the town centre from the surrounding urban area.
- **Partnership working** – There is a growing commitment across all sectors to bring about change in the town centre. The Council is taking conscious steps to ensure co-ordinated service delivery where they impact upon the town centre. This includes planning, economic development, environmental health, crime and disorder etc. Significantly, from the private sector, the Swadlincote Town Centre Chamber of Trade has recently been resurrected. These are positive steps which will bring an additional energy and focus to developing and promoting the town centre.

Progress on Previously Identified Actions 2001–2005

The following table summarises the short, medium and long term actions identified in the Vision and Strategy and indicates where progress has been achieved.

Type	Project	Progress
Short Term Projects		
P	Industrial Heritage Trail	Achieved – details on the Council's website
D	Declutter the streets	Costed proposals to be prepared through a Masterplan
E	Business Recruitment Pack	Yet to be undertaken
P	Welcome Packs for new business	Yet to be undertaken
P	Welcome Packs for new residents	Yet to be undertaken
P	Promote the evening economy	Yet to be undertaken
E	Attract Investor for Lloyds Building	Achieved – Now 'Select' clothes shop.
E	Promote Hepworths site to investors	Achieved – Morrisons superstore under construction.
D	Shopfront improvements	Ongoing – HERS scheme now in its 5 th year
Medium Term Projects		
P	Heritage and Arts Resources Centre	Achieved – open to visitors and broadening activities.
P	Develop Year Round Events Programme	Ongoing
E	Retail Mentors	Yet to be undertaken
P	Business Incubator Scheme	Yet to be undertaken
E	Retail Improvement Seminars	Yet to be undertaken
Long Term		
E	Investigate Site Assembly Options for the bus station/Market Hall site and other sites.	Background feasibility work undertaken by Donaldsons (see below). Further feasibility work necessary.
D	Strengthen Town Focus – Improve the Delph	To be addressed in 'Masterplan'
D	Improve Approaches and Gateways	To be addressed in 'Masterplan'
D	New Paving for the Town Centre	To be addressed in 'Masterplan'

[* P= Promotion, D= Design, E = Economic]

Conclusions

This monitoring Report demonstrates that significant progress has been made in implementing the range of measures and actions identified in the original Vision and Strategy document in February 2001 and other developments and initiatives have also occurred. Most importantly, real improvements to the quality and role of the town centre can be seen on the ground.

However it is clear that regeneration efforts must continue and further work is required. The most pressing actions now need to be implementation of the major long term elements identified in the Action Plan such as repaving and the redevelopment of town centre sites in order to improve the physical quality of the centre and extend its role in terms of shopping, commercial and leisure opportunities.

