

VisionsChippenham Vision

Chippenham Vision has commissioned several studies and consultation work to inform policy and planning regarding retail development in the town. These include a Retail and Commercial Health Check report in 2009 and a Town Centre Public Realm Study which aim to inform the evolution of a broader Masterplan for Chippenham, and expand the range of measures for managing traffic and enhancing the conservation area that defines the town centre. One of the main problems regarding shopping in Chippenham town centre is the shortage of suitable premises. The Vision is aware, both through these recent studies but also in discussion with major retail developers that quite a few retailers and shop chains are looking for premises in Chippenham but unfortunately many of the shop units are either too small or too restrictive for their purposes. The Vision is exploring in detail the options and viability for additional retail on key regeneration sites as change is required to improve the vitality of the town centre.

Recent consultation with local residents, local businesses as well as organisations and agencies like the Town Council, the Civic Society and local councillors it has become clear that one of their biggest concerns is the lack of range and quality of shops in the centre of Chippenham. However, there is still resistance from some to the need for change and redevelopment that will be required in order to deliver those improvements.

Chippenham Vision proposed Chippenham Alive, a project to encourage late night shop opening in the town which has been taken up by the Chamber of Commerce, Town Council and Night-time Economy Group of the Area Board. The Vision has also raised concerns regarding edge of town and out of town development and the potential detrimental impact on town centre shops.

Salisbury Vision

In Salisbury the Council is bringing forward the redevelopment of the Central Car Park and Maltings site for a retail-led mixed use development in the heart of the city. This 20 acre site will provide significant additional comparison retail to address the under-provision of larger floor space comparison retailing within the city centre. A procurement process to appoint a developer partner is underway and a preferred developer is expected to be identified early in the New Year. In addition to this Wiltshire Council is bringing forward a significant improvement project to the city's historic Market Place. This will involve re-surfacing the Market place and Guildhall Square to create a new high quality pedestrianised area within the heart of the city. The scheme will involve removal of street clutter, upgrading street furniture and the provision of enhanced street lighting. This investment is being strongly welcomed by the city's Business community in recognition of the contribution it will make to the vitality and viability of businesses within the city.

Transforming Trowbridge

The retail offer of Trowbridge can be characterised as being value based, shopped predominantly by a relatively local population. It has a strong offer in terms of basic and essential shopping but a weak middle to high end offer. There is significant leakage to Bath (in particular) for middle to high end retail. This situation is unlikely to change without further regeneration/development given that much of the existing town centre retail unit stock is comprised of relatively small, old units that do not meet the current requirements of high street retailers who are looking for large "boxes", ideally with a mezzanine to maximise sales space. The two existing shopping centres are dominated by small constrained units with little opportunity to extend these.

The response of the Vision to this situation has been two-fold:

1. Encouraging the development of large retail units to meet modern retail requirements - the recent development of The Gateway with its units of 5,000-10,000 square feet has enabled the town to attract quality high street retailers such as Next and Brantano, as well as the relocation of Argos, New Look and Boots from constrained town centre units. The success of this development is evidenced by the fact that Next and New Look are trading in the top 10% of their company's stores in England. The existence of large town centre Brownfield sites potentially makes the town attractive to retail operators requiring large units. However, in the current economic climate this market is depressed and it may require other stimuli to encourage it.
2. Diversifying the town's offer - given the relatively small size of Trowbridge and the strong retail offers of nearby towns (Bath, Swindon, Bristol), the Vision has identified the need to broaden the town's appeal. It has long been an aspiration to develop a commercial leisure offer (particular a cinema and family entertainment) and currently there are proposals for this type of development at two sites in town. If delivered in an integrated way, a commercial leisure scheme would provide a means of lengthening the "dwell time" of visitors to the town, create a family focussed evening economy offer (through chain restaurants) for the first time and attract new visitors to the town from a large catchment area. Additionally this would create the opportunity for linked leisure and retail trips to the town centre. The attraction of this kind of development is likely to make Trowbridge a sub-regional destination and would have the knock-on effect of increasing the attractiveness of the town to retail operators. Thus, the Vision believes that this would have a catalytic effect on the further regeneration of the town.

A further tactic pursued by the Vision has been to fund the "dressing" of empty retail units. There is considerable evidence that empty shop units create an air of neglect in a town centre and frequently attract a range of anti-social behaviours. In order to create a more vibrant and vital environment the Vision commissioned the dressing of 10 empty units during 2011. This approach utilises adhesive graphics that are attached the front of empty units and generally display a "false" shop frontage. This is a relatively low cost, high impact means of maintaining a vibrant town centre and has been strongly acclaimed in the town.