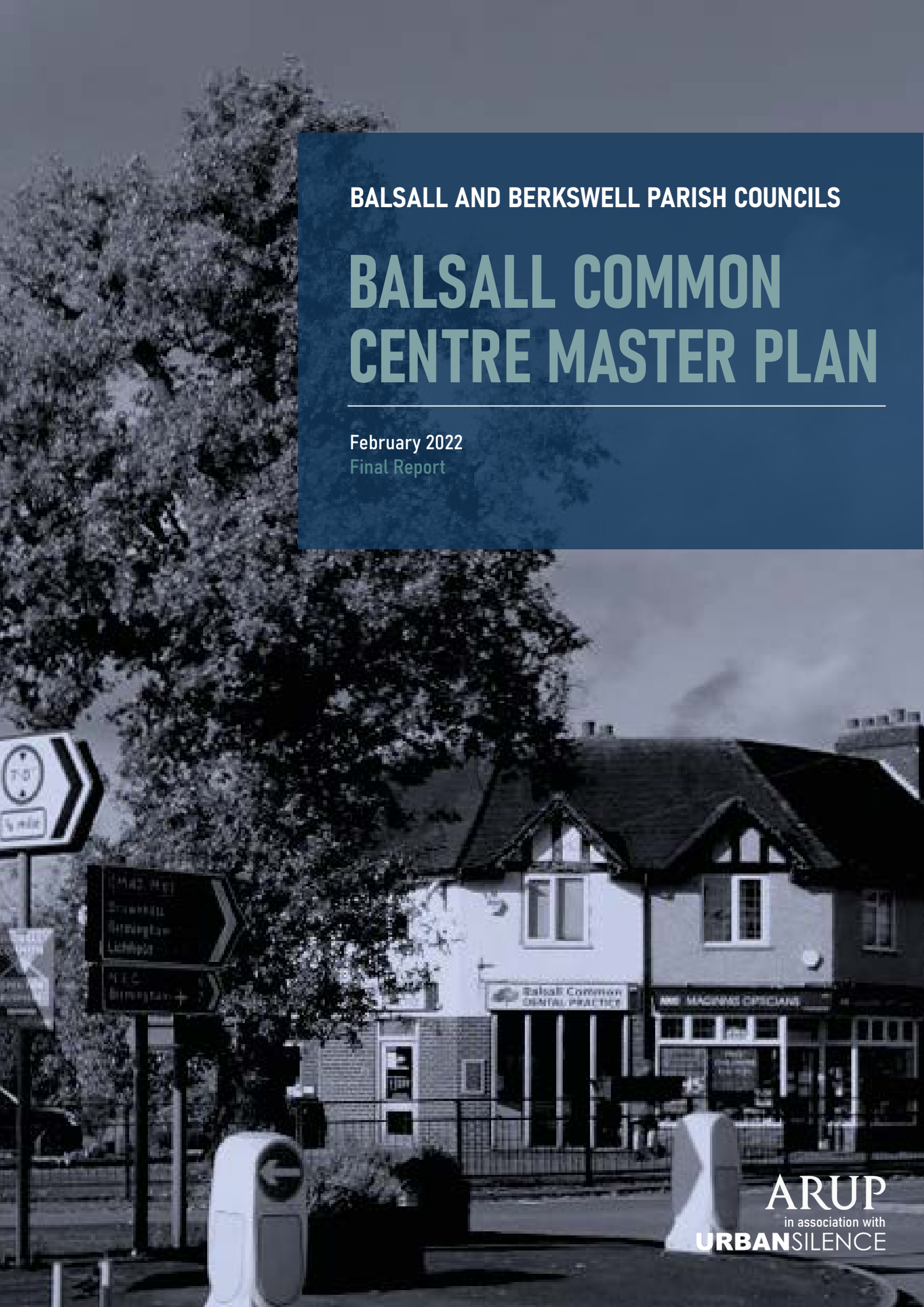


BALSALL AND BERKSWELL PARISH COUNCILS

# BALSALL COMMON CENTRE MASTER PLAN

February 2022  
Final Report



**ARUP**  
in association with  
**URBANSILENCE**

# CONTENTS

<b>1. INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>pg. 5</b>
<b>2. LOCAL VIEWS AND PRIORITIES</b>	<b>pg. 6</b>
<b>3. VISION</b>	<b>pg. 11</b>
<b>4. THE FUTURE CENTRE</b>	<b>pg. 14</b>
<b>5. INTEGRATION WITH THE WIDER AREA</b>	<b>pg. 27</b>
<b>6. IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY</b>	<b>pg. 35</b>
<b>7. IMPACT &amp; OUTCOMES</b>	<b>pg. 44</b>
<b>8. TAKING THE PROJECT FORWARD</b>	<b>pg. 47</b>
<b>TECHNICAL APPENDICES</b>	<b>pg. 51</b>

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This report takes into account the particular instructions and requirements of our client. It is not intended for and should not be relied upon by any third party and no responsibility is undertaken to any third party.  
Job number 279599-00

# 1. INTRODUCTION

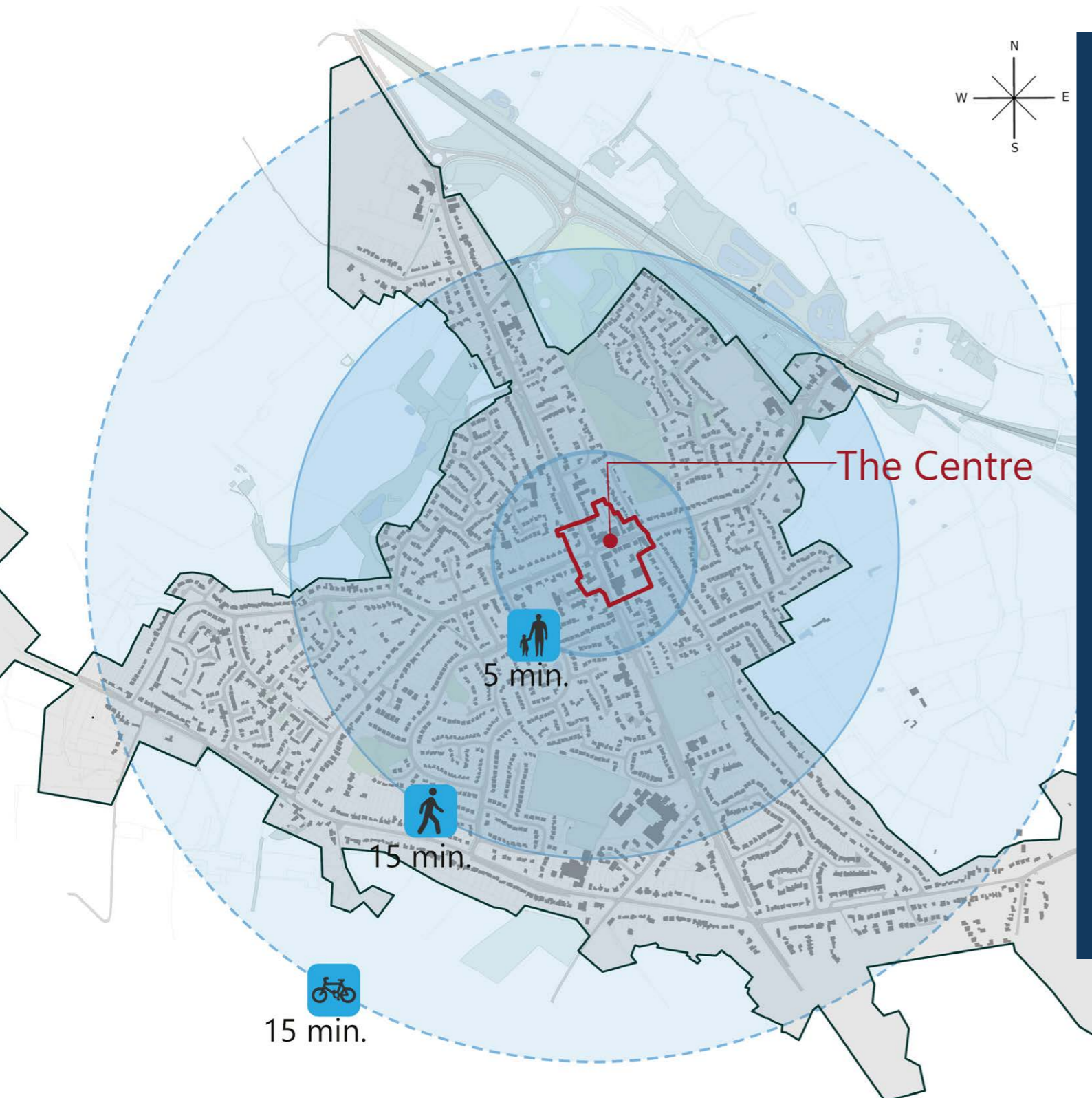


FIG. 1. THE STUDY AREA

Balsall Common is the largest village of the rural Parishes of Balsall and Berkswell. It is perfectly placed to access employment and services across a dynamic hinterland including Coventry, Birmingham, the NEC / airports, business parks and research facilities of international standing. It will soon be within cycling distance to the University of Warwick and the new HS2 station and employment at Arden Cross. In Solihull, the traditional major shopping centre and the hospital are key destinations, although they are poorly served by public transport according to residents.

Surrounded by this dynamic context, Balsall Common has retained the peacefulness and comfort of being “simply” a nice place to live.

Residents particularly appreciate its village characteristics:

- The close relationship and easy access to the countryside.
- The presence of nature, trees and hedgerows within the settlement.
- The friendly social connections through schools, clubs and activities.
- The familiar range of shops and faces in the centre, where many businesses have personal links to the area.

The village centre is at the heart of a walking and cycling area which includes nearly the whole settlement, making planning for the ‘15-Minute Neighbourhood’, a concept that promotes sustainable living by strengthening the locality, highly relevant.

The centre was built in the post-war period at the crossing of two primary highway links. Its style introduced the language of a small town: multi-storey buildings, a range of shops and office units and a broad carriageway, which over time became taken over by car parking. As the village expanded, the centre continued to serve the community well, but its built form and public space are, for many, at odds with the local character they cherish.

This report sets out how the centre can be made more attractive and welcoming for the community, while maintaining the vibrancy of its dynamic mix of businesses.

It should be read in conjunction with the previous reports (Stage 2 to Stage 5).

This project should be about “having the opportunity to stop looking over our shoulders at places like Knowle. This is our chance to make Balsall Common the best it can be”  
(Business participant to one of the workshops, 9 April 2021)

## 2. LOCAL VIEWS AND PRIORITIES

### HOW WE GATHERED VIEWS

Dialogue with local people has been at the heart of the design process, despite the restrictions imposed by the Covid pandemic. The level of active participation was exceptionally high and the inputs received extensive. These are recorded separately for each of the previous stages of the study.

We undertook:

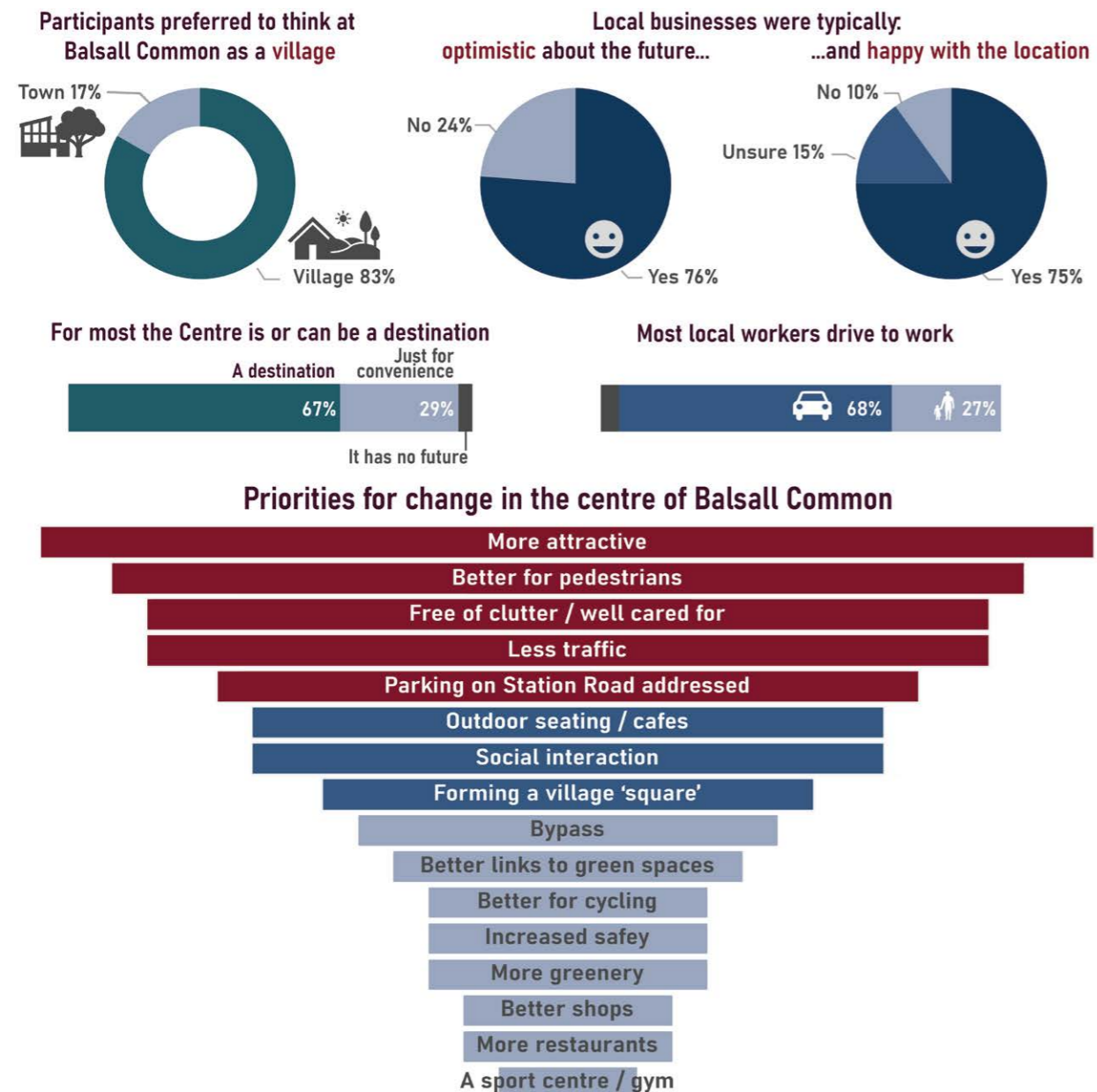
- A guided site visit with two members of the local steering group.
- 10 focus groups to learn about the village, including two youth groups (January-February 2021).
- One-to-one phone interviews with over half of the businesses of the centre (all businesses were contacted by phone or in person at all stages)
- Phone interviews with the managers of local community facilities and a small number of disabled residents.
- Three online interactive workshops to explore options attended by nearly 80 people (including 25% of the businesses in the centre) in April 2021.
- A discussion group with younger scouts.
- Three walkabouts involving people with specific interests.
- Six community groups contributing thematic inputs to the proposals.
- Leaflets and information via an e-newsletter circulated through local magazines and community groups channels (June 2021).

- A dedicated website (bccentre.co.uk) set up in June 2021, which was used to explain the proposals and invite feedback through an online questionnaire.
- Three days of public exhibition and discussions (July 2021), attended by 381 people.
- A total of 439 filled questionnaires (online and on paper) - analysed in detail.
- Meetings with representatives from various relevant departments of Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council at every stage.

In addition, the study has received the guidance and directions of a committed group of around 10 local residents including Parish and Ward Councillors and residents residing in nearby surrounding villages



FIG. 2. ENGAGEMENT DAYS IN JULY 2021



## ASPIRATIONS

Most local people believe that change in the centre of Balsall Common is necessary, even if not easy to be achieved and maybe controversial.

Change has to consider:

- The context of Balsall Common as a growing and dynamic village, with strong community spirit and longstanding connections with the surrounding countryside.
- Establishing a clearer role for the centre, as the focal point of community life and of most services.
- The need to integrate the centre with the wider and the immediate area, which provides many of the local activities in close proximity to each other.
- The aspiration to improve the cohesiveness and identity of the centre along both Kenilworth Road and Station Road.

Most people would like a centre that is much more attractive, better for walking and cycling, easier to use and more inclusive, and – above all - a place for the community. Their aspirations are captured in the word cloud below (Fig. 4) and summarised in the Success Criteria identified for the project in the Options Report (Stage 3) and summarised in Section 3.

The main concern relates to the impact of changing parking arrangements, and the implied need to change habits. There is strong consensus, on the other hand, on the value of improving the cycle network and expanding the physical links and the awareness of heritage, nature and countryside linking them directly to the centre of the village.

A small group of people preferred no change at all, and another small group thought that the proposals did not go far enough: the centre should be fully pedestrianised, or traffic restricted further.



FIG. 3. CONCERNS AND PRIORITIES EMERGING FROM THE FOCUS GROUPS (JAN-APR 2021)

FIG. 4. VISION KEY WORDS BY THE FOCUS GROUPS (JAN 2021)



### 3. VISION

The centre of Balsall Common will be transformed to become an attractive and welcoming space for the community to meet friends and participate in the social life of the village.

It will have a distinctive and people-centred design: cohesive, safe and green, appropriate to a dynamic village location and fit to encourage diverse and viable business activities.

The centre will be the hub that easily connects all parts of the village and key destinations.

# SUCCESS CRITERIA

(SUGGESTED BY THE VILLAGE)

## ATTRACTIVE AND DISTINCTIVE

- A people-centred public realm, where traffic is accommodated but not dominant.
- A clearly identifiable 'special place' for any passers-by.
- A clean and tidy layout formed of cohesive and useable spaces.
- Quality materials and distinctive design.
- Clutter-free, easy and affordable to maintain over time.

## A WELCOMING SPACE TO MEET

- With sufficient space for socialising outdoors: sitting on public benches and encouraging cafes and restaurants to offer 'al-fresco' service.
- A people-friendly space: providing safe access for children and vulnerable people (including those affected by disabilities).
- Reduced levels of stress, noise and pollution related to parking activity on the street.

## ACTIVE BUSINESS AND SOCIAL LIFE

- A viable commercial area with diverse businesses, sustained by good footfall, dwelling opportunities and local pride.
- A public realm for celebrations and festivities, potentially through partial closure of Station Road on special days.
- The focal point of community activities.
- Encouraging active participation of local businesses to an improved and livelier centre.

## WELL-CONNECTED

- With clear relationships and synergies with other important local destinations: the station, parks, sports clubs, schools, etc.
- At the centre of a walking and cycling network extending through the village.
- The starting point of a future heritage trail across the village.

## PEDESTRIAN-ORIENTATED BUT ACCESSIBLE FOR DRIVERS

- Reduced speed limits to encourage considerate and safer driving.
- Improved pedestrian amenity and accessibility for all.
- Improved opportunities for cycling.
- No restrictions to traffic movement, and no one-way systems.
- No overall reduction of parking spaces.
- Improved customer parking management.

## GREEN

- Planting as many trees as possible and introducing large and attractive planters.
- Adopting biodiversity-rich planting mixes.
- Exploring opportunities for increased greenery on buildings and private forecourts.
- Using natural and durable materials with a low carbon footprint.
- Introducing summer shading and pavement permeability.

# 4. THE FUTURE CENTRE

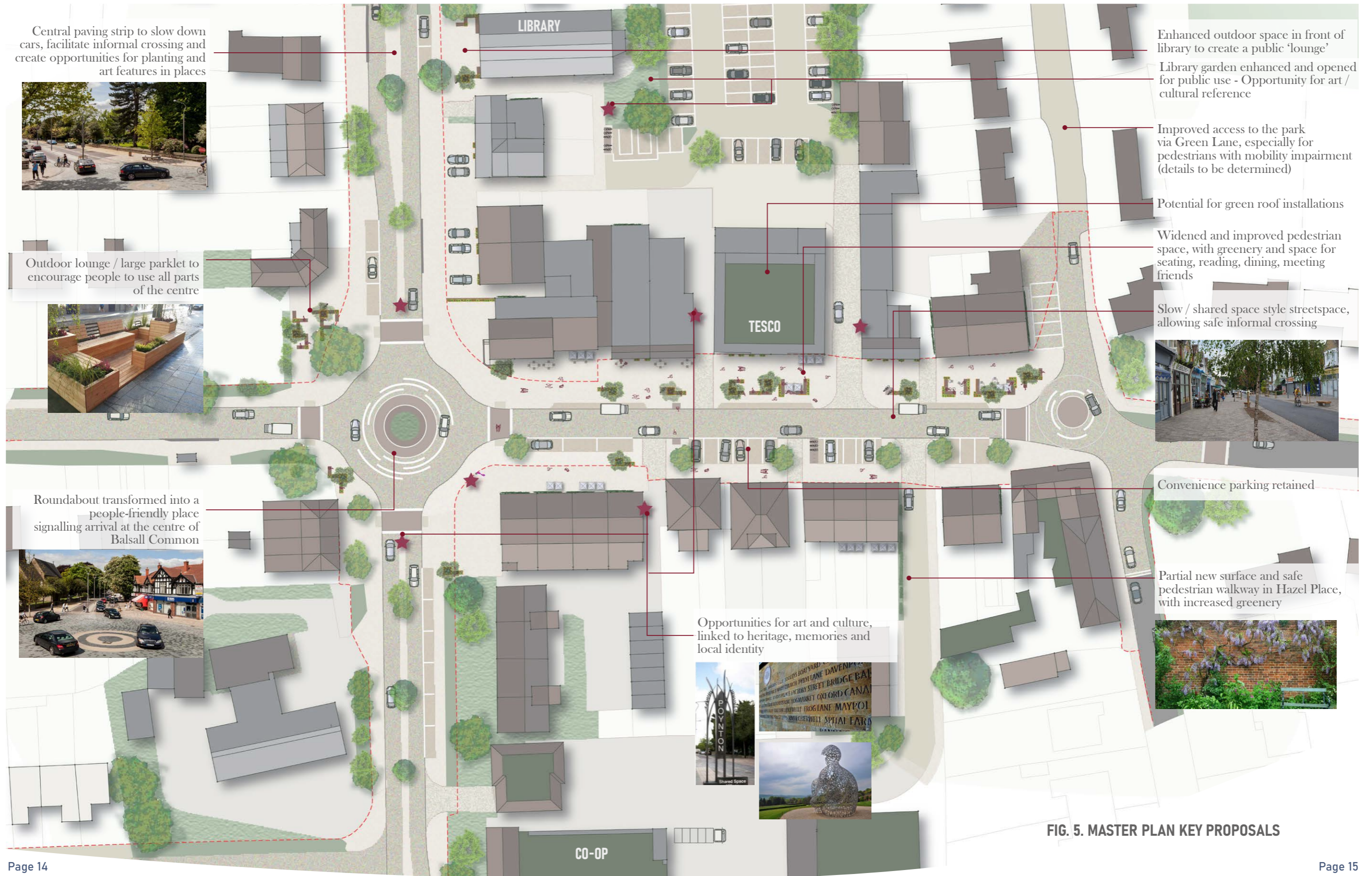


FIG. 5. MASTER PLAN KEY PROPOSALS



# CONCEPT DESIGN PROPOSAL

The proposals imagine a new future for the centre of Balsall Common; one which can fulfil more functions for the community than it currently does.

The future centre will be not only be for shopping, but also a place of encounters, community activity, social interaction, business and living. It will offer opportunities for local people and organisations to use the new space creatively, while improving local character and retaining the strengths of existing trade.

The master plan introduces:

- A delicate balance between community aspirations for a welcoming pedestrian orientated space and new opportunities for social interaction, while safeguarding the convenience of local shops by retaining parking spaces and minimising vehicular restrictions.
- Arrangements suggested by local groups to facilitate expanding their activities in the centre: from the WI market to ‘buddy bench mornings,’ carol singing on the street at Christmas and maybe even ‘on street pilates’. These visible community activities on the street will be tangible expressions of a community life open to all.
- Reinforcing the connections of the centre to the rest of the village, through improved walking and cycling, heritage trails and easier interactions with schools and sport clubs.
- Measures to strengthen the role of the centre as the focal point of activity as the village expands.

The proposals include the creation of a pedestrian / public space area on the northern side of Station Road (south facing sunny side, where most hospitality and community uses are), which is spacious enough to accommodate benches, tables and planting for public and commercial use. The southern side of the road retains parking for convenient access to the shops. All parking spaces removed from Station Road are relocated elsewhere in the centre resulting in no net loss of parking (see Highways and Parking section).

Kenilworth Road is reconfigured to slow down traffic, allow additional planting, accommodate parking spaces and improve facilities for cyclists and pedestrians. General street scene clutter and traffic management equipment is to be reduced to a minimum. The introduction of a slightly raised median along Kenilworth Road will alert drivers that they are entering the core of village and should be driving at lower speed, looking out for pedestrians and cyclists.

Additional trees and biodiversity-rich urban greenery are proposed to enhance the presence of nature in the area, reinforce its image as a village and offer shade and cooling on sunny days. Road surfacing is reduced.

This approach was presented to the community in July 2021 and encountered broad support (Fig. 6). Changes were made to address as many reservations as possible (see Draft Proposals Report).

The outcome is an ambitious master plan that finely balances local expectations, while delivering social value and contributing to the climate action agenda of the region (see Technical Appendix). The identification of the best possible balance could only be done through intense dialogue with the community, including the young and the elderly, and engaging as directly as possible with local businesses.

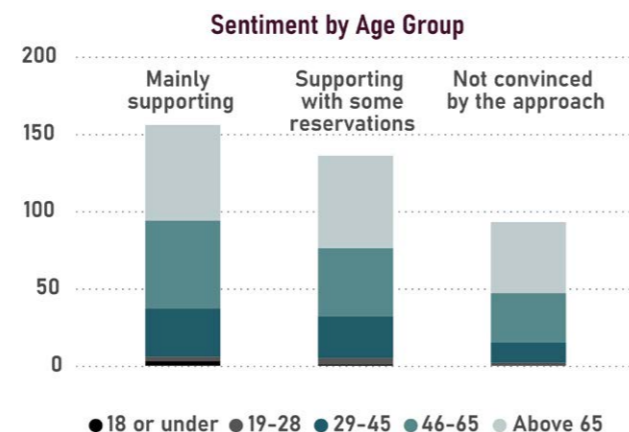
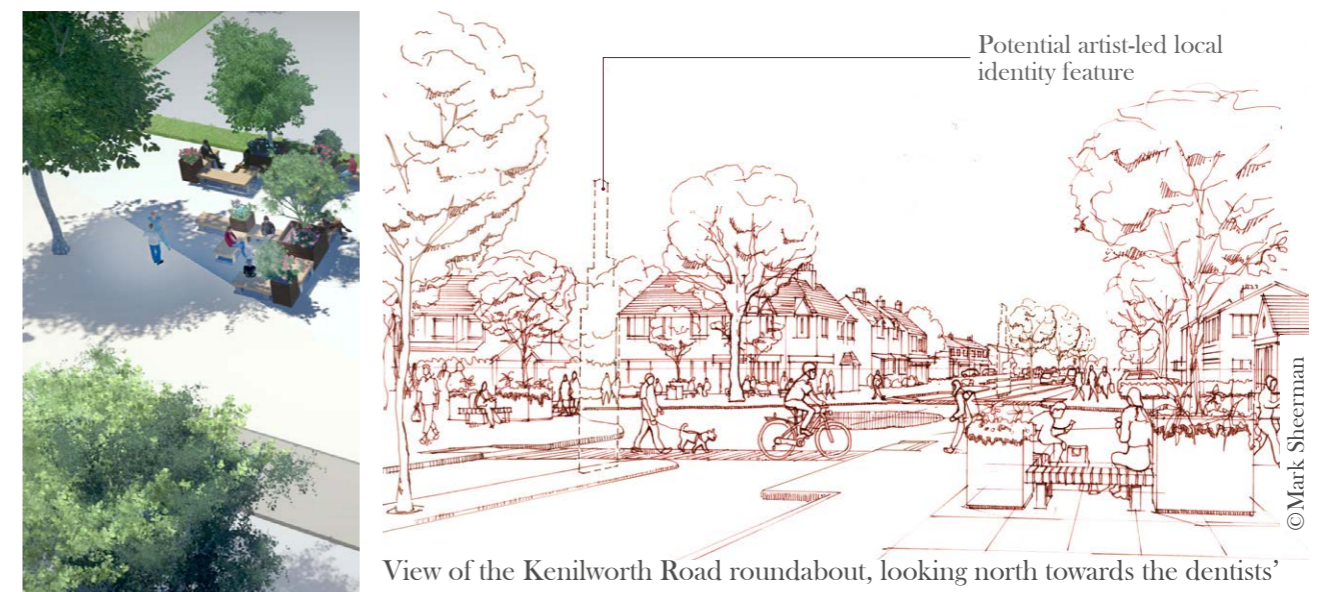


FIG. 6. COMMUNITY FEEDBACK (JUL 2021)



View from the Meeting House Lane crossroads, looking west down Station Road



View of the Kenilworth Road roundabout, looking north towards the dentists'

FIG. 7. ILLUSTRATIVE VIEWS OF THE PROPOSALS



FIG. 8. ILLUSTRATIVE VIEW OF CONCEPT AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE PAVEMENT AREA  
(from outside the Masala Club restaurant)

## OPPORTUNITIES TO CELEBRATE THE VILLAGE

The proposed changes to Station Road, with a wider footway and new car parking layout, offer the opportunity to organise occasional community events through the temporary closure to traffic of Station Road between the roundabout and the access to the Library Car Park.

This could involve:

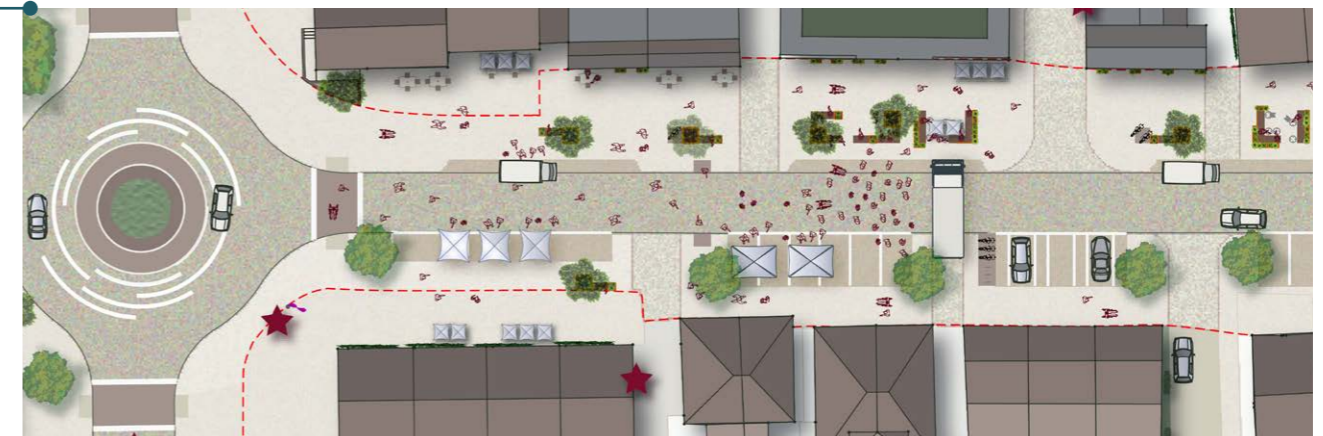
- Temporary suspension of just 9 parking bays, with full retention of disabled parking, for the period of the event.
- Potential use of parking bays and delivery bays for stalls, food vans, music equipment.
- Local provision of electricity and water supplies to facilitate organisation and cleaning, avoiding use of generators.
- If possible, agreements with landowners could allow temporary installation of bunting or shading 'sails' hooked on the facades of the buildings.



### MARKETS AND COMMUNITY FESTIVALS



### LOCAL MUSIC AND THEATRE



### PARADES AND CELEBRATIONS

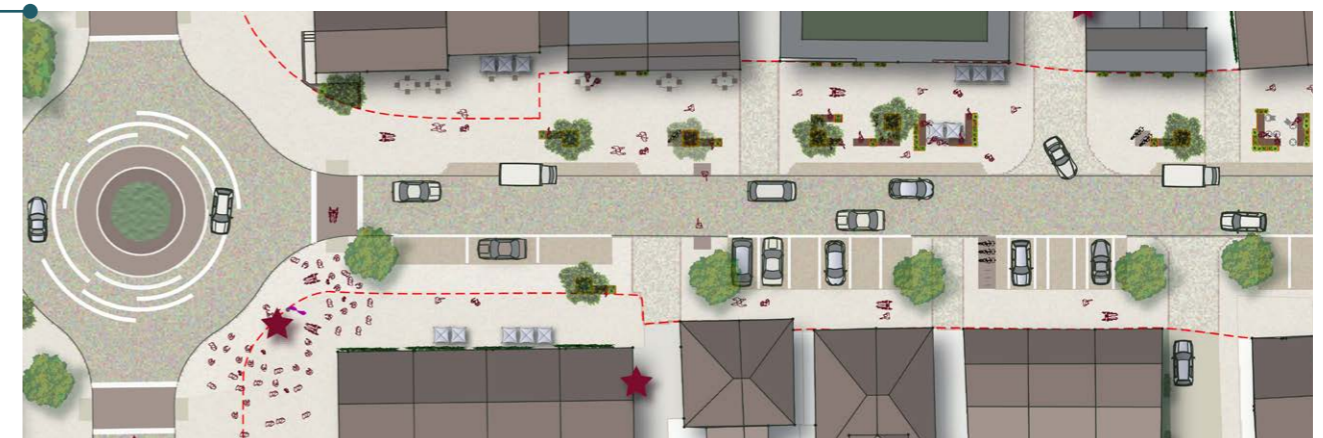


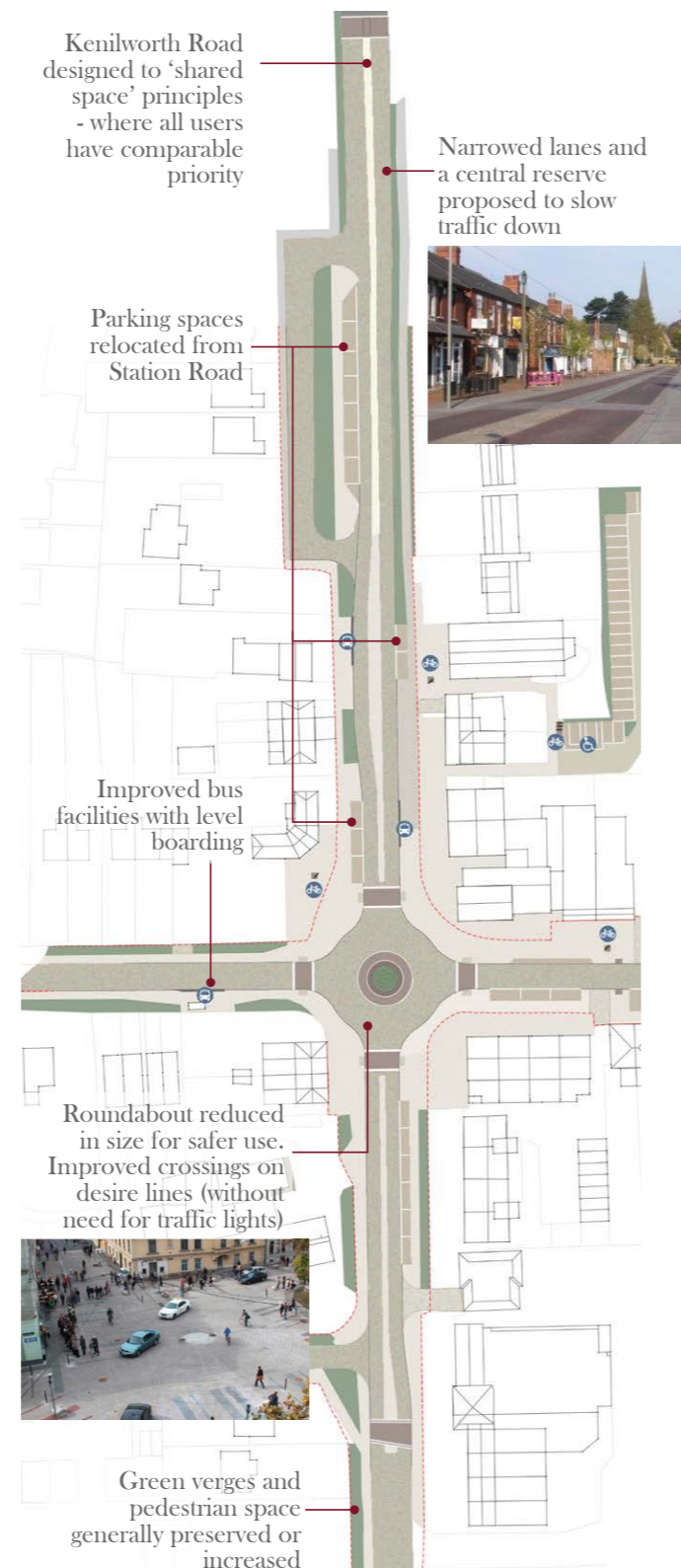
FIG. 9. ILLUSTRATIVE PLANS OF DIFFERENT POTENTIAL EVENTS EASILY HOSTED IN THE CENTRE

# HIGHWAY AND PARKING PROPOSALS

The aim of the highways proposals is to ensure that traffic conditions are compatible with the character and functions of the centre, which needs to be pedestrian friendly, safe and welcoming without imposing vehicular access restrictions. In its final configuration, the proposals include:

- A 20mph speed limit
- Reduced road surfacing and use of different materials.
- A kerbed and slightly raised central strip along the Kenilworth Road, between Haigs Hotel and The White Horse Public House to provide a refuge for pedestrians crossing the road and allow new planting.
- Signalised crossings become unnecessary and are no longer included.
- Station Road narrowed down to a minimum of 5.5m.
- A mini-roundabout is provided at the junction with Green Lane to enable u-turn movements.
- Total parking numbers in the centre remain the same as existing and relocated to an expanded Library Car Park and along Kenilworth Road.
- Parking management measures (time restrictions) are envisaged to ensure rapid turn-around in convenience parking places.
- Perpendicular parking bays have been kept on the southern side of Station Road to enable short term parking for quick/convenience shopping.
- Dedicated disabled bays provided on Station Road and in the Library Car Park.
- Cycle parking introduced on Station Road and in the Library Car Park.
- Half-width bays for delivery vehicles are introduced along the north side of Station Road.
- Parking would continue to be free.
- Private parking (around 80-100 spaces in addition to the Co-op) remains unaffected.

## KENILWORTH ROAD



## STATION ROAD

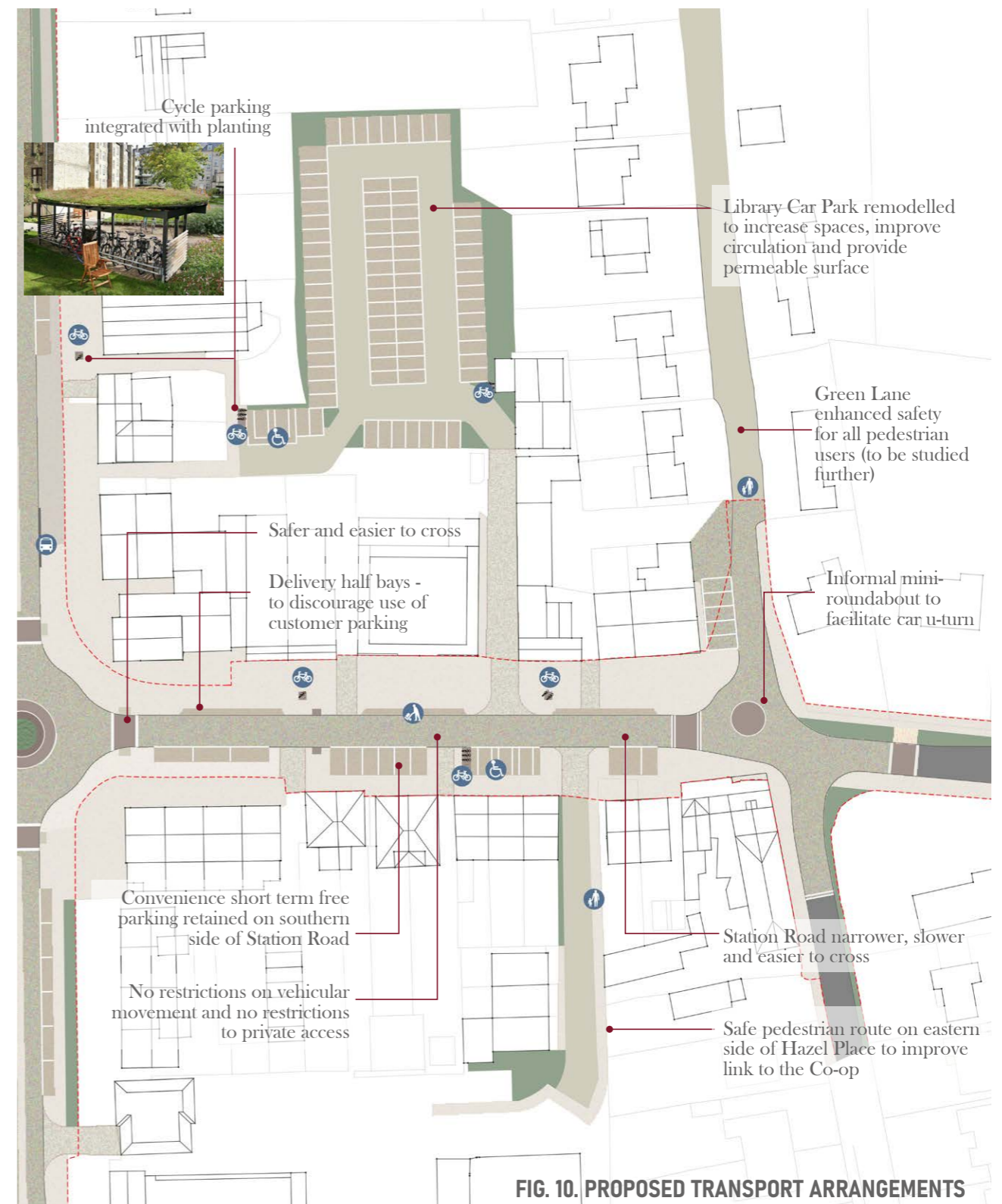


FIG. 10. PROPOSED TRANSPORT ARRANGEMENTS



## 5. INTEGRATION WITH THE WIDER AREA



## THE IMMEDIATE AREA SYNERGIES

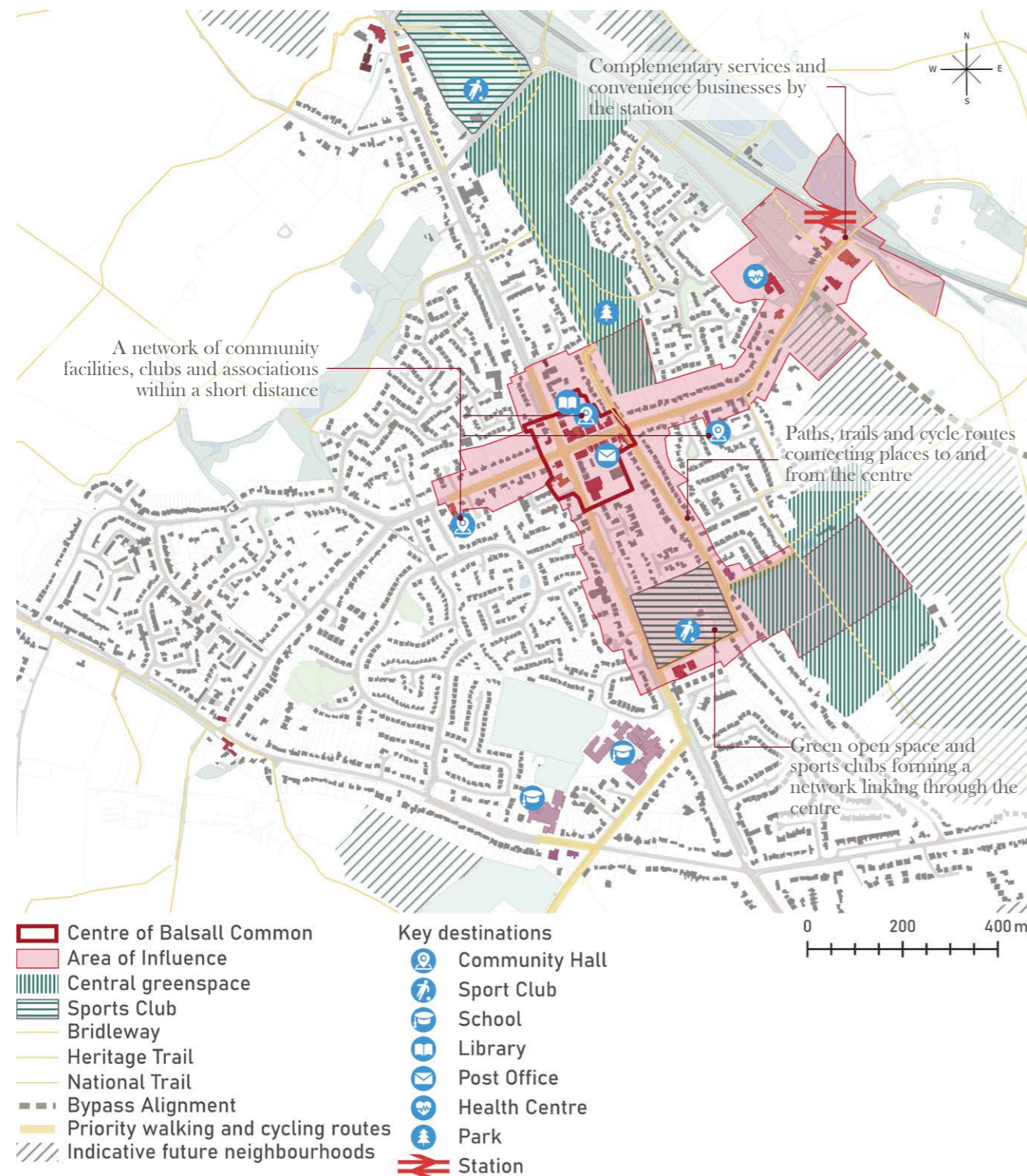


FIG. 12. SYNERGIES AND DESTINATIONS WITHIN WALKING DISTANCE

The centre can only thrive if it remains ‘central’ to the life of the village: a location of social interaction, familiar faces, shopping and activity. It should be a destination, both attractive and easy to reach, as well as the obvious hub of daily passers-by directed to the schools, sports clubs, the park and other halls and community facilities.

This dual role (destination and daily passing-by) is very important for spontaneous encounters and sense of belonging.

For this to happen, it is important that:

- Connections to the immediate area are facilitated and improved.
- Key destinations, including the station and new parks and facilities, are easy to find and feel close-by through consistent signposting, lighting and furniture.
- Sports clubs, community groups, church groups, etc. should be welcomed to use and interact with the centre for some of their activities. This could be as simple as a stall to recruit players or a club festival starting in the centre.

More detail is available in the Option Report (Stage 3) and Draft Proposal Report (Stage 4).

## POTENTIAL THREATS TO THE CENTRE

Two potentially competing clusters of commercial development are emerging in Balsall Common:

- The development of two discount supermarkets on the northern edge of Balsall Common, not far from hospitality buildings and a petrol station and convenience stop.
- The cluster of community facilities, pubs and car showrooms by Berkswell Station, where a primary school is planned as part of future development.

These clusters are necessary in an expanded Balsall Common but could also represent a significant threat to the existing centre: they will be well served by the future by-pass and will have parking facilities (on site for the supermarket and off-site at the station).

It will be very important to clarify through planning policy that these clusters should be contained and not allowed to expand or compete with the centre: they should remain contained and complementary.

This threat makes it even more important to invest in the centre and expand opportunities for interaction and close integration at the heart of the village.

## ENCOURAGING WALKING AND CYCLING



Virtually the entire village is within 15 minutes' cycling time and over half (including key destinations) is within 15 minutes' walking distance. This creates ideal conditions to encourage use of active travel modes to access the centre.

The map on pg. 32 indicates expanded leisure walks within and surrounding the village, in the form of heritage trails. The map to the side takes account of both Solihull Council's plans and the improvements suggested by the community through the Cycling Focus Group:

- A coherent network of formal cycleways and well signposted 'advisory routes' where traffic is quieter.
- Signposted shortcuts through pedestrian links.
- Connection to emerging longer distance routes to Coventry, to the University of Warwick, and to the HS2 parkway interchange station and future Arden Cross development.
- Creation of leisure cycle maps of the area.
- Consistent signposting.
- Establishment of a cycle repair hub (commercial or community based) in the centre.
- Training days for children and the community.
- Community cycle taster weekends.

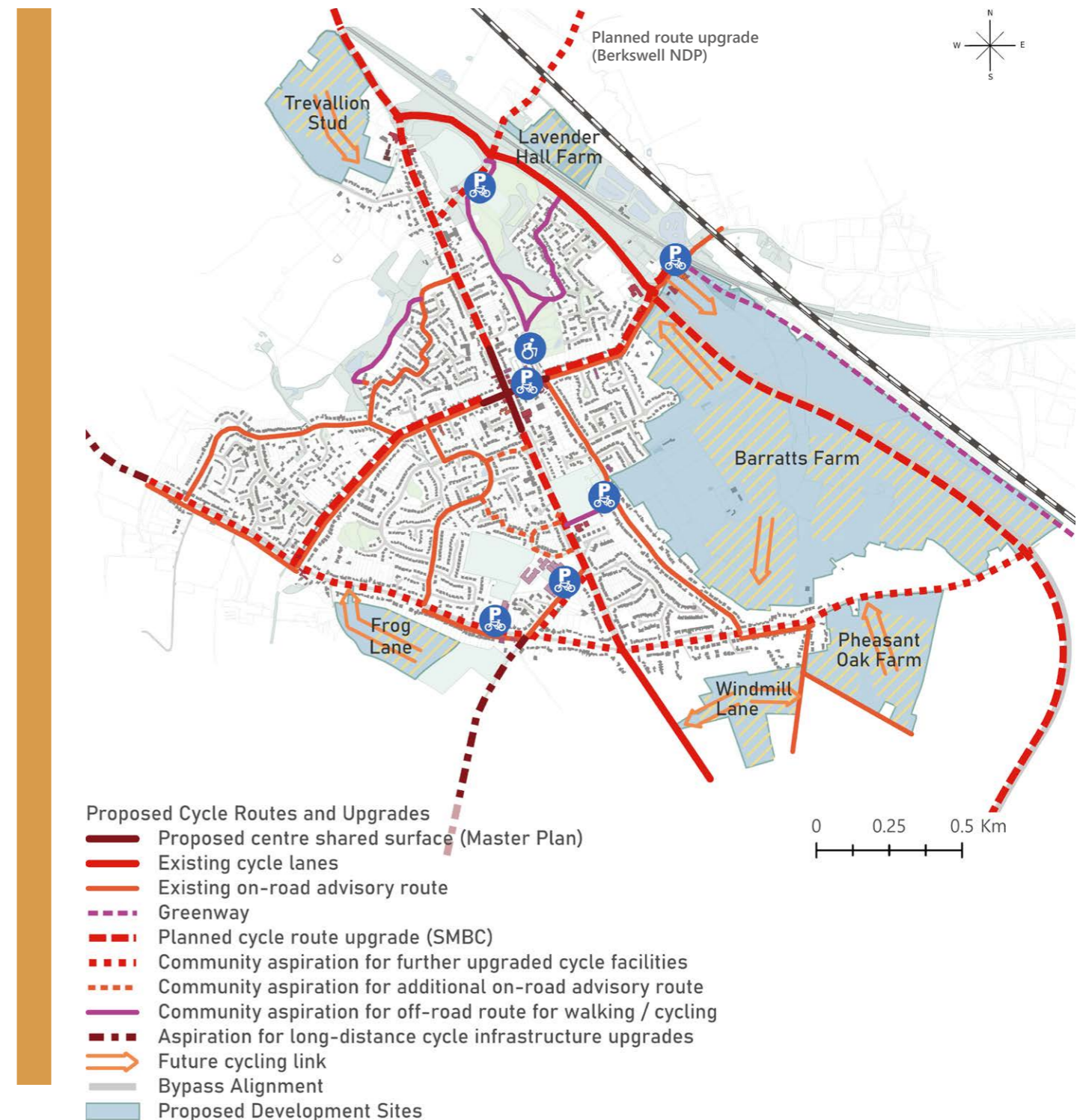


FIG. 13. COMMUNITY ASPIRATIONS FOR BETTER CYCLING IN THE VILLAGE



## STRENGTHENING LOCAL IDENTITY

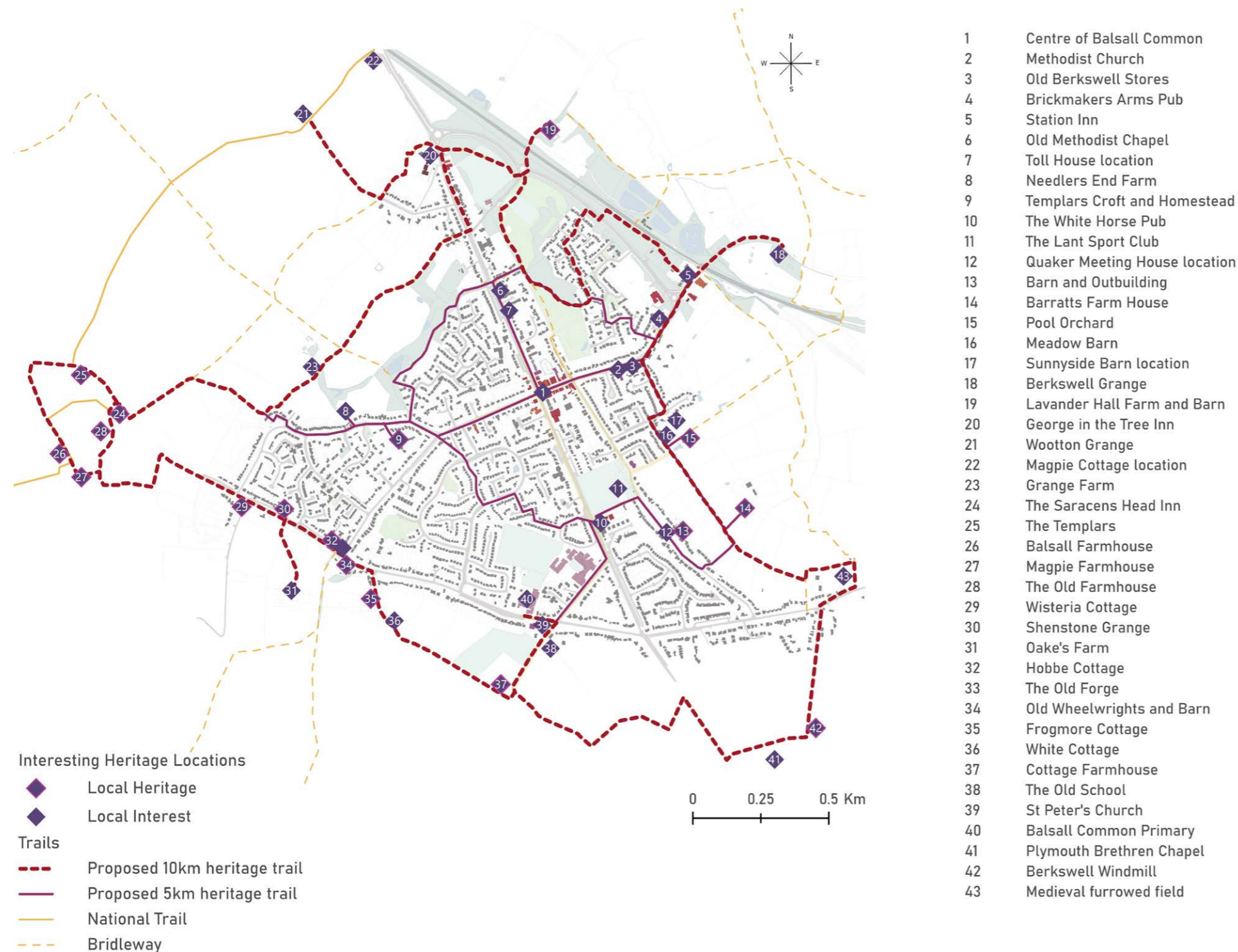


FIG. 14. LOCAL AND WIDER HERITAGE AND WALKING TRAILS

Knowing what is special about the village is very important for local identity and sense of belonging, especially as new residents move into the area and the heritage features of Balsall Common are dispersed and not immediately noticeable or enjoyable from the centre.

With the support of the Heritage Focus Group, two interconnected heritage trails have been proposed to link the centre to the history of the village. They form a 10km and a 5km pleasant and informative cultural and leisure walking routes, crossing over at the centre and providing new opportunities for local cultural and recreational activity. An art strategy could be prepared with the objective of bringing to life and making the heritage and culture of the area directly visible and relevant within the centre.

Other key suggestions of the Heritage Focus Group include:

- Creation of a printed map or leaflet to be distributed locally.
- Introduction of maps and signage at key points within the village – perhaps an artist-led feature map or mural in the centre.
- Information panels at key locations or even just name-plates and QR codes for further information.
- Introduction of additional features linked to memories of the past (long-gone shops, place names, etc.) within the centre, through artist-led pieces.

## 6. IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

The Master Plan has been reviewed by officers of Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council (SMBC), who support improvements at Balsall Common and have helped exploring potential routes to implementation.

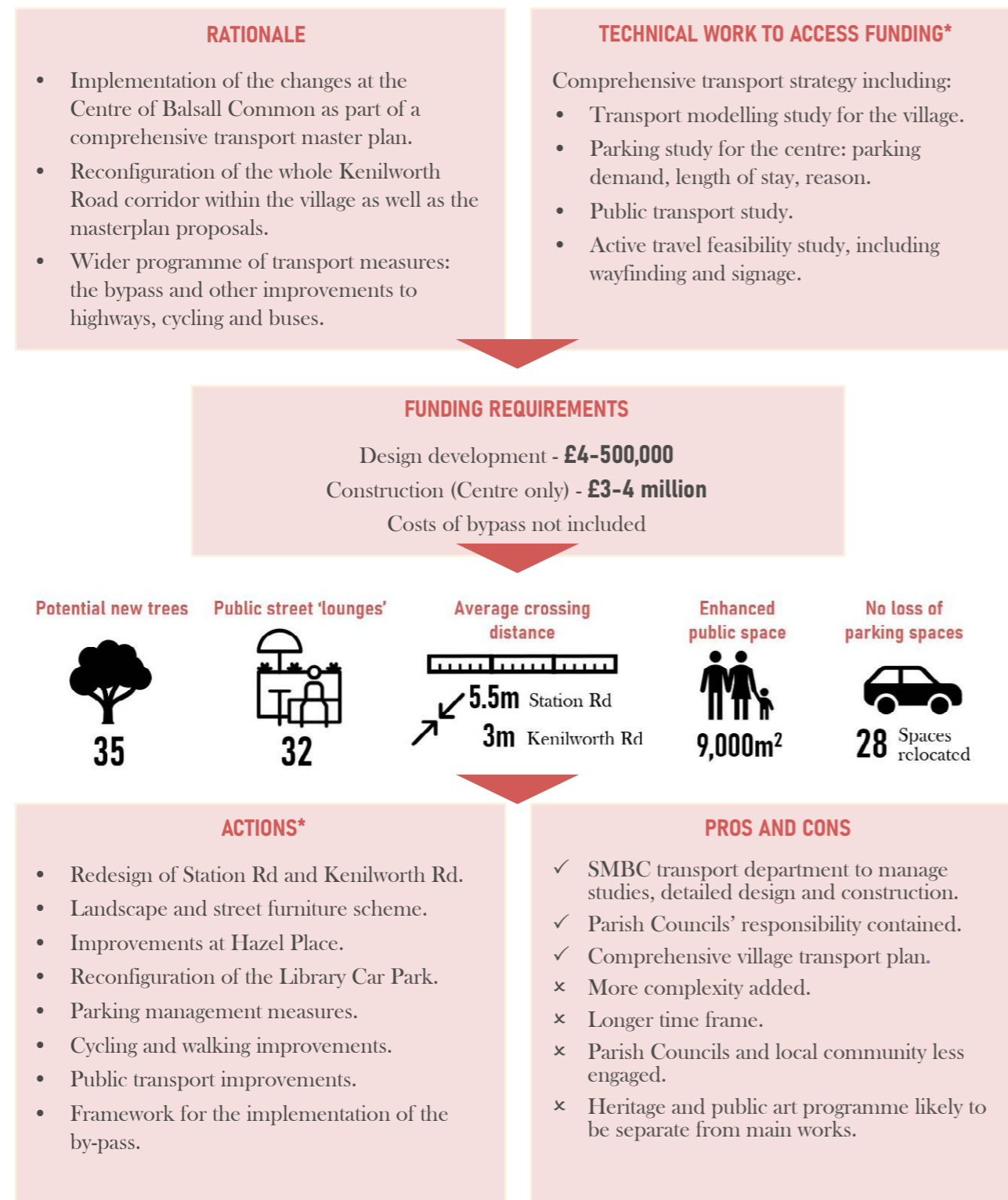
Two principal implementation scenarios have potential and could be initially pursued in parallel until there is more clarity about the most suitable funding route.

**Scenario 1** is transport-led; it requires more detailed studies from the outset and a bigger single pot of funding. It could therefore be more labour intensive and time consuming since the early stage.

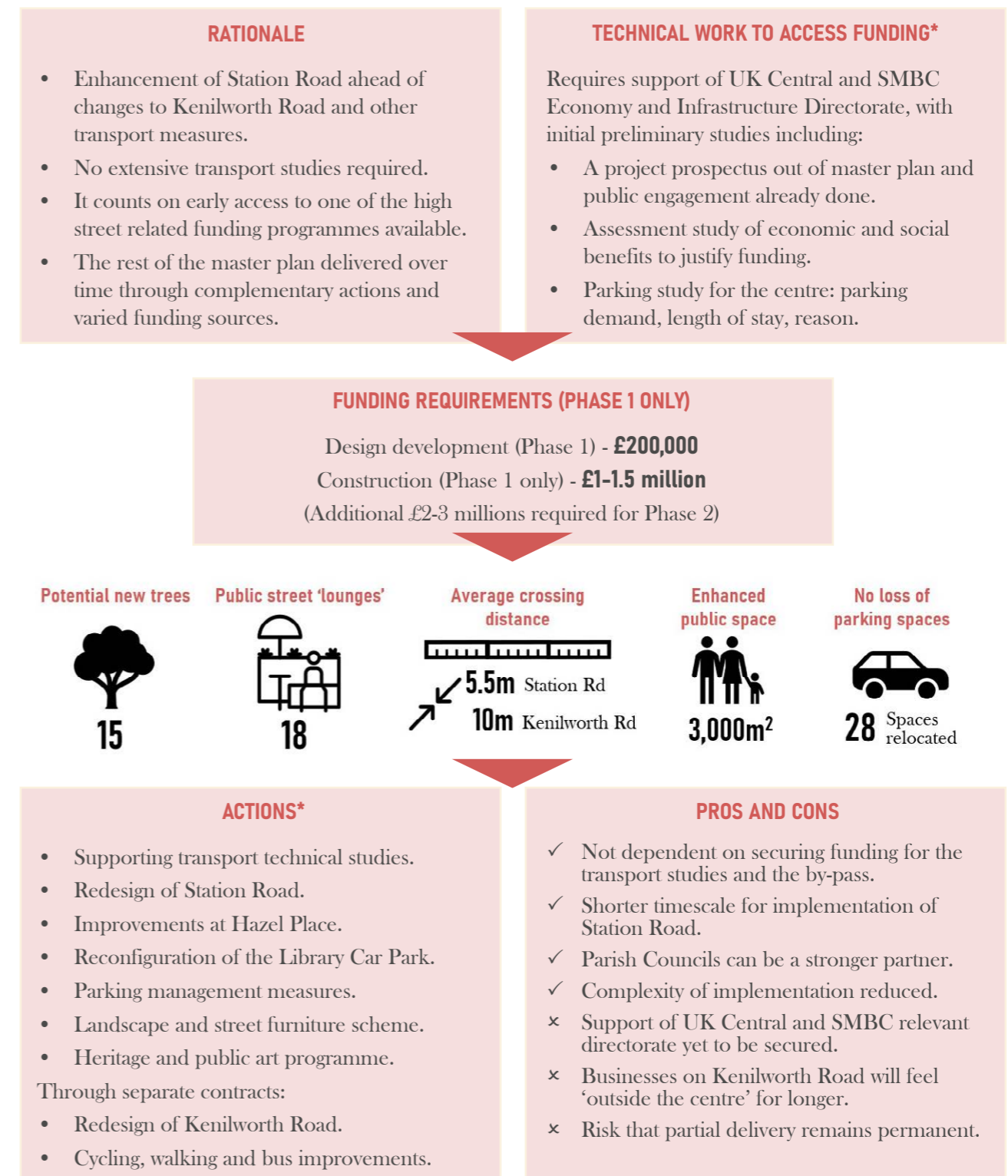
**Scenario 2** is based on the funding streams currently available for high streets and regeneration, part of three complementary government agendas: high streets, post-covid recovery and levelling-up. This will not cover the entire project, but could mean a faster implementation of changes on Station Road.

**Other** less favourable funding options are also available and have been identified in the Implementation Report (Nov. 2021).

## SCENARIO 1: TRANSPORT LED



## SCENARIO 2: STAGED IMPLEMENTATION



\* More detail about studies and stages of work are provided in the Technical Appendix

## SCENARIO 2: STAGE 1

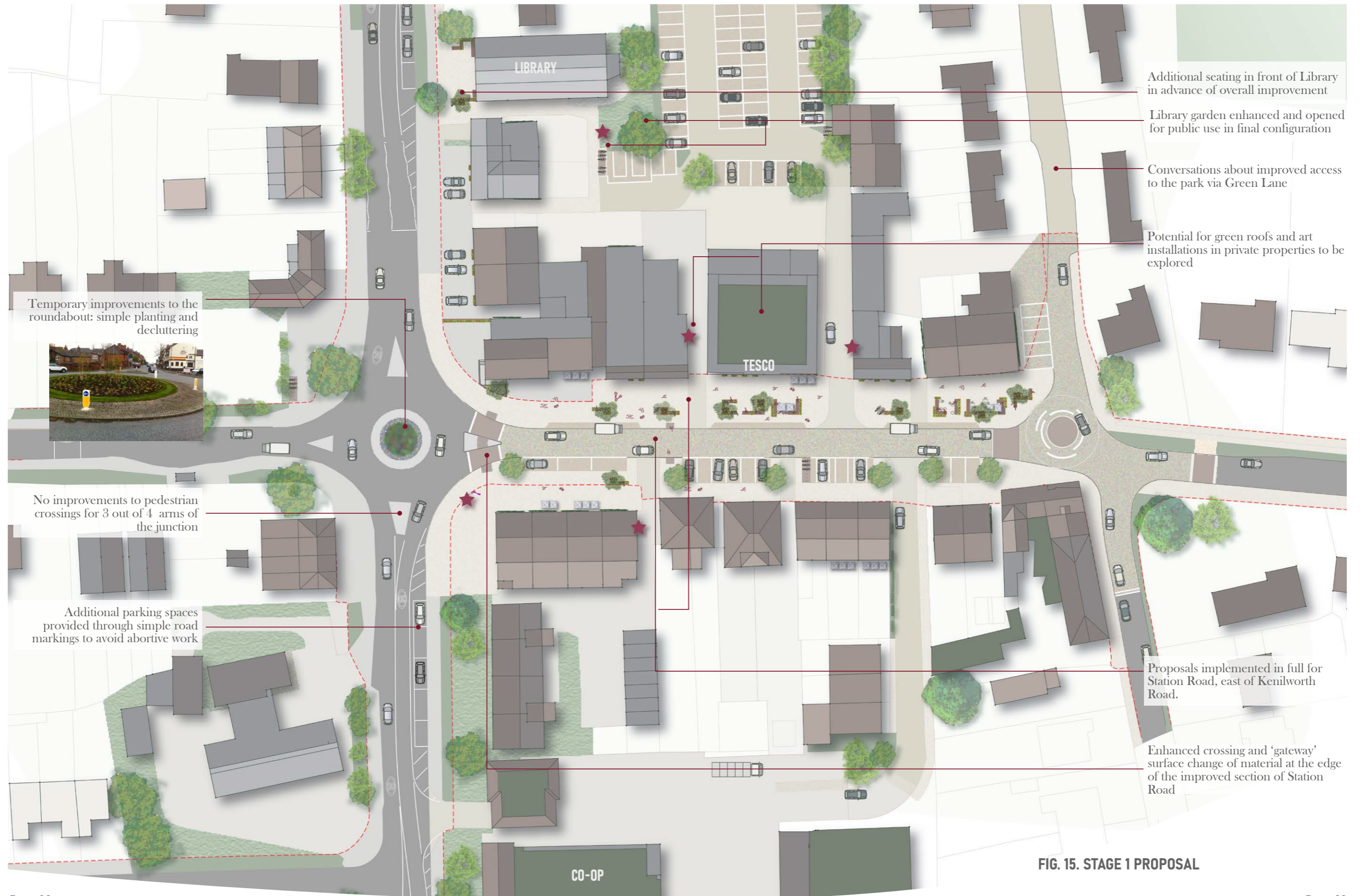


FIG. 15. STAGE 1 PROPOSAL

## SCENARIO 2: STAGE 1 HIGHWAY AND PARKING PROPOSALS

### KENILWORTH ROAD



### STATION ROAD

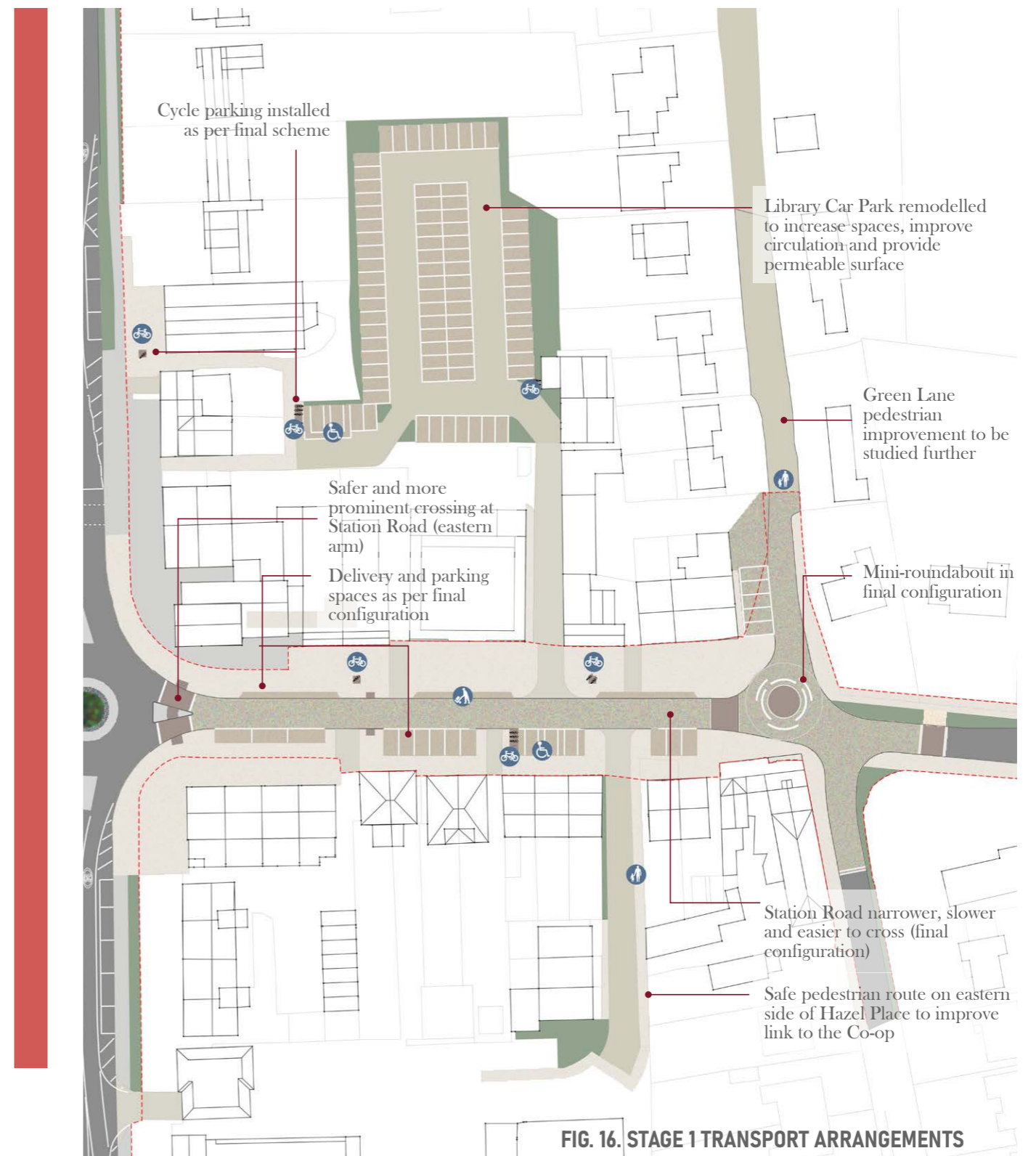


FIG. 16. STAGE 1 TRANSPORT ARRANGEMENTS

KEBABS  
BURGERS

Karndean  
Professional Services

BALSALL FISHES & CHIPS



# 7. IMPACTS & OUTCOMES

The assessment of outcomes is an important way to justify the choices made during the project.

The master plan was developed to directly respond to the Success Criteria (see Section 3) identified by the community.

The charts illustrate the preliminary assessment of qualitative performance against a range of criteria derived from local stakeholders and policy. The three coloured areas indicate current performance, phase 1 only and at completion of the full master plan. The wider and more rounded the area, the better the balance between criteria. The 'spokes' provide an indication of the scale of change.

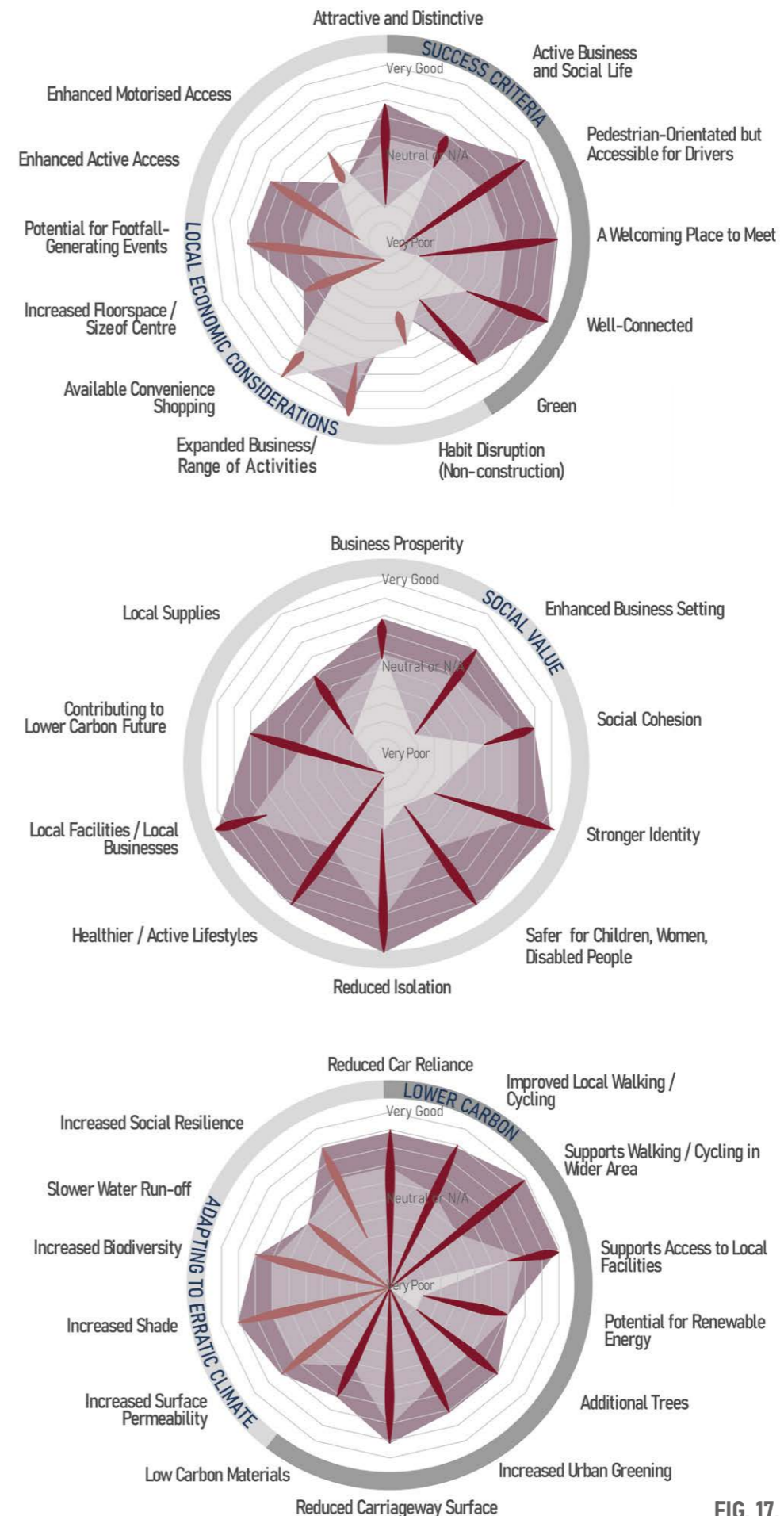
Chart 1 shows that the master plan performs very well against the Success Criteria identified in Section 3 and relatively well against Local Economic Considerations identified by existing local businesses. This reflects the concerns of some owners of local convenience activities, who would prefer to see minimal change particularly in motorised access.

Chart 2 and 3 highlight important areas of policy-driven outcomes:

- Social value and social inclusion – based on SMBC Social Value Policy criteria
- Efforts towards lower carbon emissions – based on Net-Zero Solihull criteria.
- Efforts to adapt to future erratic weather conditions – based on broad principles derived by the UN Race to Resilience.

The charts show that the proposals are well balanced and make a significant contribution to social value, and even more to the climate agenda.

This initial assessment will need to be further developed to access funding, especially under Scenario 2. More detail on the criteria used is included in the Technical Appendix.



## 1. LOCAL CRITERIA AND ASPIRATIONS

## 2. SOCIAL VALUE

## 3. CLIMATE CHANGE

FIG. 17. OUTCOMES ASSESSMENT

## 8.

# TAKING THE PROJECT FORWARD

### STRENGTHENING THE RESOLVE OF SOLIHULL METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

SMBC, as the Highway Authority, will have the main role in the delivery of the project. They are the local authority, the gateway to access funding, the lead for technical transport studies and, of course, as highway authority, have ownership of most of the land occupied by the streets in the centre (see Technical Appendix). Proposals on private land will need to be agreed and delivered through separate arrangement.

At officer level, SMBC confirmed that the proposals of the master plan are consistent with the policies and strategic directions of the Borough and have indicated their preference for pursuing implementation through a transportation-led route (Scenario 1).

This route requires technical transport and engineering studies before development of highway design. The Parish Councils and the wider community will be key consultees during the process.

The risk of this process is that other aspirations expressed by the community through the master plan (attractiveness, etc. as indicated in the master plan Success Criteria, presented in Section 3) become secondary, as the master plan becomes part of a bigger package of transport-led improvements. It will be essential for the Parish Councils to ensure that community aspirations remain at the forefront.

The alternative Scenario 2 still requires that SMBC take the leading role, but the justification for funding (social, economic and environmental benefits) and the drivers of implementation are closer to the Success Criteria identified by the community. On this basis, it should be more natural for the Parish Councils and community to be close partners of the Council and UK Central, who will lead the funding applications. Initial talks with SMBC's officers dealing with

economic development and communities have been positive, but higher-level support still needs to be secured for a funding application to proceed.

With Scenario 2, transport improvements along Kenilworth Road, the by-pass and other public transport, walking and cycling improvements will be delayed, potentially to the detriment of the wider ambitions.

#### ACTION FOR THE PARISH COUNCILS AND LOCAL COUNCILLORS

1. Undertake a proactive stakeholder role to encourage further exploration of the potential of transport-led funding (Scenario 1).
2. Explore high level support of SMBC's Economic and Infrastructure Directorate and UK Central.
3. Be ready to commission, if necessary, an economic and social benefit study to support a funding application under Scenario 2.
4. Constitute a proactive and collaborative working group (representative of all sections of the community) to become SMBC's partner and sounding board to ensure that the aspirations of the community expressed during this master plan are not weakened or overridden by technical considerations.
5. Identify and promote quick wins and interim projects (including the community-led projects below), especially with Scenario 1, which has a longer implementation timescale.



## ACTIVATING COMMUNITY-LED PROJECTS

The implementation of the master plan is not only about big construction works. It also includes a series of other initiatives that the community could explore and even lead, either through community action or with small scale professional support. Pockets of funding, available from various sources, have been identified in the Implementation Report (Nov. 2021).

The benefits of this approach are multiple: the community can participate and take ownership of some of the changes in the centre; some aspects of change can be delivered in advance of the big infrastructure works and additional layers of interest are added to the project.

During the course of the master plan, many ideas for community action were generated, such as:

- Design and planting improvements at the Library garden.
- Preparation of a local Art Strategy – commissioned by the Parish Council and maybe funded by the Arts Council or art foundations.
- Greening of building frontages and shopfronts - with technical support funded by SMBC (business improvements) or Groundwork/HS2.
- Strategy for safer streets, beyond lighting and CCTV - with technical support funded by the Safer Streets Fund.

### ACTION FOR THE PARISH COUNCILS AND LOCAL COUNCILLORS

1. Mobilise community interests and passion to take on community-led initiatives coordinated under the umbrella of the master plan.
2. Prepare and support the necessary funding applications. The master plan is the reference that provides the ‘big picture’.
3. Commission technical or professional support where necessary.

## BROADENING THE ROLE OF THE CENTRE

During the preparation of the master plan, interest groups were formed for cycling, heritage, events. They provided very valuable input into the final proposals from a local perspective.

These groups should remain active partners and champions for the centre through implementation, by remaining engaged with the progress of the project and by providing informed and collaborative stakeholders’ feedback at each stage of development.

They can also have a role in promoting community-led projects as indicated above, for example cycling events or training, the initial elements of the heritage trail or the promotion of community events in the centre.

### ACTION FOR THE PARISH COUNCILS AND LOCAL COUNCILLORS

1. Encourage the permanent establishment of relevant interest groups.
2. Prepare initial role descriptions and terms of reference for the workings of the community groups.

## PREPARING FOR CHANGE

The route to implementation is complex and potentially long. There will be periods in which there will be no news (or no good news) to share with the community, giving the impression that everything has gone quiet.

It will be very important for the Parish Councils to have some sort of communication strategy and calendar to ensure that the master plan implementation remains within the horizon of the community.

Once funding is in place and the project is progressing, it will be very important to initiate a campaign to inspire people and encourage them to change habits, for example by providing information about disruption or the delivery of new cycle facilities and relocated parking.

### ACTION FOR THE PARISH COUNCILS AND LOCAL COUNCILLORS

1. Prepare a communication strategy and calendar for quiet times (to keep the project alive) and for active times, i.e. to alert residents of disruption or relocation of facilities.
2. Coordinate and encourage community action and participation.

# TECHNICAL APPENDICES



# A1. KEY QUESTIONS ANSWERED

Will the centre, in its current format, **decline if nothing is done?**

**YES**  
quite likely

Balsall Common is expanding and this will provide a larger customer base. Proposals to open supermarkets with significant car parking on the edge of Balsall Common could create a rival centre.

This is likely to draw customers away from the centre where parking will become more congested. The variety of shops in the centre will probably reduce.

Will the 'new centre' **attract more people and activity?**

**YES**  
very likely

This will be encouraged by the new pedestrian space and 'outdoor lounges'; the inclusive public space (welcoming children and people with impairments) and the improved connections.

Will private properties and **the range of shops improve** as a result of the proposals?

**YES**  
mainly indirectly

Direct improvement of private forecourts can be included by agreement with the owners. Planning powers to control the range of shops has been limited by new legislation (Sept 2020), but a market will bring artisanal and specialist retailers.

At Detailed Design Stage, once proposals are going ahead - landowners and businesses should be encouraged once again to join in the programme of improvement.

Would **full pedestrianisation** of Station Road be better?

**MAYBE**

but with drawbacks

Pedestrianisation will create an attractive paved public space, but will probably result in additional traffic in other streets and make it more difficult to use some convenience shops. It is not a solution widely supported in the village.

Can we **fit more car parking spaces** on Station Road?

**MAYBE**

but with bad consequences

Additional spaces would be limited to 2 or maximum 3, making little difference overall. They will make, however, pedestrian crossing unsafe (in between parked cars), remove cycle parking and trees and make it harder to access individual properties.

It will be more difficult to demonstrate the benefits required to access funding.

Will it be feasible to consider a **new parking facility**?

**NO**

not with public funding

The Library Car Park and the streets are not big enough to allow for ramps up or down to a multi-level parking. Aquisition of private land (a large plot or multiple adjacent ones) will be expensive and there will be no access to public finance.

Public funding for projects which encourage car use (such as car parks) is not available. A private car park would not be viable without parking fees being imposed on all spaces.

Will the change in parking result in **shop closures**?

**NO**

very unlikely

Current car parking numbers will be retained as a minimum and be managed for better customer use.

Parking habits will need to change and there will be some initial disruption.

Before **Detailed Design Stage** a survey of parking use and times will help setting the brief to maximise the efficiency of the proposed parking.

Will **staff parking** be displaced and clog up residential streets?

**NO**

if properly managed

Residents commented that 20-30% of parking spaces are used by staff.

At this stage, parking permits and 'long stay' bays are envisaged along with restrictions in residential streets.

At **Detailed Design Stage** staff parking needs will be assessed in detail and 'long stay' parking solutions identified in detail.

Will the proposed roads and parking be **safe to use**?

**YES**

subject to Detailed Design

The design approach and 20mph speed limit are such that drivers will be aware that they are in a 'town centre' situation. The priority of 'through movement' is removed and this is proven to be a safe solution.

## A2. TECHNICAL STAGES

The Implementation Stages are aligned to the RIBA Work Stages<sup>1</sup>. A summary is provided below and more detail provided in the implementation report.

### STAGE 0 – STRATEGIC DEFINITION

- This stage refers to the master plan which is concluded with this report..

### STAGE 1(A)- PREPARATION AND BRIEFING (SUPPORTING FUNDING APPLICATIONS)

- Agree strategy for implementation including funding routes.
- Initial supporting documents and studies.

### STAGE 1(B) - PREPARATION AND BRIEFING (SUPPORTING TECHNICAL STUDIES)

- Transport studies to be commissioned by SMBC:
- Transport modelling study including the cumulative impacts of development within Balsall Common and the dependency of the Centre Master Plan proposals on Kenilworth Road on the need for a Bypass.
- Detailed study and modelling of the roundabouts.
- Parking study.
- Active travel feasibility studies – including walking and cycling.
- Other studies to be potentially carried out independently or in parallel:
- Public art.
- Landscaping and biodiversity.
- Private land initiatives.
- Infrastructure strategy – water supply, electric charging points (to support events, for example), CCTV etc
- Safer streets review.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.architecture.com/knowledge-and-resources/resources-landing-page/riba-plan-of-work>

### STAGE 2-3 CONCEPT DESIGN AND SPATIAL COORDINATION

- Design on an accurate topographical base and consideration of further refinements to the proposals including use of materials and lighting, furniture and other design elements, planting plans, drainage and connections to utilities.

### STAGE 4 – TECHNICAL DESIGN

- This stage should only commence when a confirmed funding package is in place.
- It involves detailed 3D design of the Master Plan proposals (vertical and horizontal alignments, drainage crossfalls, etc) and the preparation of technical specifications.
- The detailed design drawings will be used in the tendering process to appoint a contractor(s) to construct the scheme.

### STAGE 5 – CONSTRUCTION

- Scenario 1 assumes all funds are available and all approvals are in place to construct the scheme in full within a 6-12 month period.
- Scenario 2 assumes a two phased approach in which improvements to Station Road are delivered alongside additional temporary parking along the Kenilworth Road with full completion of the master plan at a later stage.

## A3. COST ESTIMATES

The following cost estimates are indicative and appropriate to a Master Plan stage. Without topographical surveys and more detailed designs, it is not possible to provide detailed cost estimates. An Optimism Bias factor has been included in line with Government guidance for Green Book appraisals. This is to counterbalance the demonstrated, systematic tendency for project appraisers to be overly optimistic.

### STAGE 1 FEASIBILITY STUDIES

- The Transport Studies should be undertaken and funded by SMBC. No cost for this element has been included.
- An indicative cost for all other Stage 1 studies outlined above is circa £200- 250k.

### STAGE 2-3 CONCEPT DESIGN AND SPATIAL DEVELOPMENT

- It is recommended that this stage is carried out for the whole area for both Scenario 1 and Scenario 2.
- An indicative cost is in the range of £60-80,000 depending on the exact scope.

### STAGE 4 TECHNICAL DESIGN

- Costs can vary significantly depending on the size, complexity of any scheme and quality of materials chosen. At this stage we have simply assumed detailed technical design is 5% of total construction costs.
- Scenario 1 - £178,000
- Scenario 2
  - Phase 1 - £57,000
  - Phase 2 - £122,000
- Note costs are for the Master Plan proposals only.

### STAGE 5 CONSTRUCTION

- Scenario 1 - £3,557,000
- Scenario 2 / Phase 1 Station Road - £1,145,000
- Scenario 2 / Phase 2 Kenilworth Road - £2,432,000

# A4. OUTCOMES

## ACHIEVEMENT OF SUCCESS CRITERIA

### ATTRACTIVE AND DISTINCTIVE

- Clearly identifiable as a special place within the fabric of the village.
- No longer car dominated.
- Significant increase of pedestrian and dwelling space.
- Distinctive and unified design.

### ACTIVE BUSINESS AND SOCIAL LIFE

- Additional opportunities for commercial pavement use.
- Wider footways.
- Opportunities for markets and other footfall generating events.
- Additional emphasis and space for encounters and community activities.

### PEDESTRIAN-ORIENTATED BUT ACCESSIBLE FOR DRIVERS

- Reduced speed limits to encourage considerate and safer driving.
- Improved pedestrian amenity and accessibility for all.
- Improved opportunities for cycling.
- No restrictions on vehicular access and no reduction of parking spaces.
- Improved customer parking management.

## A WELCOMING SPACE TO MEET

- Public benches and 'lounges' to socialise outdoors.
- Possibility for cafes and restaurants to offer 'al-fresco' service.
- Safer for children and more welcoming for disabled people.
- Less stressful environment.

## WELL-CONNECTED

- At the centre of walking and cycling routes across the village.
- Well connected to existing and future parks and public rights of way.
- Safe and easy walking and cycling connections to schools and clubs.

## GREEN

- Significant increase of trees and semi-natural planting.
- Opportunities for urban greening of private properties (wall planting, flower boxes, green roofs, etc).
- Increased summer shading and pavement permeability.

## SAFEGUARDING LOCAL BUSINESSES

### ECONOMIC CONSIDERATIONS FOR LOCAL BUSINESSES

- Balsall Common is a successful convenience centre but emerging retail clusters (on Kenilworth Road to the north and station Road to the east) could, in the absence of action, reduce that desirability. Research indicates that convenience and transactional shopping is also more likely to progressively move online and that professional and personal service businesses benefit from an expanded leisure and community offer where they are located. The proposals:
- Support local convenience trading by minimising disruption to customer accessibility (both road access and parking) and to deliveries and by broadening the general appeal of the centre, recognising that competing on grounds of abundant and easy parking will never be a viable strategy.
- Provide opportunities for diversification, by introducing pedestrian outdoor space and dwelling opportunities.
- Facilitate customer movement, through easier crossings and increased safety.
- Make possible to host footfall generating activities, such as markets and local celebrations.
- Ensure no net reduction in the number of parking spaces.

## ACHIEVEMENT OF OTHER POLICY OUTCOMES

### SOCIAL VALUE

Taking in consideration SMBC Social Value Policy:

- Supporting the future prosperity of local businesses, by enhancing the centre and increasing its attractiveness as a destination as well as convenience shopping.
- Increasing the cohesion of the business environment, by providing a unified high-quality setting for both Station Road and Kenilworth Road, effectively expanding the area considered to be the 'centre' of the village.
- Supporting the future prosperity of citizens and social cohesion, by strengthening the image and identity of the centre, increasing opportunities for socialising in the public space and providing the setting for community events.
- Value and respect the needs and aspirations of all people, by creating an easier and safer environment for women, children and disabled people.
- Contributing to the delivery of a lower carbon future (see Climate Change Mitigation below).
- Managing the demand for public services, by encouraging healthier lifestyles through walking and cycling, additional opportunities to meet people (reduced isolation) and improved local air quality.
- Making the best use of local people and assets by supporting local independent shops (retaining local spend) and facilitating access to community facilities, strengthening connections between the centre, village heritage and village activities.
- In future: ensure that the procurement practices associated with implementation encourage local participation and, if possible, supply.

## A5. KEY CONTACTS

### CLIMATE CHANGE: LOWER CARBON EMISSIONS

Taking into account the UK's plans for decarbonisation (the Ten Point Plan, the Decarbonising Transport Plan, the Net-Zero Strategy published in 2021), Net-Zero Solihull and Local Plan policies:

- Supporting efforts to reduce car use and encourage 50% of all local trips to be made by active modes (Decarbonising Transport Plan) by a significant reduction of car presence in the centre and welcoming measures for walking and cycling.
- Encouraging wider walking and cycling connections across the village and giving more reasons for new development to plan for walking and cycling to the centre instead of driving.
- Supporting local shopping, businesses and community activities, thus supporting the local economy and reducing the need to travel for services.
- Encouragement to provide renewable energy at least as part of public and community buildings (detailed design stage).
- Re-provision of removed planting (for example in Library Car Park) and introduction of trees and biodiversity-rich plant mixes.
- Use of low carbon materials in construction (detailed design stage).

### CLIMATE CHANGE: ADAPTING TO ERRATIC WEATHER

- Introduction of trees and planters contributing to slow water run-off and increased biodiversity.
- Encouragement of urban greenery (green walls, roofs, plant and bird boxes) to be included in private properties.
- Increased shading and reduction of urban heat in the centre.
- Increased proportion of permeable surfaces, reducing the risk of overload of the drainage system.
- Increased social resilience through additional opportunities for social interaction and participation into community activities and reinforcing the role of the centre within the village.

### SMBC

Transport Officer: Walter Bailey

Economic Development Officer: Claire Rudge

Economic Development Lead: Perry Wardle

### UK CENTRAL

Perry Wardle

Alan Smith

### TfWM

Active Travel Coordination: Paul Cobain



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