

Balsall and Berkswell Parish Councils

BALSALL COMMON CENTRE MASTER PLAN

DRAFT PROPOSALS REPORT

Final – Sep 2021

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

Ove Arup & Partners Ltd
The Arup Campus
Blythe Gate
Blythe Valley Park
Solihull B90 8AE
United Kingdom
www.arup.com

ARUP
In association with
URBANSILENCE

CONTENTS

1. Introduction	1	4. Prevailing Sentiments	23
Work to Date	1	5. Key Themes Answered	28
Aspirations for the Future	2	Proposed Changes to the Master Plan	30
Inputs from Interest Community Groups	2	6. Changes	30
2. The draft proposals	5	Recommendations for Implementation	31
A. Towards a Future Centre: Vision and Success Criteria	5	Issues to be Considered at Detailed Design Stage	32
B. The Proposed Improvements: Urban Design and Public Realm	5	Recommendations for Wider Integration	33
C. Highways, Servicing and Parking Strategy	6	7. Next Steps	34
D. Connections to the Wider Area	7	Study Next Steps	34
E. Potential Outcomes	8		
3. Seeking Feedback from the Community	22		

All photos and maps have been prepared by the study team for the purpose of this study unless otherwise credited. Ordnance Survey Map data is used under Berkswell PC authorisation number OS PSMA 100057939. ARUP are authorised to use the OS data for the specific purpose of the Balsall Common master plan project.

1. INTRODUCTION

Balsall Common is the largest village of the rural Parishes of Balsall and Berkswell. It is perfectly placed to access employment and services across the dynamic hinterland of Coventry, Birmingham, business parks and research facilities of international standing.

Balsall Common has retained the peacefulness and comfort of being “simply” a nice place to live. The centre, however, is a disappointment for many residents: it includes a range of convenience outlets, but it lacks character and sense of quality. It serves the community’s needs, but it does not generate pride or emotional attachment. For many, it is frustratingly car dominated, inadequate for the safety of children and for people with impairments.

For many businesses, it works as it is: trade is good, because of the affluent growing population and established routine custom.

The great challenge will be to improve character, quality and opportunities for social interaction without giving up the strengths of the location for trade.

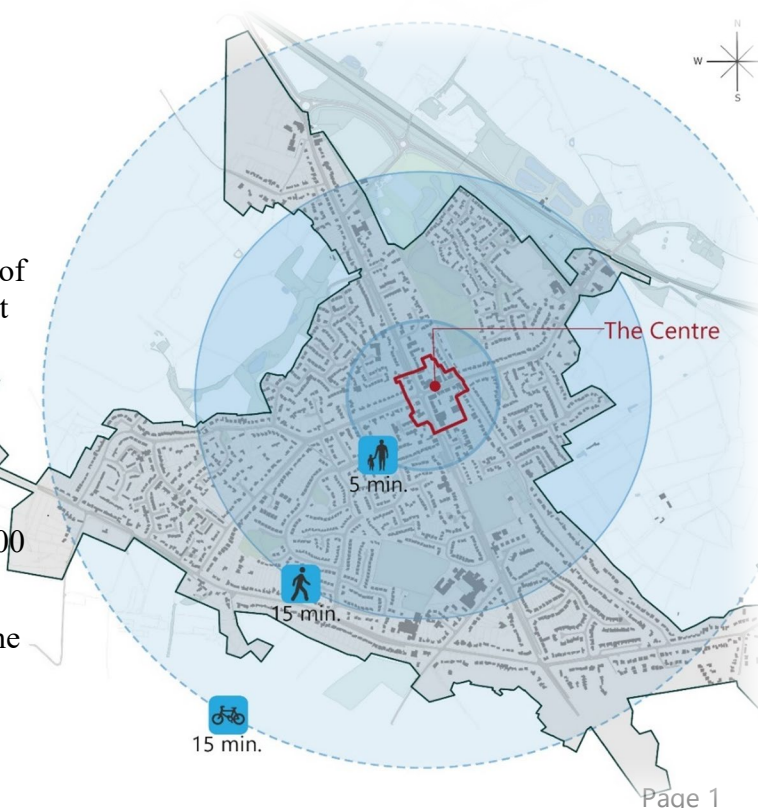
WORK TO DATE

- January and February 2021: understanding the area and challenges - focus groups with around 80 residents and interviews with just over half of the businesses located in the centre.
- March 2021: Baseline Report
- April 2021: exploration of options and alternative directions. 4 mixed focus groups (residents and businesses) attended by around 60 people.
- May 2021: Options Report
- May-June 2021: widening of the reach of the master plan through specific interest groups: cycling, heritage, events, etc.
- July 2021: development of draft proposals for the centre and recommendations for the surrounding area. Exhibition and public event in Balsall Common, attended by almost 400 people.

This report summarises this last stage of the study.

- *Arup was appointed in December 2020 to identify how the centre should change as a key asset for the community in a rapidly changing context. The Arup team is supported by urban strategists URBAN Silence.*

Fig. 1 - The Centre (Study Area)



ASPIRATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

The Draft Proposals were developed to respond to the preferences and aspirations expressed by the participants to earlier focus groups, which indicated a centre which is:

- Much more attractive
- Better for walking and cycling
- More inclusive, and
- A place for the community above all.

The centre should also:

- Become a great place to meet friends
- Offer more outdoor seating
- Display more greenery
- Encourage improvement to businesses and private properties
- Be easy to reach by car, and
- Retain the majority (all) existing parking spaces.

INPUTS FROM INTEREST COMMUNITY GROUPS

People in the village who had been active on particular issues were invited to provide inputs to enrich the impact of change in the centre.

CYCLING GROUP

Recommendations included:

- Integration of the centre in a network of safer cycle routes (segregated from vehicular traffic or ‘advisory’ and well signposted on low traffic streets).
- Indication of the routes that would best serve the village. These include in some instances different preferences or priorities than those identified by Solihull Council.
- Suggestions for cycle parking and a cycle hub.
- Suggestions for events and training to encourage more villagers to cycle.
- *These were incorporated in the Draft Proposals and are shown in Section 2.*

HERITAGE GROUP

Recommendations included:

- Creation of heritage walking trails linking heritage features within the village, generally outside the centre.
- Suggestion for a heritage display in the library or other suitable community space.
- Suggestions for interpretation and dissemination (leaflets, maps, etc.).
- *These proposals were incorporated in the design as 2 concatenated trail loops of about 10km and 5km linking into the centre, where ‘memories’ could be brought to life through murals and public art. See Section 2.*

EVENTS GROUP

Recommendations included:

- Desire to bring events, even partially, into the centre by equipping the centre with the facilities needed for the local brass band, carol singing and other similar community festivals, linking churches, halls and the park.
- Potential to have a flagpole or memorial for civic celebrations.
- Potential to have a street market on an occasional basis, to complement and enhance the offer of the local shops.
- Desirability to have ‘buddy benches’ activities to enhance community interaction, particularly for the elderly and isolated
- *These suggestions were included in the considerations for the Draft Proposals, which provides for temporary arrangements for events and markets, a flagpole and potential for public art.*

OTHER INPUTS

Other inputs were sought from a variety of groups, resulting in localised suggestions.

- **Local businesses**
All local businesses were invited to join a walk around and discussion, but only a handful actually took part (7 out of around 40 businesses in the centre). One of the business participants felt very positive about the proposals. Others expressed concerns that can be broadly summarised as reluctance to change. The convenience, quick in/ out car-based model of the centre is part of current habits of staff and customers. Businesses work as they are and changes to car parking locations and efforts to create a more social space were met with hesitancy by the few participants.
- *We responded to their concerns by integrating in the Draft Proposals facilities that support convenience trading: quick turnaround parking directly in front of the shops and introduction of dedicated loading bays.*

- **Hazel Place management company and Co-op**

It was agreed that the retention of a link between the Co-op store and parking to Station Road via Hazel Place is both a legal right and an advantage for the centre and its users. Minimising disturbance to residents and ensuring the safety of HGV movement were key.

- *The Draft Proposals include the creation of a safe walkway away from residential properties and design devices to discourage informal use.*

- **Green Lane residents**

A group of residents living on Green Lane agreed that the street should be improved and protected. Appropriate use includes activities linked to the properties and to the Right of Way leading to the park. The legal complexity and consequences of public management of the lane (through public adoption) are unclear.

- *Addressing the specificity of the legal issues of the lane should form part of a dedicated follow-on study. The master plan will reaffirm the desirability of a safe and inclusive pedestrian route to the park.*

- **Scouts (14-17 years old)**

The local scout group provided feedback on the emerging proposals, suggesting that the access to the park and connectivity (walking and cycling) to trails and the countryside is very important.

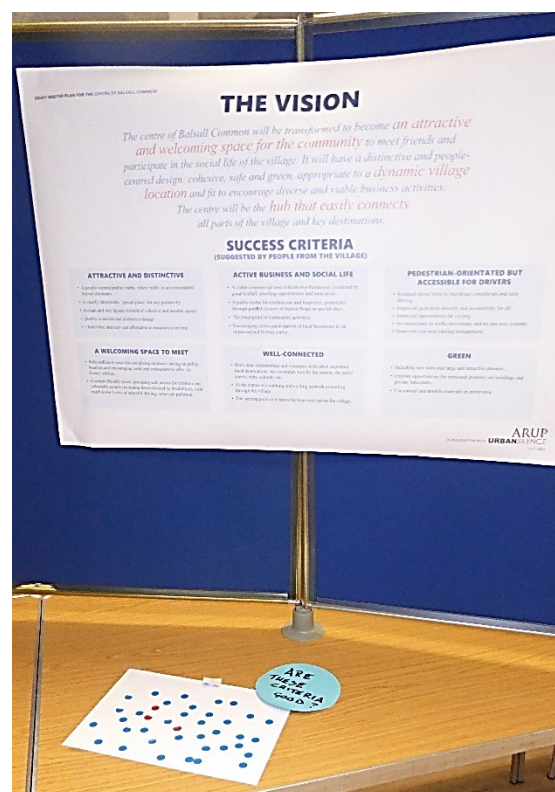
- *The Draft Proposals reinforced the importance of links and connectivity for young people.*

2. THE DRAFT PROPOSALS

A. TOWARDS A FUTURE CENTRE: VISION AND SUCCESS CRITERIA

- The presentation of the Draft Proposals started by reaffirming the Vision and Success Criteria identified through the focus groups of the Options stage.
- These constituted the ‘brief’ for the development of the proposals and the yardstick for their evaluation by the community.
- People attending the exhibition reconfirmed the direction proposed (blue sticker for agree / red sticker for disagree). They were then asked to score how well the proposals responded to the 6 Success Criteria identified in the Options Report and illustrated on pg. 11).

Fig. 2 - Community feedback on Vision and Success Criteria



B. THE PROPOSED IMPROVEMENTS: URBAN DESIGN AND PUBLIC REALM

- 4 boards presented the proposals from an urban design perspective.
- The proposals include the creation of a pedestrian / public space area on the northern side of Station Road (south facing sunny side, where most leisure uses are), which is spacious enough to accommodate benches, tables and planting. The southern side of the road retains parking for convenience use. Kenilworth Road is reconfigured to allow more planting, accommodate some parking and to improve facilities for cyclists and pedestrians. Clutter and traffic management paraphernalia is reduced to a minimum.
- Three potential temporary configurations are presented to allow occasional markets or small scale local celebrations.

- Two alternative palettes of materials (one warmer, tending towards wood and natural colours, one colder and based on a range on natural greys) were presented. The main message was that a palette (or family) of colours and materials is preferable to ad hoc and inconsistent choices.
- A final panel included ‘mood pictures’ aiming to portray the future feel and look of the centre: still modern and ‘urban,’ but greener, softer and dominated by human activities, without excluding car use.

Fig. 3 - Community feedback on the urban design proposals



C. HIGHWAYS, SERVICING AND PARKING STRATEGY

- 2 boards presented the highways and parking / servicing arrangements.
- Highway proposals include a 20mph speed limit on roads throughout the centre, accompanied by carriageways and roundabouts that are narrower and surfaced with a different material to indicate high pedestrian presence and encourage lower traffic speeds.
- In Kenilworth Road, between the Haigs Hotel and The White Horse, a central strip replaces the central turning lane. While this allows cross-over by car, it also physically reduces the carriageway width, providing a refuge for pedestrians crossing the road and allowing planting or planters in places. This arrangement encourages lower speeds and makes the area safer for cyclists, who cannot be overtaken by vehicles for the stretch of this arrangement. Signalised crossings become unnecessary and are no longer included.

- With speed limits reduced and lanes narrowed, traffic is expected to be slower but, subject to a detailed study of the junction, it is not expected that congestion will build up significantly more than at present.
- Station Road has been narrowed down to 5.5m to reduce traffic speeds and improve pedestrian crossing movements. A mini-roundabout is shown at the junction with Green Lane to enable u-turn movements, and remove the need for three-point turns within the road. .
- Total parking numbers in the centre are the same as existing, which is consistent with planning policy. Some parking has been relocated from Station Road to the Library Car Park and some to Kenilworth Road. Management measures (time restrictions) are envisaged to ensure that rapid turn-around convenience parking remains available for shoppers.
- Dedicated disabled bays are provided on Station Road and in the Library Car Park.
- Cycle parking is envisaged on Station Road and in the Library Car Park.
- Half-width bays for delivery vehicles are provided along the northern kerb of Station Road, to discourage delivery vehicles taking up customer parking spaces. These bays could be used by food vans or market stalls.
- Parking would continue to be free
- Private parking (around 80-100 spaces in addition to the Co-op) remains unaffected.
- Perpendicular parking bays have been kept on the southern side of Station Street following requests from local businesses. However, removal of perpendicular parking on the northern side substantially reduces potential vehicle conflicts.

D. CONNECTIONS TO THE WIDER AREA

- It is considered that the centre can only thrive as a place of lively social and community activities if well connected to the wider area: the schools, sport clubs, park and other halls and community facilities.
- An ‘Area of Influence’ has been identified as the primary focus for improvement of pedestrian and cycle facilities and enhancement of greenery. Where other commercial activities are present, it is recommended that a planning framework is agreed to encourage complementarity rather than competition.
- Encouraging active and sustainable modes to reach the centre is vital. Improving cycle facilities and encouraging cycling throughout the village is recommended as virtually the entire village is within 15 minutes’ cycling time.

- The proposals take account of both Solihull Council’s plans and the improvements suggested by the community through the Cycling Group. Proposals include both formal cycleways and ‘advisory routes’ where cyclists share the carriageway on roads with low volumes of traffic. It is recommended that a more in-depth study is undertaken to inform future implementation at the same time or ahead of improvements in the centre, such that a cohesive cycling network is provided.
- The heritage features of Balsall Common are dispersed and not immediately noticeable or enjoyable from the centre. With the support of the Heritage Group, two interconnected heritage trails are proposed to connect the centre to the history of the village. These are intended to be cultural and leisure walking routes, including information panels. Additional features linked to memories of the past (long-gone shops, place names, etc.) are proposed for the centre.

E. POTENTIAL OUTCOMES

Besides fulfilling the Vision and Success Criteria, the proposals need to be mindful of other drivers of future development, which also influence public sector activities and funding. An initial assessment of other potential outcomes was presented on the last board:

- **Contribution to Social Value:** this refers to the social benefits and outcomes to be derived by the project, such as more opportunities for social interaction, social inclusion, improved well-being, etc. Solihull Council has a Social Value Policy and legal obligations in the procurement of services. In the coming years, social value obligations are likely to increase.
- **Responding to climate change and sustainability:** this is part of the drive to achieve a Net Zero society and fulfil the international pledges of the UK. There are not yet specific mandatory requirements for projects of this nature, but the Net Zero Solihull Action Plan gives indication of goals and actions such

as: encouraging / prioritising walking and cycling over use of cars, reducing the carbon footprint of materials used in construction, increased greenery and biodiversity, reduced energy consumption, etc.

- **Considering benefits for local businesses:** given that Balsall Common is working reasonably well as a convenience centre, it is understandable that some people feel that change is risky and that the concerns of businesses must be taken seriously. On the other hand, recent research indicates that convenience and transactional shopping will be progressively moving online and that professional and personal service businesses benefit from an expanded leisure and community offer. This is why a balance has been sought between supporting convenience and expanding opportunities for additional footfall / activity which could increase loyalty and multiply the reasons to visit the centre, both for existing and future residents.

Fig. 4 - A well-attended public exhibition in Balsall Common - July 2021



THE CENTRE TODAY



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)

WHAT THE PEOPLE OF BALSALL COMMON TOLD US PRIORITIES

- More attractive
- Better for pedestrians
- De-clutter / maintain the streets
- Reduce traffic
- Address Station Rd. parking
- Outdoor café/ seating
- Social interaction
- Create a village 'square'
- Bypass
- Better links to green space
- Better for cycling
- Increased safety
- More greenery
- Better shops
- More restaurants
- Sport centre / gym



For most the Centre is or can be a destination



KEY WORDS FOR THE FUTURE



THE 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 PEOPLE FROM 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 and easy and affordable to maintain over time.

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.

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 traffic movement, and no one-way systems.
- Improved customer parking management.

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), with much lower levels of stressful driving, noise and pollution.

WELL-CONNECTED

- With clear relationships and synergies with other important local destinations: the secondary hub by the station, the 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.

GREEN

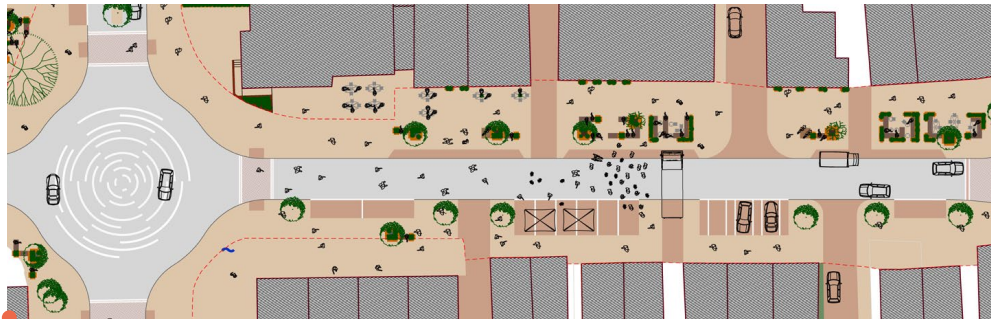
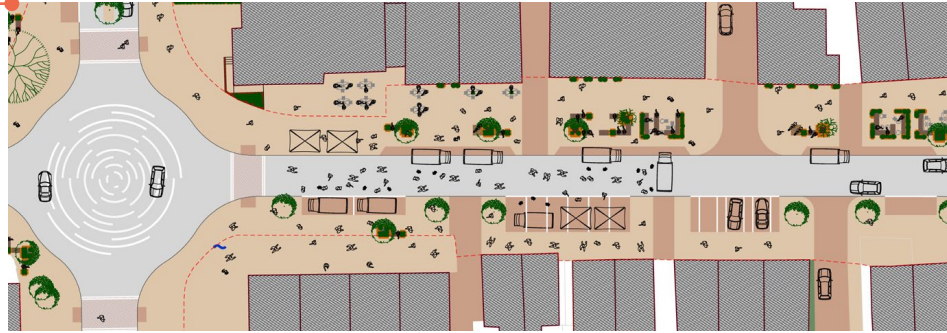
- Including new trees and large and attractive planters.
- Explore opportunities for increased greenery on buildings and private forecourts.
- Use natural and durable materials in preference.

THE FUTURE CENTRE - DRAFT PROPOSALS



THE FUTURE CENTRE - IDEAS FOR MORE COMMUNITY USE

MARKETS AND FESTIVALS



MUSIC AND CONCERTS

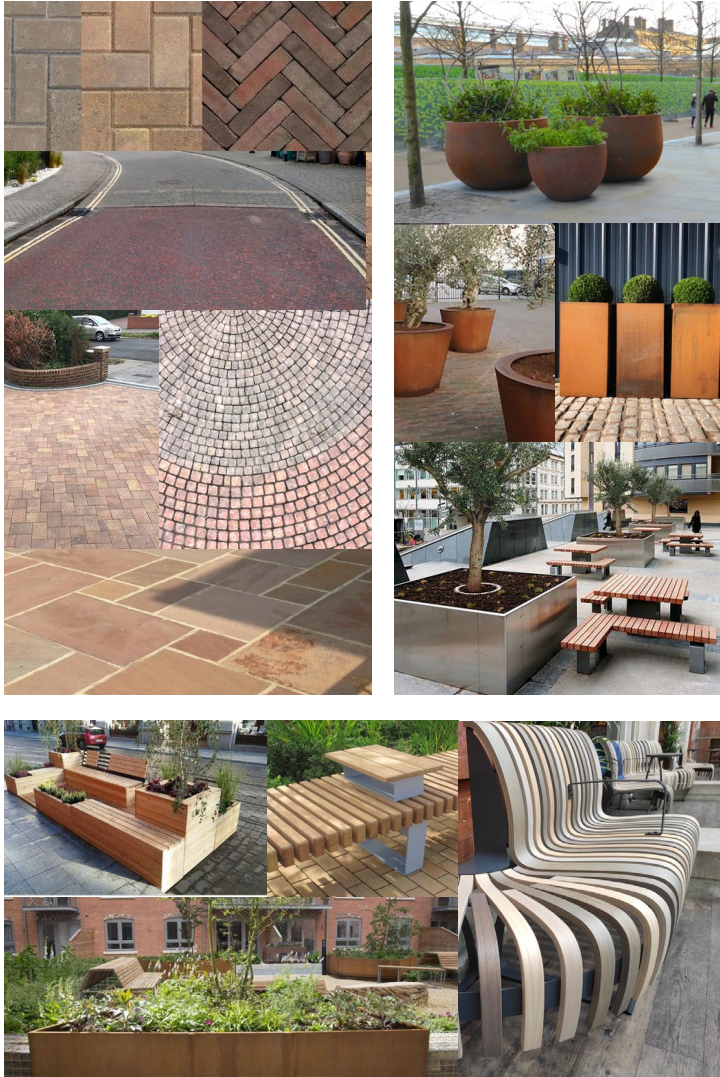


PARADES AND CELEBRATIONS

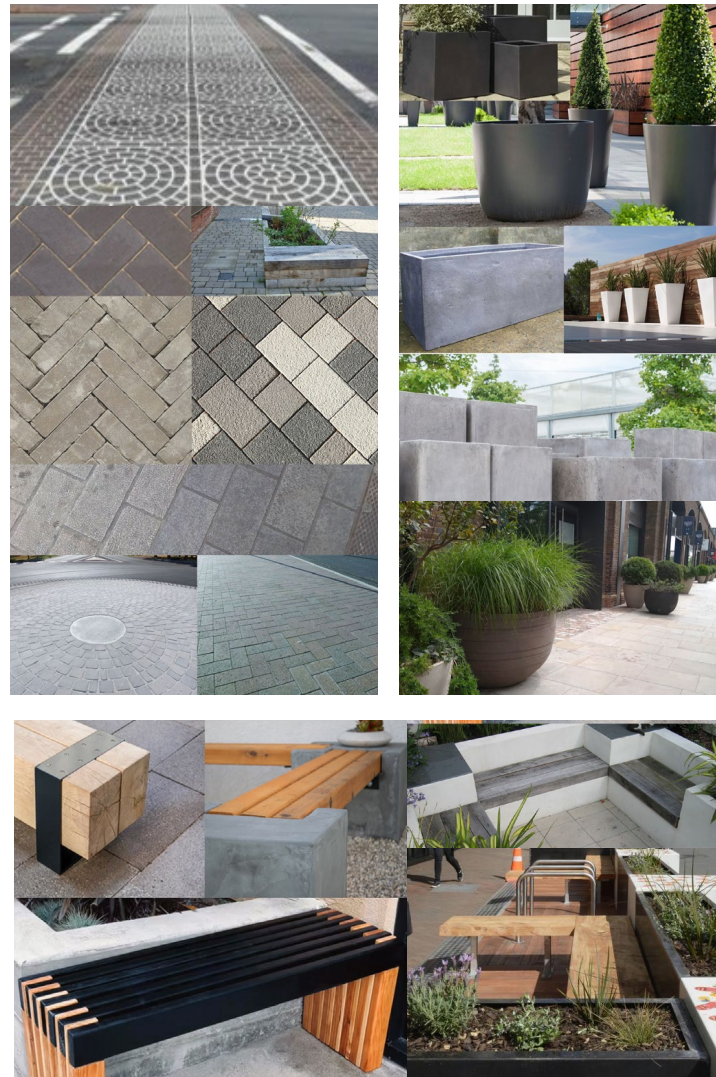


POTENTIAL MATERIALS

BROWN PALETTE



GREY PALETTE

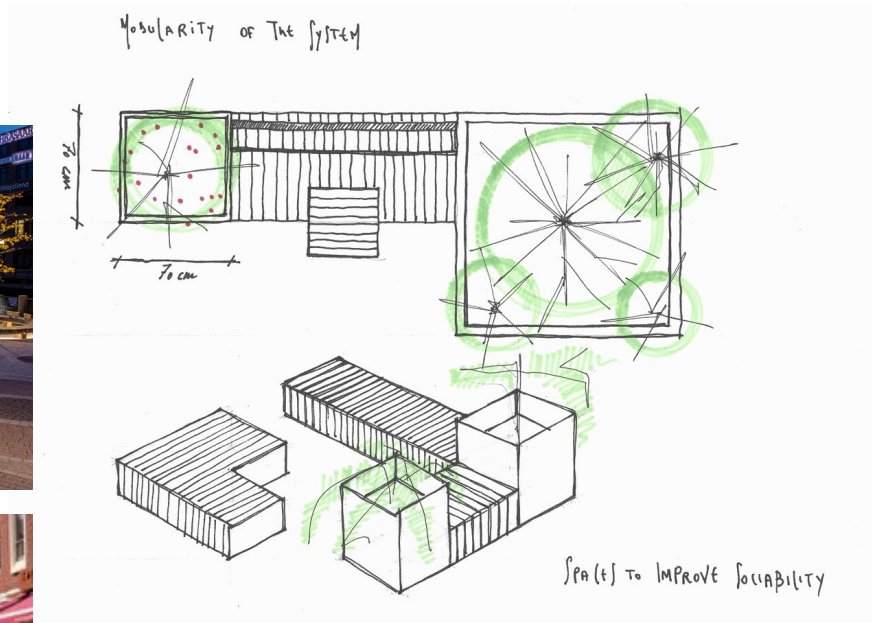


CONSIDERATIONS FOR SELECTION

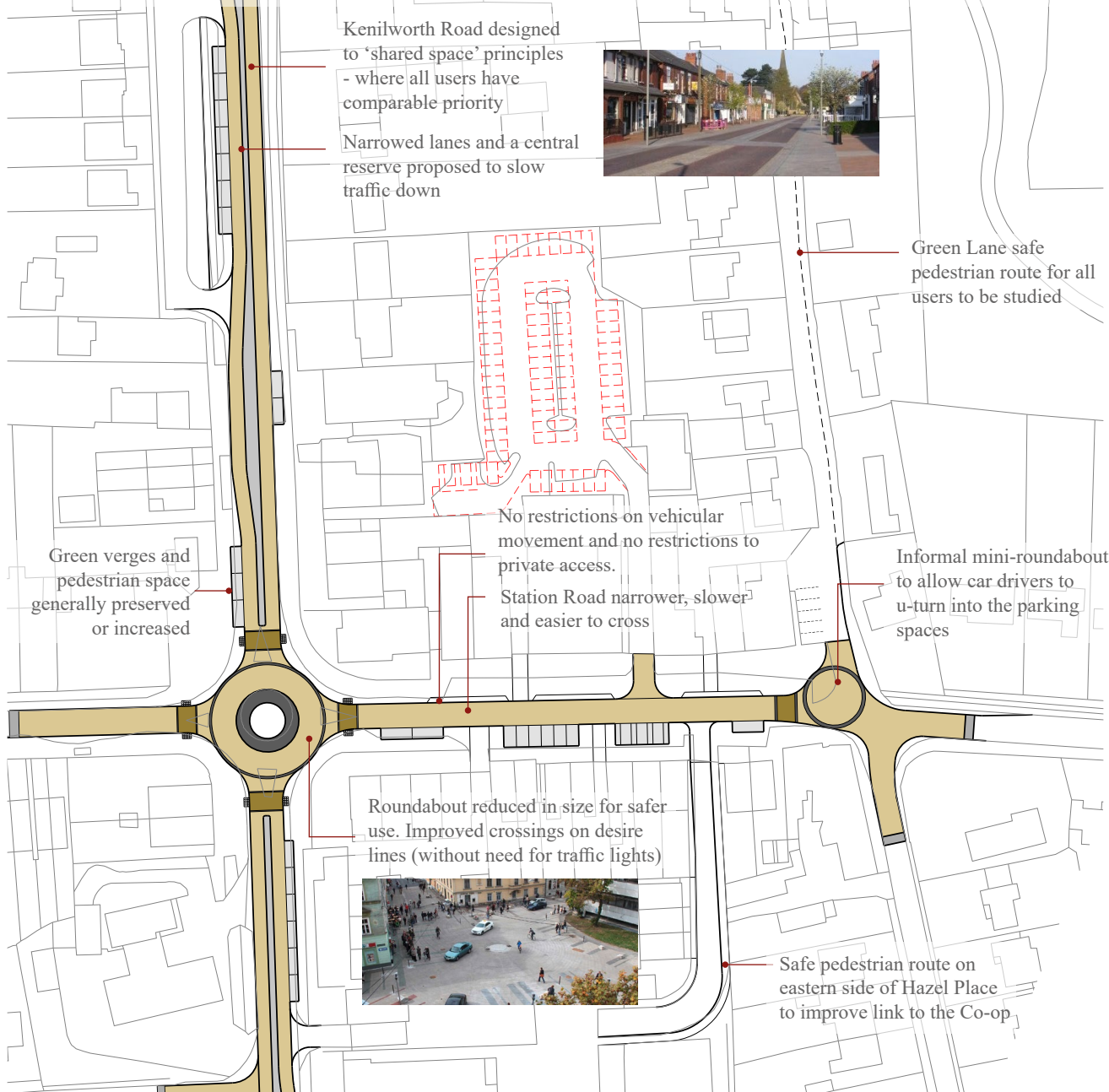
- Comfort - even surfacing for walking and cycling; benches in slatted wood for even temperature and low water retention.
- Style - aiming to give a timeless village appearance without historic pastiche.
- Big planters - to make an impact and increase urban greenery; high biodiversity planting scheme.
- Outstanding eco-credentials: certified wood, recycled materials, lower carbon paving materials.
- Ease of maintenance: cleaning, repairing and replacing, such as customisable off-the-shelf materials and furniture.

DRAFT MASTER PLAN FOR THE CENTRE OF BALSALL COMMON

FEEL AND LOOK



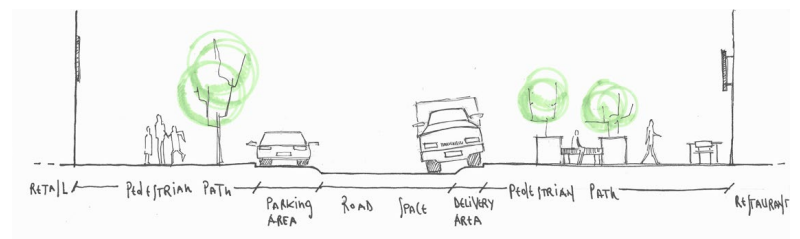
HIGHWAYS - DRAFT PROPOSALS



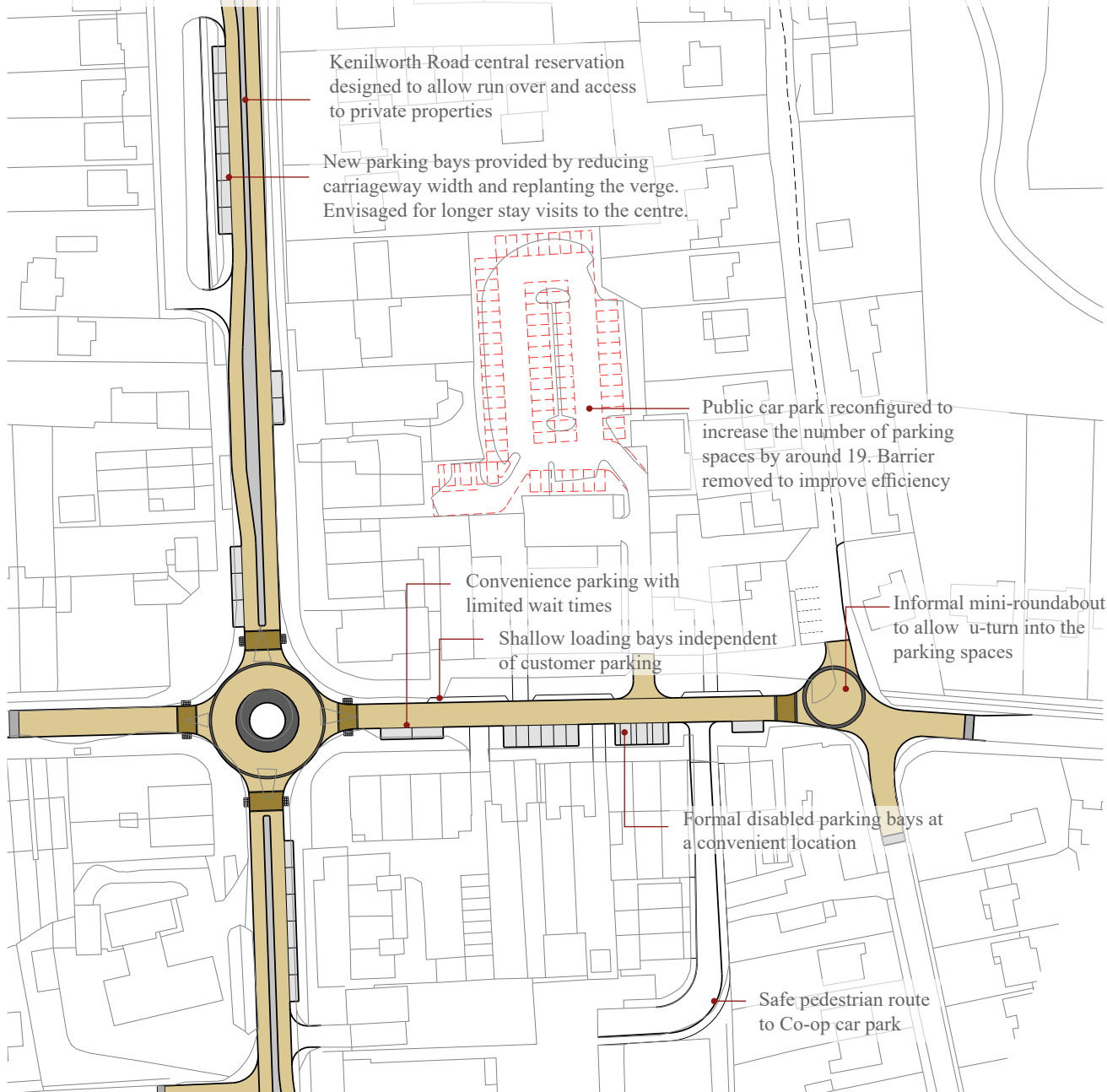
THE REASONS BEHIND THE PROPOSALS

- Kenilworth Road is a wide single carriageway, with vehicle speeds which are not considered suitable for a village centre location. The proposals seek to slow traffic, with a central reserve to improve pedestrian crossing facilities. The narrowed lanes will also help to improve priority for cyclists travelling along Kenilworth Road.
- The roundabout between Kenilworth Road and Station Road is reduced in size, to lower vehicle speeds and improve safety for cyclists. Crossing points located next to the roundabout, to minimise pedestrian diversions when walking to and from the centre.
- Station Road is narrowed, to reduce vehicle speeds, create a more pedestrian friendly environment and encourage cycling. An informal mini-roundabout is shown at the junction with Green Lane, to enable u-turn movements.

A CLEAR DEFINITION OF SPACE TO ALLOW MULTIPLE-USE



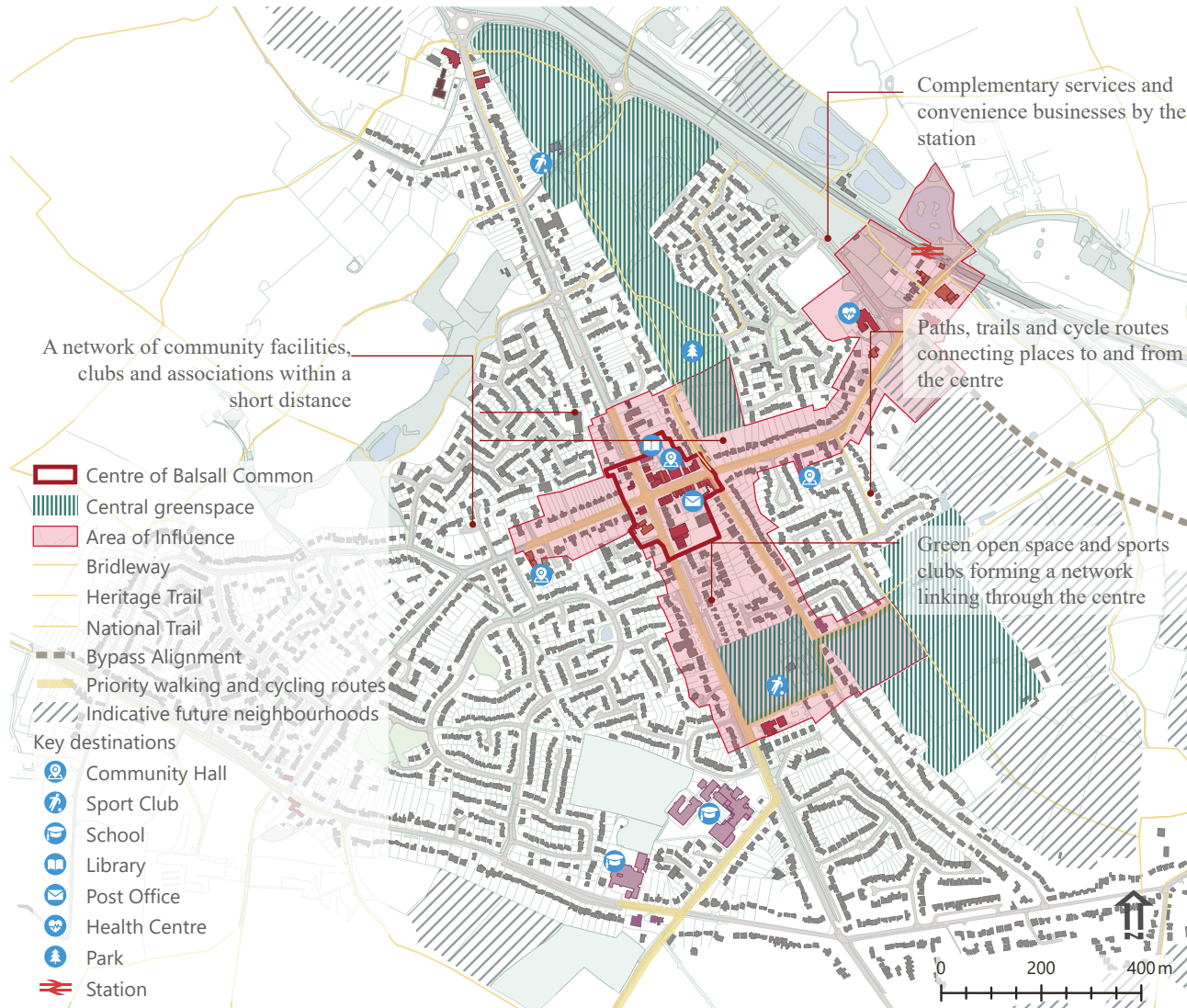
PARKING AND SERVICING STRATEGY



ENSURING APPROPRIATE CUSTOMER PARKING

- No overall change in the total number of parking spaces within the centre. Spaces managed to ensure fast turn-around of spaces nearer convenience shopping.
- Private customer and staff parking spaces unaffected.
- Station Road (southern side): 3 new formal disabled parking bays, and customer parking with limited wait times. No proposal to introduce parking fees.
- Shallow loading bays along the northern side of Station Road, to enable delivery vehicles to pull halfway off the carriageway without need to use customer parking.
- Library car park reconfigured to provide around 19 additional customer parking spaces.
- Kenilworth Road: provision of 14-16 parallel parking bays to offset changes in Station Road.
- Improved pedestrian link to 64 parking spaces available within the nearby Co-op.

WELL CONNECTED TO THE WIDER AREA



WHY CONNECTIONS ARE SO IMPORTANT

- The centre is small, but lively because of linked destinations and trips: the park, the schools, station, churches and halls, etc.
- Future expansion of parkland, sport facilities and neighbourhoods need to integrate well with the centre, which will provide cohesion for the village.
- Because the centre is small and cannot expand, it relies on a range of activities nearby to serve the population.



MORE OPPORTUNITIES FOR CYCLING

A COMMUNITY DRIVEN PLAN TO BETTER CONNECT THE CENTRE BY BICYCLE AND ENCOURAGE CYCLING IN THE VILLAGE



KEY FEATURES

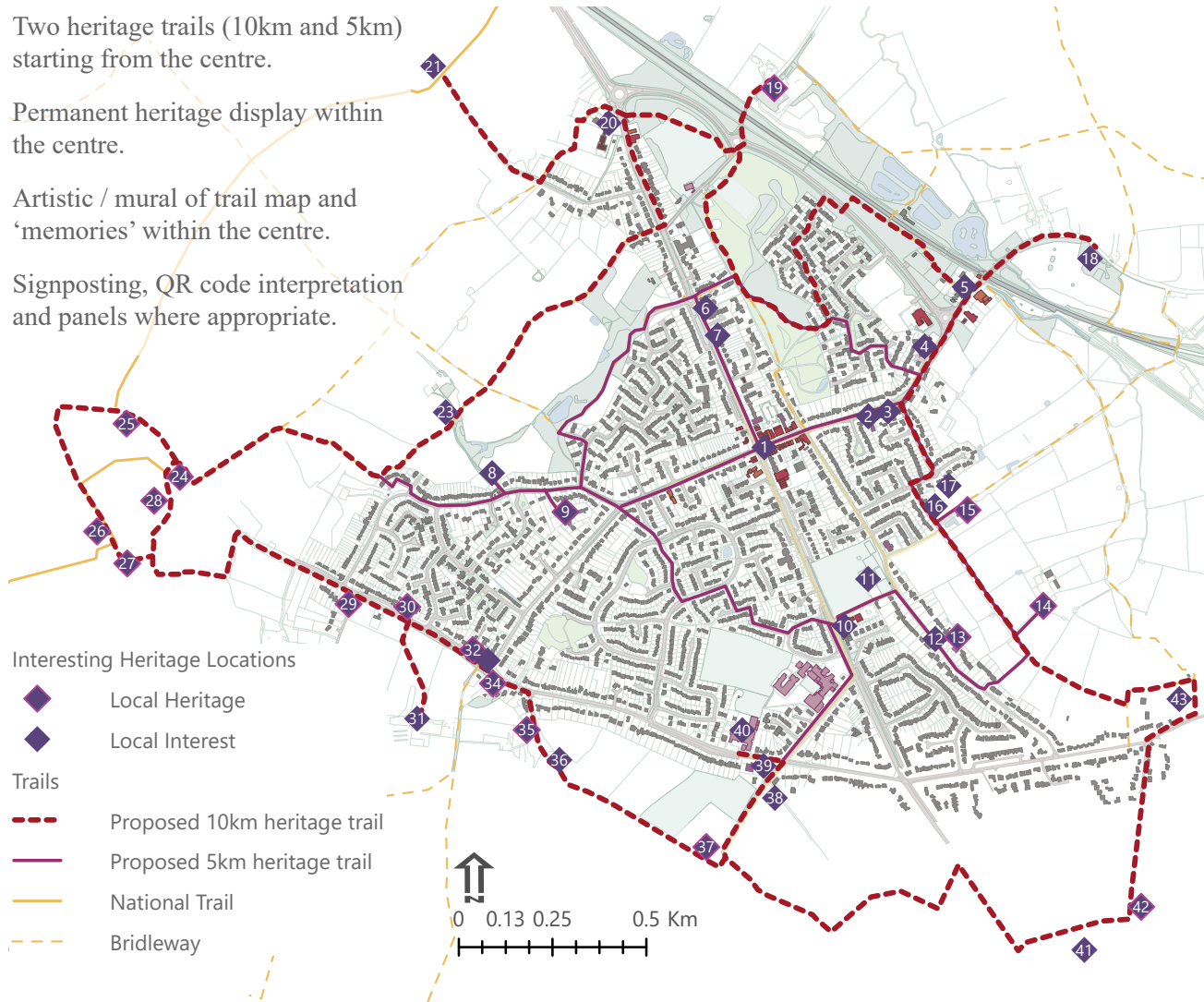
- Community driven programme of upgrades to make cycling safer across the whole village, connect the centre, schools and, in future, the new neighbourhoods.
- Community aspiration for better cycle facilities on all busier roads of the village and localised improvements and signposting on secondary and leisure routes.
- Investment in a cycle repair hub and appropriate cycle parking.
- To be accompanied by a campaign including map leaflets, expanded training opportunities, community ‘first-time cycling’ events.



STRONGER HERITAGE AND IDENTITY

POSSIBILITIES

- Two heritage trails (10km and 5km) starting from the centre.
- Permanent heritage display within the centre.
- Artistic / mural of trail map and 'memories' within the centre.
- Signposting, QR code interpretation and panels where appropriate.



Description

- | | |
|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1 Centre of Balsall Common | 22 Magpie Cottage location |
| 2 Methodist Church | 23 Grange Farm |
| 3 Old Berkswell Stores | 24 The Saracens Head Inn |
| 4 Brickmakers Arms Pub | 25 The Templars |
| 5 Station Inn | 26 Balsall Farmhouse |
| 6 Old Methodist Chapel | 27 Magpie Farmhouse |
| 7 Toll House location | 28 The Old Farmhouse |
| 8 Needlers End Farm | 29 Wisteria Cottage |
| 9 Templars Croft and Homestead | 30 Shenstone Grange |
| 10 The White Horse Pub | 31 Oake's Farm |
| 11 The Lant Sport Club | 32 Hobbe Cottage |
| 12 Quaker Meeting House location | 33 The Old Forge |
| 13 Barn and Outbuilding | 34 Old Wheelwrights and Barn |
| 14 Barratts Farm House | 35 Frogmore Cottage |
| 15 Pool Orchard | 36 White Cottage |
| 16 Meadow Barn | 37 Cottage Farmhouse |
| 17 Sunnyside Barn location | 38 The Old School |
| 18 Berkswell Grange | 39 St Peter's Church |
| 19 Lavander Hall Farm and Barn | 40 Balsall Common Primary School |
| 20 George in the Tree Inn | 41 Plymouth Brethren Chapel |
| 21 Wootton Grange | 42 Berkswell Windmill |
| | 43 Medieval furrowed field |

POTENTIAL OUTCOMES

SOCIAL VALUE

- High quality, attractive and safe public realm through wider footways, social spaces and improved accessibility.
- Improved social life and cohesion with new meeting spaces and social activities, independently of commercial pavement use. Potential for temporary road closures to host ceremonies and events in the centre.
- Improved integration between the centre, the community it serves and the surrounding area.
- An easier and fairer environment for all users including people with impairments.
- Strong local ownership of the changes through wide engagement of local groups during all design stages.

ENGAGING LOCAL PEOPLE



5

INTEREST GROUPS



15

FOCUS GROUPS

CLIMATE CHANGE AND SUSTAINABILITY

- Supporting low carbon initiatives by promoting walking, cycling and easy access to public transport while significantly reducing roadspace.
- Improved green infrastructure network through new tree plantings and greenery.
- Use of low carbon, sustainable materials.
- Stronger “village” local identity with a clearer community feel, more planting and a careful palette of materials and urban furniture.

MORE TREES



+40

ADDITIONAL TREES PROPOSED

CROSSING DISTANCE



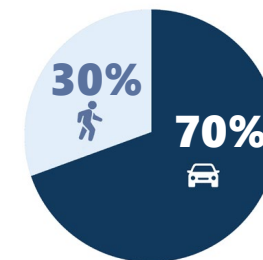
5.5M

PROPOSED (CURRENTLY 8M)

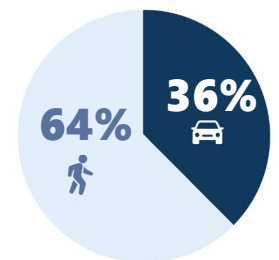
BENEFITS FOR LOCAL BUSINESSES

- A better environment for existing and future residents, able to attract a wider and growing population.
- Reinforced local customer base (70-80% of estimated business) through increased opportunities to come to the centre and spend time there.
- More opportunities for pavement use, outdoor hospitality, events and celebrations.
- Better management car parking spaces with no overall reduction.

A BETTER SHARE OF PUBLIC SPACE



TODAY



PROPOSED

3. SEEKING FEEDBACK FROM THE COMMUNITY

The Parish Councils advertised the presentation of draft proposals as widely as possible, aiming to reach everyone:

- 3 days of exhibition were published through the Parish magazine (The Bugle), delivered to all addresses in the parishes.
- A leaflet was delivered to homes in Berkswell and Balsall Parishes: about 3600 in total (about 200 homes in Berkswell parish close to Meriden or Coventry not delivered to). Leaflets were available in some of the local businesses.
- E-newsletters were sent out via:
 - a. Residents’ Association (800 members) - Twice
 - b. Berkswell Society (600 members) - Twice
 - c. U3A (350 members) - Twice
 - d. Heart of England School parent mail (circa 1000 families)
 - e. Balsall Common Primary School parent mail (circa 600 families)
 - f. Berkswell School (circa 150 families)
 - g. St Peters, Methodist, Blessed Robert Grissold Catholic Church and St John Baptist church membership lists

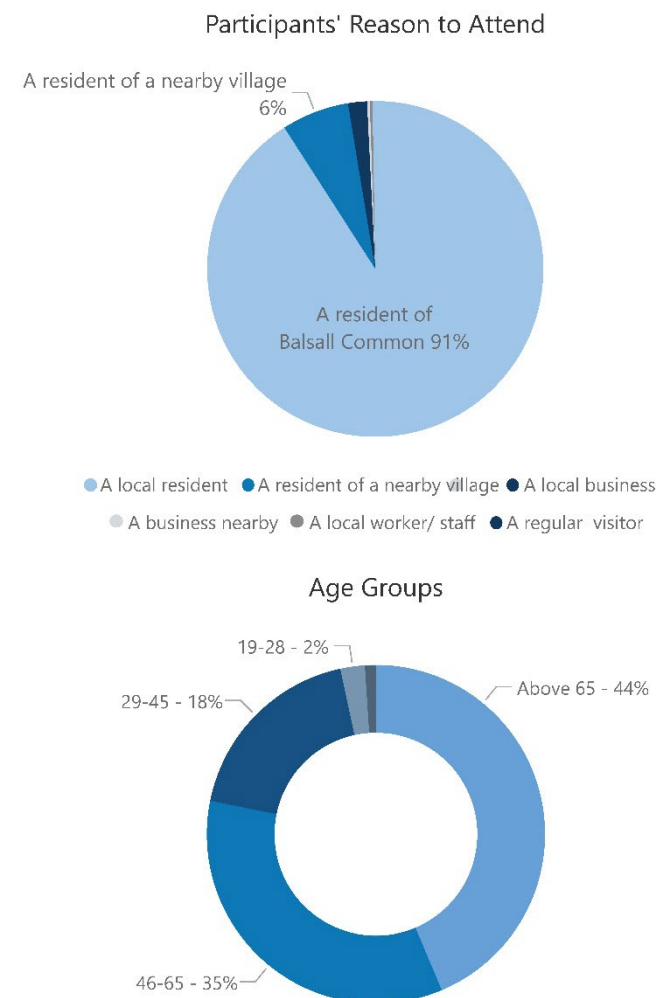
- h. A posting on the Balsall Common Facebook page and various twitter postings – multiple times.
- A dedicated website was set up to display the proposals which also had a video summary of the draft Solihull Plan and a video of the experience of Poynton.
 - All businesses in the centre were personally visited by a member of the working group and received a written invitation.

The presentation took the form of three events at the end of July. People provided feedback by asking questions (the working group and professional team attended), by placing ‘like’ (blue) and ‘dislike’ (red) stickers next to each board, responding to a questionnaire, and expressing their overall sentiment upon exit.

Across the three days nearly 400 people visited the exhibition:

- 87 people - Friday 23 July (3-7pm)
- 120 people - Sat 24 July (10am-4pm)
- 174 people – Sat 31 July (10am-4pm)
- 439 questionnaires were received, either during the days or through the website.

Fig. 5 - Summary of participants



4. PREVAILING SENTIMENTS

The overall view is that the community is generally appreciative of the changes proposed and the overall feedback is that of support or cautious support, across all age groups (see Fig. 5). Concerns primarily relate to the balance between cars and pedestrian space (see Fig. 6). There is strong consensus, on the other hand, on the value of improving the cycle network and the physical and thematic links of the centre to the heritage and countryside of the village.

There was widespread uncertainty that the proposed parking arrangements will work to provide adequate and safe access to the shops. Most participants were happy that overall parking numbers will remain the same, but expressed unease because a change in habits will be required. Around 10% of participants argued for more car parking: an additional site, a multi-storey or even an underground facility.

A small group preferred no change to the changes proposed and another small group thought that the proposals did not go far enough: the centre should be pedestrianised, or traffic restricted further (see Fig. 7).

Fig. 6 - Prevailing sentiment

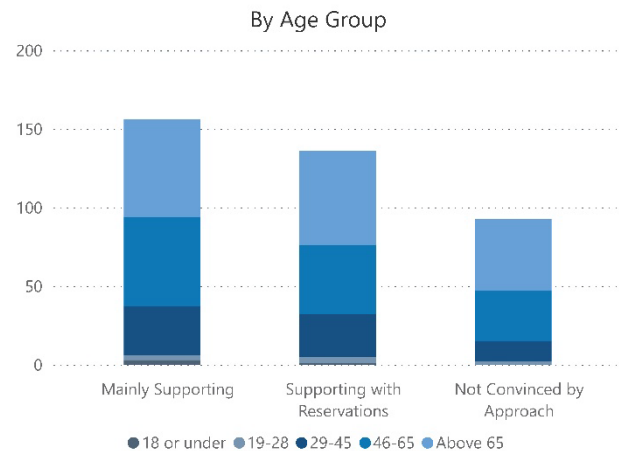
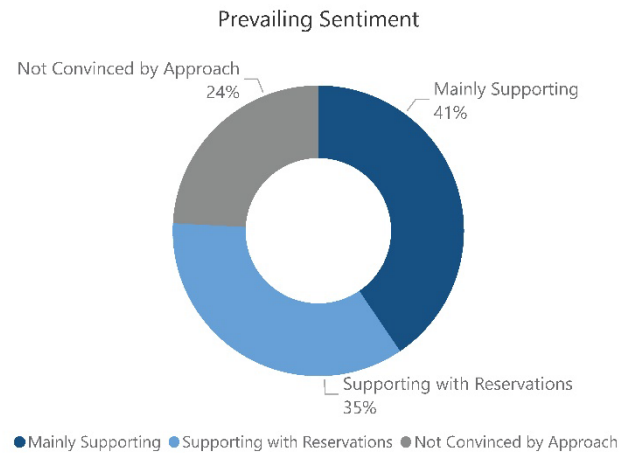


Fig. 7 - Balance and links to the wider area

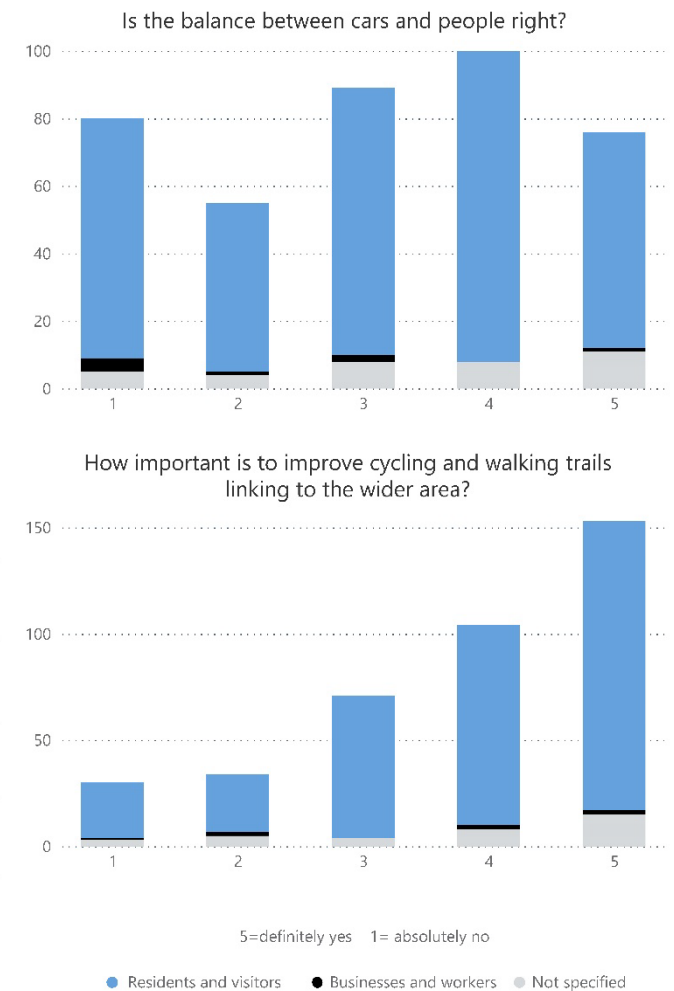


Fig. 8 - Summary of main messages (qualitative analysis of questionnaires)

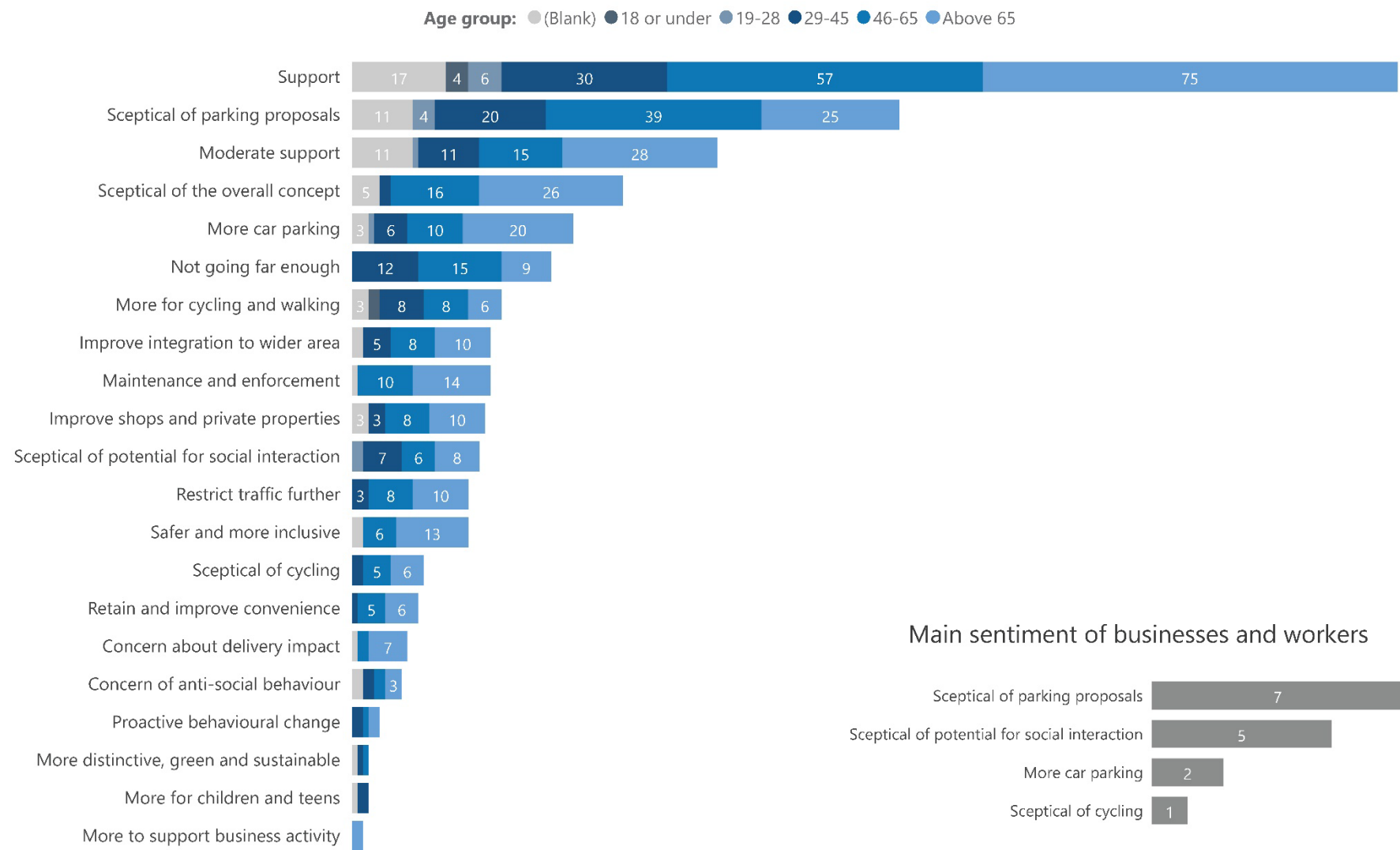
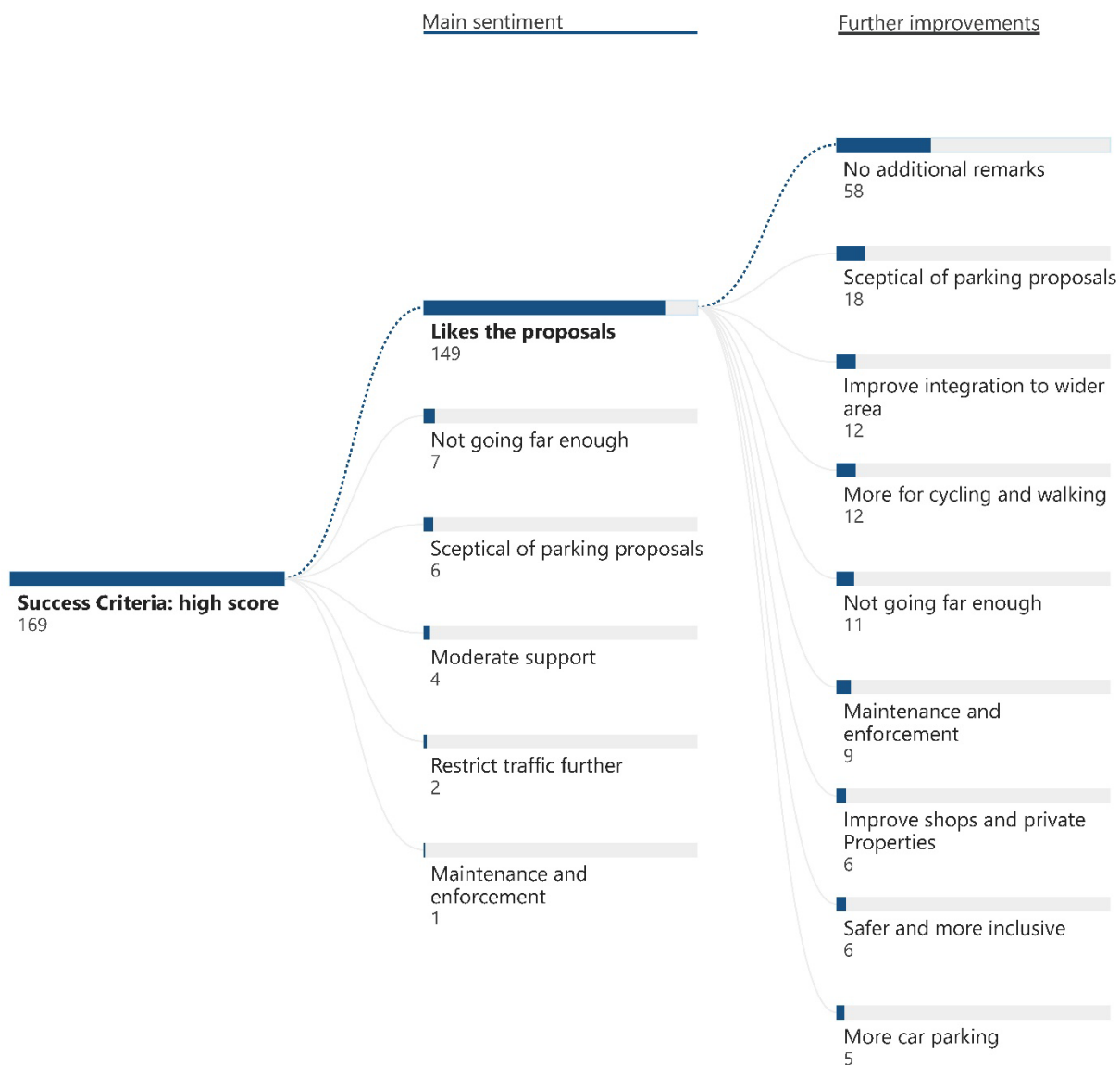


Fig. 9 – What other views were expressed by those who gave the strongest support

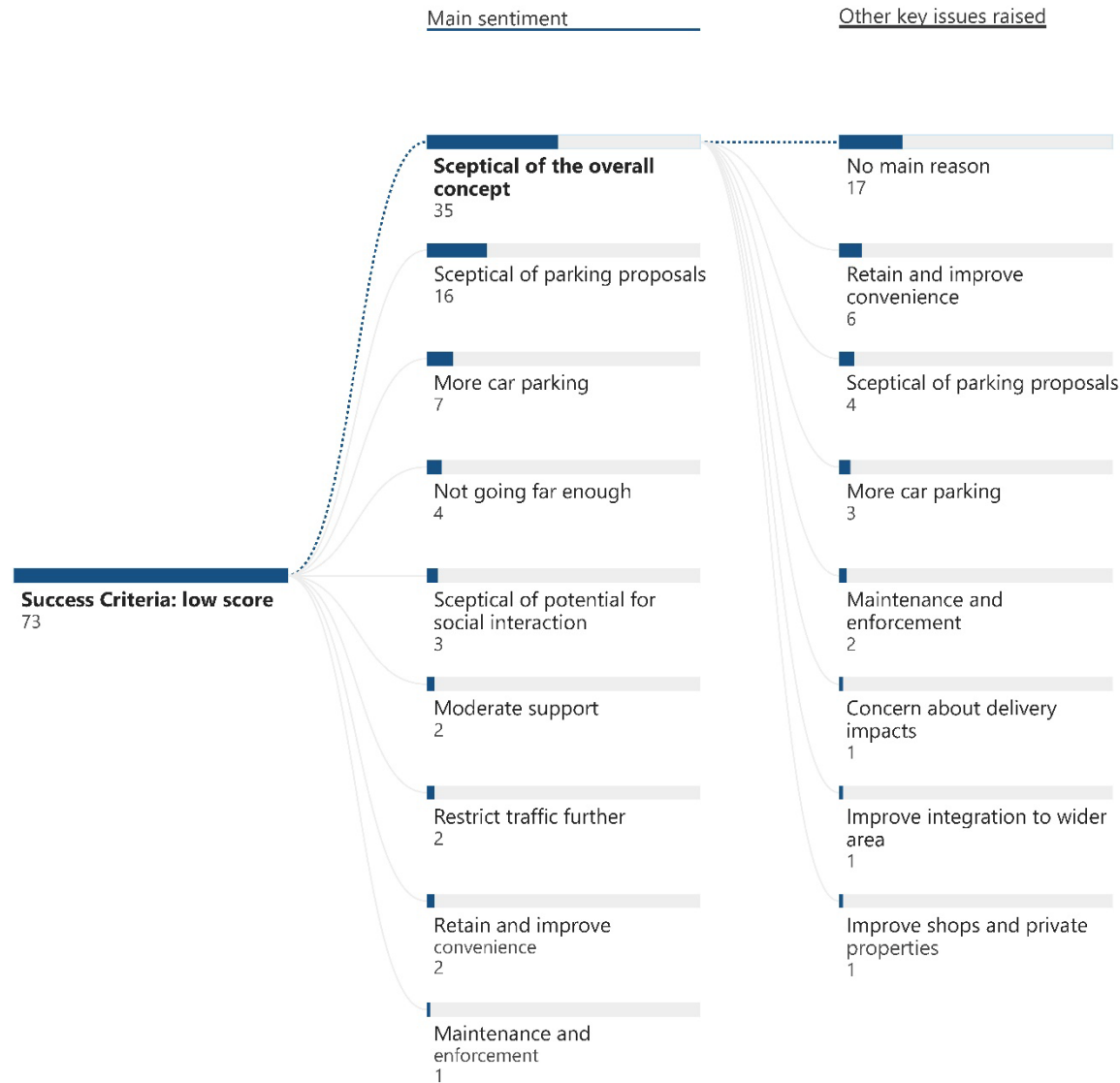


Participants scored the proposals 1-5 (with highest support as 5) against the Success Criteria.

The graph summarises the main comments made by those with an average score of 4 or more in all categories (strongest overall support – 38% of all questionnaires).

The graph shows the range of concerns that accompany even strong expression of support: doubts that parking will work, maybe not enough done to reduce traffic, the need to improve further walking and cycling or how enforcement and maintenance will be done.

Fig. 10 – Going deeper into the other concerns of those who were not convinced by the Draft Proposals



Participants scored the proposals 1-5 (with highest support as 5) against the Success Criteria.

The graph summarises the main comments made by those with an average score of less than 3 in all categories (lowest overall support or strongest opposition: 17% of all questionnaires).

The graph shows the range of concerns of people that are not convinced: mostly they do not think that change is necessary and that Balsall Common is about passing trade and convenience, some believe that the most urgent improvement is major investment in a new parking facility. A few rejected the proposals because they would prefer full pedestrianisation.

FEEDBACK OF THE PARISH COUNCILS AND WORKING GROUP

The Working Group and some Parish Councillors were directly involved in the events and analysis of feedback and questionnaires.

A companion report on the events by the Working Group provides a summary of their analysis and the joint responses by the Working Group and Arup technical team.

Overall, they concluded that:

- The publicity and timing of events and Draft Proposals was such that anyone who had an interest, could have expressed an opinion.
- That the community is generally supportive of the proposals.
- Concerns about parking require further explanation (summarised in Section 5) and adjustments to the master plan proposals (in Section 6).
- Other issues and concerns require further explanation in the final report and in some cases resolution at detailed design stage (after this study).

FEEDBACK FROM SOLIHULL METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

SMBC confirmed that the Draft Proposals are consistent with the policies and strategic directions of the Borough.

It is recognised that parking is always a sensitive issue where change is proposed, but we cannot live in a world with continuous increase in parking spaces and car use without incurring serious drawbacks.

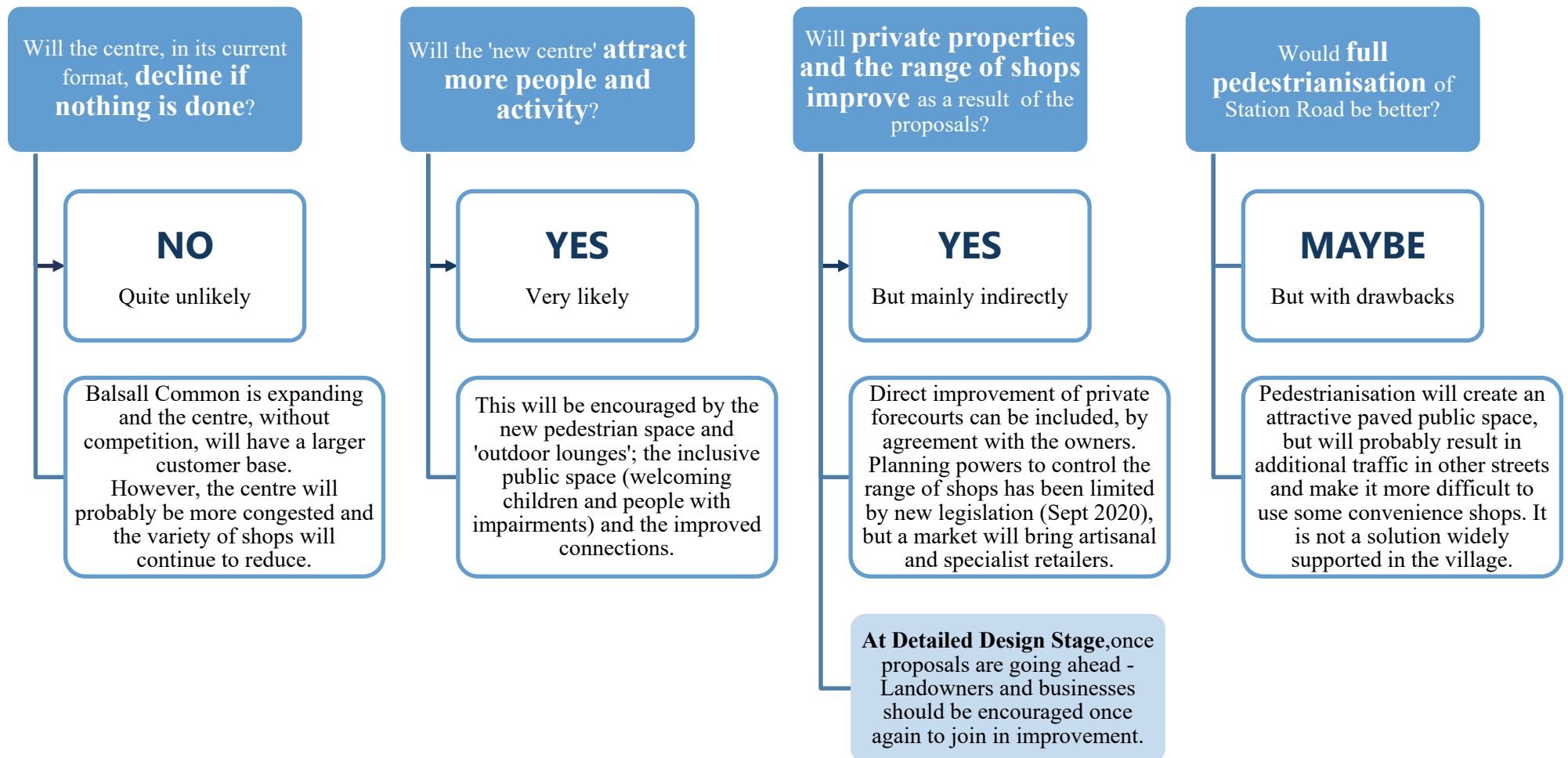
The proposed approach and intent is therefore supported, but consideration of the details and of wider transport are also important:

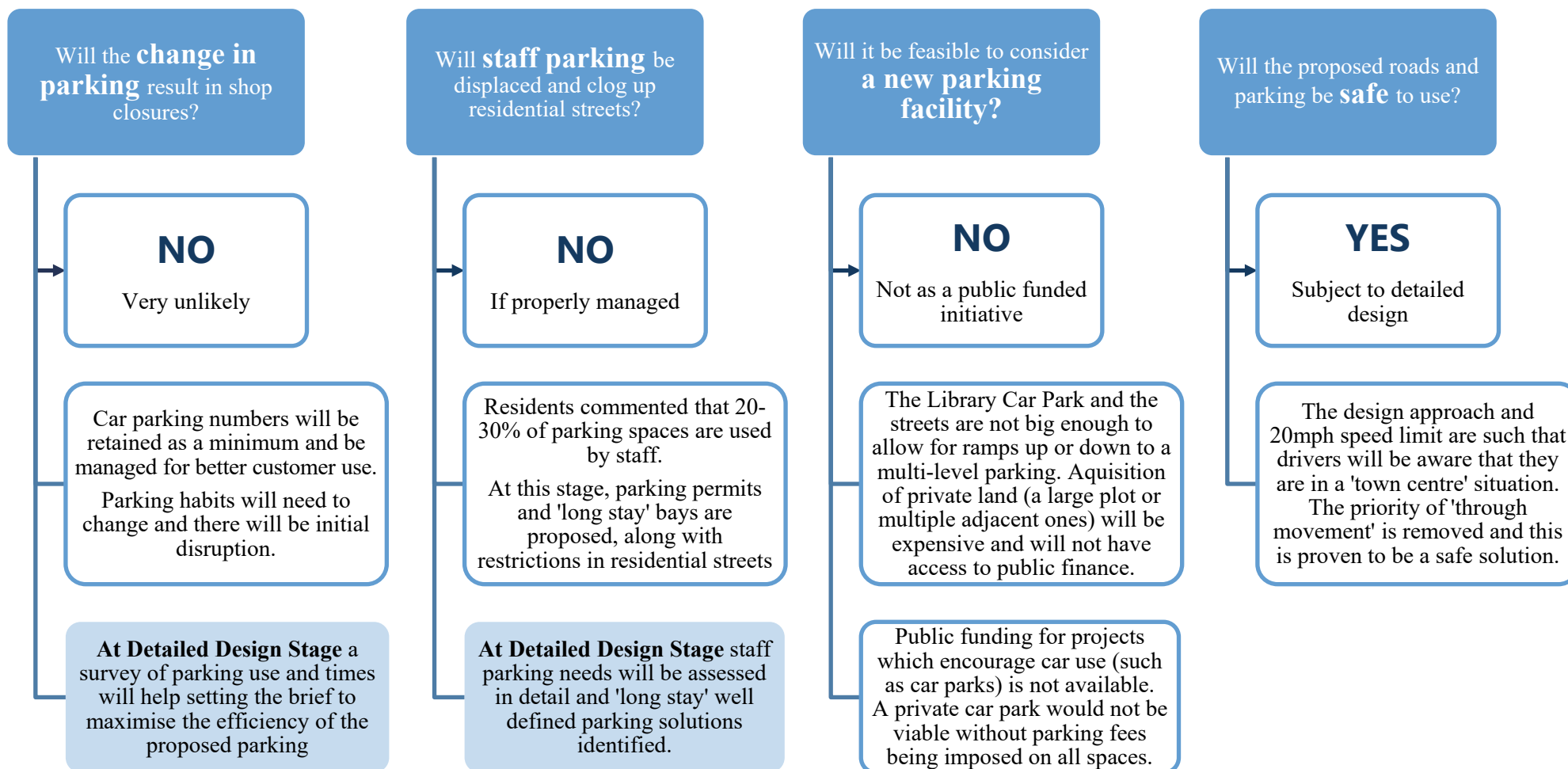
- The balance between short-stay and long-stay, details on restrictions and the way parking restrictions will be enforced etc.
- Exploration in more detail the impact of the proposals on traffic and the relationship with the proposed bypass – through the development of a traffic model.

- Integration of the proposals in the refresh of the borough-wide transport strategy: Solihull Connected and bus service improvement plan.
- Consideration that public funding is directed at active travel schemes, even to some detriment to road capacity.
- Support for the ‘parklet’ systems (outdoor lounges), planters and coordinated palettes of materials, but only subject to detailed study of inclusion, sustainability, cleaning and maintenance regime.

5. KEY THEMES ANSWERED

Some general themes raised by the community time and again are summarised here.





6. CHANGES

PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE MASTER PLAN

ROADS / HIGHWAYS

1. Modify the roundabout drawings to ensure they represent the requirement for a turning movement. No central island to be included, which will attract safety signage and other clutter.
2. Clarify suggestions for enforcing the 20mph speed limit through good design, without need to rely on speed cameras..
3. Clarify and emphasise measures to facilitate and improve safety of pedestrians (of all abilities) crossing the roads or the entrance to the car park.
4. Clarify the pedestrian friendly concept and its difference from ‘shared space’ and how it will allow safe use by all people, including children, women and those affected by impairments.

PARKING

1. Make clear that no public funding is available for expansion of parking.
2. Retaining the current parking numbers (status quo) as a minimum and exploring further afield for additional spaces.
3. Identify additional ‘long stay’ parking bays in Kenilworth Road and Station Road (eastern side).
4. Explore opportunities for additional short stay parallel parking on Station Road (southern side) at either end near the crossing with Meeting House Lane and at the junction with Kenilworth Road.
5. Include a variable message sign (VMS) indicating if spaces are available in the Library Car Park.
6. Widen some parking spaces, where possible, without changing total numbers.
7. Ensure that parallel parking spaces allow safe alighting from the vehicles.
8. Review and confirm availability of disabled parking bays, including those with rear wheelchair access.

9. Review and confirm cycle parking locations.

PUBLIC REALM

1. Maximise opportunities for greenery, with as many trees as possible, with evergreens, wild plants and biodiversity rich planting, including the potential for ‘living walls’ and rain gardens.
2. Identify opportunities for shade and weather protection.
3. Integrate the library garden as a public green space.
4. Expand on the possibility and role of public art.
5. Clarify availability of toilets only as part of other facilities.

EVENTS

1. Ensure these are intended as community-based, village events, supported and organised by local groups and churches.
2. Clarify role of potential market as a way to expand range of shops (green groceries, bakery etc).

PRIVATE PROPERTIES

1. Emphasise the intention to unify the pavement space (regardless of the adoption boundaries) to ensure a coherent public realm.
2. Suggest measures to improve the quality or interest of plain private buildings, through urban greening or heritage/memory references.
3. Encourage businesses and building owners to improve their assets.
4. Suggest inclusion of solar panels on public and community buildings.

ADJACENT PRIVATE STREETS

1. Given the importance of Green Lane to access and connect the centre to its Area of Influence, a detailed study for adoption of the lane as a local access and pedestrian shared space should be undertaken. The interests of the residents should be carefully considered. Lighting, enforcement (including CCTV) and maintenance should be considered as part of any future solution.
2. The link from the Co-op (and car park) to Station Road via Hazel Place is integral to the functioning of the centre. The overall design and a new pedestrian walkway seeks to encourage safe pedestrian use and reduce conflicts between residents and other users.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

The next stage of the Master Plan study will consider the first framework for implementation.

Funding options should explore the governments' long-term plan to support the evolution and regeneration of high streets (Build Back Better High Street – July 2021), funding for active travel, walking and cycling improvements (Local Transport Plan), any HS2 funding. CIL funds to be considered as a last resort.

Implementation and costs should include:

1. Identification of appropriate implementation timing considering HS2 construction traffic, the relief road and new development. SMBC has already initiated the process of developing a transport model for Balsall Common.
2. Investigation of staff (working in shops / restaurants etc in the centre) parking requirements and options as part of a comprehensive parking study.

3. Allowance and methodology for further design inputs: public art (including heritage, memorials, etc), architectural lighting, a wildlife / biodiversity programme.
4. Considerations of maintenance and enforcement.
5. Consideration of campaigns / communication strategy to support habit change and reduce anti-social behaviour.
6. Proactive engagement of local groups to encourage new activities and events.
7. Proactive engagement of businesses and landowners in improvement of private properties.

ISSUES TO BE CONSIDERED AT DETAILED DESIGN STAGE

These are the suggestions and feedback of the community. The technical steps of detailed design will be more fully explored in the Implementation Stage of the study.

ROADS / HIGHWAYS

1. Assessment of traffic impact of the proposals.
2. Safety, particularly of Kenilworth Road and the roundabouts.
3. Materials and maintenance.
4. Locations and upgrade of bus stops.

PARKING

1. Detailed assessment of patterns of parking use; detailed plan for staff parking arrangements and assessment of motorcycle parking requirements.
2. Optimisation of the size of parking bays.
3. Cycle parking: availability and visibility.
4. Measures to deter pavement parking.
5. Removal of barrier in the Library car park with intent on finding a solution to prevent associated anti-social behaviour from car drivers.
6. Consideration of CCTV and additional lighting in Library car park.

PUBLIC REALM

1. Maximisation of sustainability in choice of materials.
2. Expanded biodiversity: natural planting, native trees, wildflowers, etc.
3. Good tree root containment systems to avoid damage to the roads.
4. Comprehensive and unifying system of seating, shading / protection, café outdoor use, bins, lighting taking account of sustainable materials and easy repairs / replacements.
5. Inclusion of electric points and wash-points to allow small scale events and markets.
6. Wayfinding programme showing local walking routes to local places of interest, such as the Greenway, the station, etc.
7. Public art programme, including consideration of memories/heritage and a memorial.
8. Architectural lighting programme.
9. Integration of library garden.
10. Designed to minimise anti-social behaviour.

PRIVATE PROPERTIES

1. Programme of private property improvement (planting, forecourts, etc) in agreement with landowners.
2. Coherent public realm and materials across adoption boundaries.

ADJACENT PRIVATE STREETS

1. Inclusion of Green Lane upgrade if possible- subject to separate study.
2. Hazel Place pedestrian link and upgrade included.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR WIDER INTEGRATION

The centre does not exist in isolation and its future success is reliant on integration of initiatives elsewhere.

TRANSPORTATION IMPROVEMENTS BEYOND THE CENTRE

1. Speed restrictions and parking restrictions in the roads and lanes in the vicinity of the centre.
2. Coherent and continuous cycling network for the village (see pg. 19), including signage and appropriate priority and safety of cyclists.
3. Coherent walking routes and crossings particularly across the Area of Influence (see pg. 18), to the schools and future school site.
4. Proactive and early integration of new development areas, particularly by active and sustainable modes of transport.
5. Exploration of the possibility of a mini-bus loop connecting all neighbourhoods

of Balsall Common to the centre and to key facilities.

6. Consideration of parking restrictions to prevent shoppers parking in residential streets in the vicinity of the centre.

PUBLIC REALM

1. Extended heritage trails / active walking routes to reinforce the identity of Balsall Common and encourage healthy habits.
2. Increase of biodiversity value of planting and verges – for example taking inspiration from the [Good Verge Guide](#) and promote tree planting.

ACTIVITIES AND USES

1. Sports clubs, the Library, community groups, church groups, etc. should be invited to use the centre for some of their activities, so that they gain increased visibility with the general population and the centre gains new uses and users.

7. NEXT STEPS

STUDY NEXT STEPS

This stage of the Master Plan Study is to be followed by two more stages:

IMPLEMENTATION STAGE

This is when we will consider the steps necessary to further develop and implement the proposals, the timescales and dependencies, the costs and construction (in outline terms) and the potential sources of funding.

This stage will include engagement with SMBC to confirm that the framework of the Master Plan will become part of local strategies and implementation programmes.

Considering implementation may result in further design changes.

FINAL MASTER PLAN STAGE

This will include:

- The final master plan design.
- A narrative explaining the proposals.
- Recommendations for detailed design
- Recommendations for further studies
- An implementation action plan.