

Balsall and Berkswell Parish Councils

# BALSALL COMMON CENTRE MASTER PLAN

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OPTIONS REPORT

FINAL – May 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

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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. CURRENT SITUATION

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, business parks and research facilities of international standing.

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

The village centre was built in the post-war period at the crossing of two primary highway links. Development at the time introduced the architectural language of a small town: multi-storey buildings, a range of shops and office units and a broad streetscape. As the village expanded, the centre continued to serve the community well, with shops, hospitality and services conveniently located and easily accessible.

*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.*

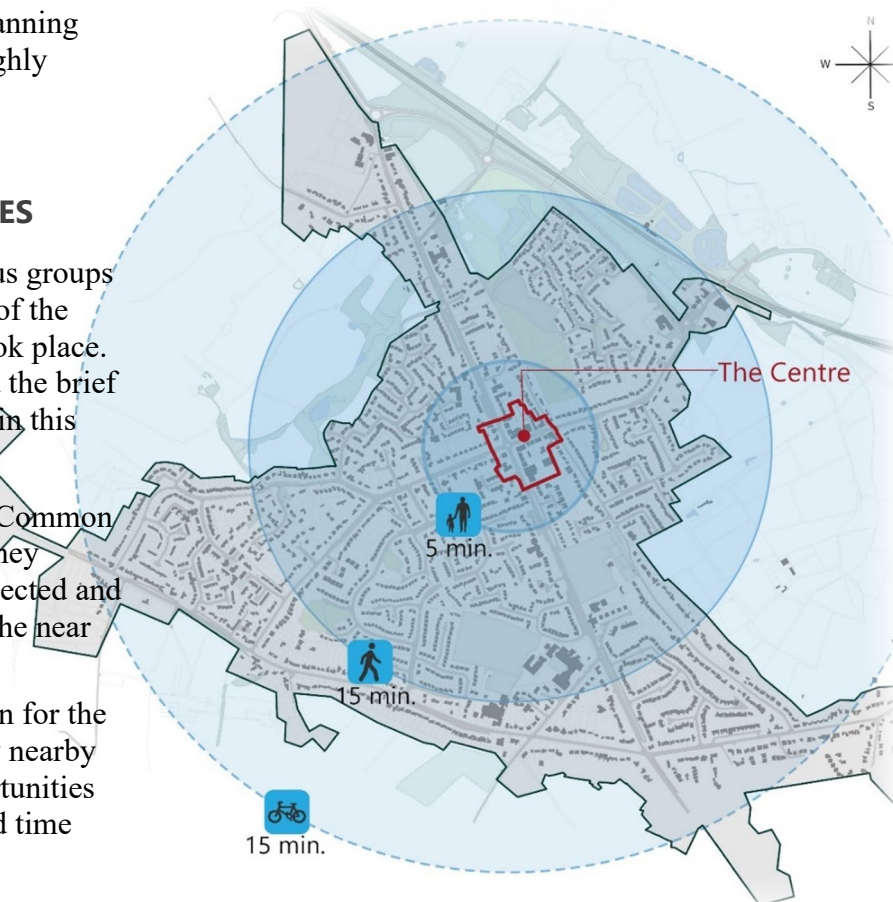
The centre is at the heart of a 15-minute walking and cycling area which includes nearly the whole village, making planning for the ‘15-Minute City’ concept highly relevant.

## KEY MESSAGES FROM THE COMMUNITY AND BUSINESSES

In January and February 2021 focus groups and interviews with just over half of the businesses located in the centre took place. The messages received constituted the brief for the exploration of options within this report. People said:

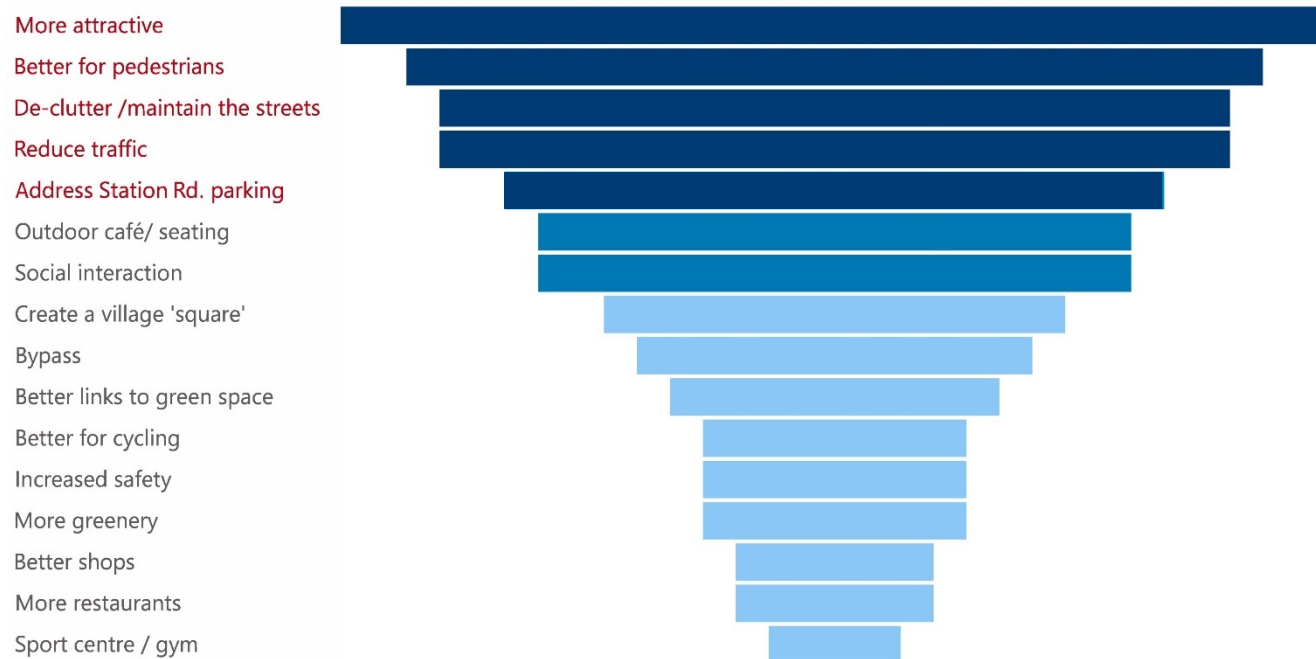
- People prefer to think of Balsall Common as a well-served, large village. They believe this image should be protected and nurtured as the village grows in the near future.
- The centre is already a destination for the village community and some key nearby areas. It has, however, few opportunities for residents and visitors to spend time and socialise and this should be encouraged.

Fig. 1 - The Centre (Study Area)



- Many of the people we talked to regularly walk to the centre (just under 50%) for a variety of reasons: they all think that pedestrian facilities are poor.
- Many people also regularly drive to the centre (about a third): most of them find the car parking challenging – but particularly the head-on parking on Station Road dangerous and stressful.
- Customers are varied, because the range of businesses is also very diverse; but for most, 50-70% of business comes from locals, and the rest from the immediate surrounding areas and passers-by. This makes the quality of public spaces, a better defined local character, and opportunities to dwell very important for business success.
- Improving the public realm, creating a welcoming environment and space for people (for seating outside, a village ‘square, a market or simply meeting people) is a key priority.
- Addressing the perceived dangerous parking situation on Station Road and the adverse impact of traffic and congestion is also essential.

Fig. 2 - Priorities from the Stage 1 focus groups



118

Total suggestions

Fig. 3 - Working Group's aspiration for change





## 2. WHAT NEEDS TO BE ACHIEVED

There is a sense that change in the centre of Balsall Common is necessary, even if it may not be easy to achieve or if it will attract scepticism and maybe even controversy.

This is because the centre has a constrained environment, with small scale properties and not many redevelopment opportunities. Over the past decades, the impact of traffic and the dominance of on-street car parking has been felt more and more, especially as nearby locations such as Dorridge have been improved and regenerated.

Significant changes will necessarily imply a changed perspective and a new outlook, which is always difficult. In Balsall Common, the options for change inevitably explore the balance between pedestrian space and parking directly in front of the shops. This is not just a matter of physical space, it is about the very nature of the centre: from a place of convenience and rapid service, to a place one has opportunity to spend time in.

The options aim to consider a range of things to be achieved and help to identify the best possible balance. The range of considerations include the following elements.

- The context of Balsall Common as a growing and dynamic village, with strong community spirit and direct links to the countryside.
- A clear role for the centre, as the focal point of community life as well as of most services.
- The need to consider the wider area and the immediate area of influence of the centre, which sustains 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.
- Ensuring that the improvement of the centre is not technically dependent on other non-committed projects such as the Relief Road.
- The climate crisis and the need for a more sustainable future, one that values the

resilience of communities and reduces the use of private vehicles.

- The changing nature of the High Street across the country, greatly accelerated by the pandemic: more focused on the experience of social interaction or as a way to access person-to-person services.

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)



## THE EXISTING SITUATION

- A vehicle dominated space, with a range of commercial activities, but very limited opportunities to socialise outdoors.
- Poor pedestrian and cycle accessibility.
- 1,580m<sup>2</sup> of carriageway between Kenilworth Road and Meeting House Lane.
- 43 on-street public car park spaces, plus 61 spaces in the Jubilee Centre / Library Car Park. 64 additional spaces at Co-op (private car park).
- Around 90 customer-accessible spaces within 300m, primarily for businesses on Kenilworth Road, or in private courtyards accessed via driveways.
- Other accessible spaces in short walking distance: Village Hall (about 20), Methodist Church (10), approx. 140 private spaces across Lant Trust Playing Fields, White Horse, Surgery, etc.
- 3-5m width footways, insufficient to accommodate outdoor seating or activities.
- 10 trees, with only three by the shops.

### 3. COMMON ELEMENTS OF ANY SOLUTION

#### ROLE OF THE CENTRE

- The centre will be supported to remain the most important destination within the village: this means establishing synergies with complementary but secondary destinations where additional services are to be provided – for example around the train station.
- Its centrality will be reinforced through a programme of upgraded spaces and improved connectivity within an ‘Area of Influence’ (see Section 4).
- Its size and ‘presence’ in the village will be reinforced, through a distinctive coherent environment and sense of unity extending beyond the shop frontages of Station Road in all directions.

#### PUBLIC REALM

- A framework of change that will see no value in simply repairing the existing.
- Village character will be reinforced in the choice of materials and detailing, to create the best possible timeless quality design.
- Greenery, including trees, coordinated planters and urban greenery as part of buildings, will be greatly enhanced.

#### FUNCTIONAL IMPROVEMENTS

- The connection across Hazel Place linking the Co-op supermarket to the centre is very important to support the centre; potential solutions will be explored with residents, businesses and landowners.
- Safety by design measures will be considered and recommendations made for additional arrangements that will improve safety for all people.





## TRANSPORT IMPROVEMENTS

### PARKING

Any change to current parking provision will potentially attract scrutiny and possibly scepticism. It will be important to have a full picture of parking usage patterns in a post-pandemic situation and a clear strategy for optimisation of parking space usage. This is likely to require further surveys and analysis beyond the scope of this study.

Key guiding principles include:

- No net addition to public car parking spaces: this cannot be justified as no new commercial development is proposed and because of the need to reduce car use more generally to meet carbon reduction targets.
- Loss or relocation of car parking spaces will only be proposed where there is a significant benefit for the community or to support sustainable travel methods such as walking and cycling.
- Reductions in parking numbers will be mitigated by better management and potentially options for redesign, to

optimise the availability of car parking for customers and reduce long-stay parking.

- The opportunity to increase parking capacity at the Library car park will be explored.
- Options for maximising use of private commercial parking within a short walking distance of the centre could be explored.

### DELIVERIES AND SERVICING

- Deliveries and servicing arrangements will be designed to minimise the need for increased road space or dedicated facilities. Access to private entrances will be retained.
- Arrangements for deliveries and servicing will be discussed with businesses once a preferred solution is identified.



## WALKING AND CYCLING

- Amendments are proposed to the centre roundabout at Kenilworth Road / Station Road to improve safety and convenience for pedestrians and cyclists.
- Where possible, informal crossings will be adopted in preference to signalised crossings. Defined crossing points for vulnerable users (mobility impaired / sight impaired) will be identified through changes in material and visual cues.
- Pedestrian movements will be prioritised in the village centre above parking bays and traffic movements.
- Cycling facilities and parking are proposed to be enhanced along Station Road, and on the approaches to the centre along Kenilworth Road.
- Whilst outside the scope of this project, recommendations can be made for cycle improvement across the village in line with the aspirations of SMBC and to encourage active mobility within the village for new residents.

## BUSES AND RAIL

- Improvements will be recommended at bus stops and shelters within the centre to meet relevant standards.
- The proposals will seek to encourage sustainable modes of travel, including the uptake of bus travel to/from the village, the centre and Berkswell rail station.





## HIGHWAYS

- Proposals for a reduction in vehicle speeds in the centre will include the provision of 20mph speed limits on Kenilworth Road and Station Road in the centre.
- Opportunities will be explored to reduce the carriageway lane width and the size of junctions (including the centre roundabout) to help reduce the dominance of vehicle traffic, as per the approach taken in locations such as Dorridge, Dudley or Poynton.



## 4. AREA OF INFLUENCE

Balsall Common village centre is the key node within a wider Area of Influence on which it is dependent, as people use other facilities and destinations within the village.

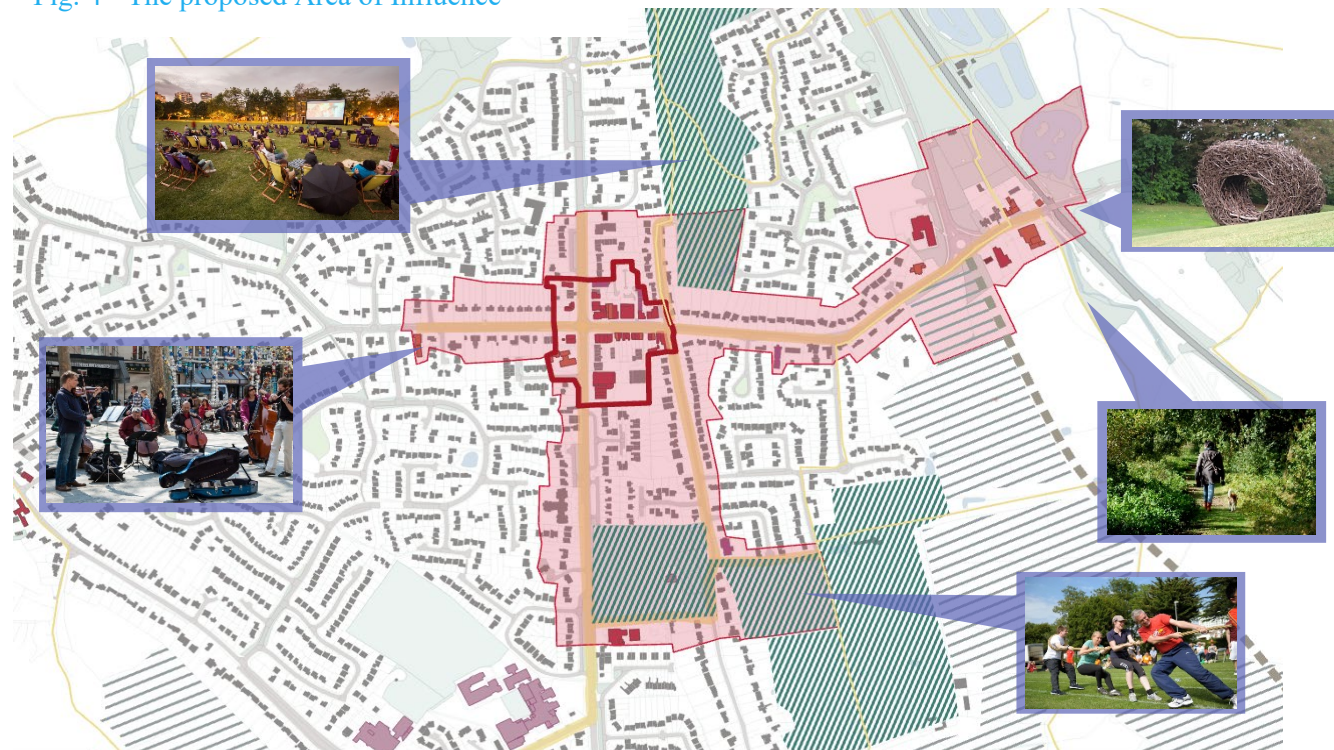
Activities and opportunities within the Area of Influence are also dependent on the centre to form a network of destinations within Balsall Common, rather than remaining isolated.

Opportunities to improve the public realm and create a cohesive wider network will be explored and recommendations will be made to create a framework of integrated possibilities, such as:

- Synergy and cohesive presentation of the centre and the hub by the station, through better and safer walking and cycling.
- Improved access to Lavender Hall Park and potential to consider open air events, like an outdoor cinema as part of the cultural offer of the village.
- Improved and clear links to an outer heritage trail, the Greenway or simply countryside routes directly from the centre.

- Potential for improved walking or cycling connectivity between the centre, schools and future development at Barratt's Farm through Meeting House Lane.
- Expansion of sport and recreational use at the Tennis and Cricket Club for community sport.
- Opportunities for landscape art.
- Opportunities for outdoor events, such as markets, music in private yards or forecourts.

Fig. 4 - The proposed Area of Influence





# 5. EXPLORING DIFFERENT APPROACHES

## EXPLORING VARIATIONS

The main variables that generate alternative approaches relate to:

- The spectrum from maximising social interaction and attracting people from a wider area on one hand, and (at the opposite end) maximising convenience with quick in/out access to services.
- The range of easy access for drivers (arriving and parking) on one hand and ease for pedestrians and cyclists on the other, even at the expense of car accessibility.

**The two main variables are not totally independent**, because it is physically impossible to find space within the centre for both social interaction and a large number of parking spaces. Also, realistically, it is unlikely that a centre designed for improved walking and cycling will have a retail offer targeting exclusively convenience.

Four options have been identified to cover a broad range of realistic combinations (Fig. 6).

Fig. 5 - Range of options

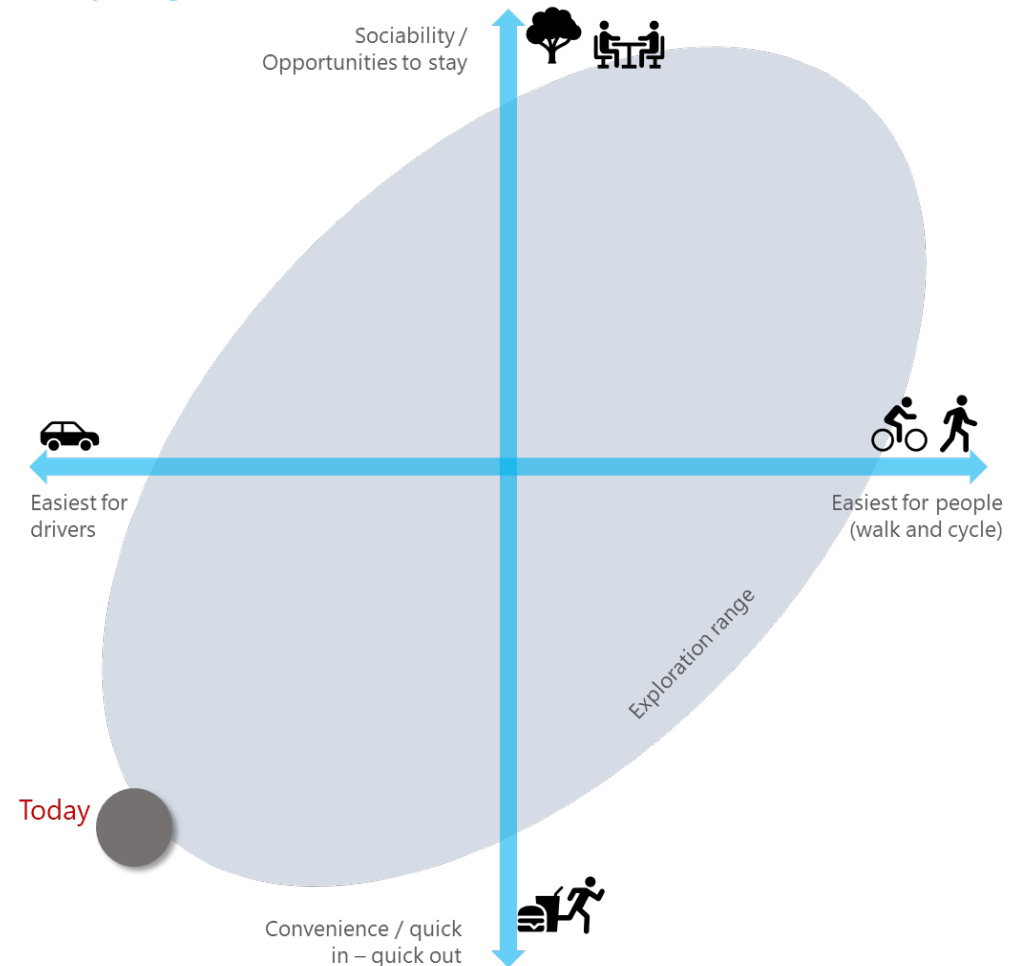
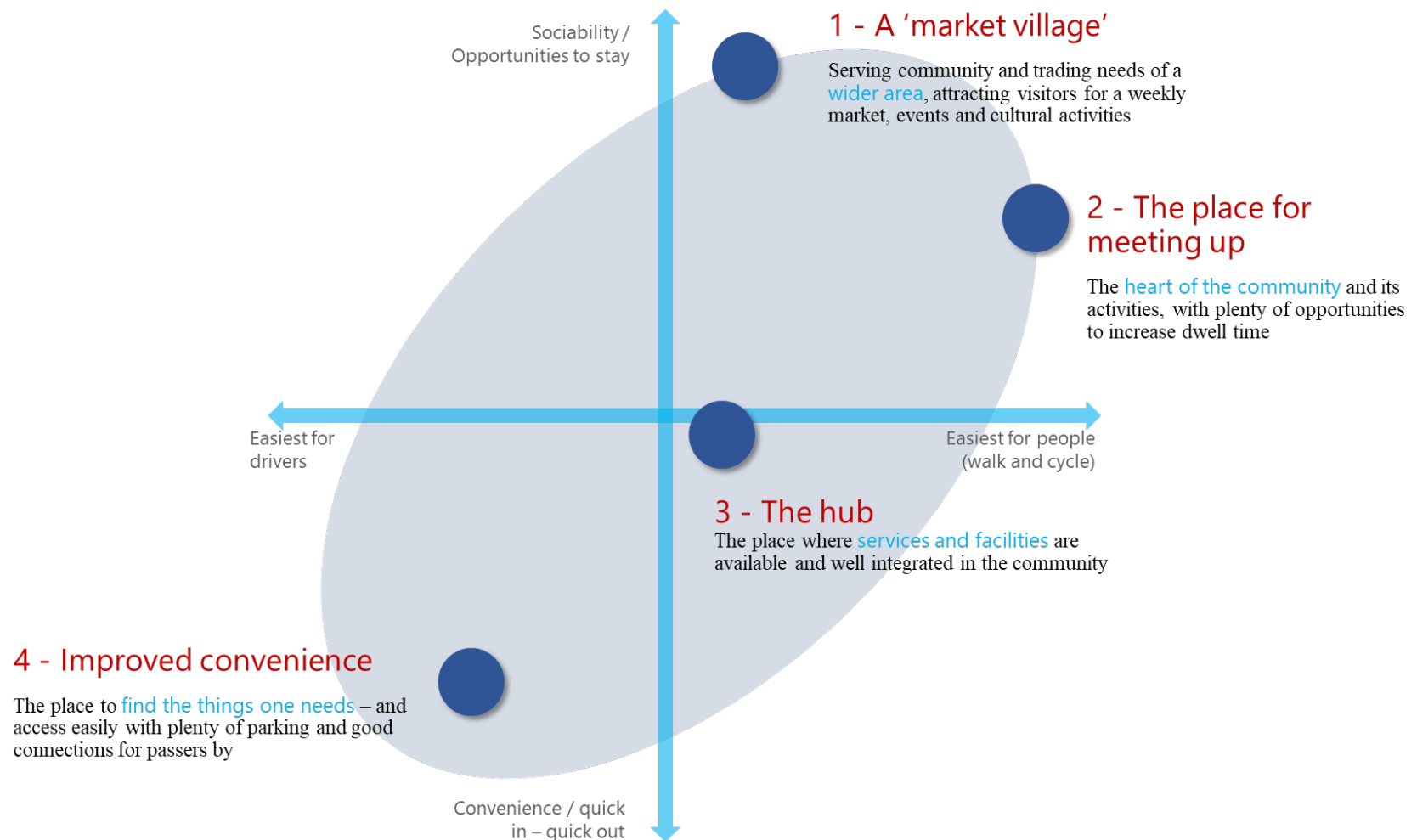


Fig. 6 – The range of four options explored



## OPTION 1

### A 'MARKET VILLAGE'

Serving **community and trading needs of a wider area**, attracting visitors for a weekly market, events and cultural activities.

### ROLE OF THE CENTRE

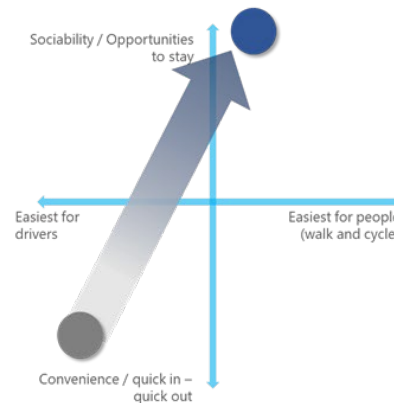


This is an outward orientated centre: serving not only the immediate community but also developing 'buzz and personality' capable of attracting people from the outer villages and fringes of Coventry to spend leisure time.

This will be done through maximising opportunities for street activities and events and adding new special features (art, attractive furniture, etc)

- The scale of change will be between **Rebrand / Reinvent** on the High Street Task Force scale.

Fig. 7 – Impressions of a 'market village' concept



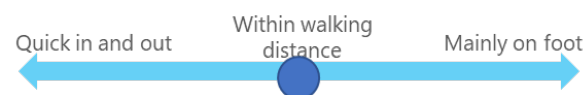
## HIGHWAY ARRANGEMENTS



The approach to the highway layout is driven by the aspiration to retain vehicle accessibility, making it easier for pedestrians to reach the centre from all directions and at the same time maximising public space on the south facing side of the road to host activities.

- 20mph zone throughout with narrower Kenilworth Road.
- 44% of road space between Kenilworth Road and Meeting House Lane (700m<sup>2</sup>) compared to today.
- 12-15m width footways on south facing side.

## PARKING



- The new centre will attract people from a wider area and a proportion will come by car and stay a few hours: parking availability with 400m for a weekly event (market) and 800m for a festival-type event would be acceptable.
- On-street car parking spaces (around 20-21) can be provided along Kenilworth Road in locations which do not affect existing property accesses (provisionally indicated in Fig. 8), with the possibility to differentiate between short stay (closer to the centre) and long stay (further away).
- The Library car park has the potential to be improved to provide additional parking spaces and managed to increase customer use (2-3 hrs stay).



Fig. 8 – ‘Market village’ - indicative highway and parking concept



## PUBLIC REALM



To carry this concept through, the public realm needs to have the following characteristics:

- Offer at least one generous area for regular events and activities, like a market, without interfering with normal operations or obstructing footfall or outdoor use of other shops.
- Present the possibility of occasional road closure or other management arrangement to support special events.
- Facilitate good and easy pedestrian access from nearby areas and car parks within extended walking distance.
- Encourage cycle access from within the village in preference to car.
- Be easy to manage and maintain, assuming surges of activity and footfall at times.
- Include public seating and places to rest or socialise without commercial interest.

- Present a distinctive and memorable streetscape design, capable of creating a local ‘brand’ with distinctive and possibly colourful furniture, public art, coordinated and unique flower displays, etc.
- Coordination with existing businesses to support the brand, with improved forecourts and frontages, better or themed shop windows, etc.

It is expected that collective effort will be made to put together an attractive calendar of events to take place in the centre and its area of influence.

Fig. 9 – ‘Market village’ - indicative opportunities for use of public space





## OPTION 2

### THE PLACE FOR MEETING UP

The **heart of the community** and its activities, with plenty of opportunities to increase dwell time.

### ROLE OF THE CENTRE

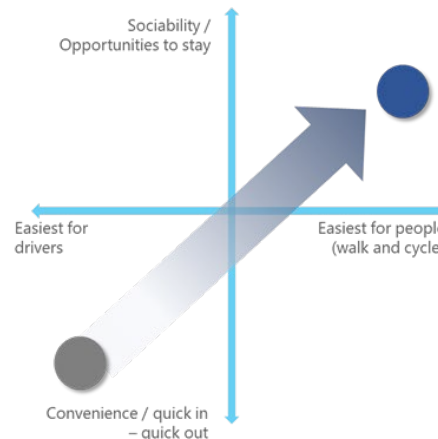


This is a centre focused on providing services and opportunities for social interaction for the local community, with a strong sense of identity, ease and familiarity.

This will be achieved through the creation of a much more welcoming village public realm, which encourages social interaction in the street and through a stronger presence of community activities in the public realm.

- The scale of change will be between **Reposition / Rebrand** on the High Street Task Force scale.

Fig. 10 – Impressions of the concept of a place for meeting up





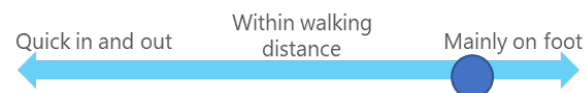
## HIGHWAY ARRANGEMENTS



The approach to highway layout is driven by the desire to slow vehicles down and encourage drivers to give way to pedestrians and cyclists on both Kenilworth Road and Station Road.

- 50% of road space between Kenilworth Road and Meeting House Lane (800m<sup>2</sup>) compared to today.
- 11m+ width footways on south facing side plus 1m extra on the north facing side.
- Kenilworth Road designed to slow traffic, adopting a shared surface approach with a slightly raised 'central reserve' area which helps to facilitate numerous informal pedestrian crossing points.
- Cycle movements along Kenilworth Road are significantly improved through the proposed surfacing arrangement, which gives cyclists 'priority' within the lane.

## PARKING



- The centre is designed to welcome people on foot and by bicycle.
- Bicycle parking spaces will be available in the centre in prominent and easy to reach places.
- A small number (approx.. 7) of on street 'convenience' and very short stay public car park spaces are provided on Station Road.
- The Library car park has the potential to be improved to provide additional parking spaces and managed to allow time for multiple activity and social interaction (3-4 hrs stay).

Fig. 11– The place for meeting up - indicative highway and parking concept



## PUBLIC REALM



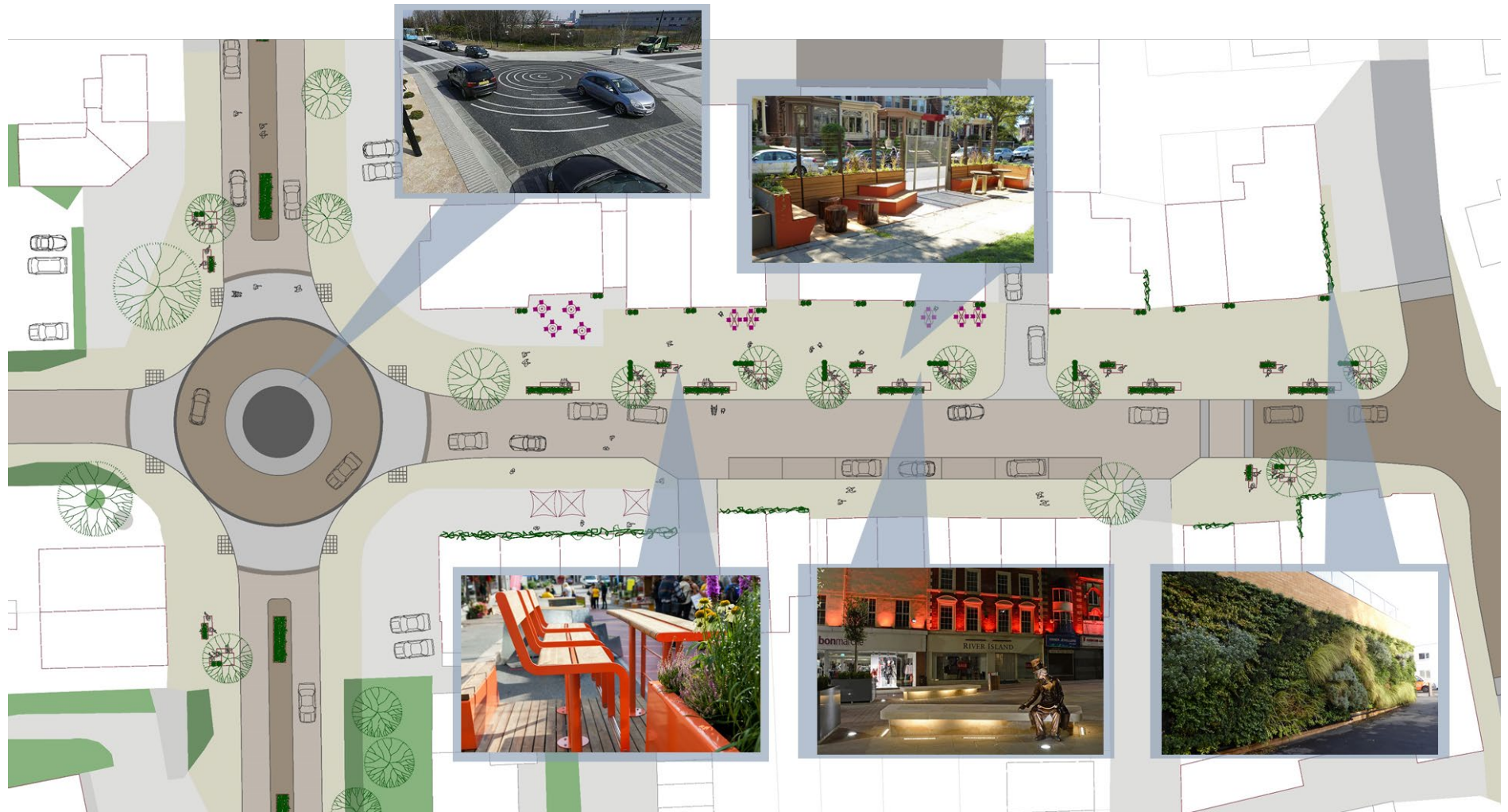
This approach demands a design that reinforces village identity, but with a focus on having a renewed image and increased opportunities to meet people in the street or simply ‘see what’s going on’:

- Offer plenty of space for public seating, occasional 1-2 market stalls or vans and commercial pavement use.
- Present the possibility of occasional road closure or other management arrangement to support markets and community events.
- Facilitate easy pedestrian and cycle access from the rest of the village and improve pedestrian connections to all destinations within the area of influence.
- Include plenty of public seating and places to rest or socialise without commercial interest.
- Multiply the opportunities for greenery: trees, planters, flowers and collaborate with building owners to increase façade or roof green space.

- Promote the history and identity of the village through storytelling local memories, via old photos, information plaques and public art.
- Signpost all community activities within the centre and in the area of influence.
- Be easy to manage and maintain, so that it presents itself well over the long term.
- Coordination with existing businesses to improve forecourts and frontages, have flower displays, etc.



Fig. 12 – The place for meeting up - indicative opportunities for use of public space



## OPTION 3

### THE HUB

The place where **services and facilities** are available and well integrated in the community.

### ROLE OF THE CENTRE



This is a centre focused on providing a range of services and activities for the local community, recognising that the centre is part of a web of connections rather than a destination in its own right.

This will be achieved through balancing car and pedestrian accessibility, targeting public realm improvements in between space needs of commercial pavement use and opportunities for public outdoor space. This will be accompanied by improving the links to schools, parks, sport clubs, etc.

- The scale of change will be between **Restructure / Reposition** on the High Street Task Force scale.

Fig. 13 – Impressions of the concept the hub



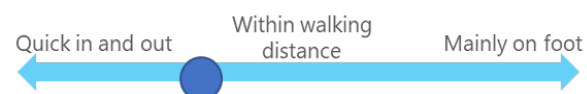
## HIGHWAY ARRANGEMENTS



The approach to highway layout is driven by improving accessibility by walking and cycling, while keeping constraints to car users and parking to the minimum.

- 20mph zone throughout
- Kenilworth Road narrowed and provision of on-road cycle lanes.
- 60% of road space between Kenilworth Road and Meeting House Lane (925m<sup>2</sup>) compared to today
- 9m width footways on south facing side of Station Road, plus 1m additional footway width on the north facing side.

## PARKING



- The centre is improved to reduce vehicle dominance, and welcome people on foot and by cycle.
- Cycle parking spaces will be available in the centre in prominent and easy to reach places.
- Parallel car park spaces will be located in front of shops on both sides of Station Road (around 13 spaces).
- The Library car park can be improved to provide additional parking spaces, and managed to allow time for multiple activities and social interaction (3-4 hrs stay).



Fig. 14– The hub - indicative highway and parking concept



## OPTION 4

### IMPROVED CONVENIENCE

The place to find **the things one needs** – and access easily with plenty of parking and good connections for passers by.

### ROLE OF THE CENTRE

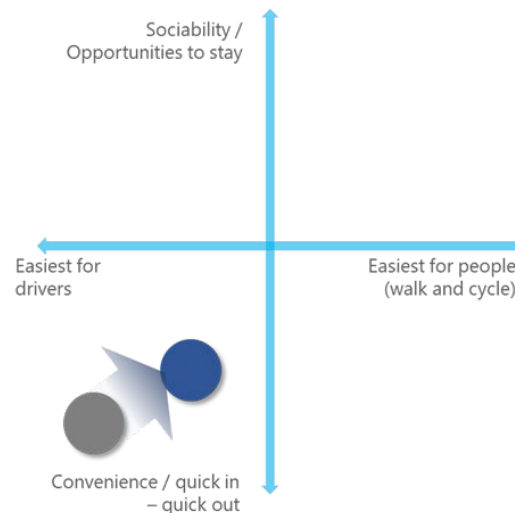


This is a centre focused on providing a good selection of convenient services and shops: a place that is tidy and safe, but remains orientated towards easy car access and quick turnaround shopping activities.

This will be achieved through slower traffic movement, improved pedestrian crossings and clutter-free public realm.

- The scale of change will be a partial **Restructure** on the High Street Task Force scale.

Fig. 15 – Impressions of the concept the improved convenience centre



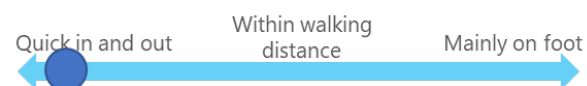
## HIGHWAY ARRANGEMENTS



This approach seeks to slow down traffic flows on Kenilworth Road, facilitate pedestrian crossing movement and maximise parking availability on Station Road.

- 20mph zone throughout and Kenilworth Road narrowed to provide segregated cycleways and a smaller, easier to navigate roundabout.
- The road space on Station Road between Kenilworth Road and Meeting House Lane remains similar to today (around 1,500m<sup>2</sup>), with increased footway buildout areas for safer pedestrian crossings.
- The width of footways is increased around the Kenilworth Road roundabout, but remain unchanged on Station Road.
- Reversing in and out of perpendicular car parking spaces is retained. Other parking bay arrangements (echelon or parallel) would not maximise car parking availability.

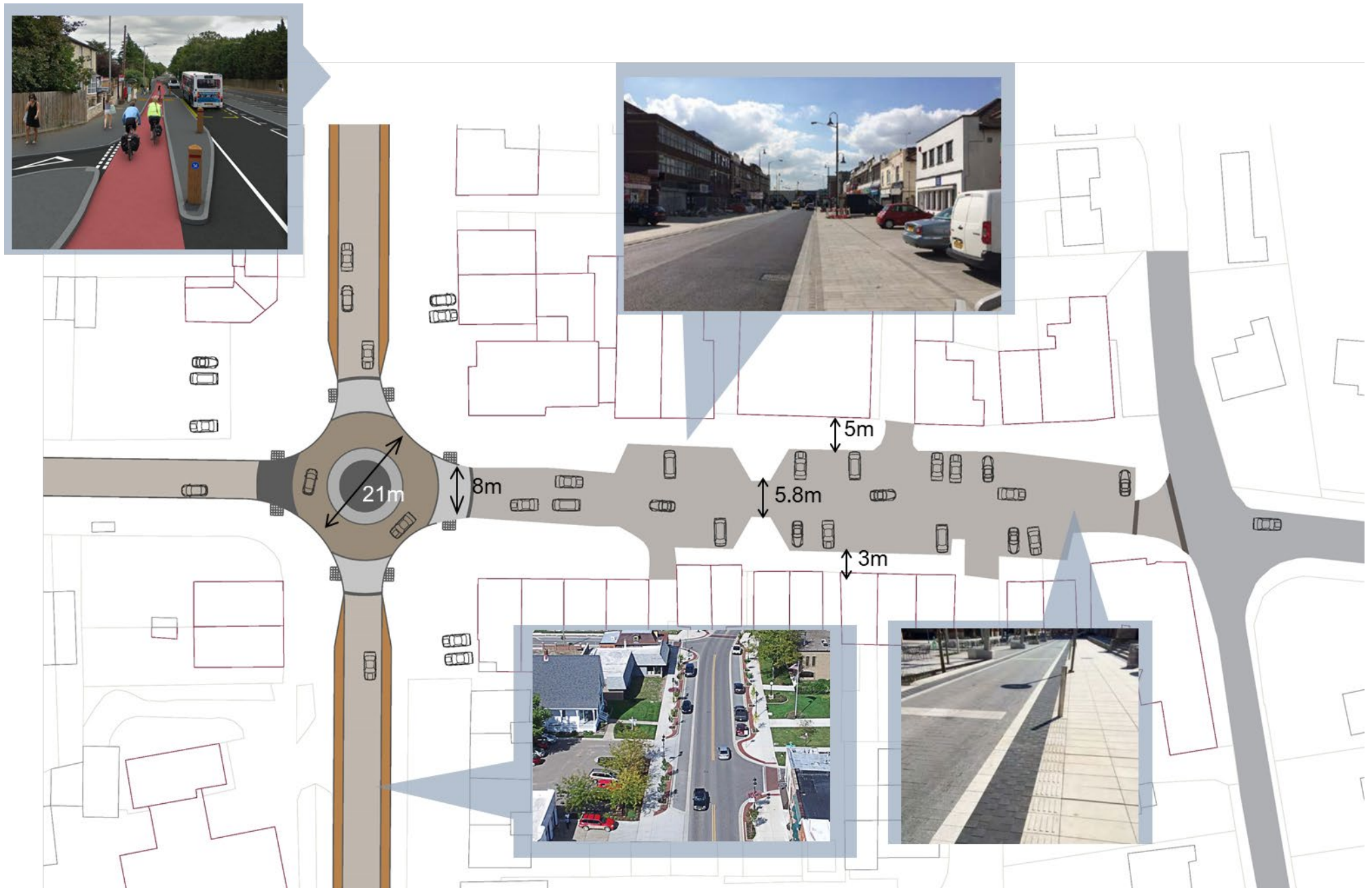
## PARKING



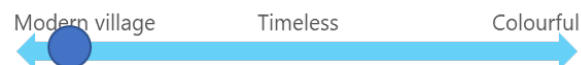
- The centre is designed to improve access by people on foot and bicycle.
- Bicycle parking spaces will only be available on Kenilworth Road and within the car parks.
- On street parking spaces will be managed as 'convenience' and very short stay, with a maximum 38 spaces retained on Station Road.
- The Library car park can be improved to provide additional parking spaces and managed to allow time for multiple activities and social interaction (3-4 hrs stay).



Fig. 16– Improved convenience - indicative highway and parking concept



## PUBLIC REALM



The effort deployed with this approach is essentially focused on removing obstacles and clutter and improving the appearance of the centre through pavement art and shop improvements:

- Location of public seating and trees by the roundabout, where additional footway width has been created.
- Limited and well demarcated commercial pavement use; outdoor dining encouraged on private forecourts.
- Consideration of use of surface public art to demarcate crossings or decorate walls to add character and make the centre special.
- Coordination with existing owners to have a seamless transition and minimal demarcation of private forecourts, encouraging integrated design and surfacing throughout.
- Encouragement of coordinated design and improvement of the shop fronts.
- Identification of informal crossing points on Station Road, discouraging people from crossing between parked cars.
- Majority of greenery delivered through collaboration with building owners to increase façade or roof planting.
- Promote the history and identity of the village through storytelling local memories, via old photos and information plaques.
- Signpost all community activities within the centre and in the area of influence.
- Be easy to manage and maintain, so that it presents itself well over the long term.

Fig. 17 – Improved convenience - indicative opportunities for use of public space





## OTHER PROPOSALS CONSIDERED AND NOT PURSUED

Two earlier proposals, put forward by the community, were carefully analysed and then not pursued for various reasons as set out below.

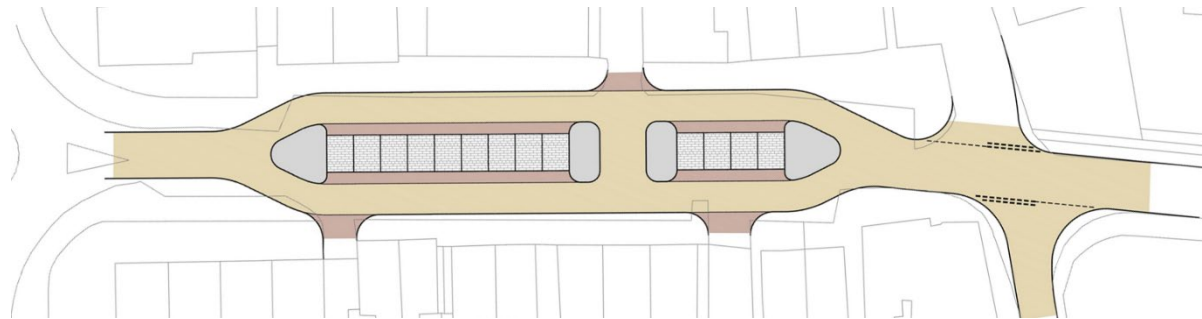
### PARKING IN A CENTRAL ISLAND ON STATION ROAD

Once fully explored, this proposal would deliver the same number of spaces as Option 3 but without any footway widening.

This is because of the wider lane needed to swing a car or van into a parking place and the need to have wider spaces to enable safe manoeuvring.

This proposal also raised safety concerns due to the requirement for people to stand in a live carriageway while loading and unloading the car, and crossing between parked vehicles.

Fig. 18 - Sketch of central parking proposal



### ONE WAY STREET WITH PARKING ON ONE SIDE

This Option would deliver the same number of spaces that Option 1 provides on Kenilworth Road, and provide improved public realm on the south facing frontage.

However, a one-way system would result in long detours to access / exit the centre, damaging its ability to attract customers. Depending on the direction of the one-way system, it would also increase volumes of traffic on quieter streets such as Meeting House Lane and Lavender Hall Lane.

Fig. 19 - One way systems



# 6. THE FEEDBACK RECEIVED

## WORKSHOPS AND PARTICIPANTS

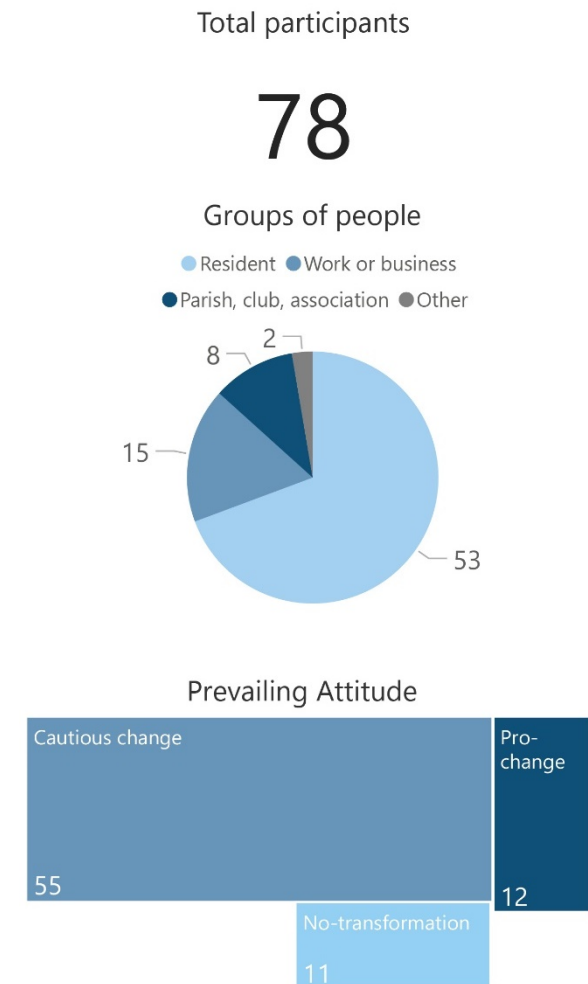
Three workshops were held online to respect the ongoing pandemic restrictions. The options were presented and participants were invited to react using an online polling system.

- Invitations and reminders were sent to a list provided by the Balsall Common Working Group including 160 people including residents, local businesses, clubs and associations. Over 70 people attended and a minimum of 50 ‘reactions’ in total were obtained to the majority of the questions.
- Around 25% of the local businesses were represented.
- A group of 8 younger teenagers (the local scout group) was also invited to provide feedback in a dedicated session.

Overall, participants adopted one of three broad attitudes:

- **Pro-change:** people who declared they were very keen on change and openly supporting pedestrianisation or dramatic change in favour of walking and cycling. These were about 15% of participants, including 2 businesses.
- **Cautious change:** the largest group (70%), including the majority of businesses. This group expects change and a better environment, but also careful consideration of the practicalities of deliveries and better managed (even if reduced) car parking.
- **No-transformation:** people who think that retaining the current on street parking should be a priority and those who prefer not to have any change at all. This group was just under 15% and included three businesses.

Fig. 20 – Workshop participants



## IMMEDIATE REACTION TO THE OPTIONS

Participants reacted to each option immediately after the option was presented, without benefit of comparisons or full knowledge of the choices available.

Reactions were scored on a range of +/-100 where 100 is a full positive reaction and 0 would be scored when as many people liked the approach as many disliked it.

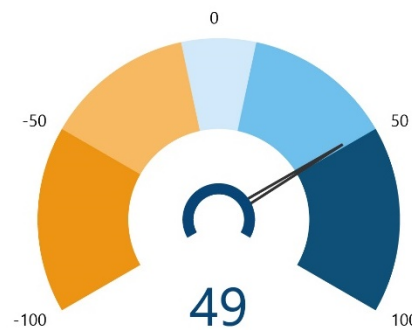
Option 1 and 2 had a clear positive reaction from most participants, while options 3 and 4 were generally considered missed opportunities.

A small number of participants were of the opposite view to the majority. When asked, they confirmed that their principal concern was the loss of parking spaces in proximity to the shops and the impact this would have to the viability of the businesses and the convenience of shoppers.

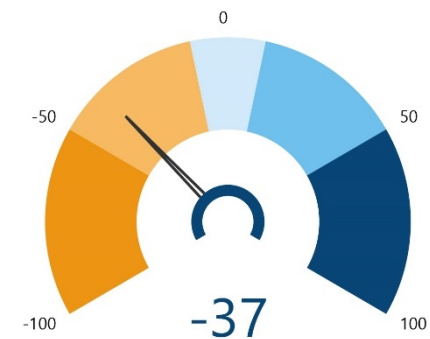
Six participants who declared they did not want any change did not put forward any preference.

Fig. 21 – Gauging preferences

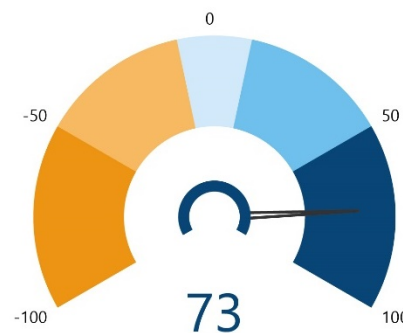
Op. 1 - The 'market village' - first reaction



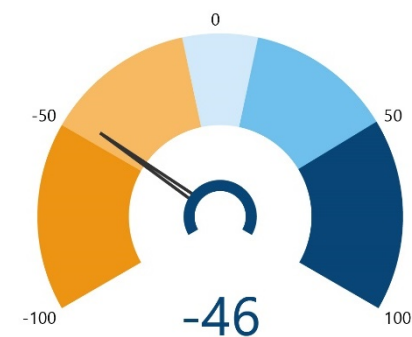
Op. 3 - The hub - first reaction



Op. 2 - The place for meeting up - first reaction



Op. 4 - Improved convenience - first reaction





## PREFERENCE BY COMPARISON

After presenting all four options, participants were asked to select their favourite approach for Kenilworth Road and Station Road separately.

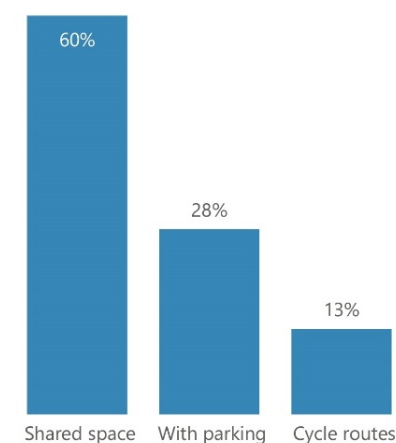
The expressed preferences confirmed the previous findings: a clear majority for a more people-orientated space with room for outdoor enjoyment and additional greenery. The concern about the loss of parking equally persisted for a minority of participants.

Interestingly, the younger teenagers expressed slightly different views:

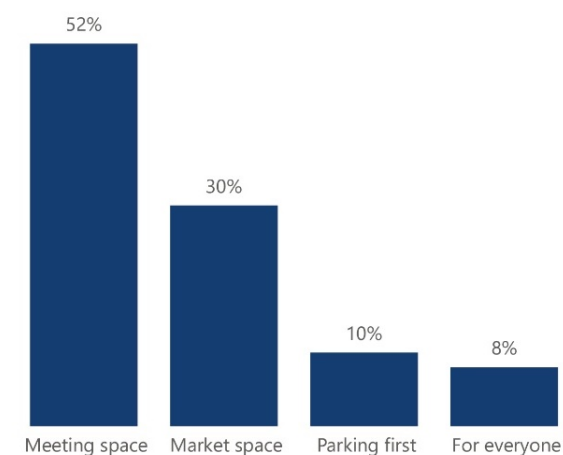
- The safety and comfort of cycling was considered essential, and the version of Kenilworth Road with formal cycle routes was preferred.
- They were hesitant with big change in Station Road, concerned that too much change would be too disruptive.
- However, they want to see a step change and a much more green environment in the centre.

Fig. 22 – Preference

Preferred choice for Kenilworth Road



Preferred choice for Station Road



## SUGGESTED DIRECTION FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

- Towards the end of the workshop, participants were asked to suggest the ‘right position’ on the two-axis model. The majority suggested that any solution should make considerable improvement in opportunities for social interaction and pedestrian and cycle space (see Fig. 23).
- Participants were also asked to select three priority success criteria from a set of 14 possible choices based on inputs from the previous focus groups. The outcomes, consistent with the sentiment expressed elsewhere during the workshop, are shown in Fig. 24.
- Some concerns were raised about car parking provision: the need to secure at least some convenience short term parking on Station Road (especially near the pharmacy). A smaller number of participants - typically people with mobility impairments, or residents living further from the centre - were keen to see that car parking provision is not dramatically reduced.

Fig. 23 - Suggestions on the two-axis model

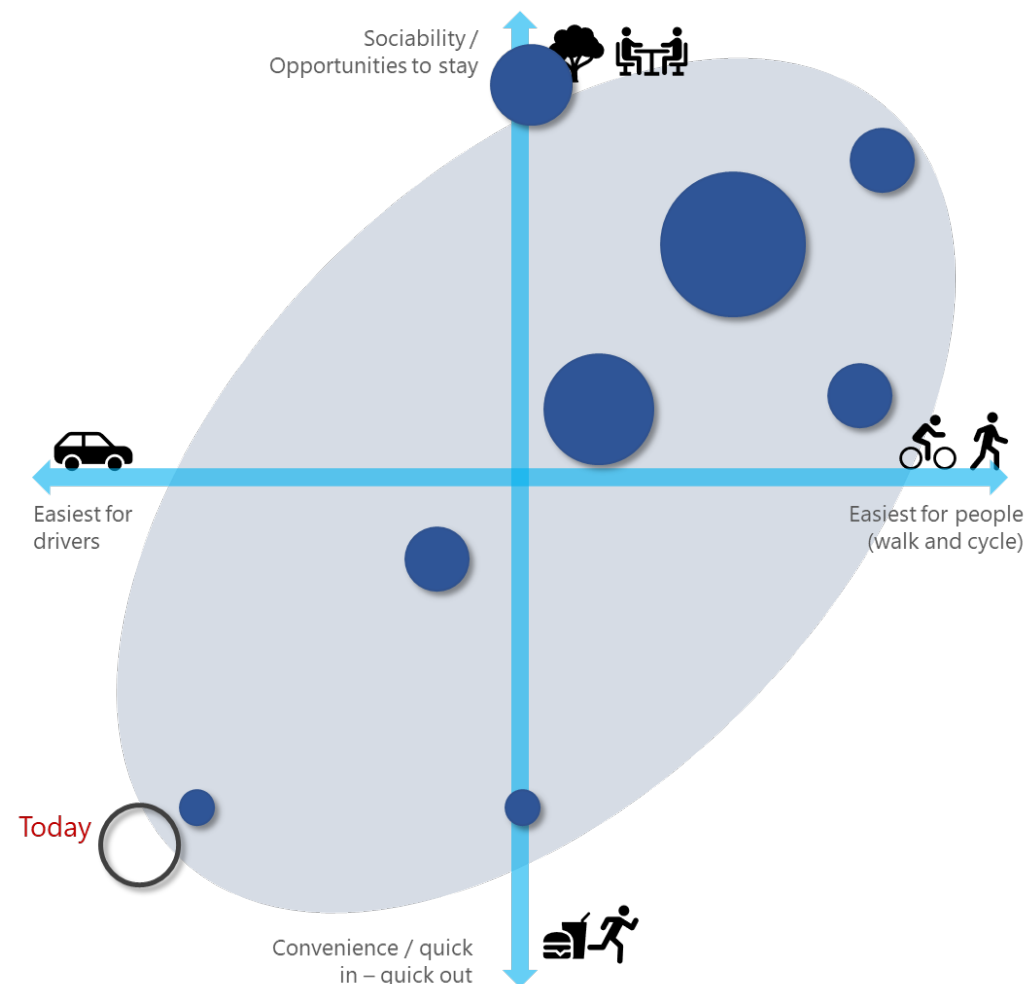
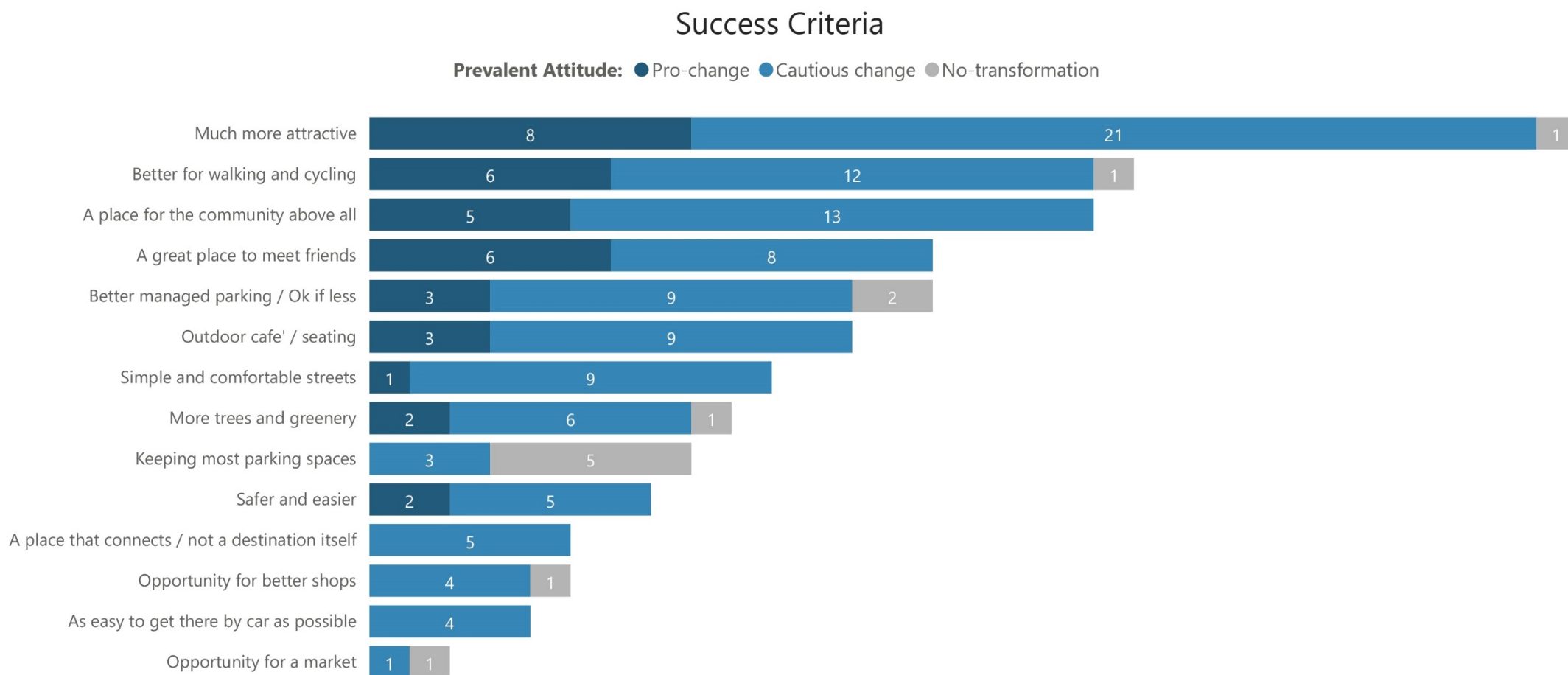


Fig. 24 - Success criteria prioritised by the participants



# 7. TOWARDS A PREFERRED OPTION

A preferred option will be elaborated during the next stage of the study based on the exploration to date and the feedback received to date. It will be a hybrid of Option 1 ('Market Village') and Option 2 ('The Place for Meeting Up') with a particular focus on greening and relocation, rather than reduction, of parking spaces.

It will also take into account preference and feedback of the Working Group and SMBC.

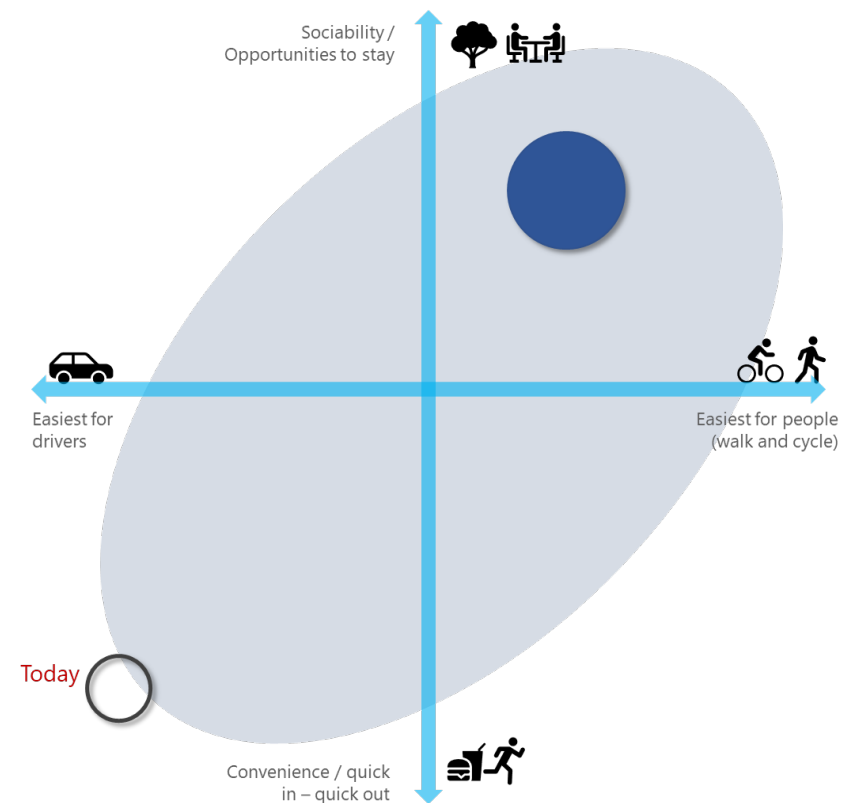
It is suggested that interest groups are set up to feed specific proposals into the draft master plan.

## 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.*

Fig. 25 - The preferred balance





## SUCCESS CRITERIA FOR THE NEXT STAGE

### 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.

### 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.

### ACTIVE BUSINESS AND SOCIAL LIFE

- A viable commercial area with a diverse range of businesses, sustained by good footfall levels, dwelling opportunities and local pride.
- Allowing use of the public realm for celebrations and festivities, potentially through temporary pedestrianisation of part of Station Road on special days.
- The focal point of community activities, giving prominence to the library, the Jubilee Centre, Lavender Hall Park and by improving connections to the Village Hall and Methodist Church hall a short distance away.
- 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 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.

### PEDESTRIAN-ORIENTATED BUT ACCESSIBLE FOR DRIVERS

- Reduced speed limits and careful driving throughout the centre, with lower traffic dominance.
- Improved pedestrian amenity and accessibility for all (including people with disabilities), with safe crossings on desire lines or at various points on streets close to the centre.
- Improved cycle provision, which will encourage cyclists to use the centre from all parts of the village and beyond.
- No restrictions on traffic movement, i.e. no one-way systems etc.
- Improved management of parking to facilitate use and retention of some convenience very short-term parking.

### 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.

## COMPONENTS OF THE PREFERRED OPTION

### THE CENTRE (STUDY AREA)

- A very attractive people-friendly space on Station Road with wide footways on the south facing side to accommodate seating, outdoor cafés, occasional market stall, trees etc. Wider footways and some convenience parking space on the north facing side, particularly in front of the pharmacy.
- A compact and pedestrian friendly / shared surface approach for the reconfigured roundabout at Station Road / Kenilworth Road.
- Kenilworth Road redesigned using shared space principles, with a central strip with planters (where possible) to transform the streetscape, improve pedestrian and cycle amenity and reduce traffic speed.
- Relocation of most of the parking lost in Station Road through reconfiguration of the Library Car Park and additional spaces in appropriate locations on Kenilworth Road.

- Exploration of opportunities and consequences of re-providing all parking formerly on Station Road at other nearby locations.
- Preliminary parking management strategy.
- Indicative proposals for attractive materials, planting and furniture.
- Identification of opportunities to reinforce the identity of the centre.
- Exploration of ways to improve the links through Hazel Place and Green Lane, both private essential links for the centre.

### THE AREA OF INFLUENCE

- Clear recommendations for public realm improvements and maintenance through the Area of Influence.
- Identification of synergies and relationships with other destinations, including consideration of supporting planning guidance.
- Recommendations for cycling and walking integration across the village.

### GUIDING ASSUMPTIONS

- **No increase in car parking provision:** due to wider policy aspirations for reduced car use, and no evidence of additional need as no new commercial development in the centre is provided. No obvious negative impact on business viability directly linked to car parking numbers at present.
- **No dependency on the delivery of the by-pass:** the proposals aim to slow down traffic, but do not otherwise introduce vehicular restrictions or significantly impact capacity.
- **Support and promotion of walking and cycling across the village** in general and in new housing development in particular.
- **Progressive improvement of bus facilities** as part of the wider public transport network.
- **Prevention, through planning, of loss of commercial floorspace** in the centre and commitment to the delivery of complementary and supporting commercial development (not-competing) elsewhere in the village.

## EXPANDING PARTICIPATION AND COLLABORATION

This project will have a big impact on Balsall Common and it is essential that the community makes it their own.

Starting from the next stage, it will be important to gradually build a network of collaborations and partners willing to actively contribute to the development of the master plan. Collaborations will also enable implementation, through this project, of existing complementary initiatives, and broaden the overall impact.

Through this process, more people will have the opportunity to engage in shaping their community and will, in time, constitute a resilient legacy to support the project in future.

The following groups are suggested. They should be set up during the next few months, reporting to the master plan by end of May.

### BUSINESSES IN THE CENTRE

A small group of people from the local businesses could be mandated with:

- Clarifying and making suggestions for servicing and delivery to the shops and businesses.
- Making suggestions for the location and style of planters and flower displays.
- Discussing with other businesses ways to increase coherence and presentation, for example through a palette of colours or coordinated outdoor furniture.
- Identifying opportunities for temporary improvements to be put in place in advance of major change.

**These recommendations will directly feed into the master plan.**

### CYCLING GROUP

People from the local community passionate about cycling as an important mode of transport could identify:

- The routes that should be made safe as a priority.
- Advisory routes for cycling to the centre from key parts of the village.
- Future desirable cycling connections from new developments and facilities.

- Other measures necessary to promote cycling.

**These suggestions will form part of the wider recommendations of the masterplan and could feed into SMBC's sustainable access and cycling strategies.**

### HERITAGE / HISTORY GROUP

Local people with knowledge of local history could be invited to contribute ideas to highlight local memories and traditions by, for example:

- Developing further the concept of the heritage trail – starting from the centre – with signage, information boards etc.
- Identifying local stories (the old cinema, the Chattaway's store, local street names etc) and other ways to celebrate them in the future: through roundel plaques, hanging signs or other means.

**Part of these suggestions will be incorporated in the master plan, while the rest will be part of wider recommendations.**

## EVENTS GROUP

Local associations, sports clubs and the Library organise events for special occasions during the course of the year. Suggestions on how to integrate and use the centre better would be very welcome, including:

- Type of events that could take place in the centre, after pavement space is widened or through temporary closures of Station Road in the village centre.
- Events which could be in close proximity (such as open-air cinema in the park) and could be better served by change in the centre.
- Cultural activities in the Library, Library Garden, Jubilee Centre or Village Hall which could occasionally ‘spill-over’ on the street to raise awareness.

**These recommendations will directly feed into the master plan.**

## GREEN LANE GROUP

Residents of Green Lane should be engaged into finding possible solutions to improve the accessibility of the park from the centre, which is now in very poor condition. Adoption by the Council as a pedestrian and local access route should be considered.

**Any suggestions will directly feed into the master plan.**

## HAZEL PLACE GROUP

This is a sensitive topic which involves commercial and private interests. A technical working groups formed by the Arup Team, the Parish Council, the Co-op and the landowners should be formed to explore ways to retain this important link and at the same time improve the safety of users and comfort of residents.

Residents will be invited to provide feedback once a potential solution has been identified.

**The recommendations will directly feed into the master plan.**