

Midsomer Norton Town Centre Economic Regeneration Delivery Plan

1. Introduction

Midsomer Norton is located approximately 10 miles south west of Bath and 16 miles south east of Bristol in the Mendip Hills. Neighbouring market towns including Wells, Shepton Mallet and Frome are all within 10 miles of the town and present significant competition to Midsomer Norton as a market town destination.

The town is the principal market town for the Somer Valley, serving Radstock and a number of rural settlements including Peasedown St John, Paulton and Farrington Gurney. The town centre provides a range of retail outlets, a library, and leisure facilities and caters for the majority of the local service needs in the Somer Valley area attracting frequent shoppers from its catchment population of over 46,000. Reinforcing the town as the service destination for the rural hinterland is a key priority for this plan.

Historically, housing growth in the wider area has not been matched by increases in local employment and out-commuting has steadily increased and now stands at over 60% of the working age population. Further housing growth will increase the pressure for the redevelopment of brownfield sites surrounding the town centre, including older employment areas. Given there is little existing employment land capacity to generate new jobs there is an urgent need to bring forward a new strategic employment location at Old Mills.

The focus of this ERDP is Midsomer Norton town centre together with the significant development sites at Norton Hill and Old Mills. This has been prepared in the context of the Core Strategy. The Placemaking Plan will take forward the strategic planning approach provided by the Core Strategy and take into consideration the economic objectives of the council expressed in the Economic Strategy and ERDP.

2. Midsomer Norton's Economic Context

With nearly 30% of jobs in manufacturing, limited office-based service-sector employment and a decline in local farming, the economy in the Somer Valley area faces some serious challenges which need to be addressed.

The local economy is vulnerable to global economic change and the area is facing a period of economic restructuring. To counter this and move towards a modern local economy, the need for proactive promotion of the area, the targeting of new economic activity, the realisation of opportunities to bring forward new development sites and enhancing the levels of business support in the area, has become increasingly important.

The town centre is a focus for employment in Midsomer Norton and supports nearly 800 jobs, almost half of which are in retail. Overall the Midsomer

Norton and Radstock area rely heavily on manufacturing jobs, which account for a quarter of the local employment and twice as high as the district average. Over half of the residents in the area travel to work elsewhere.

3. Targets and Trajectories

B&NES ambition for smart economic growth in Midsomer Norton is to focus on those sectors which can make it a strong self sustaining economy re-enforcing its position as the principle market town for the Somer Valley. To deliver sustainable growth Midsomer Norton needs to create an additional 1,000 jobs. This means actively targeting growth in the following sectors:

- Business services
- Construction
- Distribution & Retail

A strong and thriving town centre is crucial to retaining and attracting employers to the Somer Valley area. Research has shown that businesses value good local services centres and quality public realm which their employees can enjoy. The town centre has suffered from a lack of investment, and that which has taken place, with a number of exceptions, has lacked quality and consistency. Whilst job and GVA increases are an important indicator of success, the focus for Midsomer Norton town centre is to strengthen the retail offer, encouraging more support for local shops and services.

4. Vision

The Council's ambition is for the Somer Valley to become a more sustainable self-reliant area with a stronger more diverse economy and for Midsomer Norton to fulfil its role as the market town for the Somer Valley community and position itself as an attractive destination that fights back against the out of town offer. This is the main focus of the ERDP which is aligned with the strategic objectives of the Draft Core Strategy.

To achieve this ambition Midsomer Norton town centre needs to:

- Strengthen the shopping heart – provide larger shops in the core area of the High Street to attract national retailers, in particular an anchor food store.
- Create a mixed use centre – create the opportunity for redeveloping outdated units to provide a mix of new shops, office and housing.
- Improve local attractions – planting and public realm improvements to strengthen the arrival points in the shopping, park and leisure areas.

Surrounding the town centre, we need to maximise the potential of nearby development sites to complement and support the High Street and within the wider town facilitate the development of the allocated employment land at Old Mills.

5. Opportunities and constraints

This section sets out how the character of the area presents opportunities and constraints in relation to the council's economic and regeneration ambitions.

- **Access and movement** - Key to the success of the strategy is to create a town centre which is highly accessible to all residents and businesses, where facilities and services are available for all.

The strategy aims to encourage more people to walk and cycle through improved connections to the town centre. Encouraging more vehicles to use South Road would help reduce congestion in the southern end of the High Street, whilst improving facilities for public transport is an important consideration.

- **Parking** - Critical to the success of new and existing retail uses in the town will be to retain short stay spaces in close proximity to the High Street. There is potential to improve the appearance of parking areas to create a more welcoming arrival to the town. Long stay spaces will be required to support the growing employment provision.
- **Public Realm** - The town centre currently suffers from poor quality public realm, although it has the potential for a strong, distinctive physical environment. Delivery of environmental improvements to the High Street will help create a more attractive setting for retail activity and investment, but will depend on the potential to reduce the level of traffic flow on the High Street. Improvements should emphasise the river as a feature of Midsomer Norton town centre and enhance the setting of key buildings:
 - Public realm enhancements to improve arrival and awareness of the Town Centre at Stones Cross
 - Tree planting to hide gaps in street frontage at top end of the High Street
 - Potential junction realignment at High Street / Excelsior Terrace junction
 - High quality paving treatment of the High Street Core creating an improved pedestrian environment
 - Improved Hollies Gardens to create a flexible space for events
 - Potential junction realignment at High Street / Silver Street to enhance setting of Town Hall
- **Community Facilities** - Midsomer Norton benefits from a range of leisure and community facilities in the heart of the town centre. Midsomer Norton County Primary School is currently being extended and will have the potential to become a facility for wider community use.

The faith community are active in the town, with three churches located adjacent to the High Street, and another using the facility of the Town Hall on a regular basis. The local community have been instrumental in reinventing the Town Hall into a focus for community events and activity.

Gullocks Tying is the focus for leisure offering a range of indoor and outdoor activities including a swimming pool at the Sports Centre. The recently opened Somer Valley Adventure Play Park provides a fantastic facility for a range of ages and is a valuable asset to the town centre.

6. Development Sites

To seek to deliver the ERDP objectives for MSN town centre and the wider Somer valley area five key development opportunities have been identified. Whilst the ERDPs focus on the town centre, they recognise the importance of large sites in the vicinity that will contribute towards the economic wellbeing of the area.

The development opportunities are:

HIGH STREET CORE

Development Site 1: Streamside (Annex 1)

Development Site 2: South Road (Annex 2)

Development Site 3: The Hollies (Annex 3)

Development Site 4: Alcan (Annex 4)

Development Site 5: Old Mills (Annex 5)

- **High Street Core** - Central to the High Street the core commercial area covers three key sites which together have the potential to create a new 'heart' for the town centre, providing new employment opportunities, improving retail vitality and raising the quality of the public realm.

The **Streamside** area fronts the High Street between the Excelsior Terrace Junction and The Island, bounded to the rear by South Road. The River Somer is an attractive feature, flowing through the middle of High Street. This area is relatively weak in terms of retail as the units are of lower character and the area is dominated by non-retail units such as the library, pubs and takeaways.

This prominent area should be the focus for shopping, eating and drinking with new retail floorspace and an attractive public realm encouraging people to stay longer and support local businesses. Significant potential for redevelopment and renewal exists in the central part of the site, from the former Palladium building through to the Old Brewery and the pedestrian route connecting the High Street to South Road.

This area has the potential to provide:

- Up to 4,500 sq m of new comparison retail space
- Up to 8,500 sq m of new mixed use residential and office accommodation
- Approximately 400 jobs

- **South Road Car Park** - The site is located to the south of the High Street on South Road at the rear of the Streamside area. It is currently a free car park for the town centre (236 spaces), with residential properties and redundant industrial buildings forming the eastern edge. The Midsomer Norton Conservation Area wraps around the car park site to the north, west and east.

There is potential for part of the site to become the location for a modern foodstore to attract more shoppers into the town centre and stimulate higher quality investment from new and existing retailers into the High Street. Part of the site will be required to be maintained as a car park serving the town centre as well as the new food store.

Development of the site would provide:

- A new 3000 sq m convenience retail food store
 - A remodelled 300 space public car park with improved pedestrian links to the High Street
 - Up to 150 jobs
- **The Hollies area** - The site is dominated by the presence of Sainsburys foodstore which is set back from the High Street with a free car park (195 spaces) to the rear. Vehicular access and egress points to the car park are confusing and cause congestion on the High Street and pedestrian connections from north to south are difficult with lengthy ramps to address the changes in levels. The site is bordered by MSN County Primary School, the MSN Children's Centre and the Hollies office block. Central to the site the south facing Hollies Gardens is a terraced green public space in the centre of town, mainly used for seating and a location for the monthly farmer's market.

A reconfiguration of the site could provide an important mix of uses for the town centre including shops, jobs, community facilities, housing, public parking and green spaces with a strong retail frontage to the High Street and opportunities to spill out on to the improved Hollies Gardens which becomes a more flexible space for markets and events. There should be a mix of uses at upper levels, to meet the requirements for modern business space and more housing in the town centre. The car park should be allocated for short stay car parking to serve the High Street.

Reconfiguration of the site could provide:

- Up to 2,500 sq m of new and refurbished comparison retail, commercial leisure and hospitality space
- Approximately 3000 sq m of new office space
- 6000 sq m of new residential accommodation
- around 300 jobs

- **Alcan** - A significant vacant former industrial site which is adjacent to and overlooks the town centre. The site was previously occupied by Alcan, the multi-national packaging company, which closed the Midsomer Norton plant in 2006, with a loss of 220 jobs. Due to its location, surrounding residential uses and restricted access, the site is unlikely to be suitable for large scale industrial re-use.

Redevelopment of the site for a mix of uses could contribute towards achieving the regeneration objectives for the Somer Valley by facilitating the provision of new modern business space focused on office based business services & knowledge, employment which can replace the jobs that were lost when the factory closed whilst helping to restructure the local economy.

The site has the potential to deliver:

- Around 4,000 sq m of modern office space
 - Up to 4,000 sq m of residential accommodation with improved connectivity to surrounding residential areas and the town centre
 - A contribution towards the replacement of the existing community facilities on the site
- **Old Mills** - The site covers 13.5ha and is allocated for employment uses. It is a mainly greenfield site on the north western edge of Midsomer Norton adjoining the existing Old Mills commercial area and has good access to the A37 which connects the Somer Valley to the A303 as well as Bristol and the national motorway network.

The Old Mills site has a key role to play in securing the regeneration and future economic well-being of Midsomer Norton and the Somer Valley area. However infrastructure constraints have prevented the site coming forward for development.

A masterplan and delivery strategy is currently being prepared for Old Mills. The masterplan will include:

- Infrastructure planning
- Transport statements
- Delivery and phasing strategy
- Design guidance
- Clear and robust development plan and planning application guidance

The site has the potential, subject to confirmation under the masterplan, to deliver:

- Up to 38,000 sq m of industrial space and warehousing
- Around 12,000 sq m of office and non-food bulky goods retail space
- Approximately 1,400 jobs