

## OLD TOWN

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# OLD TOWN

## The Old Town Today

11.42 The Old Town is essentially a Medieval settlement which until Victorian times was the core of Hastings. Architecturally it is the most valuable part of the town and understandably popular as a tourist attraction. It was the first conservation area to be declared in the Borough in 1968. Its unique character owes much to the striking topography, confining the settlement within the Bourne valley between the East and West Hills.

11.43 The working beach, with its shore-based fishing fleet, net shops and maritime attractions dominates the south eastern corner of the Old Town. To the west, resort activities prevail, but the amenity of the open landscaped areas is also valued.

11.44 Tourist activity is at its greatest in the Old Town, particularly on the seafront, The Stade, George Street and the High Street. The quality of the conservation area is central to the Old Town's attraction for residents and visitors alike. However, the number of visitors, particularly at high season, creates some pressures in terms of volumes of traffic and car parking. Another factor is the A259 which runs along the seafront and up The Bourne.

11.45 Since George Street was pedestrianised more than a decade ago, its character has changed with more craft, souvenir and antique shops, and restaurants for the tourist trade. However, some businesses which primarily serve the local community still remain and this balance gives year round life and vitality to the street. The vacancy rate compares favourably with other centres in the Borough. Along Pelham Place, Marine Parade and East Parade, novelty shops, amusements and fish and chip restaurants continue to predominate.

## Strategy for the Old Town

11.46 The following strategy will be pursued through the Local Plan and other initiatives, including the Conservation Area Partnership Scheme (CAPS) and Government transport and regeneration funding bids. Additional support from external sources will be important to some projects.

- Support the role of the Old Town shopping area (George Street/High Street/Courthouse Street) as a speciality/local centre, serving the needs of both tourists/visitors and local residents.
- Promote progressive improvement of the visitor attractions and the working beach in The Stade, and the wider Old Town area, and its co-ordinated management as a primary tourist destination.
- Improve the seafront A259 by increasing pavement areas and removing parking clutter and unnecessary road space.
- Promote more traffic calming/reduction in the Old Town area.

## Priorities for Highway Improvements

11.47 With a central reservation along much of its length, the Old Town section of the A259 is effectively a dual carriageway in most places, but due to the amount of on-street parking this contributes little to its capability as a highway. There is considerable potential for upgrading the environment and improving crossing arrangements for the pedestrian. With this in mind, the Borough Council will support the removal of the dual carriageway between Winkle Island and Pelham Place together with a narrowing of the road on its northern side allowing wider pavements, environmental improvements and associated parking. The volume of tourist activity is a strong justification for such a change.

11.48 In the Pelham Place area, in particular, such improvements would provide a much wider and more attractive pavement on the north side, which is heavily congested by people walking between the town centre and the Old Town. The changes would provide a better, more architectural setting for Pelham Crescent and St Mary-in-the-Castle. The Council will work with the Highway Authority to achieve this.

11.49 Another highway priority is the improvement of the Winkle Island junction area which is poor in traffic terms and unsafe for pedestrians.

### **Pelham Place Car Park Area**

11.50 Pelham Place car park is very well used by tourists and residents, and will be retained for the foreseeable future. However, visually it is unsatisfactory as a setting for the historic Pelham Crescent buildings. A scheme for its improvement would complement the plans for Pelham Place referred to above.

## **Rock-a-Nore Area**

11.51 Rock-a-Nore Road is heavily used by tourists using the car park and attractions, including the museums and Sealife Centre. The Council will, with the Highway Authority, prepare a scheme for upgrading the paving materials and other surface treatments in Rock-a-Nore Road in a manner appropriate to the conservation area and in co-ordination with proposals for Winkle Island.

## **Traffic Calming and Pedestrianisation in the Old Town**

11.52 From a purely conservation perspective, removal of traffic and parked cars from the streets in the Old Town would be desirable. However, a balance has to be struck between that ideal and the practical needs of residents and businesses. Some traffic calming measures have been implemented and George Street has already been pedestrianised.

11.53 Further studies will be undertaken to ascertain the potential for further traffic calming and pedestrianisation measures in the Old Town. This could be related to moves to direct visitors to appropriate car parks. Further traffic calming may be undertaken where feasible with the aim of minimising the impact of the private car on the conservation area. However, additional pedestrianisation will only be considered where there is no demonstrable harm to the interests of local residents and businesses.

## **The Stade Coach and Lorry Park**

11.54 The Council is bringing forward proposals for an enhanced visitor centre on land currently occupied by the coach and lorry park. The proposed centre will provide tourism information, interpretative/educational and related tourism facilities, including

the possibility of a quality fish restaurant. It is intended that the centre would act as a focus and 'gateway' for tourists visiting the various heritage attractions in The Stade/Old Town area (see Policy SS1 in Chapter 11g 'Seafront Strategy').

11.55 Planning permission has been granted for a replacement coach park on land adjacent to the Summerfields Leisure Centre on Bohemia Road. This will be supplemented by pick-up/set down facilities serving The Stade/Old Town area. Alternative lorry park facilities may be made available elsewhere in the town.

## Streets of Sensitive Character

11.56 In historic areas, such as the Old Town, the use of traditional materials is extremely important in preserving their character. This applies to the streets as well as the buildings. When maintenance and repair work is undertaken to street surfaces and lighting, the aim should be, not just to retain traditional features, but replace inappropriate treatments that may already be there. It is acknowledged that this can have significant cost implications.

## Old Town Protection Area

11.57 The Council is concerned that the general setting of the Old Town should be protected, and in particular, development should not be permitted in the open West Hill/Bembrook Road area.

### POLICY OT1

#### Old Town Protection Area

The general setting of the Old Town will be protected and enhanced and, apart from existing commitments, development will not be permitted in the West Hill/Bembrook Road area as defined on the Proposals Map.