

# CENTRAL ST LEONARDS

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# CENTRAL ST LEONARDS

## St Leonards Today

11.27 Though it is now joined to Hastings, St Leonards began life as a separate resort. Immediately to the east of the original Burtons' St Leonards is the present day centre of St Leonards with the shops grouped around London Road. The grand set piece of Warrior Square with its gardens forms the eastern boundary of central St Leonards.

11.28 After Hastings itself, St Leonards is the second largest shopping centre in the town and larger than all other district centres by some margin. It contains a wide range of shops and other services but very few multiples are represented (e.g. the small Boots) with several small food stores. The vacancy rate is high compared to other centres and highlights its vulnerability.

11.29 The strengths of the centre can be identified as the range of local convenience shops, some of its specialist shops (e.g. electrical, fabrics, restaurants) and the concentration of antique shops in Norman Road. The location of Warrior Square Station adjacent to the shops is advantageous and the easy availability of short term on-street parking could be regarded as important for passing trade. The architectural heritage of St Leonards is recognised by the fact that virtually all of it is within conservation areas.

11.30 The weaknesses of the centre can be summarised as follows:-

- the centre, especially London Road, is congested with traffic and pavements are generally narrow;
- the overall quality of the street environment is poor;
- the A259 road separates central St Leonards from the seafront promenade and detracts from the settings of historic buildings;

- the shopping area and surrounding streets suffer from a chronic lack of investment with resultant problems of decay;
- the Western Road/Cross Street area is in particular need of regeneration/redevelopment.

11.31 A need for some action has arisen from the gentle but steady decline of the area over many years with contraction of traditional seaside holiday activity. The more recent threat for the shopping centre is the increased competition from out-of-town centre retailing and the improving quality of Hastings town centre.

## Strategy for Improvement

11.32 Planning policies for central St Leonards are intended to contribute to the strategy set out below. The strategy is being pursued by a range of means. Rejuvenation of central St Leonards is a key element of the Hastings Regeneration Strategy and substantial funding for improvement of the area has been secured under the Government's Single Regeneration Budget scheme. In addition, Government transport funding, conservation and improvement grant funds are being directed to the area.

- Support for the shops – Strengthen the identity of St Leonards; by promoting its individual image, its strength as a speciality and convenience shopping centre by town centre management and by signposting and street improvement works. The centre would be considerably strengthened if a new food store could be persuaded to locate in the area.
- Upgrade the Kings Road/Warrior Square Station area – The station has been refurbished. Its surroundings and Kings Road need to be similarly improved.
- Upgrade the built environment by directing funds to the area:-
  - Housing improvement grants (Southwater and Central St Leonards Renewal Areas).
  - Single Regeneration Budget projects [SRB].
  - Conservation grants (Conservation Area Partnership Scheme [CAPS]).
- Key sites for improvement/redevelopment projects are:-
  - Cross Street and Western Road area.
  - Warrior Square Station Area
- Introduce environmental, transport, traffic and safety improvements for the London Road area (Hastings and Bexhill Transport Package funds):-

- Traffic changes to improve pedestrian safety and convenience.
  - Bus priority and service quality improvements.
  - Widen pavements where possible.
  - Minor environmental improvement schemes.
- Prepare proposals for improving the A259 to offer better pedestrian and townscape linkage between the built-up area and the seafront.

# POLICIES

## Kings Road/Warrior Square Station Area

11.33 This area is seen as the focus for the regeneration of central St Leonards. It is valuable in architectural and social terms, and its improvement will do much to lift the image of St Leonards as a whole. Resources are being directed to the area under the Hastings Regeneration Strategy.

11.34 The Council's objectives for the area are:-

- (i) Preservation and architectural enhancement of the buildings;
- (ii) Supporting continuing economic use for existing buildings, including upper floors;
- (iii) Improvement of the streetscape and station surroundings in keeping with the character of the local architecture;
- (iv) Management of traffic in the interests of shoppers and other pedestrians.

11.35 The Taxi Office/BR Social Club adjacent to Warrior Square Station is allocated for housing purposes in Policy H1. It is also included as a mixed use development area in Policy H2. The Council considers that any redevelopment of the site should allow for commercial uses serving the local area on the ground floor with residential uses above.

### POLICY SL1

#### Taxi Office/BR Social Club Site

**Planning permission will be granted for the redevelopment of the Taxi Office/BR Social Club adjacent to Warrior Square Station for a mixed use development with compatible commercial uses serving the local area on the ground floor and residential above.**

## Traffic Generally

11.36 Central St Leonards, especially London Road, is congested, making for a poor shopping environment. However, through traffic cannot be removed. Radical changes to the traffic system do not appear to be an option. The general transport strategy identifies the centre as a 'pedestrian priority area' and for this reason, it is considered that measures to calm traffic and improve pedestrian safety and convenience should be pursued wherever possible. Narrow pavements are a particular shortcoming in London Road. The Council will therefore support the implementation of schemes that include increased pavement areas, better pedestrian crossing arrangements and other environmental improvements. However, the area is within the Battle Road Quality Bus Corridor and any changes must be designed to assist bus movements. The Council will also be undertaking work to assess the adequacy of parking facilities in central St Leonards.

## Problem Buildings

11.37 Several major buildings within the area are in need of refurbishment and/or lack a viable use. Their plight also adversely affects the appearance of Central St Leonards as a whole. One such building, The Marlborough Hotel, has been successfully redeveloped and Christ Church Old School and the former Hampdens Building have been refurbished. The declaration of Central St Leonards as a Renewal Area will provide further impetus to tackling problems of dereliction in the area. Where opportunities arise, the Council will support proposals that would bring key buildings back into use and secure their future.

### POLICY SL2

#### Problem Buildings

**Planning permission will be granted to suitable proposals to tackle key buildings within central St Leonards which are in need of**

repair. A flexible approach to their future use will be adopted if this assists in securing their future viability.

## **Western Road/Cross Street Area**

11.38 The area is run down and contains several vacant sites. It also provides accommodation for a variety of small businesses. The priority is to see the area comprehensively revived through redevelopment and some refurbishment. Housing development will assist the area generally, as well as contributing to the Borough's overall needs. Other compatible uses will be encouraged if the opportunity arises to promote mixed development which is desirable in sustainability terms. Redevelopment for social housing has already taken place on the western side of Western Road and the SEEDA Brownfield Land Assembly Trust (BLAT) may undertake further development schemes within the area. It is therefore proposed to prepare a planning brief for the area.

### **POLICY SL3**

#### **Western Road/Cross Street Area**

**Planning permission will be granted to proposals for development and refurbishment in the Western Road/Cross Street area. Housing will be the primary use but other uses will be approved provided they are compatible with the housing, and particularly if such uses assist the viability of central St Leonards.**

## **A259 St Leonards Seafront**

11.39 Until the A259 can be relieved of some of its traffic, there will be a limit on how much can be done to improve the area environmentally. However, it is important not to use this as a reason for holding back on possibilities that currently exist. The Council will work with the Highway Authority in seeking environmental and safety improvements to the central St Leonards A259. This may include carriageway width reductions, improved crossings, bus and cycle enhancements, street furniture and paving improvements. An aim will be to reduce the severance between central St Leonards and its seafront.

## **Southwater Housing Renewal Area**

11.40 A group of residential properties centred on Southwater Road has been designated a Housing Renewal Area, with Single Regeneration Budget and Borough Council funds available to finance the project. A further Renewal Area has since been designated in central St Leonards.

11.41 The Council supports the retention of part of the existing wooded valley west of Woodland Vale Road as an area of open space in conjunction with the implementation of the existing planning permission for residential development (see also Policy H1).

