South Woodham Ferrers
Neighbourhood Plan

Town centre analysis

Troy Planning + Design

February 2019

Consultation and Local Plan studies

TOWN CENTRE
CONSULTATION COMMENTS

- Limited retail offer

- Dominated by Asda

- Encouragement should be given to attract other stores to the town centre, providing choice and competition

- Suggestion that land ownership arrangements 'stifle' change in the centre

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TOWN CENTRE
LOCAL PLAN EVIDENCE BASE

- Asda an important 'anchor': food shopping main reason for visiting.
- Need for new convenience floorspace – but this forms part of northern growth area allocation (so not in the town centre)
- Proportion of comparison retailers below national average: new provision would be supported
- But previous attempts to attract national multiple retailers unsuccessful: reflects limited catchment of the centre
- 70% of visitors arrive by car, but only 9% of visitors from outside SWF (so most people in SWF drive to the town centre)
- Car parks at capacity (are these all visitors?)
- Footfall focused on Asda entrances and declines rapidly beyond this
- Quality of environment mixed, and dated in some areas

TOWN CENTRE
QUESTIONS ARISING

- How do we capture trips to Asda for benefit of the town?
- If the retail catchment is limited what other role and function can the centre have? Should community facilities be provided here (though note medical / emergency services closing)?
- Can the catchment be increased? Can better 'internal' links within SWF be created, better linking the town centre with residential and employment areas, and surrounding green spaces?
- Is there an opportunity to have a more regular and formal market?
- Who is using the car parks? Is this space really needed?
- Can public realm works improve the quality and enjoyment of the retail environment?
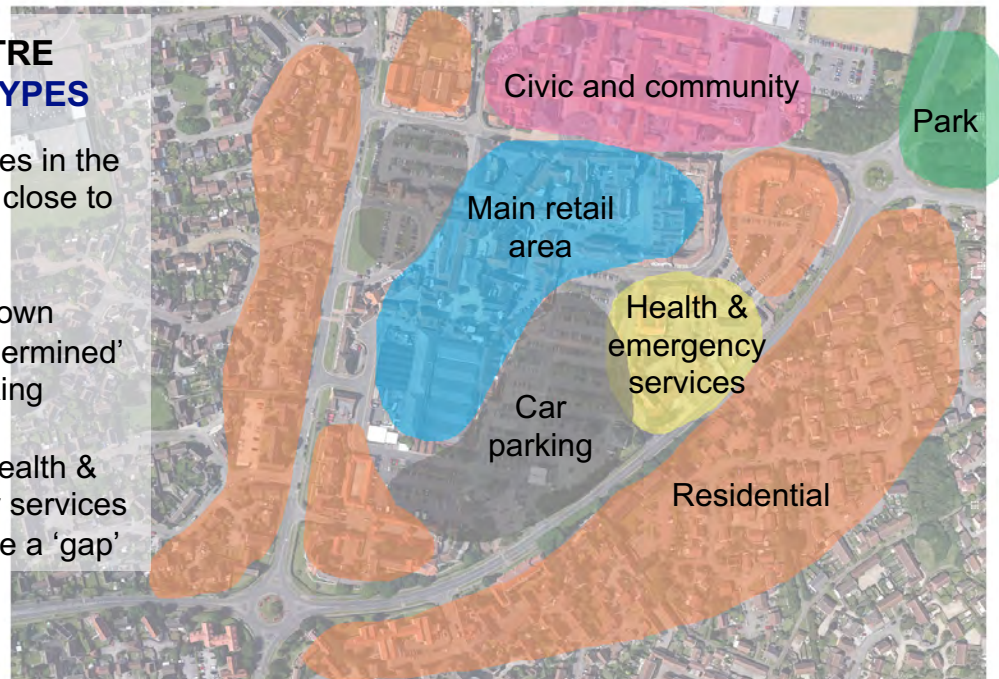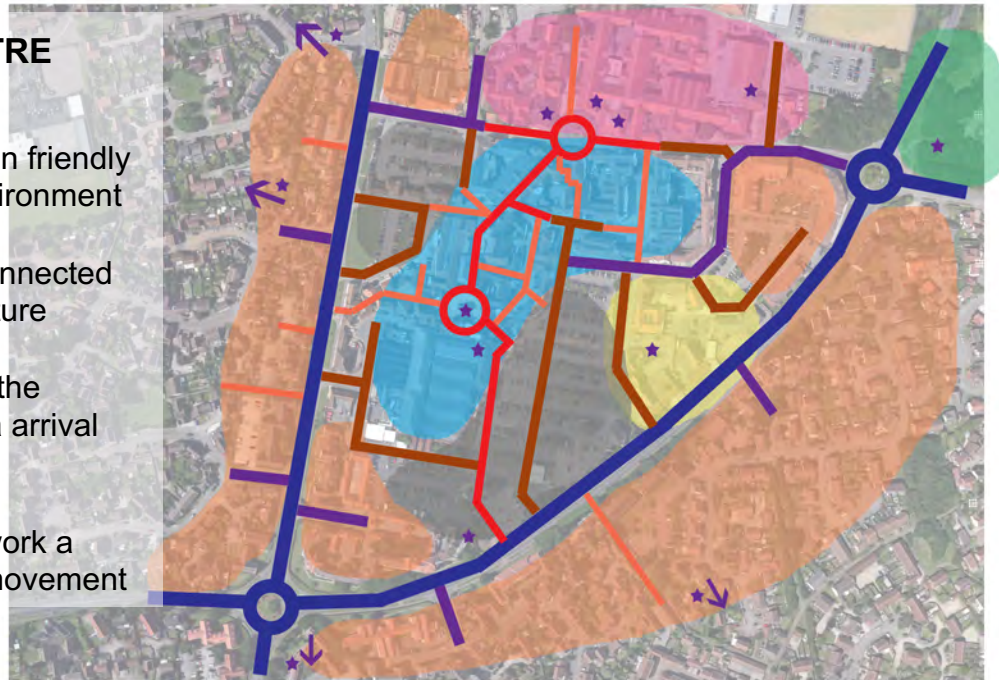
Urban Morphology

TOWN CENTRE
MAIN USE TYPES

- A mix of uses in the centre and close to the centre

- Setting of town centre 'undermined' by car parking

- Future of health & emergency services could create a 'gap'

Map labels: Civic and community, Park, Main retail area, Health & emergency services, Car parking, Residential

TOWN CENTRE
ROUTES

- A pedestrian friendly central environment

- But a disconnected route structure

- 'Breaks' in the network via arrival points

- Street network a barrier to movement

URBAN MORPHOLOGY
TYPICAL TOWN CENTRES

- At the confluence of main routes
- A gathering and trading place
- A place of rest on longer journeys
- A clear hierarchy of streets and spaces
- Strong building frontages and activity on the main street
- Public and private spaces clearly defined
- Civic buildings act as landmarks
- Strong sense of arrival

(image: Walker map of Chelmsford, 1591)

URBAN MORPHOLOGY
SWF TOWN CENTRE

+ve
- References historic centres (e.g.: Barclays Bank as Corn Exchange)
- Intimate, human-scale spaces

-ve
- Lacks direct access to or through the centre – main routes 'by-pass' the centre
- Limited connectivity with wider catchment
- No real sense of arrival: routes lead to car parks
- Building lines deflect and terminate views: unclear what lies beyond
- Hierarchy of streets, spaces and squares, and their differing functions, unclear
- Mix of building fronts and backs, with exposed service yards and blank walls being 'unwelcoming': not entirely clear what is a public, semi-public or private area

TOWN CENTRE
CHALLENGES

- Is the town centre a place for people or for cars?

- Does this create a sense of arrival?

- Is it a welcoming experience?

TOWN CENTRE
CHALLENGES

- Where is the 'front door' to the town centre?

- How clear is it that there is a wider town centre offer beyond the arrival point / Asda car park?

TOWN CENTRE
CHALLENGES

- What happens in this space?

- Does it lead anywhere?

TOWN CENTRE
CHALLENGES

- Am I meant to follow this route?

TOWN CENTRE
CHALLENGES

- Are these private or public spaces?

- Is this the front or back of a building?

- Should I be here?

TOWN CENTRE
CHALLENGES

- What happens in these spaces?

- What would make people stop and enjoy being in these places?

- Can the environment be softened?

Town-wide structure

SPACE SYNTAX 'CHOICE'
**MAIN ROUTES 'BYPASS' THE TOWN CENTRE**

- Red routes indicate most connected and direct routes

- Illustrates that the Town Centre is poorly connected

- The main routes 'by-pass' the Town Centre

TOWN CENTRE CATCHMENT AREA
### 400M / 5 MINUTE WALK

- Limited walking catchment around town centre following street network

- Some extension following footpaths

- But catchment limited in contrast to 'as the crow flies' distance

## TOWN CENTRE CATCHMENT AREA
800M / 10 MINUTE WALK
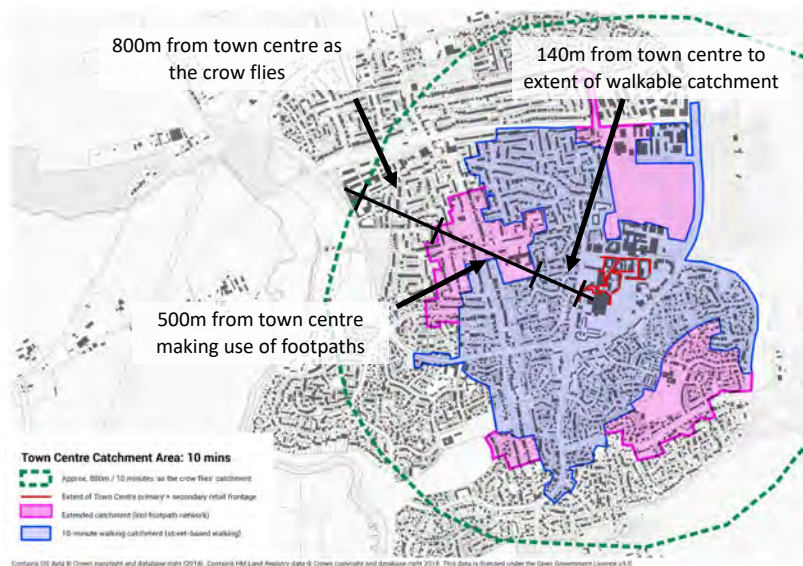
- 10-minute catchment area extends further

- But still limited by nature of street network and footpath links

URBAN STRUCTURE
SEPARATE CELLS OF DEVELOPMENT
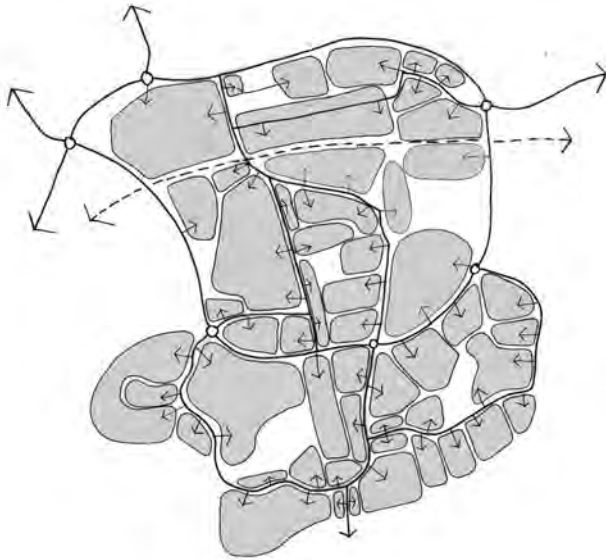
- Urban structure based on a series of separate 'cells' of development

- Limited permeability reduces accessibility

- Impacts on mobility: do people drive because other choices (walking and cycling) are limited?

URBAN STRUCTURE
FOOTPATH NETWORK
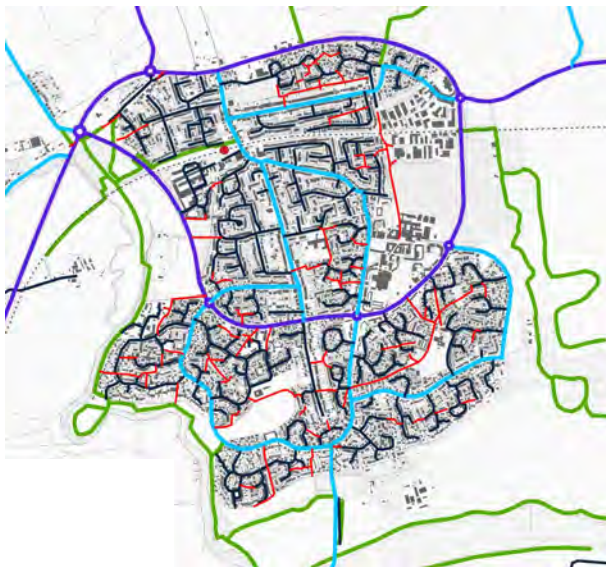
- Are existing routes used?

- Do people feel safe using them?

- Could safer, more direct access for walking and cycling be made?

- Do people consider this an issue?

Potential opportunities

URBAN MORPHOLOGY
RESTRUCTURE AND REDEVELOP?

- 'Open-up' main routes leading into QEII Sq from town centre arrival points
- Bring forward development opportunities along Inchbonnie Road to create new, well defined arrival points and enclose the 'backs' of existing development
- Align connections and routes with existing network of routes, connecting to residential areas, schools and open space
- Create active frontages where blank walls current exist (eg.: open up school front)
- Define public areas by enclosing service areas
- Consolidate retail in main central spine, or 'flip' the town around, creating new frontage wrapped around the superstore

URBAN MORPHOLOGY
QUESTIONS

- Suggestions above require new development and or redevelopment

- Would new development (or redevelopment) be welcome by the Town Council, resident and business community?

- Other interventions (e.g.: pubic realm) have previously been explored (2008 Plan). Do these need revisiting? Why were they unsuccessful?

URBAN MORPHOLOGY
OTHER STRATEGIES

- A public realm strategy that creates a clear hierarchy of streets and spaces, giving each 'square' a clear identity and function.
- 'Green' the environment with new trees and raingardens, connecting with surrounding green spaces and helping adapt to climate change
- Rationalise car parking through a parking strategy (investigate a a multi-storey car park?) that minimises the impact of the car and providing scope to re-use land
- Create space for a regular market in a central location
- Rebalance surrounding street network to encourage walking and cycling
- Reconsider location of local landmarks

URBAN MORPHOLOGY
FURTHER QUESTIONS

- What is the future of the emergency and health-related facilities in the town centre?

- Should other existing civic and community facilities potentially be relocated here to generate shared trips to the town centre?

- What other uses might be appropriate in this area? Residential? Flexible employment space?

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