

Keynsham Town Centre Economic Regeneration Plan

1. Introduction

Located between Bath and Bristol, Keynsham is ideally located to play a significant role in supporting sustainable economic growth across the District. It has retained its own identity and is surrounded by countryside, while also having good transport links. Bristol and Bath are both 10 minutes away by train and the A4 connects the town to the M4. It also has good schools and a strong community spirit.

Given these components, Keynsham should therefore be a desirable commercial location. However it suffers from a lack of available modern business space, the High Street has seen little regeneration over the past decade and it has recently seen the closure of the Cadbury Somerdale site.

The town centre is characterised by local independent retailers, some larger nationals and charity shops. The town's dominant employer is the public sector, with the Council having an office there.

Over the next decade, however, Keynsham has a very significant opportunity to revitalise its economy. The Economic Strategy for B&NES highlights the need to bring forward new employment space in the town centre, in particular the redevelopment of the Town Hall site, and at Cadbury Somerdale, increasing the number and diversity of jobs available locally.

Delivery of these schemes needs to build on the strong heritage of the town and make the most of its close proximity to the River Avon.

The preparation of this ERDP complements the strategic objectives for Keynsham set out in the draft 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 outlined here.

2. Keynsham's Economic Context

Keynsham has a population of over 16,000, making it one of the largest urban areas in the district, although over half the resident working population travel to work elsewhere (Bath/Bristol).

The town has a limited employment base of about 3,500 full time equivalent jobs (2008) which is dominated by distribution (a reflection of good transport links), public administration and business services. The Cadbury factory accounted for 10% of local employment.

The High Street is one of the most distinctive characteristics of Keynsham. It is a strong linear feature which gives Keynsham centre a market town 'feel'. Although the High Street has very few empty shops, it is characterised by a number of outdated buildings, an unattractive physical environment and traffic congestion.

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It is dominated by retail uses but the small size of the shop units makes it difficult to attract higher quality national retailers. It is currently losing retail expenditure to competing retail centres such as Longwell Green. A key objective of the ERDP is to reverse this trend.

The commercial office market for Keynsham is limited and while it has had major employer names in the area (such as Cadburys), due to a lack of critical mass has tended not to attract significant commercial offices to the town.

The town centre environment is compromised by poor quality development, traffic and poor pedestrian links to the car parks and park. As a result, the experience of the town centre tends toward the functional rather than a place to enjoy.

3. Targets and Trajectories

B&NES ambition for smart growth in Keynsham is to focus on those sectors of the economy that make the most of its strategic location and its potential as a hub for the public sector and allied business services. To deliver sustainable growth Keynsham needs to create an additional 1,500 jobs. This means actively targeting growth in the following sectors:

- Business services
- Distribution
- Construction
- Public services

4. Vision

Our ambition is to put Keynsham on the map as a complementary commercial location to Bristol and Bath, with a strong retail offer focused on the High Street, enabling people to live and work in the town, and significantly reducing out commuting.

To achieve this ambition Keynsham needs to:

- Create new jobs – the Town Hall, Riverside and Somerdale are major ‘town centre’ employment destinations that can ‘anchor’ each end of the High Street and be major footfall generators, with the additional potential to attract office occupiers by creating a local labour pool for prospective employers.
- Improve the shopping experience – enhance the quality of shopping by satisfying the demand for new, larger retail footplates to attract higher quality shops and enable existing retailers to expand.
- Improve the Memorial Park - the green connection from Dapps Hill to Hams makes an attractive leisure route which will enliven the town centre. A cultural facility overlooking the Park could help strengthen the evening economy to support a growing population and workforce.

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. It details some of the key issues which will need to be addressed as development comes forward.

- **Access & Movement** - Treatment of the High Street will be critical for the regeneration of Keynsham town centre. Traffic modelling is exploring the potential to re-direct the priority traffic flows through Keynsham, seeking to reduce the level of traffic on the High Street. Recognising the comments received during consultation, pedestrianisation of the High Street is not recommended. However it is important to review the use of alternative routes such as Ashton Way.

Keynsham is positioned on a major public transport corridor between Bath and Bristol. It is relatively well served by buses, although the routes and location of stops can be confusing. It benefits from a railway station linking it to Bath and Bristol, although the frequency of services and access to and from the station, need to be improved to maximise the town's potential to deliver sustainable growth.

- **Parking** - It will be critical for the success of new and existing retail uses in the town to maximise the number of short stay spaces in close proximity to the High Street, such as at Ashton Way to support shopping trips. It is also recognised that additional long stay spaces may need to be provided to support the growing employment provision within the town centre.
- **Public Realm** - The town centre suffers from poor public realm, with the High Street that is dominated by traffic congestion. The lack of alternative public spaces along the High Street core area limits opportunities for outside eating and drinking. The useable space outside the Town Hall is limited by the level differences and materials. 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 focus on encouraging pedestrian movement to and from the High Street which include:

- Public realm enhancements to improve arrival and awareness of the Town Centre
- Improve gateway into the northern end of the High Street and setting of St Johns Church
- Quality paving treatment of the High Street Core creating an improved pedestrian environment
- Create a pedestrian bridge across the A4
- Improved pedestrian links from main car parks to the High Street and the park
- Create a new civic space at the top of Bath Hill that can be flexible to serve performance and events

- Extending the Park through Somerdale to the Hams and maximising the benefit of the river frontage.

6. Development Sites

There are four significant development opportunities which will contribute significantly to delivering the medium-long term economic aspirations of the Keynsham ERDP.

Development Site 1: Keynsham Town Hall (Annex 1)

Development Site 2: Riverside (Annex 2)

Development Site 3: High Street Core (Annex 3)

Development Site 4: Somerdale (Annex 4)

- **Keynsham Town Hall** - The site is positioned at the gateway to the High Street at the junction of Bath Hill and High Street. It is currently occupied by the Town Hall, the library and a parade of shops that front public open space. The five storey building creates a landmark feature at the southern end of the High Street although the quality of the buildings is very poor and outdated, creating a negative impression of the town and High Street at this important arrival point. The civic space is underutilised and cluttered, making it difficult to successfully adapt as a space for events. The site currently turns its back to the Memorial Park and connections from the park to the High Street through the site are non-existent.

The redevelopment of the Town Hall site provides an opportunity to create a high quality mixed use development in a key location at the heart of the town centre including active frontages to the High Street and the Park; high quality public and civic spaces; improved access between the town centre and the park. The site has the potential to provide:-

- Up to 7000 sq m of modern office accommodation
 - Up to 2000 sq m of retail space
 - A new library and “one stop shop”, with flexible meeting space
 - New public space for events such as markets and exhibitions
 - Around 750 jobs
- **Riverside** - The Riverside complex is a 1970s development which was originally designed as a hotel, but has always been used as office accommodation. The development presents an imposing structure and is a significant barrier to pedestrian connections between the park area and High Street / Temple Street. There are a number of retail units on the ground floor and Keynsham Leisure Centre is located within the Riverside block on the lower ground floor levels.

The office accommodation is now dated and part has been vacant for an extended period. A comprehensive proposal for the refurbishment of the Riverside block could provide a new mix of uses, retaining the leisure and retail space, which could improve the vitality of the Temple Street area of the town centre. The refurbishment could provide:-

- Up to 3000 sq m of new residential accommodation
 - Approximately 3000 sq m of refurbished office space
 - Retention of the existing leisure and retail space facilities
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- **High Street Core** - The “linear” High Street is one of the most distinctive characteristics of Keynsham, but the high level of traffic flows detracts from the shopping environment. The main shopper car park at Ashton Way is situated to the west of the High Street but lacks adequate pedestrian connections and is characterised by poor quality buildings. Overall there is a lack of larger retail floorplates which makes it difficult to attract high quality national retailers.

The western side of the High Street has the potential to be comprehensively redeveloped. Opportunities exist to amalgamate and redevelop existing units to create larger, more regular sized units to attract higher quality retailers. Smaller shops on Ashton Way will provide opportunities for local businesses.

The creation of local offices and apartments at upper levels including ‘rear frontages’ with appropriate parking and servicing, will bring more life and activity to the town centre.

Better links to the Park will increase the potential for linked trips and viability of cafes, bars, restaurants and cultural facilities. Ashton Way has the potential to take traffic pressure from the High Street to create more space for pedestrians and attract new retailers.

The High Street core has the potential to deliver:

- Approximately 4,500 sq m of additional retail floorspace
 - Up to 2,500 sq m of new office accommodation
 - 2,500 sq m of residential accommodation
 - Around 350 jobs
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- **Somerdale** - Located to the north of the town centre, adjacent to the railway station, the site contains the now vacant Cadbury Chocolate Factory, the Fry Club and Conference Centre and the Keynsham Hams leading down to the River Avon which marks the northern and western boundaries of the site. It has an estimated developable area of 25ha.

Somerdale presents a major opportunity to provide new, high quality employment led mixed use development including homes, leisure, recreation and community facilities. A priority is to continue Somerdale’s important employment role in Keynsham. The main entrance is suitable for offices, being close to the town centre and rail station. Conversion of some of all the factory buildings could create a distinctive location for workshops, studio space and apartments. The rear of the site is large and flexible enough to meet a range of different requirements and there is an opportunity to improve ‘green’ connections between the Hams, the River Avon, Memorial Park and town centre, giving local people access to a range of leisure facilities.

The site has the potential to provide:

- Around 20,000 sq m of office and creative workspace
- Up to 20,000 sq m of high end light industrial accommodation
- New leisure facilities including a relocated Fry Club and possible hotel
- Up to 600 houses
- Approximately 1500 jobs