

Ponteland Village Centre Regeneration Design Brief Draft – September 2007

Foreword

The regeneration of Ponteland Village Centre has been one of the original major items on the Ponteland Community Partnership's list of objectives since its inception in October 2003.

Liaison with Ponteland Parish Council and Castle Morpeth Borough Council led to the commissioning and production of the report by the consultants, Nathaniel Litchfield & Partners, finally published in autumn of 2006. The Parish and Borough Councils expressed a preference for Option 4 of the report which called for the complete demolition of Merton Way and redevelopment of the area.

The well supported public consultation meeting held in the Memorial Hall in December 2006 generally expressed a view that what was not wanted was another supermarket within the village centre re-development. This was confirmed by the above average number of responses to the subsequent regeneration questionnaire. For the aspects that people wanted to see in a revitalised village centre, the majority favoured retaining the library in the village centre, upgraded buildings and providing adequate car parking. These preferences were followed in priority by the requirement for improving the green spaces, retention of the existing retail offer and the provision of a community facility.

The responsibility for moving forward the ideas for regeneration now lies with the Partnership, and to this end a new Regeneration Sub Group was formed, taking in as wide a range of interests as possible, charged with producing a Design Brief that would meet the community's requirements.

The production of this Design Brief is the first step towards the regeneration of Merton Way shopping area and the necessary public consultation to assess the support of the community at large for the ideas proposed by the Ponteland Community Partnership.

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 The role and remit of the Regeneration Sub Group

The Regeneration Sub Group is made up entirely of residents and business representatives who have a passion about the village in which they live or work. Their time is given voluntarily and their professional services are offered free of charge. The Group has a chairman, vice chairman, a Terms of Reference and is constituted under the Ponteland Community Partnership.

It was decided at a very early stage in the group's inception that this Design Brief would be written by them on behalf of the residents of Ponteland and not by an outside organisation. This Brief will be a 'first' in that residents will have a 'hand' in the shaping of any new or upgraded facilities and it will ensure that any development activity is not simply imposed upon them without any consultation.

The wider role of the Regeneration Sub Group is to ensure that any major regeneration developments proposed for within the Ponteland Settlement boundary is community driven and not developer led. Their remit with regards to this Brief is to provide a document that encompasses the views and opinions of a wide range of individuals, land owners, neighbours and agencies, all of which will be affected by any change within the Village Centre.

This Brief has not been written with the intention of being prescriptive or overly detailed, it has been written with the sole intention of guiding potential developers as to the wants and needs of local people and businesses.

Within the Brief (which sets it apart from many other Briefs) you will find many references to 'we' and 'our' these both will mean the residents of Ponteland.

The Ponteland Community Partnership (PCP) will continue to play a leading role with this document throughout its lifetime and beyond including the short-listing of potential developers, arranging and supporting public consultation to view said plans and models and ultimately to aid Castle Morpeth Borough Council (CMBC) and others to instruct a chosen developer.

2.0 Site History & Information

2.1 History of Ponteland

Ponteland is a historic village built around the bridge over the River Pont which is crossed by the A696 Newcastle to Edinburgh Road. The study area lies 13km North West of Newcastle City Centre providing a local centre for the residents of Ponteland. Newcastle International Airport is located 3km to the south east with the main administrative centre of Morpeth lying approximately 19km to the north.

The first early settlement was established about 8000 years ago and was subsequently occupied by the Romans, Anglo Saxons and Normans. Over time the historic pattern of the settlement grew slowly with the reorganisation of land for agricultural improvements in the 17th and 18th centuries. Economic opportunities flourished in the early 20th century with the construction of a railway station and this was followed by significant growth in the post war years resulting in the area becoming the second largest settlement in the district, trebling Ponteland's population to over 10,000.

2.2 Ponteland Today

As can be seen from the front cover of this Brief, Ponteland is a green and leafy suburb surrounded by open countryside. The charm and appeal of semi-rural living coupled with the close proximity to Newcastle City Centre has made Ponteland a desirable place to live with demand for housing far outweighing current supply. This in turn has boosted house prices beyond many people's reach with some homes being valued in excess of one million pounds.

Population figures show that Ponteland has an ageing population with a high percentage of residents being over the age of 65. Residents between the ages of 40 – 60 tend to be professional working within the City. Statistics show a worryingly low level of people under the age of 40 moving into the area due to the high property prices.

The Business sector in Ponteland centres mainly on Meadowfield Industrial Estate, a medium sized industrial estate tucked away to the West of the Village. This site is one of Castle Morpeth Borough Council's more significant employment sites bringing approximately 300 jobs to the area. These jobs are mainly semi-skilled and there are no statistics available to comment on whether the people that are employed within these businesses actually live in Ponteland.

Concern has been raised that Ponteland may be becoming a 'dormitory' village. People leave the village to work, spend leisure time and shop but return to live and sleep. One of the aims of this Brief is to break this cycle and to provide residents with enhanced facilities that are suitable for the whole of the community both young and old. Somewhere they can meet and spend leisure time and to provide shopping facilities that encompass and satisfy all age ranges.

3.0 Background

3.1 The Ponteland Masterplan document – why and how?

In 2004 a committee of representatives including the Parish Council, Borough Council, County Council and Community Partnership came together with the aim of commencing a much needed change in the Village Centre. This group was formed after years of complaints from residents as to the deterioration of Ponteland Village Centre.

Funding was secured to instruct an external organisation to draft a document which would both inspire residents and attract a developer to the area. After a short-listing exercise carried out by the above organisations Nathaniel Litchfield & partners (a local company) were instructed to carry out the research and produce a document.

Public Consultation events were held at the end of 2005 with the culmination being a document titled ‘The Ponteland Master plan’ being produced. (A copy of this document is included with the Brief)

This document was put into the public domain in late 2006 and met with an overwhelmingly negative response. Telephone calls, letters and e-mails from residents expressing their concerns were sent to both the PCP and local authority officers. In conclusion a public meeting was held in December 2006 where residents were able to express their views verbally.

It is safe to say that ‘The Ponteland Master Plan’ did nothing to inspire residents as to regenerating the village centre but what it did do was to provide the Ponteland Community Partnership with a basis for future consultation and also with a core of committed residents who subsequently joined the Community Partnership with the aim of ensuring that any development within the village centre is community driven.

3.2 The Questionnaire

In 2007 a new round of consultation took place led by the PCP. This took the form of a questionnaire (copy enclosed) which was developed to ask people what they wanted to see within a new and re-vitalised village centre. Over 500 households returned copies which equates to approx 1000 people (around 10%) of residents.

The results and comments from the survey are the inspiration for this Design Brief.

3.3 In conclusion

The ‘Ponteland Master plan’ left residents feeling somewhat sceptical and untrusting of the regeneration exercise as a whole. Negativity spread with rumours that ‘it was a done deal’ with many residents feeling that their views and opinions were being ignored. It is the hope of the Regeneration Sub Group that this Design Brief will go some way to changing the views of those residents and that the people of Ponteland end up with a village centre that they are proud to shop and spend leisure time in.

4.0 The Study Area

4.1 The Village Centre

Please see area outlined in Figure 4.1.1 & Fig 4.1.2

Coupled with Main Street the study area includes the whole of what we would term as our Village Centre. Most shopping, social and business premises are based within this area.

Merton Way Shopping Centre

General feelings about this area are that it is in need of major investment. Buildings were erected in the 1960 - 70's with no more than a 30 year life expectancy, they are certainly looking their age with many falling into a state of dis-repair with peeling paint and an extremely dull grey exterior. All buildings are privately owned and many are leased to the current businesses.

Although a bit of an eyesore the residents of Ponteland like the situation of their shopping centre. It is close to transport links and has adequate car parking facilities close by. Many of the businesses have been in situ for over 20 years and have built up a substantial amount of 'goodwill'. Many of the negative points raised by residents to the Ponteland Masterplan were around the total destruction of Merton Way and the effects on the current businesses. Hence careful attention should be paid to this point by interested developers. A feasibility study should be carried out as to the structural adequacy and sustainability of the buildings and the possibility of upgrading existing buildings.

In addition to shops and businesses some of the buildings are privately owned or have tenanted flats above. Details should be checked with HM Land Registry to check current ownership as whilst this document has been formatted properties have changed hands.

Merton Hall

Another 1960's building owned by Castle Morpeth Borough Council. Merton Hall is a well used community venue with one large lounge area, a meeting room and a conservatory. The building itself seems in a good state of repair mainly due to the management committee and its fundraising activities.

The building is used both during the day and on an evening by the older generation who enjoy playing bridge, art & painting sessions and many other community spirited exercises.

The loss of the function of this community venue has been a matter of contention throughout this regeneration planning exercise. A petition with over 100 names was sent to CMBC asking that **if** Merton Hall were to be lost that another suitable community venue should take its place.

Ponteland CIU Club

An extremely well used 'private members' working men's social club. The building is physically in a good state of repair. It is run and constituted by its members and has an on-site manager and steward.

The building houses a number of bars, a lounge and function room which is very well used for birthdays, weddings and christenings.

The loss of this building will be of a great significance as it also has an on-site house for the steward. Again **if** this building were to be lost another suitable venue within the village centre must be found.

The Library

The Library is the single most significant building within this whole exercise of regeneration. The building is owned by Northumberland County Council (NCC) and has been under review for over 3 years. The building itself has come to the end of its life time and in major need of renovation. The windows need replacing, the roof requires work and the actual size of the building is too small for the amount of people who use it.

A review of the library provision across Northumberland has left Ponteland Library in an extremely precarious position. A number of meetings have been held with NCC to ascertain a final decision on whether it will be moved out of the village centre, the decision merely being postponed or deferred.

88% of residents who completed the questionnaire want the library to remain within the village centre.

Car Parking

The Study area includes 3 car parks one to the east and two to the west of the site. Car Parking is adequate and free of charge for the current shopping facilities. The Car Park to the South of the study area is of significance because of its proximity to St Mary's Church & Church Hall.

Green/Open Spaces

The main area lies directly in front of Ponteland Library. It is a compact but pleasant area set to grass with trees and borders which are maintained by CMBC and Ponteland Parish Council. This area is regularly used by residents to relax and meet friends.

There are smaller green/open areas situated beside footpaths which are extremely pleasing on the eye and of which residents are extremely proud, if any of these areas are lost there should be provision for new (and preferably more) green areas to be planted.

In Addition

In addition to the above facilities there are Public Toilets situated in the south car park and 5 garages belonging to the shops behind the shopping arcade.

Conservation Area

In conservation areas the design of new buildings and the alteration of existing buildings should preserve or enhance the quality and character of their location in appearance and massing; and use architectural features and materials appropriate and extensions to buildings designed to match or complement existing features. Temporary buildings and the inappropriate use of land will not be permitted (extract from Local Plan)

Figure 4.1.1

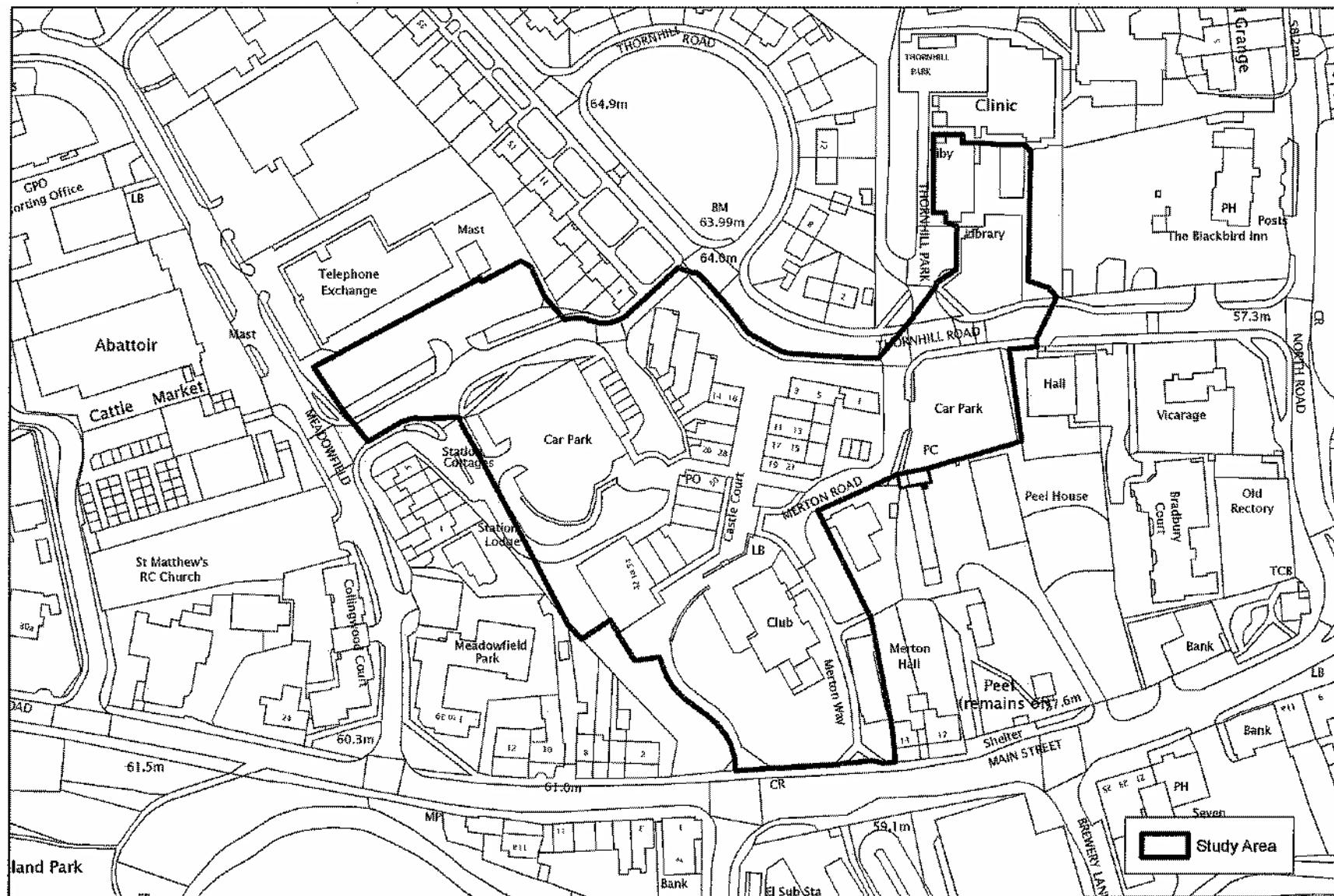
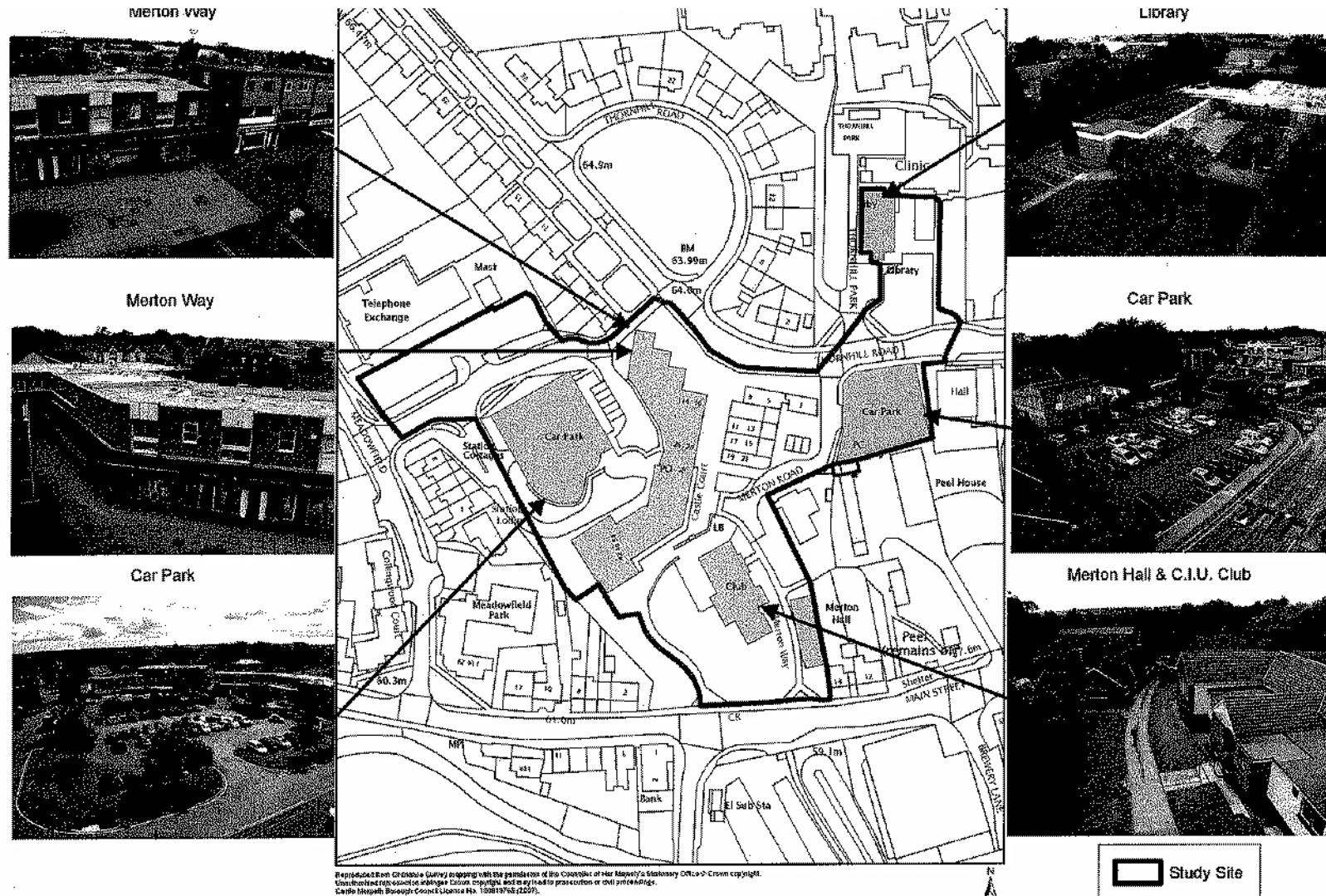
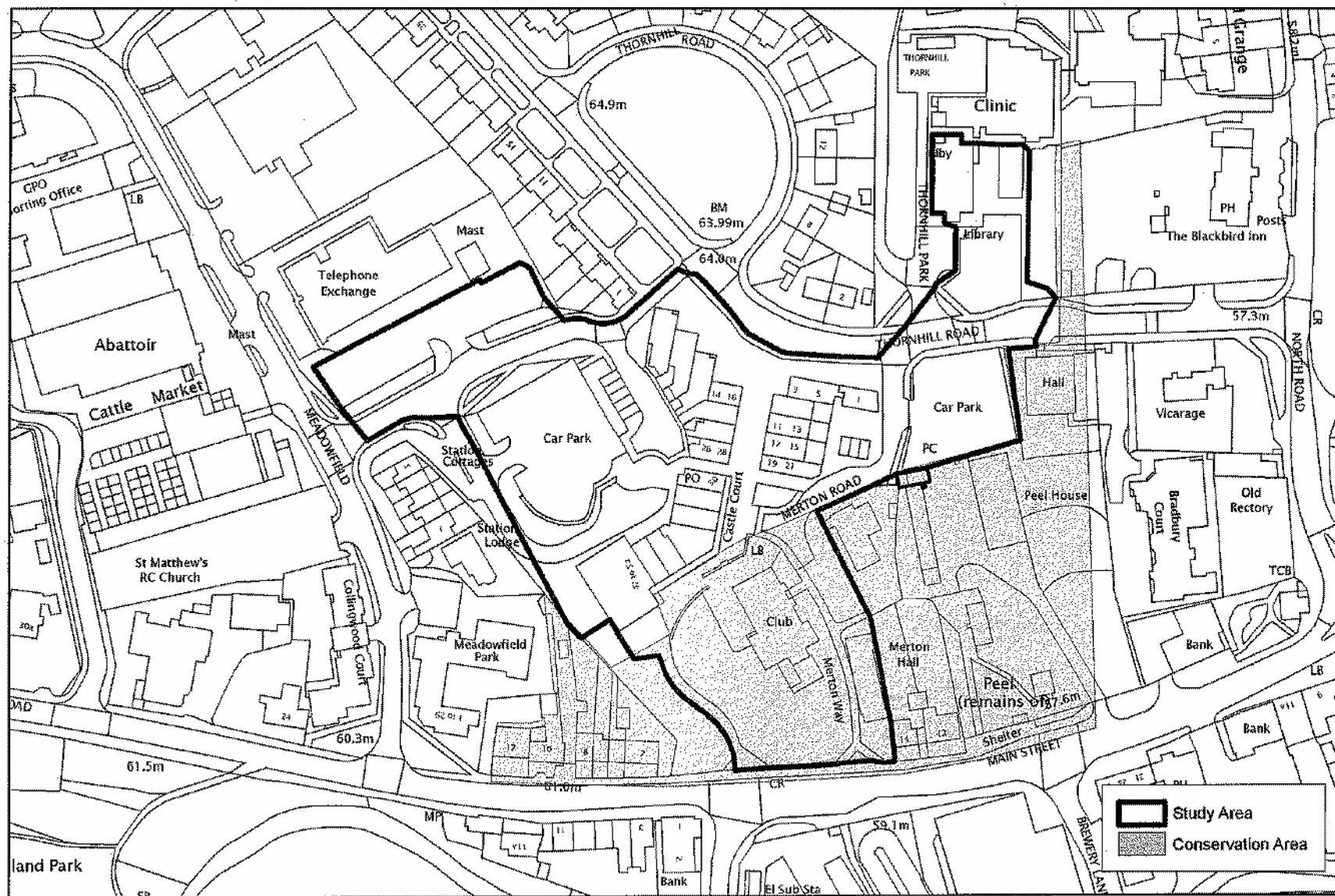


Figure 4.1.2 Buildings within the Study Area



Figures 4.1.3 Conservation Area



4.2 Access

The study area has good access from all directions both pedestrian and vehicular. Both car parks can be accessed via Thornhill Road or Merton Road with safe pedestrian routes from both car parks to the shopping area.

Other modes of transport other than the car or walking are rarely used. There is little provision made for the housing of motorbikes or bicycles and no provision at all for disabled electric wheelchairs.

Due to the ageing population within the village it is a priority that all re-vamped or new buildings are DDA (Disability Discrimination Act) Accessible and that they cater for all people regardless of age, gender or disability.

4.3 Traffic Generation

Thornhill Road suffers major congestion because of traffic to and from the Middle & First Schools situated upon it. At Peak times (9am and 3pm) residents who would like to shop are unable to do so as buses, taxis and cars used to pick up children fill the car parks and lay-bys.

It is unlikely that this situation is about to change but it is an item of information that any developer should take into consideration when planning any new development.

A traffic survey should be carried out by any interested developer.

5.0 Buildings of Significance outside of the Study Area

5.1 Please see Fig 5.1.1

St Mary's Church Hall

An extremely well used Church Hall re-built approx 10 years ago. The hall is used by people of all age groups for community purposes. The church and hall do not have adequate car parking for the numbers that use them and parishioners tend to use the south car park on Sundays and during the week.

Some negative feedback has been received about the regeneration scheme from residents due to the fact of the possible re-location of this car park.

Auction Mart

Ponteland Auction Mart closed approx 5 years ago and has been left to deteriorate greatly in that period. The site is a general eyesore with young people using it as a skateboard park even though it is a dangerous and hazardous place to be.

The Auction Mart car park is currently being used by St Matthews Church congregation.

Whilst this Design Brief has been in the formatting stage the Auction Mart has been marketed for sale and has been sold subject to planning consent.

Somerfield

Somerfield is a high quality building that suits the architecture of Main Street, it is a medium sized food outlet based on Main Street next to Ponteland Park. Much discussion has taken place during this process as to whether the term ‘supermarket’ is best to describe the shop. The general feeling by residents is that they do not want or require another ‘supermarket’.

People tend to shop outside of Ponteland where they can obtain a better choice and higher quality goods.

Main Street

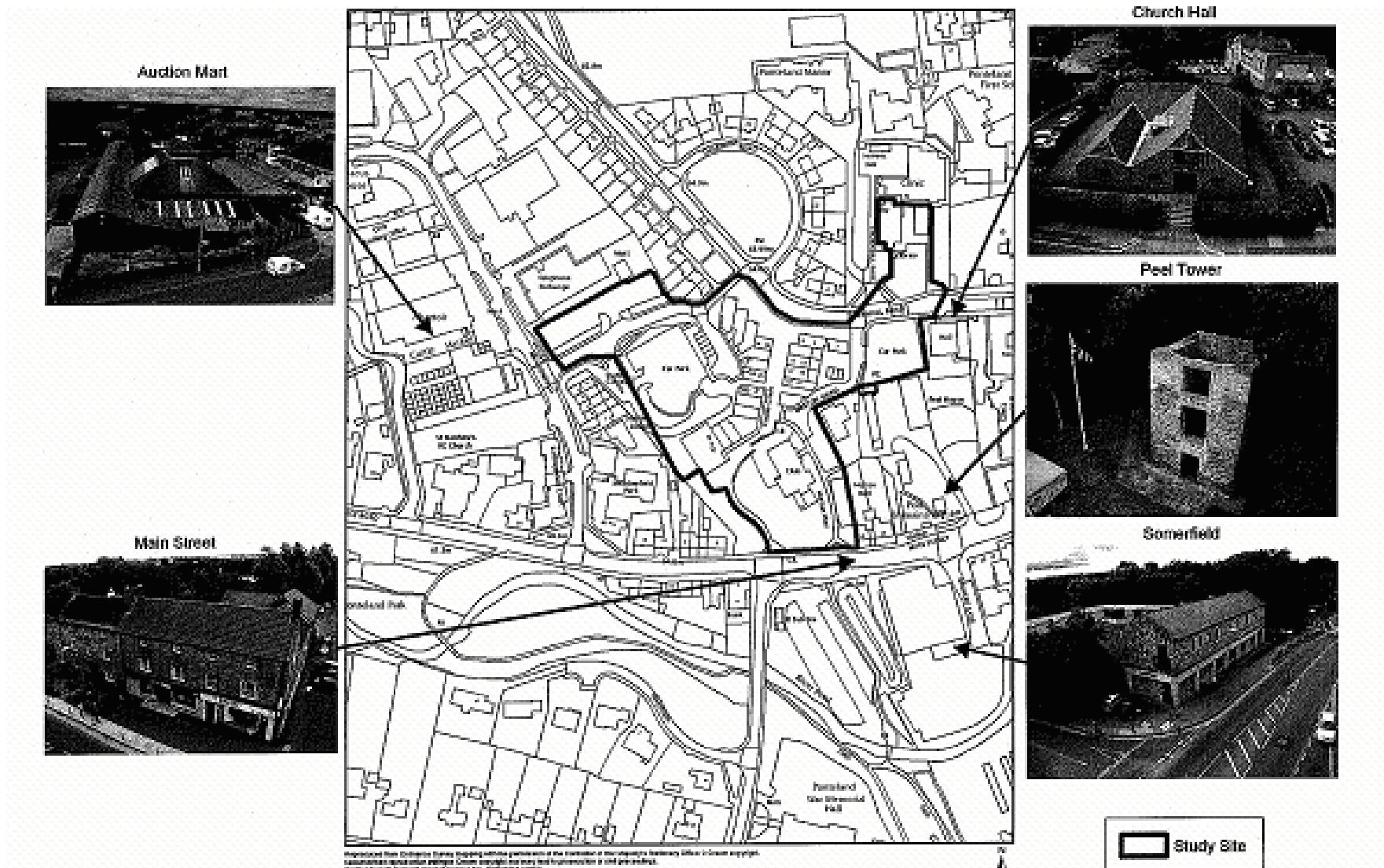
Main Street has the advantage of being on the main A696 road from Newcastle to Edinburgh. The shopping range is varied with in the main estate agents, pubs and banks.

The buildings in situ on Main Street vary in age. Some are quite recent (within the last 20 years) but most are over 100 years and some are Grade II Listed with English Heritage.

Residents favour the older buildings as they add character and charm to the village. Some of the more recent additions are classed as eyesores and not in keeping with the village atmosphere.

It is important to note that over 70% of households that returned the questionnaire have stipulated that any new development should be in keeping with the ‘village feel’.

Figure 5.1.1



6.0 Additional Opportunity

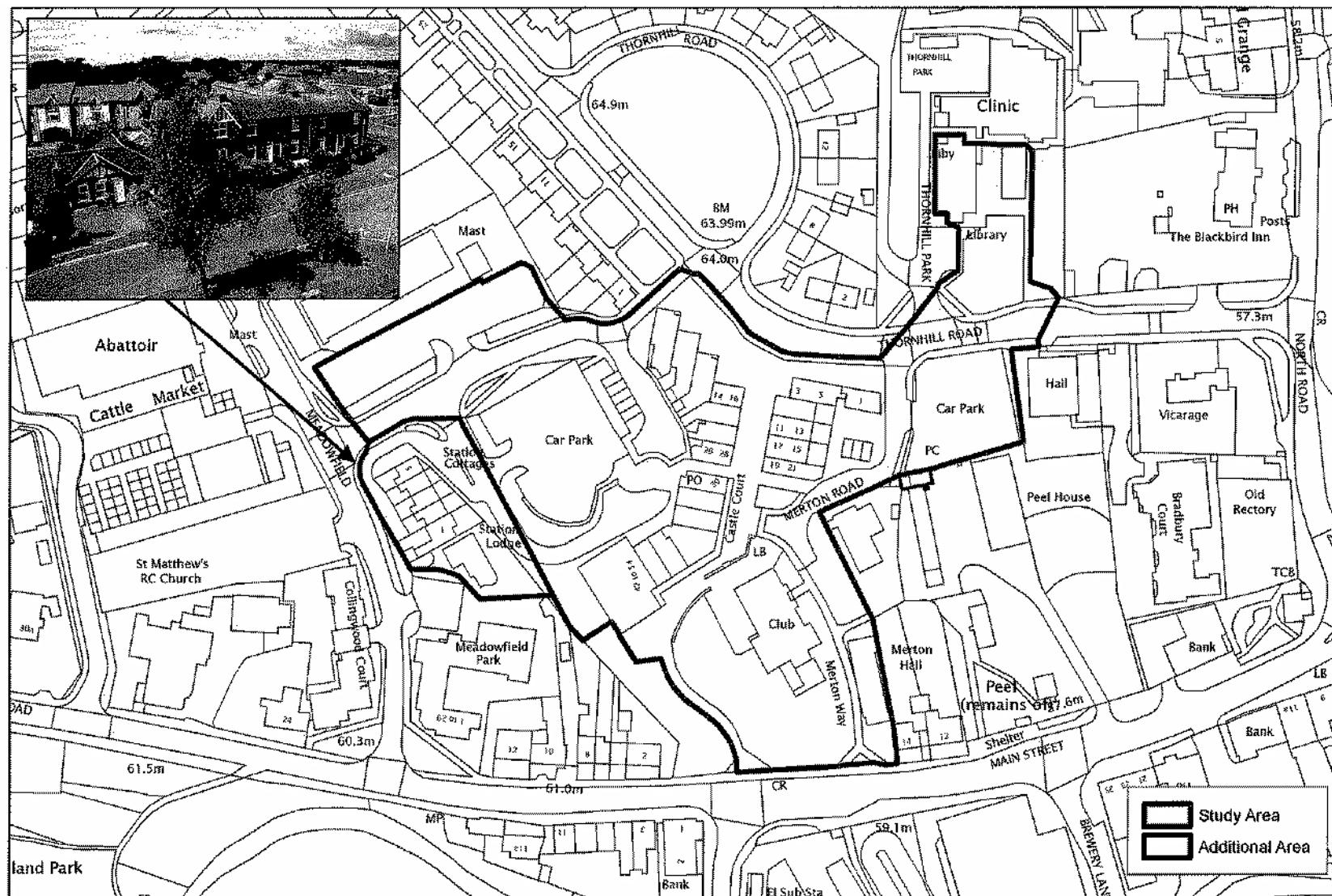
6.1 Please see figure 6.1.1

An opportunity has arisen to extend the study area to the north and to include an area which presently houses 5 terraced cottages (Station Cottages) and a detached single storey bungalow (Station Lodge).

Residents are willing to talk to developers about the inclusion of this site but it must be noted that this area is not under any circumstances subject to Compulsory Purchase Orders.

Extending the site would enable developers to gain direct access to Meadowfield Road.

Figure 6.1.1



7.0 the Vision for the Future

Please note that this section does not include any illustrations or photographs of what we intend the village centre to look like – the design element for the village is entirely left to the developer to formulise. But thought should be given to the following suggestions and only those developers who include as many of the points as possible will be considered for short-listing.

7.1 The Vision

The vision is to have a safe, high quality development sensitively integrated and combined with the existing retail, residential, social and business facilities both in terms of services and aesthetics in order to achieve a vibrant centre with a human face. It will enhance the experience for everyone who uses any of the facilities, existing or proposed, by having an attractive and welcoming ambience intrinsically present in the buildings, street scene and spaces.

7.2 Requirements

- ✓ To have a minimum of 20 retail units within the village centre
- ✓ To retain as many of the current businesses as possible
- ✓ To ensure that the library and community facilities are retained within the village centre
- ✓ To replant and replace any lost green/open space that is lost or moved
- ✓ To provide at least as many car parking places within walking distance of significant buildings
- ✓ To ensure that at least 50% of any new housing built is affordable
- ✓ To provide a better arrangement of car parking within walking distance of significant buildings
- ✓ To supply a multi functional open space

7.3 Phasing and protection of existing users

The proposals should allow for trading and other activities to continue during construction and arrangements should be made to allow existing businesses and residents to continue trading and living in the new development. The developer should prepare an economic strategy for all existing businesses and residents. It is essential that Post Office facilities are available within the development.

Consultation exercises must take place separately with businesses. It is important that they be consulted throughout the whole process both before and during the build stage of the project. Whilst we realise that rent increases are likely we would not expect to lose our current independent retailers for high street brands who can afford large rents.

8.0 Planning Policy

Any development proposals will need to take account of the relevant planning policy framework, which is set by national policy and Castle Morpeth Borough Council's Local Plan 2007 – 2012.

8.1 Regional Perspective

The aim of the Northern Way (Government policy document) is to reduce regional and economic disparities between the north and south. To achieve this, eight City Regions have been identified as drivers of economic growth, one of which is Tyne and Wear city region. Although definitive boundaries for the City Region have not been identified, there is a strong relationship between Ponteland and Tyneside, particularly Newcastle. Ponteland has therefore an important role to play within the Tyne and Wear City Region.

Quality of place is highlighted as a key factor which will contribute to the City Region's economic competitiveness in terms of attracting and retaining people and businesses. In terms of creating a 'quality of place' the following objectives are being promoted:

- ✓ Sustainable development in semi-rural areas is also important to the City Region, providing key centres of housing and local employment
- ✓ Commitment to design excellence at all levels. Whether this is the design of new housing development, public realm schemes, or at major employment locations, a clear process will be adopted to ensure quality and innovation in design remains a hallmark of the City Region.
- ✓ Quality and diversity in the day and night economies are central to achieving creative places
- ✓ The potential of life within the City Region must remain a key asset

8.2 The Local Plan

Local Plan policies seek to protect and where appropriate enhance Ponteland Village, through a combination of policies that encourage high quality new development, with others seeking to maintain the existing character of the area. A range of policies in relation to landscape corridors (C4), new housing development (H15), protection of Industrial Estates (E7) & (PE1) and retention of A1 uses within retail centres (PS1) aim to ensure that the primary function of the designated area remains.

CMBC seeks to ensure that a co-ordinated approach is taken to the enhancement (PS9) and redevelopment of shopping centres (PS10) so that the overall viability of shopping centres within the District is strengthened, and any such development reinforces their role within the local economy.

Due to the high house prices within the area, any new housing development should include low cost housing. The interim policy in relation to affordable housing is under review.

A copy of the Local Plan is available from CMBC. Please call 01670 535 000.

8.3 Design Guidance

A key Government objective is to encourage good design and layout for all new developments. This is supported by other guidance documents including;

1. By design in the Planning System: Towards better practice, CABE & DETR, May 2000
2. Places, Streets and Movement – A Companions Guide to Design Bulletin 32 Residential Roads and Footpaths, DETR, September 1998
3. Our Towns and Cities: The Future – Delivering an Urban Renaissance, DETR, November 2000; and
4. Sustainable Urban Extensions: Planning Through Design – A Collaborative Approach to Developing Sustainable Town Extensions Through Enquiry by Design, The Princes Foundation, September 2000.

Using the guidelines, the design of the new development will seek a quality environment that:

The building style should be in scale to the existing development with finishes relating to and compatible with the better aspects of the existing buildings. The appearance should promote a ‘village’ image with a human face which does not overpower the user and will have a timeless image rather than reflecting passing fashion.

9.0 The Process

The following includes a preliminary timeline for developers to work to:

1. Initial submission for interest to Tender by March 2008
2. Complete Design Brief sent to chosen developers by June 2008
3. Design & Plans submitted for consideration by September 2008
4. Designs considered and short listed by November 2008
5. Chosen designs to public consultation by December 2008