

THEME 01

RECOGNISING THE UNIQUE LANDSCAPE SETTING AND MAKING IT ACCESSIBLE TO ALL



Given that the landscape setting is one of Halifax's unique characteristics, no strategy for the future of the town would be complete without addressing this issue directly. Much of the effort should be directed at the preservation or enhancement of what exists now, allied to better public access. The value of the landscape asset - social, physical and economic - should become more central to all future consideration of the development and improvement of the town. The landscape strategy set out in this Strategic Development Framework does not represent detailed proposals but seeks to set out the main considerations arising from the Urban Renaissance process.

PROPOSITION

The unique setting of Halifax should be exploited and enhanced to make the green landscape a fundamental part of life in the town and an attraction for residents and visitors alike.

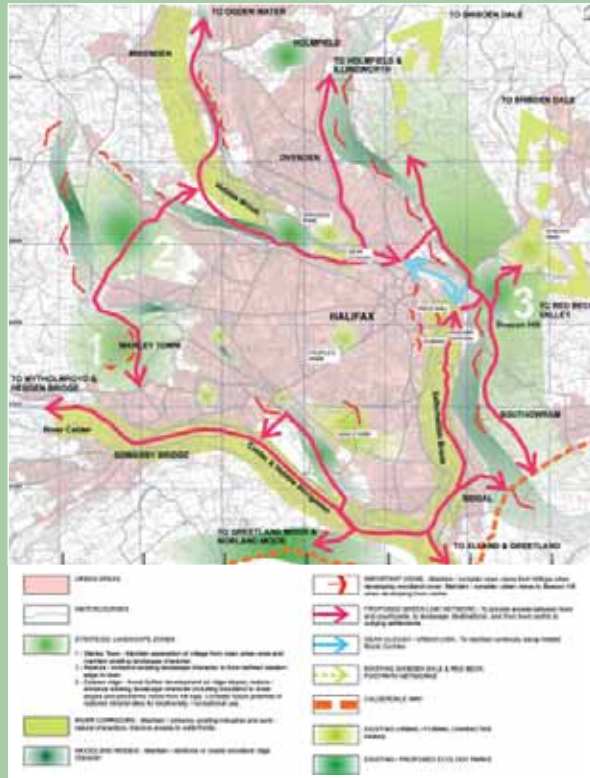
HALIFAX URBAN RENAISSANCE
COMBINED LANDSCAPE STRATEGY

The future landscape strategy comes under six headings:

- I: PROTECT AND ENHANCE THE UNIQUE LANDSCAPE SETTING
- II: CREATE LINKS FROM THE TOWN TO SURROUNDING COUNTRYSIDE, VILLAGES AND OUTLYING PARKS
- III: CREATE NEW COUNTRY PARKS AND ECOLOGY PARKS AS LOCAL AND SUSTAINABLE DESTINATIONS
- IV: CREATE NEW GREEN/PUBLIC SPACES NEAR OR IN THE TOWN CENTRE
- V: BRING OUT THE SPECIAL HISTORY AND CHARACTER OF HALIFAX
- VI: RE-OPEN THE CALDER & HEBBLE NAVIGATION

The landscape strategy for the town is shown opposite. The strategy combines:

- The wider landscape setting of Halifax
- The landscape of the town centre



KEY OBJECTIVES ARE AS FOLLOWS:



BEACON HILL

- Avoid small or large scale built or infrastructure development on the western face of the hill, which might damage the appearance of the hill in views from the town as a 'green wall'.
- Consider ways to reduce the prominence of existing infrastructure elements on the hill or consider relocation to less sensitive locations (eg. the telecommunications mast on the hill top)
- Avoid new lighting impacts on the western face of the hill, to maintain a dark backdrop in night-time views from the town.
- Restrict the spread of the town centre to the foot of the hill.
- Retain the heavily wooded character of the lower hill slopes and open character of the hill top.
- Maintain views of the hill from key streets and spaces in the town centre.
- Maintain panoramic views over the town from the top of the hill.



CALDER VALLEY

- Maintain the integrity of existing woodland belts along the northern valley side.
- Increase woodland cover to mitigate the impact of existing large scale built development on the northern valley side.
- Consider carefully the impact of future development on the northern valley side and encourage provision of a strong wooded setting where development is permitted.
- Protect and enhance the setting of Wainhouse Tower.



WESTERN TOWN EDGE

- Preserve the character of the attractive landscape pocket around Warley Town, and maintain separation of built form between Warley Town and nearby urban areas.
- Strengthen landscape character along the western edge of the town and clarify the urban/countryside boundary.
- Avoid development which would break the skyline in views from open Pennine countryside to the west of the town.
- Maintain panoramic views to open Pennine countryside from the ridge at Tower Hill/ Sentry Edge.



NORTHERN HEBBLE VALLEY

- Avoid further spread of industrial uses along the valley floor.
 - Maintain the integrity of the valley as a green finger and wildlife corridor.
- Potential exists to enhance and reinforce the town's landscape setting through sympathetic planting measures:
- The reinforcement and linking together of valley side woodlands; along the Beacon Hill and Pepper Hill flanks east of the town, as far south as the Calder Valley; along the northern flank of the Calder Valley and along the Hebble Valley north of the town.
 - The establishment of new wooded slopes beyond the ridge at the western edge of the town.
 - Development of a more diverse landscape character on the western edge of the town, including mosaics of limited woodland cover, scrub, heather and acid grassland.

The 'doorstep' landscape of Halifax is a valuable asset but it could be made more accessible and usable. Although an extensive public rights of way network exists around the town, routes out from the urban area to the countryside are not always clear or continuous. Potential also exists to provide wider links to interconnect Halifax with surrounding villages, outlying parks (eg. Shibden Park) and other potential ecology/country parks.

Beacon Hill, although clearly visible from the town centre, is not readily accessible. At first glance it appears cut off from the town by the railway, roads and a combination of derelict and redeveloping areas in the valley bottom. The historic Magna Via route does provide access from the town centre up the hill but its start point is hard to find.

Key countryside links and access issues identified by the Town Team include:

- A strong west-east link from the town centre, Piece Hall and Eureka! across the valley bottom, up Beacon Hill and on to Shibden Park, using the Magna Via. The link should be an integral component of the valley bottom re-development.
- Such an west-east link may be supported by a cable car or funicular railway from the town centre to the crest of Beacon Hill, increasing accessibility and creating a visitor attraction. The design of such a system could be the subject of an international competition (see Theme 02 Repopulating the Valley Bottom).
- A strong north-south link along the Hebble and Salterhebble Valleys, north and east of the town, extending as far as Ogden Water Country Park in the north and the Calder Valley in the south. This link should include connections through the town centre and the valley bottom between the railway station and Dean Clough.
- Secondary connections could provide links to outlying villages and between the Hebble Valley and Calder Valley via the western edge of Halifax, allowing alternative routes to open countryside for people living on the western side of the town.
- Routes should also connect to the Calderdale Way.
- Panoramic ridge-top routes could be developed across the western edges of Beacon Hill and Pepper Hill.
- Routes should cater for pedestrians and cyclists (where topography allows).

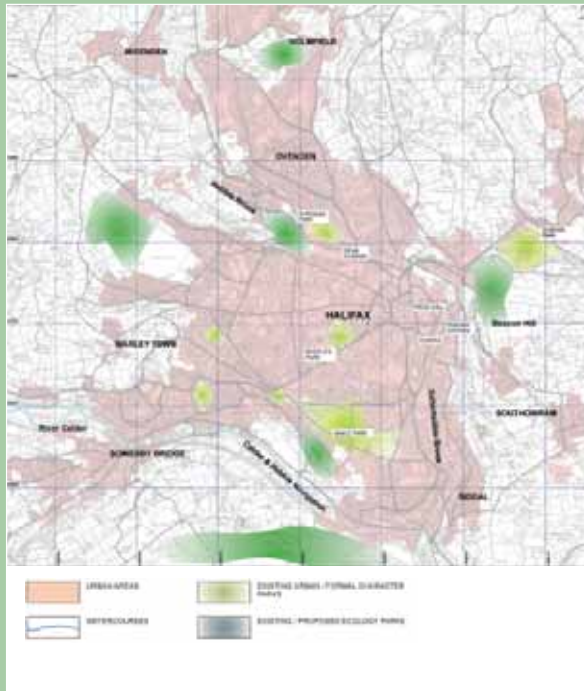


A CABLE CAR FOR BEACON HILL?

“A WEST-EAST LINK MAY BE SUPPORTED BY A CABLE CAR OR FUNICULAR RAILWAY FROM THE TOWN CENTRE TO THE CREST OF BEACON HILL”

III: CREATE NEW COUNTRY PARKS & ECOLOGY PARKS AS LOCAL & SUSTAINABLE DESTINATIONS

HALIFAX URBAN RENAISSANCE LANDSCAPE DESTINATIONS



Use of the 'doorstep' landscape may be increased through the provision of informal 'ecology' parks close to the town edges. These parks would provide a 'countryside experience' complementing the more structured experience provided by the network of urban parks within the town. A series of evenly distributed sites would give easy access from most areas of the town and would provide a local, sustainable alternative to driving to more distant country parks such as Ogden Water and would increase ecological diversity in the district. Calderdale Council have already begun this process, by identifying and obtaining funds for a number of suitable sites. It is important to recognise and incorporate this initiative within the renaissance landscape strategy.

IV: CREATE NEW GREEN/PUBLIC SPACES NEAR OR IN THE TOWN CENTRE



THEMES FOR A EUREKA PARK



A key ambition of the Town Team has been the creation of new green/public spaces within or close to the town centre. A number of sites have been identified which could provide a chain of new public spaces linked to the town trails:

The Piece Hall courtyard - a place for urban events, retaining a "hard" character but being animated by fountains/water features when not in active use. An illustration has been prepared to show what fountains may look like within the court. In principle however the central space should be free of clutter so as to not detract from the beauty of the inside of the Piece Hall.

Square Chapel/St John the Baptist Parish Church - could be used to develop a series of peaceful, green spaces, complementing surrounding historic architecture and providing an alternative to busier public spaces.

George Square - could become a new urban square and setting for Somerset House, predominantly hard in character and providing a lively focus to night-time Halifax.

Broad Street - new greenspace could be incorporated in redevelopment proposals as public rooftop gardens (possibly an enclosed 'winter garden', to counter the Pennine weather), celebrating the '3-D' nature and value of land in Halifax and providing spectacular views over the town to Beacon Hill.

The combination of Piece Hall Courtyard, church gardens and Eureka car park would reinforce the sense of a west-east link through the town to Beacon Hill and Shibden Park and would also act as a connection between the town centre and emerging valley bottom settlement.

The reopened section of the Hebble Brook could tie into this series of spaces or, alternatively, create a new linear waterside park through the new valley bottom settlement (see over).



GEORGE SQUARE, "GREENED" FOR THE TRADITIONS FESTIVAL

PIECE HALL COURTYARD FOUNTAIN



V: BRING OUT THE SPECIAL HISTORY AND CHARACTER OF HALIFAX

A series of projects are proposed that will improve the quality and diversity of the environment, increase local pride and identity and reinforce visitor pulling power and regional status of the town.

HEBBLE BROOK



Hebble Brook has played a major role in the industrial history of the town, yet now lies buried in culvert or in deep channels between Dean Clough and the railway station. The Town Team identified an opportunity to reopen, widen and provide access to parts of the brook where it passes through the valley bottom redevelopment area. This would allow the brook to be used as an attractive linear feature within the development and would create a strong link between upstream and downstream parts of the brook which are currently severed. Where the brook passes beneath the existing leisure centre car park its route could be identified in an abstract sense on the surface, by lines of willow and alder trees and kinetic sculpture or lighting powered by the changing force of water within the brook.

At Dean Clough and areas south of the railway station, the brook lies in a stone sett channel, with weirs, splittier islands and vertical walls. In these locations it is important to preserve the industrial character of the brook, as a reminder of its importance in the early history of the town and a contrast to more naturalistic sections of the brook.

Below the high level A58 road bridges, and the older North Bridge, the brook sits in deep channel, the lowest point within a three dimensional and vertical environment. In this location the brook takes on the character of a 'Stygian Pool', a dark underworld, contrasting with the elevated, panoramic expanse of Beacon Hill. Measures could be used along this part of the brook to reinforce the damp, wet, 'hidden' atmosphere, with lush native planting and mosses, highlighting the landscape contrasts to be found in Halifax.

A58 CORRIDOR



The A58 corridor encircles the northern and western sides of the town centre. The high level bridges over the Hebble Brook are impressive engineering structures.

However, the landscape which runs through the road corridor is less impressive, taking on an anonymous appearance which could be found on almost any road scheme in the country.

Potential exists to replace this scheme with something more dramatic and unique, which announces the presence of Halifax in the surprise view of the town from New Bank on the eastern approach. A well designed scheme would take on two further important roles:

- **Environmental mitigation of the road environment as it passes close to the town centre and residential areas.**
- **Definition of the western and northern edges and approaches to the town centre.**



THE DRAWING LEFT SHOWS HOW THE ROAD CORRIDOR MIGHT LOOK USING BOLD TREE AVENUES WITHIN ROUNDABOUT ISLANDS AND THE POCKETS OF GREENSPACE WHICH LINE THE SIDES OF THE ROAD.

PENNINE ROOF MEADOWS

The dramatic topographical setting of Halifax gives rise to a special Pennine characteristic - numerous views from ridges, hills, buildings, roads and footpaths over the town and its roofscape. In many cases roofscape views provide an added layer of interest but some larger, modern buildings detract from the scene, particularly within the Hebble valley upstream and downstream of Dean Clough.

Over the longer term, potential exists to consider the use of 'green roofs', on replacement buildings, as a further means of bringing out the special qualities of Halifax. Given time, a concentration of roofs treated in this manner could be achieved within the Hebble valley, creating a 'quilt' of flowering rooftop meadows.

In addition to creating an attractive visual effect this approach could increase biodiversity value, improve building insulation and add a unique feature to the towns urban fabric.



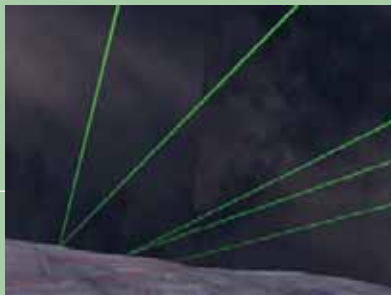
THE PENNINE STAR

A series of lasers are proposed to cast a horizontal web of light over the town, in response to its setting, nestled amongst higher surrounding hills. Lines of light would 'stitch' the sky above the town, reflecting its relationship with the cloth weaving industry. The Piece Hall once acted as a focus to the flow of cloth into the town, from domestic producers in the outlying districts, and out again to market. Light beams stretching back and forth across the town would reflect this movement process, in addition to the more literal interpretation as threads of wool being stretched across a loom.

From enclosed areas within the town abstract strips of light would be visible in the night-time sky. In more open areas a pattern of diverging lines would emerge from Beacon Hill.

From Beacon Hill itself the viewer would be able to move above and below the layer of light. Through optical illusion a 'star' shape would emerge at some locations on Beacon Hill, creating a surprise effect and reinforcing the idea of the historic link which once radiated between Halifax and its surrounding district.

See Theme 07 'Showing off the Town: Towards a Lighting Strategy' for more images of the Pennine Star.



VI: RE-OPEN THE CALDER & HEBBLE NAVIGATION

Potential to reopen the Halifax Branch of the Calder & Hebble Navigation appears to be compromised by loss of the former canal basin below the current Nestlé factory. This means that if the canal were to be reopened it would have to stop well short of the town centre which would compromise its value as a feature of, and regeneration tool for, the town centre area. Research has also shown that the number of locks required to overcome the elevational change between Sowerby Bridge and the town centre further inhibits the potential for navigation by boat.

It has however been shown that there is much potential to improve the Hebble Valley south of the Nestlé Factory, not just in terms of access as a trail for walking and cycling but also for certain forms of development.

The area already has small businesses (some in poor condition) some attractive mill buildings as well as some housing, but development has happened (and is still being built) in an ad-hoc pattern that neither respects its special location nor the existing Hebble Trail (the Hebble Trail has in places been forced around the backs of development, etc). A balance should be created between improving access to the Hebble Valley as a recreation area and promoting certain forms of development.

The latter should be of a mixed use nature, in other words not just housing but also scope for small businesses which together would create a more interesting and diverse valley. The development should happen gradually and must respect the natural setting of the valley and the Hebble Trail itself.

An additional approach to improving the valley would be to utilise remaining parts of the canal as an ecological feature, enriching the Hebble Trail and proposed wider north/south link along the Hebble/Salterhebble Valley to the Calder Valley. Infilled sections of the canal could be excavated out to create a chain of damp wetlands, marshes and ponds. These habitats would add to the biodiversity of the existing Hebble/Salterhebble corridor, adding to the existing combined character of semi-natural habitats and industrial heritage.





THE HEBBLE BROOK