

# THEME 02

## RE-POPULATING THE VALLEY BOTTOM



Halifax shares important aspects of its character with a seaside town, but instead of the sea it has Beacon Hill. This is a marvellous and unique asset, historically associated with a picturesque view of the town from above, a singular asset obvious to the town's fathers, but one that needs to be rediscovered today. The view to and from Beacon Hill is important in every change to the town that has to be considered. But the close relationship of the hill to the town centre limits the catchment population for whom the town centre and its facilities are within walking distance.

### PROPOSITION

Vacant land in the valley bottom should be redeveloped as a housing-dominated, mixed-use, community close to the town centre within a new landscape setting focused on the Hebble Brook.

HOUSING AT THE  
POINT, BRISTOL



“THE CREATION OF A  
NEW LIVING COMMUNITY  
IN THE VALLEY BOTTOM,  
A NEW TOWN CENTRE  
NEIGHBOURHOOD”

The residents of Halifax abandoned the valley bottom many years ago. The commercial life of the town migrated up the gentler slope opposite Beacon Hill, taking the resident population with it. The valley floor became dominated by ever larger factories and mills, by gas works and the railway: the Hebble Brook, foundation of Halifax's industrial power, was hidden in a culvert through the town and lost both to view and to sound. The parish church, for 800 years the heart of the community, has been left in isolation on the town's eastern edge, surrounded by poorly utilised land and buildings.

In this post-industrial period, factories are being replaced by retail sheds that challenge the primacy of the established town centre; but there is a great opportunity to repopulate the valley floor and to reintegrate the parish church, and to rediscover the river as the heart of a new community. It is the recommendation of the town team that priority be given to the creation of a new living community in the valley bottom, a new town centre neighbourhood. There is sufficient land and buildings to create a community of 300 to 400 homes in a mixed use scheme that has small-scale employment, local shops and services and high quality open space as integral parts of it.

This should be a high quality development, built at relatively high densities with apartments and town houses. The location is close to the town centre and close to the bus and railway station for those that may work out of town, and it is capable of supporting a sizeable neighbourhood population. The core of the community will be created on land adjoining the Parish Church and on the former gasworks site.

There are current plans for more 'bulky-goods' retail development for much of this land but this is not an appropriate aspiration for the valley - the real assets of the church, the river and Beacon Hill will not be celebrated by more large box buildings and open car parks.



THE CORE OF THE VALLEY BOTTOM



COIN STREET  
APARTMENTS,  
LONDON



- NEW DEVELOPMENT
  - EXISTING RESIDENTIAL BUILDINGS
  - EXISTING DEVELOPMENT
  - HEALTH SERVICES BUILDING
  - LIBRARY
  - SMALL GREEN LAWN AREA
  - PERFORMANCE AREA
  - PERFORMANCE PRACTICE AREA
  - EXISTING PERFORMANCE AREA
  - SPECIAL SUPPORT TREATMENT FOR FIELD HALL BUILDING
- N

Instead the Hebble Brook should be opened up as the centrepiece of a linear park through the area to create a unifying element at the heart of the new community. Around this a new network of streets should be created, lined with new residential buildings as a series of perimeter blocks. These will create new links across and along the valley. The most important locations will be alongside and around the Parish Church, which must be given a new setting. In part this will be by way of new buildings, in part by encouraging conversion of existing buildings. The town's war memorial will become the focus of a new public square.

At the south end of the new community, the car park to Eureka! should be reconfigured to create a deck of new development level with the approach to the station above a layer of parking. The focus at this end will be the base station of a cable car to the top of Beacon Hill (see Theme 06).

At the north end the Royal Mail sorting office is an inappropriate use for such a valuable town centre location. It should be relocated and redeveloped to bring the new neighbourhood into the heart of the town centre, to create populated routes to and from the town centre and to present a much better frontage to Winding Road, an important approach to the town centre.

Most important will be the quality of connections to the town centre. Where each of the east west streets meet Winding Road/Square Road, the junctions will be redesigned to give much greater priority to pedestrians and to change the character and culture of the road, shifting the focus away from through traffic to the needs of the town centre and its adjoining communities.

At the south end the approach to the station will be improved and a new connection across Square Road will link to new development on the site of Square Chapel and a new eastern entrance to the Piece Hall. This will be a major connection from the station and Eureka! to the town centre, linking the cable car and the Piece Hall along the way.



AERIAL VIEW OF THE DEVELOPMENT STRUCTURE