

# THEME 06

## MAKING THE TOWN CENTRE A GOOD PLACE TO WALK

### PROPOSITION

The accessibility of the town centre to traffic and to public transport is excellent. But in a lot of places this level of accessibility has been won at the cost of a poor quality walking environment, both within and on the approaches to the town centre. Given that all the life of a town centre revolves around pedestrian activity, irrespective of the travel mode by which people arrive there, this balance is wrong and needs to be adjusted.



So far the recommendations in the Strategic Development Framework deal primarily with the fringes of the town centre and the need to improve connections into the town centre from these fringe locations. But what of the town centre itself?

The main issue here is the need to make it a good place for pedestrians, for people to walk to and through the town centre. In all the Town Team meetings the point has been made that the balance between pedestrians and traffic in the town centre as a whole is wrong and that walking is inhibited as a result. Given the 30 year horizon of the Strategic Development Framework, the one certainty is that transport will be very different then to what we have now, but the needs of pedestrians will remain paramount in the town centre. This Strategic Development Framework does not seek to resolve traffic and transport issues in detail; rather it sets priorities for detailed investigations in the future.



PEDESTRIAN PRIORITY,  
COPENHAGEN

In Corn Market and Southgate, the town has established a quality benchmark for pedestrian spaces in the town centre; but this is limited in extent. Outside of the pedestrian-only areas of Corn Market/Southgate and Woolshops the perception is that there is traffic everywhere and pedestrians are subservient to its needs, despite the recent re-configuration of the street network to discourage through movements. Even in traffic restricted streets such as Market Street and Commercial Street, the environment is dominated by buses that use these routes to pass through the heart of the town, in large numbers and on very frequent schedules.

This balance needs to be changed so that the walking environment is given precedence and the needs of pedestrians are paramount. This will have knock-on effects on the perception of accessibility but these can be overcome.

There is substantial potential to change this balance, but some of the solutions may be radical - relocating the bus station and diverting bus routes for example. The issue needs a concerted study in its own right, but the outcome must be the establishment of much greater pedestrian priority in such streets as:

- Winding Road/Smithy Street/ Charles Street/Square Road
- Market Street,
- Albion Street,
- Westgate,
- Cow Green
- Commercial Street,
- George Street,
- Broad Street/Northgate



PEDESTRIAN STREET, COPENHAGEN

## WINDING ROAD/SMITHY STREET/ CHARLES STREET/SQUARE ROAD



This is a key part of the main road system in the town centre connecting the residential areas south of the town to and through the town centre. However, the road carries a regular flow of traffic that dominates the space.

Because there is no great concentration of development and activity east of this road, there has not been any great requirement to make better connections although the Station and Eureka! are made remote from the town centre by this road, and there is little interrelated activity.

But the overall Strategic Development Framework envisages that this situation will change markedly in the near future and the environment of the road must change.

The diagram is an initial investigation of potential that proposes reducing the carriageway width along much of the road corridor to increase the area available to pedestrians.

Allied to this is traffic light control of more of the main junctions with clear capacity for pedestrian crossing to create direct links between the town centre and the area east of the road, and redevelopment of many of the adjoining sites (particularly on the eastern side between Dispensary Walk and Well Lane and on the Mail Sorting Office site - on the western side) to present active building frontages to the road.

## HEART OF THE SHOPPING AREA

Market Street can be relieved of through traffic by redirecting existing bus services to maintain accessibility while relieving Halifax's main shopping street of its intrusive impacts. This would be part of a wider network strategy for public transport across the town centre and the pedestrianisation of more of the public realm in the town centre. The impact in terms of the quality of the public realm and the interconnectivity of the Borough Market, Corn Market/Southgate and the Piece Hall would be very significant.

Opportunities should also be considered in appropriate locations for more weather protection. There is a need for places where people can enjoy sunny days, but also to ensure that they can walk around comfortably on wet days. A feasibility study has been undertaken for the covering of parts of Westgate which will not only provide relief for shoppers from rain but will also improve the links and pedestrian environment between 2 jewels of the town centre: the Borough Market and the Piece Hall.



## BROAD STREET

Broad Street has far more capacity than is required by the traffic that actually uses it. The proposals in Section 8 reveal how important connections across the road are to the integration of new development on the Broad Street car park and of Dean Clough beyond. However, at the moment pedestrians wishing to cross are corralled in pens in the centre of a daunting dual carriageway, or made to use circuitous routes to reach existing crossing points.

Initial proposals are to reduce the road to a single carriageway and to create a new system of linked, at-grade and direct pedestrian crossings by a comprehensive redesign of the existing traffic light controlled junctions. Some of the space won back from traffic should be used to enhance the size and shape of the Broad Street development site.



## COW GREEN



Cow Green is the greatest single barrier to linking the living and working communities of West Central Halifax and the town centre. A simple programme of changes could involve the redesign of at-grade pedestrian crossing facilities to create direct connections for pedestrians, and changed priorities to discourage extraneous traffic from entering the town centre to the east of this cordon.

In George Street, the potential exists to permanently transform this space by moving bus services to Silver Street and by a comprehensive programme of re-landscaping in concert with the restoration of Somerset House.