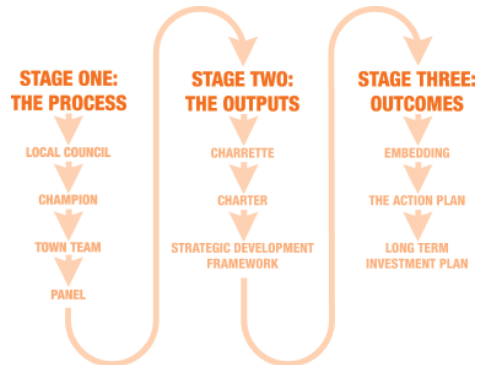


## 6: THE PROCESS

The process had three distinct phases:

- Phase 1 explored ideas and issues in the town centre
- Phase 2 concentrated on analysis and development of proposals
- Phase 3 generated proposals and priorities



## PHASE 1: IDEAS AND ISSUES

Thirty two local people joined the David Lock Associates team in the Square Chapel on 30th October 2003 to begin to shape the Renaissance Strategic Development Framework for Halifax. The focus of activity on that night was for groups to consider what worked, what did not and how should the situation change under five main themes - Quality of the Built Environment, Communication, Movement, Activity and Street-life, and Cultivating the Town.

Each theme revealed strong consensus about what needed to be done. The Built Environment has wonderful but underplayed assets; there are few green spaces and few trees in the town centre; and the points of arrival into the town centre - the gateways - are universally poor. In terms of Communication the Halifax Courier was seen as a great ally of the process and a good tool for widening support for change; illumination should be a central part of any strategy to show off what the town has; innovative means of involving citizens in the life of the town should be employed; and the overriding need is to market the town in terms of its assets. Discussion about Activity/Street-life focused on: the problem of the drinking culture that dominates the evening economy of the town centre; the road network that separates the town centre

from the rest of the town; and the need to create a more balanced 24 hour town centre.

On Movement the main concerns were that: the movement pattern in the town centre operates for the benefit of cars, not pedestrians; buses cause congestion in the heart of the town centre; barriers created by roads around the town centre need to be overcome; the Piece Hall needs to be better integrated; roads need to be transformed to become strong urban streets; in summary the theme requires that the ring road is broken down, through traffic should be removed and the connections between attractions should be improved.

Cultivating the Town requires tender loving care to be applied to those parts with the potential to become great: the Piece Hall requires a new and long term use for the future; Somerset House needs to be rediscovered and the setting of Rawson Street and George Square revitalised; pubs dominate the evening economy whereas upmarket bars and restaurants are wanted; there are not enough anchor retail stores and those that do exist are too dispersed; and in conclusion a realisation that the town's assets are not well enough connected to the rest of the town centre and to each other.



On 14th November 2003, more than 30 members of the Town Team met in the Parish Church Hall to continue the debate. The evening started with some personal perspectives on the town centre and its role in the life of the town and then the examination of the town centre continued under five new headings - Illuminating the Town, Controlling Traffic, Improving Connections between Destinations, Opportunities to Live in the Town, Improving Public Spaces - that started to move the discussion from issues and problems to ideas and solutions. This built on the themes developed in the first workshop, and reinforced all of the issues defined then that now form part of the Renaissance Strategic Development Framework.

## PHASE 2: ANALYSIS AND DEVELOPMENT OF PROPOSALS

The third Town Team workshop with more than 40 participants took place on 27th November 2003 which sought to move the debate towards proposals and projects. The analysis captures the themes of the first two workshops in a series of plans of the town.



The A58 Route and Broad Street/Cow Green/Horton Street form considerable barriers to pedestrian movement. All the gateway points have a poor environment.



Within this collar there is a very strong and legible street pattern that has remained essentially unchanged for many years. However the radial routes to West Central Halifax are disconnected.



The town has high quality assets ("Crocks of Gold") - Eurekal, The Piece Hall, the Parish Church, the Borough Market, The Town Hall, Somerset House, Dean Clough and People's Park. There are also some important opportunities for new development - Eurekal car park, Broad Street car park, Horton Street car parks, and buildings in Hopwood Lane.



A unique feature of Halifax is the green setting of Beacon Hill and adjoining hills that are so prevalent in views out from the town centre to the east.



Although key streets in the town centre have been relieved of general traffic, they remain dominated by buses and the pedestrian environment suffers as a result. The density of accessibility for bus users is extraordinarily high.



Taking buses out of Market Street, King Edward Street, Albion Street and Westgate would still offer very good public transport accessibility but would release a whole network of streets within the town centre for the enjoyment of people walking.



Bringing all these together offers a diagrammatic representation of the potential of the town centre for change in the future. Overlaid on this are desire lines that connect the destinations together, that define priorities for improvement to the public realm.



A structure for the town emerged that looked at the quality of the key streets in relation to the key assets and suggested "Strings of Pearls" as a metaphor for the connection of these two and through the town centre.

In addition the Town team considered the appearance of the town centre from the classic view of Beacon Hill, and in particular the view at night.



The view from Beacon Hill perfectly encompasses the town centre and all of its key features, with the Piece Hall at its core.



There is the potential for colour to become a feature of both existing and new buildings in the town so that they are celebrated in the "view from the hill".



Further across the valley such treatments can be used to draw the eye away from the more recent development in the valley bottom that is less sympathetic to the setting of the town centre.



The strength of such an approach could be emphasised at night when the main structures could be illuminated to create a dynamic night time view of the town centre.

The Halifax Courier took this theme further by developing a panorama of the town showing the potential of a new scheme of floodlighting in the view from Beacon Hill.



The analysis and development of proposals in this stage were consolidated at a public "drop-in workshop" at the Piece Hall on 9th January 2003 at which the centre piece was a draft model and series of computer based town trails that allowed people to navigate themselves along a series of routes in the town that replicated the "strings-of-pearls". These prompted significant debate about the quality of the public realm and the opportunities to bring about improvements.



IMAGES FROM TOWN TRAIL ONE: STATION/EUREKA TO THE TOWN CENTRE



IMAGES FROM TOWN TRAIL TWO: TOWN CENTRE TO DEAN CLOUGH

These Town Trails are available to view on the internet at

[www.halifaxcouriertoday.co.uk](http://www.halifaxcouriertoday.co.uk)

The outputs of Phase 2 formed the briefing for Phase 3 where the bones of the overall Strategic Development Framework would be put in place.

## PHASE 3: PROPOSALS AND PRIORITIES

There were two main parts to Phase 3 of the process:

- EcoCity Workshop - the construction of a model of the ideal town by primary school pupils (26th-31st January, 2003)
- A weekend design workshop for the Town Team (31st January-2nd February, 2003)

### THE ECO-CITY PROJECT

The EcoCity project was crucial in introducing the views of young people - future citizens - into the renaissance process. 41 children from three Halifax schools were presented with a three-dimensional model base measuring 6m by 4m on which the key buildings - Halifax's 'crops of gold' - were located, but little else. Then they had a week to build their ideal 'new' Halifax having first spent some time learning about how towns are created. When complete the children provided conducted tours for their teachers, parents and Town Team members to explain their concepts and the plan.

The project created a fantastic representation of their ideal Halifax, a truly urban place, and provided a useful brief for Town Team members embarking on their own design workshop. The highlights were:

- Children feel excluded from the town centre because of accessibility, the lack of children oriented facilities (such as a cinema) and the evening culture, and their parents are reluctant to let them go there.
- Much reduced traffic would provide a more people friendly environment
- The connections between the town centre and the rest of the town need to be improved
- Beacon Hill is a fantastic vantage point and the view from there must be considered
- Water was important to the origins of the town and must be central to our thinking today
- Buildings should be orientated to make best use of sunshine
- New buildings in the town should have a real urban feel.



## THE WEEKEND DESIGN WORKSHOP

The weekend design workshop brought together the Town Team with experts to consider in detail the vision and Strategic Development Framework for Halifax over the next 25 years, with the benefit of a brief drawn up by the children. The workshop considered the need for action at three levels, from the truly strategic to the local and detailed. The three groups were:

### 1 The Strategic Landscape Setting of the Town (led by Steve Warren)

### 2 The Town Centre (led by David Lock)

### 3 The Piece Hall and its Immediate Surroundings (led by Will Alsop)

The process involved Town Team members rotating between the three groups and required the consideration of each theme in three parts:

- Problems
- Proposals
- Priorities

The conclusions are summarised below:



### 1 THE STRATEGIC LANDSCAPE SETTING OF THE TOWN

Underpinning all of the ideas and proposals was the acknowledgement that the landscape surrounding the town centre is currently undervalued.

Objectives and proposals included the following:

**Control future spread of town to avoid damaging unique landscape setting**  
Particularly on the valley sides and ridges.

**Create links from the town to surrounding countryside to make it more accessible/usable**

New east-west walking and cycling routes across the valley to take in Beacon Hill and Shibden Park with north-south routes along the valley.

**Create new green/public space near or in the town centre**

Green space in the Eureka car park or in the valley of the Hebble Brook along with new hard spaces in the heart of the town centre - Piece Hall, Broad Street, George Street

**Create new country parks/ecology parks as local destinations as an alternative to having to drive to more distant facilities (eg Ogden Water)**

While Ogden Water is a beautiful place which people should still visit, the choice should be there for people to be able to walk to parks around the edges of Halifax - ie, make the most of locations near to the town - the former tip in northern Hebble Valley and Quarried areas at Swales Moor

**Projects to bring out the distinctiveness of Halifax**

- Laser lights as part of a new illumination scheme for the town, rediscovering the Hebble Brook, transforming the A58 corridor.

## 2 THE TOWN CENTRE

Discussion around the Town Centre focused on the identified Town Trails - the valley bottom to the Town Centre, Town Centre to Dean Clough, Town Centre to West Central Halifax and Town Centre to the Shay Stadium. It was agreed that the focus of attention should not just be on these routes but their wider environments as well.

Halifax has four major 'jewels' - Piece Hall, Eureka!, Dean Clough and the fabric of the town centre itself, and the imperative was to maximise connections between and access to these jewels.



### Valley Bottom to Town Centre

- Putting the Piece Hall on the route with a 4th entrance from Square Road.
- Maintaining Winding Road/Square Road as a key traffic route but slowing traffic down and creating places to cross.
- Redeveloping the valley bottom as a high density, high quality residential neighbourhood focused on a Hebble Brook park, and thereby putting the Piece Hall in the centre of the urban area, not the edge.
- Creating a cable car to the top of Beacon Hill to connect to open country, particularly Shibden Hall, and to allow appreciation of the classic view. This should be enhanced by a viewing area and building at the top serving as a restaurant / café.

### Town Centre to Dean Clough

- Dean Clough is perceived to be a long way from the town centre - the development of the Broad Street site will make the distance shorter and the development brief must focus on the quality of the public realm.
- Broad Street and Northgate can be downgraded as traffic routes and more space allocated to development and to pedestrians.
- A long term view must be taken of the surrounding development opportunities.
- Market Street should have far less bus usage, with buses possibly being diverted along Square Road/Winding Road, and the bus station should be relocated near the train station, and the existing site redeveloped.

### Town Centre to West Central Halifax

- The main aim must be to better integrate these two areas to maximise the choice of routes for people.
- The route from People's Park via Hopwood Lane can be improved but much of the Asian community would not feel comfortable using this route because of the pub/club culture that exists around Bull Green - the termination of Hopwood Lane. The Muslim religion do not support this kind of activity and in general Muslims do not frequent the town centre in the evening even though they live nearby.
- Gibbet Street should be extended to enter the town centre at Crown Street via new surface crossings, so that there is a pedestrian route that avoids the Bull Green area.
- Development could occupy the gaps alongside the bridge over Burdock Way.
- George Street should become a celebrated public space and a setting for Somers House. Rawson Street similarly should receive pedestrian treatment.
- There is an urgent need to discuss these issues with Highways so as to agree a way forward.

### Town Centre to the Shay

Since the Shay is not currently a major seven day a week destination this particular route did not require any immediate attention.

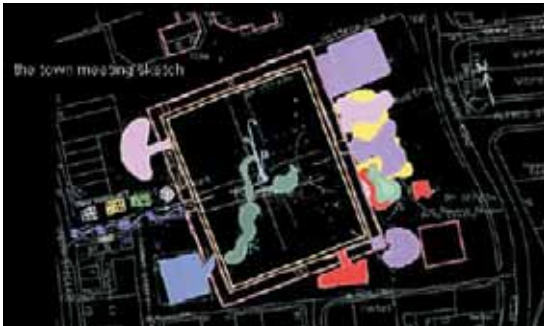


### 3 THE PIECE HALL AND ITS IMMEDIATE SURROUNDINGS

This group's deliberations created a brief for future design work.

- The Piece Hall must become a place of international, national and regional as well as importantly local significance, reflecting local history and cultures and containing activities that the people of Halifax want.
- The Piece Hall must become a part of the street network of the town—a town square not a cul-de-sac. To achieve this a 4th gate on the eastern side should be built.
- Proposals must be such that they serve to draw people into the Piece Hall. The primary interventions should involve adding 'rooms' or activities to the outside of the Piece Hall that are accessed from the inside of the Piece Hall. Activities could include a cinema, residential uses, facilities connecting the Square Chapel to the corner of the Piece Hall, a youth facility.
- The building formerly housing the Industrial Museum is not particularly special, yet this type of museum could be highly beneficial and should be relocated elsewhere in the town centre.
- Cultural/creative/craft industries and learning spaces should be introduced into the Piece Hall, and these uses should be beneficial to the local economy and to the community.
- The centre should be an uncomplicated, simple space just to relax.
- It is important to keep the connection with the sky and Beacon Hill.
- Trees should not be planted inside the Piece Hall as these would obstruct views of the beautiful architecture.
- The existing Market should be relocated to occur just outside the present western gate of the Piece Hall in lower Westgate.
- Regarding the space inside the Piece Hall, the sun should dictate what happens where but water could be a pleasant feature.

A SKETCH FROM WILL ALSOP'S WORKSHOP



These considerations form the basis of the main recommendations of the overall Renaissance Strategic Development Framework, and are the foundation of the proposed projects.