

Walsall Town Centre Area Action Plan 'A Place For Everyone' Issues and Options

Consultation Summary Document

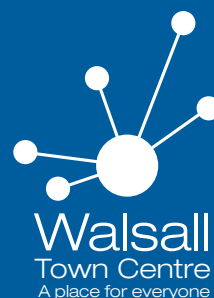


Planning 2026: Have Your Say

Consultation Period: April 22nd – June 3rd 2013



Walsall Council



What is the purpose of the Town Centre Area Action Plan – Consultation Summary Document?

The Walsall Town Centre Area Action Plan will focus on Walsall Town Centre and will allocate sites for new shops, leisure facilities, and offices, as well as setting out strategies for improvement.

This Consultation Summary document provides a summary of the main Issues and Options report and enables you to respond to key questions. The key questions in this summary document use the same numbering as the main report and are shown in bold. You should view the main report for full details and full list of questions if you have a specific interest.

Where does the requirement to produce the Area Action Plan come from?

The Council adopted the Black Country Core Strategy in 2011. This sets out the vision for the future of Walsall up to 2026 and includes targets for matters such as the amount of land that has to be provided for new offices and retail space.

The flow diagram below sets out the process we intend to follow to adopt the Walsall Town Centre Area Action Plan:



How have we identified sites?

Many of the sites have been identified from our own evidence, but some have also been submitted by land owners and developers in response to a 'Call for Sites' in 2011. The sites and land uses proposed in the 'Call for Sites' may not necessarily be ones that we consider to be suitable and will be considered further at the next 'Preferred Options' stage.

If you would like this information in another language or format please contact Planning Policy on Phone: 01922 658020, Textphone: 01922 654000 or Email: ldf@walsall.gov.uk

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1. Introduction

What is Walsall Town Centre AAP?

The town centre is the heart of Walsall, and as such it needs protecting, enhancing and promoting. The Council is working on this Area Action Plan (AAP) to provide a clear direction for the centre that the Council, businesses, investors, stakeholders and communities can all work towards together.

The AAP is a long term plan that will allocate sites within the town centre for the development of new shops, leisure opportunities and offices, as well as setting out policies and proposals for other aspects including transportation and the environment. The report looks at what we think are the five key themes for the town centre, focusing on Shopping, Business, Leisure, Living, and Investment, as well as transportation. Once the AAP is adopted it will be the basis on which planning decisions within the town centre are made.

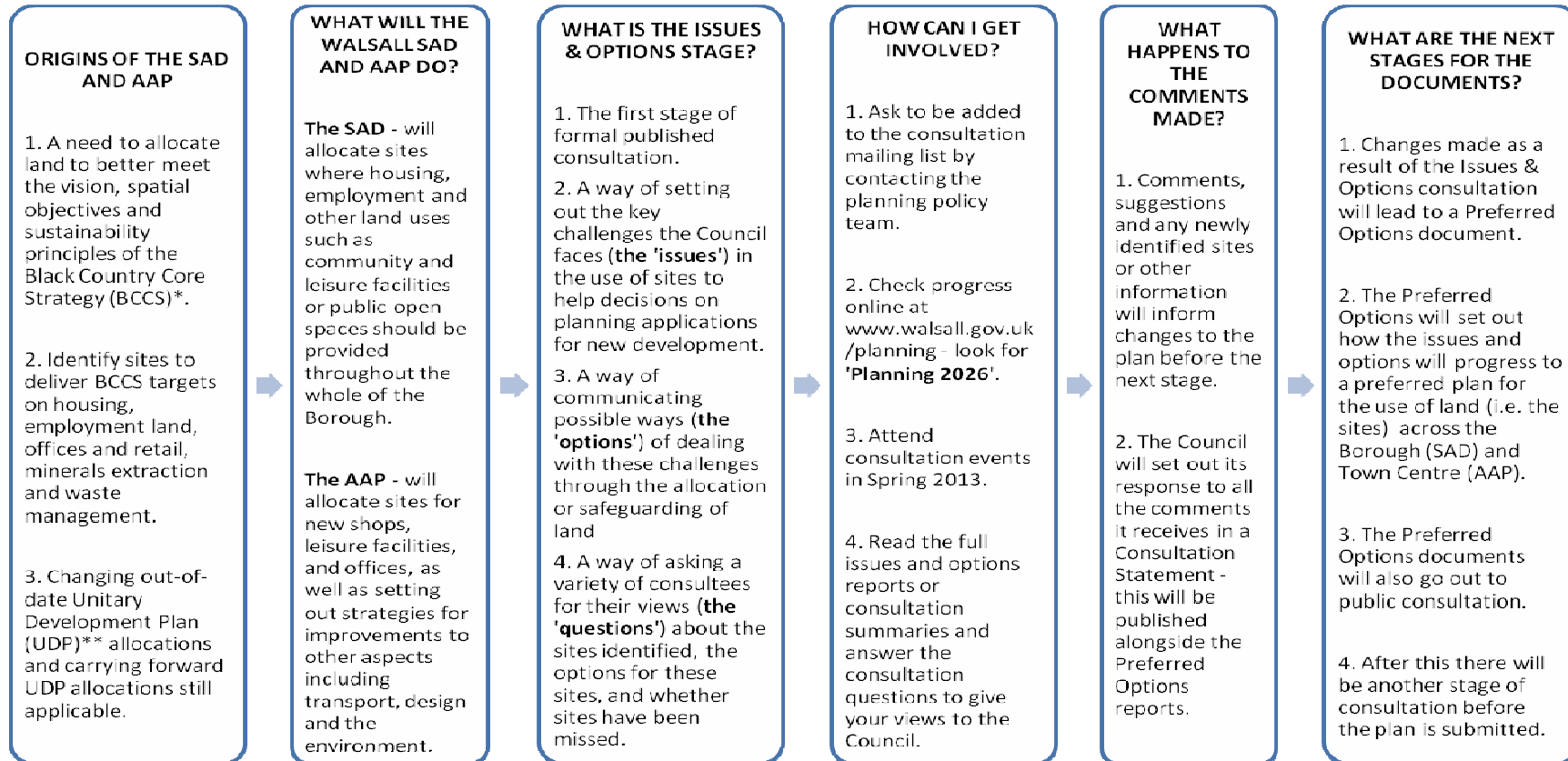
The AAP is being produced in parallel with Walsall Site Allocation Document (SAD) which covers the whole of the Borough. The flow diagram on the following page sets out **why** we are producing the SAD and the AAP, **what** they are, and **how** you can get involved.

What is the Issues and Options Stage?

As the first stage in preparing the AAP, we have drafted a report that reviews the current health of the town centre and starts to identify possible proposals for the future. This “Issues and Options” Report presents the most important issues affecting the town centre and sets out some options for its future development.

The Issues and Options Report is a consultation document which poses questions which are intended to get you thinking about how you consider Walsall town centre should develop and what approach should be taken to the different areas within the centre.

Walsall Town Centre AAP - Why, What, and How?



* The Black Country Core Strategy (BCCS) is sub-regional planning policy covering the four Black Country Local Authorities (Dudley, Sandwell, Walsall and Wolverhampton) and adopted in February 2011. New planning policy for Walsall Council must be consistent with what the BCCS says.

** The Unitary Development Plan (UDP) is Walsall Council's current land-use plan for the Borough and was adopted in 2005. Parts of this will be replaced by the SAD and AAP.

How to “Have your Say”

This Consultation Summary provides a summary of the issues which are discussed in more detail in the full report. This is why the question numbers don't always follow on from each other – as we are using this document to focus on the really crucial questions that we want your help with. You can comment on either document, but generally speaking the main document contains more background information, technical details, site specific information and in-depth questions. A questionnaire for you to complete has been produced and is available on our website at www.walsall.gov.uk/planning_2026. You can answer as many or as few questions as you like. Where possible please provide details and evidence to support your answers.

**Consultation is running from the
22nd April to the 3rd June.**

2. What are we trying to achieve?

The BCCS sets ambitious targets that by 2026 Walsall will have delivered:

- 85,000 square metres of additional comparison¹ retail floorspace (approximately the size of 12 football pitches)
- 220,000 square metres of additional office floorspace (approximately the size of 30 football pitches)
- 450 new residential dwellings.

The AAP needs to explore how this can be delivered in the town centre.

Do we need to change the Town Centre Boundary?

The AAP will need to define the area to which policies in the plan will apply while recognising links to the surrounding area. The extent of Walsall Town Centre is designated by the 'saved' policies of Walsall Unitary Development Plan (UDP) and the BCCS. The Town Centre Boundary also includes the Primary Shopping Area, the area in which retail development is focussed.

Figure 1 below shows the boundary used in the BCCS for the strategic centre boundary and is based on the UDP Town Centre boundary. It would therefore be a logical starting point for the AAP to be based on this boundary. However, there could also be a case for expanding the boundary to include important surrounding areas, or to shrink the boundary to make the centre more compact.

¹ Comparison retail is the provision of items not obtained on a frequent basis. These include clothing, footwear and household goods.

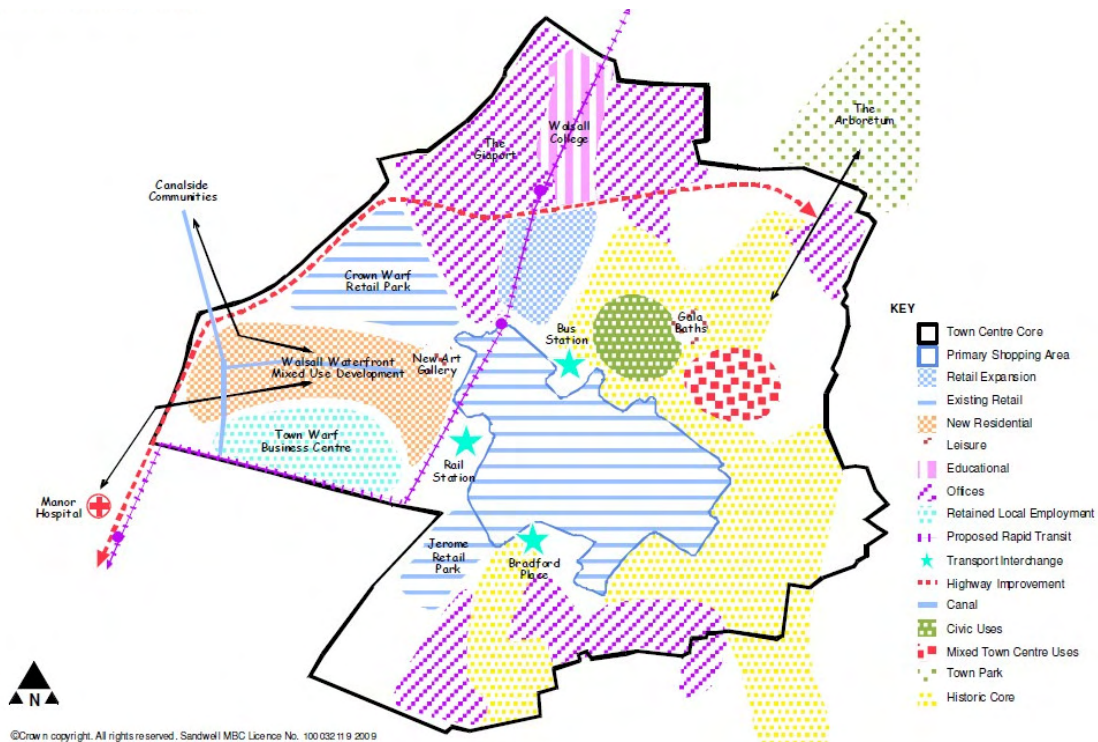


Figure 1: BCCS Town Centre Map

<p>Boundary Option 1: Retain the current extent of the Town Centre Boundary</p>	<p>Implications: The AAP continues to cover the extent of the Town Centre as defined in the UDP and BCCS</p>
<p>Boundary Option 2: Increase the current extent of the Town Centre Boundary</p>	<p>Implications: Increasing the area the AAP covers may make it harder to deliver transformational change across the whole of the town centre</p>
<p>Boundary Option 3: Decrease the current extent of the Town Centre Boundary</p>	<p>Implications: AAP policies will be concentrated on a smaller area, but it may be harder to achieve floorspace targets as set out in the BCCS</p>

TCB:Q1 Which of the above options do you agree with most, and why?
TCB:Q2 If you think the boundary should be changed please explain to us how and provide any evidence you have to support the need for this change?

3. What is the vision for Walsall Town Centre?

The Black Country Core Strategy (BCCS) has the following vision for Walsall town centre and we want to know if this fits your vision:

The Vision: By 2026 Walsall Strategic Centre will have been regenerated as a sub-regional focus for the local economy and the community. It will provide its catchment area with an attractive choice of comparison shopping and leisure, entertainment and cultural facilities, as well as supporting a thriving office market. Walsall will also support modern town centre living. The centre will bring all of these activities together in a vibrant, safe, attractive and accessible environment that combines local heritage with modern design.

AV:Q1 Do you agree with the vision? What is your vision for the Town Centre?

The vision has been broken down into ten objectives which can be seen in **Section 3.2** of the full document. Below is a shortened version of the 10 objectives of the AAP.

AAP Objectives

1. Establish and allocate a series of high quality, ambitious and deliverable proposals creating a thriving and prosperous centre,
2. Enhance and maximise Walsall's competitiveness for investment,
3. Increase the choice, quality and diversity of the town centre retail offer,
4. Diversify and strengthen the economic base and deliver a strong office market,
5. Strengthen the current cultural offer through increasing the mix of uses within the town centre, such as a cinema, performance venues and community facilities complimented by restaurants, cafes and bars,
6. Support businesses to increase employment opportunities, skills and aspirations,
7. Improve accessibility to and within the centre through the provision of integrated transport and enhanced cycling and pedestrian links,

8. Protect areas and buildings of historical importance while delivering high quality sustainable design,

9. Promote the sustainability of the centre by delivering environmental improvements that will deliver a range of benefits,

10. Transform the experience and perception of Walsall town centre for those who shop, work, visit, invest and live in Walsall.

AV:Q2 Do you agree with the AAP objectives? If you disagree, why?

AV:Q3 Are there any other objectives that should be considered as part of the AAP?



4. A Place for Shopping

Competition from other centres and out-of-centre retailing means Walsall town centre is in poor health, with high vacancy levels and low footfall. The town centre needs to attract new investment to provide a quality retail offer in order to maintain its role as a strategic centre, compete with other town centres and attract more people, whilst protecting Park Street at the heart of the town. We believe that this can be done through the following priorities:

- Allocating deliverable sites to increase retail floorspace, in order to attract high end retailers and improve the number and variety of shops provided
- Proactively marketing the town centre and its businesses to address negative perceptions, increase footfall and raise our profile to compete with neighbouring retail centres
- Encouraging investment through refurbishments and making better use of existing units to reduce the number of void properties
- Building on the heritage of the market and developing its trade in order to strengthen the overall shopping offer.

S:Q1 What do you think of the current shopping experience in the town centre? What can be done to improve the experience?

S:Q2 How much impact does the variety of shops available in Walsall have on the attractiveness on the town centre as a place for shopping?

S:Q3 Should the AAP explore issues around the number of some uses in the town centre such as hot food take-away outlets or betting shops?

Where should Major New Retail Development be located?

Retail investment should in the first instance always be focussed in the Primary Shopping Area in order to protect the heart of the centre. **Figure 2** shows the extent of the Primary Shopping Area. **Section 4.4** of the main document looks at the Primary Shopping Area in more detail, including setting out some options for changing its boundary.

S:Q5 Do you think the primary shopping area needs to be changed? If so how?

The AAP will need to allocate the key locations for future retail development and we have several options as to where to allocate for major new investment.

<p>Location of New Retail Option 1: Park Street and St Matthew's Quarter are allocated for retail development opportunities</p>	<p>Implications: Shopping investment remains focussed and the heart of the centre is maintained.</p>
<p>Location of New Retail Option 2: Once opportunities have been maximised for Park Street and St Matthew's Quarter, development opportunities elsewhere in the town centre will be allocated for retail development</p>	<p>Implications: A phased approach to the location of major new retail investment would ensure the heart of the centre is protected whilst providing opportunities to meet the comparison retail targets. Investment may take longer to deliver as Park Street and St Matthew's Quarter is in need of redevelopment and reconfiguration in order to meet modern retailers' requirements but this approach would ensure a sustainable approach to retail development.</p>
<p>Location of New Retail Option 3: The location of major retail development is uncontrolled through the AAP and the location of key retail is left to the market.</p>	<p>Implications: The Council would have little control over the location of new retail development and the heart of centre would be at risk of further decline as investment is attracted to easier to develop edge of centre locations. A lack of control over the location of retail development would have implications for the delivery of other targets such as office.</p>

S:Q8 Which of the above options do you agree with most?

S:Q9 Do you agree with the sites we have identified as retail development opportunities? Where should major retail development be located, and why? (See Figure 3 for the sites identified).

How do we secure the future of Walsall Market?

The market in Walsall is an important tradition of the town centre and has been in existence since 1219. Although popular and part of the town's heritage, there is a perception that the quality of the stalls provides a negative image of the town centre, and its attractiveness and usage has declined since its peak. To enhance the place value of the town centre and encourage stallholders and customers to stay, a permanent home is required for the market. The Council has commissioned independent work to assess the potential locations for the long term home for the market. This has concluded that the market should be located permanently on The Bridge and in Bradford Street, and this should be accompanied by significant investment in the public realm, the quality of the stalls and supporting infrastructure, the range and quality of produce, and the way in which the market is managed.

<p>Walsall Market Option 1: Pursue the proposed permanent location for the market on The Bridge and in Bradford Street (See location on Figure 2 below)</p>	<p>Implications: This will deliver an improvement in the quality of the market. However the spatial constraints may lead to a reduction in the overall number of market stalls.</p>
<p>Walsall Market Option 2: The Council should reconsider other potential indoor and outdoor locations for the market.</p>	<p>Implications: It is considered that this may lead to further delays and uncertainty about the future of the market.</p>

S:Q10 Which option for the location do you agree with and why?

S:Q12 What improvements or changes are needed to ensure the long term success of Walsall market?

S:Q13 If the market is permanently located around the Bridge, should the public space here which will be used be replaced elsewhere in the town centre?

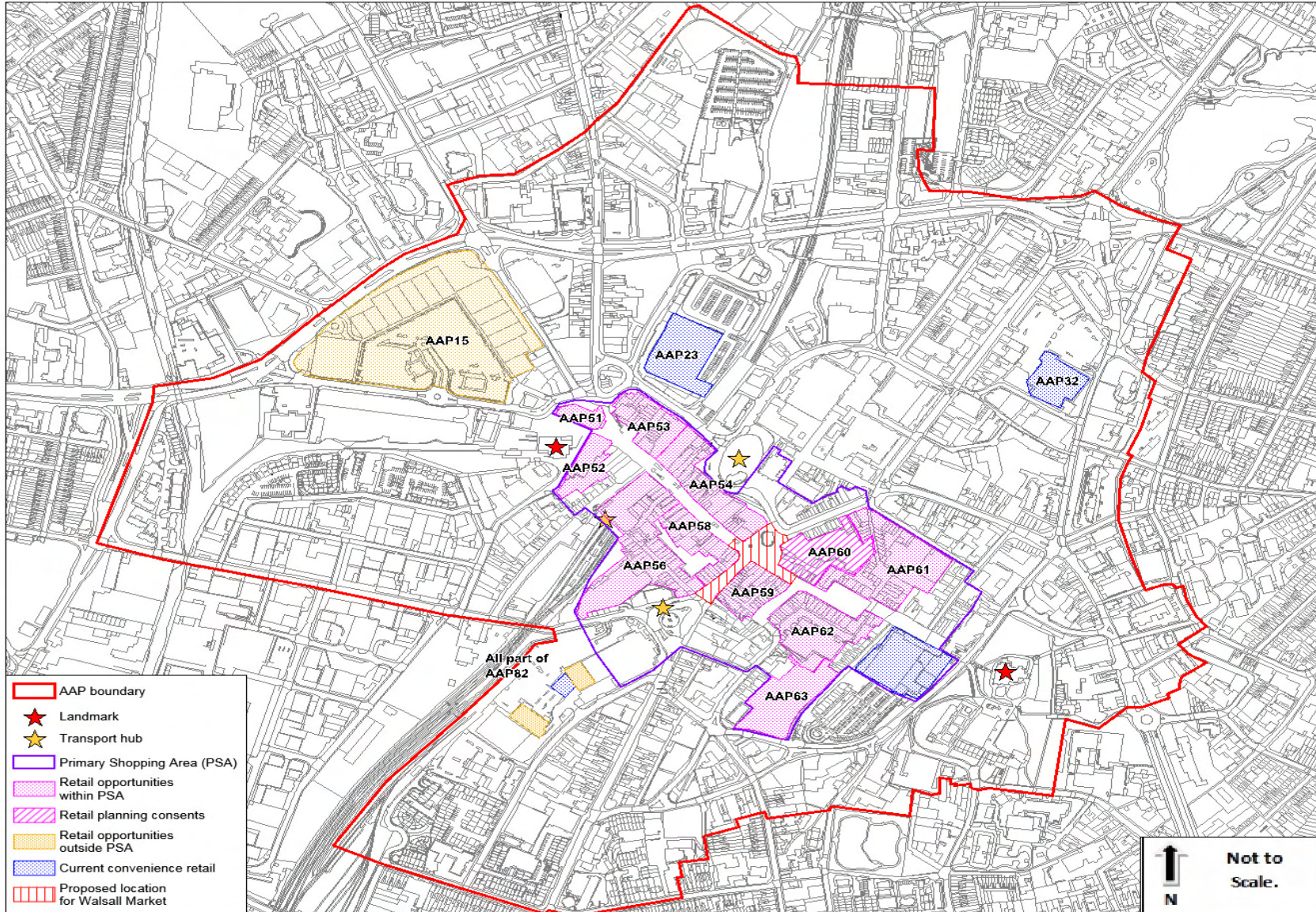


Figure 2: A Place for Shopping



5. A Place for Business

In order to lead the regeneration of the Borough and therefore increase its competitiveness, Walsall town centre needs a thriving and diverse economic base that meets the needs of a 21st century town centre. Whilst protecting and enhancing Walsall's manufacturing sector, there is a need to create more jobs in other sectors and to bring new businesses into the Borough in order to ensure the economy is more resilient to changes in the wider economic environment. We believe that this can be done through these priorities:

- A strong office market is key to a diverse economy as it will attract investment, create employment and increase expenditure in the centre
- The Gigaport needs to provide an attractive, accessible and modern office location in order to attract investment into the Borough

Where should Major New Office Development be located?

The development of a strong office market is crucial for the strength of the centre and will be critical to improving the spending power within the town centre, and act as a catalyst for other developments in the leisure and retail sectors. It also serves a wider role in the economy of the whole Borough.

B:Q1 What type of offices should be delivered?

B:Q2 What can we do to create demand for offices and a strong business environment?

<p>Office Option 1 The Gigaport remains the prime location for office development (See Figure 3)</p>	<p>Implications: Office accommodation is concentrated in an accessible and attractive location, creating a business environment that connects well to the town centre.</p>
<p>Office Option 2 Offices are dispersed around the centre</p>	<p>Implications: Office accommodation is spread across the town centre, missing out on the opportunity to create a business district and therefore making the offer less attractive to investors and businesses.</p>

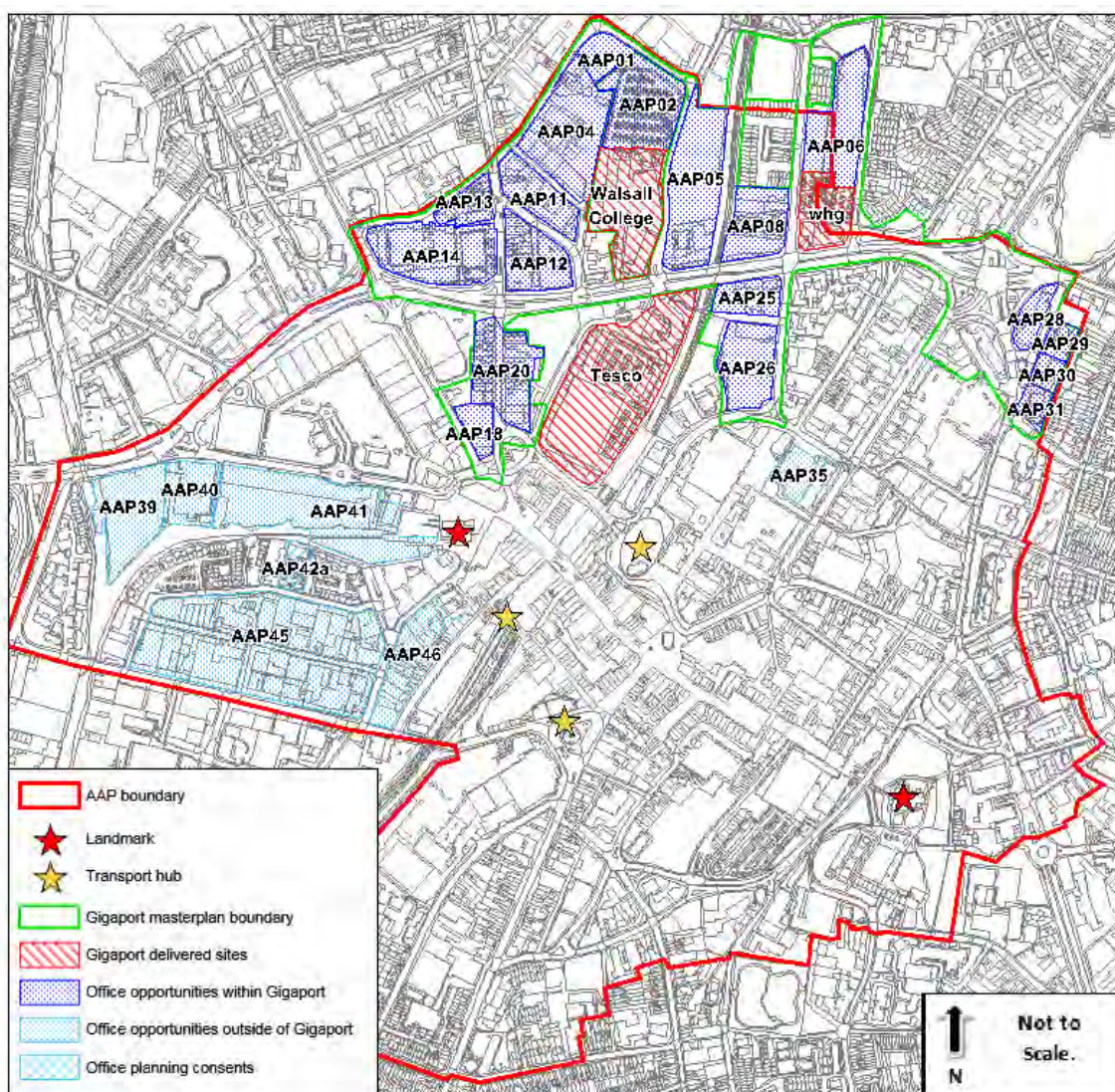


Figure 3: A Place for Business

B:Q3 Which of the above options do you agree with most, and why?

B:Q4 How can we ensure Gigaport links well with the rest of the town centre?

B:Q5 Are there any other locations where we should encourage major new office development within the town centre?

What should happen to the current Industrial Uses?

As shown in **Figure 4**, there are currently some industrial uses within the boundary of the town centre and consideration needs to be given to what, if any, possible changes should be brought forward through the AAP to such uses and areas.

<p>Industrial Uses Option 1: The AAP protects and enhances the current industrial uses within the town centre its boundary</p>	<p>Implications: Employment uses are protected but not necessarily in the right location. This may constrain the businesses, conflict with surrounding uses and stop areas being used for development of town centre uses especially offices.</p>
<p>Industrial Uses Option 2: Alternative uses for the current industrial sites and the relocation of industry are considered once all other development opportunities have been maximised (as in accordance with BCCS Policies)</p>	<p>Implications: This is the current situation and would allow for flexibility. It allows industry to be protected without constraining the growth of the centre and development of centre uses. This may however put pressure on business owners to relocate and would depend on a mechanism for relocating industry being found.</p>
<p>Industrial Uses Option 3: The AAP aims to attract particular industrial sectors, for example those that would utilise the close location to the hospital could be allocated sites for the promotion of Research and Development or other related uses</p>	<p>Implications: This could help with the diversification of the economy within the centre, attract new businesses and bring more expenditure into the centre. A balance would need to be found in promoting industrial sectors and freeing land for other development.</p>

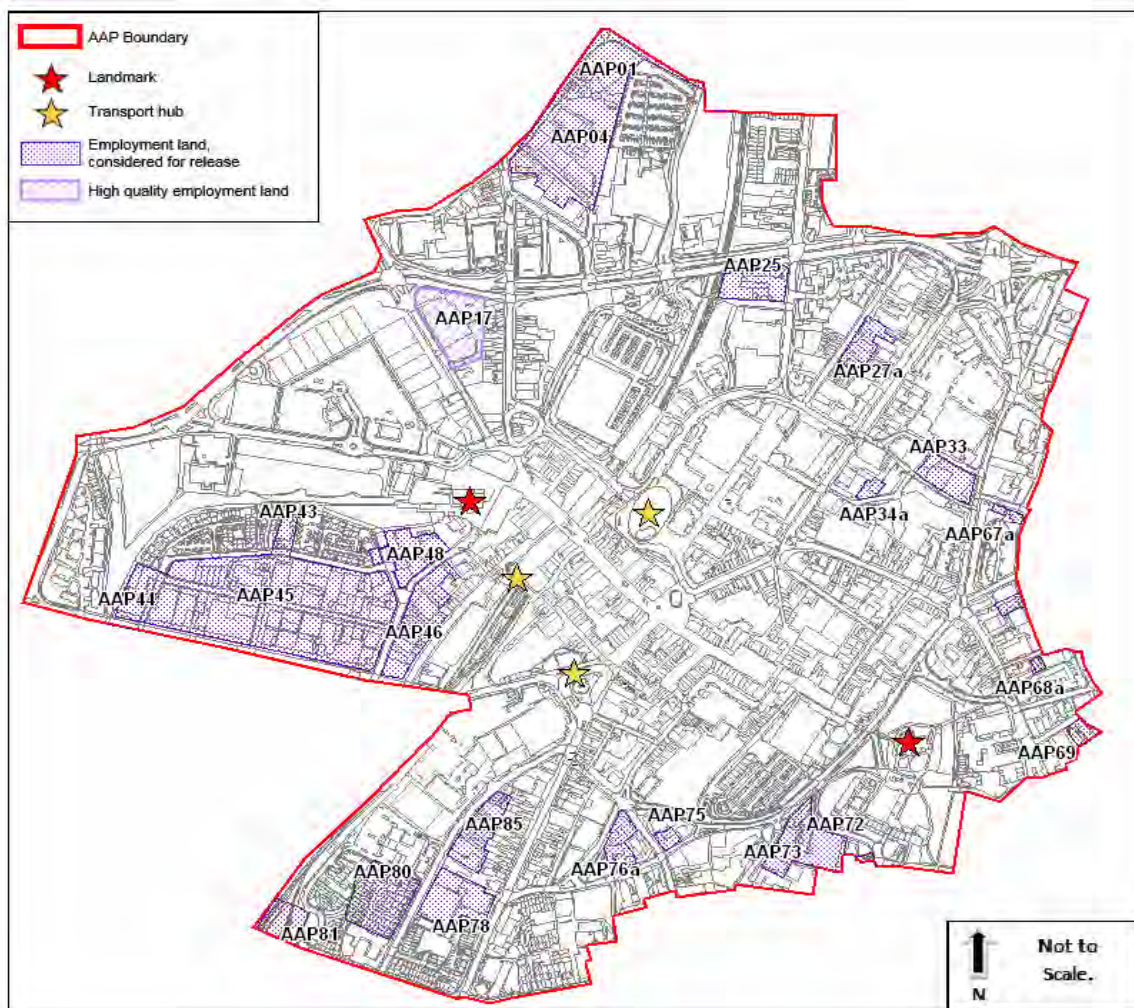


Figure 4: Industrial Uses

B:Q6 Which of the above options do you agree with most, and why?

B:Q7 Do you think the sites shown above on Figure 4 should be allocated for alternative uses than industry? Have you any suggestions for what the sites should be allocated for?

B:Q8 Do you have any suggestions for how we can ensure businesses in the town centre are relocated to more suitable locations?



6. A Place for Leisure

For town centres to be truly attractive as places to live and work they need to offer a full range of housing, retail, work and leisure opportunities. Centres increasingly need to offer a combined shopping and leisure experience, with restaurants, cafés, bars and multiplexes which attract shoppers and encourage longer stays. Leisure priorities are identified as:

- The need for sport and active recreation opportunities, given the low levels of physical activity in the Borough and the consequent health problems
- The Arboretum Restoration is a key development and should be utilised for the maximum benefit of the town centre
- The current lack of diversity of eating and drinking venues

What changes are needed to the current provision of leisure in the centre?

Gala Baths has offered town centre sport and leisure provision since 1961. The age and configuration of the building means that its current income is considerably less than the expenditure required to run it. This financial gap, plus the constraints of the site, would make the refurbishment of Gala Baths to deliver the facilities required in a modern leisure centre prohibitively expensive.

Meaningful improvements to Gala Baths could be made – for example the changing provision could be refurbished and the gym extended. However the capital cost would be high and the level of quality and service delivered would be less than in a rebuild. Substantial investment in the Gala Baths would almost certainly be at the expense of Sport and Leisure development elsewhere in the Borough. We have

some options about how to address the issues around Gala Baths and these have been set out in **Section 6.2** of the main document; however the key questions are included below.

L:Q1 What should happen to Gala Baths if a refurbishment is not possible?

L:Q2 What sort of sport, leisure, and active recreation facilities do you think should be provided in the town centre?

L:Q3 Do you think these facilities should be provided in the Gala Baths? Or can they be provided in other locations? If yes, where?

L:Q4 What factors impact on your decision to use leisure facilities?

L:Q5 Do we need to allocate for protection any of the sport and leisure facilities?

Another key leisure attraction is the Arboretum which, while outside the boundary of the AAP, is just a short walk away from the centre, and developments here will be of such significant value to the town centre that it cannot be overlooked in the AAP.

L:Q6 How do you think the physical links between Walsall town centre and the Arboretum could be improved?

L:Q7 What do you think could be done to encourage more users of the town centre to visit the Arboretum? And vice versa?

What is needed in the centre in terms of cultural and community facilities?

Walsall's current cultural and community attractions consist chiefly of the New Art Gallery, Walsall Museum, the Leather Museum, the Local History Centre, Walsall College, the Town Hall, and the Goldmine building. While these venues are successful in attracting visitors from within and outside the Borough, it is considered that the range of cultural attractions needs to be strengthened and expanded, creating a unique selling point to bring visitors to the town. The Town Centre is also lacking a large performance venue and locations for public events.

There have been discussions around the possibility of combining the Museum with the Leather Museum and Local History Centre in one facility, and a feasibility study has concluded that this could be located on the site of the Leather Museum. Further details can be found in **Section 6.4** of the main document.

L:Q8 Should the Council explore the potential of combining the Museum, Leather Museum and Local History Centre?

L:Q9 Is there an adequate range of cultural and community facilities in the town centre?

L:Q10 Do we need to allocate for protection any of the current facilities (See Figure 5 below)?

L:Q12 What kind of events should be held in the town centre? Where should such events be held?

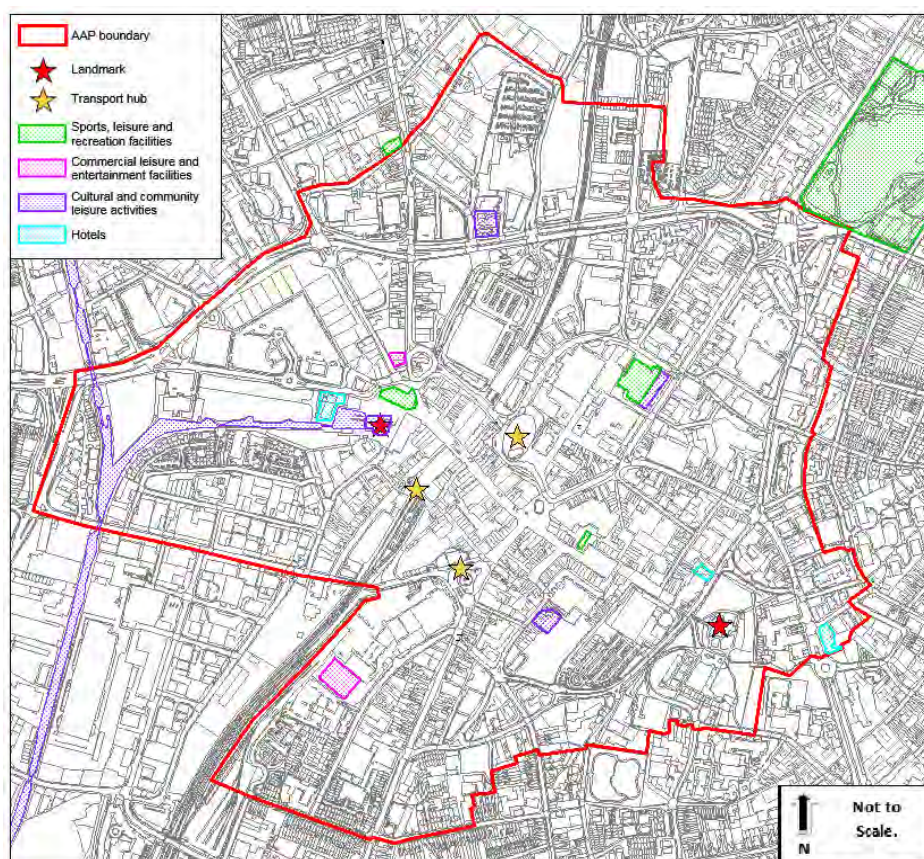


Figure 5: Current Sports, Entertainment, and community leisure facilities, and hotel provision.

How can we make the centre vibrant in the evenings?

The AAP needs to encourage investment in drinking venues and restaurants in order to provide a more diverse experience for users of the town centre. There is a need to attract greater diversity of people into the town centre, and meet the needs of all residents, especially families. The AAP will need to explore how to attract such investment, and the best location for such uses.

<p>Evening Option 1: The AAP identifies particular zones within the town centre in which to focus investment in the evening economy</p>	<p>Implications: This may prove attractive to both customers and investors, and be more manageable from a public safety perspective, whilst not detracting from the amenity of other town centre uses.</p>
<p>Evening Option 2: The location of evening economy establishments is not zoned</p>	<p>Implications: The creation of an attractive and manageable evening quarter could not be guaranteed.</p>

L:Q15 Which of the above options do you agree with most, and why?

L:Q16 What do you think is missing from the eating and drinking offer in Walsall town centre?

L:Q17 Where do you think such outlets should be located?

L:Q19 Is there an adequate range of overnight accommodation in the town centre? Where should additional accommodation be provided?

How do we make the most of the canalside location?

The canal forms an important network for pedestrians to navigate across the town centre, and acts as an important habitat and link to the Borough's industrial heritage. It forms a crucial part of the environmental infrastructure network in Walsall. Further details can be found in **Section 6.7** of the main document.

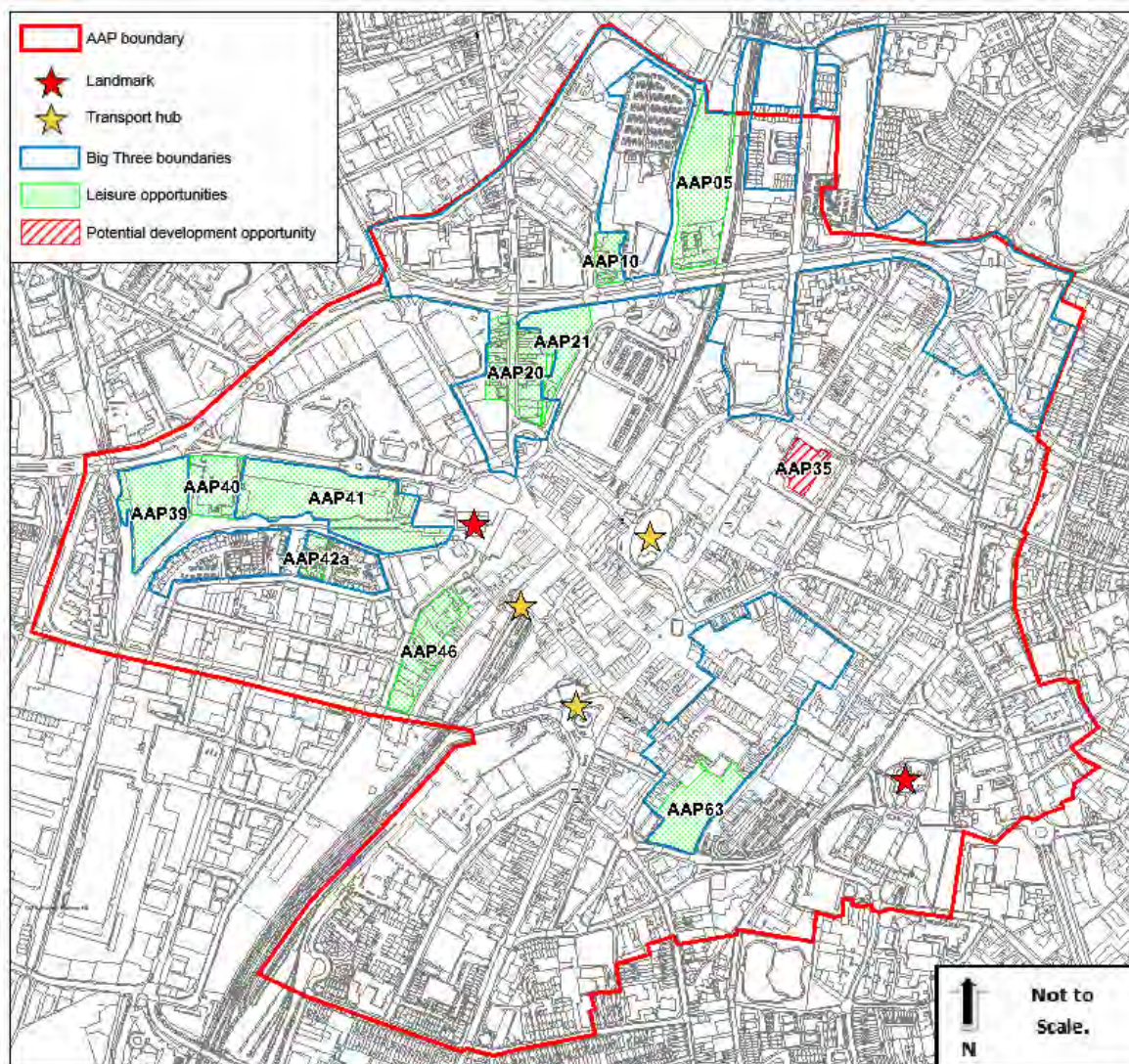
L:Q21 Are any additional canal user facilities required to enhance the canal network? For example, commercial and/or residential moorings.

L:Q22 How should canal-side developments be designed to enhance the canal network?

Where should Major Leisure Development be located?

There is evidence to suggest there is a need for a large commercial leisure development, such as a cinema, to be located in the town centre, and the AAP should identify a location for such a facility. The attraction of a cinema operator as an anchor to a development scheme, with its footfall generation, will attract a number of other end users in the leisure sector. Building upon the success of the New Art Gallery, Waterfront has been promoted as the location for large scale leisure developments, and could accommodate a cinema and supporting bar/restaurant uses. There are, however, other locations where there has been interest in a cinema and as the centre could only support one, careful consideration is needed over the best location for a cinema. **Figure 6** shows potential locations for leisure developments.

<p>Leisure Option 1: The AAP allocates Waterfront as the primary location for large scale leisure developments</p>	<p>Implications: Waterfront is an attractive location for leisure development, and has the potential for such uses.</p>
<p>Leisure Option 2: Leisure development is allocated elsewhere in the town centre only when Waterfront is fully delivered for leisure or other uses</p>	<p>Implications: This would allow greater flexibility, but other town-centre sites may not prove as appealing as Waterfront for leisure investors.</p>
<p>Leisure Option 3: Leisure development is not allocated and the location of such development is left to the Market</p>	<p>Implications: Leisure developments often require a significant footprint and consequently if locations are not assigned, sufficient space may not be found to accommodate developments.</p>



6: A Place for Leisure

L:Q23 Which of the above options do you agree with most, and why?

L:Q24 What kind of commercial leisure facilities would you pay to use in Walsall town centre?

L:Q25 Where do you think is the best location for such facilities, especially the cinema?



7. A Place for Living

Encouraging people to use the town centre is vital to its success and so it is necessary to provide high-quality facilities that meet the needs of the catchment population in an attractive environment. This section looks at the current housing provision within the town centre, education and health facilities, the character and quality of public space in the town, and community and environmental infrastructure. Priorities for this chapter are:

- Protecting current provision and attracting investment in health, education, community facilities and environmental infrastructure
- Protecting the town centre's historic buildings, streets and spaces. To further improve and enrich the quality and image of the Borough, new development must create a positive character with an identity that relates to the specific characteristics of Walsall and its historic context.
- Improving the public realm across the whole of the town centre to provide an environment which is clean, attractive, uncluttered and consistent, and will attract more investors and customers to the town.

Do we need any more housing in the centre?

The town centre has already met the housing target set by the BCCS of at least 450 new dwellings by 2026 and many of these have been delivered alongside the canal, creating a new neighbourhood of high quality residential units. Consideration now needs to be given to the future development of housing in the town centre.

<p>Housing Option 1: The AAP allocates further sites for housing development</p>	<p>Implications: Specific sites are identified for housing development, meaning in these locations this use is preferred over other town centre uses. This could impact on the ability to deliver BCCS floorspace targets for retail and offices. Whilst this would ensure a high quality environmental setting for new housing, it may have an impact on supporting infrastructure.</p>
<p>Housing Option 2: No further land is allocated for housing development, but the use is included as an option for mixed use developments where suitable</p>	<p>Implications: There will be no further solely residential developments within the town centre, further housing will instead be provided as part of mixed use schemes which will make schemes viable and more attractive to investors. However there may be impacts upon residential amenity from neighbouring town centre uses.</p>
<p>Housing Option 3: The AAP encourages the use of flats over shops or other vacant floor space for housing,</p>	<p>Implications: Further housing is provided through the conversion of existing vacant floorspace in the town centre. Possible impacts on infrastructure if delivering housing where none currently exists. However there may be impacts upon residential amenity from neighbouring town centre uses.</p>
<p>Housing Option 4: No further land is allocated through the AAP for housing development</p>	<p>Implications: There will be no further residential developments within the town centre. This may mean that some development opportunities are not delivered for a considerable period of time.</p>

LV:Q1 Which of the above options do you agree with most, and why?

LV:Q2 Are we providing the right types and amounts of housing to reflect demand now and to meet future requirements?

LV:Q3 Do you think any of the sites identified on Figure 7 should be allocated for housing? Have we missed any sites you think should be allocated for housing?

LV:Q6 What is needed to ensure a good environment for residents in and around the town centre?

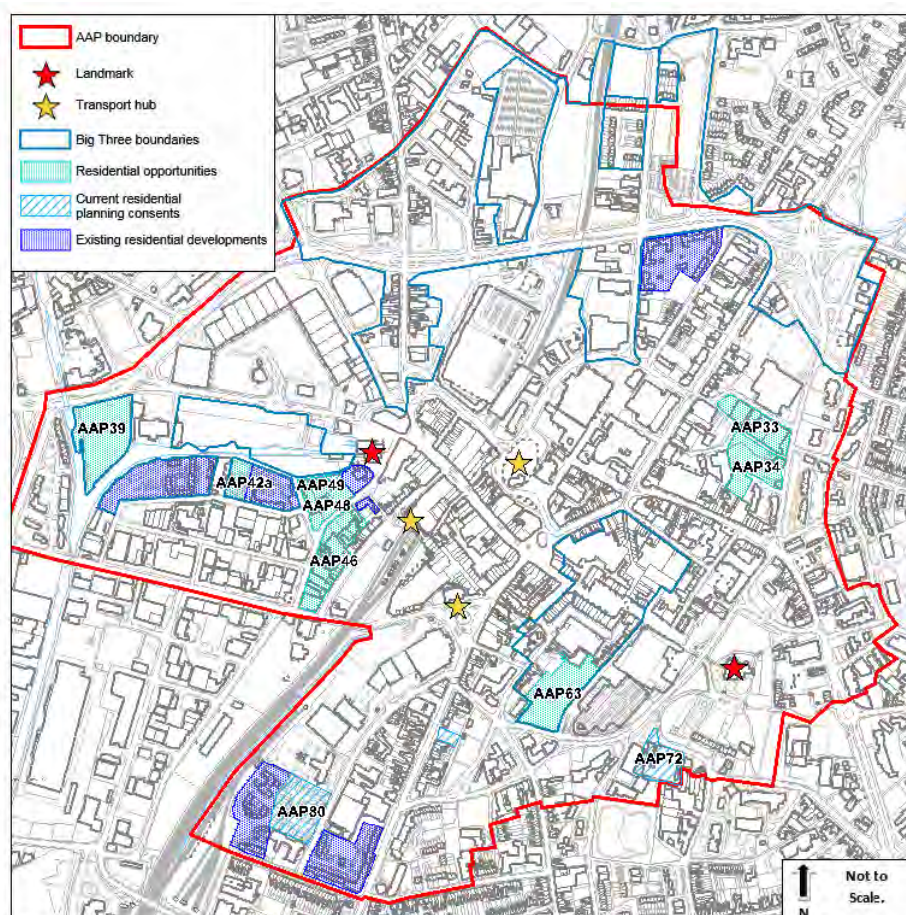


Figure 7: Housing

What Community Facilities are needed?

Community infrastructure provides an important role in the economic and cultural diversity of the town centre, and is important to both town centre residents and those from across the Borough. In this instance, community infrastructure includes civic buildings, libraries, places of worship, banqueting halls/wedding venues, meeting rooms, colleges and schools, doctor's surgeries and health facilities.

LV:Q13 Is there any further need for education and health facilities in the town centre?

LV:Q15 What scale of community development should be located in the town centre and where do we put new facilities?

LV:Q16 Should any of the sites shown on Figure 8 be allocated for protection through the AAP? If yes which and why?

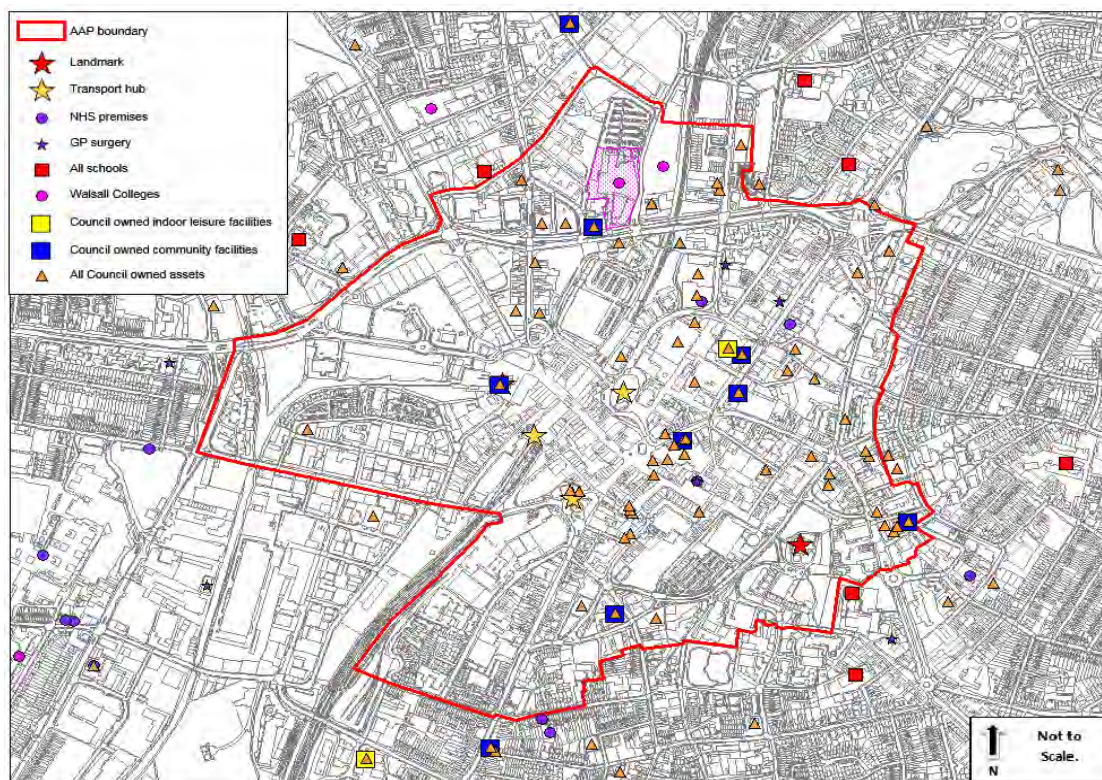


Figure 8: Health and education facilities, leisure and community facilities.

How can the character of the town centre be enhanced?

We recognise that the character of the town centre is important not only in attracting investment but is in how users experience the town centre. The AAP will therefore need to look at how to protect and enhance the character of the town centre, while ensuring new investment is delivered. The modern day quarters of the town, as shown in **Figure 9**, illustrate that the town has evolved over time, however it also shows that there are still distinctly different areas around the core that make the town interesting for visitors and residents alike. Further details can be found in **Section 7.6** of the main document.

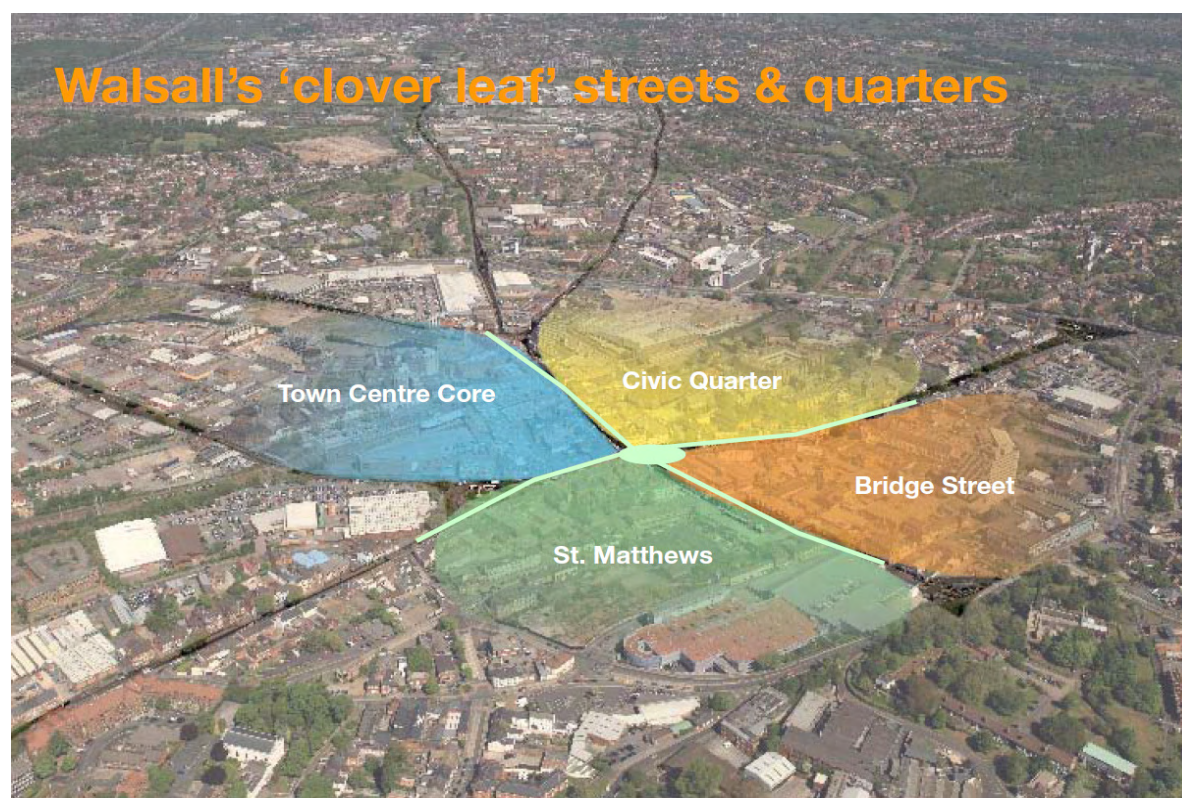


Figure 9: Walsall's Four Character Areas

<p>Character Option 1: The AAP identifies buildings that enhance the character of Walsall town centre and protects them</p>	<p>Implications: The historic character of the town centre would be retained and enhanced. However protecting certain buildings could impact on forthcoming developments by constraining the design, restricting the opportunity for comprehensive development, or adding costs. This could impact on the ability to deliver comprehensive schemes in order to meet the BCCS floorspace targets.</p>
<p>Character Option 2: The AAP identifies buildings and places that are positive to the character of Walsall town centre and seeks to ensure they contribute to future development.</p>	<p>Implications: This would allow for new development to be positively encouraged, however, would mean that historic buildings and spaces would not necessarily be conserved in their entirety.</p>
<p>Character Option 3: The AAP seeks to consolidate and enhance the four identified character zones (As in Figure 9)</p>	<p>Implications: This approach would enhance the attractiveness of the town centre and assist in its legibility. However it may impact upon scheme viability.</p>

LV:Q17 Which of the above options do you agree with most, and why?

LV:Q18 How important is heritage to Walsall town centre? How can we protect and enhance the historic character of Walsall town centre?

LV:Q21 What buildings do you think are important to Walsall and how do we ensure that these are protected?

LV:Q23 Do we need a policy to protect views such as the church and the art gallery? If yes which views and how?

How do we get good design in the centre?

Walsall has a rich history and this is visible in many of its buildings, streets and spaces. To further improve and enrich the quality and image of the Borough, new development must create a positive character with an identity that relates to the specific characteristics of Walsall and its historic context.

LV:Q26 What level of design guidance should the AAP provide for new buildings within the Town Centre?

LV:Q27 Are there any areas in the Town Centre that should have higher design requirements?

What do you think of the public realm experience?

An attractive public realm enhances people's quality of life and the perception of a place. The AAP will need to consider how to improve the public realm within the town centre. Legibility across the town centre, between the interchanges, the retail core and other important elements of the town centre also needs to be improved. Further details can be found in **Section 7.7** of the main document.

LV:Q30 Which areas of the town centre need public realm improvements, and how should this be done? Is any new public realm needed? If so where and why?

LV:Q32 Are there parts of the centre that you consider difficult to move around? What would improve the pedestrian experience

LV:Q35 How can linkages between Park Street and other parts of the town centre be improved?

How can the environment of the centre be improved?

The amount, location and quality of environmental infrastructure (see glossary) is crucial to the successful and sustainable regeneration of Walsall town centre. This includes places and spaces within the town centre that protect important features such as a historic building or part of the local canal network, ensure more sustainable new development and construction is delivered, and contributes to an attractive visual environment for users.

LV:Q37 What Environmental assets should be improved? How can such improvements be delivered?

LV:Q38 Do you know of any sites in the town centre that should be allocated for public open space?

8. Transportation and Accessibility

Improving accessibility to Walsall town centre provides an opportunity to increase access to employment, education and training along with retail and leisure activities. Transport under-pins all of the regeneration and development activity anticipated through the AAP; without this the town centre would not be able to function effectively. Transportation provision also makes the town centre the most accessible place for the whole community, and as well as having a major impact on the environment and our health. The priorities for transportation are identified as:

- Ensuring the town centre is accessible by all modes of transport
- Improving the transport interchanges
- Addressing parking issues

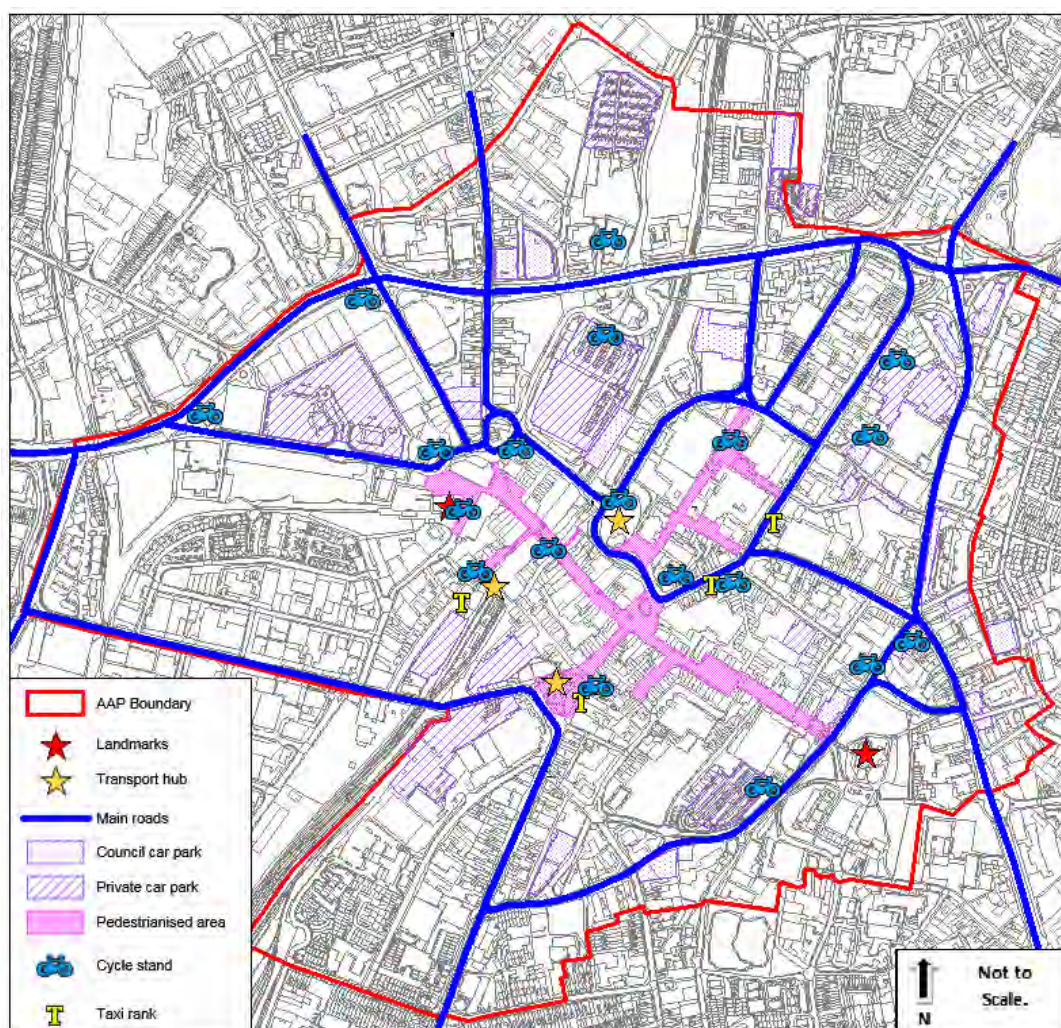


Figure 10: Key Transport Assets

What improvements are needed to pedestrian movements?

The movement of people within the town centre is largely influenced by the location of the three transport hubs, and key town centre uses. Accessibility across these routes needs to be improved so pedestrian journeys between the hubs are quicker, safer and easier.

<p>Pedestrianisation Option 1: The area between Crown Wharf Retail Park and Park Street is pedestrianised to encourage movement between the town centre and the retail park</p>	<p>Implications: The town centre is well connected, providing better links between the town centre and the retail park. There would however be implications for traffic movement.</p>
<p>Pedestrianisation Option 2: Through partial de-pedestrianisation buses could be allowed into the Bridge and/or Park Street areas to allow greater penetration into the town centre and easier links between public transport modes and services</p>	<p>Implications: Loss of pedestrianisation could lead to safety concerns and people being dissuaded from using Park Street and the Bridge due to having to share it with buses.</p>
<p>Pedestrianisation Option 3: No further areas of pedestrianisation are identified through the AAP</p>	<p>Implications: There continues to be a physical separation between Park Street and the Crown Wharf Retail Park and in other locations across the town centre.</p>

T:Q1 Which of the above options do you agree with most, and why?

T:Q2 How should the AAP seek to improve pedestrian movement between the retail core, indoor shopping centres, transport interchanges and other important elements in the town centre?

Does the current public transport service meet your needs?

Good public transport is key to ensuring the town centre is sustainable and that it can be accessed by all residents. The AAP needs to review how the three existing transport hubs within the town centre currently meet users' needs, and how this could be improved in the future. More detail of the options outlined in **Figure 11** can be found in **Section 8.5** of the main document.

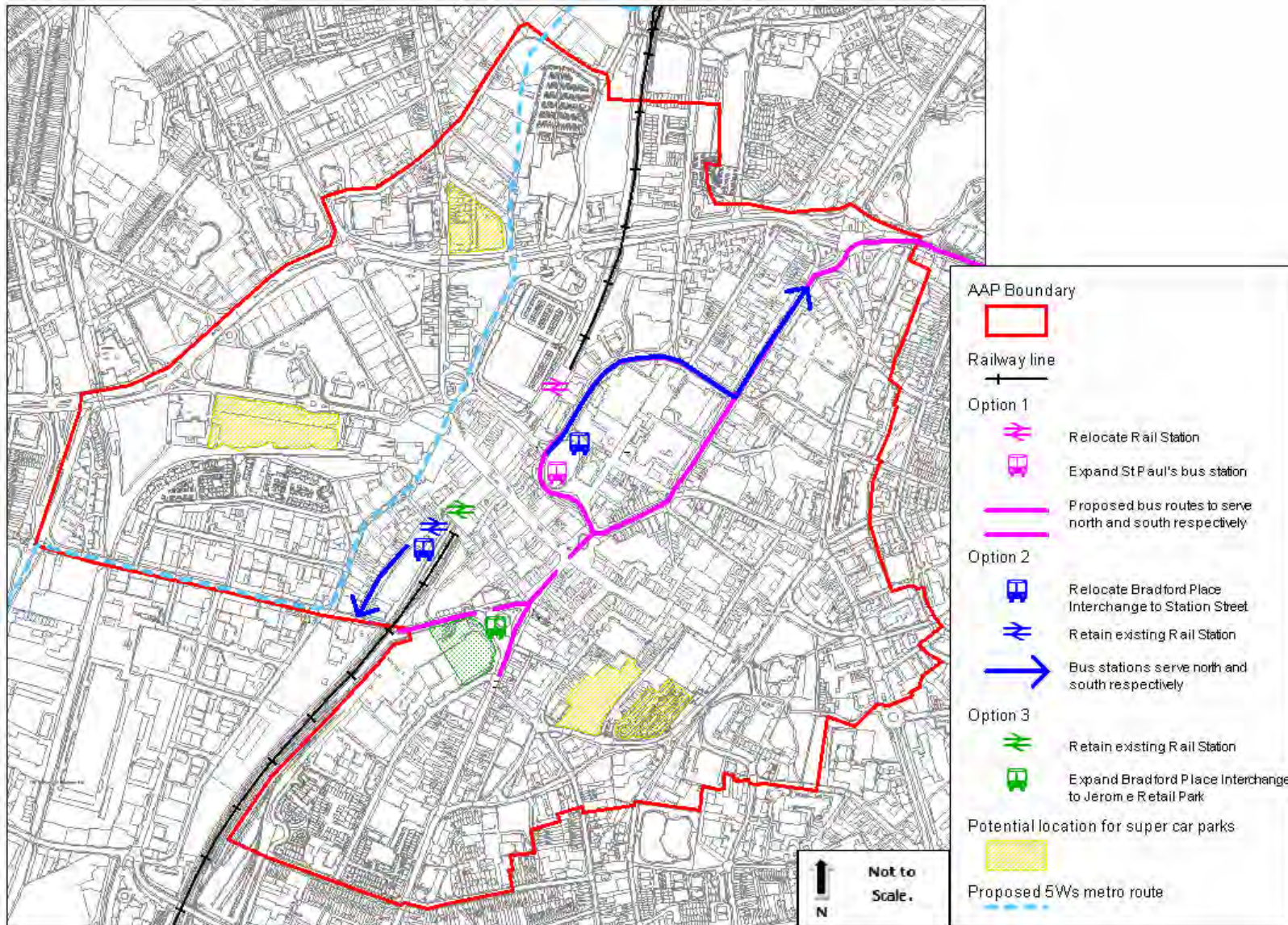


Figure 11: Public Transport Options

<u>Public Transport</u>	
Public Transport Option 1: Re-develop St. Paul's into a bus station with larger capacity	Implications: This would deliver one centralised bus station with close proximity to the rail station, which would increase accessibility to the town centre. However this would require large detours for buses or the de-pedestrianisation of The Bridge, and have implications for neighbouring land uses.
Public Transport Option 2: Development of a new multi-modal facility at Station Street	Implications: This would result in a much improved bus/rail interchange. There would however be implications for the railway station car park.
Public Transport Option 3: Redevelop Bradford Place Interchange to create larger capacity by expanding into Jerome Retail Park	Implications: Creating extra capacity will improve passenger experience, safety and the reliability of services, but would have implications for neighbouring land uses.
Public Transport Option 4: No major public transport changes are identified through the AAP	Implications: As demand rises, public transport will face further pressure, resulting in less reliable services, causing more car dependency and potentially impact upon the economic growth prospects of the town centre.

T:Q5 Which of the above options do you agree with most, and why?

T:Q6 What improvements do you think are needed to public transport to and around the centre?

Whilst Walsall's rail link to Birmingham is adequate (although a 10 minute service would be more beneficial), it has no links beyond Birmingham or outside the region. This situation will be partially alleviated when the Chase Line is electrified and line speeds improved in the next rail funding period (2014-19). As well as large regional benefits, this will also give the opportunity for Walsall to gain direct services to cities in the north west and south of the country, and as an alternative route for trains using the congested Birmingham to Stafford section of the West Coast main line.

Ultimately these improvements will lead to more trains stopping at Walsall station. Anticipating these service enhancements, the currently dated station requires updating and extra capacity creating.

<p>Rail Option 1: The AAP proposes the redesign and expansion of the railway station to create greater capacity</p>	<p>Implications: This will impact positively on the economic growth prospects of the Borough, enabling local rail services to be improved and increase the possibility of attracting national rail services. However there will be implications for the Saddler's Shopping Centre.</p>
<p>Rail Option 2: The AAP promotes the railway station as a transport hub but does not seek to enhance its capacity</p>	<p>Implications: Current situation is maintained with minor improvements to some local services. However the full economic benefit of improving the rail network is not achieved.</p>

T:Q7 Which of the above options do you agree with most, and why?

The town centre is also served by taxis and coaches, which provide an important service to the town centre.

- T:Q9 Do you consider the amount of available taxi ranks to be an issue? Where should additional ranks be located?**
- T:Q11 Where should coach stopping facilities be provided in the town centre? Should this be linked to the redevelopment of the transport hubs?**

Are there problems with accessing the town as a car user?

There are excellent links from the national highway network, with the M6 junctions 7, 9 and 10 providing access for long distance travel and bringing visitors and goods to the Borough. Within the town centre boundary, the local roads can at times experience congestion due to large traffic flows, the impact of new developments and occasional diverted traffic from the motorway. There are some issues regarding the quality of the air in the town centre which the Issues and Options report covers in more detail in **Section 8.6**. To read more and comment please the main report.

T.Q13 What are the issues that you consider to be significant for road traffic movement in and around Walsall town centre?

What improvements should we make to car parking?

The main issues relating to parking in the town centre are the type of parking available (long or short stay), the amount of parking, the location of car parks and the price of parking. The parking strategy in Walsall aims to establish a coordinated and consistent approach to parking.

T:Q15 Where should car parks be located to cater for the regeneration of the town centre?

T:Q16 Does car parking play an essential role in your decision to travel into Walsall town centre? What changes are needed to car parking in your view?



9. A Place for Investment

Ensuring the town centre is a 'Place for Investment' is crucial to the success of the AAP and indeed to the future of the town centre and even Walsall Borough as a whole. Giving investors the certainty and confidence to invest in our town centre is key to unlocking sites and delivering further improvements to the centre such as design and public realm. The priorities for investment have been identified as:

- Ensuring enough sites in the right locations have been identified to meet the targets for retail and office floorspace
- Providing enough sites for other key uses such as leisure, community facilities and residential to meet future needs
- Understanding the impact that decisions made about one site has on other parts of the town centre

What approach should we take to investment?

Much of the regeneration activity in the town centre in recent years has been focused around the "Big Three" development opportunities – St. Matthew's Quarter, Gigaport and Waterfront – and along with Park Street. We need to establish if this approach is still the right one.

<u>The Approach</u>	
<p>Approach Option 1: The AAP promotes the Big Three and Park Street as the key development opportunities as the overall approach to regenerating the town centre</p>	<p>Implications: These sites are promoted as the main development opportunities in the town centre, in favour of other smaller sites. Potential investment is directed towards these areas.</p>

<p>Approach Option 2: The AAP sets out clearly the vision for the Big Three and Park Street along with the type of uses to be promoted within these developments</p>	<p>Implications: These sites are promoted as the main development opportunities in the town centre. Each site has a clear vision for the types of uses which are acceptable, and other uses will be discouraged. Focusing on specific uses should result in a stronger town centre, with developments only being delivered in the locations which are most appropriate. This would allow clarity on how the BCCS targets would be met. However refusing all alternative uses may mean that investment is not forthcoming and sites may remain undeveloped for longer.</p>
<p>Approach Option 3: The AAP is flexible about uses and the vision for the Big Three and Park Street allowing the market to lead</p>	<p>Implications: The AAP does not seek promote certain areas or to control where particular uses are delivered within the town centre. This may mean that developments can be delivered more quickly, but investment may not come forward in the most appropriate locations which could have a negative impact on the attraction of other investment. This could result in the BCCS targets for retail and office floorspace not being met.</p>
<p>Approach Option 4: The AAP sets exemplar environmental standards for the Big Three in order to drive the town centre forward</p>	<p>Implications: These buildings would have only minimal environmental impact and would set a precedent for developments in the rest of the town centre. However such high standards may bring increased costs, impacting on viability.</p>
<p>Approach Option 5: The AAP sets exemplar design for the Big Three in order to drive the town centre forward</p>	<p>Implications: These buildings would be of a very high quality and would set a precedent for developments in the rest of the town centre, improving its overall attractiveness and acting as a catalyst for further investment. However such high standards may bring increased costs, impacting on viability.</p>

INV:Q1 Which of the above options do you agree with, and why?

INV:Q2 How can we market and promote investment in the town centre more effectively?

With all of the investment opportunities considered in this chapter, there are a number of occasions where different sites within the town centre would lend themselves to a number of uses, and conversely, certain uses could be deliverable in a number of locations. However, if a certain use, for example a cinema, is delivered in one location it may affect the long term deliverability of other sites. Therefore, there needs to be careful consideration given through the AAP process to

competing sites and uses to ensure the long term objectives for the town centre are achieved and the implications of any decisions are carefully thought through.

In **Figure 12** on the following page we have highlighted the sites where we think there are key decisions to be made, and where decisions made on one site can impact on another. These are the things where we really want your views as we think they hold the key to the future of Walsall Town Centre.

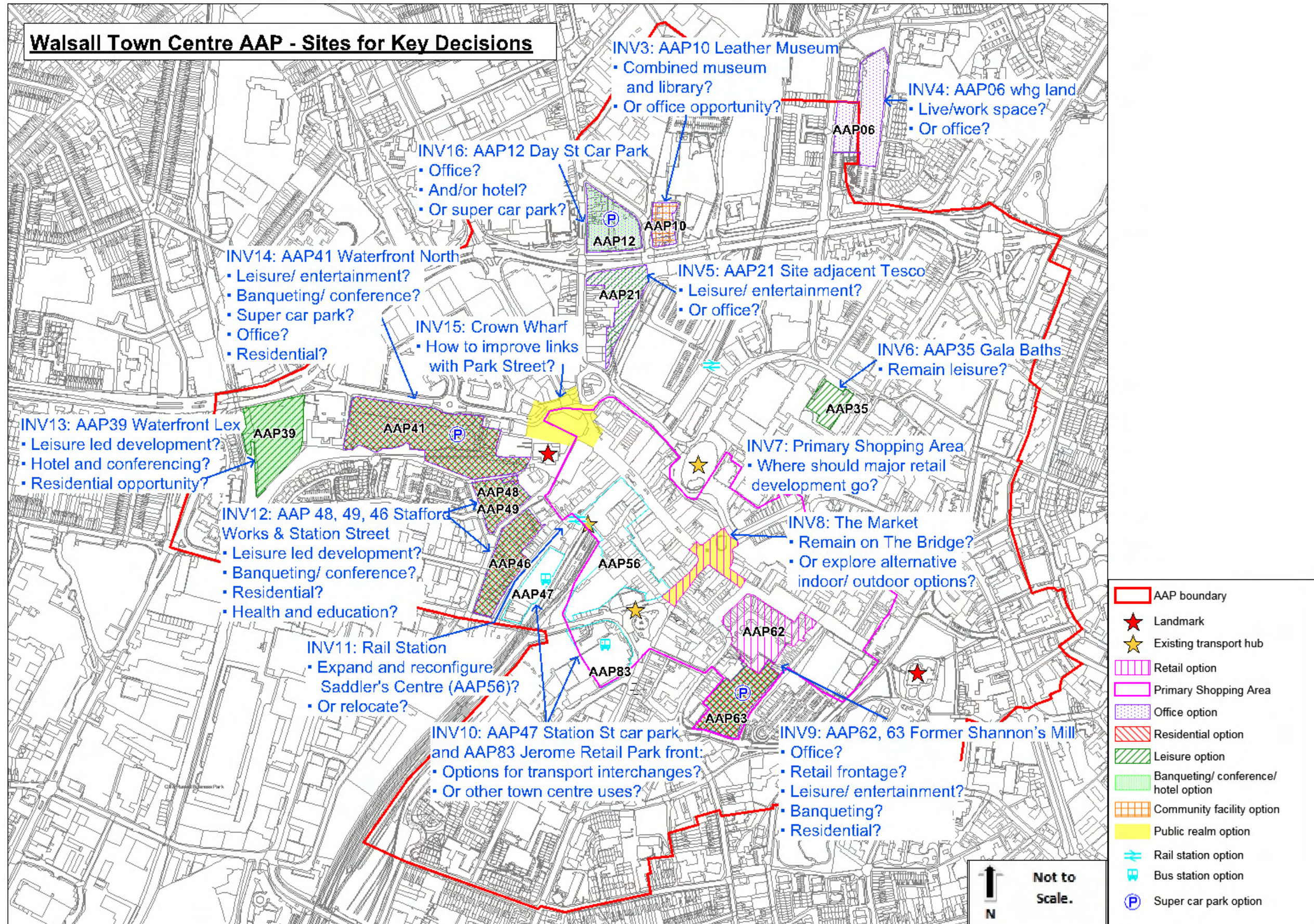


Figure 12: Key Decisions

What is the future of St Matthew’s Quarter?

St Matthew’s Quarter is the area of the town centre where the Council has been encouraging retail investment. To achieve this aspiration, the Council has been working with the two major landowners of the Old Square Shopping Centre and the land on the southern side of Digbeth known as the former Shannon’s Mill site (bordered by Lower Hall Lane and George Street).

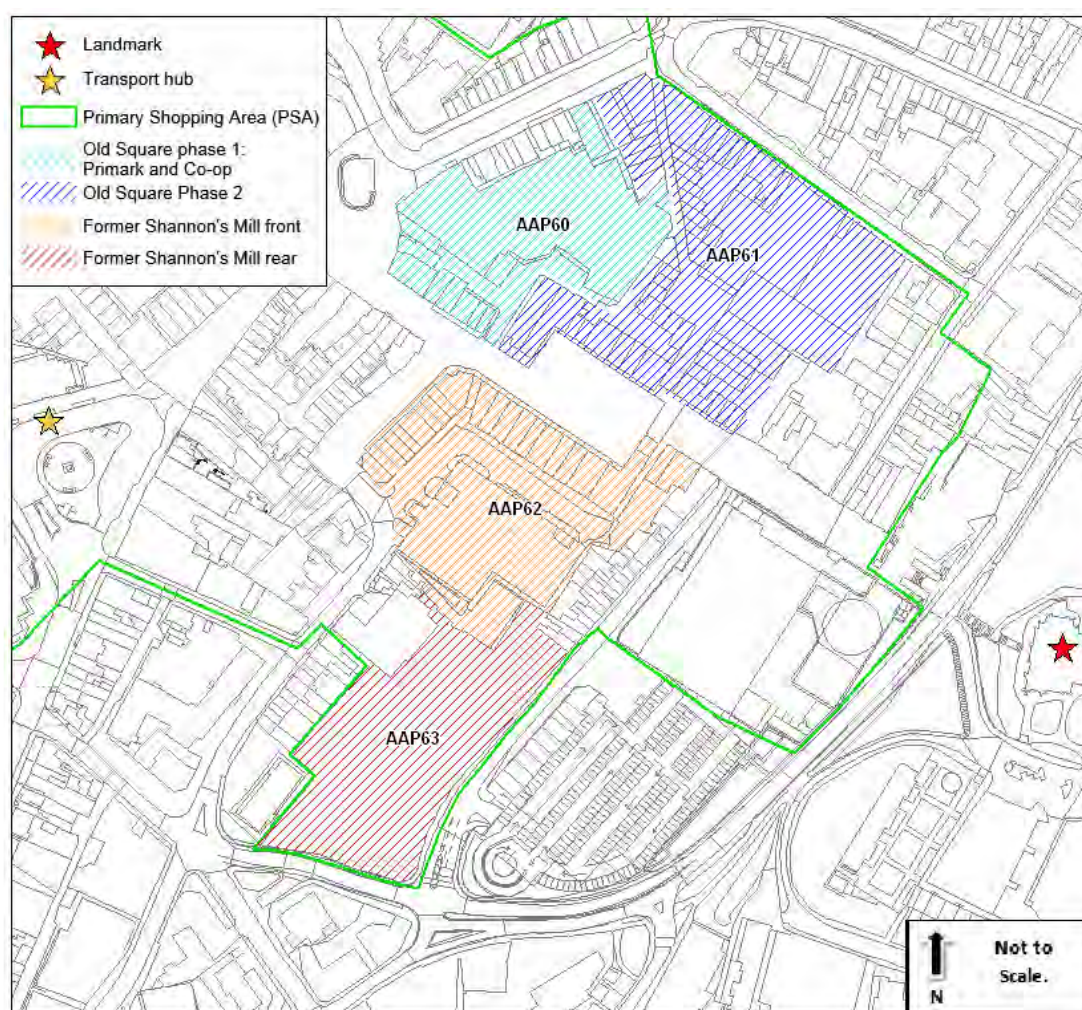


Figure 13: St Matthew’s Quarter

St Matthew’s Quarter	
St Matthew’s Option 1: Old Square Shopping Centre remains primarily a retail location	Implications: This will help to deliver the BCCS targets for retail floorspace and protect the core of the town centre.
St Matthew’s Option 2: The AAP identifies the	Implications: This may result in the relocation of some existing businesses, but could attract retailers seeking

Old Square Shopping Centre as an opportunity to be expanded/ redeveloped to provide larger units	larger unit sizes which are not generally available elsewhere in the town centre, therefore enhancing the overall shopping experience and vitality of the town centre.
St Matthew's Option 3: Old Square Shopping Centre is promoted as a development opportunity for a variety of town centre uses	Implications: This could lead to the redevelopment of the shopping centre for alternative uses, but would have knock-on effects on the delivery of certain uses in other parts of the town centre and may lead to other sites not being delivered. It could also mean that the BCCS targets for retail floorspace cannot be met.
St Matthew's Option 4: Shannon's Mill site remains primarily a retail location	Implications: This will complement the retail offer at the Old Square shopping centre and the existing retail frontage to the site. A development here would help to meet the BCCS retail floorspace target.
St Matthew's Option 5: Shannon's Mill site is identified as a development opportunity for any appropriate town centre uses	Implications: The AAP does not seek to control the uses delivered on this site. This may mean that developments are brought forward more quickly, but there could be knock on effects for the deliverability of other areas of the town centre. Allowing any town centre uses may also mean the BCCS retail floorspace target is not met.

INV:Q17+Q18 Which of the above options do you agree with most, and why?

How do we develop The Gigaport?

The Gigaport will be the prime location for the development of a modern office market that will draw new companies into the town centre located around a high quality business environment. With outline consent granted the Gigaport provides a real opportunity to draw investment into the centre.

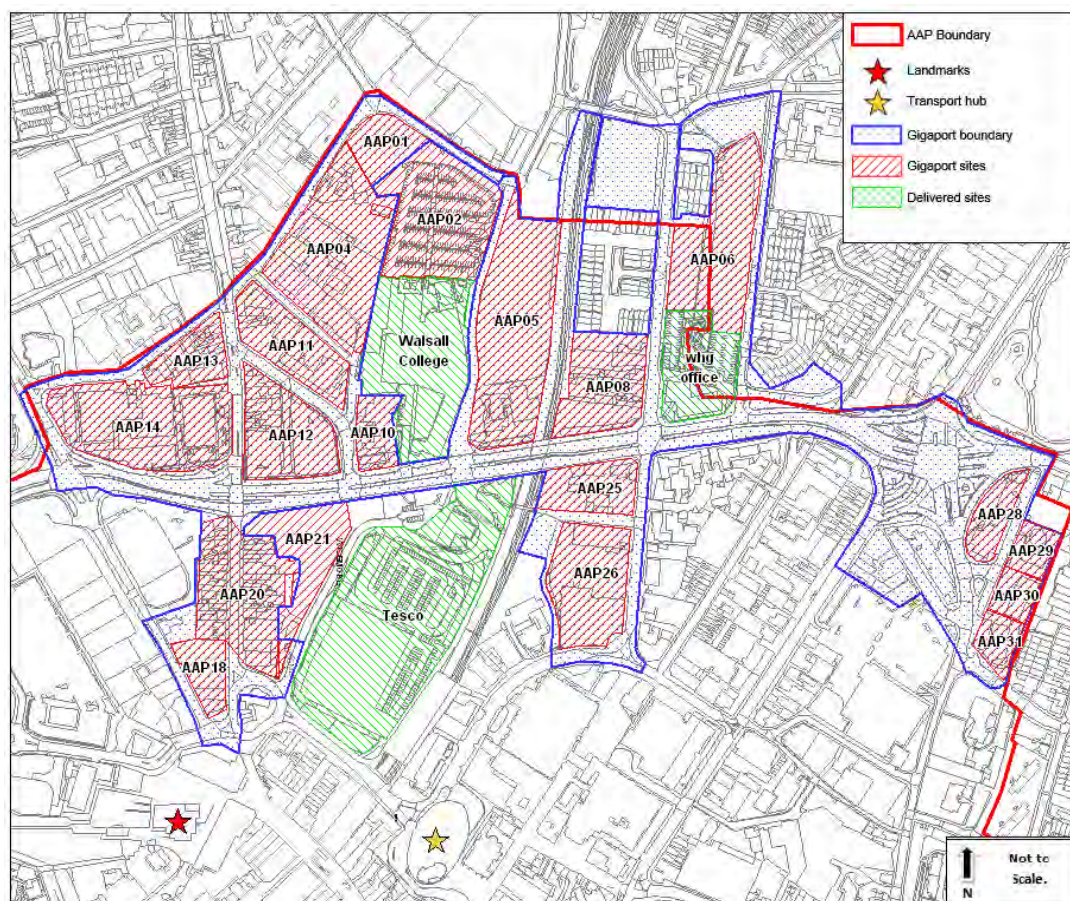


Figure 14: The Gigaport

Gigaport	
<p>Gigaport Option 1: The Gigaport is allocated and promoted through the AAP as Walsall’s business district with the development of large office accommodation and associated uses</p>	<p>Implications: The Gigaport area would be allocated specifically for business and associated uses, and proposals for other town centre uses would not be acceptable. It can be beneficial for offices to locate close to each other and in attractive environments, and once delivered this would go some way to meeting the BCCS office floorspace targets and create much needed service sector employment. However allowing only office uses could mean sites remain undeveloped for some time, particularly as the office demand in the town centre is currently not strong</p>
<p>Gigaport Option 2: The Gigaport is allocated for other appropriate town centre uses and business needs are allocated elsewhere in the town centre</p>	<p>Implications: The AAP does not control which town centre uses are delivered in the Gigaport area. Being located away from the heart of the centre the area may not be suitable for other town centre uses. It could also be more difficult to meet the BCCS floorspace targets using a collection of smaller sites. Furthermore a dispersed office market is less likely to attract similar levels of investment.</p>

Gigaport Option 3:
The sites located adjacent to Littleton Street should be promoted as the first phase of sites delivered in Gigaport

Implications: These sites are the most prominent and their successful delivery will provide impetus for further investment. However focusing on these sites could lead to other less prominent sites remaining undeveloped for longer periods of time.

INV:Q21 Which of the above options do you agree with most, and why?

How do we make Waterfront a gateway destination in Walsall?

Waterfront has real potential to become a gateway destination in Walsall. There are opportunities to build on the historic canal frontage creating a unique waterside venue for leisure and cultural attractions, building on the success of the New Art Gallery as a landmark building.

Waterfront is split between 3 distinct development opportunities, Waterfront North, Waterfront South and Lex Site. There needs to be a consistent approach between the sites in terms of linkages, design and complementary uses.

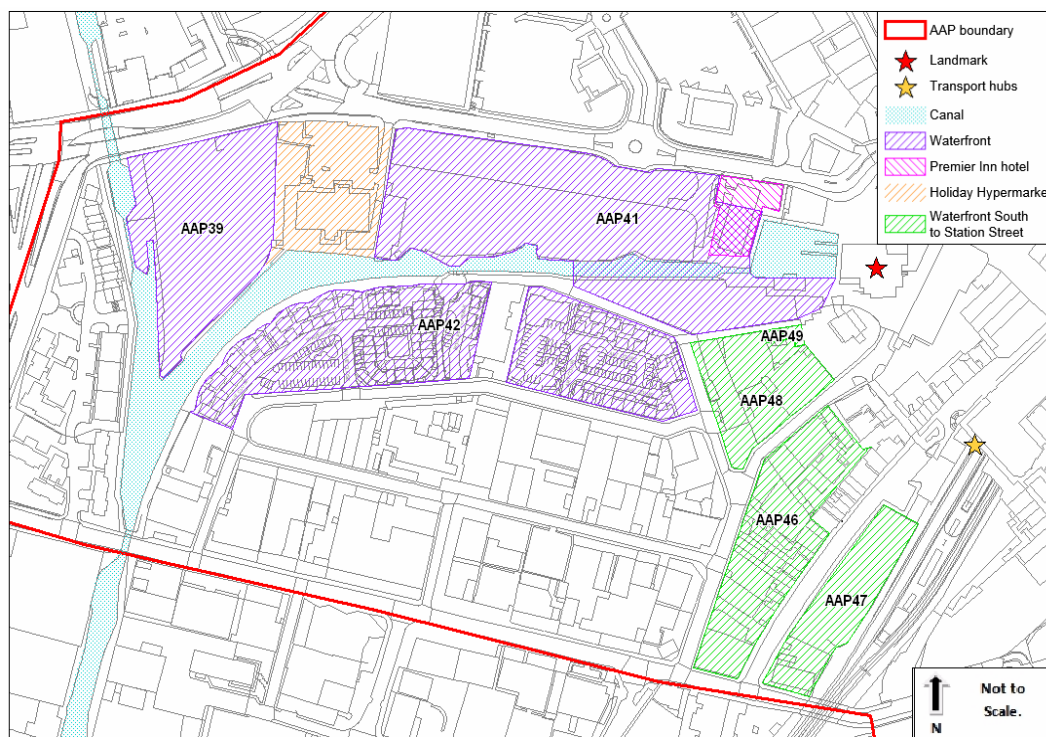


Figure 15: Waterfront

Waterfront South: This site has made a considerable contribution towards the BCCS target of 450 new homes in the town centre, by delivering a high quality scheme of 322 residential units which should be completed in late 2012. This scheme also includes six commercial units (currently to let) and could accommodate approximately 5,000 sq m of office space if a suitable end user were identified.

INV:Q23 Are there any further improvements needed to Waterfront South?

Waterfront North: This has been the location at which the Council seeks to attract key leisure facilities for the Borough such as a Cinema in order to build of the current uses and new hotel.

<u>Waterfront North</u>	
Waterfront Option 1: Waterfront North is allocated through the AAP for leisure facilities, for example cinema and conferencing facilities	Implications: Waterfront North would be promoted as the key opportunity for strategic leisure developments. The area is a good location for leisure facilities, in close proximity to the Art Gallery, with the potential for an enhanced canalside environment, and good public transport links. However dismissing other investment on this site may mean that some investment is not secured in the town centre.
Waterfront Option 2: Waterfront North is allocated for any appropriate town centre use	Implications: Other town centre use may come forward but this may not be the most appropriate location for such uses and there may be a knock on effect on other areas of the town. This would make it difficult to meet the BCCS aspiration to attract a cinema, and could result missing the opportunity to make the most of the canalside location.

INV:Q26 Which of the above options do you agree with most, and why?

Waterfront Lex: With its dual canal frontage, this site would offer an opportunity for leisure led development activity, for example hotel and conference facilities, if it can be integrated better with Waterfront North. However, if this was not a possibility, and

given surrounding uses at Pleck Road and Smith's Flour Mill, a predominantly residential scheme may be more appropriate for the Lex site.

<u>Waterfront Lex</u>	
Lex Option 1: Lex is allocated through the AAP for leisure facilities, for example conferencing/ banquetting facilities	Implications: Leisure facilities at Lex would complement potential facilities at Waterfront North.
Lex Option 2: Waterfront Lex is allocated through the AAP for residential use	Implications: Residential development could be an appropriate use for this site. However the town centre's BCCS target for residential development has already been met, and allocating land for further housing may deter other town centre investment.
Lex Option 3: Waterfront Lex is allocated for any appropriate town centre use	Implications: There would be no way to control or zone particular uses and some investment may be deterred, whilst the maximum benefit of the canalside frontage would not be realised.

INV:Q27 Which of the above options do you agree with most, and why?

How do we reinvigorate Park Street?

Park Street is the core of the town centre. Its position moving forward should remain as the retail core where retailers and complementary service providers are encouraged to locate. However if this position is to be maintained in the long term, the attractiveness of Walsall to retail investment needs to be improved. The two shopping centres are also fundamental to the vitality of the town but suffer from vacant units and a lack of investment.

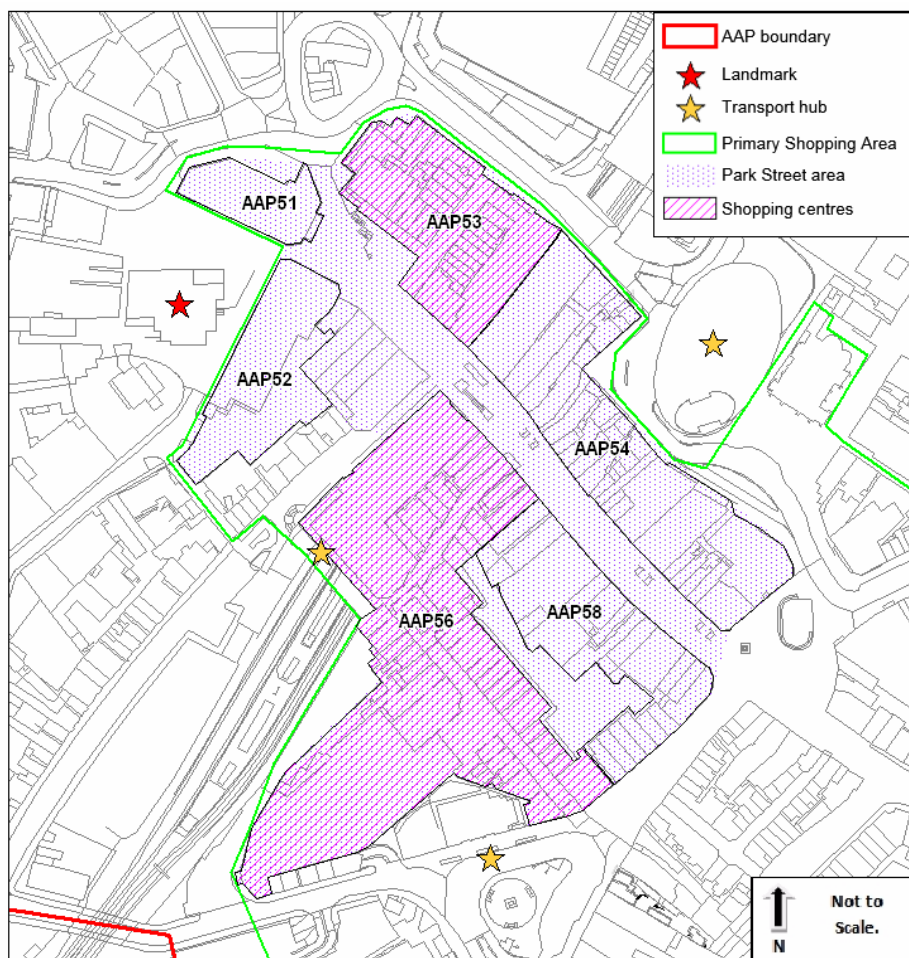


Figure 16: Park Street

<u>Park Street</u>	
<p>Park Street Option 1: Park Street is allocated and promoted as the key location in the town centre for retail uses</p>	<p>Implications: Retail investment is focused on Park Street and the retail heart of the town is maintained. Some redevelopment of units may be required as without this it could be hard to attract investment, particularly from retailers requiring larger stores.</p>
<p>Park Street Option 2: Park Place Shopping Centre and the Saddler’s Centre should be allocated as the focus for retail-led development</p>	<p>Implications: Retail investment is still promoted in the Park Street area, but is focused on the two shopping centres rather than the street itself. This may offer greater opportunity to create larger units which are needed to attract retailers, but the smaller units on Park Street may become vacant.</p>

INV:Q30 Which of the above options do you agree with most, and why?

INV:Q31 How can we reinvigorate Park Street and its shopping centres?

10. The Sites

This section is all about the sites that make up all the opportunities in Walsall Town Centre. Throughout the document lots of sites have been discussed and some suggested uses for these sites have been put forward. You can comment on any of the sites you want and you are also welcome to submit sites through the Call for Sites process which is explained further in the main document in **Section 10.2.1**.

Site Summary Tables

The tables in **Appendix 1** of the main document set out what sites we have considered. These have been presented under each chapter and have been crossed referenced in these chapters. Some sites will be included in more than one table as there is a potential for different or multiple uses. It includes a summary of we consider to be the key issues facing that site which we will need to explore more as the plan progresses to the next stage. The uses set out in the table are just suggestions at this stage and are not allocations. We want your views on what we have indicated as potential uses for the sites.

SIQ:1 Have we considered all possible sites?

SIQ:2 Do you agree with our initial response to the Call for Sites submissions?

SIQ:3 Do you have any comments or further information on any of the sites we have listed in the summary tables?

If you wish to comment on the above see Appendix 1, also please list carefully the AAP site reference number and the site address so we can respond to your comments.

Site Constraints

There are a number of constraints in the town centre, many stemming from the industrial history of the area and historic drainage systems. As such, development in

Walsall is often constrained by abnormal development costs. The table in **Appendix 2** of the main document sets out some of the key constraints to development in the town centre with some suggestions of how the AAP will address these. Examples of these constraints include: flood risk; areas of poor air quality; poor grounds conditions / land contamination; and minerals.

SI:Q6 Are there any other constraints the AAP needs to consider?

11. Delivering the AAP

Delivery is a key test of soundness for the AAP. Proposals that are identified within the document must be shown to be deliverable over the AAP plan period. Over this plan period, a number of potential delivery options to fund the planned quantum of development will need to be identified and fully considered. This must include the Council working closely in partnership with all of the major landowners to assist wherever possible in securing delivery and investment.

It will also require the Council to consider how it can best use its own limited land ownership to encourage investment, be it disposing of its land at less than best consideration to further the economic, social or environmental well-being of the Borough, or entering into joint ventures, local asset backed vehicles or other delivery mechanisms to secure investment.

D:Q1 What delivery mechanisms do you think should be explored through the AAP process?

D:Q2 Are there any parts of the town centre you think should be prioritised for investment/development?

D:Q3 What needs to be delivered in order to kick start the transformation of the town centre?

D:Q4 Are you aware of any potential deficits in utilities infrastructure that could affect the deliverability of any of the sites?

Thank You...

D:Q6 Are there any further comments you would like to make about the town centre?

12. Get involved

We want our residents and other interested parties to inform the development of our plans. Your views (where possible, supported by evidence) are important, and the Council wants to receive them during the 6 week consultation period 22nd April 2013 – 3rd June 2013.

You can view these documents and respond online by visiting www.walsall.gov.uk/planning_2026. Paper copies of the documents are also available to view at your local library.

What happens next?

Following the consultation period, a consultation report will be produced which will outline the comments which were received and how they have been used to inform the next stage of the AAP. This document will be available to view using the 'Planning 2026' tab as above.

The responses received during consultation will be an important source of information which will be used to help shape our more specific proposals through the Preferred Options for the AAP. The Preferred Options Report will be published and this will also be available for your comments. Your views on the Preferred Options will then be used to produce the final Area Action Plan. This will be submitted to the Secretary of State and will be subject to an Examination by an independent Planning Inspector who will test the soundness of the Plan and produce a report setting out what changes, if any, are required.

Throughout the AAP process the Council will continue to collect evidence, react to currently unknown development proposals and evaluate the options. This will help to ensure that the emerging planning policy is up to date, robust and considered deliverable.

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