



Heckmondwike Town Centre Blueprint

Kirklees Council



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Executive Summary

Kirklees Council's Cabinet has endorsed a plan-led approach to investment in local centres across the district. Initially, this programme will see £1.5 million invested into each of four town centres across the district: Cleckheaton, Batley, Heckmondwike and Holmfirth. This fund will support the delivery of projects aligned with the focus areas shown below. This report sets out the final blueprint and projects for Heckmondwike town centre.

Heckmondwike is a town in the metropolitan borough of Kirklees, West Yorkshire, England, 9 miles southwest of Leeds. Historically part of the West Riding of Yorkshire, it is close to Cleckheaton and Dewsbury. The town covers an area of one square mile (640 acres), the town boundary is not the same as the ward boundary.

This Heckmondwike Blueprint seeks to build on the heritage of the town whilst looking to the future. In developing this blueprint, local communities were invited to share their views and feedback through the Kirklees Place Standard consultation and the subsequent Public Consultation on the emerging blueprint proposals, which took place between 19th May to 19th June 2023. This highlighted that there are issues which will need to be addressed, including traffic and congestion, a lack of safe, high-quality pedestrian and cycling routes and facilities, a lack of natural green and recreational spaces, as well as poor health and perceptions of lack of safety. This blueprint reflects the feedback received from the consultation and outlines a plan and projects for the town centre. This will guide investment in the town over the next ten-to-fifteen years.

The Vision and Supporting Principles

'Heckmondwike: A healthy, vibrant town centre where people are proud to live, work and relax.'



Principle 1: Creating community and inclusivity



Principle 2: A vibrant and active town with strong connectivity for all users



Principle 3: A sustainable and healthy town with good access to parks and green space

This blueprint aims to deliver on the vision and principles by building on Heckmondwike's strengths, including the vibrant and rich heritage of the town centre, Green Park and Algernon Firth Park as well as its proximity to the Spen Valley and National Cycle Network Route 66. This place-based approach aims to reduce the dominance of vehicles in the town centre, reclaim greenspace and improve pedestrian routes, giving people more space to enjoy the town's culture, heritage leisure and community offer.



Green Park/ Bus Station Crossing

Executive Summary - Heckmondwike Town Centre Blueprint



This plan illustrates the Blueprint proposals for Heckmondwike Town Centre which are set out in further detail in this report.

Baselining - Overview and Key Issues

To inform development of the final blueprint for Heckmondwike, the project team have undertaken a baselining exercise to understand the key issues, challenges and opportunities in Heckmondwike. This involved:

- Undertaking a review of local and wider planning policy
- Undertaking a review of previous public consultation feedback from the Place Standards Toolkit
- Analysis of socio-economic data for Heckmondwike and wider Kirklees
- Engaging with elected members within the ward
- Working with officers from Kirklees Council
- Undertaking site visits to Heckmondwike
- Spatial and architectural analysis of Heckmondwike town centre
- Undertaking a car parking survey of all public car parks within and adjacent to the town centre.

A summary of the key findings from this baselining exercise is provided on this page.

Ward members



Councillor Aafaq Butt



Councillor Steve Hall



Councillor Viv Kendrick

Key Issues in Heckmondwike

Higher than average empty shops and offices in Heckmondwike town centre

Deprivation – in Jan 2022, 17% of people in Heckmondwike claim Universal Credit, compared to 13.8% of the English population (DWP, 2022)

Bus journeys to larger towns and cities tend to be indirect and experience congestion

The redevelopment of brownfield sites, particularly in the Spen Valley which are at risk of flooding, is a challenge

Traffic congestion on main routes and at junctions.

Health – the percentage of residents in Heckmondwike rating their health as 'very good' is 2.4% less than the national average (ONS, 2011)

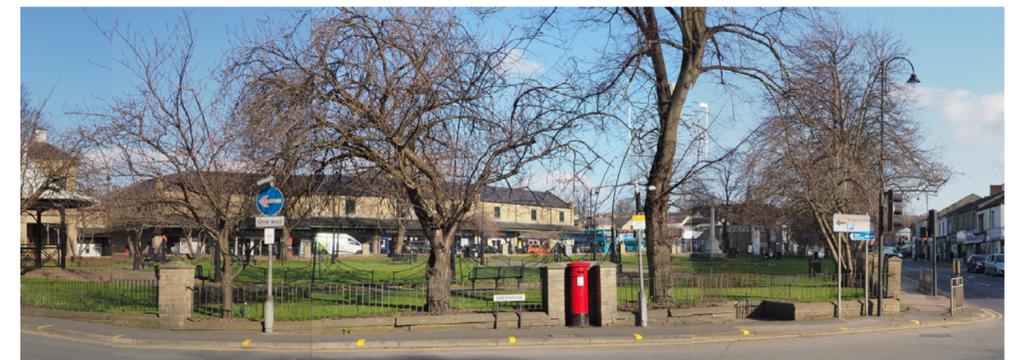
Poor environmental quality in some areas reduces the potential for investment

There is no train station in Heckmondwike

In 2011, 6.8% of households in Heckmondwike were without central heating (ONS, 2011)



View from bus station



View of the memorial



View from Northgate

Baselining - Place Standard

Kirklees Council are using a tool called the Place Standard. The purpose of the tool is to initiate conversations and give local communities a voice in what happens in their area, by using some simple questions.

Kirklees Council began by testing out the Place Standard in 2018. Following this testing, the tool was rolled out to Heckmondwike. This enabled residents of Heckmondwike to comment on the issues in their area and suggest ideas on how to improve it. The feedback from the Place Standard process formed part of the baselining exercise for the Heckmondwike town centre blueprint. Prior to this, this tool had not been used before in this context, and it was valuable in enabling residents to comment on the issues in their area and ideas on how to improve it.

This feedback helped us to shape the blueprint for Heckmondwike town centre and identify the projects set out in this report. For example, you highlighted your concerns around traffic congestion, poor walking and cycling infrastructure, lack of connection between green and insufficient recreational spaces in the town centre. We listened to your views and used this as a basis to develop the proposals for Heckmondwike town centre.

The main concerns from the Heckmondwike Place Standard consultation feedback are:

Lack of influence and control, don't feel listened to

Poor condition of pavements - narrow, cracked, uneven

Improve outdoor/sports facilities that are affordable

Lack of connection of green spaces to each other and centre

Lack of play facilities with poor maintenance and damaged equipment

Spaces and buildings look uncared for, derelict and unloved, with litter

Attract new businesses

Market back in Market Place

Lack of proper safe crossing

Loss of identity - a place to travel through and needs cohesion

Lack of quality amenities - shops, market, food and drink and no public toilets

Unreliable public transport - poor bus hub with lack of facilities

Perception of lack safety at night - antisocial, driving, drugs, fly tipping. More police presence needed

Traffic and congestion - heavy goods, pollution, noise, safety, speeding, antisocial, parking inappropriately

Baselining - Socioeconomic Analysis

In developing the final blueprint, the project team undertook an analysis of various socioeconomic indicators in Heckmondwike including population, how people travel, access to greenspace, crime rates and health. This socioeconomic baseline outlines the rationale and need for change, identifying the opportunities and challenges for economic growth and evidencing the vision for the area.

This review has identified the following strengths and challenges:

Strengths

- Spen Valley and the National Cycle Network 66 are in close proximity
- High levels of local pride
- Green Park is a key asset
- There is a higher-than-average car accessibility rate
- Strong local volunteer groups

Challenges

- Levels of crime
- Poor rail connectivity with no train station in the town
- The population of Heckmondwike has a lower skills level than average
- Heckmondwike has poor health, with a higher under 75 mortality rate than average

Socioeconomic Analysis:

Key Facts

Deprivation in Heckmondwike is among the 50% highest in the UK

In 2015-17, Kirklees' under 75 mortality rate was 7% higher than in England

The crime rate in Heckmondwike is 14% higher than the West Yorkshire average

Employment in Heckmondwike is comparable to Kirklees, but skewed towards care and leisure occupations

12% of the population aged 16-64 in the Batley and Spen area have no qualifications (NVQ), this is 3% higher than the Kirklees average

Heckmondwike Ward has open space issues, but the study area has two key assets: Green Park and Algernon Firth Park

More people commute out of Heckmondwike for work, than commute into Heckmondwike - car and van is the most popular method

Spatial Analysis

In addition to reviewing the socioeconomic indicators in Heckmondwike, the project team undertook a spatial analysis of the town centre, which involved a review of existing green space, pedestrian and cycle routes, highways, public transport services and identification of any existing issues within the town.

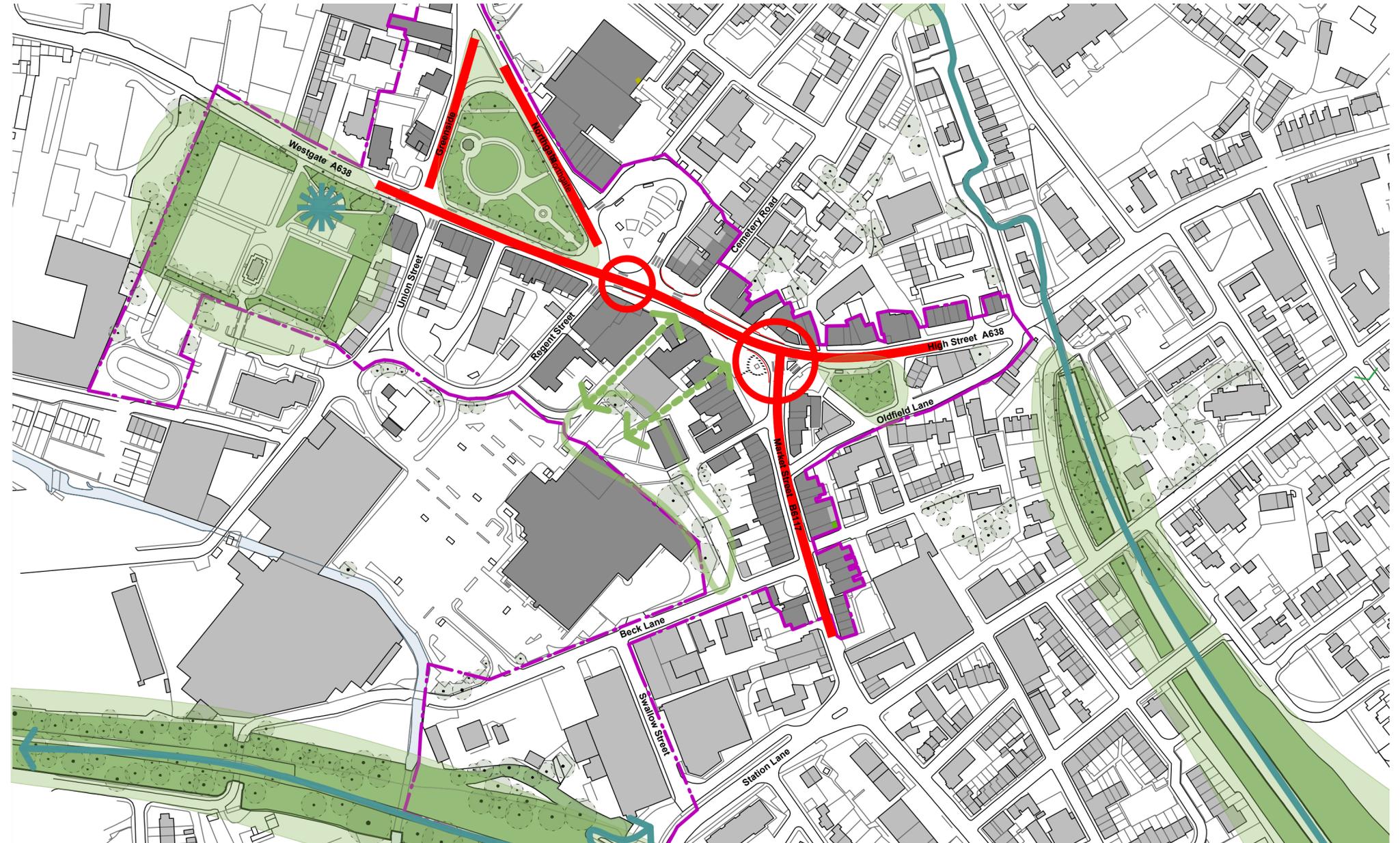
A summary of this analysis is provided below.

Green space

Heckmondwike is well catered for in terms of greenspace. The town is connected to both the Spen Greenway, which provides a six-mile-long linear park for pedestrians and cyclists to the south, and the Spen Valley Ringway to the east. Within the town are Green Park and Algernon Firth Park providing space for exercise and relaxing. These are great assets for the town, but all suffer from poor visual and physical connectivity. Market Square has been given over to parking in an already car dominated townscape, making the town centre feel unwelcoming.

Key codes:

- | | | | |
|---|-------------------------|---|--|
|  | Good quality greenspace |  | Pedestrian barrier |
|  | Other greenspace |  | Pedestrian and cycle routes |
|  | Playspace, poor quality |  | Study Area |
|  | Pedestrian routes |  | Dangerous junction with poor pedestrian crossing |



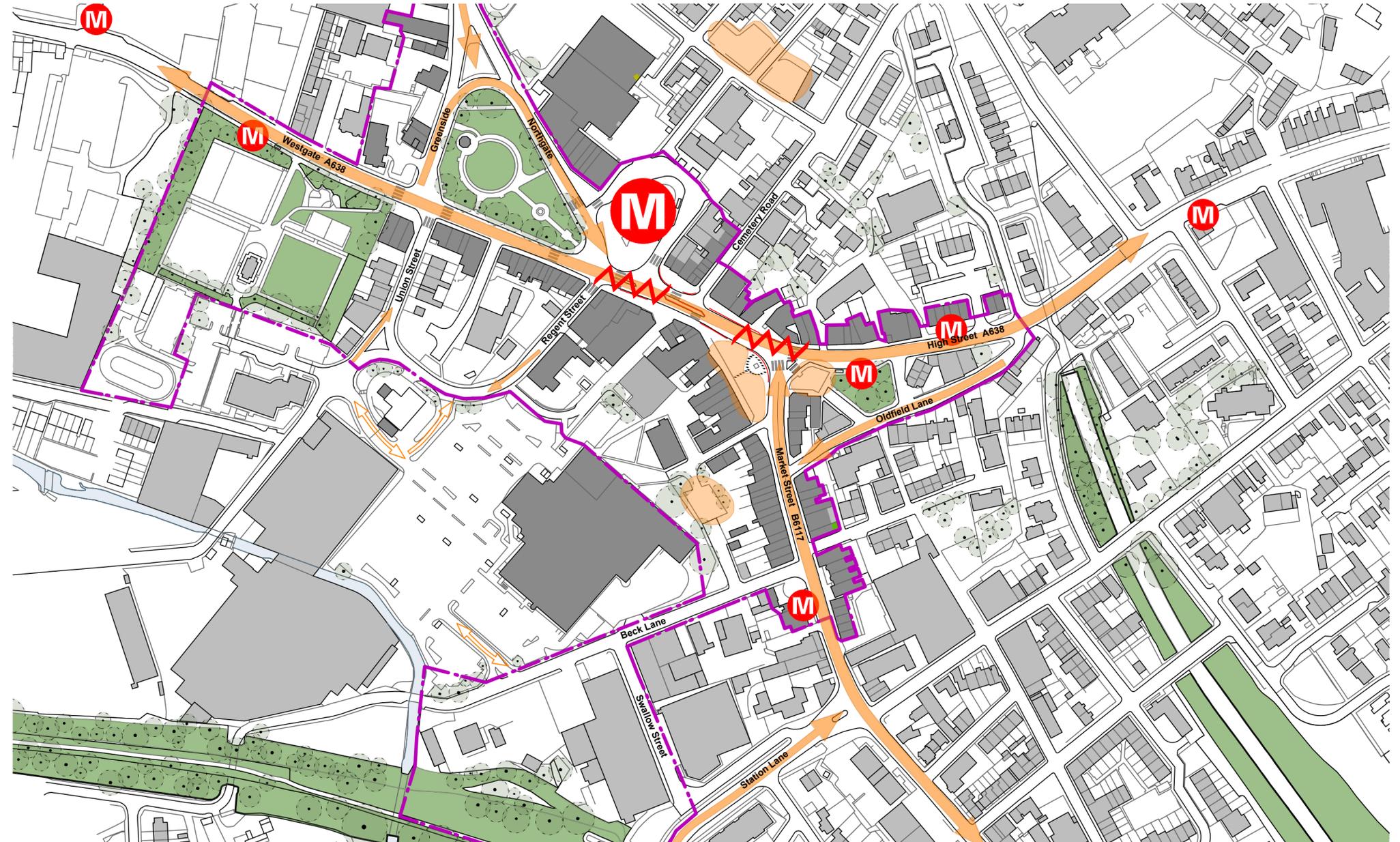
Spatial Analysis

Highways

The town is impacted by the A638 moving traffic west to east, this in turn impacts on Northgate and Greenside to the north and Market Street to the south. The high street is a major route for traffic, and this dominates the street scene leaving little positive space for pedestrians. Crossing the A638 is constrained to a couple of barriered locations that inhibit movement across the street. Green Park, a strong asset for the town, exists as an island surrounded by multi-lane traffic. The bus station is situated in the centre of the town and is well used. The space is unwelcoming however there are plans to upgrade this facility. There are small car parks around the town, along with the supermarket car park to the south that has strong pedestrian links with the Westgate and High Street.

Key codes:

- Bus Station
- Bus Stop
- Vehicle flow - two way
- Vehicle flow - one way
- Public car park
- Supermarket access
- Vehicular and pedestrian conflict
- Study Area



SWOT Analysis

Following the baselining exercise, the project team have appraised the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) for Heckmondwike. These are summarised below and, in addition to the feedback you provided through the Place Standard process, have guided development of the Heckmondwike Town Centre Blueprint and projects, which are set out in the following pages of this report.



Spenn Valley and National Cycle Network (NCN) 66 in close proximity



Green Park and Algernon Firth Park



Lack of quality pedestrian and cycling routes



Poor access within the town



Community groups and sense of community



Well connected public transport



Lack of identity



Poor air quality

Strengths

Weaknesses

Opportunities

Threats



Stronger connectivity for pedestrians and cyclists



More community facilities and events



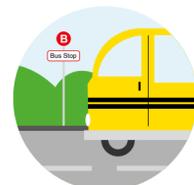
Safety and crime levels in area



Dominance of busy roads



Opportunities to improve linkages into the NCN 66



Bus Station upgrades



Nearby larger towns and cities



Perception of town

Heckmondwike Town Centre Blueprint

The following pages set out the final blueprint, vision and supporting principles for Heckmondwike town centre, as well as the identified projects which will be delivered in the town.

It builds on your feedback, the baselining exercise and SWOT analysis and looks to address the key issues, challenges and opportunities which have been identified as a result of this process. It sets out a clear plan for the town centre, which will guide investment in the town over the next ten-to-fifteen years.

The Vision

Heckmondwike:

“A healthy, vibrant town centre where people are proud to live, work and relax.”

Supporting Principles

We have developed the three principles below to support in delivering the vision for the town centre. Combined, the vision and principles have guided the development of the individual projects for the town.



Principle 1: Creating community and inclusivity

The town has a sense of place through celebrating cultural assets through events, markets, and community facilities engaging all ages.



Principle 2: A vibrant and active town with strong connectivity for all users

Improved connectivity and legibility throughout the town supporting safe and attractive pedestrian and cycling routes.



Principle 3: A sustainable and healthy town with good access to parks and green space

Enhanced natural assets and the creation of new green spaces and pocket parks to support the wellbeing and health of residents and sustainability of the town.

The Blueprint will deliver on the vision and principles through the following concepts for the town centre:

Vibrant and Inclusive Spaces for People

The blueprint intends to offer high-quality public realm through the incorporation of new landscaping, planting, seating areas and community amenities. This offers people opportunities to dwell and enjoy the town's culture, heritage, leisure and community facilities.

These improved public spaces will build on Heckmondwike's existing strengths, encouraging better interactions between people and creating a more natural, green environment.

Connecting Heckmondwike

Heckmondwike is currently dominated by traffic. The A638 between the motorway and Dewsbury runs through the centre and people are consigned to narrow pavements and complex crossing points. The main square has become a carpark and it does not feel like a place to spend time.

It is not feasible to move the road and its traffic, so the concept is to move the people. By creating a new pedestrian axis away from the A638 and rerouting cars away from the north side of the memorial park, the town begins to have quality public realm on which to build a new future. Linking these spaces with the Greenway adds further to a new direction for the town

Heckmondwike Town Centre Blueprint



- Public Realm
- ✕ New Development / Re-Development
- ★ Gateway
- ★ New Community space
- + Pedestrianisation
- Improved parking
- ★ Road Amendments
- ↔ New Crossing
- ▲ Improved Signage
- New Playground
- ↑ New Access
- Cycle / Walking Lane

Projects

The following pages set out the projects which have been identified for Heckmondwike town centre. These have been informed and developed through the baselining exercise, Place Standard process and SWOT analysis for the town, and have subsequently been refined to incorporate your feedback following the public consultation which was undertaken between May to June 2023.

A high-level summary of the projects is provided below, and more detailed descriptions of the individual projects is provided in the following pages.



Algernon Firth Park Refurbishment

- Extension of the park
- New crossing connecting Algernon Park with Green Park
- New signage and a stronger sense of place
- New walking / running track with better lighting

A Connected Green Park

- Re-routing traffic to extend the park and reduce vehicle dominance and noise
- New high-quality public realm
- New landscaping, planting and seating areas providing comfortable areas to sit and enjoy.

Bus Station

- Better and safer connectivity for pedestrians and cyclists
- New landscaping and comfortable seating areas
- Reduced vehicle dominance
- Toilets

Market Square

- Relocate parking
- Green, soft edge to the space to create a better environment for pedestrians and shoppers
- High quality public realm with seating and safe, protected footways
- Space for market stalls

New Square

- Reduced vehicle dominance
- New public square with seating and planting
- More space for flexible uses
- Underused buildings refurbished.

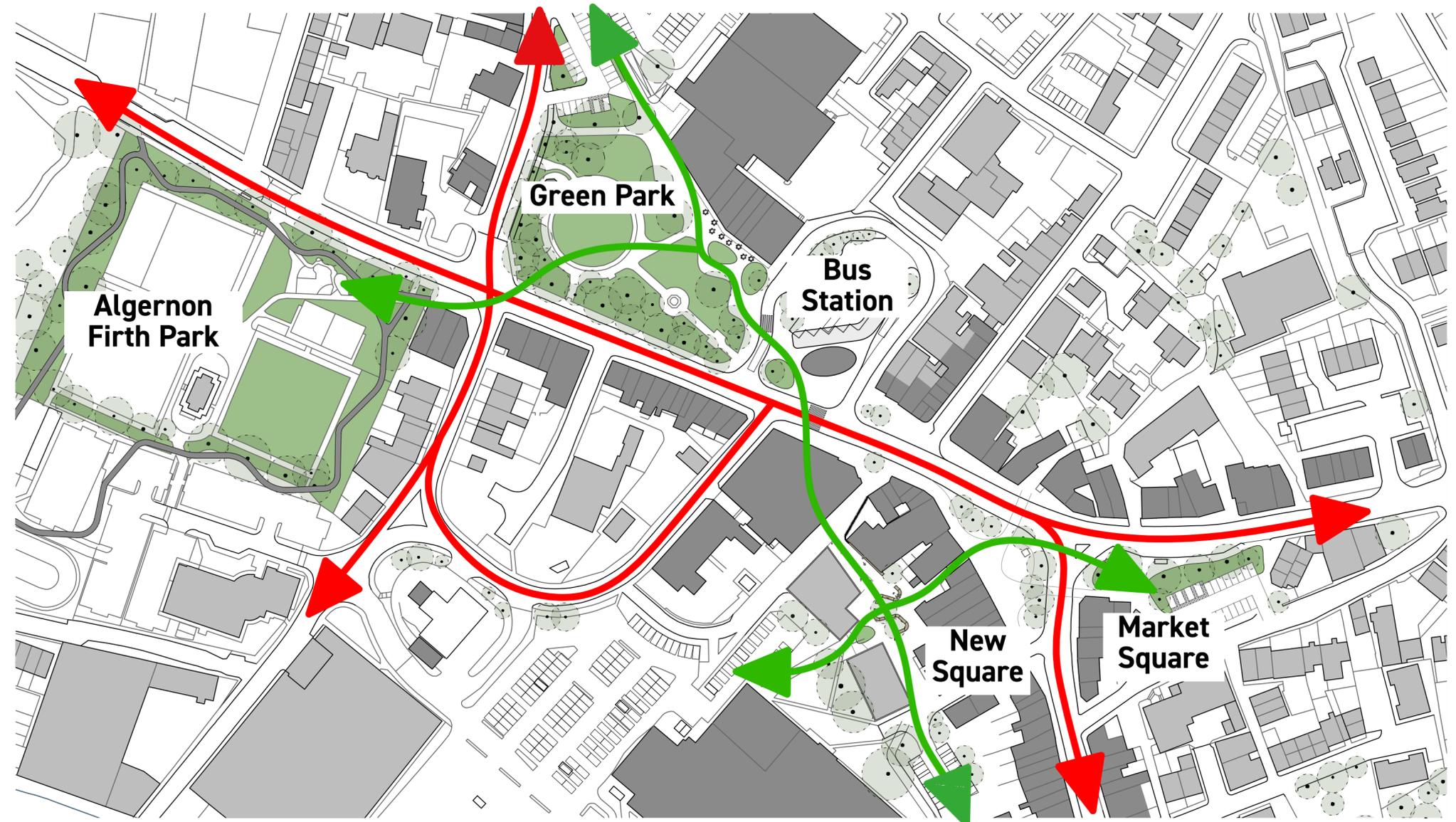
Greenway Link

- Widened and improved access to the Greenway
- New signage
- New lighting
- A new cycle lane to create a safe connection into Market Square

Projects

Heckmondwike Town Centre Concept

This drawing aims to reinforce the concept for Heckmondwike Town Centre. It highlights how changing the pedestrian axis creates comfortable and safe environments for people away from the traffic, linking Green Park to New Square and the reworked Market Square. With well considered crossings and good clear signage, the link to Algernon Firth Park can be improved upon too.



↑ Main Vehicle movements

↑ Main Pedestrian movements

Heckmondwike concept showing key movements

Projects

New Square

Shifting the axis creates the opportunity for a new public square away from the noise and irritation of traffic. This could include a new library, community building, and a public space with seating to encourage interaction. The former bingo hall could be refurbished and reorientated to overlook the main space. Artwork could be displayed on the rear walls of the Westgate retail units. The square aims to be an informal, intimate and versatile space.



New Square

Projects

Bus Station

The proposed new bus station sits in the heart of the town. The proposal to close Northgate to traffic dramatically lessens vehicle flows in this area and makes the space more connected and safe. New landscaping will help soften the frontage and create a comfortable space to sit and wait.



Bus Station looking towards Green Park

Projects

Green Park

Green Park and its memorial, whilst a loved space, is completely separated from the town by busy roads on all 3 sides. By rerouting traffic off Northgate, the park can be extended up towards the south-facing shops, creating a safe and inviting public realm. This expansion preserves the park's formal elements, while offering easy, car-free access. Additionally, it allows for a cycle lane alongside new footways, improving connectivity to the New Square and Greenway for all users. This will also enhance the connection between Green Park and the bus station, creating a well-connected and accessible link that serves the community.



Green Park extended up to the buildings

Projects

Market Square

Market Square, apart from the listed clock, currently consists of a hard-surfaced car park with no seating or landscaping. The space is completely open and dominated by Northgate and Market Street. We aim to relocate parking onto Oldfield Lane (with potential to keep some accessible bays) and provide a green, defensible edge, creating an appealing environment for shoppers. This revamped area will feature protected seating, footpaths and provide space for market stalls, bringing more vibrancy and buzz to the town.



Market Square for local communities to enjoy

Projects

Algernon Firth Park

Heckmondwike has many positive elements, including Algernon Firth Park, which was recently refurbished with a new playground, fitness and picnic area. A new gateway was constructed over the existing entrance and we propose to add new signage on Westgate to reinforce connections between the town and green park.

The current pedestrian access from the town is along Westgate. We propose to add new crossings directly from Green Park, making the link as strong as possible with the constraints of the road network. New signage within Green Park will inform people of the amenities. We are proposing a well-lit walkway/jogging track that reconnects the whole of the area, ensuring its safety and appeal. The site adjacent is allocated for housing and provides an opportunity to extend the park and its access into this space. The new housing should overlook the space to engender an element of community involvement and ownership.

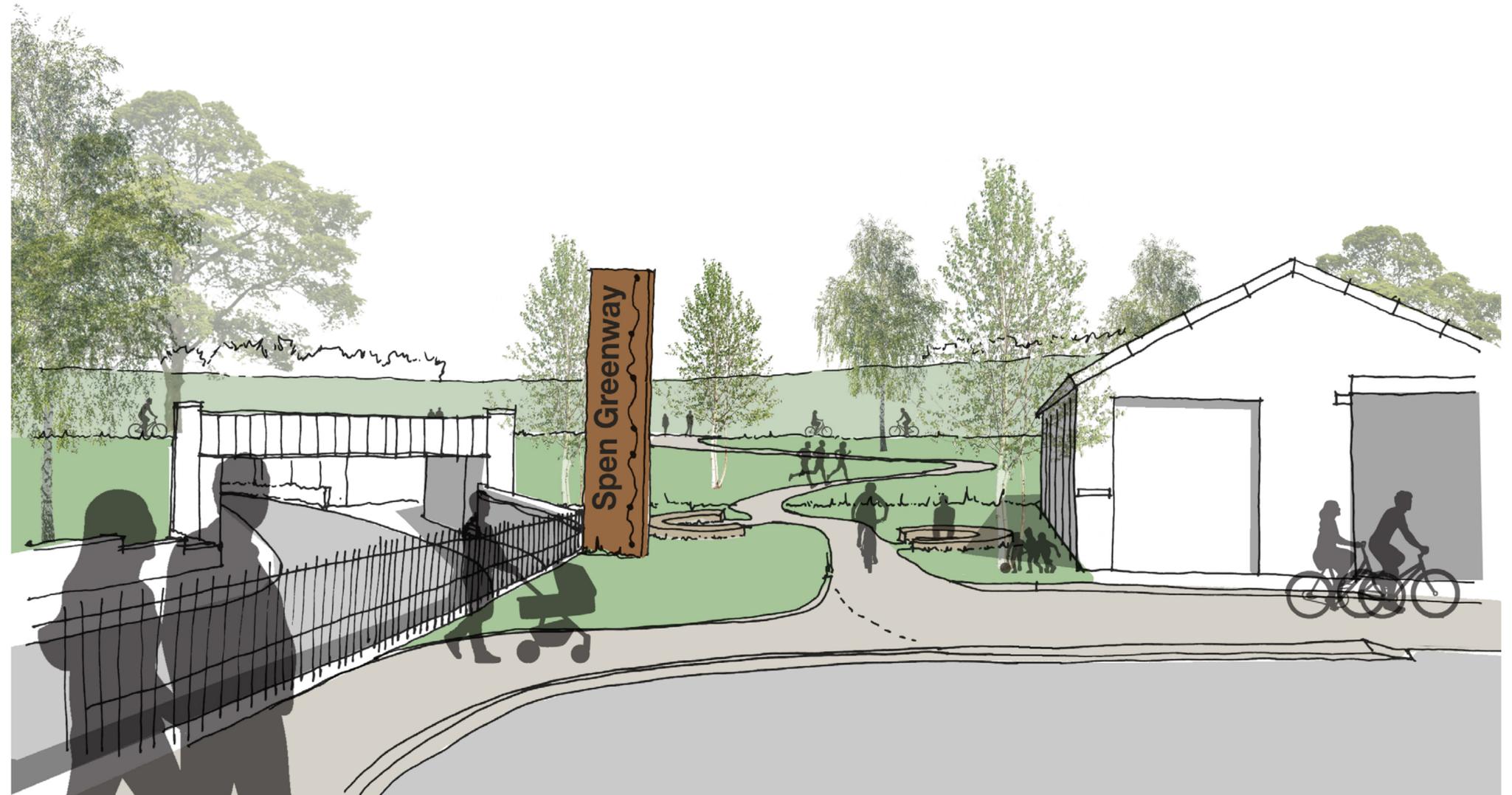


New Park Entrance at Algernon Firth Park

Projects

Greenway Link

Another positive is the Spen Greenway that connects Heckmondwike to Cleckheaton, Dewsbury Moor and beyond. It is a well used walking, cycling and running trail that links poorly with the town. We aim to widen and improve the access point on Station Road and add new signage and lighting to improve the Greenways visibility. A new cycle lane along Swallow Street and Beck Lane will create a safe connection into the new Market Square and the centre of the town.



Improved Greenway Link

How we took your views into account

In developing this blueprint, we engaged with the local community to listen to your views and get your feedback on the emerging proposals.

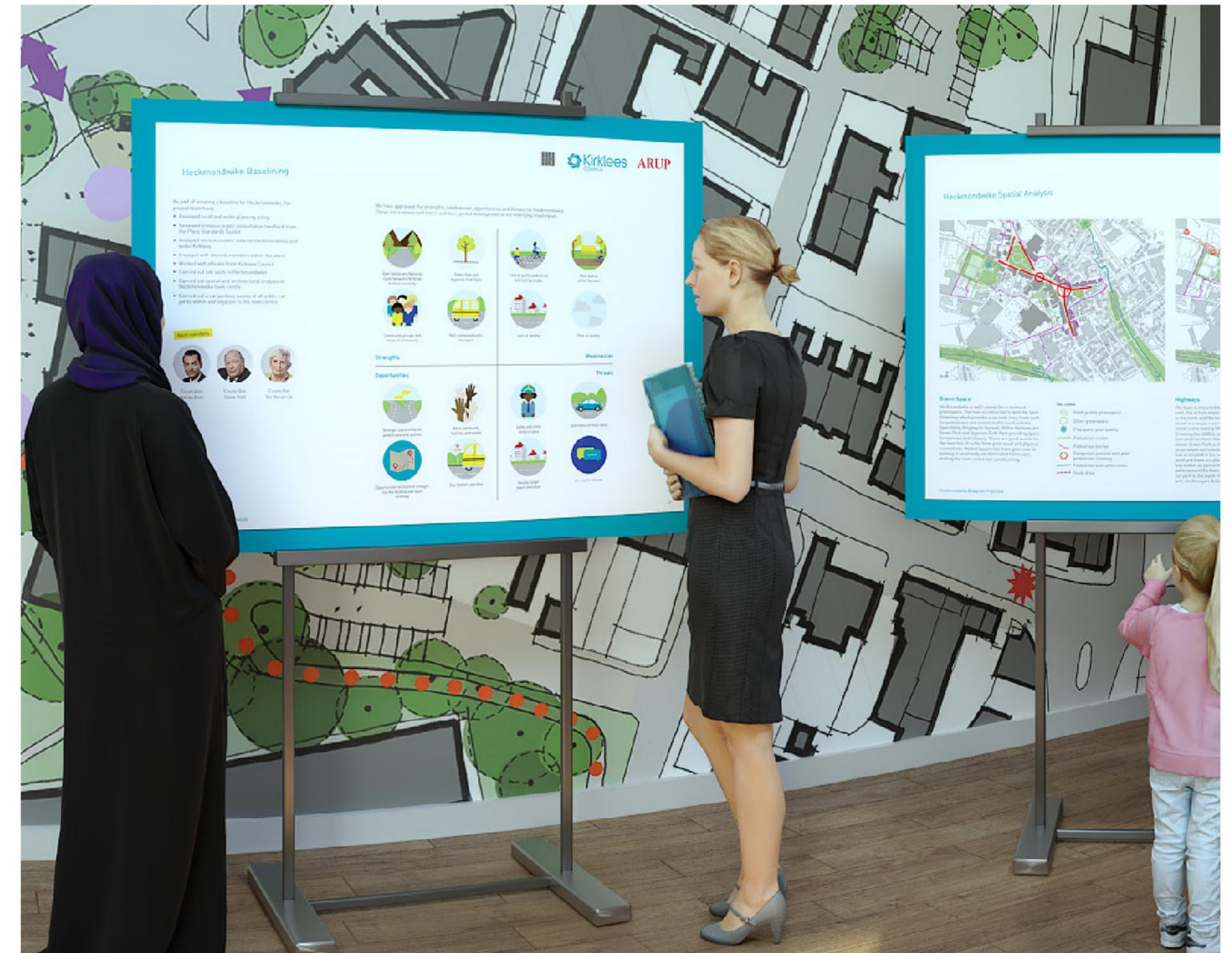
Public consultation on the emerging blueprint ran between 19th May 2023 to 19th June 2023. The aim of the consultation was to raise awareness of the proposals among the local community and to gather feedback from the public and stakeholders about the proposed blueprint and help to prioritise the proposed projects.

The consultation comprised of a range of engagement methods to ensure everybody could access the information and share their views. This included notification letters to the local community, putting up posters in local facilities and the library, Facebook ad polls, in-person consultation events where people could talk to the project team and provide feedback, as well as a virtual engagement platform where people could interact with the consultation material and complete an online questionnaire.

The in-person events were held at Heckmondwike Farmer's Market, The Pavilion and Brighton Street Community Centre on different days and times of the day to reach a wide audience and hard copies of the questionnaire were available for the public to submit their feedback on the proposal. The full community feedback report can be found online at the Kirklees Council website.

In person events:

- Heckmondwike Farmer's Market, Saturday 20th May 2023 – 8am-12pm
- The Pavilion, Thursday 25th May 2023, 12pm-2pm
- Brighton Street Community Centre, Thursday 08th June 2023, 2pm-4pm
- The Pavilion, Tuesday 13th June 2023, 6pm-8pm



Heckmondwike Virtual Engage Consultation Room

How we took your views into account

What you told us

Feedback was received through the following channels:

- Responses submitted online via the Heckmondwike Blueprint Virtual Engage website
- Responses submitted via email to the 'Our Local Centres' inbox
- Social media polls
- Hard copy responses submitted via post

Once the public consultation period ended, we reviewed the feedback received to understand the key themes and comments raised. The public were invited to share their feedback on themes including how often they visit the town centre and for what purpose, what would make them visit the town centre more often, whether they agree/ disagree with the proposed projects, and how they would prioritise each of the projects.

We then summarised the responses received in a community feedback report which helped to prioritise the projects and inform the final blueprint. The full community feedback report can be found online at the Kirklees Council website. A summary and analysis of the feedback received from the consultation is provided below.

How you use the town centre

From the responses received, it is evident that a significant proportion of respondents regularly visit Heckmondwike town centre (often more than once a week) either as residents or to visit family and friends. The majority of respondents accessed Heckmondwike town centre via car on their last visit, with some also choosing to walk. Those travelling by bus, taxis and bicycles were limited to a few respondents. However, there was support for the proposed enhancements to walking and cycling infrastructure as well as improvements to the bus station. The findings highlight the potential of the proposed projects in promoting and facilitating more sustainable transportation options, ultimately enhancing the town's infrastructure for pedestrians and cyclists.

Spaces for people

Responses indicate strong support for new facilities and amenities, particularly catering to the younger population's needs and interests. This highlights the importance of access to parks, recreational facilities and community spaces, which would enable people to dwell and utilise the town centre more.

Suggestions for improvements include greater safety and security, better wayfinding and signposting, more green space and public areas, improved care and maintenance, and encouraging increased footfall and activity. There is clear support for the principles of revitalising the town into a green and sustainable town, creating more spaces for people, and an inclusive and diverse town.

Improved accessibility was also a notable theme of the responses, with many expressing a desire for improvements for active and public travel. Some respondents expressed an interest in Spen Greenway as a walking, cycling and running route that could benefit from improvements. The blueprint shares this ambition for the Spen Greenway, with plans to enhance this route and improve connectivity to Heckmondwike.

Feedback on the proposed projects

The feedback indicates broad support for all the proposals presented and their objectives. Further analysis of the feedback reveals that the creation of a high-quality public realm at New Square, Market Square and Green Park is a top priority for most respondents. This highlights support for the provision of elements like new footways, landscaping as well as the closure of Northgate to improve the town's environment and people's experience.

Overall, the respondents were supportive of the blueprint and further emphasised the importance of providing access to recreational opportunities, addressing transportation challenges, maintaining green spaces, and utilising available land.

How we took your views into account

What we changed and next steps

The feedback you provided on the blueprint has been invaluable in developing the final proposals and prioritising the projects for the town centre. It was evident from the responses received that there is strong support for the blueprint and the proposed projects. The feedback emphasised the importance of providing new recreation and leisure facilities and amenities. In particular, the creation of a high-quality public realm at New Square, Market Square and Green Park were highly supported and perceived as a high priority by many respondents.

The following changes have been incorporated to the projects as presented in the consultation:

- A notional allowance is made for “street scene” improvements, e.g. general maintenance, litter bins, seating, accessibility improvements, wayfinding signage, etc. with this forming an additional project (the exact scope of which will need to be defined through further work).



Market Square from above, with New Square in the background

