



The Stow

Supplementary Planning Document

Adopted July 2016



Foreword

The Stow was the first neighbourhood shopping centre in Harlow and will always have an important place in Harlow's history. Today it is still an important place for people to live and work and which also provides a range of valued community facilities, but we know it could be even a better place for local residents, businesses and visitors alike.

This Supplementary Planning Document provides a framework to guide future development that will help the regeneration of The Stow area. It has been prepared following input from local residents, businesses and community groups who participated actively in the consultation process. It will help to ensure The Stow retains its important function in providing shops and services for local residents and visitors.

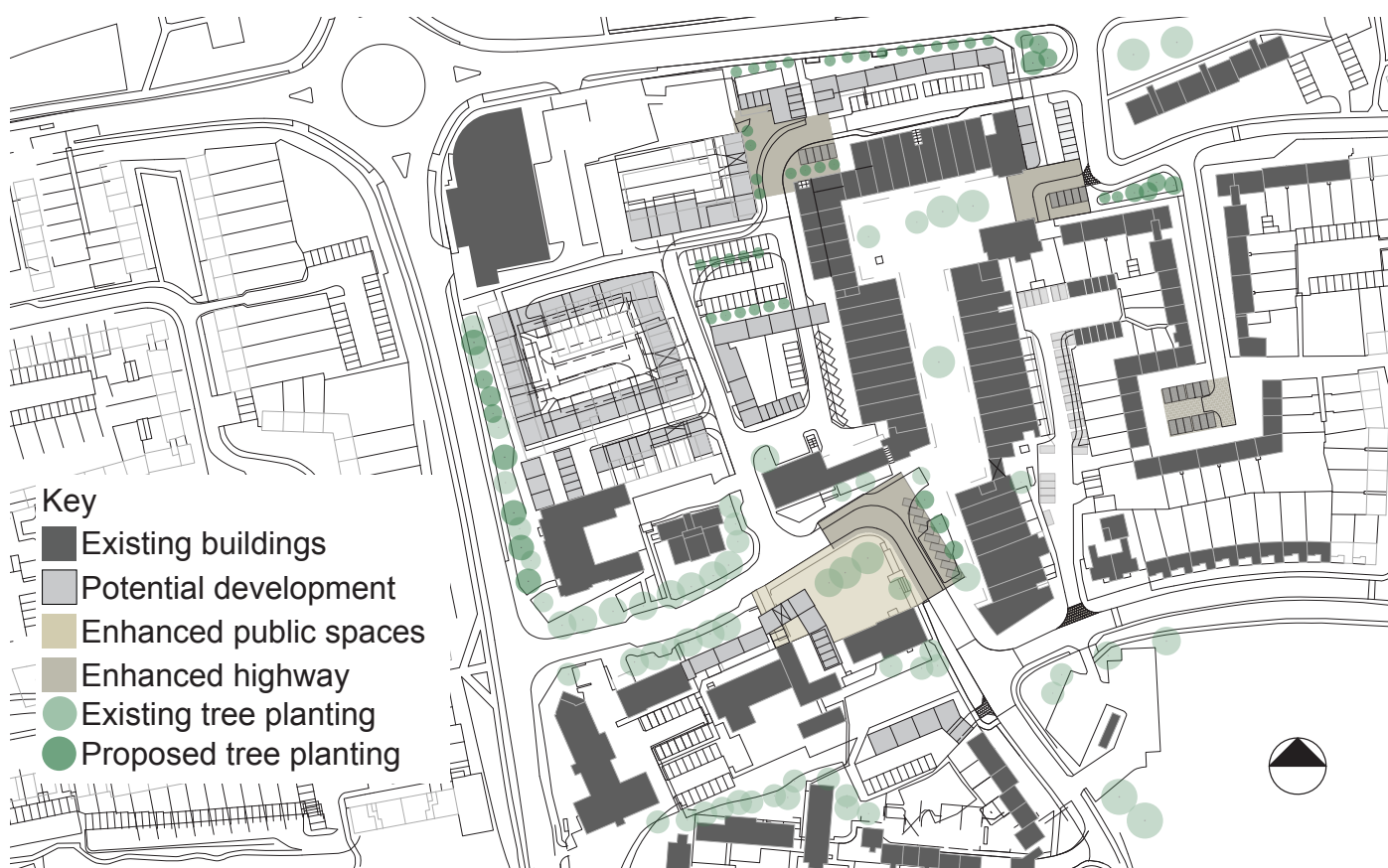


Councillor Tony Durcan, Portfolio Holder for
Regeneration & Enterprise

The Stow vision: “Securing the future of a vibrant neighbourhood”

Executive summary

- Securing the appropriate mixed use development of the service bays site and site adjacent to Aldi including new homes and business/retail units.
- Develop opportunity sites, to create a new outward-looking development frontage to First Avenue
- Improve the Orchard Croft Gateway including landmark public art seen from First Avenue
- Address and improve the backs of The Stow retail units; creating an active frontage
- Introduce a package of improvements to the shopping centre including public realm, lighting, landscaping and street furniture
- Create a range of improved public spaces and squares
- Review and consolidate the public car park and access to service yards
- Improve and enhance Moot House Community and Business Centre
- Greater pedestrian prioritisation and access
- Introduce a comprehensive package of signage, public art and branding throughout The Stow
- Explore whether it would be beneficial for the area to designate the shopping centre as a conservation area, to ensure any future works retain or enhance the historic and distinctive design characteristics of the area
- Cooperative Management – Funding and resource support for the setting up and running of a Stow Neighbourhood Centre community organisation ensuring local businesses, residents and other interested parties have the opportunity to be involved in the management of the neighbourhood centre



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1.0 Introduction

1.1 Background and purpose

1.1.1 This design framework has been produced to help guide future developments and improvements to The Stow Neighbourhood Centre. The Design Framework is being led by Harlow District Council with assistance from Place Services at Essex County Council.

1.1.2 The purpose of this Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) is to provide a clear, robust and deliverable Design Framework which can be used to regenerate The Stow. It will promote and guide development opportunities, whilst identifying how funding, reinvestment and planning gain might be used to improve existing buildings and the public realm, as part of a combined regeneration package for the area.

1.2 Study approach

1.2.1 The 2013 'Live, work, shop and play' masterplan provides an in depth study of The Stow Neighbourhood Centre and a range of proposals for improvement, appearing particularly strong on architectural and historic elements. It highlights the historic value of the neighbourhood, but also how The Stow is perceived (and functions) today as a neighbourhood centre. The key proposals of the 2013 'Live, work, shop and play' masterplan are themed around:

- **Refocussing** – A new public space as the focus for new development and acting as a central node linking the otherwise relatively dispersed anchor points - the pedestrianised precinct, Aldi and the Health Centre.
- **Reconnecting** – Possible reinstating vehicular traffic through the precinct to increase passing trade and rationalise access more generally, with shops being serviced from the front.

- **Revealing** (streetscape and visibility) – Improving the visibility of The Stow by filtering the landscape buffer to the north, new outward looking development frontage, improved signage, new connections, decluttering of key street scenes and public realm improvements including opening up the space in front of Moot House.

- **Restoring** – Identified improvements include consistent shop front design, integrally 'designed' security grilles, refurbishment of canopies and colonnades including lighting, replacement and extension of feature tiling, replacement curtain walling above Dorringtons and to bridge, brickwork cleaning and decluttering/screening of rear elevations.

- **Redefining** (identity) – Reviewing the future retail offer in The Stow and how it can complement Aldi by serving a niche/local need, increasing concentrations of offices and restaurants providing a balanced mix of uses and rebranding through signage, colours etc.

1.2.2 Each of the above key proposals will be used to influence the Design Framework short, medium and long term proposals. Where possible, each theme will be linked to a funding package provided through planning gain, Harlow District Council and Essex County Council.

1.3 Location

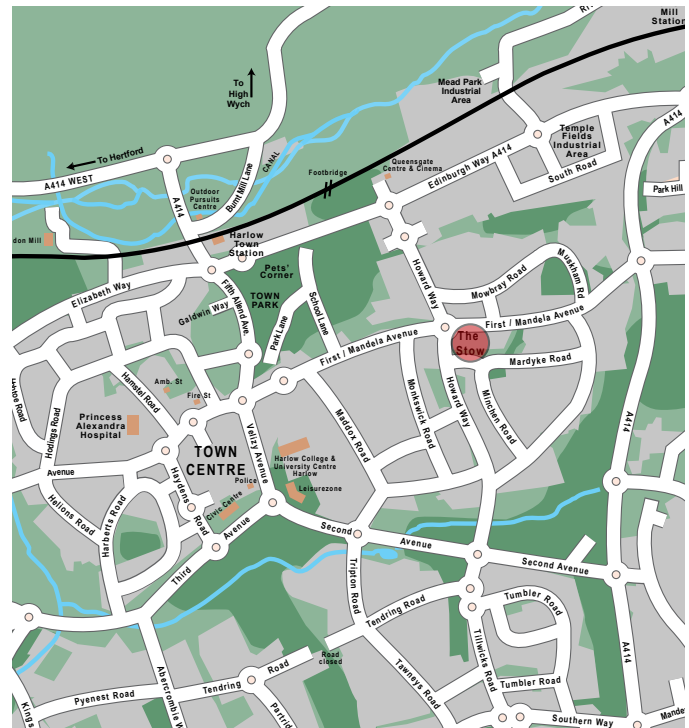
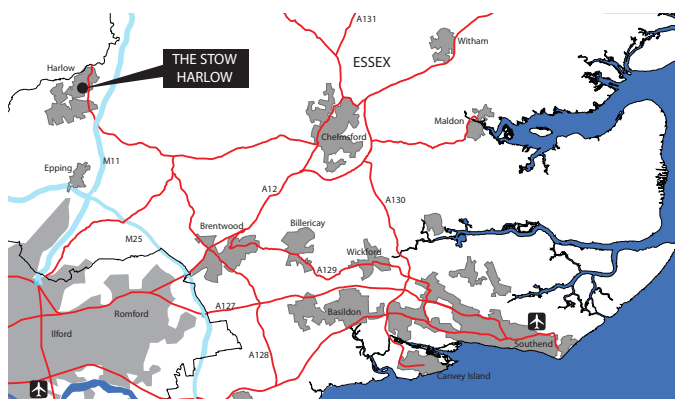
1.3.1 The Stow is located to the eastern edge of Harlow, fronting both First Avenue and Howard Way. The Stow (like all neighbourhood centres in Harlow) is very well connected to the town centre for both public transport and pedestrian/cycleways. The green open space (fronting Mardyke Road and Minchen Road), to the immediate south of the The Stow provides the neighbourhood with green amenity space and recreation space.

1.3.2 The Stow primarily supports the surrounding residential areas, providing both a convenience retail shopping as well as a range of services. Mainly due the range of services provided, The Stow also attracts customers drawn from the wider Harlow area and beyond, and although The Stow's physical appearance has gradually declined since its conception, the neighbourhood centre has a higher business occupancy rate than Harlow town centre, 97%.

1.4 Study area

1.4.1 The study area combines the allocated local plan neighbourhood centre area with the wider area deemed The Stow. The eastern site boundary has been drawn to include links into Orchard Croft, Mardyke Road and the north-western corner of the recreation ground.

1.4.2 The significance (and visual importance) of Our Lady Fatima Church on the First Avenue/Howard Way roundabout, as a gateway building to The Stow, means that this site has also been included within the study area.



The Stow in relation to Harlow Town centre

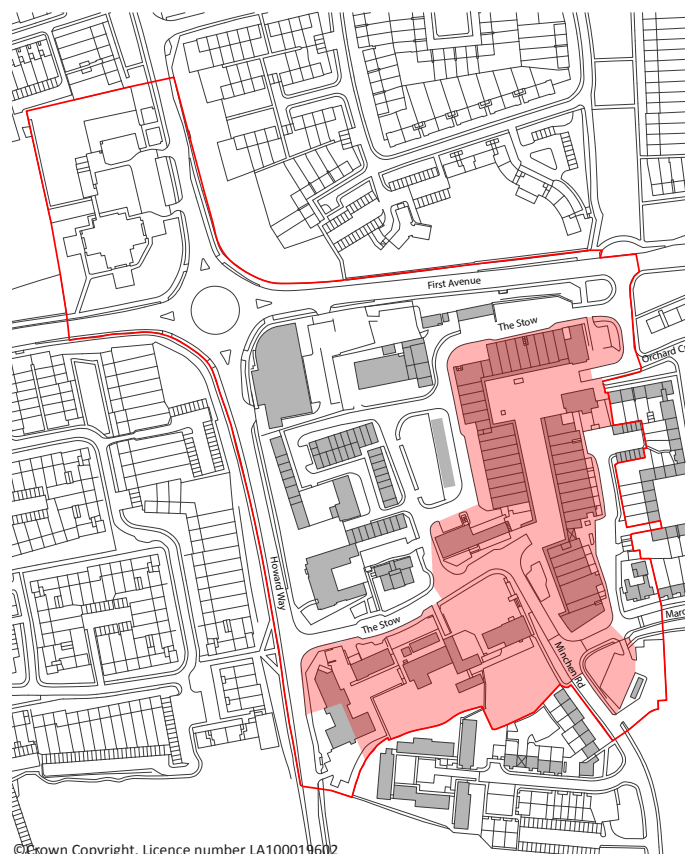


Fig.1

Designated neighbourhood centre
Wider study area

2.0 Background Policy and Initiatives

2.1 National Planning Policy Framework (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2012)

2.1.1 Section 7: Requiring Good Design states “good design is a key aspect of sustainable development, is indivisible from good planning, and should contribute positively to making places better for people.” (para.56). Also that “it is important to plan positively for high quality and inclusive design, including individual buildings, public and private spaces”. (para.57)

2.1.2 It goes on to suggest that planning policies and decisions should aim to ensure that developments function well, add to the quality of the area, establish a strong sense of place, optimise site potential, sustain an appropriate mix of uses, respond to local character, create safe and accessible environments, and are visually attractive. (para.58) However, it guards against detail and prescription and instead says policy should focus on “guiding the overall scale, density, massing, height, landscape, layout, materials and access of new development in response to neighbouring buildings and the local area” (para.59)

2.2 Adopted Replacement Harlow Local Plan (Harlow District Council, 2006)

2.2.1 Policy SD4 suggests mixed use proposals within neighbourhood centres will be permitted if uses are compatible, there would be no loss of viability and vitality to the centre or amenity due to a change of use, and that car parking might be reduced for residential use.

2.2.2 Policy RTCS1 says proposals for retail and other developments which attract large numbers of people, will be determined on a sequential basis, considering need and capacity, sustainable access and Harlow’s hierarchy of centres. Development must be

appropriate to the function, size and character of the centre.

2.2.3 Policy RTCS14 indicates that proposals will be permitted which enhance/protect the role of the neighbourhood centres by improving the range and quality of facilities whilst meeting local need, promoting residential use above shops and on previously developed land, suitably caters for all access modes, and encourages high quality design.

Policy RTCS15 suggests the following uses classes will normally be permitted: A1 (shops), A2 (financial and professional services), D1 (non-residential institutions), D2 (assembly and leisure) and launderettes; provided that centres with 5 or more original units retain a minimum of 40% of frontage length in A1 (shop) use.

2.2.4 Policy RTCS16: states that: “Proposals for the improvement and, if shown to be necessary, partial redevelopment of The Stow will be favourably considered. All proposals must respect the existing character of the Centres, and their position in the architectural heritage of Harlow. Exceptionally, proposals for the full redevelopment of the Centres will be favourably considered. Proposals should not result in the loss of key facilities that contribute to the range of offer or that act as anchors or catalysts which assist in retaining existing or attracting new operators in the neighbourhood centre.”

2.2.5 Policy NE1 protects green wedges such as related to First Avenue and Howard Way.

2.2.6 Policy BE10 guards against new development adversely affecting conservation areas such as the Mark Hall North Conservation Area which adjoins the study area to the north.

2.2.7 The designated neighbourhood centre boundary (shown in figure 1) covers the core retail and service area but excludes emerging peripheral areas including Aldi.

2.3 Harlow Design Guide SPD (Harlow District Council, 2011)

2.3.1 This document provides general guidance for informing site specific policy and planning applications, with section 4.4 focussing on neighbourhood centres:

2.3.2 DG13: Improvement of Existing Neighbourhood Centres includes suggestions that they should promote local identity, enhance legibility by providing taller buildings in suitable locations, provide a vibrant and self-policing mix of uses, ensuring adequate active frontage over the public realm and parking areas, make sure public space is appropriately spatially enclosed, reconnect centres with surrounding neighbourhoods, ensure parking and servicing doesn't dominate the street scene, and promote high quality public realm in appropriate locations.

2.3.3 DG14 Shop Frontages suggests centre should respond to the grain and proportions of buildings, relate to upper storey design, reflect/complement existing materials, reflect diversity, not display inappropriate advertising and external security should not have an adverse visual impact.

2.4 The Stow Neighbourhood Centre Masterplan: Live, Work, Shop and Play (Architecture and Design Services, 2013)

2.4.1 This generates various ideas for the centre's regeneration. It was commissioned by Harlow District Council, though is not adopted policy. Proposals are themed:

- Refocussing – a public space and framing development between Aldi and the shopping centre, as the hub binding the different parts of the neighbourhood centre;
- Reconnecting – potentially reinstating vehicular traffic through the precinct to increase

passing trade and rationalise access, with shops serviced from the front;

- Revealing (streetscape and visibility) – improving visibility by filtering landscape buffers, outward looking development, improved signage, new connections, and a less cluttered public realm;
- Restoring – consistent shop front design, integrally 'designed' security grilles, refurbished canopies and colonnades, tiling restoration and extension, replacement curtain walling, brickwork cleaning, and decluttering/screening of rear elevations; and
- Redefining (identity) – consolidated niche/local retail complementing Aldi, more offices and restaurants, and rebranding through signage, colours etc.

2.5 Harlow Retail Study and Town Centre Heath Check (Harlow District Council, 2007)

2.5.1 This report does not take into account recent changes, notably the new Aldi store. It estimates there are 35 retail, leisure and service business space units in Neighbourhood Centre, equating to 7448m² gross floorspace (875m² gross of convenience goods retailing, 1783m² gross comparison goods retailing, 2,649m² community use, 123 m² leisure use, 1822m² services and 108m² vacant).

2.5.2 It suggests there is a relatively good mix of retail outlets, complemented by a range of other uses, and with community facilities also acting as important anchors.



2.5.5 The report highlights the potential for redevelopment, to provide more modern retail

2.6.3 Where the amount of on-site car parking can be reduced, a contribution may be sought by negotiation from developers for use on schemes within the Harlow Area Transport Strategy.

2.7 Planning Applications

2.7.1 The Stow Planning Applications

Approved Applications- Change of use, conversions

Address	Decision Date	Application Details
94 The Stow	10/04/2015	Change of use from restaurant (A3) to a Hot Food Take-away (A5)
42 Service Bays	17/12/2014	Change of use to a Beauty Treatment/Therapy Salon
117 The Stow	20/08/2014	Change of use from Class A2 (Financial and Professional Services) to Hairdressing Salon
116 The Stow	20/08/2014	Change of use from Class A2 (Financial and Professional Services) to Sui Generis
59-60 & 71-72 The Stow	08/05/2014	Conversion of 3 office units into 5 flats

2.7.2 There are no current applications for The Stow

3.0 Baseline Analysis

3.1 Historic Environment

3.1.1 What is now known as Moot House (Community Centre) was a former Vicarage associated with St Mary-at-Latton Church (400m to the north-east). This property is thought to have been built in the 1840s and is now a grade II listed building. Adjacent to Moot House is a late C18 century stable range.

3.1.2 The first quarter of the new town to be completed would be the Mark Hall/Netteswell neighbourhood cluster, with The Stow at its heart becoming the town's first neighbourhood centre designed to serve a neighbourhood population of 20,000. Across First Avenue from The Stow lies Mark Hall Conservation Area which includes Mark Hall North, the first completed housing area.

3.1.3 Gibberd began work on The Stow's design as early as 1949. Opened in 1952, the ideas would act as a precedent for the town centre, in particular the lively and inclusive concentration of uses alongside the shops, including a cricket field, tennis club, church hall and service garage. The shopping centre at the core was designed with open spaces at either end of a north-south axis orientated to maximise sunlight and a with a Z shape which helps enclose views. Two key design principles were continuous shop front display and a canopy/recess for weather protection which also distinguished the shops from the dwellings/offices/hall (now leisure club) above. Against Gibberd's wishes a road originally ran through the shopping centre with on-street parking. However, this was considered a failure, resulting in it soon being converted to the pedestrianised system seen today.

3.1.4 The area to the west of the shopping centre was one of the first examples of service industry bays planned to relate to a shopping street, with small single storey units for people

to 'start it off' and larger sites including petrol station (now Aldi) on the perimeter. Service bays were intended to provide self-contained modest premises at affordable rents for small businesses of varying character, purpose and tidiness, which might include working trades, workshops, crafts, retailers, offices and manufacturers.



The Stow, 1952. Hulton Archive



The Stow, 1952. Hulton Archive



Harlow, Moot House, 1960. Francis Frith

3.2 Land use, Ownership and Tenure

3.2.1 The original planned land uses of the Gibberd plan remain largely intact, forming three main character areas:

3.2.2 The Shopping Centre – This is the focus for retail (primarily convenience though with some comparison) and services, with residential, offices and leisure space above. A recent planning application approved the conversion of 3 office units (59-60 and 71-72 The Stow) to 5 flats.

3.2.3 It is thought there are currently 56 dwellings above the shopping centre, with access splitting accommodation into four areas – northern block section (11 units), western block section (31 units), south-eastern block (5 units) and eastern block (9 dwellings). The majority (47) are thought to be 2-storey maisonettes accessed via rear stairs, communal paths and often benefitting from front roof gardens, though there are also some flats (9). Most dwellings are still in public ownership, though 10 (with another pending a decision) have been bought out by residents. Residential values and living conditions are adversely affected by anti-social behaviour within the shopping centre, maintenance issues, lack of parking and inadequate self-policing/security to the rear.

3.2.4 Service Industry Bays – These still provide affordable premises to a range of small business, though with a growing proportion of fast food outlets, some vacancies and an out-dated physical environment.

3.2.5 Community Area – Community uses are focussed to the south of the study area, including the Moot House community complex, health facilities, St Andrews Church, library and loosely related to the Recreation Ground. Moot House generously provides seven halls/ large rooms for hire (including occasionally for weddings), other rooms dedicated to particular community groups, a social club, café and

gardens.

The neighbourhood centre previously lacked an anchor supermarket able to cater for weekly bulk buy shopping, though this is now provided by the new Aldi, albeit on the former service station site, somewhat detached from the core retail area. Other important anchors/attractors include the post office, health centre and other services. Night time uses include a pub and five restaurants spread loosely across the neighbourhood centre.

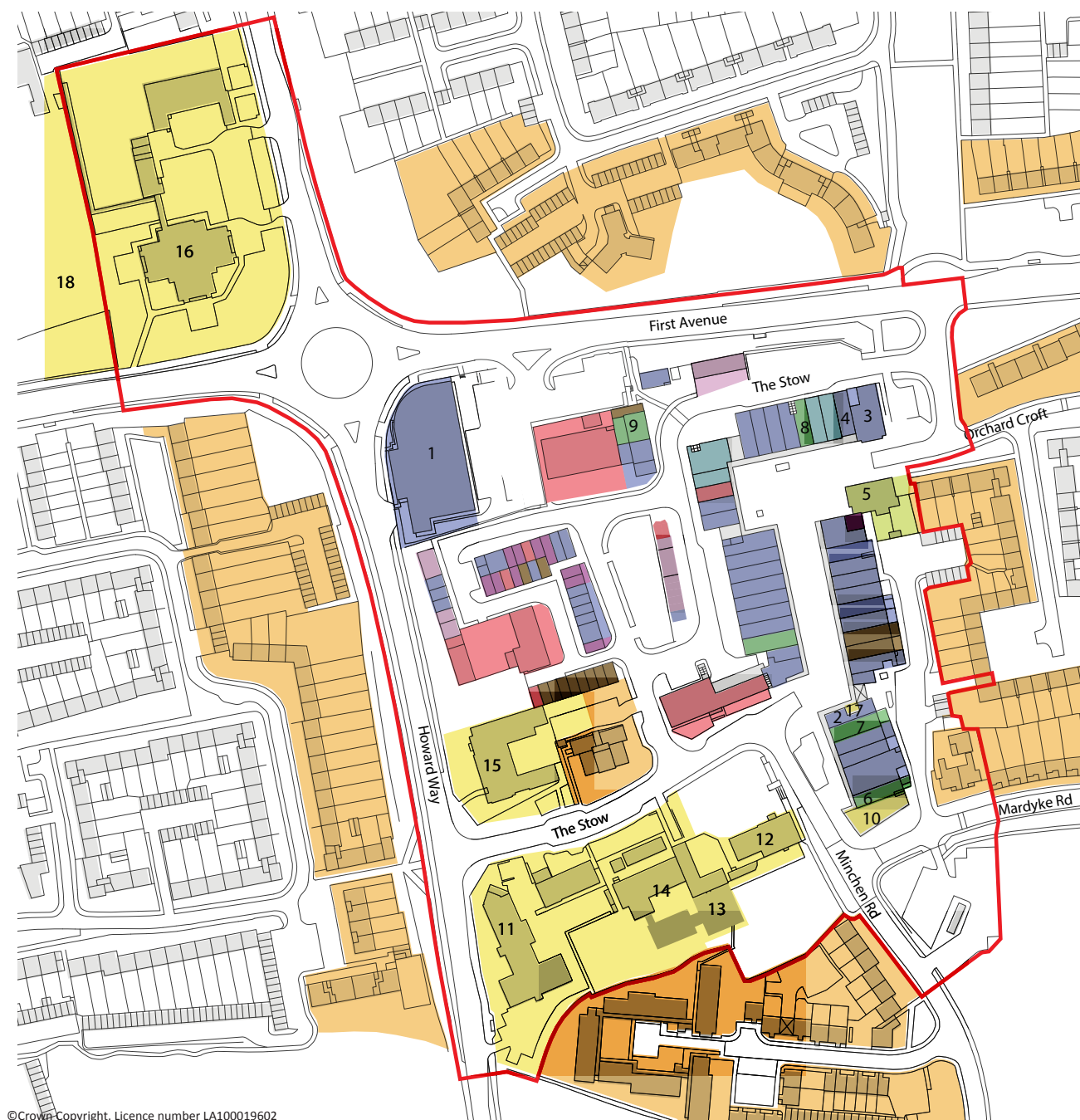
3.3 Urban Design

3.3.1 The neighbourhood centre is inward-looking in nature, generally presenting a hidden, inactive and/or unappealing edge to adjoining main roads. However, the new Aldi now actively addresses the (gateway) roundabout and has noticeably improved the centre's outward profile. The proximity of Aldi to Our Lady Fatima Catholic Church, on the other side of the roundabout, also helps integrate the latter within the neighbourhood centre. Similarly the relatively new and outward looking Nuffield House Health Centre helps positively highlight the key turning into the neighbourhood centre from Howard Way. In contrast it is difficult to see the neighbourhood centre from the gateway junction of First Avenue and Orchard Croft, whilst the blank wall of the library provides an uninviting scene approaching from the south.



Entrance to the public car park

Figure 2 Ground Floor Landuse



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Key

- Study area boundary
- Retail
- Professional service
- Food and Drink
- Drinking establishment
- Takeaways (hot food)
- Business (offices and workspace)
- Residential
- Non-residential institutions & civic
- Industrial
- Vacant

Shops

- 1. Aldi
- 2. Dorrington's Bakers
- 3. One Stop Convenience Store
- 4. Post Office

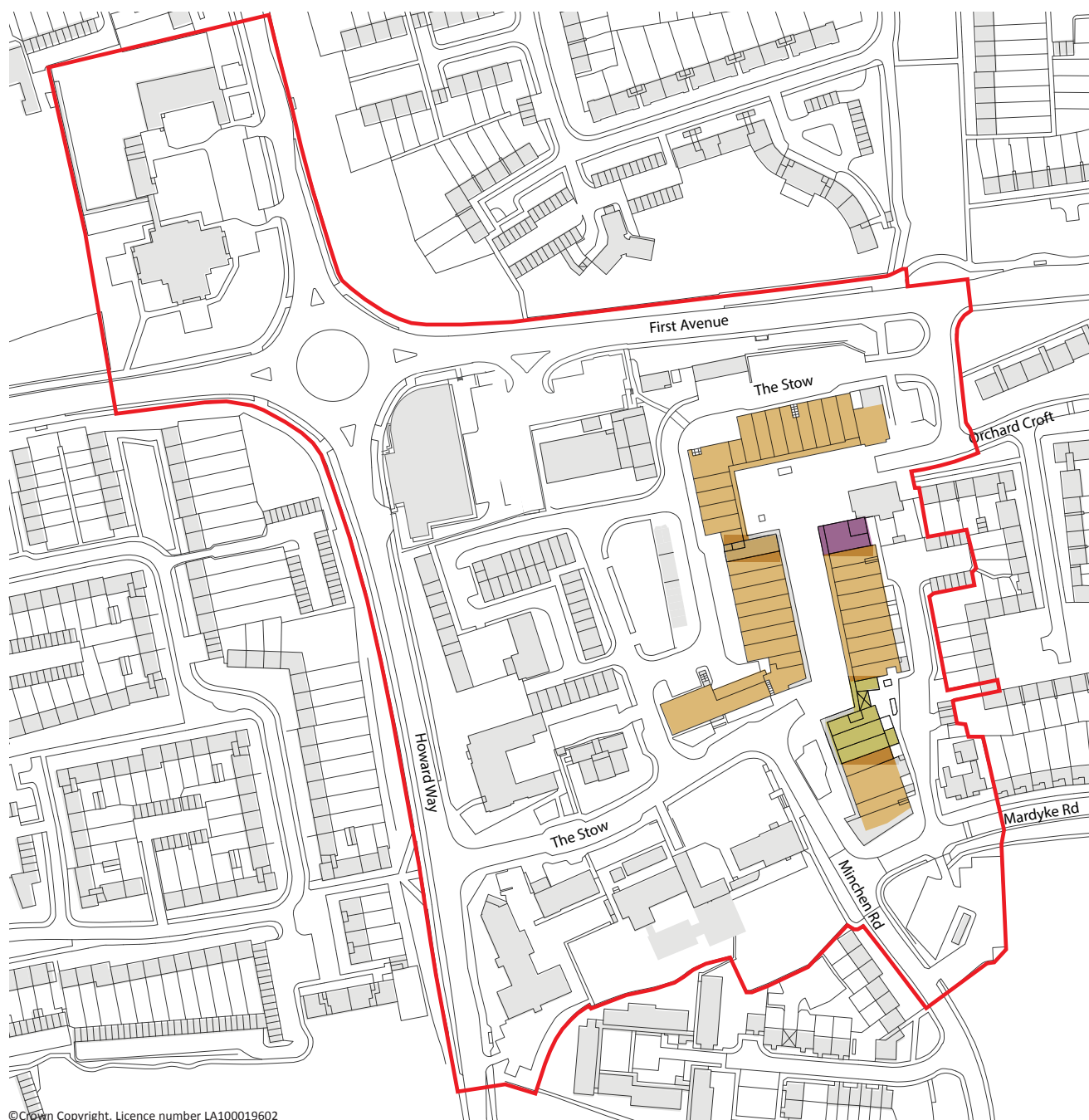
Night time

- 5. The Essex Skipper Pub
- 6. Belash Indian Restaurant
- 7. New Cathay Chinese Restaurant
- 8. Tales of India Restaurant
- 9. Village Kebab

Non-residential institutions

- 10. Mark Hall Library
- 11. Nuffield House Heath Centre
- 12. Moot House (meeting rooms)
- 13. Moot House (social club)
- 14. Moot House (halls)
- 15. St. Andrews Methodist Church
- 16. Our Lady Fatima Roman Catholic Church and Hall
- 17. Stow Leisure Club (above Dorringtons)
- 18. St. Alban's Catholic Academy (Primary School) and Burnt Mill Academy (High School)

Figure 3 First Floor Landuse



Key

- Study area boundary
- Retail
- Professional service
- Food and Drink
- Drinking establishment
- Takeaways (hot food)
- Business (offices and workspace)
- Residential
- Non-residential institutions & civic
- Industrial
- Vacant

3.4 Building Design

3.4.1 The shopping centre, designed by Gibberd, provides a reasonably attractive townscape, highlighted by projecting concrete window surrounds and balconies, added tiling (to underpasses, colonnades and unit dividers), and feature curtain walling; though the utilitarian and standardised block form lacks the variety of use and expression often experienced in traditional centres where smaller plots have developed over time.

3.4.2 The shopping centre has an urban character with 3-4 storey continuous block forms and active frontage, which together with the Z shaped layout and colonnades/canopies presents a strong sense of enclosure. Modernisation, including UPVC replacement windows, traditionally styled canopies to maisonette entrances and pigeon protection measures (including netting to balconies), have slightly eroded the centre's architectural integrity, though much remains intact. Publicly accessible streets immediately behind the shopping centre mean the unattractive visible backs of properties are exposed to public view and are vulnerable to unwanted intrusion. Furthermore, as housing is set back behind roof gardens, these rear areas suffer from poor natural surveillance which might otherwise help deter crime and anti-social behaviour.

3.4.3 The Service Industry Bays consist of a number of quite basic and small-scale industrial-type one-storey buildings, offering little or no architectural quality, often appearing run-down and largely back onto The Stow Road, but in places still offer interest considering the range of businesses, freely expressed individual shop front design/displays and winding close-knit site layout.

3.4.4 Moot House and the catholic church provide distinctive and relatively prominent local landmarks, though the latter's presence is undermined by the adjoining square's poor condition and overgrown vegetation.

3.4.5 The approach road from Howard Way to the shopping centre currently suffers from some relatively inactive development edges including an enclosing high wall to part of the Moot House complex.



The shopfront design has declined



The Service Industry Bays



The public facing back of The Stow is poor.

Figure 4 Townscape Plan



Key

- Study area boundary
- Excellent building townscape quality
- Good building townscape quality
- Average building townscape quality
- Poor building townscape quality
- Very poor townscape quality
- ⊙ Landmark
- ⊙ Key gateway
- ➔ Key view

3.5 Public realm

3.5.1 The public realm describes the publicly accessible streets and spaces including car parks. There are two main spaces within the neighbourhood centre.

3.5.2 The space outside Moot Hall is the main space, given it is where the area's strategic pedestrian routes converge and where the shopping centre meets the area of community uses. The space is formed by the set-back to Moot House which forms the showcase building. It is also reasonably well framed by the shopping centre, though poorly framed to the west, where blank walls and untidy parking areas prevail, and to the north, considering the building's relatively unresponsive uses and design. The landscape treatment has deteriorated and is poor, with uneven and often filled in concrete paving, excessive overshadowing from trees, outdated raised beds providing the only seating opportunities and being too perceptually split by the road running through.

3.5.3 The other square, designed into the northern section of the shopping centre, is reasonably framed by strongly enclosing active development frontage which nevertheless allows for good access (and reasonable activity) in all directions. As with the rest of the shopping centre, raised kerbs are retained from its days as a trafficked road, creating the need for regular ramps and, protecting the ramp edges, some unappealing and often unplanted concrete planters. The square is reasonably well paved though generally lacks a coherent landscape scheme, with trees within the space appearing too dominant and counter to the sense of building enclosure, raised planting beds poorly maintained and blocking view lines, out-dated and poorly arranged seating, and where the potential attraction of the 'Not in Anger' sculpture is lost amid the clutter. Such issues affect the rest of the pedestrianised public realm.

3.5.4 Despite being in close proximity, the neighbourhood centre poorly relates to the Recreation Ground to the south, seemingly turning its back on this attractive space and with the Minchen Road Car Park cutting off views and blocking safe access.

3.5.5 Aside from the streets and spaces mentioned above the public realm treatment is fairly standard, being predominantly bitumen roads and pathways. This is generally in reasonable condition, though service and rear parking areas are often in poor condition and poorly lit, typically a patchwork quilt of deteriorating/broken/infilled materials, including sections of in-situ and concrete paving nearest the shopping centre.

3.5.6 Howard Way and First Avenue are well landscaped routes, designated as green wedges in the local plan. Green verges and street trees also give an attractive green character to The Stow between Howard Way and the Recreation Ground.



Figure 5 Public Realm Plan



Key

- Study area boundary
- Development blocks
- Inaccessible woodland
- Excellent public realm treatment
- Good public realm treatment
- Average public realm treatment
- Poor public realm treatment
- Very poor public realm treatment

3.6 Transport and movement

3.6.1 The Stow is centred on the neighbourhood's strategic pedestrian network (converging in the space outside Moot House). Strategic pedestrian and vehicular networks are separated, which is consistent with the segregated transport thinking of the post-war era. First Avenue and Howard Avenue, running around the periphery, still provide main road vehicular access to the centre, though do not pass through. Originally the shopping centre was also trafficked, to lend vehicular passing trade and on-street parking, though problems led to it reverting to the pedestrianised layout preferred by Gibberd.

3.6.2 Pedestrian access through the neighbourhood centre is generally adequate, though some routes are poorly overlooked and therefore self-policed. The new Aldi has improved pedestrian access to the shopping centre, though does not provide a direct link to the core area of Service Industry Bays.

3.6.3 Cycle access to/from the neighbourhood is reasonable, though not focussed on it. The excellent strategic/neighbourhood off-road cycle network instead converges on the nearby Stow Recreation Ground, whilst First Avenue also provides a signed on-path route running east-west. Cycle parking is not provided in the neighbourhood centre, though sign/lamp posts etc appear to provide ad-hoc potential for this.

3.6.4 The neighbourhood centre is generally provided with good and convenient bus links, though the stops on the main road are isolated from development and therefore might appear vulnerable to crime.

3.6.5 'Back' roads run behind the shopping centre providing access to service industry bays, car parking, upper floor dwellings and enabling servicing. The main back road is also now being used to access the new Aldi considering there is no right hand turn into

the site from First Avenue. A lack of natural surveillance from surrounding development together with poor lighting means these back roads appear vulnerable to crime and anti-social behaviour.

3.6.6 Car parking is at capacity throughout the neighbourhood centre and a priority issue for local residents in particular. There are two pay-and-display car parks, whilst the new Aldi car park also caters for short-stay needs. Unmarked roads outside the centre provide free/over-spill potential, though in places and at certain times this can unreasonably conflict with the needs of local residents. To the western and northern rears of the shopping centre there is currently no freely available car parking available for residents except out-of-hours. However, in practice, residents, amongst others, appear to be using the (too) limited parking potential on lined streets without enforcement and largely without unduly affecting servicing. The road to the eastern rear of the shopping centre is unlined, though there is again intense competition for the limited number of spaces, including from the rear adjoining cul-de-sac on Orchard Croft which itself has inadequate on-street parking to the front. A small number of garage courts can also be accessed from this back road, though reportedly these and servicing vehicles are sometimes blocked by inconsiderately parked cars.

3.6.7 The Stow address is not street based and instead, rather confusingly for wayfinding, describes the area. This includes five streets covering the main through road, the pedestrianised shopping centre and the collection of roads servicing the rear of the shopping centre and service industry bays.

Figure 6 Movement Plan



3.7 Opportunities and Constraints

Strengths

- Moot House (historic landmark/community facility)
- Generally unspoilt shopping centre original buildings
- Small businesses (encouraging business starts, the local economy and diversity)
- Dorringtons – classically styled large bakers
- Aldi anchor store
- The Stow Service Industry Bays hubs; niche retail offer
- Affordable rents
- Dwellings provide community presence and proximity to amenities means they need less parking
- Trees and general sense of greenery
- Good spaces (potentially) – within pedestrianised area and outside Moot House
- Pedestrianisation – safe/comfortable environment
- The car park is convenient
- Convenient bus stops
- Connectivity to off-road strategic cycle network
- Relatively higher property values
- Buildings adjoining main roads reduce noise

Opportunities

- Restoration of shopping centre and Moot House.
- Better usage and long term viability for Moot House
- Structured well maintained landscaping
- Views focussed on the catholic church
- Improved pedestrian/cycle crossings
- Open up neighbourhood centre to main roads; outward facing development frontage
- Reintroduce road access through/crossing the shopping centre to increase visibility
- Improving the link through to the park
- Improve maisonette gardens and open space
- Improve back parking/servicing areas
- Cycle lanes to green corridors and cycle facilities
- Better desire line pathways between First avenue and the shopping centre
- Filter trees to open up views
- Encourage uses that animate streets and spaces
- Spaces in the shopping centre/outside Moot House.
- Permit parking to help manage potential conflict between occupiers and visitors
- Market stalls to complete range of retail, animate spaces and foster new businesses
- Offices and workspace contributing to the neighbourhood centre mix
- Toilets if not already provided
- Public art to help enliven and brand
- Improve lighting and design out anti-social-behaviour

Weaknesses

- Poorly maintained public realm and planters
- Too 'concretey' in places
- St Andrews Methodist Church looks poorly maintained and has suffered from vandalism
- Moot House appears poorly maintained
- Community uses appear peripheral rather than an integral part of the centre
- Difficult and potentially dangerous to cross roundabouts on foot or bike, with signalised crossings requiring potentially long detours
- Rear parking appears unattractive, mostly illegible, lacks natural surveillance and is poorly laid out.
- Pedestrianised centre lacks vehicular passing trade
- Upper maisonettes are vulnerable to public intrusion
- Tree planting sometimes doesn't complement built environment structure
- Park lacks recreational facility and the play area seems small and dated
- Area based addresses can hinder wayfinding

Threats

- Too much community space (inside & out) to maintain
- Small (community) businesses priced out, undercut (by big business) and forced out – sterilised centre
- Mixed land ownership and potential for ransom non cooperation
- Developer buy-out and inconsiderate redevelopment
- Public sector land sell off without any development controls
- Unwanted uses, e.g. McDonalds and another supermarket
- Local resistance to change and loss of local assets
- Underground utilities may curtail development
- Harlow's relatively low property values
- Road disruption would affect highway network
- Access to Aldi becomes a problem from west
- Revert to street based addresses
- Lack of a residents association representing The Stow
- The balance between residential, private and business parking spaces
- Creating a 'rat-run' route avoiding First Avenue

3.8 Sustainability Appraisal

3.8.1 Planning Practice Guidance states that Supplementary Planning Documents do not require a sustainability appraisal but may in exceptional circumstances require a strategic environmental assessment if they are likely to have significant environmental effects that have not already have been assessed during the preparation of the Local Plan.

3.8.2 A strategic environmental assessment is unlikely to be required where a supplementary planning document deals only with a small area at a local level (see regulation 5(6) of the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004), unless it is considered that there are likely to be significant environmental effects.

3.8.3 A Screening Report has been produced to accompany this document to determine whether or not the contents of The Stow Neighbourhood Centre Design Framework SPD will have significant environmental effects and in turn require Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) in accordance with the European Directive 2001/42/EC. For more information please visit www.harlow.gov.uk/spd

3.9 Summary Issues and Opportunities

3.9.1 Overall the comments received suggest that residents and other stakeholders are in agreement that some form of redevelopment needs to take place to benefit the users and business owners of The Stow.

3.9.2 The short-term suggestions were well received, in particular the planting. There were numerous other comments relating to the need for street furniture and lighting to be considered as well as safety measures such as CCTV.

3.9.3 It was agreed by the majority of respondents that the Service Bay Area needed some improvement; however the specifics of

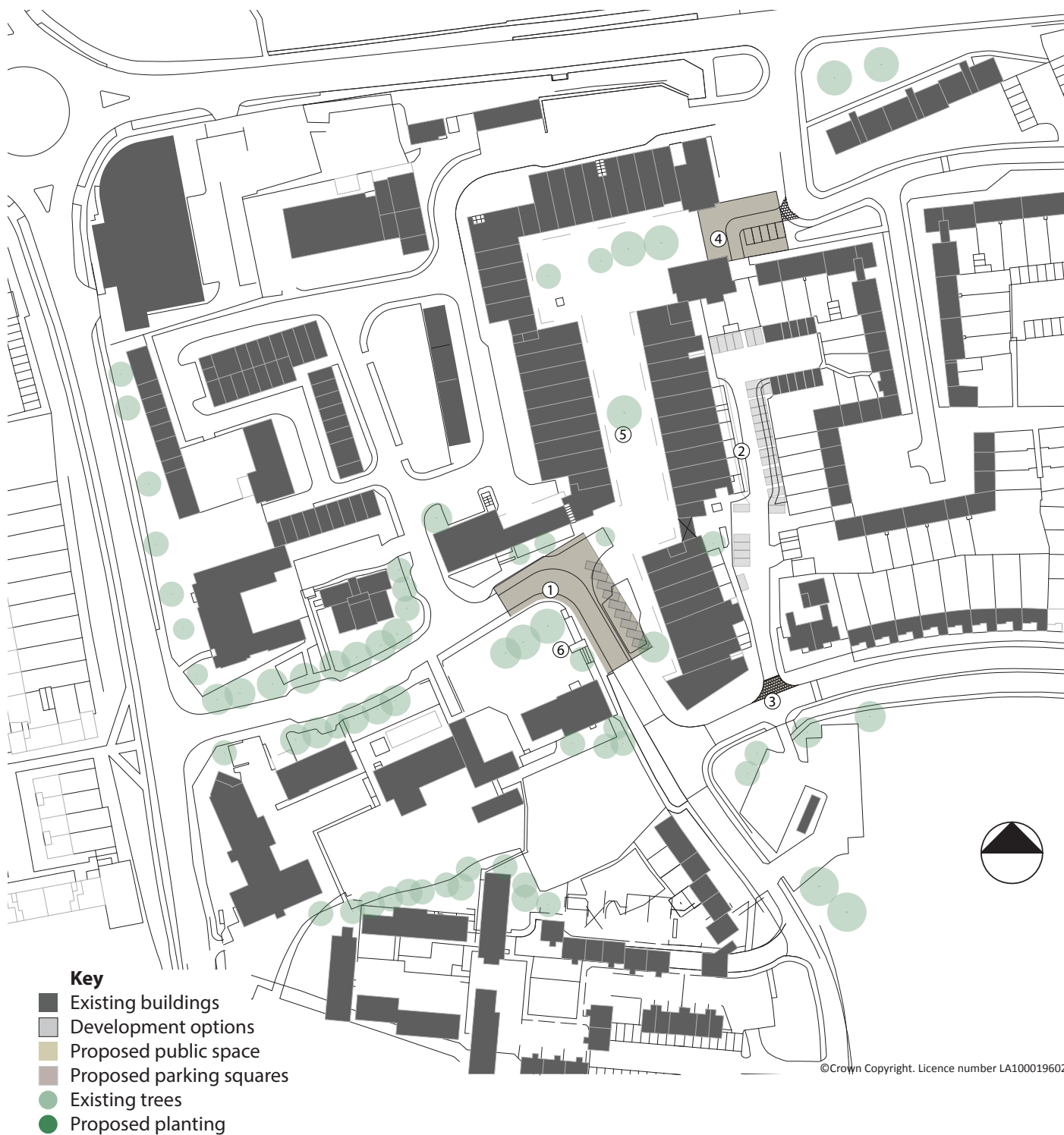
what should be done here were not clear.

3.9.4 Parking and traffic flows were also key themes with several respondents making clear that any new properties should be allocated sufficient parking spaces.

4.0 Development Options

4.1 Short Term interventions (1 to 6)

- 1- Parking square
- 2- Permit parking zone
- 3- Entrance to permit zone and pedestrian priority
- 4- Parking Square- northern entrance
- 5- New lighting and landscaping
- 6- Tree maintenance



4.2 Medium Term interventions (7 to 12)

continued from 4.1

7- Moot House Square

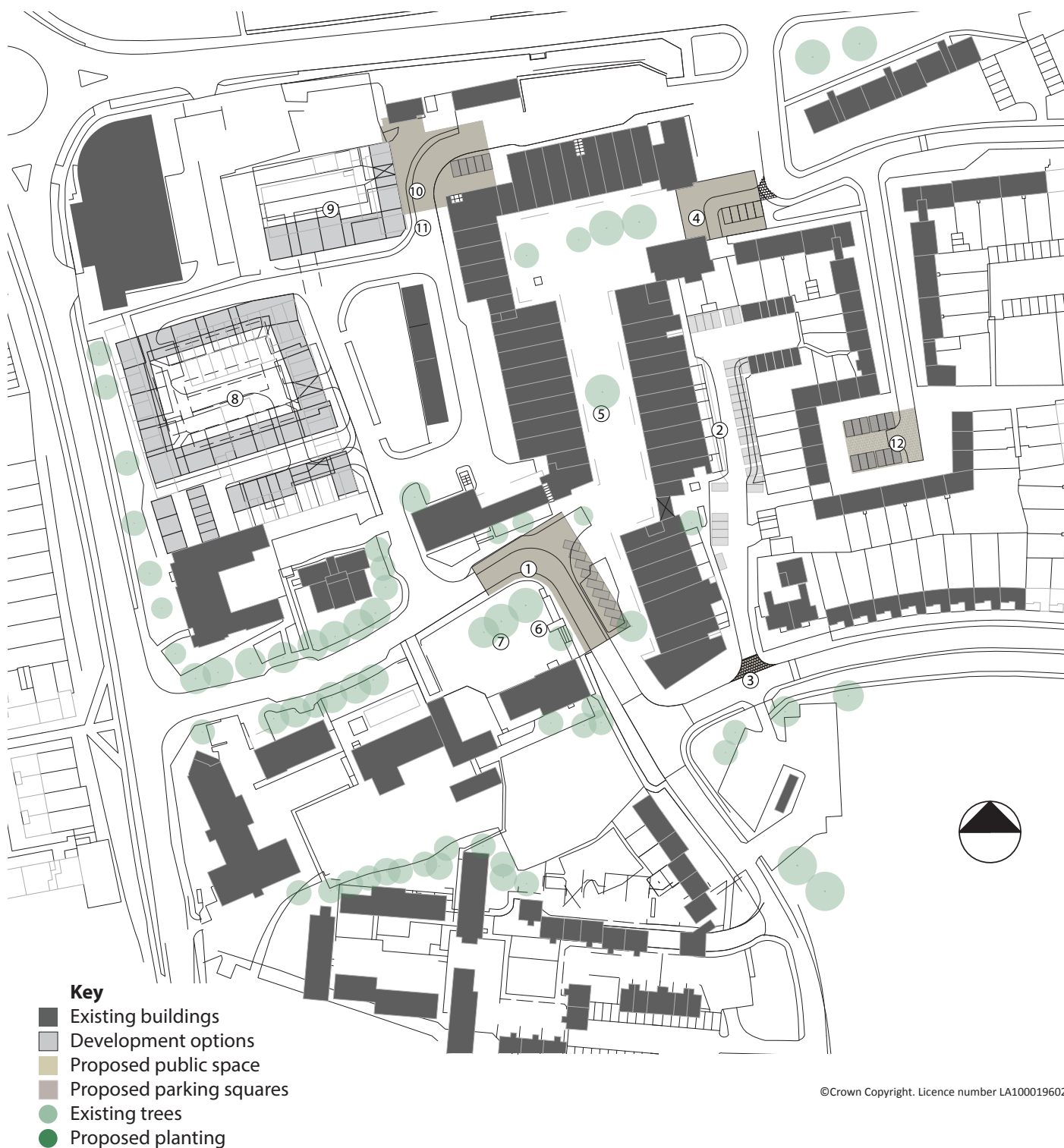
8- Development site on service bays site

9- Development site on the other large site

10- Parking Square

11- Through road access blocked

12- Provision of new parking for residential area

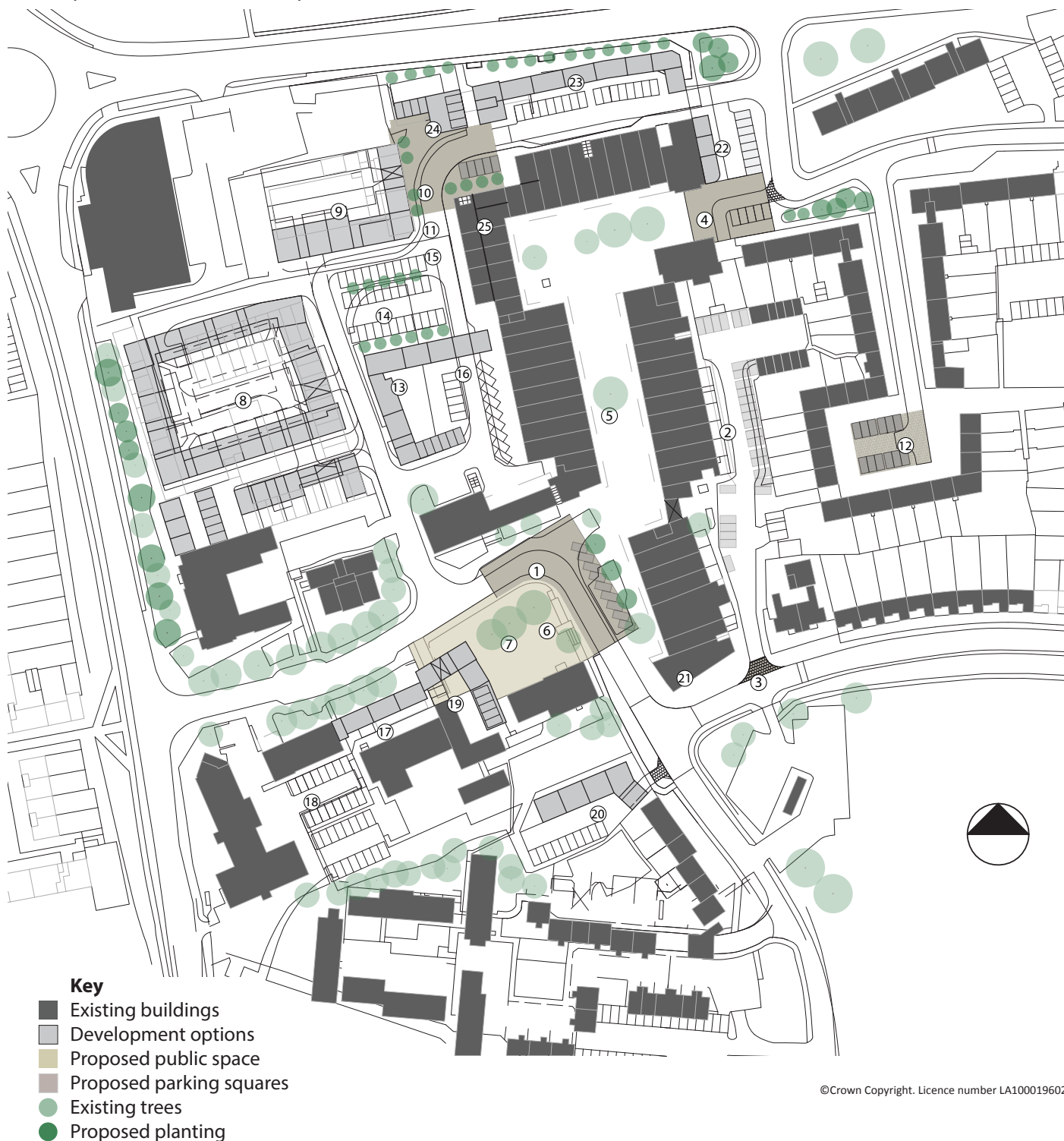


4.3 Long Term interventions (13 to 25)

continued from 4.2

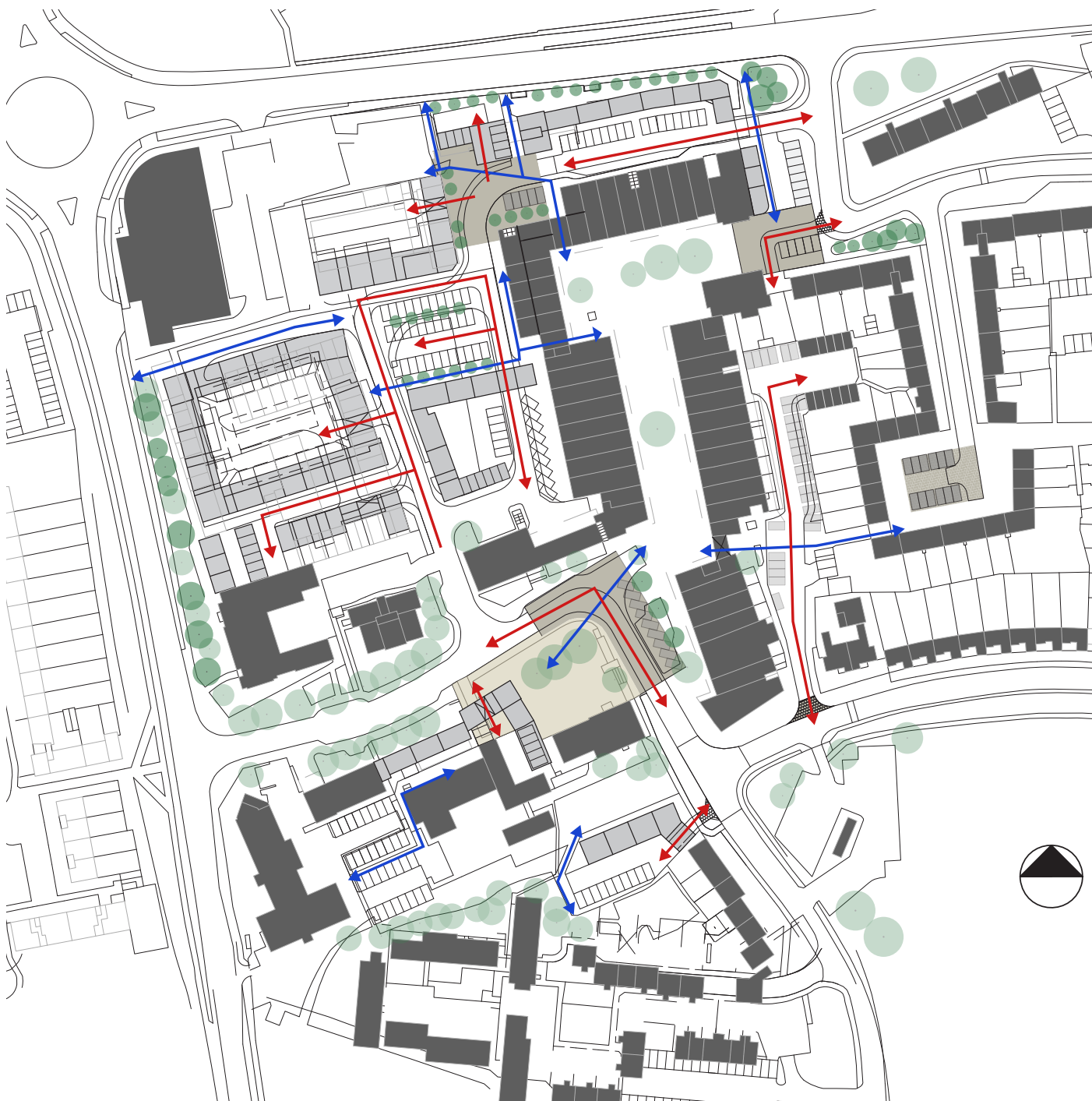
- 13- Redeveloped car park
- 14- New public car park
- 15- One way access road
- 16- Service entrance
- 17- Redeveloped community meeting facility
- 18- New parking on open space adjacent to dentists
- 19- Proposed mixed use development

- 20- New residential development
- 21- Refurbished community Library and café
- 22- New development at gateway to The Stow
- 23- New development on the car park site
- 24- Development site on funeral directors site
- 25- Divided units to create double frontages



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4.4 Proposed key access and movement



Key

- Existing buildings
- Development options
- Proposed public space
- Proposed parking squares
- Existing trees
- Proposed planting
- Key pedestrian routes
- Key vehicular routes

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4.5 Options analysis

Short Term interventions

1- Parking square: redesigned public realm connecting The Stow with the Moot House, incorporating short stay car parking and loading on a shared surface. Parking areas could be extended further into The Stow, but will need to be carefully designed not to limit pedestrian movement.

2- Permit parking zone: controlled and allocated parking zone to improve resident and business parking approximately 28no. spaces to allocated plus service access and delivery bay.

3- Entrance to permit zone and pedestrian priority: enhanced entrance table to control speed.

4- Parking Square- northern entrance: enhanced public realm creating an entrance gateway to The Stow from the northern entrance. The redesigned entrance includes short stay parking for 5no. vehicles, landscaping and pedestrian priority entrance point; access to the private resident forecourt is maintained.

5- New lighting and landscaping: interventions within The Stow designed to improve the environment and help tackle anti-social behaviour issues.

6- Tree maintenance: failing planting beds removed

Medium Term interventions

7- Moot House square: redesigned square which could be used for public events including visiting markets.

8- Development site on service bays site: the redeveloped service bays could accommodate

a mixed use development incorporating approximately 55* units over 3 storeys, 55 parking spaces and private/communal outdoor space. (At least 1 space per unit and some parking for shop units)

9- Development site on the other large site: the redeveloped service bays could accommodate a mixed use development incorporating approximately 15* units over 2 storeys, 15 parking spaces and private/communal outdoor space. (At least 1 space per unit and some parking for shop units)

10- Parking Square: located centrally which connects the Aldi with The Stow and incorporates 6no. parking spaces.

11- Through road access blocked: The parking square could be used to transform the through route into two separate non connecting access roads.

12- Improved parking for residential area: potentially used in conjunction with intervention 2, the redesigned central residential area could provide parking for an additional 12no. spaces, taking pressure away from the proposed on street parking permit zone.

Long Term interventions

13- Redeveloped car park: redeveloped public car park providing a mixed use development which fronts onto the new service yard development, incorporating approximately 15* units up to 2.5 storeys (to ensure any proposals do not dwarf the adjacent Stow buildings or create a tunnel effect between sites 8 & 13), 15 parking spaces (spaces could be allocated out of the public car park provision) and private/communal outdoor space. (At least 1 space per unit and some parking for shop units)

14- New public car park: relocated and redesign featuring 34no. public car park spaces

and through its central location reinforces the links between The Stow and the surrounding development sites.

15- One way access road: a new one-way route maximising the potential for parking.

16- Service entrance with dedicated refuse collection: dedicated waste collection facility to help improve the appearance of the rear blocks.

17- Redeveloped community meeting facility: redeveloped to provide a residential development which fronts onto the main street, incorporating 6* units over 2.5 storeys, 12 parking spaces (spaces would be allocated out of the additional spaces adjacent to the dentist) and private/communal outdoor space.

18- New parking on open space adjacent to dentists: using the currently available space to alleviate parking pressures in creating spaces for a variety of uses.

19- New mixed use development adjacent to Moot House: redeveloped to provide a residential development which fronts onto the square, incorporating 5* units over 2 storeys, 5 parking and private/communal outdoor space.

20- New residential development and parking to the rear of Moot House: redeveloped to provide a residential development which fronts onto the square, incorporating 5* units over 2 storeys, 10 parking and private/communal outdoor space.

21- Refurbished community Library and café: enhanced library, redesigned to front onto the park, providing active frontage and community uses which connect with the space. A community café could be incorporated.

22- New development at gateway to The Stow: redeveloped to provide a residential development which fronts onto the square, incorporating 6* units over 2 storeys, 8 parking

and private/communal outdoor space.

23- New development on the car parking site to the north: redeveloped to provide a residential development which fronts onto the square, incorporating approximately 15* units over 2.5 storeys, 15 parking and private/communal outdoor space provided as balconies. (At least 1 space per unit and some parking for shop units)*Depending on unit size and or residential/commercial mix.

24- Development site on funeral directors site: redeveloped to provide a residential development which fronts onto the square, incorporating approximately 8* units over 2.5 storeys, (with a focal structure in the north west corner of the site to emphasise The Stow), 8 parking and private/communal outdoor space. (At least 1 space per unit and some parking for shop units)

25- Divided units to create double frontages: to create active frontage to the rear of the block and provide smaller starter units in place of the service bays.

*Depending on unit size and/or residential and commercial mix

5.0 Consultation

5.1 Key stakeholder walk and talk

On the 21st August 2014 a 'walk and talk' consultation event was held at The Stow. The main purpose of the event was to understand and discuss some of the specific issues and opportunities currently faced by The Stow. The invited attendees included:

Paul Sallin	Place Services
Peter Dawson	Place Services
Elizabeth Fitzgerald	Harlow Council Planning
Will Hales	Harlow Council Property
Judy Lodge	Harlow Council Housing
Clr Jackie Cross	Mark Hall Ward Councillor
Clr Jerry Crawford	Mark Hall Ward Councillor
Clr Janet Doyle	Mark Hall Ward Councillor
Clr Mike Danvers	Mark Hall Ward Councillor
John Curry	Harlow Civic Society

Key discussion points:

- The square outside Moot House looks tired and in need of enhancement- the space is owned by Harlow Council. Markets and other activities could be encouraged in this location.
- There was a distinct lack of cycle parking and street furniture.
- Pedestrian and cycle links between the neighbourhood centre and park might be improved.
- Many of the trees are overgrown and are in need of crown lifting.
- Planting beds, planters and other landscaping lack maintenance and have become overgrown.
- Planters are poor and are failing.
- Sponsorship or alternative maintenance opportunities were discussed.
- The conifer trees could be removed.
- Street lighting could be updated and enhanced.



Walk and Talk on site with local ward members

Buildings

- General cleanliness and maintenance would help improve the look and feel of The Stow.
- Satellite dishes appear on many of the public facing elevations - these need removing and replaced with a single hidden satellite dish
- Business signage at the entrance to The Stow would be useful to encourage business. This might include a list of occupants.
- Proposals need to make reference to the original building design by referencing the tiles and colours.
- Explore options for feature/canopy lighting on buildings
- Any new development which includes residential should include on plot parking, affordable housing and a mix of tenures suitable to The Stow.
- Toilet block and storage bays need refurbishment / redevelopment.
- Tidy the rear service entrances of the commercial units.
- Shutter design should be explored considering visual appeal and security.
- There is a general pest control problem relating to pigeons and the design of the buildings, i.e. featuring lots ledges suitable for perching.

Car parking and access

- Explore alternative options for parking at the rear of The Stow including business and permit parking.
- De-clutter access through The Stow – removing unnecessary bollards and traffic controls.
- Explore options and viability for a 'car club' scheme, perhaps as a pilot for Harlow and recognising that planning cannot force this on developers.
- Improve parking spaces adjacent to First Ave
- Explore options for the space currently used for four disabled parking bays - this could potentially be used as a development site.
- Some residents have reported a shortage of parking, which has been made worse where previously free spaces have reverted to pay

and display, e.g. Minchen Road Car Park.

- Access between Aldi and the rest of the neighbourhood centre might be further improved, though this is complicated by level changes, ownership issues etc.

General

- The historic importance of The Stow Neighbourhood Centre was recognised and its architecture is a key factor in the Harlow story.
- We discussed the importance of the sculpture outside Moot House, which was the first Harlow sculpture to be installed on site in Harlow.
- Co-ordinated public notice boards (explore options for new locations)
- Ideally keep some of the businesses currently occupying the service bays as part of any redevelopment proposals.

5.2 Pre-engagement open event

A drop-in event for the community to give their views was being held on Thursday 4 September 2014, 1pm-7.30pm at the Annexe, Moot Hall, The Stow. This event was facilitated by Harlow Council officers and colleagues from Place Services. The event had 18no. people attendees including business owners and local residents.

5.3 Public consultation on options

Following this, options for redevelopment were created, these were consulted in June 2015. Positive comments included support for new service bay proposals, the proposals for extra parking also received a positive response.

In total, 18 people attended the event including business owners and local residents.

A summary of the feedback received is available from the planning policy team.

5.4 Reoccurring public feedback and comments

The Stow SPD consultation report (2015) contains a wealth of feedback which has influenced the vision and key principles of this document.

The buildings are historical part of Harlow and should stay – no reason why it can't become more of a community area

No drinking zone and stop anti-social behaviour so shoppers feel safe to browse without feeling intimidated

Would demonstrate pride in the area, reinvigorate sense of identity and local businesses could help promote sense of place

Better signage for The Stow, its businesses and wider Harlow amenities (e.g. nearby museum and walled garden)

More variation to bring people in – not just food outlets we need a balanced range of shops

If loitering and vandalism can be reduced, then trees and flowers can thrive – at the moment any efforts are immediately trashed

Starter homes (1-2 bed apartments)

Redevelop area (looking very scruffy) – mixture of flats and shops

Through road would increase passing trade and reduce loitering

Space in front of Moot House made more attractive and useable

The original retail blocks form a mini-conservation area

Would prefer it to stay pedestrianised but make it a no drinking zone and see community police to stop the drinking and drug abuse

Ensuring roads and foot/cycle paths are in good condition
Pavements and roads in need of repair and attention

More parking, free public parking and a greater amount of resident/business parking

A community cafe ran by residents

6.0 Design Framework

6.1 Strategic Vision

6.1.1 Harlow Council's Corporate Plan 2014/15 - 2016/17 sets out the Council's vision and priorities to drive improvement over the next three years.

6.1.2 Page 5 of the Corporate Plan 'An Enterprising Place' sets out the current and future picture of Harlow as a location for business and growth.

6.1.3 Despite the tough economic climate, Harlow has remained a competitive location for business and growth and is well equipped and situated to support economic growth across west Essex.

6.1.4 However, there are variations in different parts of Harlow. Household incomes of residents are 11 per cent lower than workplace wages and there are pockets of deprivation, notably around the centre and southwest of Harlow.

6.1.5 As Harlow continues to become more business orientated in coming years, a key opportunity is to use the regeneration of deprived areas to create employment opportunities and reinvigorate communities.

6.1.6 The Council will need to continue to work with community groups and other organisations to tackle local problems and improve the lives of residents.

6.1.7 Harlow Council's Corporate Plan, Regeneration and a thriving economy goals for the next three years are:

1. Lead on the delivery of the Enterprise Zone
2. Deliver neighbourhood regeneration and Priority Estate schemes
3. Work with Essex County Council to deliver transport infrastructure

4. Preparing for Growth
5. Support improvements to the Town Centre
6. Support the economic development of Harlow

6.1.8 Key goals relevant and deliverable through the regeneration of the The Stow include:

- Deliver neighbourhood regeneration and Priority Estate schemes
- Preparing for Growth
- Support the economic development of Harlow

6.1.9 Harlow Council is planning to review and set out a regeneration framework for each of the neighbourhood centres, including Bush Fair and Staple Tye.

6.2 Key Principles

6.2.1 The development options have been reviewed and amended. The following key principles should be used to inform the future development of The Stow.

- Securing the appropriate mixed use development of the service bays site and site adjacent to Aldi including new homes and business/retail units.
- Develop opportunity sites to create a new outward-looking development frontage to First Avenue
- Improve the Orchard Croft Gateway including landmark public art seen from First Avenue
- Address and improve the backs of The Stow retail units; creating an active frontage
- Introduce a package of improvements to the shopping centre including public realm, lighting, landscaping and street furniture
- Create a range of improved public spaces and squares
- Review and consolidate the public car park and access to service yards

- Improve and enhance Moot House Community and Business Centre
- Greater pedestrian prioritisation and access
- Introduce a comprehensive package of signage, public art and branding throughout The Stow
- Explore whether it would be beneficial for the area to designate the shopping centre as a conservation area, to ensure any future works retain or enhance the historic and distinctive design characteristics of the area
- Cooperative Management – Funding and resource support for the setting up and running of a Stow Neighbourhood Centre community organisation ensuring local businesses, residents and other interested parties have the opportunity to be involved in the management of the neighbourhood centre

6.3 Development Framework

6.3.1 First Avenue Frontage and Perimeter Block - new outward-looking development frontage to First Avenue and contributing to a self-securing 'perimeter' block, with a newly privatised rear parking/servicing courtyard where general through traffic is prevented, and moving the bus stop for improved access and self-policing.

6.3.2 Orchard Croft Gateway - gateway improvements including landmark public art seen from First Avenue, an enhanced green approach to the neighbourhood centre, better integrated car parking and new outward-looking commercial units.

6.3.3 Service Bays Loop – a secondary neighbourhood centre loop, with replacement 'service bays' including a mix of retail, offices, workspace, studio space and leisure uses at ground level, and predominantly residential above giving a community presence.

Service Bays Residential Area – a relatively high density community of apartments, mews and compact townhouses closely related to and supporting the neighbourhood centre, and providing a stronger development edge to Howard Way / subject to parking demand, the southern portion of this area might alternatively be developed as an attractively landscaped long-stay public car park primarily aimed at ensuring the viability of high employment uses such as offices.

6.3.4 Service Bay Square - parking square with high quality landscape treatment, providing an attractive focal space for the redeveloped service bay area, and convenient residential and business car parking.

6.3.5 Backs Converted to Active Frontage - New service bays created by splitting off the back portion of selective retail units, to ensure continuous active and attractive frontage to surrounding public realm, and contributing to viable neighbourhood centre circuits.

6.3.6 Shopping Centre Improvements – including integrally 'designed' security grilles; refurbished canopies, balconies and colonnades; tiling enhancement; replacement curtain walling; brickwork cleaning; decluttering of elevations (e.g. satellite dishes, bins and mechanical vents); enclosing and securing stairwells; more bespoke dwelling canopies; 'making-over' the former Cornerstone Centre building; removing/remodelling (reducing to seating height) raised beds; removing some trees to increase daylighting; better arranging the context for the Not in Anger sculpture to give it better presence; and replacing concrete planters with integrally designed landscaping

6.3.7 Eastern Car Parking and Servicing Improvements - Rear service access improved and car parking increased by removing the single storey rear extension to create more space and enhancing the landscape treatment, with adjoining pressures for car parking

reduced by turning the Orchard Lane cul-de-sac into an attractively landscaped parking square.

6.3.8 The Stow Gateway Approach - Redevelopment of underdeveloped/utilised sites to provide mixed use (including replacement dentists) and mews housing development contributing to a more actively fronted street, with mature trees protected to the front and additional parking provided to the rear.

6.3.9 Moot House Community and Business Centre - Moot House's role widened to accommodate car parking (adjoining Nuffield House Surgery), a car-club, co-working space, and a managed resource for supporting local workspace, incubator units and other small business initiatives requiring meeting space, support infrastructure and affordable (shared) services.

6.3.10 Main Square - in front of Moot House transformed into the main neighbourhood square, including new and improved development, a high quality landscape treatment, shared street concept which helps unify the space, cafes and restaurants encouraged to spill out into the space, and promoting events including markets.

6.3.11 Greater Pedestrian Prioritisation – Carriageways narrowed and turnings tightened to maximise pedestrian space, facilitate safe crossings and emphasise greater pedestrian prioritisation, for example running through main squares and at key desire line crossings.

6.3.12 Signage, Public Art and Branding – A coordinated strategy embracing landmarking, directional and street signage, history and branding, with public art helping express and bind the different elements including establishing a neighbourhood centre brand, bespoke signage, new art pieces in key locations, tiling restored/replaced and changing

to street based addresses (rather than by area).

6.3.13 Conservation Area – Explore and review the benefits of including the shopping centre as a conservation area, to ensure any future works retain or enhance the historic and distinctive design characteristics of the area.

6.3.14 Cooperative Management – Funding and resource support for the setting up and running of a Stow Neighbourhood Centre community organisation ensuring local businesses, residents and other interested parties have the opportunity to be involved in the management of the neighbourhood centre, through engagement, representation, support for local initiative and, where appropriate, taking on day-to-day management responsibilities in partnership with the Council.

6.4 Summary

6.4.1 It is clear that The Stow needs to evolve to sustain, enhance and protect its status as a key neighbourhood service and retail centre.

6.4.2 The way in which the Stow develops is critical to attract new businesses and investment, without negatively affecting the many positive elements The Stow provides its residents, businesses and users.

6.4.3 This document sets out a number of short, medium and long term interventions which combine to provide a development framework that enhances The Stow. The document highlights a series of quick wins which could be immediately achievable without the need for large scale investment. The medium and long term interventions set out a series of enhancements addressing the potential development form, use, location and massing suitable for The Stow.

6.4.4 This document has been informed at each stage by stakeholder engagement and

public consultation, and it is clear that there is a widespread desire to see positive change and investment into the stow. This is clearly evidenced in the consultation summary report.

6.4.5 Harlow Council as both a key stakeholder within The Stow and planning authority have been proactive in developing, commissioning and supporting this Supplementary Planning Document to help inform a holistic development framework.

6.4.6 When adopted, this document should be used to guide, assess and inform any emerging planning application, Highways or transformation project within The Stow.