

Lymington NP 4015\_021

## A Vision for the Town Centre

13<sup>th</sup> July 2022\_v6

## 1.0 Introduction

*“Town centres are a focal point for our culture, communities and everyday economies. They support the most sustainable models of living and working, including active travel and shorter commutes. And they are where new ideas, new ways of living, new businesses and new experiences are made.”*

(High Streets and Town Centres Adaptive Strategies, 2020)

Town centres in the UK have become increasingly focused on their economic functions with development policies promoting the growth of retail and office space which have led to a reduction in public realm and a loss of other functions which had traditionally supported the town centre.

Town centres are now more sensitive to changing consumer and economic trends, and with the rise in online shopping, the 2008 economic crash and more recently COVID-19, the decline of many town centres has accelerated, and although Lymington Town Centre has retained its attraction as a vibrant destination that draws in many visitors and tourists throughout the year, consideration still needs to be given to how it will meet these and other longer term challenges including the climate crisis.

To achieve this the 21st century town centre must diversify its functions and provide a more balanced mix of social, public and economic activities as they did in the past. It must take a ‘Place First’ approach that reflects the needs of its users, its specific characteristics, strengths, culture and heritage.

This report sets out a vision for Lymington town centre which includes the High Street and its role in connecting and supporting the other elements of the town centre. It has been prepared in the context of the Lymington and Pennington Neighbourhood Plan (LPNP) which is currently at Regulation 14 stage for statutory consultation, and it is intended to support the LPNP by setting out a vision for the High Street, and the mechanisms by which the LPNP can help facilitate the delivery of the vision.

## 2.0 Analysis

The following analysis of the town centre considers its layout, its business, community and residential areas, its public spaces and special features (e.g. rivers and bridges), together with the trainlines, roads and footways that connect the various areas.

The analysis has been informed by a walk around with the town centre working group and discussions on previous proposals to highlight issues and opportunities which have been used to propose objectives for a vision and identify opportunities for helping deliver the vision.

### 2.1 Lymington Town Centre: The Structure

The structure of Lymington town centre is defined by four elements:

#### **1) The Quay and Riverfront**

At the northern end there are retail and leisure uses including the Ship Inn, with a pedestrian connection to the High Street via Quay Hill, and to the Station via Quay Street and Mill Lane.

The central area of the waterfront is dominated by marine related businesses and moorings which have limited public access. The Bath Road Recreation Ground is publicly accessible open space that hosts events.

At the southern end is the Sea Water swimming baths and further moorings surrounded by parking areas and marine businesses. A network of footpaths extends southwards forming a recreational loop around the southern part of the town via Lower Pennington and Pennington. The Waterfront has the following issues:

- Although it is in an attractive setting animated by marine activity, with views east to open countryside and south across The Solent, it is dominated by parking and suffers from poor connectivity, wayfinding and visibility from both the High Street and the Station. The connection to the Station via the waterfront is particularly circuitous and difficult to navigate.
- A previous initiative to create a public space at the eastern end of the town and the Quay was unsuccessful due to a lack of vision, objections from local residents over its impact, the loss of parking, and spiralling costs.

## 2) The High Street

The High Street runs east-west, from Gosport Street to Church Lane and for the purposes of this report includes St Thomas Street up to Priestlands Place. The High Street has retained an active mix of shops, services and businesses with a combination of independents and chain stores.

The High Street is also the main part of the Georgian Conservation Area with a layout predicated on burgage plots, with the popular Charter Market held every Saturday along the High Street. In addition to the shops, services and businesses there are a substantial number of residential properties above the shops and tucked away in the alleyways leading off the High Street.

However, the High Street lacks a significant public space, such as a town square, to provide a meeting place and a focus for the community.

The layout of the High Street makes it accessible, attractive and easy to navigate with the landmarks of the tower of St Thomas the Apostle at the western end and a view across Lymington River to open countryside at the western end where the High Street drops down to the river valley. A large part of the town is within an 800m/10 minute walking distance of the High Street.

The road width along the High Street is generally 10m to 11m narrowing to 8m at the western end and has parking provision on both sides along the majority of its length. The High Street has the following issues:

- Despite the width of the road there is no tree planting along the High Street apart from the three trees outside the post office.
- There is a lack of spill out spaces for food and drink businesses to encourage people to stay longer.
- Apart from the signalised pedestrian crossing at the western end, the environment is car dominated with little provision for cyclists.

### **3) The Station**

Lymington Town Station is tucked away at the eastern end of the town off Gosport Street with the line continuing a few hundred meters across Lymington River to the Lymington Pier terminus. The Station has the following issues:

- It is not an attractive or easily navigable entrance into the town.
- It is poorly connected to the High Street and The Waterfront.
- Its shared access with the bus depot has a negative impact on the pedestrian environment.
- There are no supporting shops or services close to the station.

### **4) The New Street Community/Cultural area**

The area around New Street has been recommended by the neighbourhood plan Design and Heritage group to become a 'Cultural zone'. It includes the Lymington Centre, St Barbe Museum, and the now largely unused Literary Institute.

### **5) The Town Centre Green Spaces**

There are a number of green spaces close to the town centre including Grove Gardens, Emsworth Road (with a playpark and petanque court), the Sports Ground (including the football, cricket, bowls and tennis facilities) and the underused Gurney Dixon land (more recently named Withy Wood).

### **6) The Priestlands Schools and Health and Leisure Centre**

Approximately 400m to the west of the High Street/St Thomas Street, is a key piece of community infrastructure in the triangle between Milford Road, North Street and Priestlands Road. It includes the Priestlands Infant's, Junior and Secondary schools, the Lymington Health and Leisure centre, and Withy Wood which includes a 2.6 ha accessible wooded area with three small lakes. Withy Wood is an important wildlife site and open space amenity within the built-up area of the town. These facilities are well connected to Pennington, but pedestrian/cyclist connectivity eastwards to the High Street and to the other amenities to the east are restricted by Milford Road and the Priestlands Place/Stanford Road gyratory.

## 7) The Town Gateways

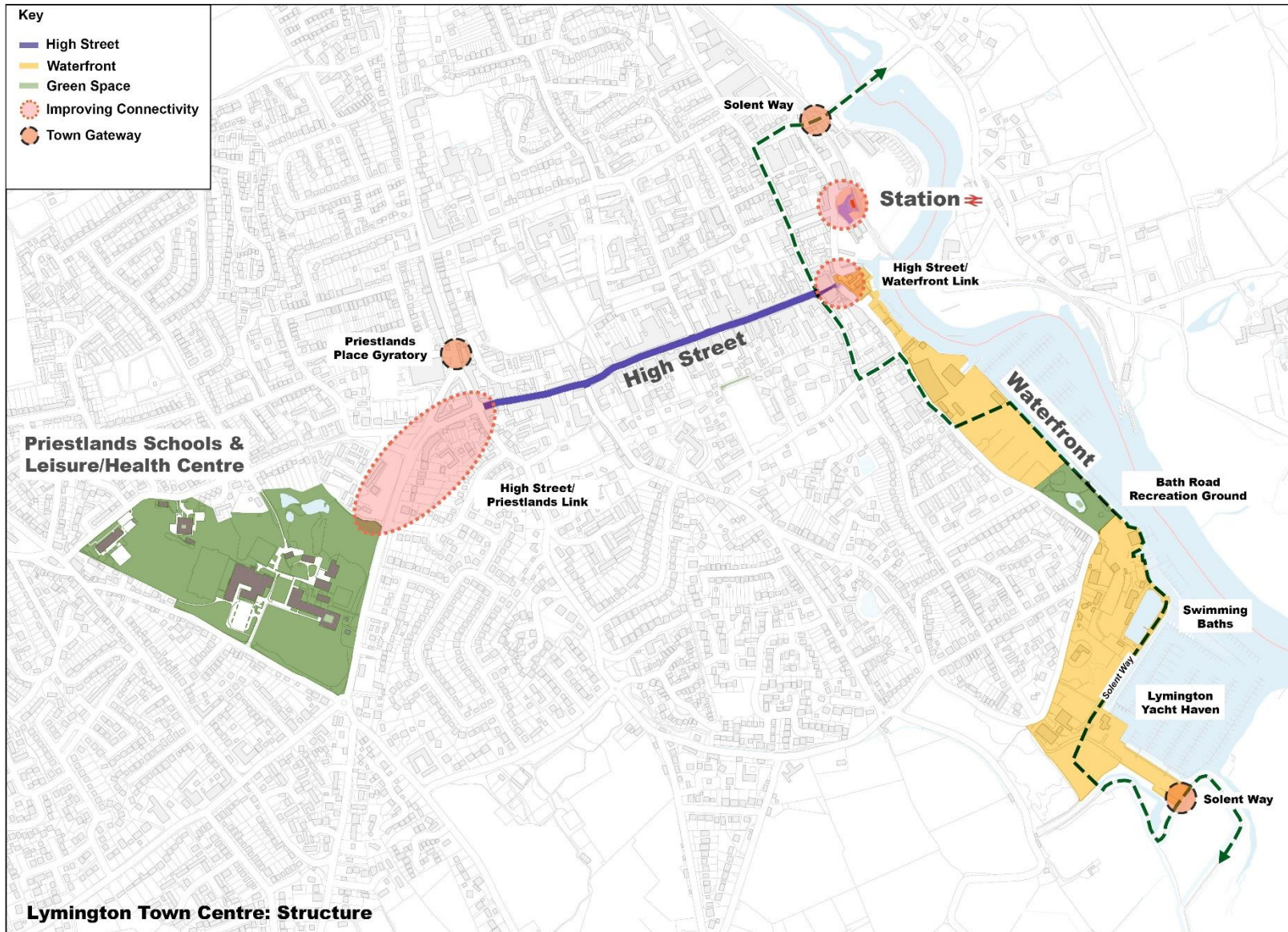
The town centre can be accessed in a number of ways: from Lymington Railway Station, Bridge Road/Gosport Street which is a busy approach from the New Forest and the Lymington Pier Railway Station/IOW ferries, and the Priestlands Place Gyratory which is a busy road approach from the north and west.

The Solent Way coastal walking route which forms part of the LPNP green infrastructure plan, is also a gateway to the town, running from Milford-on-Sea to Emsworth Harbour alongside Lymington's waterfront via Bath Road and Captains Row, passing the eastern end of the High Street onto Gosport Street after which it heads towards Beaulieu via Bridge Road.

A new footbridge over the railway line as part of the Lymington Shores/Almansa Way development, giving access to a riverside walk, gallery, shop and restaurant has yet to be delivered.

The Lymington Town Centre Structure diagram illustrates the relationship between the key elements of the town centre. Four areas have been highlighted where connectivity, setting and presence could be improved to make the town centre more accessible:

- The Station which lacks presence, a sense of arrival and attractive navigable routes to the High Street Quay/Riverfront
- The link between the High Street and the Quay/Riverfront
- The link between the High Street and the Priestlands Schools/Health and Leisure Centre
- Enhancing the other gateways into Town.



## 2.2 Lymington Town Centre: Amenities

Apart from the Leisure Centre/Withy Wood and the Bath Road Recreation Ground along the Waterfront, there are two further significant green spaces within easy reach of the High Street.

- At the western end of the High Street is the Lymington Sports Ground with the cricket and football clubs, and the Emsworth Road recreation ground, totalling around 3.8ha. These can be accessed by footpaths from the residential area along Avenue Road to the north, and from the High Street through the grounds of Saint Thomas the Apostle.
- Towards the eastern end of the High Street is Grove Park, a grassed area of around 1.3ha. accessed from the High Street via Ashley Lane and connected to the waterfront via Grove Road/Nelson Place.

New Street is the cultural focus within the town centre with the St Barbe Museum and Art Gallery. It is also a primary connecting route between the High Street and the residential areas to the north.

In addition to the primary connecting routes, there are a number of lanes, courts and secondary streets off the High Street to the north and south which are a legacy of the town's burbage plot planning. These spaces are heritage assets and an important part of the character of the High Street. They also provide additional connectivity for pedestrians and cyclists to access the town centre, outside spaces for businesses and socialising, and a town centre residential population that contributes to its character and vitality.

## 2.3 Town Centre walkabout

Following a meeting with the group to discuss issues around the future of town centres generally, and the particular issues that Lymington faces, there was a walkabout with members of the town centre working group on the 8<sup>th</sup> February 2022 to consider where improvements should be focused.

The route taken was from the town hall offices onto the High Street via Lymington Sports Ground/ Saint Thomas the Apostle churchyard, onto Ashley Lane, Grove Gardens, Madeira Walk and Quay Road, then along the waterside and Mill Lane to finish at the station.



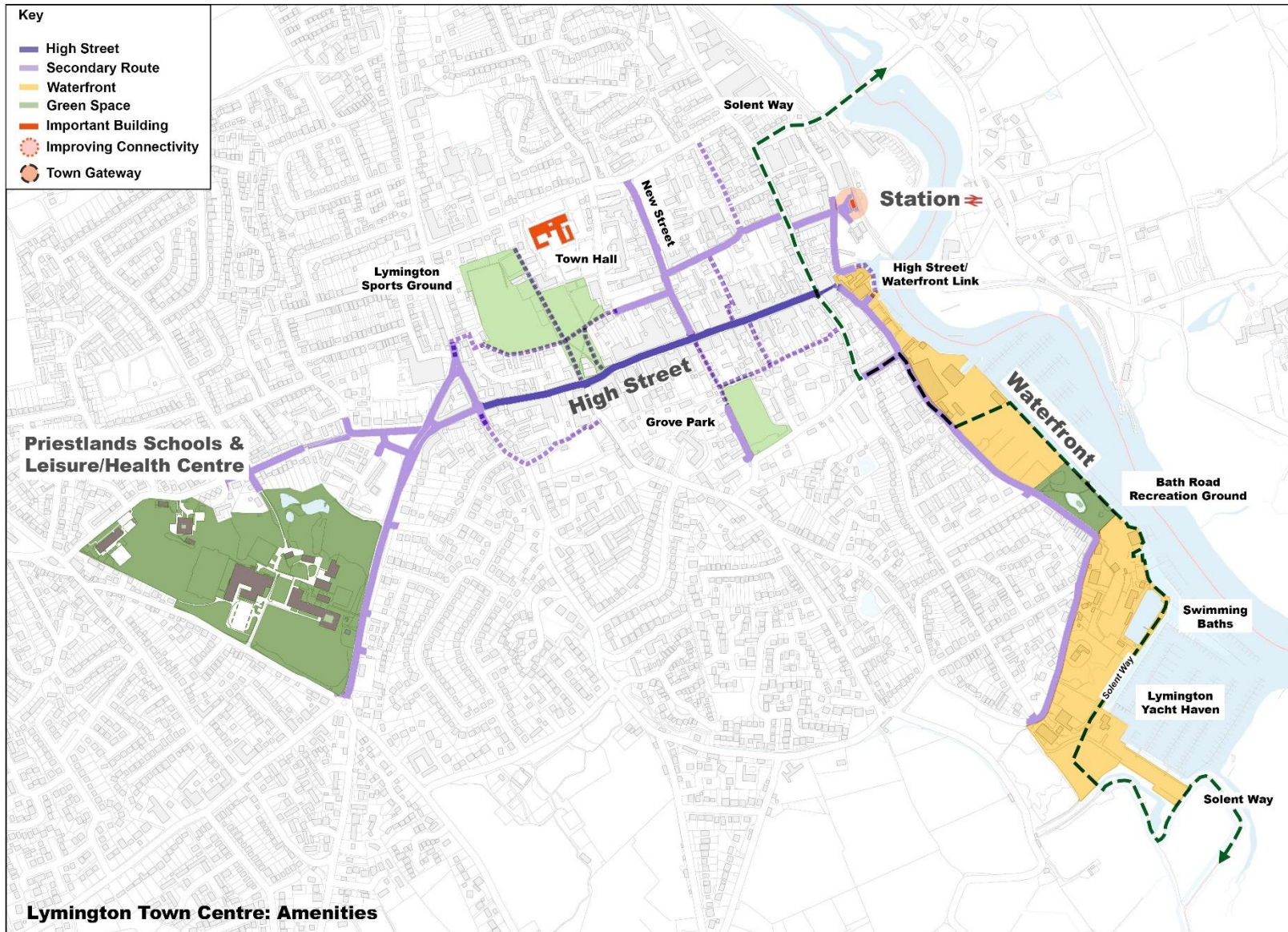
The following points were made:

- The opportunity to improve connections through the Lymington Sports Ground/open space area and the High Street
- The High Street environment - tree planting and parking
- Opportunities for green spaces, placemaking and spill out activity along the High Street
- Potential of the Grove Road open space as a 'town park'.
- Public space and activities on the waterfront
- access to waterfront from the High Street
- Improving the connection between the waterfront and the station
- The station setting and its quality as an entrance to the town.
- Provision for cyclists
- Improvements to wayfinding

## 2.4 Summary

The key issues for Lymington town centre:

- Connectivity: improving the quality of the links between the town's four key elements.
- Navigation: improving wayfinding which is particularly relevant to the experience of tourists and visitors.
- The pedestrian/cycle environment.
- A lack of spill out/social spaces.
- Open spaces: green spaces that are accessible to the town centre, encourage longer stays and more diverse activities.
- Future proofing: addressing climate change and changes to transport.
- Management: to improve the appearance of the High Street.



### 3.0 A vision for Lymington town centre

In response to this analysis and discussions with the town centre working group, the following vision objectives are proposed to support economic vitality, create employment opportunities and improve the resilience of the town centre:

- Making the town centre an attractive, accessible and navigable place for the local community and visitors.
- Integrating the town's facilities and amenities through improved wayfinding and enhancements to the streetscape.
- Making provision for spill out spaces to extend the offer of local businesses.
- Supporting the creation of new soft and hard landscape public realm to increase opportunities for social activities.
- Using green infrastructure as part of a climate change response.
- Improving provision for pedestrians, cyclists, and other wheeled users.
- Future proofing through providing for electrification of transport.
- Management to improve the appearance of the High Street and facilitate events and activities.

#### 3.1 Lymington Town Centre: vision

The Vision Diagram provides a spatial framework for developing a series of projects and town centre improvements to deliver the objectives of the vision:

**Inner ring:** An 'inner ring' around the town centre which would be a safe, attractive and accessible route for pedestrians and cyclists to use to make local journeys and access the town centre as an alternative to car use. The inner ring, running along Avenue Road Gosport Street/Captains Row, Grove Road and Church Lane would be within 400m of the High Street and act as a 'collector' for the surrounding residential areas.

**Inner ring ped/cycle network:** Within the inner ring, the streets and public realm could be improved to provide a ped/cycle network with provision for secure parking, charging, seating and hard and soft landscape to facilitate wheeled users and social interaction.

**Priestlands Link:** Ped/cycle connectivity between the 'inner ring' and the Priestland schools/leisure& health centre would need to be improved. This could be achieved with a signalised crossing at the Stanford Hill/Belmore Road junction, and enhancements to Belmore Road/Rowlett Road/St Thomas Street car park link to the town centre via Church Lane.

**Gateways:** The creation of 'gateways' along the High Street to improve wayfinding and the public realm, working with landowners when sites come forward for development, such as Bridge Road and Jewsons, to enhance the sense of arrival into the Town. This would be integrated with the LPNP green infrastructure plan and Solent Way routes, making the town centre a stronger feature as part of local and visitor recreational journeys.

**Public realm projects:** A series of public realm projects should be used to articulate the 'inner ring' and make the town centre a more attractive place to use and visit. The projects could be implemented individually but should be planned and coordinated to maximise their collective benefits.

## 1) High Street

To make the High Street more accessible and encourage people to spend more time on the High Street by improving the High Street environment, linkages and wayfinding.

- Spill out space: Encouraging pavement spill out spaces to support commercial activity and create places for residents and visitors to sit out and socialise.
- New enterprises: Pop up shop space for short term try out/start up enterprises.
- Landscaping: including tree planting to create an avenue and provide shade.
- Wayfinding: A 'Lymington Town Centre' suite of signage.
- Electrification: provision of charging points.
- Parking: management to balance commercial needs with environmental improvements
- Air quality: monitoring to set targets and assess improvements.
- Management: Encouraging owners of premises to improve external decoration and maintenance standards and putting pressure on utilities providers to repair and redecorate control boxes etc

## 2) Grove Park

With a few low key interventions, the open space at Grove Park has the potential to be used as a town Park, a green space that is easily accessible to the High Street.

- Wayfinding: Signage to let people know it is there.
- Character: A more varied and interesting landscape as a 'green room' to the High Street.
- Socialising: Using landscaping to create pockets, space for people

- Ecology: Habitat enhancement including simple things like birdboxes.
- Management: Designed to be low maintenance.

### 3) Waterfront

The Riverfront and quay need a simple public space at the northern end to improve the link to the High Street and provide a focus and destination around the Quay Road/Quay Street/slipway area.

- A multi-functional space: Using hard landscape to differentiate the space from the parking areas.
- Design: Capable of accommodating small scale events.
- Tree planting: To create visual presence and a more attractive place to sit and socialise.
- Inclusion of the Quay Street area in front of the Ship Inn to provide a south facing outdoor/spill out area.
- Furniture: Seating and lighting.
- Wayfinding: Signage, surfaces and lighting to improve the legibility of the Quay Street pedestrian route to the Station.
- Parking: Controlling parking so the car doesn't dominate.

### 4) The Station

The station is detached from the High Street and the Waterfront and is an uninviting pedestrian environment. Improvements are needed to create a more welcoming gateway to Lymington town centre.

- Consideration of the future redevelopment of the adjoining sites to create a more attractive and better connected setting.
- Tree planting along the Waterloo Road frontage
- A pedestrian bridge linking Lymington Shores to the town centre, forming part of the Solent Way.
- Extending the station frontage/concourse to create a stronger pedestrian emphasis and include the Waterloo Road/Station Road junction.
- Bus depot: management of the bus parking area to create a more attractive interchange.
- Furniture: Seating and lighting.
- Wayfinding: Signage, surfaces and lighting to improve the legibility of the Quay Street pedestrian route to the Waterfront.
- Parking: Controlling parking so the car doesn't dominate.

- Development: working with landowners, such as the Jewson site to enhance the Station setting and sense of arrival into the Town.

## **5) Lymington Town Hall:**

Given its location and relationship to the Lymington Sports Ground and other amenities, the redevelopment of the Lymington Town Hall site, either in whole or part, provides an opportunity to improve the town centre.

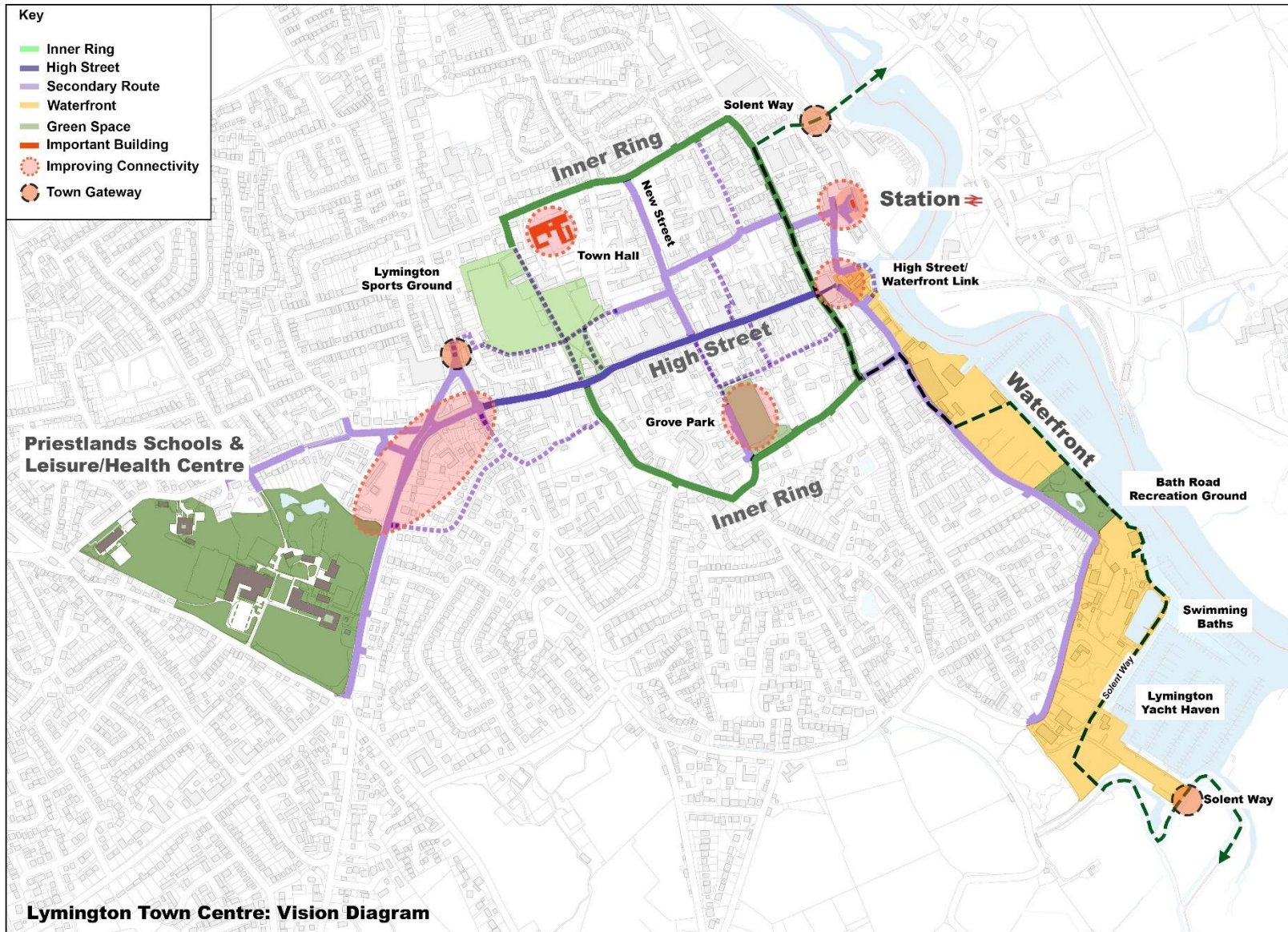
- Any proposals should include safe and attractive ped/cycle linkages through the site from the residential area to the north.
- Access to the open spaces, sports and recreation amenities to be connected into the new ped/cycle linkages.
- Uses on the site to take account of its civic functions.
- Residential uses on the site to be considered to create a more mixed use and lively environment.
- Parking to be designed and controlled so the car doesn't dominate.

## **6) Priestlands gyratory**

Although the Priestlands Place/Stanford Road gyratory has an important traffic management function it is also a gateway to the town centre from the north and the west. Consideration should be given to how it functions as an entrance to the town centre and the potential for improving connectivity.

- Street tree planting to contain the traffic and provide a landscape buffer.
- The creation of focuses at the apexes of the gyratory with tree planting, hard landscape and lighting to signify entrance and calm traffic.





## 4.0 delivering the vision

The scope of the projects proposed in the vision is based on the analysis carried out in this report and should be taken as a starting point for developing and agreeing more detailed briefs for the projects.

The vision provides a framework that will deliver benefits through the collective impact of the projects. However, the vision is not an all or nothing approach. The projects can be delivered incrementally, over a period of time, and as funding opportunities arise.

An early demonstration that the vision is achievable will be important. There are a number of 'early wins' that could be focused on, such as improvements to the street frontage to the Royal Mail building using the existing trees to demonstrate the benefits of greening the High Street. This will help engage residents in the wider vision and the individual projects.

There are three ways that the vision and proposed projects can be supported and delivered:

### A. Neighbourhood Plan

The neighbourhood plan can support the vision and the projects for the town centre by:

- Referencing this report as part of the neighbourhood plan evidence base.
- Integrating the proposals with the neighbourhood plan policies such as the Green Ring where there is common purpose.
- Making specific reference to relevant parts of the report where site allocations are proposed which may impact on the town centre. (The Jewson, Waterloo Road and Bridge Road sites).
- Making specific reference to relevant parts of the report where guidance is given for the development of sites in the future which may impact on the town centre (The Town Hall site.)

### B. Local Infrastructure Projects

Where opportunities arise through S106 agreements (or through the Community Infrastructure Levy) to secure financial contributions to invest in improving local infrastructure. Should an opportunity arise, the Town Council can review the evidence base and community consultations for the neighbourhood plan to inform its view in liaising with NFDC. This is in addition to the infrastructure projects that are proposed to be delivered through site specific policies in the Neighbourhood Plan.

A preliminary list of projects is to be agreed by the Steering Group and the Town Centre Working Group taking for inclusion in the Draft Neighbourhood Plan.



### **C. Other funding**

Funding for specific projects such as street tree planting, electrification infrastructure, and ped/cycle improvements can be sought from the public and private sectors. Having a wider vision for the town centre that demonstrates how individual projects will contribute to sustainable change, and a neighbourhood plan that provides a framework for delivery will help secure funding.

NOTE: The '*Future Lymington High Street*' project carried out by SPUD Youth should be incorporated into the neighbourhood plan evidence base and used to inform future plans for the town centre.

### **The Lymington and Pennington Neighbourhood Plan**

This vision document will form an element of the Lymington and Pennington Neighbourhood Plan Green Infrastructure network and policy, and as part of the statutory consultation of the LPNP, the attention of the relevant statutory consultees including; New Forest District Council, Hampshire County Council Highways and Network Rail should be directed to this vision document and the proposed projects with an invitation to comment on funding, delivery and support.

It would also be helpful to consult informally with other non-statutory consultees, such as the Hampshire Nature Partnership to invite their input, support and thoughts on funding opportunities.