

## *WELCOME TO THE VISION FOR WINCHESTER TOWN*

This document aims to help us meet the challenge of change. It's not a plan, it's a guide - a vision for the things we want to achieve. Its aim is to guide policy makers, planners and all who can and will shape our town.

The vision is proposed by Winchester's Town Forum on behalf of Winchester as a whole. It is an update of the first vision document produced in 2006. Significant elements are unchanged because they remain valid. Other parts have been updated following discussions the Forum has hosted about various aspects of Winchester life. The Forum's Members will champion this vision, keeping it under review, encouraging the City Council and others to help make its aspirations reality. And this is not just for the City Council; it provides a common focus and shared agenda for all organisations who can help shape our future.

If we've got it right, and are influential with our vision, our city will embrace changes over the next six years or so. We should see a change in the employment base, expanding and strengthening the economic prosperity of our residents. We should see an improvement in the prospect for people to get a home of their own. We should see progress made to reduce our individual and collective impact on the world's resources and we should see more calm on our streets with better buses and facilities for walking and cycling as an alternative to the car.

We want to achieve all this, but without doing harm to our lovely heritage and setting.

Most importantly, this must be a shared vision. I want to encourage all who read it to ask "what can Winchester become?" and "how can I help realise this vision?".

Councillor Brian Collin  
Chair, Winchester Town Forum

1 – for clarity this document uses the term 'town' to refer to the unparished area represented by the Wards of St Barnabas, St Bartholomew, St John & All Saints, St Luke, St Michael and St Paul – what is traditionally referred to as the old city of Winchester

## Why do we need a vision?

Winchester, like many historic towns, faces huge challenges. They come from the need to ensure the sustainable prosperity of our economy, from the need to address the shortage of housing which is affordable to rent or buy, from the demands and consequences of increased transport and mobility, and from the higher expectations of our citizens. Our unique historic and natural environment, which makes Winchester so attractive, has to be protected as we meet those challenges.

The character of a town is heavily dependent on its economic life – we need to ensure that Winchester is a place where jobs are created; where new businesses and moreover new styles of business thrive. At the same time we must cherish our built and natural environment. The secret is to ensure we guide and manage change rather than being overwhelmed by it. That is why we need a vision, to say what we want our town to become and to give us control of our future.

The Town Forum has been helped by a “partnering report”. This suggested not only ‘what’ but ‘how’ the updated vision could do to guide the future of Winchester and this update draws on their report. It reminded us that Winchester is not an island. To meet the challenges of the twenty-first century while developing an attractive modern town, we need to look outwards. Winchester has much to learn from other places about how to manage our environment and economy.

An update rather than a rewrite of the vision published in the 2006, this document tries to paint a picture of our future based on what local people want their town to become. Not all will agree with everything here, and our views will evolve over time. The first vision document was effective in guiding policy making and practical improvements. In the last five years we have seen:

- the opening of the new Discovery Centre, a joint project between the City and the County Council
- a new athletics stadium with synthetic turf pitch developed in partnership between the City Council and the University of Winchester
- a new building in a new location for the Trinity Centre; a charity that helps homeless and vulnerable people
- a new centre for an Emmaus project which provides people who have fallen on hard times a home and a route back into work
- major new facilities on the University of Winchester campus
- the refurbishment of the City centre by repaving the High Street and the Square
- new retail and community service provision in Weeke
- the opening of the South of Winchester park and ride

- major new facilities at the Royal Hampshire County Hospital
- 800 homes built within the town wards
- and, more recently, a long term reduction in public sector employment as part of the national austerity programme

The severe economic downturn at the end of the last decade has had relatively modest impact on overall employment in Winchester; such is the strength of the local economy. But economic uncertainty continues and Winchester will not be immune to its effects. We cannot therefore rely on our past economic successes. The contraction in spending on public sector activity could impact on a centre of administration like Winchester. New businesses may struggle to find finance or premises. Our young people need career opportunities. Major changes in planning and other government policies will affect us as they effect every where else. We cannot rest on our laurels. Rather; we should try to continue a climate where new businesses start up and thrive.

## What does the vision say?

Since the Town Forum was established in 2002 it has hosted discussions on many different aspects of Winchester life: the local economy, retail and tourism, community safety, transport and housing have all been discussed. Local residents and local organisations have shared their views on these matters, and the Forum has helped shape all sorts of initiatives, from the exciting regeneration of Silver Hill to new community safety policies.

A small group of members of the Town Forum took evidence from a wide section of bodies and individuals. The members brought their experience and knowledge of Winchester into the discussions.

This document follows the first vision in looking at life in Winchester from different thematic perspectives. This time we have placed the section on the economy first. This reflects the Forum's view that the vision for the economy of Winchester is the most important theme. Economic prosperity makes a crucial difference to individual and family well being and makes so many other things possible. The vision then considers our heritage, tourism and shopping, housing, transport, our culture and our environment. For each of these themes the vision tries to capture the aspirations for the town's future which represent a reasonable consensus of opinion. These aspirations are expressed simply as the key things which we, the Winchester community, will achieve in the coming years.

It has already been said that this is not a plan, so this vision does not set specific dates or allocate budgets to projects. Its aim is to encourage those organisations with budgets and the ability to achieve change – including the City and County Council, the Police, our Universities, Sixth Form College and schools, voluntary or health sectors, and the local business community – to do what the Winchester community has set out in this vision.

The Town Forum is made up of representatives of all parts of Winchester town, from Weeke in the north to St Cross in the south, Highcliffe in the east to Stanmore in the west. The vision is meant for all those communities, whether it is talking about the retail heart of town or maintaining the quality of our suburban housing estates. Its aim is to map out a future for all aspects of life, and for all of our communities.

## What is it about Winchester that we all value?

Winchester has developed successfully over the centuries, growing steadily and meeting the needs and expectations of each new generation, while retaining its unique characteristics. Today, it is a distinctive and vibrant city in a remarkable setting, with a unique heritage arising from its ancient role as the capital of England and as a major centre of commerce, civil government, the church, the law and the military. The special nature of Winchester encompasses events like the hugely popular Hat Fair, unique buildings like the Cathedral and to the special environment found in the water meadows, the trees which define and populate our urban areas, and the surrounding hills. Even the archaeology beneath us is some of the best preserved and most important in the country. But it is also found in the pleasant suburbs and well managed housing estates; the quality of day to day living and the public services we use.

In their shared response to the City Council's Blueprint exercise, the City of Winchester Trust, Winchester Action on Climate Change (WinACC) and Winchester Area Community Action (WACA) worked together to set out ten inter-related principles that they thought should 'guide all the physical development in the City' and be 'embedded in all planning policies'. The Town Forum endorses those principles and has included them in the Vision (they are printed at the back of this document).

In collecting evidence, the Forum was presented with the conundrum of "we don't mind change, as long as everything remains the same". Our challenge therefore will be to cherish the character and culture of Winchester whilst allowing reactions to pressures – absorbing change into Winchester rather than being dominated by it.

Put most simply we value Winchester not because it is unchanging or fixed but because its past lives successfully with its present.

## Themes for our future

This document considers aspirations for Winchester's future under eight themes, considering how we should:

- encourage people to create economic prosperity;
- care for our history, heritage and setting;
- be a natural destination for visitors and shoppers;
- provide new and affordable housing;
- improve transport, infrastructure and air quality;
- become a regional centre for creativity and culture;
- create a green and environmentally friendly city;
- be a town of safe and stable communities.

For each of these themes the document sets out below some important aspirations, which the vision boldly says we will achieve. If we are to be successful then we must influence the plans and actions of a number of different organisations. When you read these aspirations remember that they are often interdependent: better transport will improve accessibility to retail and leisure facilities which will encourage investment, a cleaner more pleasant environment will attract more visitors to boost the local economy.

## Encouraging people to create economic prosperity

For over 100 years the largest part of Winchester's economy has been in the public sector – in council services, the law, education and healthcare. Reductions in public sector expenditure over the next three years will have an impact on the number of jobs they provide in the town. Our private sector businesses are a variety of small and medium-sized enterprises and we need more of these to provide more jobs at every level.

Winchester offers employers an excellent environment, good transport links and a well educated workforce. We need to ensure that the town meets the needs of businesses as they establish, grow and develop. This means providing more and better office space and actively promoting Winchester as a business location. We will inevitably see a cycle of new employment sites being created and older ones being redeveloped. Employment areas such as Winnall industrial estate provide very valuable employment opportunities and should be improved further to intensify these. The area around the station could act as a focus for the regeneration of some employment sectors in Winchester. Getting transport and housing provision right to support business are also vitally important.

The Silver Hill development will help to revitalise the town centre with better public facilities, retail space and more people living in the heart of the urban area. We need to ensure that Silver Hill acts as a catalyst for the whole town and bring benefits which reach wider than the development itself.

Overall, we will provide opportunities for further investment and enhance our role as a major employment and service centre and we will support pioneering steps towards creating a low carbon economy.

### **To develop our economy we will:**

- market ourselves as a vibrant, well connected and environmentally responsible place to do business
- support the Winchester BID which gives a voice to business and practical improvements to the BID area;
- work closely with development interests to ensure that Silver Hill delivers a boost to the whole of the Winchester town economy;
- encourage expansion of existing private sector business, attract new new and start up businesses;
- promote a planned approach to the provision of employment sites, particularly in the city centre and at Winnall;
- promote accommodation to the latest private sector standards particularly in the area around the railway station;
- support the development of our creative industries and make use of the economic contribution of the arts;
- work with local educational institutions to promote learning excellence, to improve our skills base and to exploit the strengths of our local students and graduates;

- promote our town as a venue for conferences to exploit the knowledge exchange skills that are already here.

## Caring about our history, heritage and setting;

Winchester was successful in avoiding the worst excesses of 20th century post war development, and has worked hard to keep its historic qualities whilst adding some good modern buildings.

Our vision is to live with the past, not in the past. We treasure our heritage and what it is that makes Winchester 'special' and a great place to live in and visit. Living in a historic town is a privilege, it attracts potential entrepreneurs and it makes good economic sense to invest in our heritage.

Winchester is a compact city where town meets countryside without ribbon development. Whatever development there is should retain this character, even if the edges of the town change over time. Some of the entrances to the town, including the railway station area, need regeneration to make best use of land and their good transport links.

We must make sure new development is of high quality – guided by imaginative and sustainable architecture bringing complementary new design. Investment in our public realm will be difficult to finance but brings rewards in creating a high quality living and trading environment. The town should adapt and integrate buildings new and old and our public spaces well use, active and lively. Our history and heritage should be imaginatively displayed and accessible to all.

The City Council has agreed to allocate land at Barton Farm for an urban extension of the city. We will work with the developer to ensure that as the proposals go forward we achieve the successful integration of the new suburb into the town.

### **As the city evolves we will:**

- seek imaginative new uses for historic buildings and land so as to retain their contribution to the environment;
- integrate new communities into the town
- recognise and protect the outstanding landscape qualities and setting of the town;
- insist on high quality design for all new buildings to ensure they complement our heritage;
- remove the worst examples of architecture or, where not possible, seek their renaissance by imaginative design solutions;
- create exciting new public spaces: a new public area to host markets and events outside the Guildhall and a new town square in the Silver Hill development;
- open up more of our heritage to the public;

- enhance the quality of our public spaces: parks, streets and squares, and bring them to life with entertainment and activity.

## Remaining a natural destination for visitors and shoppers;

Our strength lies in not being just a leisure or shopping destination but in providing a distinctive experience. The shopping centre is compact, attractive and well integrated with the historic core of the City. We have no wish to compete head on with larger destinations but we should offer an opportunity for people to do most of their shopping locally and offering local specialist shopping in delightful surroundings. We do not want to become a bland and branded shopping centre.. We intend to retain our distinctive character and personality.

It is essential that Winchester retains and enhances its distinctive character and personality. We have over 350 shops, restaurants and café bars with a strong leisure and cultural mix and strong demand from new retailers to open in the town. Our Purple Flag status demonstrates the safety and welcome of our evening economy.

After a pause in 2010 due to the financial climate the Silver Hill development is now back on track and should begin in 2013. We want this to be one of the best mixed use shopping and residential schemes of its size in the country, helping to reinvigorate our high street and complementing what we currently offer to provide a mix of shops and other facilities.

## **To enhance Winchester's character and attractiveness for residents and visitors we will:**

- build an award winning new town quarter at Silver Hill with a mix of uses majoring on retail;
- develop our role as a major tourist centre based on heritage as a backdrop for a growing reputation for creativity and the arts;
- support the efforts of the BID to promote and market what Winchester offers;
- invest in our retail areas to make them attractive to a good mix of quality and speciality<sup>0</sup> shops;
- become a renowned centre for food and drink with quality restaurants, cafes and hotels;
- use our Purple Flag status to promote Winchester as a safe place, (we will tackle anti-social behaviour, working with licensed premises and we will deal firmly with unwelcome drinking in public places);
- promote regular and varied markets and events to complement the retail and heritage offer of the city;



- support retail business with better signage and management of our streets;
- develop an evening economy offering something for everyone; in particular, encouraging families into Winchester in the early evening;
- support our cultural facilities and develop a wider range of events and attractions.

## Providing new and affordable housing;

More homes are needed in Winchester. People are living longer; people are marrying and having children later in life; divorce rates are rising; more people remain single for longer and more people want to live here. Without new homes there will be fewer young people in the town to work in local business and to pay for local services. This will boost our economy and contribute to town life.

The average price of a house in Winchester far exceeds the average across England and is high even for the South East. The shortage of affordable housing causes recruitment and retention difficulties for local firms, contributes to unsustainable commuting and damages the character and social cohesion of communities around the city. New homes must, however, be part of the community, not commuter dormitories and so the biggest challenge is to ensure that housing growth is sensitive to the needs of the established community. It must be integrated with the town and its communities, not bolted on. This will be the challenge with the Barton Farm development which must be planned so as to become a well integrated part of Winchester. It will also be a challenge for in fill development within the town which should be planned so as to make the best of the sites that are available, recognising any strain they place on particular infrastructure components.

### **To provide more homes for local people we will:**

- ensure the successful implementation of the Barton Farm development
- ensure that new homes meet the needs of our community, including affordable housing taking seriously the housing needs of young people, older people and the disadvantaged in our community;
- secure housing for Winchester's key workers essential to our economy;
- work with the University of Winchester, Sparsholt College and the University of Southampton to ensure an adequate supply of well managed student housing and to reduce the pressure for conversion of family homes to houses in multiple occupation
- work with local communities on neighbourhood plans for their local area to ensure new housing integrates well;
- promote the highest standards of building and urban design in all development;
- support the principle of self build or cooperative housing on suitable sites
- ensure new homes meet the highest environmental standards..

## Improving transport, access and air quality;

Our goal is to reduce pollution and improve access by managing traffic well and providing real choice between modes of transport.

Some see Winchester as congested. By the standards of many successful towns it is not, but it certainly draws in traffic, which brings workers, visitors and shoppers. We will not be anti-car but we need to balance between ease of access and the economic gain that brings with the protection of our environment and the town's ambience – keeping the town centre a pleasant place for residents and visitors. Reducing traffic speeds to 20mph in commercial and residential streets will be play an important part in this.

The answer lies in providing choice - good quality public transport, park and ride schemes, alternative means of getting around town, well maintained and signposted car parks, safe walking and cycling routes, traffic calming and championing excellent public spaces with good design and quality. We recognise that many people will continue to need to use cars for business or leisure.

In recent years we have seen a number of initiatives: adding the South Winchester Park and Ride site to provide 1500 park and ride spaces in total, improving the High Street and Jewry Street by reducing traffic speeds and improving the pedestrian environment; and improving the interchange between buses, taxis, trains, pedestrians and cyclists at Winchester Station.

The debate over car parking spaces in town has become increasingly polarised. The Forum has a clear vision of car parking provision in Winchester. There must be sufficient spaces in the right place to support the economic success of the town centre whilst unused spaces in the wrong place should be put to better use.

A major challenge remains the viability of many bus routes which are caught in a vicious circle of rising prices and lower passenger numbers. Public subsidy is reducing and services will only thrive if paying passenger numbers are increased.

### **To improve access and reduce pollution we will:**

- promote choice and variety in the ways people come to the city;
- promote the implementation of a 20mph limit throughout residential and commercial areas – other than on the radial routes into the town;
- seek to reduce the need to travel by ensuring more services and facilities are provided locally;
- manage the availability of car parking to balance the need of residents, visitors and businesses;
- promote improvements to parking at Winchester station and establish better links to and from the station, particularly from outlying areas;
- reduce levels of congestion and manage traffic to reduce vehicle emissions and improve air quality;
- establish more, safer and convenient walking and cycling routes;
- promote workplace and school travel plans;

- reduce street clutter and champion well designed and managed streets.

## Becoming a regional centre for creativity and culture;

Winchester is home to an exciting mix of creative and cultural activities. During the year we have a children's festival; folk festival; dance music festival; food festival; the Hat Fair – Britain's longest running festival of street theatre – and a variety of music, art and literary events. These complement our theatres and other performance venues and galleries.

The flagship Discovery Centre in Jewry Street has established itself as a centre for cultural activity, a true hub and meeting place. The Theatre Royal continues to deliver an attractive programme and is an essential part of the town's cultural life, and the University of Winchester has expanded its facilities. The effective loss of the Tower Arts Centre on Romsey Road as a public performing arts venue has been one disappointment in recent years.

Weighed against this loss of the Tower are the increasing opportunities for young people to access leisure activities. Dance is a particular example where young people are able to exercise, collaborate and enjoy a creative activity.

There are challenges: the evening economy of Winchester is lively, but does not yet offer something for everyone. Bringing families and older people into town in the evening will remove the fear of disorder. We should build on the wide ranging offer of our theatre, cinema, restaurants and bars.

The town has real potential to grow as a centre for culture. Events should be supported and allowed to develop. New businesses can emerge from the talent in the arts and creative activities – from film to design. Leisure is also important, whether informal play or relaxation space or more formal sports facilities. Our sports clubs and societies are an important resource, and help promote local peoples' health and well being.

The River Park Leisure Centre remains an important facility but it is recognised that significant investment will be required unless an alternative strategy for providing a major public venue can be devised. The Forum will support the provision of such facilities in the future with an open mind as to how this is done.

### **To develop Winchester's rich cultural mix we will:**

- work with the main venues in the town to promote an attractive and well balanced programme of events and activities
- work with artists to bring life to the city and help retain professional artists at work in the area;
- support established businesses and new entrepreneurs in the creative and cultural sector;
- work with our two Universities to promote creative activity and support new creative enterprises
- promote a mix of leisure and entertainment activities throughout the day and evening;

- promote the refurbished Guildhall as an accessible, popular conference and entertainment venue;
- consider all options to ensure that Winchester continues to improve what it offers for public leisure facilities;
- support local sports clubs and recreation organisations to increase their membership and activities.
- Provide more opportunities for young people - particularly those in relatively disadvantaged areas – to enjoy creativity and artistic opportunities close to where they live

## Creating a green and environmentally friendly city;

Winchester's environment is one of its main assets. The Town is clean and pollution levels are generally low – although we do have concerns about air quality in some areas. For many, the greatest thing they treasure about Winchester is the quality of the built environment, be it our historic buildings or well designed, sympathetic new development.

Our urban green spaces and the countryside immediately around the city are important in defining the place. So is the extent of the tree planting which enhances so much of the urban area. The extension of the city at Barton Farm will mean the loss of one of Winchester's green wedges. The task for the future is to ensure that what is built is both excellent in its own right and reflects rather than changes the character of Winchester.

The management of our local environment also has national, even global, implications. We can and should play our part in seeking to address climate change, the protection of biodiversity and reduction of pollution. Thoroughly insulating our buildings will create warmer homes and offices, lower energy bills and reduced carbon emissions. We will promote an environmentally responsible approach to living and doing business in Winchester, something which will have benefits for everyone in the medium to long term.

Design of new development, and protection of our best historic buildings, is crucial. Planning policies must protect older buildings and ensure new development is appropriate and sustainable.

### **To protect and enhance our environment, we will:**

- manage our public open spaces to keep them clean and green;
- create a green town of top quality parks, gardens and open spaces;
- remove street clutter to enhance the town's appearance;
- give a lead role to our Neighbourhood Wardens in maintaining the local environment and street scene;
- manage our environment in a sustainable way;
- encourage the use of public transport, walking and cycling to reduce space lost to the car;
- encourage high quality public art in the town;
- support the introduction of renewable energy, combined heat and power and district energy schemes into the town wherever possible
- explore opportunities to increase the availability and use of allotments
- bring back drinking fountains to our public spaces

## Be a town that supports safe and stable communities

Like all towns Winchester has many communities. Geographically, these include distinct geographic areas such as in Weeke to the north, St Cross to the south, Stanmore to the west and Winnall to the east. There are communities which are not geographically based but nevertheless share interests or aspirations – young people or people with disabilities for example.

All of these groups will gain if we realise the aspirations set out in earlier chapters. And making places cleaner, safer, better designed or better served by transport is an aim not just for the centre of Winchester, but for residential areas away from the heart of town.

Nor should anyone be excluded. When we think about new services or facilities, we must ensure that we are not inadvertently excluding one group or another from using them because of decisions taken about how, where and when they should be provided. Services can and should be designed to meet the need of all.

We also need to ensure Winchester's communities have a voice: their own aims and aspirations for their locality and their town are heard and listened to. The Town Forum provides an focus to hear those voices, and it will try to ensure all have a say.

### **To help us understand and respond to the needs of all Winchester's communities we will:**

- support the voluntary sector network;
- encourage volunteering and active citizenship;
- support the work of Neighbourhood Wardens in managing community programmes;
- Expand the public engagement work of the Town Forum to:
  - ensure all communities in Winchester have a say in local organisations' plans, policies and programmes which affect them;
  - ensure that organisations across the town listen to the aspirations people voice as they set their budgets and priorities..
- use the best urban design principles to encourage good neighbourliness



## Balancing potential conflicts between objectives<sup>0</sup>

Inevitably we shall find that our ambitions will from time to time be in conflict with each other, or with the things we value. The Forum will establish a method of assessing and resolving these conflicts which will include consulting residents and other stakeholders.

## What next?

This vision sets out how we see Winchester evolving. For this to happen we need co-ordinated action by many organisations and individuals. Town Forum's role is to encourage and promote that action, and ensure it is properly co-ordinated. The Forum will be assessing the plans of the City Council and others to see what is already underway to achieve the vision, and identifying the gaps that need to be filled.

## So has the Town Forum set out the 'right' vision for you?

As was said at the beginning, the vision is based on widespread discussion. But it is certain that views on the future of Winchester will continue to evolve as the town itself does. The Town Forum wants to ensure the vision stays relevant, and changes along with the expectations and aspirations of the Town's communities. The Forum will keep this under view and report annually how well we are doing in realising the hopes it sets out. If you want to comment on any aspect of this vision, or suggest what might be missing, then contact Colin Veal at:

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## Our vital statistics:

population - 42,000

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**jobs in Winchester - 30,000**  
**39% of people who work in Winchester also live in Winchester**  
**900,000 people live within a 30 minute drive time**  
**3,800 public parking spaces**  
**3,500 private car parking spaces**  
**1500 spaces at Park and Ride sites**  
**800 buses per day**  
**140 trains per day**  
**23 cycle routes**  
**2 universities and 18 schools**

## **Appendix: The Town Forum**

The Town Forum is made up of Councillors from the six wards in Winchester town: St Barnabas, St Bartholomew, St John & All Saints, St Luke, St Michael and St Paul. Members meet quarterly to discuss issues which affect Winchester Town, and host regular public meetings on issues of concern to the town's communities. They guide the Council on priorities for spending the Town Charge, that proportion of Council Tax which Winchester town residents pay for spending on issues of local importance.

If you want to know more about the Forum, the issues it has discussed or the dates of meetings and events, then look at the City Council's website ([www.winchester.gov.uk](http://www.winchester.gov.uk)) or contact Colin Veal on the above address.