

Chertsey Improvement project

In 2013 Runnymede Council commissioned consultants to review Chertsey Town centre as a response to the changing economic and retail environment. Chertsey being one of the main Town Centres in the borough was perceived to be under-performing in terms of shopping against its neighbouring town centres, Addlestone and Egham.

Runnymede Borough Council (RBC) and Surrey County Council (SCC) set out a joint aspiration to lift and enhance the town centre, retaining essential parts of its heritage while also optimising opportunities offered by the land and property assets. Chertsey has a particular set of needs and opportunities. The primary need is to advance the role and function of the centre and strengthen its offer while respecting the particular local character. Upgrades to the function and appearance of the public realm were identified as being key. Access and parking issues also needed to be addressed. Details of the report can be found in the link below.

[140123 - Chertsey report - high res.pdf](#)

Chertsey town Masterplan 2013

The Chertsey Town Centre masterplan 2013 was seen by the borough council to be unrealistic and too ambitious against the council's financial constraints but was used as a baseline for future projects and development work.

In 2020- 2021, the impacts of COVID-19 and the declining economy impacted high streets across the country. In reaction to this central government made it their priority to support high street businesses through the Welcome Back Funding (WBF).

The fund allowed local authorities in England to put in place additional measures to create and promote a safe environment for local trade and tourism, particularly in high streets as their economies reopen. It also allowed Council's to reassess their town centres for future strategic planning.

Chertsey refresh masterplan 2021

With the support of the WBF, Runnymede commissioned Lambert Smith Hampton and NEW Masterplanning to carry out a '[refresh](#)' masterplan alongside a wider retail and town centre uses study. This report drew from previous studies and masterplanning work, but had a holistic vision of what communities expect from town centres. The masterplan was seen by the council to be too ambitious. With ongoing pressures on council financial budgets, a large masterplan project would not be realistic. However, it was used as an informative piece of study for internal reference to support future development opportunities and for investigative supporting material.

As part of the refresh masterplan, the consultant carried out some engagement tasks that included a town centre 'walkabout' with officers and local stakeholders. Attendees included ward Councillors, and local historical society members. The Chertsey Society particularly flagged up issues of the environmental appearance of Guildford Street, including shopfronts and roller shutters. Members of the museum and county and council officers were also invited to attend.

In addition, a face-to-face survey was undertaken with shoppers in Guildford Street. A total of 100 interviews were undertaken. Shoppers were asked questions on their shopping behaviours, the thoughts on what the town centre meant to them and what improvements they would like to see.

Key findings included:

- More than 50% visited the two main food stores in Chertsey showing the importance of enhancing pedestrian routes and providing strong wayfinding from these stores and their car parks through to Guildford Street businesses.
- The most important qualities of the town centre were considered to be its historic character and specialist/independent businesses.
- Carlo's Deli and the Church were near the top of the list when people were asked to name their favourite places in Chertsey. Just Relish and the Revive Café were other locations on Guildford Street that were mentioned.
- After 'better choice of shops' the main improvement visitors wanted to see was to the physical environment and appearance of the town centre. The percentage of visitors wanting to see environmental improvements was three times that in Egham and Addlestone.
- The vast majority of respondents visit the town centre for one hour or less, which highlights the opportunity to increase dwell time.

Market & event Survey 2021

In June 2021, during the pandemic period, Economic Development Officers surveyed over 100 retail businesses across the primary towns of Runnymede. This was Addlestone, Chertsey and Egham. The priority was understand how businesses could be supported to reduce the declining footfall within the borough's town centres. Businesses were surveyed on town centre activities and street market developments.

30% of respondents were from Chertsey. 30% were from Addlestone and 40% from Egham.

The overall response to the development of markets and events in the town centres was largely positive with 46% seeing the development of street markets and events as '*very beneficial*' and 33.6% seeing it as '*beneficial*'. Only 7.9% commented that it would not be of 'benefit to the town centres.

When asked what other suggestions they can give to increase footfall in the towns. The most common feedback was:

- More places for secure bike racks
- Increased free parking,
- Improve the look and feel of the town,
- Investment in rejuvenating the town centre like the other two town centres.
- Make the town centre look more upmarket with baskets, displays, pleasant seating areas and bunting.

Visitor Economy Report (2022)

In 2021/22 Runnymede Council assigned a tourism consultant to carry out a thorough study and action point outcomes for a visitor economy and tourism strategy that would align with

the council's economic strategy and the overarching corporate strategy for Runnymede 2022-2026

The visitor economy strategy would support the '*return to high streets safely*' priority and help '*build back better from the pandemic*' aims of local authorities across England that were encouraged by the central government through the WBF.

Town centres lack vibrancy and vitality

Feedback from businesses and residents through scoping exercises indicates that there is a need to support the towns, especially Chertsey where trade and vibrancy have declined.

54 local businesses in July 2021 showed that '*The main disadvantages of Runnymede as a business location were cost of property, congestion, empty units in the town centres, and poor footfall in the town centres*'.

In terms of the borough's three main towns, the headline findings are:

- These are not 'destination towns': they are 'service towns' for their local area. Each town has some pleasant characteristics, occupancy levels of commercial premises appear to be relatively good, and the public realm is relatively well maintained compared to many English towns.
- While the towns are not drivers or motivators of tourism themselves, they do have a potential role as 'visitor hubs', providing facilities and services for visitors to the wider area. However, they do not currently position themselves or behave as visitor hubs:
- They lack vitality and distinctiveness – and there is no encouragement for visitors to explore either the town itself or the wider area.
- There is little or no tourism signage, wayfinding or story-telling.
- Although all three towns have waterways – rivers, canals, navigation systems – they are hardly or not at all signposted from the town centres.
- There is a lack of "animation". Events we learned about are distinctive but small scale. There appears to be no strategy or coordinated resource – either funded or voluntary – to stage and promote regular events that could have a positive impact on footfall and profile.
- The towns are all accessible by rail – but the car dominates. There is a lack of alternatives to the car when it comes to moving around the borough between towns and visitor attractions. Public transport is infrequent and walking/cycling routes are non-existent or invisible.

The report noted that visually Chertsey has a pleasing introduction to the town centre thanks to the Georgian market-town architecture along Windsor Street, and the uninterrupted stretch of period buildings at the top of Guildford Street. However, *Guildford Street – the main high street – promises more than it delivers: there is a lack of commercial investment and several businesses look down-at-heel.*

For visitors looking for local stories, Chertsey Museum has a very well-presented local history gallery. The attractive small museum is housed in an impressive early 19th-century building, close to the ruins of Chertsey Abbey. Elsewhere there is little to reveal the town's history to visitors, although there are distinctive annual events – the Cherry Fair and the Goose Fair – which hint at its important past.

Should Runnymede wish to support the development of its Town Centres it should consider: having a long-term vision and development plan for each town centre. Encourage locals to take an active interest in the look and feel of the town centres. Encourage social, creative

and cultural elements (alongside the commercial) through repurposing buildings and investing in high-quality public realm, and creating a welcoming place to set up a business.

Shop Front improvements Survey 2022

In 2022 Economic Development Officers spoke to 20 businesses on London Street, Windsor street and Guildford Street to get feedback on what businesses felt about opportunities for shop frontage improvement grants.

The majority of respondents were businesses on Guildford Street. This was primarily due to which business owners were available at the time of the survey being carried out.

Questions such as, would you be interested in shop front improvements if you were offered part funded grants? 68% of businesses said they would be interested. 26% said they would consider it.

When asked what type of work would they do if they had the finance, 60% said painting and maintenance would be their priority.

When asked any reasons for not taking up the grants there were varying responses such as, not having the freehold of the shop, asking permission from the landlord, the business owners were retiring soon.

The engagement carried to date is considered to be substantial evidence towards the case that Chertsey Town Centre needs support to create a more attractive place for visitors and businesses.

Shared Prosperity Fund

In 2022, Runnymede Council received £1 million from the Government's Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF) to improve the borough's urban environment and strengthen the sense of community and resilience for residents and businesses. The Council has identified improvements to our town centres as a key priority area for the funding.

Following the investment in Addlestone and Egham town centres, the Council's next objective is to enhance Chertsey Town Centre, the borough's third major town. The Guildford Street North area was seen as the primary focus of the much-needed investment to improve the town's historical attraction and draw visitors back to the high streets. Previous studies and feasibility work has directed the focus on Guildford Street as a much-needed location that is considered by locals and reports to be the hub of the town's activities.

The Council assigned consultants, NEW masterplanning, to carry out a consultation process with Guildford Street businesses and town stakeholders. NEW masterplanning have previously worked on the refreshed Chertsey Masterplanning 2021 and much of their investigation and engagement provided a solid foundation for the next phase of work.

Approximately £500,000 has been allocated to improvements to the public realm, environmental beautification, business grants to improve the frontage of their businesses and additional streetscape, furnishing where identified opportunities arise.

SPF- Guildford Street improvements

Approximately £500,000 of funding is available from Shared Prosperity Fund for public realm improvements to Chertsey town centre. Using the draft town centre masterplan (which was never formally published) as the starting point, consultants identify priority areas for environmental improvements to the town centre, with Guildford Street (North) as a first phase.

SPF funding must be spent by the end of the 2024/25 financial year. It is essential therefore that the proposed public realm improvements be delivered within this timescale. £165,000 will be allocated to support improvements to shopfronts and building frontages on Guildford Street. Grants offered will be between £5- £20,000. A 15% contribution will be required from businesses. This report identifies buildings where improvements could potentially reinforce the proposed public realm improvements. Consideration to Surrey County Council LCWIP strategy proposal is highlighted in the draft report and will be considered in any future developments.

The report identifies the key outcomes through a SWOT analysis of Chertsey and Guildford Street and highlights opportunities that can be reinforced. The outcomes from the SWOT encompass previous reports and recommendations and align them with more recent engagements that the consultants have been carrying out. The following table demonstrates the breadth of engagement that has been carried out over the last 2 years:

Name	Type of engagement
Stakeholder engagement	Town Walkabout in Chertsey
Stakeholders and businesses	Town Team meetings
General public	Retail survey
Residents and businesses	Town Health Check
SME businesses	Survey on Shop Front Grants
Town Centre businesses	Events & Market Survey

A report by New Masterplanning has identified the key challenges and opportunities to enhance the north side of Guildford Street. The report suggests dividing the area into zones, which will allow a wider range of businesses to benefit from the improvements. This approach will prevent some areas from appearing outdated while others are improved.

The report outlines the journey from the northern and southern gateways into Guildford Street. An environmentally-enhanced public area will be created, which will attract visitors to the street. Guildford Street will be developed into a cultural hub for the community, where street markets and events will be held. This will encourage dwell time and increase footfall. The community will also use it as a meeting point.

The concept design takes consideration for the future development of SCC's LCWIP strategy (Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan). It aims to reduce the speed of vehicles approaching the road and promote walking and cycling during summer periods. The design is also aligned with Runnymede Council's climate change strategy, which encourages the development of environmentally friendly and open spaces in local neighbourhoods. It also highlights key priorities from the Runnymede economic development

strategy to increase footfall and to make our town centres more vibrant areas to support the businesses and the community to prosper.

Issues that have been highlighted from previous reports from engagement from stakeholders on the lack of parking areas where service deliveries can drop off goods to businesses. There are also concerns that free parking is not long enough to encourage people to spend more time in Guildford Street which means that shoppers pick up and get back into their cars without the opportunity to have a snack or a drink.

The key outcomes from the New Masterplanning report highlights the following:

- Support those businesses which would benefit most from an improved public realm and attractive place to visit
- Improve arrival points for pedestrians to create a more welcoming environment and improve footfall
- Improve the historic character of the street and individual buildings
- Improve areas which can stimulate interest in vacant premises
- Create focal points of interest along the street,
- Increase opportunities for socialising, with more seating and attractive places to spend time,
- Increase greenery in the street,

In conclusion, Guildford Street is the hub of Chertsey Town Centre and attracts most of the town's visitors when community events are held. It also hosts a large number of heritage buildings that are in much need of upgrading and beautifying to elevate its attractions.

It was mentioned in a previous report (Visitor Economy 2022) that *Chertsey offers so much yet delivers very little* in terms of its heritage attraction and lack of interest in the main town centre.

Previous feasibility studies and engagement carried out with stakeholders echo much of the frustrations by its businesses and residents in Chertsey not having been given the same amount of attention in investment as Addlestone and Egham. Should future funding opportunities arise, the priority for the council should be to deliver on a strategic plan to upgrade Chertsey Town Centre.

