

Fleet Town Plan
The Future of our Town

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1 Introduction from Michael Butcher, Chair of Fleet Future

Welcome to our Town Plan for Fleet.

What should Fleet be like in 2033? What will be the main challenges between now and then and what can be done to meet them? What can local people do to support and sustain local business? The Halifax Quality of Life Survey reported that Hart was the best place to live in the UK in 2011 and 2012 – what can we do to make Fleet better still?

Fleet has seen lots of change from the arrival of the steam railway in 1847 which made Fleet and Fleet Pond a destination trip for Londoners, through the building of the Blue Triangle, Pondtail and more recent developments. Fleet, like other towns, has also had to compete with changes in the retail sector, the development of supermarkets, out of town shopping, Sunday opening and more recently, online shopping.

People are passionate about Fleet. They love the friendliness of the people who live and work here, and they love the environment which Fleet is so fortunate to have. Our vision is to build on this to create a bustling, attractive, sustainable, leafy green town which is easy to get about in and has an active community. We want to take advantage of our strengths – Fleet Pond and the canal, our green spaces within the town, our prosperous night-time economy and our excellent transport links.

We set up Fleet Future in February 2013 – a community group of volunteers – to develop a Town Plan for the town we love. We have been gathering your comments and thoughts about how you want your town to develop and have produced this evidence-based plan to set our community's strategic direction for the future. We want to make Fleet a 'destination' town again – a place where people want to come to experience our unique and friendly atmosphere.

We hope all who read this document will find many of their views, and of people they know, in Fleet reflected here. We see the Town Plan as a living document that outlines proposals formulated from recent research and community consultations with you. Our intention is to persuade relevant agencies and organisations to work with us through our action programme to deliver positive change across the town in partnership with Fleet Town Council, Hart District Council, Hampshire County Council, businesses and community organisations.

We have strived to involve all partners in our planning process from start to finish.

I would like to thank all those who have helped to produce the Town Plan – particularly those people in the community who came forward and joined our working groups and steering committee. Without their support and commitment it could not have happened. Many thanks too, to all the residents and businesses who took the time to respond to our consultation exercise over the summer. Over 1,300 people filled in our survey and many provided careful and considered comments about their town. We hope you feel we have done justice to your efforts.

Michael Butcher

Chair of Fleet Future

2 Summary of the Fleet Town Plan

2.1 The start of Fleet Future and its mission

The Fleet community embraced the concept of developing a community-led plan for Fleet at public meetings last winter. This encouraged enthusiastic volunteers to join the new Fleet Future team – an independent, apolitical, community-led group formed early in 2013. Initiated and supported by local councils, the group set about the challenge of developing an evidence-based plan, with the support of the community, to bring about improvements to the town.

Because Fleet Future is an active community organisation, with over 600 Facebook followers, around 35 members and 10 committee volunteers, it provides an ideal independent forum where people from all walks of life in the town can offer their thoughts for how a better Fleet will look, share their ideas for strengthening the prosperity of the town, and challenge any apathy or inertia that prevents us from making progress.

The Town Plan has come about as a result of enormous energy from volunteers gathering information about the town, analysing the facts and trends, preparing recommendations, consulting the community, and shaping an action plan to help inform plans for Fleet in the future.

2.2 Fleet's favourable location

Situated in the north-east corner of Hampshire, near to the M3 motorway, Fleet is fortunate to be surrounded by small towns, unspoiled villages and pretty hamlets. 38 miles from London, it owes much of its development to its proximity to the capital, and to its excellent road and rail links. Fleet's pleasant environment is highly valued by the community and features strongly on their list of reasons for living in the area.

2.3 Hugely supported community vision for Fleet

We believe that paying particular attention to the quality of our spaces, our buildings, our entertainment and leisure facilities, and our town centre economy offers the best opportunity to deliver our vision for Fleet. This vision, **'to create a bustling, attractive, sustainable, leafy green town which is easy to get about in and has an active community'**, was supported by over 95% of respondents in our survey in summer 2013.

2.4 Improving Fleet, the town we care passionately about

The Fleet Future team developed and consulted on 17 recommendations covering the economy, transport and community matters. These were put to the people of Fleet in summer 2013 and all were supported to a greater or lesser extent by the 1,335 respondents, giving Fleet Future a clear mandate to develop these recommendations further and suggest actions for implementing them.

The five recommendations that received most public support in addition to the vision were:

- **First:** Free car parking in all council-owned town centre car parks after 6pm and on Sundays to increase the number of people visiting the town during weekend daytime and evenings (95% agree or strongly agree, 3% disagree or strongly disagree, 2% don't know).
- **Joint second and third**, with 92% agreeing or strongly agreeing that:
 - Town centre leisure activities should be created, maintained and improved to bring more cultural and leisure activities into the town.
 - Local authorities and key stakeholders should work together to improve access and relieve congestion at Fleet Station.

- **Joint fourth and fifth**, with 89% agreeing or strongly agreeing that there should be:
 - Improved information about the local bus service to provide clear directions to passengers.
 - A consultation with town centre businesses to explore the feasibility of flexing business rates to incentivise economic development.

Fleet Future believes that focusing attention on a limited number of key outcomes is essential to achieving its vision. For us, these outcomes are: to make it easier for businesses to succeed in Fleet; to improve the image of Fleet – both in perception and in reality; and TO make life better and easier for the community. Our plans to achieve these outcomes are outlined in our action programme, in Chapter 8 in this Town Plan.

2.5 Making it easier for businesses to succeed in Fleet

Fleet, of course, is not unique in the challenges and the pressures on businesses in the town centre but our consultation showed that the message from businesses was that their difficulties stemmed from the economic pressures on their customers, competition from neighbouring towns and retail developments, and the increasing cost of business rates and rents. The growing use of the internet for retail purchases was also seen as a major threat to town centre businesses. Our recommendations and actions are designed to work alongside businesses to demonstrate community support and a willingness to promote activities that keep our high street alive and thriving in an uncertain future.

Businesses and the public (87%) agree that a business-led ‘Fleet Centre Business Team’ should come together and work up a vision and a plan for the town centre. 76% of respondents to our survey think that creating a Fleet Town ‘brand’ as somewhere to visit during the day and evening is a good idea – but nearly twice as many businesses (47%) **strongly agree** compared with 26% of residents.

While the idea of developing a Fleet ‘brand’ was seen as the least important of the recommendations in the economy section by residents, it was seen as one of the most important by businesses. The same trend was evident in our recommendation on providing better information, signage and publicity about town centre businesses to increase visitor numbers – 50% businesses strongly agreed with this compared with 27% of local residents. Fleet Future’s suggested action for several of these recommendations is to encourage our town centre business volunteers to evolve into a business-led ‘Fleet Centre Business Team’ to undertake more research into what a Fleet brand might look like and work with key partners like the town and district council to provide better signage and information.

We believe that as we come out of recession, changes in the way we live will happen at ever-increasing speeds and developments in technology are likely to bring increasing opportunities and challenges. We will have to look for ideas for the future, seeking to change our town to ensure that it continues to offer a vital, viable centre for the Fleet community – a place that people will want to visit and spend time in, a place that provides more of an ‘experience’ perhaps than hitherto.

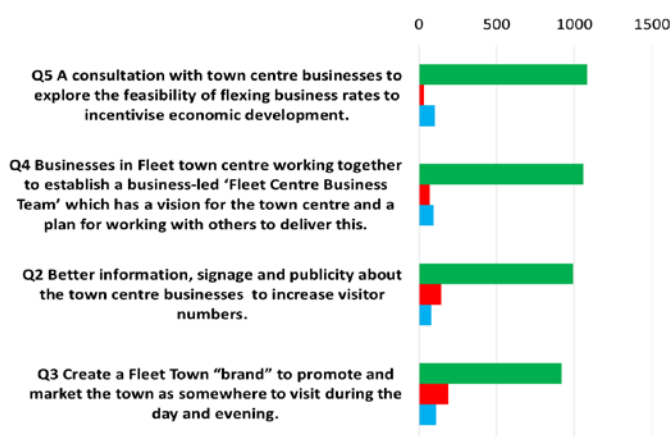


Figure 2-1. Results from economy questions in the town plan consultation exercise conducted by Fleet Future in summer 2013

2.6 Making it easier to get about in Fleet

Fleet Future’s transport group has concluded that there are two constituencies for travel in the Fleet area following the results of our consultation exercise: these are those people with a car available when they want to travel, and those without. For the former, priority issues are car park capacity at Fleet Station; peak time congestion at a number of junctions, particularly Fleet Station roundabout; and the cost of short-term parking.

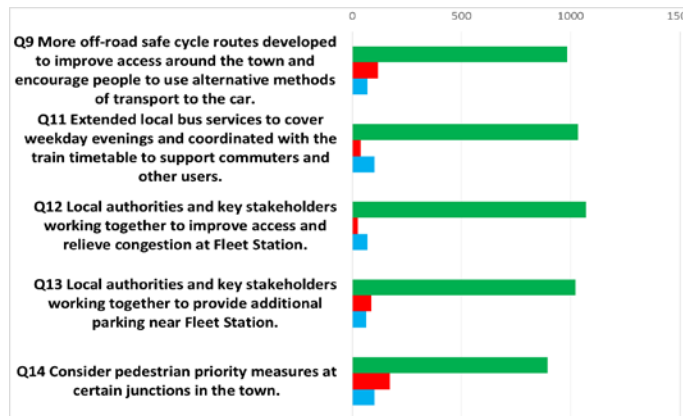


Figure 2-2. Results from transport questions in the town plan consultation exercise conducted by Fleet Future in summer 2013

Car parking is often mentioned as a negative aspect of town centres across the country and Fleet residents and businesses concurred. A number of consultation recommendations centred on car parking – ‘pay as you leave’ systems, free car parking on Sundays and in the evening, and finding additional car parking near Fleet Station. There is no shortage of car parking spaces conveniently located for the town centre even at weekends and the problems seem to lie with the cost and competition from free parking available at the major supermarkets on the edge of, or not far from, Fleet.

‘Pay as you leave’ arrangements for town centre car parks were supported by 78% of respondents to the Fleet Future survey. Many businesses and residents suggest this will encourage people to spend more time in town than they would otherwise. Fleet Future is asking Hart District Council to investigate the community’s recommendation that a ‘pay as you leave’ system should be implemented.

The planned increase in car park capacity by the provision of a multi-storey car park at the station will alleviate the current problem, but demand will continue to exceed supply and Fleet Future wants to work with local authorities and key stakeholders to seek additional parking within easy distance of Fleet station.

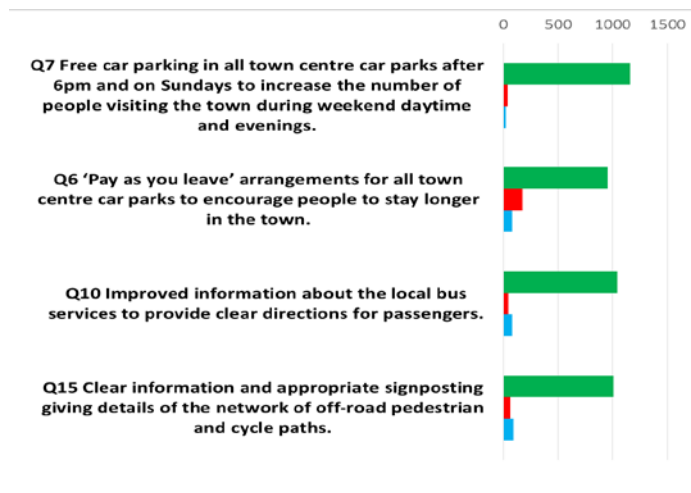


Figure 2-3. Further results from transport questions in the town plan consultation exercise conducted by Fleet Future in summer 2013

For those without access to a car when they want to travel, or wishing to use other modes of transport, the priority issues are inadequate bus services; lack of safe routes for cycling; and some issues for pedestrians at a number of junctions and at Fleet Station. Fleet Future plans to address these by opening discussions with key stakeholders (Hampshire County Council, Stagecoach and South West Trains). We will present the findings from our consultation analysis and ask these influential stakeholders to work with us and let us know what they are doing about the issues that are so important to local people.

2.7 Improving the image of Fleet – both perception and reality

Both businesses and residents wanted to see more events and activities in the town centre in order to increase footfall and to help create a bustling, attractive, and sustainable elements in our vision for Fleet.

The consultation showed very strong endorsement that town centre leisure activities should be created, maintained and improved to bring more cultural and leisure activities into the town with 92% agreeing or strongly agreeing with this recommendation. Only 4% disagreed and 4% gave no opinion.

34 respondents commented on leisure activities in Fleet. There was strong support for a bigger and better leisure centre (already in Hart District Council's corporate plan) with for a wide variety of sports and a café. Some wanted it to be in the town centre, others in the vacant offices on Fleet Road or near the station. Most felt that children and teenagers needed more facilities. The most popular requests were for a swimming pool, cinema in The Harlington (where some of the equipment already exists), bowling, soft play areas, climbing wall and for making better use of Gurkha Square for evening and weekend activities. Fleet Future is going to ask Fleet Town Council to facilitate a meeting of the various groups in Fleet to coordinate and promote a substantial programme of events in the town for all sections of the community.

The future of the land centred on the civic offices, the Harlington, library and Gurkha square was always going to be controversial. Our Fleet Future recommendation that it *“be redeveloped for mixed use which might include residential, commercial, community entertainment and cultural activities, while preserving a town square and links to The Views”* received an overall majority in favour but with a narrower margin than the others. 56% supported the recommendation, 39% disagreed and 9% responded “don't know” or “don't have an opinion”. There were also 80 comments submitted by community members in their consultation responses. When analysing the results in greater detail, it becomes apparent that respondents under the age of 65 voted by more than 2:1 in favour of redevelopment. On the other hand, those over 65 voted against the recommendation. This highlights the challenge in arriving at a consensus for this topic.

Fleet Future actions are firstly to form a team that includes key stakeholders to identify the desires and aspirations of all, understand the financial imperatives and the key issues that need to be addressed and resolved. Fleet Future would then like to see a minimum of two, maximum of three, alternative viable options for the use of the land developed for consideration by the wider community. Following this, Fleet Future believes the community should be consulted on the options and that their preferred option should be delivered in a timely manner.

2.8 Working together to deliver our Town Plan

Closer working around focused outcomes is one of the first aims of this Town Plan. Much of what is needed to ensure the future success of the town will be better achieved by working together and pooling scarce resources. Liaison with Fleet businesses, community and voluntary organisations, schools and colleges, Fleet Town Council and Hart District Council will enable closer cooperation and understanding which will bring greater benefits to the town than could be achieved otherwise.

2.9 We need your help – please get involved

We know that we have set an ambitious and challenging action programme (detailed in Chapter 8 of this Town Plan). All of our recommendations need further work to turn them into achievements and we realise that our current volunteers cannot do that alone. The next phase for Fleet Future will be to establish new action teams to take a lead on the

recommendations developed through this process and people with a new range of skills and enthusiasm will be needed. Your help, skills and support may be exactly what's needed to turn this plan into reality. We do hope you will come forward and volunteer to help deliver our plan. You can contact us by emailing us at info@fleetfuture.com or via our website www.fleetfuture.com.

3 Background and preamble to the Town Plan

3.1 Vision

The Fleet Future vision received an overwhelming endorsement from local people in summer 2013 when over 95% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed with the vision and only 3% disagreed or strongly disagreed, while 2% did not know [2]. The vision is to *'create a bustling, attractive, sustainable, leafy green town which is easy to get about in and has an active community.'*

3.2 Background to the Town Plan

Fleet Town Council came into being in 2010 and questioned Fleet residents about their housing and development priorities in 2011 [3]. The key areas of concern identified by local people should new development go ahead were as follows:

- Traffic congestion on key access junctions
- Insufficient medical services
- Traffic congestion in the town centre
- Lack of secondary school places
- Lack of primary school places
- Insufficient commuter parking
- Commuter rail service congestion
- Devaluing of property prices

The Town Council has stated that it wants to give everyone a chance to shape their future and develop a vision for the town with real actions driven by local people. It is keen to see a community based partnership develop and helped to set up Fleet Future as a vehicle to gather a strong evidence base to inform a new vision for Fleet and develop a Town Plan that local people and businesses want to see. More importantly, it wants to see local people coming forward to take part and deliver projects that make a real difference to the quality of life in Fleet.

Hart District Council is also keen to understand the community's vision and aspirations for Fleet in the future. It has said that it welcomes this 'grass roots' approach to identifying the priorities of local people, and will take their views into account when making decisions about services and planning issues under its control. It is keen to support businesses in the town to grow and develop, wants to see Fleet buck the national trend of failing high streets, and would welcome a dialogue with businesses going forward.

Both the district and town councils are supporting Fleet Future to develop a vision and Town Plan. Both have made their previous reports and research available to Fleet Future and both want to discuss the final report and support the actions outlined in the plan, where they can.

3.3 Pen-portrait of Fleet

Fleet is situated in the north-east corner of Hampshire, near the M3 motorway, and is surrounded by small thriving towns and many parishes of unspoiled villages and pretty hamlets. It is 38 miles from London and it owes its development to its proximity to the capital. In 1838 a railway line was opened from Winchfield to London, with a station opening near Fleet Pond in 1847. Londoners flocked to Fleet to enjoy natural beauty of Hampshire's largest freshwater lake, Fleet Pond, in the summer and skating in the winter when the pond froze over.

Fleet and Church Crookham form a contiguous urban area of 19.04 sq km with a resident population that has grown from 27,300 in 1991 through 31,800 in 2001 to 37,800 in 2011 [4].

The population is close to national average in age distribution, with 16.8% aged 65 and over and 2.4% aged 85 and over (average for England in 2011: 16.3% and 2.2%, respectively). But this conceals large variations between wards. Fleet Courtmoor has 24.0% aged 65 and over, and Fleet Central 4.7% aged 85 and over, while Fleet North has only 4.8% aged 65 and over. The Office for National Statistics forecasts show an increase in the number aged 65 and over between 2011 and 2018 of 773 or 13%. Also, the population aged 10 to 14 is predicted to grow by 9% between 2011 and 2018, with implications for the number of school places required.

The modern town, previously a market town, with its few Victorian buildings, has fast links to London either by the M3 or by rail with a 40-minute fast journey to Waterloo.

A canal links the town to the Wey Valley. There is a community hospital, a number of schools, Hart Shopping Centre, The Harlington civic centre and Hart Leisure Centre. The town hosts a week-long Carnival in July, a Christmas Festival and the official pre-London half marathon, amongst other leisure activities. Fleet has ten churches which have established Churches Together, an ecumenical group that undertakes many activities to help and support the local community from foodbanks to projects that bring peace to the High Street at night time.

Church Crookham was home to the Gurkhas from 1971 until 2000 and the town is still proud of its links with the Gurkhas, reflected in the square outside The Harlington being named Gurkha Square and a small exhibition in The Harlington.

By any economic measure Fleet and the surrounding area is one of the more prosperous parts of the country. Unemployment is lower and incomes are higher. It is an affluent area, with 26% of the population classed as professional and 16% as directors or managers (average figures for England are 17% and 11%, respectively) [4]. Traditionally considered to be a dormitory town housing commuters to London, Fleet now has several business parks which contain many IT and other high-technology companies.

This does not mean that the recession has passed the area by. Residents and businesses have undoubtedly been hit by the economic downturn. Public sector austerity measures, high house prices and cost of travel to work have stretched disposable income for many.

Home ownership is amongst the highest in the country. There is a cost associated with living in the area: house prices are well above the national average and there is a shortage of affordable housing. Fleet has expanded significantly in the past few decades with new residential areas being built in and around Fleet including Ancells Farm, Zebon Copse, Elvetham Heath and Edenbrook. Further development is taking place at the Queen Elizabeth Barracks in Church Crookham as well as other smaller sites nearby. This has resulted in pressure upon the local infrastructure, education, public transport and the provision of health services. Hart Leisure Centre, opened in 1991, is no longer adequate for the size of the population and Hart District Council proposes to build a new leisure centre close to the existing location.

Car ownership is high [4], with the average number of cars or vans per household having increased from 1.47 in 1991 to 1.65 in 2011 (average for England 1.16). Only 9% of households did not have a car or van in 2011. The total number of cars and vans in the area increased from 14,900 in 1991 to 24,900 in 2011. The number of residents of Fleet and Church Crookham who commute by rail increased from 1,200 in 1991 and 2001 to 1,800 in 2011.

Given the affluent and thriving nature of Fleet summarised above, it is hardly surprising that Hart District, for the second year running, was recognised in the annual Halifax Quality of Life Survey as the best place to live in Britain in 2011 and 2012 [1]. Although the survey

covers a range of factors such as the health of the residents and crime levels, the relative economic prosperity of the area is a major factor in the district being identified in this way.

3.4 Fleet Future public meeting, November 2012

To begin the process of work on the Town Plan, an embryonic Fleet Future team organised a drop-in public meeting at The Harlington on 24 November 2012. Over 600 people attended during the day and when asked what would they change in Fleet the most common changes were parking (21%), shops (13%), vacant buildings (13%), traffic issues (10%), environment (10%) and the town centre (7%) [5].

People were also asked to contribute to a 'dream wall', giving them an opportunity to draw a picture or write a piece about what the Fleet of their dreams would look like. There were 157 responses. The majority of contributions suggested town centre improvements (38%) and the redevelopment of The Harlington (27%), while transport and better pedestrian and cycle access came in third and fourth place with 10% and 7%, respectively.

3.5 Setting up Fleet Future steering committee

Following the public meeting, all those expressing an interest in being further involved were invited to another meeting in January 2013 to elect local people to key roles on the Fleet Future steering committee. In the following months the committee set out its constitution and terms of reference for the development of the Town Plan. The Fleet Future steering committee recognised that developing a vision, a Town Plan and action programme in a year was a very ambitious timetable, but felt it would be achievable if people got behind it and remained focused on these specific outputs.

3.6 Beginning the work on a Town Plan

Fleet Future committee members and the working groups reviewed the information from the Fleet and Church Crookham Town Healthcheck (October 2010) [6], Fleet Town Council's housing development proposals survey (2011) [3], and the results of the Fleet Future public meeting [5], and realised that issues relating to the town centre and the economic vibrancy of Fleet were gaining in importance to local people. However, there was not much quantitative information available about the town centre itself. Although much work has been undertaken to review town centres and high streets, to see what can be done to redress the economic downturn and the challenge posed by online shopping, it was difficult to see where Fleet sat in a national context. To address this, research using a town benchmarking system was commissioned from Action for Market Towns (AMT) (see Section 4.1.3).

3.7 Thematic working groups

Based on the importance of issues for local people, four thematic groups were set up to address them. These were:

- Economy and town centre
- Transport and accessibility
- Environment
- Social and community

Over time the latter two groups merged as there was some duplication of focus and a shortage of volunteers to complete the tasks assigned.

By summer 2013 the three groups came up with 17 recommendations and were anxious to consult the residents and businesses in Fleet again to ensure that people were comfortable the right issues had been addressed and the recommendations were ones they supported.

3.8 Consultation on Fleet Future recommendations

A consultation exercise was conducted in summer 2013 to test the Fleet Future recommendations. The consultation attracted 1,335 responses and all recommendations were supported by the respondents.

The five recommendations that received the most public support in addition to the vision (95%) were:

- **First:** Free car parking in all council-owned town centre car parks after 6pm and on Sundays to increase the number of people visiting the town during weekend daytime and evenings (95% agree or strongly agree, 3% disagree or strongly disagree, 2% don't know).
- **Joint second and third,** with 92% agreeing or strongly agreeing that:
 - Town centre leisure activities should be created, maintained and improved to bring more cultural and leisure activities into the town.
 - Local authorities and key stakeholders should work together to improve access and relieve congestion at Fleet Station.
- **Joint fourth and fifth,** with 89% agreeing or strongly agreeing that there should be:
 - Improved information about the local bus service to provide clear directions to passengers.
 - A consultation with town centre businesses to explore the feasibility of flexing business rates to incentivise economic development.

Further information on the findings of the research will be referred to in the working group chapters of the Town Plan and a report is available on the Fleet Future [website](#).

3.9 Drawing up the Town Plan

Chapters 5–7 in this Town Plan outline the working group findings and their recommendations for the future. Fleet Future is pleased that all its recommendations were supported in the public consultation exercise – to a greater or lesser degree – and the groups have gone on to develop an action programme for the future to suggest how these might be progressed (see Chapter 8).

Some of the working groups have made additional recommendations in their chapters too. Comments from the public consultation exercise have been analysed and the quality of the ideas expressed and strength of feeling about some topics impressed the authors very much. The working groups wanted these to be reflected and felt that more information/scoping/ research should be carried out by others in the future to explore the issues raised by residents and businesses. They wanted local people to know that their views had been heard and recorded and hope that more volunteers will come forward to develop proposals to address the issues they care so much about.

3.10 Next steps

Fleet Future working groups and the steering committee have now completed the Town Plan along with an action programme. The report will be presented to Fleet Town Council and Hart District Council with some ideas for the shape of the organisation in the future. This will include a governance structure for 2014 and beyond to complete the work programme of the Town Plan, ensuring the community remains involved in the strategic plans for Fleet and has an opportunity to contribute from the vast and extensive experience of its residents, businesses and volunteers on decisions about the town.

4 Methodology

Fleet Future has worked hard to ensure that the voices of the people of Fleet and its different sectors are heard and considered. This exercise was led by volunteers who live in the town who wanted the voice of local people to be heard so that the Town Plan can truly be seen to be grass roots-led.

Existing information on Fleet was reviewed and studied. Volunteers analysed available reports and consultation material and where there were gaps, new information was commissioned. All the sources which helped inform the Town Plan are listed in Chapter 9.

A steering committee was set up to consider the strategic issues facing Fleet and consider how it might respond to these challenges. Thematic working groups were established to drive the development of the Town Plan under the key topics of: town centre economy; transport and accessibility; and environment, social and community. All worked closely together within an agreed framework to produce this Town Plan to address the concerns of Fleet residents and businesses.

The sections of this Town Plan have been written by the working groups and, as such, each adopt a style that the working group has deemed appropriate.

4.1 Quantitative research

4.1.1 Fleet and Church Crookham Town Healthcheck

Quantitative research from the Fleet and Church Crookham Town Healthcheck [6] was reviewed to identify issues still relevant in Fleet today. There were 880 responses to the survey conducted in 2007.

4.1.2 Fleet Town Council's housing development proposals survey

Quantitative research from Fleet Town Council's housing development proposals questionnaire in 2011 [3] was reviewed. There were over 700 respondents.

4.1.3 Action for Market Towns report

The 'town centre' was identified as an area for action in both of the above reports but little information existed on the town centre, so it was decided to commission research to provide greater insight (this was funded by Hart District Council), to understand the main concerns of local people about the town.

The research was commissioned from Action for Market Towns (AMT), which has developed a town benchmarking system to address the real issues of how to understand measure, evaluate and ultimately improve town centres. It is a registered charity with the objective to promote, maintain and ensure the vitality and viability of towns across Britain. AMT works with community partnerships in small towns and their rural hinterland to build on their many strengths, and to ensure that they continue to be recognised for their central contribution to social and economic development.

AMT's benchmarking approach offers a simple way of capturing data on 12 key performance indicators (KPIs) selected by those involved in town centre management. The analysis provides data on each KPI for the benchmarked town individually and in a regional, national and, where possible, town type context.

The report from this exercise [7] was used by the working groups in their deliberations and is available on the Fleet Future [website](#).

4.1.4 Fleet Future consultation

Finally, once Fleet Future recommendations had been developed in summer 2013, quantitative research was undertaken to consult on these using an online tool called 'survey monkey'. This was supplemented by the same survey questions in hard copy for those who preferred to give their opinion in that way. There were 1,335 responses to the survey [2].

4.2 Qualitative research

Qualitative research was obtained in a number of ways throughout the process. Starting with a public meeting at The Harlington in November 2012, attended by more than 600 people, Fleet Future gathered views and developed an evidence base of what Fleet people wanted for the town [5]. Most of the issues people raised related to the town centre – empty shop units and vacant office buildings, the cost of car parking, a declining retail offering and lack of transport infrastructure.

Following this meeting, a Facebook group was created to encourage open debate from residents and businesses about what they wanted to see in Fleet. The group grew quickly to over 600 members and regularly attracts comments and debate.

The recommendations devised by Fleet Future were tested with a number of groups before going out to consultation in summer in 2013. These included a meeting with local businesses, talking to local people at a Fleet Pond event in June, a focus group discussion with residents on transport and accessibility issues, and a focus group discussion with blind and partially sighted people in July 2013.

Further qualitative research was undertaken at Hart Shopping Centre over the weekend of 6–8 September 2013, where members of Fleet Future staffed a stall and talked to local people about Fleet Future's recommendations and encouraged them to complete the consultation survey online or in hard copy.

5 Economy

5.1 Introduction

Fleet is one of the most prosperous parts of the country and various independent surveys over the years have clearly demonstrated this. However, this does not mean that it is an area without its economic problems and residents and businesses have undoubtedly been hit by the economic downturn.

The most tangible evidence of the impact of the recession on Fleet can be seen in the town centre where office blocks have been unoccupied for a number of years and an increasing number of retail premises have become vacant as companies close. A recent report by Knight Frank [8] for Hart District Council estimates that the town centre vacancy rate is about 12%, marginally higher than the UK average despite the relative prosperity of the area, and many of those retailers that have continued to operate have seen sales fall. It was not surprising therefore that when the residents of the town were invited to express their views about the future of the town at the Fleet Future public meeting in November 2012 the issues most frequently referred to related to the town centre – closure of shops, vacant premises, and what many saw as a limited and declining retail offering. Cost of car parking in the town centre was also regularly referred to as a problem.

At the time of the public meeting, Hart District Council was exploring the possibility of allowing a major national food retailer to develop in the area around The Harlington and Gurkha Square. However, it did not seem to those who provided comments that this was the solution to the problems of the town, and on the ‘dream wall’ (where people were invited to express their one wish for the future Fleet) the most common request was *‘Do something about the town centre’*. It was therefore clear to Fleet Future that the economic focus of any town plan should, at least initially, be to address the concerns of residents about the town centre and see how it can make a contribution to delivering the Fleet Future vision of a *bustling, attractive, sustainable, leafy green town which is easy to get about in and has an active community*.

5.2 Background

Fleet, of course, is not unique in facing these challenges and the pressures on businesses in the town centre over the last few years have been mirrored across the country as Dame Mary Portas made clear in a government-commissioned report in December 2011 [9]. In Fleet the message from businesses was that their difficulties stemmed from the economic pressures on their customers, competition from neighbouring towns and retail developments, and the increasing cost of business rates and rents. The growing use of the internet for retail purchases was also seen as a major threat to town centre businesses.

Although the public meeting had given a snapshot of what the issues were that needed to be addressed within the town, this was not the first time that these issues had been raised. In 2007, the Fleet and Church Crookham Town Healthcheck [6] had asked residents what would encourage them to use Fleet town centre more, the top three responses to which were – a wider range of shops, a department store, and cheaper parking.

To validate the concerns expressed, a report was commissioned earlier this year and undertaken by the Action for Market Towns (AMT) [7]. The aim was to benchmark the performance of Fleet town centre with other small towns in south east England, small towns across the country as a whole, and towns with similar characteristics. This survey provided valuable information about how the town centre compares with these other towns from the point of view of the businesses in the town and the town centre users. Table 5-1 and Table 5-2 below provide a summary of what each of these two groups see as the positive aspects

of Fleet and how these compare with the view of those in other towns across the south east of England.

Table 5-1 Positive aspects of having a business located in Fleet town centre [6].

	% of Fleet businesses mentioning this	% of businesses mentioning this in other small SE towns	Additional % in Fleet
Potential local customers	83	76	+7
Prosperity of the town	67	40	+27
Geographical location	46	42	+4
Transport links	29	29	–

Table 5-2 Positive aspects of Fleet Town Centre for users [6].

	% of Fleet town centre users mentioning this	% of town centre users mentioning this in other small SE towns	Additional % in Fleet
Ease of walking round centre	86	73	+13
Convenience e.g. near where live	86	72	+14
Access to services	84	76	+8
Restaurants	74	29	+44
Safety	66	47	+19
Markets	57	22	+35
Pubs/bars/nightclubs	44	21	+23

The businesses identify the prosperity of the town and the potential of local customers as being the main attraction of Fleet and these score more highly than other small towns in the south east of England. For the users what stands out is the particular attraction of the night life in Fleet compared with other similar towns in the south east as well as the attraction of the market, even though this is smaller than in many other towns and is only held on a Saturday morning.

Table 5-3 and Table 5-4 summarise those issues that make Fleet less attractive, again from both the perspective of the local businesses and from the town centre users.

None of these findings are surprising given what previous surveys have shown, but it is interesting to see how much more significant issues like car parking, the variety of shops, and property costs are compared with other small towns in the region.

Table 5-3 Negative aspects of having a business located in Fleet town centre [6].

	% of Fleet businesses mentioning this	% of businesses mentioning this in other small SE towns	Additional % in Fleet
Car parking	75	56	+19
Rental values/property costs	67	38	+29
Competition from the internet	58	44	+14
Crime	52	40	+12
Mix of retail offer	46	25	+21
Competition from other places	42	41	+1

Table 5-4 Negative aspects of Fleet town centre for users [6].

	% of Fleet town centre users mentioning this	% of town centre users mentioning this in other small SE towns	Additional % in Fleet
Car parking	52	37	+15
Variety of shops	51	29	+22
Cultural facilities	49	37	+12
Leisure facilities	46	44	+2
Transport	44	24	+20

Over recent years a great deal has been written about the problems of Fleet town centre, and the views of the businesses and residents have been widely canvassed. The one thing that has been missing is a concerted effort to address these issues.

5.3 Addressing the issues

This Town Plan aims to look at some of the elements that lie behind the decline of the town centre and see what can be done to address these. It is important to recognise, however, that the nature and character of town centres has evolved over time and will continue to do so. The town centres of the future are unlikely to be the same as the town centres of the past, and in setting a plan for the future we have to ensure that the town centre of Fleet provides a diverse range of uses and activities that will ensure that it is a vibrant and lively place that people of all ages are attracted to for a variety of business and social activities.

In developing recommendations to achieve this, however, it is important to be realistic about the areas where a Town Plan might be able to make a difference and those over which it has little or no influence. Much has been made in discussions with businesses in the town about the level of rents and this is reflected in the comments by businesses in the AMT report (although the recent Knight Frank report [8] suggests that rent for retail premises in the town are lower than most of the neighbouring towns). Rents are a matter for negotiation between landlords and tenants and there is very little if anything that a Town Plan can do to influence this. Similarly, proposals can be set down for the development of land or the change of use of buildings, but unless the development is to be funded by the public sector, it will only occur if the private sector is prepared to invest.

In a similar vein, the need for a greater variety of shops in the town centre, which is seen in Table 5-4 above as one of the most negative aspects of the town centre, is not something that Fleet Future or the local authority can easily remedy. These are very much commercial decisions which rest in the hands of prospective retailers based on the commercial viability of Fleet town centre as a location for their particular retail outlet. However, what we can do to help encourage new businesses to come to Fleet is to make the town centre a more attractive place for residents and visitors through the ease with which they can get there, the ease and cost of car parking, and the variety of retail, leisure, and cultural facilities that they can enjoy there. Creating a vibrant town centre with a growing footfall and with suitable premises readily available will as much as anything encourage new businesses to locate to the town centre and help retain those that are already located there.

There is much that the Town Plan can do to help create this more vibrant and commercially viable town centre and this is reflected in the various recommendations on which the people of Fleet were consulted during the summer.

5.4 Establishing a business team and brand

RECOMMENDATION:

Businesses in Fleet Town Centre should work together to establish a business-led 'Fleet Centre Business Team' which has a vision for the town centre and a plan for working with others to deliver this.

'For a high street to survive and grow it must have a very clear vision of where it wants to get to. And it needs co-ordinated planning and management to get there.' Portas Review [9]

Over the years a number of attempts have been made to get the businesses in Fleet town centre to work together in a co-ordinated way to address the issues that are common to all or most of them and to provide a basis for a constructive dialogue with the local authorities and bodies that can deliver the changes that are desired. For a variety of reasons none seem to have achieved the co-ordinated planning and management that Portas sees as vital if the high street is to survive. Without this level of collective ownership from those that stand to benefit commercially from a more vibrant town centre it will be very difficult to bring about the scale of change in the town that is sought.

Responses to the Fleet Future consultation [2] indicate that 87% of those responding support this recommendation and barely 5% disagree with the concept. The remaining 8% did not express a view. Interestingly the level of support for this recommendation was as strong from local residents as it was from businesses in the town centre. It would appear that the residents expect to see a more co-ordinated approach to addressing the challenges the town centre faces and there was comment in the consultation that town centre users and customers should also have a role in the business-led team that was being proposed.

Over the summer Fleet Future organised three meetings of town centre businesses and there appears to be an appetite from many of those who attended to continue the dialogue that has developed and to involve as many as possible of the other businesses in the town centre in this. The aim is that this group evolves into a Fleet Centre Business Team or Action Team which, with the support of Fleet Future volunteers, would work closely with all the relevant agencies and stakeholders to implement the recommendations in this Plan and any other measures that would seem to support this.

ACTION:

The current Fleet Future-led meeting of town centre businesses should evolve into a business-led Fleet Centre Business Team by the end of 2013.

RECOMMENDATION:

A Fleet Town 'brand' needs to be created to promote and market the town as somewhere to visit during the day and evening.

Fleet has much more to offer than many people realise – Fleet Pond is the largest freshwater lake in Hampshire and an area of Special Scientific Interest, the Basingstoke Canal offers the opportunity for many recreational activities, and the Fleet half marathon attracts people from far and wide as competitors and spectators. The town centre has a large number of restaurants and pubs and as the AMT survey referred to earlier shows, this is part of the Fleet town centre economy that is popular and successful. In addition, events at The Harlington attract many people from outside the area.

Despite this, the comment has been made that Fleet is 'soulless' and lacks the character of neighbouring towns like Farnham and Guildford. One of the respondents to the consultation

exercise said *'Fleet definitely needs an identity'*, whilst another commented that it *'seems to be lacking in core character; it's not quaint, it's not modern, it's not rural, it's not urban; it feels very lost and in the middle'*. Many people have suggested that the linear nature of the town centre makes it less attractive than these neighbouring towns, but it also suffers from having less history and architectural character than these neighbours

To counter this, Fleet Future recommends that Fleet needs to develop a 'brand' which can be marketed and promoted not just to visitors and potential visitors to the area, but also to local residents so that they feel a greater identity with the town and what it has to offer. Activities and events can then be developed around this 'brand' and in this way many more people will be attracted to the town centre increasing its vibrancy and commercial opportunities for businesses in the town.

Response to this recommendation in the consultation was positive, with 76% agreeing that this would be a good idea, 15% disagreeing, and 9% not expressing a view. Whilst overall the response from businesses and residents was fairly similar, nearly twice as many business respondents (47%) strongly agreed with the recommendation compared with 26% of residents. It should also be noted that when asked to rank this recommendation it was seen as the least important of the recommendations in the economy section of the Town Plan by the residents, but one of the most important by the businesses.

The challenge is to develop a brand and identity which is consistent with the nature of the area and what Fleet can offer, and that has widespread support. It also needs to be something that is distinctive from other towns in the area. Some towns have built their brand around food and drink festivals, others around antiques or literary festivals. Amongst the suggestions made in the consultation exercise were that Fleet should develop itself as a Centre of Excellence for health and fitness, whilst others suggested it should build on its reputation for food and drink and develop a unique food and drink festival. The attractiveness of Fleet Pond and the Basingstoke Canal were also seen as a basis for developing a unique Fleet brand.

Further research and consultation need to be undertaken on this and it would seem to be an issue that Fleet Town Council and the proposed Fleet Centre Business Team should develop together with, if necessary, some independent outside advice.

ACTION:

Fleet Town Council, Hart District Council's Economic Development Officer and the proposed Fleet Centre Business Team work together to undertake further research and consultations on what is an appropriate 'brand' for Fleet.

5.5 Improving the town centre for visitors

RECOMMENDATION:

There needs to be better information, signage and publicity about town centre businesses to increase visitor numbers.

In discussion with local residents and businesses in the town it is clear there is a lack of knowledge about what the town centre already has to offer in terms of the retail offering, businesses, leisure and cultural activities. The population in the area is growing rapidly and professional people are regularly moving in and out of the area with their jobs which might be one reason for this. It is also clear, however, that many long-standing residents are not aware of many of the facilities that the town centre has to offer. At the same time, there are an increasing number of visitors to the area, something we want to encourage and which will inevitably increase with the opening of a new hotel near the station.

At present there is little, if any, collective marketing of Fleet; there are no guides to the town centre in any of the car parks; no list of shops at the entrance to the Hart Shopping Centre; and the main hotel in the town has nothing available to tell its visitors about Fleet and what retail and recreational facilities are available. There are at least four websites which attempt to promote Fleet and provide information about what is available in the town (www.lovefleet.co.uk, www.lovefleetnightlife.co.uk, www.welcometofleet.weebly.com and www.fleethants.com). Nevertheless, other local towns such as Farnham seem to do this much better.

In the discussions that Fleet Future held with town centre businesses, better information was, interestingly, top of their list for improving the situation in the town centre and over 80% of those responding to this recommendation in the consultation said they agreed that this was an important issue that needed addressing, whilst 12% disagreed and 7% did not have a view. Businesses felt more strongly about this (50% strongly agreed) compared with local residents (27%), and rather surprisingly it was given a low level of importance by residents compared with other town centre-related recommendations.

This is an issue that needs to be addressed if we are to attract more people to the town centre, improve the commercial prospects for the businesses that are already there, and attract new businesses to the town. However, developing and implementing an effective communication strategy will not happen overnight and needs the collective input of businesses in the town as well as other relevant agencies. It must ensure it embraces new forms of electronic and social media communication in parallel with more traditional means. It needs to relate to all age groups and the information that is covered must be kept up to date so that people really feel they are in touch with what is going on. Some things can be done at relatively little cost in the short term including preparing a map of all the businesses in the town and improving the signage. These should be taken forward as quickly as possible whilst a longer-term strategy is being developed and funding is sought.

ACTION:

Fleet Town Council should work with the Economic Development Officer at Hart District Council, the proposed Fleet Centre Business Team and, where appropriate, Hampshire County Council to deliver this recommendation.

5.6 Business rates and rents

RECOMMENDATION:

There should be a consultation with town centre businesses to explore the feasibility of flexing business rates to incentivise economic development.

A major concern for many businesses in the town centre is the level of rents and business rates they have to pay at a time when their turnover has come under increasing pressure. The level of rents are a contractual matter between businesses and their landlords and business rates are set by central government with Hart District Council acting as the agent for collecting these. Over recent weeks there has been growing pressure on the government to provide some relief from the business rate burden for small businesses and particularly retailers in the town centres. Various reports have been presented on the subject, and the Sunday Times is now fronting a campaign for a reduction in business rates.

There was a high level of support in the consultation for this recommendation, with 89% agreeing that Hart District Council should explore whether some reduction in business rates might help existing town centre businesses as well as attracting new businesses into the empty premises. Residents feel as strongly about this as businesses, and many of the additional comments identified this as one of the few direct things that they felt the local authority might be able to do to help businesses at this time.

Hart District Council has indicated that it is prepared to explore possible ways of minor flexing to business rates if it was felt this would help improve the economic vibrancy of the town centre. It has to be recognised, however, that any consequent shortfall in the overall income it receives will have to be met from the Council's other funds or by increasing other income. Options that would be worth exploring might include a temporary reduction of business rates for new businesses setting up in the town in sectors that are not already well represented, or taking a lead from other authorities like Wokingham where money has been set aside for reduced rates for businesses that put forward innovative ways of improving the economy of the town.

Responsibility for undertaking the proposed consultation exercise clearly has to rest with Hart District Council. However, there is also a very important role for businesses as they can help identify the kind of flexing that would be of most assistance and deliver the outcomes that are hoped for in a commercially fair way.

ACTION:

Hart District Council identifies, in discussion with the proposed Fleet Centre Business Team, options for flexing business rates in order to help economic development and makes a proposal for any resulting changes to Council members by April 2014.

5.7 Car parking

RECOMMENDATION:

'Pay as you leave' arrangements should be introduced for all town centre car parks to encourage people to stay longer in town.

In the AMT survey, car parking was the most frequently mentioned negative aspect of Fleet town centre by both residents and businesses in the town. This would probably be the case in most town centres, but as the survey results show, this seems to be felt much more strongly than in other similar-sized town centres in the south east of England.

The AMT survey, however, showed that there was no shortage of car parking spaces conveniently located for the town centre even at weekends, and the problem seems to lie with the cost and the competition from free parking available at the major supermarkets on the edge of, or not far from, Fleet such as at Elvetham Heath, Southwood, Watchmoor Park and the Meadows.

One particular feature of the local authority car parks in Fleet town centre is that they require motorists to purchase a ticket from a machine on arrival and display the ticket in the car. This presumes that visitors know how long they intend to stay in the town centre and many residents and businesses suggest that this means that people spend less time in the town centre than they would otherwise because having put a ticket on their car they are concerned about overstaying and are not keen to be delayed by meeting people or making unscheduled visits to places in the town. Hart District Council has therefore been reviewing the advantages of introducing a system of 'pay as you leave' from its town centre car parks.

The recommendation that 'pay as you leave' arrangements should be introduced in the town centre car parks was supported by 78% of the respondents to the consultation, 15% disagreed and 7% had no view. A slightly higher proportion of females favoured this (83%) than males (74%). Some queried whether the significant capital expenditure required could be justified.

The potential benefits of this recommendation also have to be weighed up very carefully against the substantial capital cost of implementing these new arrangements. Nevertheless there seems to be a sufficiently strong level of support for this move from those who

commented on the recommendation to justify Hart District Council completing a detailed cost-benefit analysis of these arrangements.

ACTION:

Ask Hart District Council to investigate the community's recommendation that a 'pay as you leave' system should be implemented.

RECOMMENDATION:

Free car parking in all town centre car parks after 6pm and on Sundays should be introduced to increase the number of people visiting the town during weekend, daytime and evenings.

The cost of car parking is a controversial issue in most town centres and Fleet is no exception. Various measures have been taken over the years in Fleet town centre to try to find suitable arrangements both in the town centre car parks and with parking along the road side. Pre-paid cards are available from Hart District Council but whilst these make payment easier, they do not offer any discount. Sainsbury's refunds car parking charges for up to 2 hours for customers who spend £15 in its store.

Council-owned Fleet town centre car parks currently charge:

- Up to 30 minutes – 20p
- Up to 1 hour – 80p
- Up to 2 hours – £1.60

Parking between 6pm and 8am and all day Sunday is typically a fixed charge of £1, without the 20p for 30 minutes option.

Comparison with neighbouring towns is not easy because of the varying charges according to the exact location of the car park. An analysis of parking charges, for example, in Camberley and Farnham suggests that in Farnham charges are slightly lower (typically 60p for 1 hour and £1.20 for 2 hours) whereas in Camberley in one of the main car parks there is a 2-hour minimum charge of £1.60 and in another an 80p charge for the first hour moves to a £1.20 charge for 2 hours.

The recommendation above, which was included in the consultation, was intended to address major concerns about the fixed evening and weekend charge which clearly was a disincentive to people who wanted to come to the town for a short visit. People were saying, for example, that they had stopped coming to Fleet on Sunday for a short shopping trip because of this high fixed charge.

Perhaps not surprisingly, therefore, there was overwhelming support for this recommendation. 95% of those that responded agreed with this recommendation, the most positive response to any of the recommendations. Only 3% disagreed and the remaining 2% said they did not have a view. Businesses and residents were united in their support for the recommendation. There will inevitably be cost implications for Hart District Council because of the lost revenue and so it would be prudent to keep under review the impact on revenue and visitor numbers.

ACTION:

Ask Hart District Council to introduce, on a trial basis, free car parking in all council-owned town centre car parks after 6pm and on Sundays at the earliest opportunity, and monitor the effect of this on the town's economy.

Although the focus of one of the recommendations was on evening and Sunday car parking there was still concern about the wider level of parking charges in the town centre and this generated as much additional comments from respondents as any other single issue in the consultation. As was pointed out by many respondents, the competition is not so much with neighbouring towns, but with the free parking in many of the edge of town/out of town shopping areas. Some argued for free parking in the town centre to counter the attraction of these out of town shopping areas, but history has shown that unless this is carefully managed the spaces are all taken early in the morning by commuters and town centre employees and no space is left for those visiting the town during the day.

An alternative proposal put forward by many respondents was that the first 2 hours of parking should be free at all times, or on particular occasions when an effort is being made to bring people into Fleet. This would come at a considerable cost to the local authority and they would have to address the financial implications. However, given the strength of feeling about the issue amongst residents and businesses, we would encourage Hart District Council to review the costs and benefits of this proposal and various alternatives, and engage in a dialogue with the businesses and residents of Fleet about the implications of this.

Draft RECOMMENDATION for future consideration:

Ask Hart District Council to review the costs and benefits of introducing 2 hours free parking in the town centre car parks.

Draft ACTION for future consideration:

Once the above review is completed, Hart District Council should engage in a dialogue with the businesses and residents of Fleet about the implications of this.

5.8 Additional issues raised by those responding to the Fleet Future consultation

Over half of the 1,335 respondents to the consultation also added comments about various recommendations or about additional issues that they felt should have been covered. Many of these comments related to the economic issues that the consultation document was seeking to address.

5.8.1 Pedestrianisation of parts of Fleet Road

Several people thought that the shopping area would be more attractive if sections of Fleet Road were pedestrianized, particularly the stretch from the Oatsheaf to Church Road traffic-free either all the time or at weekends. Most proposals suggested routing traffic along Albert, Clarence or Connaught Roads, usually making two of the three roads one-way.

This has been raised on a number of occasions in the past and there have always been mixed views on the merits of such a proposal. However, Fleet Road is an 'A' class road and as such it is very difficult to get agreement to close it except for a few major occasions (like the Carnival and the Christmas Festival).

5.8.2 Attractiveness of the buildings in Fleet town centre

Several respondents felt that more should be done to improve the attractiveness of the buildings and the environment in the town centre. Clearly there is very little that can be done in the short term to change the architecture of the buildings in the town or the elongated nature of the shopping area. Residents would, however, like to see more colour in the town centre and for the owners of properties that are not currently occupied to find some way of making the properties more visually attractive.

5.8.3 A wider variety of shops

Many people wanted to see a wider variety of shops in Fleet, noting in particular the absence of any children's clothes shops and sports shops from the town. Some would like to see a major department store in Fleet, whilst others would prefer to see more independent retailers with a specialist offering and were concerned that the larger stores were limiting the opportunities for such independent retailers. Businesses will only set up in Fleet if it is attractive for them to do so. This is why improving the 'image' of Fleet is important.

5.8.4 Events

Both businesses and residents wanted to see more events in the town centre in order to increase footfall and to help create the *bustling, attractive, and sustainable* elements in our vision for Fleet.

There are currently at least three major events – Fleet Carnival in the summer, the Christmas Festival, and the Fleet Half Marathon in the spring – and most local traders say they see a significant upturn in trade at the time of these events. There is therefore a great deal to be said for developing additional events that will bring both local people and visitors to the area to the town centre.

One small step has already been made with the agreement of the Hart Shopping Centre to make available one of the vacant units for a **'pop-up shop'** towards the end of 2013 and Hart District Council has generously agreed to support this venture. The idea is that potential new businesses will, in competition, be able to bid for a period of time (typically 2 weeks) during which they can trial their business (retail, services, etc) in front of local people and this will give them a better ideas as to whether what they are developing has the potential to be commercially viable. It is hoped that, as well as providing an opportunity for business start-ups, this will attract additional people to the town centre, curious to see what these new businesses have to offer.

Longer-term ideas are already being developed for a **Fleet mile**, a race along Fleet Road, and a **Food Festival**. In addition many towns have been successful in attracting people to their towns through extending the **town market**. Other ideas include making more use of the pavement space in the town centre: perhaps inviting local schools to perform there in turn in order to attract families and friends to the town on the day they are performing. What is needed is for the various community groups that already arrange events in the town and others who have ideas to come together to ensure that a more substantial events programme is put together that relates to all the different age ranges in the area and to ensure that there is co-ordination in what is being offered.

The provision of events and activities is discussed again in the next chapter and recommendations and actions are suggested there.

6 Social, community and environment

6.1 Introduction

The social, community and environment section covers population, housing and public safety, sport, culture and heritage, and leisure and open spaces.

In many regards, Fleet and Hart work very well. For the second year running, Hart has been ranked the best place to live in Britain by the Halifax on the basis of jobs, housing, health, life expectancy, crime, weather, traffic, and house prices [1]. Halifax economist Martin Ellis said: "While not necessarily being the leading district across all measures, Hart comes out on top because it scores consistently highly across nearly all indicators. In particular, Hart residents enjoy good health, high employment, low crime, and high quality schooling."

6.2 Housing

Fleet is under continual pressure from central government to provide more housing but, due to its geography, has a particular difficulty in this respect. Approximately two-thirds of the geographic area of Hart District lies within 5km of the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area and more or less the entire densely populated district lies within 7km. It is clear from various survey results that the residents of Fleet do not want further substantial housing development and are concerned that the current infrastructure cannot cope. Yet the North West Surrey and North East Hampshire Strategic Housing Market Assessment in 2009 [10] supported the view that more affordable housing is required in the district.

In 1994 Hart District Council transferred all its housing stock to Sentinel Housing Association. Although no longer a direct provider, Hart continues to be the statutory housing authority for the area, and works with other organisations to ensure that the most acute housing needs in the district are met. At present there are ten times as many people on the list for local authority housing as houses become available each year.

The draft Hart District Council Core Strategy, setting out the long-term planning policy framework for Hart until 2029, has been withdrawn after the Planning Inspector recommended in July 2013 that it should not be adopted. Hart District Council will submit a revised plan in 2014.

At the Fleet Future public meeting in November 2012 [5], comments made on housing and development included:

- *'No more green field housing development'*
- *'Turn empty commercial buildings in Fleet into houses, flats, etc'*
- *'Development needs to be much less concentrated on Fleet and Church Crookham and pushed further out even though that means providing more infrastructure'*
- *'Keep villages separate from town centre – maintain green belt'*
- *'Less local authority housing'*

Taking these views into account, alongside other information sources, Fleet Future made the recommendation below.

RECOMMENDATION:

The vacant offices in the area bounded by Fleet Road, Kings Road and Albert Street should be redeveloped to provide mixed housing, with green spaces and play areas.

There was strong majority support (87%) for a coordinated development of the redundant office area bounded by Fleet Road, Kings Road and Albert Street. As the land is owned by a

number of individual owners, it is acknowledged that the District Council has no authority to dictate development, unless it wishes to pursue compulsory purchase.

Currently, McCarthy & Stone are demolishing two of the offices to construct assisted living apartments, one of the offices is nearly fully let, and the remaining two are owned by developers who have planning permission to build a care home.

The Department for Community and Local Government is, at the time of this report, testing public opinion on the conversion of shops and offices to residential use without the need for planning permission. However, even this would not facilitate the coordinated approach that the community wishes to see for this site.

ACTION:

Hart District Council, Fleet Town Council and Fleet Future work proactively with property owners and developers to secure the appropriate type of coordinated development for future and similar sites so that a cohesive, rather than piecemeal, approach can be developed. This joint approach should be acted upon as soon as possible (Spring 2014).

6.3 The land centred on the civic centre, The Harlington, library and Gurkha Square

RECOMMENDATION:

The land centred on the Civic Offices, The Harlington, library and Gurkha Square should be redeveloped for mixed use which might include residential, commercial, community, entertainment and cultural activities while preserving a town square and links to The Views.

6.3.1 Background

In 2009 Hart District Council's *A Vision for Fleet Town Centre* [11] outlined plans for a strategic redevelopment of the land centred on the civic offices, Gurkha Square, The Harlington and Fleet Library. In 2011, an informal public consultation on the "Vision" took place but did not result in a clear indication of the views of the people of Fleet. More recently, the withdrawal of a major supermarket as a potential developer has left the project in a state of abeyance.

6.3.2 Fleet Future consultation

This recommendation received an overall majority in favour but with a narrower margin than the others. 56% supported the recommendation, 39% disagreed and 9% responded "don't know" or "don't have an opinion". 80 respondents submitted comments on this recommendation. When analysing the results in greater detail, it becomes apparent that respondents under the age of 65 years voted by more than 2:1 in favour. On the other hand, those over 65 years voted against the recommendation. This highlights the difficulty in arriving at a consensus for this topic.

The analysis undertaken by Fleet Future identifies three different perspectives on this subject:

- Those who own the land and buildings (i.e. the councils) are concerned about both the ongoing cost-effectiveness of the buildings, such as necessary refurbishment and under-utilisation, as well as the challenge of funding any changes required. The Harlington, now the responsibility of Fleet Town Council, is a 1970s building in need of major refurbishment. The adjoining library is the responsibility of Hampshire County Council. Behind these buildings, the Hart District Council civic office is larger than required, as the number of council staff has been reduced.

- Many see an opportunity to redevelop the site so as to provide a real “heart” or focus for the town centre, embracing a wide range of activities including retail, business, leisure, entertainment, cultural, residential, etc. This could create a town square where Gurkha Square is currently used as a car park, with a renovated library, cafés, a route through to the Views and a new Fleet Town Council civic centre with improved facilities for the community and a hall at least as large as the existing hall in The Harlington. Space would need to be provided for W. C. Baker, the ironmonger, retention of which rated highly in the responses to the public consultation
- Others however perceive a high risk that any major development might well result in a reduction of the existing highly valued community facilities, hence hurting the community and cultural activities that currently take place on the site. There is much appreciation for the existing facilities and much anxiety that a developer might not attach the same priority to the maintenance of these facilities as the community.

Again, there is a range of options from just refurbishment of The Harlington through to complete redevelopment of the whole site. However, there is not a “do nothing” option as there is significant work required on The Harlington.

The diversity of viewpoints and options are not necessarily irreconcilable and there is common ground to be explored. However proceeding from just one perspective would be likely to alienate a significant proportion of the community.

It is for this reason that the actions proposed by Fleet Future start with small steps, one at a time, with the aim of reaching a solution which has broad community consensus.

ACTION:

Working in partnership with current and future stakeholders, Fleet Future will facilitate the development of viable options for the use of the land mentioned above in the following four phases:

1. A team that includes the key stakeholders is formed to identify the desires and aspirations of all stakeholders, the financial imperatives and the key issues that need to be addressed and resolved.
2. A minimum of two, maximum of three, alternative viable options for the use of the land are developed for consideration by the wider community.
3. The community is consulted on the options.
4. Timely delivery of the community’s preferred option proceeds.

6.4 The Views

The Views, located next to The Harlington, is the most visited open green space within Fleet [6]. It is particularly well visited by younger residents to make use of play equipment and the skate park. The same source found that 40% of students visited the Views at least fortnightly. The number of events held in the park has reduced substantially in recent years as civic events such as the Fleet Carnival and Lions Fireworks display have relocated to the larger Calthorpe Park. This has given an impression of the park not being as well used as in previous years.

The park is hidden away from the high street with poor signage and access to town centre visitors. The integration and access to the park from the high street needs to be improved independent of any redevelopment of The Harlington/Civic Offices site. A range of formal seating and garden areas may also make it an inviting meeting place for shoppers and families.

The Views also has a natural amphitheatre layout that is not used for the small-scale events currently held in the park e.g. Circus Big Top. Inclusion of facilities to support small-scale events within The Views that make use of this layout could provide a central leisure/cultural facility for the town.

To reflect these views the following recommendation was included in the consultation.

RECOMMENDATION:

The Views should be improved as a central place for residents to gather and events to be held.

The response in the consultation was strongly in support of maintaining The Views as an open green space, with 79% agreeing or strongly agreeing. Only 10% disagreed or strongly disagreed, with 11% not expressing an opinion.

There were 31 comments, most of them positive. The most common focus of these was improvement of facilities for children e.g. sandpit, paddling pool, table tennis and crazy golf. Several respondents suggested a bandstand to allow Sunday concert performances like those in Gostrey Meadows in Farnham. The Views was compared unfavourably with other parks such as Yateley Park, Sandhurst Park, the play area at Alice Holt Forest, King George V Playing Fields in Farnborough and the Broadway Activity Park in Gloucestershire. There was also a wish to make it more attractive with trees, shrubs and flowers. Some thought that it might be suitable for smaller events but most felt that larger events like fairs and fireworks displays should continue to be held at Calthorpe Park.

ACTION:

Fleet Town Council to encourage the formation of a 'Friends Group' for the Views to explore and address the issues raised.

6.5 Sport and leisure

Fleet is fortunate in having access to a wide range of sport and leisure facilities. It also enjoys excellent sporting facilities nearby at the athletics stadium, swimming pool and gymnasium complex in Aldershot Military Town. Fleet is proud to host the annual pre-London half marathon and some of its residents compete in sport at national and international level. Some residents have campaigned for the provision of improved sporting facilities including a running track. Hart District Council operates a Leisure Centre in Fleet which offers a wide variety of activities for the whole family, although the AMT survey found significant criticisms of it, in part because it was overcrowded.

Fleet Town Football Club is a semi-professional football club established in 1890. It plays home games at Calthorpe Park which has a 250-seat stand. Fleet also has a well-supported cricket club located in Calthorpe Park.

Fleet is fortunate in the number of popular parks it has available to visitors and residents:

- **Oakley Park:** featuring an 11-a-side football pitch, children's play facilities, climbing wall and basketball hoop, streams and 3 acres of nature reserve, a dipping pond and pavilion.
- **Calthorpe Park:** home of many of Fleet's community events. It features mini-pitches, a football pitch, tennis courts and wooden play area.
- **Basingbourne Park:** an enclosed playground for the under 8s and a climbing frame for the under 12s and a well-used woodland area. The park is also home to Fleet Town Colts Football Club and features the only 9-a-side pitch in the area.

- **Elvetham Heath:** a number of small, clean and modern playgrounds are dotted around Elvetham Heath. The play area at The Key also has a skate park and is situated close to the Church on the Heath which operates a coffee shop. A nature reserve is a popular local facility.
- **Ancells Farm Playground:** new wooden playground equipment for the 4–7s; plus plenty for the over 8s, including a zip wire.
- **Azalea Park:** a popular play facility in neighbouring Church Crookham, with a new and improved playground.
- **The Views:** located close to the town centre, The Views contains a skate park and a playground for smaller children. It has hosted fun fairs and the annual firework display. A new cycle path runs through the park
- **Zebon Copse Playground:** a playground suitable from toddler age and upwards and a trim trail.

Fleet Pond is covered in Section 6.9.

Sport, leisure and open spaces are very important issues to residents of Fleet. Demand and expectations are high and information sources reviewed by the working group reflect residents' expectations in this regard.

Fleet and Church Crookham Town Healthcheck. The Views was the most used green urban space/park in this 2007 survey. About 40% of people questioned made use of The Views and about 10% used it regularly. Oakley Park also had high regular usage with over 100 respondents using it fortnightly or more. This is perhaps because of its location within a suburban area of the town surrounded by housing. Several other parks were used by about 20–25% of the population, a large proportion of households.

The most popular suggestions for leisure activities were a cinema, followed by bowling and a café or drop-in centre. There were several requests for this facility to the south of Fleet or in Church Crookham, rather than in the town. There were various suggestions for more and better sporting facilities.

Respondents wanted to see The Harlington used for films, theatre productions (both amateur and professional), shows e.g. musicals and live music events such as bands, classical concerts, folk, jazz and country music, craft and visual arts exhibitions, including photography.

There was overwhelming support for an improved Hart Leisure Centre to provide more sports and recreational facilities.

Fleet Future public meeting. Suggestions from this 2012 meeting included more leisure and sport facilities for children and youths in Fleet, more large-scale play parks and splash parks such as at Sandhurst, Basingstoke and Guildford, more bench seating (chairs with backs and arm rests) on the open spaces, lighting in open spaces to deter vandalism and antisocial behaviour at night, a running and cycle track circuit at Calthorpe Park, improved playground facilities in Oakley Park, better signposting to parks and leisure centre, and long-term relocation of leisure/sports centre into the town centre.

AMT benchmarking report for Fleet. Fleet's leisure facilities were identified as a positive aspect of living in Fleet, by 33% of those interviewed in 2013, compared to 46% who said it was a negative aspect. Some thought Hart Leisure Centre too crowded and in need of replacement. Nearly half of town centre users wanted to see improved leisure facilities in the town.

Taking these comments into account the following recommendation was included in the consultation.

RECOMMENDATION:

Town centre leisure activities should be created, maintained and improved to bring more cultural and leisure activities into the town.

The consultation showed very strong endorsement of this recommendation, with 92% agreeing or strongly agreeing with this recommendation. Only 4% disagreed and 4% gave no opinion.

34 respondents commented on leisure activities in Fleet. There was strong support for a bigger and better leisure centre (already in Hart District Council's corporate plan) with for a wide variety of sports and a café. Some wanted it to be in the town centre, others in the vacant offices on Fleet Road or at the station. Most felt that children and teenagers needed more facilities. The most popular requests were for a swimming pool, cinema in The Harlington (where some of the equipment already exists), bowling, soft play areas, climbing wall and for making better use of Gurkha Square for evening and weekend activities. Adults also strongly endorsed the need for a cinema to provide something else to do in the town centre apart from eating and drinking.

ACTION:

Ask Fleet Town Council to facilitate a meeting of the various groups in Fleet to coordinate and promote a substantial programme of events in the town for all sections of the community.

6.6 Health

Fleet residents are served by three GP surgeries, a community hospital in Fleet, a highly-rated general hospital at Frimley, seven dentists and five opticians. They enjoy a good standard of health according to three sources of information:

Halifax Quality of Life Survey [1]. This showed:

- 95.3% of residents report being in good or fairly good health compared to a national average of 91%.
- Life expectancy is higher than the UK average (79 years) at 81.7 years for men.

The NHS Quality and Outcomes Framework (QOF) [12]. This measures the performance of GP surgeries using four main components – clinical (e.g. asthma, cancer, dementia, diabetes), organisation, patient experience and additional services offered. Each surgery's score can then be compared with all surgeries in Hampshire and with the average for England. The latest QOF scores (for 2011/12) show that the three Fleet surgeries' scores are the same or better than Hampshire and even better than the England average.

Public Health England local health profile 2011 [13]. As Table 6-1 shows, Fleet scores better than Hampshire and England, except for binge drinking.

Table 6-1 Comparison of Fleet’s Health with Hampshire and England [13].

Indicator	Fleet	Hampshire	England
In bad/very bad health	2.5	4.0	5.5
Limiting long-term illness or disability	12.1	15.7	17.6
Obese children (Year 6)	11.1	15.3	19.0
Obese adults	18.8	23.7	24.1
Binge drinking adults	18.9	17.7	20.0
Emergency hospital admissions*	70.4	89.3	100
Mortality (all ages)*	75.6	89.0	100
Premature mortality*	54.6	79.2	100

% except where indicated *Scaled against all-England average

Despite the body of evidence above that Fleet enjoys relative good health, research reviewed by Fleet Future indicates that residents seek improvements.

Fleet and Church Crookham Town Healthcheck. Respondents to this survey in 2007 made the following comments:

- Additional doctors were needed to cope with the increasing population, particularly with the development of Elvetham Heath at that time.
- The growing demand should be met by new (local) surgeries rather than expanding existing surgeries.
- Booking systems at surgeries should be improved.
- GP clinics should be available in the evenings and on Saturday morning to cater for those at work.
- Transport access to Fleet Medical Centre and Fleet Hospital should be improved.

Fleet Future public meeting. Comments from the attendees at this meeting in November 2012 suggested a walk-in health centre in Hart Shopping Centre or Fleet Hospital. In reply to the question ‘*Can you get a doctor’s appointment?*’, 35 people gave negative replies compared to 11 giving positive replies, out of more than 600 people who attended the meeting.

Surveys by GP surgeries [14]. The three Fleet surgeries have surveyed their patients over the past 2 years about a number of issues such as the surgery environment, appointments system, and availability of GP and nurse appointments. Although it was not possible to do a proper quantitative analysis as the questions were asked in different ways, one concern was the difficulty in getting an appointment with one’s own doctor. Partly this was a problem with the booking system and partly with not being able to see the doctor of one’s own choice. Seeing any doctor urgently was not a problem.

From these pieces of evidence the most important concern seems to be that the availability of GPs will lag behind the continuing growth in Fleet’s population. In considering this concern it is important to note that the situation is changing so comments may not necessarily reflect the current or planned position: for example, one of the surgeries has increased the number of GPs since the surveys were carried out while another has implemented an online booking system and a commuters’ clinic. Richmond Surgery is embarking on an expansion to accommodate a further 3,000 patients and the other two surgeries have indicated that they too would like to expand. In assessing the level of provision of GPs it would be useful to compare Fleet with other towns in Hampshire and this should be pursued.

Another factor to take into account is the mix of GPs and nurses at each surgery. Sometimes it is more appropriate to see a nurse than a GP. It is for the practices, as independent businesses, to make these judgments, bearing in mind their patients’ needs.

Patients also bear some responsibility in this area. Patients who fail to attend surgery appointments with doctors and nurses make it harder for other patients to get appointments.

All three surgeries have Patient Participation Groups (PPGs) whose role is to represent the patients' interests and concerns to their practice. The PPGs should therefore be the first channel to use to address this issue. They are best placed to work with surgeries to find practical ways to improve availability e.g. through booking systems (including online booking), ways of reducing missed appointments such as text message reminders, provision of appointments at different times to suit commuters and greater use of telephone consultations. There might also be some benefit in a joint meeting of the three Fleet surgeries to share ideas and experiences.

For those without a car, access to Fleet Medical Centre and Fleet Hospital remains a problem as they are not served by bus (see also Section 7.4.3). Although there is an hourly bus to Frimley Park Hospital, the last service to the hospital leaves Fleet at 16.45 and the last departure from the hospital is at 17.35. Visiting is only allowed in the evening, so this is not possible by public transport. The car park at the hospital is congested and patients often have to queue for a place.

There was no question about health provision in Fleet Future's consultation but previous comments suggest two recommendations that could be pursued by future task groups should volunteers come forward with an interest in this topic.

Draft RECOMMENDATION for future consideration:
Fleet Future should offer this information to the Patient Participation Groups and explore future actions with them.

Draft RECOMMENDATION for future consideration:
Fleet Future should press the local bus company to provide a service to Fleet Hospital and Fleet Medical Centre.

6.7 Public safety

One of the factors in the Halifax survey that made Hart the best place to live is low crime. Crime in this area has fallen for 6 years in a row and, as Table 6-2 below shows, now has a lower rate of reported crime than Rushmoor and Basingstoke, though not as low as Wokingham or Waverley (Farnham). Burglary from dwellings and shoplifting are particularly low in Hart, though both theft of vehicles and theft from vehicles, and burglary from buildings other than dwellings, are relatively high. To some extent the level of vehicle crime will reflect the high car ownership in Hart, but Wokingham and Waverley have similarly high levels of car ownership and lower rates of vehicle crime.

Table 6-2 Police-reported number of various criminal offences 2011–12 [15].

Area	Burglary in a dwelling	Burglary in building not a dwelling	Theft from vehicle	Theft of vehicle	Shoplifting	All offences
Hart	0.24	1.07	0.97	0.43	0.38	11.31
Wokingham	0.47	0.78	0.65	0.16	0.67	9.37
Waverley	0.35	1.10	0.80	0.13	0.90	10.53
Basingstoke	0.57	0.94	0.69	0.30	1.20	16.56
Woking	0.75	0.66	0.77	0.23	1.45	16.66
Rushmoor	0.85	0.94	0.84	0.42	1.84	18.32

Crime rates per 1000 population

Fleet has its own police station which is no longer open to the public and exists only a base for 'front line' police staff. The Safer Neighbourhood Team comprises two police officers and three Community Support Officers. The police station will be sold shortly, but the Safer Neighbourhood Team will remain in Fleet, in rented space in the Hart District Council offices.

The working group has reviewed information sources that show that crime reduction and the fear of crime are of some concern to members of the public who feel that more needs to be done to improve public safety.

Fleet and Church Crookham Town Healthcheck. 41% of households and 45% of students experienced a problem with antisocial behaviour, mainly in the town centre, in the previous 12 months (survey in May 2007, before the start of the Town Centre project – see below). When asked what solution would reduce antisocial behaviour, the highest number of responses was for additional police presence (763). 621 respondents identified 'more youth facilities'. Other solutions were parental control with 83 people suggesting this. 58 replies from students suggested improving activities for youths followed by reduction of alcohol-related behaviour and then improving policing.

Fleet Future public meeting. Comments from this 2012 meeting included the need for improved lighting in open spaces to deter vandalism and antisocial behaviour at night. Speed restrictions in Branksomewood Road, Elvetham Road and near elderly residences were also mentioned.

AMT benchmarking report for Fleet. This 2013 survey found that 52% of businesses surveyed had suffered crime over the last 12 months, 22% higher than the national average. From this group, three-quarters had suffered theft. In contrast, 66% of town centre users considered safety to be a positive aspect of living in Fleet, compared to only 10% who said it was a negative aspect.

Fleet Future consultation. Our consultation did not contain any recommendations about public safety. Free-text comments made by respondents confirmed the results of the AMT survey, with only a very small number of comments focused around antisocial behaviour and speeding, which are elaborated below.

Fleet town centre is sometimes the scene for antisocial behaviour late at night. Levels of intoxication and emotion can be high as revellers spill out of the town's pubs, clubs and restaurants into the streets late at night. This can be a highly charged and sometimes threatening environment, particularly for individuals who become more vulnerable in these circumstances. Since December 2007, Churches Together in Fleet and Crookham has been operating a Town Centre Project (www.fleettowncentreproject.org.uk). Based in the car park of The Emporium pub, the project operates every Friday and Saturday night from 10pm to 2am, offering free tea, coffee, biscuits, flip-flops and lollipops. It provides a safe place for people to relax and find a sympathetic ear. Teams of trained community volunteers also patrol Fleet Road providing help, non-judgmental advice and reassurance. Visitors to the Project include those who are 'out on the town', taxi drivers, the police, and staff from nearby pubs and restaurants. The initiative is enthusiastically supported by local businesses, Hart District Council, Hampshire Constabulary, and other local organisations. During the life of the project excellent relationships have been built with all involved.

Speeding is also considered by some to be an issue but there is little consensus as to how this should be addressed as previous attempts at traffic control measures have found little favour. A 20mph trial is to take place on some residential roads close to the town centre. The road casualty rate for Fleet is less than half that of England as a whole.

In May 2013, Rushmoor and Hart launched a joint state-of-art control room monitoring 120 CCTV cameras across Aldershot, Farnborough, Fleet, Yateley, Blackwater, Hook,

Hartley Wintney and Odiham. New technology includes digital mapping, essential for pin-pointing locations quickly when incidents occur. Research has shown that the public feel safer if the town centre, parks and open spaces are monitored by CCTV.

6.8 Culture & heritage

Although Fleet enjoys a number of musical, arts and cultural societies, sources considered by the working group found that, whilst Fleet residents enjoy many opportunities for participating in cultural activities, more could and should be done to improve this situation.

Fleet Future public meeting. Comments suggested a local history/heritage resource centre and more free activities for all

AMT benchmarking report for Fleet. Fleet’s cultural facilities were identified as a positive aspect of living in Fleet by 26% of those interviewed, much lower than similar towns or the national average. 49% said it was a negative aspect of living in Fleet. Nearly half of town centre users wanted to see improved cultural facilities in Fleet.

Fleet Future considers that groups providing cultural and heritage activities could be invited to join other community groups in devising and promoting their events in a coordinated programme.

6.9 Open spaces

Whilst many people have expressed concern about the slow degeneration of the town centre, there is also a huge appreciation for Fleet’s open, green spaces, Fleet Pond and surrounding countryside and the Basingstoke Canal. Part of the Town Plan should include ways to preserve, protect, and improve the environment of Fleet and the surrounding area, and to ensure that the community continues to thrive and enjoy the heritage, countryside, open spaces, parks & play areas, Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC) and Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) in and immediately around Fleet.

The Fleet and Church Crookham Town Healthcheck gathered views over a number of years, starting with simple questionnaire in 2004. This showed that access to the countryside, Tweseldown and the canal were the most popular ‘likes’ (see Table 6-3).

Table 6-3 Likes with regard to Fleet and Church Crookham in 2004 [6].

Access to the countryside	40%
Tweseldown and the canal	28%
Friendly community feel	25%
Low crime	9%

This was followed by a scoping exercise to find out in more detail what people liked and disliked about Fleet. This again showed that access to the countryside and other green spaces was very important (Table 6-4).

Table 6-4 Likes and dislikes with regard to Fleet and Church Crookham in 2006 [6].

Likes	Dislikes
Proximity to countryside	Development, especially without adequate infrastructure
Geographic location	
Fleet Pond	Pubs, drinking and rowdiness
Basingstoke Canal	
Small town feel	

Basingstoke Canal and Fleet Pond provide extensive quiet recreational space for walking and enjoying wildlife. Several areas such as Beacon Hill/Tweseldown, Minley Manor and Velmead Common are available for walking and offer the chance to get away from the urban area, though limited car parking can make access difficult and on occasions the areas owned by the Ministry of Defence are used for military training. The popularity of Tweseldown is clear, with about half of everyone responding to the Town Healthcheck making use of this recreational area. It has a different character to most of the other areas except Velmead Common, and both of these areas are used regularly, especially for dog walking (which accounts for the regularity of use).

The Town Healthcheck found a keen appetite for more information about the countryside, with almost 40% of respondents identifying this. This may be that people do not know what is currently available or that there is a shortage of literature. A significant number of people thought a visitor centre at Fleet Pond would increase their enjoyment of this natural area. It is an objective of Hart District Council and the Fleet Pond Society to provide a visitor centre at Fleet Pond but there is not sufficient funding for this at present.

An appreciation of the benefit of wardens and rangers is clear. However, Hart District Council and the town/parish council have limited resources to look after all the important natural environments in the area. The establishment of volunteer groups could be one way of addressing this issue and considerable progress has been made in the past 18 months in this regard, with the formation of four new 'Friends' groups to support the local parks and an increase in volunteering events in parks and the town centre.

The maintenance of Basingstoke Canal was an important issue for nearly two-thirds of respondents to the Town Healthcheck, especially at that time because the local authorities had cut back their funding. Basingstoke Canal is unusual in not being owned by the Canal & River Trust, but by Hampshire and Surrey County Councils, and is funded by a mixture of county and district monies, donations, fund raising and voluntary work; the funding received is regarded as being less than the canal would receive if it were owned by Canal & River Trust. The canal is managed and maintained on a day-to-day basis by the Basingstoke Canal Authority. The Basingstoke Canal Society is a voluntary body which helps to enhance the canal with voluntary support. In recent years it has also helped with maintenance and repair work, although it has no direct responsibility for this.

There was no recommendation about open spaces in the public consultation exercise because the Town Plan focuses on the town centre. Nevertheless, there were a small number of comments from respondents on the importance of Fleet Pond, the Basingstoke Canal and other open spaces for quality of life.

Further recommendations could be pursued in the future if volunteers come forward and want to include support for parks and open spaces other than The Views.

7 Access and transport

7.1 Introduction

Using data cited in Section 7.3 below, the access and transport working group has concluded that there are two ‘constituencies’ for travel in the Fleet area. These are those people with a car available when they want to travel, and those without. For the former, priority issues are car park capacity at Fleet Station; peak time congestion at a number of junctions, particularly Fleet Station roundabout; and the cost of short-term parking. For the latter, priority issues are inadequate bus services; lack of safe routes for cycling; and some issues for pedestrians at a number of junctions and Fleet Station.

The group proposes the following vision for access and transport in Fleet:

‘A town in which it is easy to drive and park a car, in which it is also easy to live and get about without a car, and in which the use of sustainable means of travel are encouraged.’

7.2 Background

Car ownership is high (see Section 3.3) and the number of residents of Fleet and Church Crookham who commute by rail increased from 1,200 in 1991 and 2001 to 1,800 in 2011 [4].

During the morning and evening peaks there is congestion on the approach roads to Fleet, particularly approaching the railway station from the Minley and Cove Roads, at the Oatsheaf junction from Reading Road North, and in Reading Road South in both directions. Off-peak there is little congestion, although some delays in Fleet Road are caused by vehicles delivering to shops, and there is congestion in Reading Road South at school starting and finishing times. The widths of the roads in Fleet are mainly as they were in the 1930s, and in general there is little space available to widen them.

Car parking at Fleet Station is full by about 8am on weekdays. Traffic leaving the station experiences severe congestion in both morning and evening peaks, because of a steady flow of traffic from Minley Road over the railway bridge.

Bus services radiate from the railway station along the main roads and to Reading, Basingstoke, Farnborough (for Frimley Park Hospital) and Aldershot, on 30- or 60-minute headways. Services do not run in the evenings after about 6.30pm nor on Sundays.

Until recently, the only cycle route consisted of narrow painted lanes on one road to the railway station. An off-road route from the town centre to Calthorpe Park secondary school and Hart Leisure Centre was opened for use in July 2013, an on-road route for Kings Road has recently been marked out, and a shared pedestrian and cycle route on a footway to Fleet Station and a route from Calthorpe Park School to Elvetham Heath are planned.

Hampshire County Council has a number of initiatives which should provide solutions to some of the priority issues mentioned in the introduction. These are:

- Hampshire Local Transport Plan (version 3) [16]
- Hampshire Sustainable Transport Towns Project [17]
- Fleet Town Access Plan [18]
- Fleet Station Travel Plan [19]

Finally, a study by consultants for Hart District Council examined a number of options to improve the junction at Fleet Station [20].

Summaries of the contents of these initiatives are given in Annex A of the Town Plan (available on the Fleet Future [website](#)).

The rebuilding of Fleet Station started in May 2013.

7.3 Residents' priorities for access and travel

Sources of information include comments from the Fleet Future public meeting in November 2012 [5], comments written in the Fleet Future consultation in August/September 2013 [2], Fleet Town Council's housing development proposals survey of September 2011 [3] and, although based on data from 2004 and 2007, the Fleet & Church Crookham Town Healthcheck of October 2010 [6]. The Fleet Future data make it possible to identify residents' difficulties with access to various services and activities and suggestions for improvements. The Town Council survey identifies priorities for possible investment. The Town Healthcheck identifies residents' problems and requirements.

As mentioned in the introduction to this section, it is clear that there are two constituencies for travel in the Fleet area: those with a car available when they want to travel, and those without.

With regard to vehicle ownership, whilst only 8.6% of household did not have a car or van available in the 2011 census, a further 36.1% had only one car or van. Some of the households with only one vehicle will not have a vehicle available during the working day, and thus up to 45% of households, plus all the young people who cannot yet drive, will need to travel within and outside Fleet without a car.

7.3.1 Comments from the Fleet Future public meeting

In November 2012 attendees at Fleet Future's public meeting were invited to contribute comments on all aspects of Fleet. This produced some 345 comments bearing on access and transport. The topics of the comments may not be representative of the concerns of all residents for several reasons. The attendees were mainly older and retired people, so there are likely to be fewer comments from young and working age people. Also, there was no control on the numbers of comments posted, and it does appear that some issues attracted multiple posts. Despite the older age of most attendees, there were a significant number of comments about school travel and parking at schools, and smaller numbers on problems of commuting and of getting about Fleet with a baby buggy.

With the qualification above over the lack of significance of the numbers of comments, about 105 were classed as related to parking; 70 to the railway station (including a number on bus services and bus/rail coordination); 45 on traffic, congestion and speed; 30 on bus services; 25 on school travel and parking; 20 on general access; 15 on pedestrian issues; 10 on cycling; 10 on development and miscellaneous; and 10 on Fleet Link (the bus service for people who struggle to use public transport, live too far away from a bus stop or do not have access to a convenient bus service).

The comments on parking were overwhelmingly about the cost of parking, particularly for short stays. The only comments about lack of parking capacity were at the railway station and a single comment on lack of capacity in Calthorpe Park. There were some comments on congestion, mainly at the exit from the railway station and in Reading Road, particularly at the Oatsheaf junction, and a few comments about the safety of specific junctions. There were a number of comments about speeding traffic, intimidation by traffic and difficulties experienced by pedestrians. Most of the other comments were about the concerns of people who do not have a car available, and have difficulty reaching a number of places identified in the comments, plus issues for pedestrians, cyclists and bus users.

7.3.2 Fleet Future consultation

During the consultation which ran from July to September 2013, 1,335 responses were received. These rated approval for the vision of Fleet and for 16 recommendations, ranked the recommendations in priority order, and invited free-text comments on the future of Fleet.

More than a third of all respondents ranked as most important (ranking 1 or 2) the recommendations on cycle routes, extended bus services, additional parking at Fleet Station and reducing congestion at Fleet Station. They considered the least important recommendations concerning information about pedestrian and cycle paths, pedestrian priority measures and better information about bus services.

Considering the high car ownership in Fleet, it is impressive how much support there is for alternative means of transport (bus services, cycle routes, good conditions for walking and safe road crossings for pedestrians). Car owners' priorities are parking capacity at Fleet Station and reduced congestion at the exit from the station. There is also a strong desire for lower cost town centre parking, particularly for short stays, in the evening and at weekends (see economy Section 5.7).

Of the 779 free-text comments, 172 concerned general transport issues, 72 were about parking and 29 suggested at least partial pedestrianisation of Fleet Road or the town centre (the latter two categories are addressed in Economy, Section 5.7).

In the general transport comments, there were many more requesting better bus services and cycle routes than wishing to increase road capacity for cars.

The bus service improvements mentioned included, for example, providing routes to Farnham, Pondtail and Fleet Hospital (see also Section 6.6), and running later in the evening. Some comments were from people who had stopped using buses after the service changes in April 2013.

There were a substantial number of requests for pedestrian crossings or pedestrian phases at traffic signals. The junction of Kings Road and Fleet Road, the Oatsheaf crossroads and the pedestrian route to Elvetham Road from Fleet Station were mentioned many times.

Comments on road capacity and congestion focused on the Oatsheaf crossroads. There was much support for more parking space at Fleet Station, redesign of the exit from the station to reduce congestion and also for bus services better linked to the train timetable and running later in the evening, to avoid the need to take a car to the station.

7.3.3 Fleet Town Council housing developments survey

In this survey, residents were asked to mark their top three choices from a list of 13 possible infrastructure projects that might be paid for with funds made available as a result of house building (so-called S106 contributions, and now replaced by the Community Infrastructure Levy). 57% of respondents included road improvements in their top three priorities, followed by extension to Calthorpe Park School (51%), land for a new primary school (40%), and additional parking at Fleet Station (34%). 93% of residents were 'Very concerned' or 'Quite concerned' about traffic congestion on key junctions, 93% were also concerned about insufficient medical services. 89% were concerned about traffic congestion in the town centre, 74% by insufficient commuter parking and 74% also by commuter rail congestion.

The survey seems to be saying that if there is to be more housing development, then infrastructure and services of all kinds (transport, health care, education, etc) should be improved to accommodate the increased demand. Road improvements to accommodate the increased traffic from future developments were the top priority.

7.3.4 Fleet and Church Crookham Town Healthcheck

This document is based on a survey of 880 residents and 118 students, conducted in 2007. At an initial meeting on the project in 2004, a simple survey of likes and dislikes showed the importance of access to the countryside, to the railway station and M3, and to Tweseldown and the canal. Main dislikes were over-development and traffic congestion.

Questions in the 2007 household questionnaire included a list of required destinations for bus services. The most frequently requested was to the railway station, followed by Farnham and Camberley; there were also requests for a service to the Meadows and Frimley Park Hospital, which could be served by a service to Camberley. Other towns were also requested: Farnborough, Basingstoke, Guildford, Aldershot and Reading. In fact, there are bus services from Fleet to Farnborough and Frimley Park Hospital, to Basingstoke, to Reading via Hartley Wintney and to Aldershot. The service to Farnham was withdrawn in April 2013. A circular service around Fleet and Church Crookham (service 77) was introduced in April 2013, running on a 30-minute headway between 8.31am and 3.11pm.

There are a number of services providing peak-only connections to schools and colleges in Yateley, Farnborough, Alton and Farnham.

50% of households and 40% of students said that they would cycle more if there were safe designated cycle routes. The cycle route most frequently requested was along Reading Road South, significantly exceeding one along Fleet Road. Reading Road North was the third priority for a cycle route, with Kings Road and Crookham Road close behind. There were requests for a route from Ancells Farm to the station, and from the town centre to Hart Leisure Centre and Calthorpe Park School, which was completed in July 2013. There were also requests for a route from Elvetham Heath to Calthorpe Park School and Hart Leisure Centre. The vast majority of routes requested were to the town centre, with only eight respondents mentioning the railway station.

The most frequent replies to an open-ended question “Can you identify any major danger spots on the roads or any road safety concerns for cyclists or pedestrians?” are shown in Annex B of the Town Plan (available on the Fleet Future [website](#)). The station bridge and entrance attracted a large number of comments, largely to do with pedestrians crossing at the bridge area and the roundabout at the station entrance. 59% of household responses commented on the lack of short-term or free parking bays and 20% commented that cost was too high.

These comments are 6–9 years old. However, they do echo issues that emerge from more recent surveys, and so reinforce the conclusions of those later surveys.

7.4 Improving transport and accessibility in the Fleet area

This section lists the recommendations from the working group, with a short explanation of the reasons for each recommendation and the actions that are required to implement the recommendation. The first seven recommendations are those used in the consultation and the last two are ones developed as a result of comments made during the consultation.

Detailed proposals to improve transport and accessibility in the Fleet area are given in Annex C of the Town Plan (available on the Fleet Future [website](#)).

7.4.1 Cycle routes

Input from residents suggests that after better bus services, the initiative that would most improve access within Fleet for those without a car is a network of safe cycle routes. Fleet has level terrain, a relatively dry climate and is the right size for cycling to have potential as a

means of getting about. The main deterrent to more use of pedal cycles is that the relatively narrow main roads are perceived as being too dangerous for cyclists to use.

At present, facilities for cycling are poor, although a good quality cycle route from the town centre to Calthorpe Park School and Hart Leisure Centre was opened for use in July 2013. Both the comments from the public meeting and Town Healthcheck suggest that significant numbers of residents would like to cycle if facilities existed to make cycling a safe and comfortable way to get about. This would be of particular value to those who do not have a car available.

Fleet Town Access Plan proposes a comprehensive network of cycle routes, though the timescale for providing them is not clear and there is insufficient emphasis on off-road routes. In addition to the route from Fleet town centre to Calthorpe Park School, plans are in hand for:

- An on-road route along Kings Road, which will link to an off-road route to Farnborough;
- A shared pedestrian/cycle route along a footway of Fleet Road from Kings Road to Fleet Station; and
- An off-road cycle route from Calthorpe Park School to Elvetham Heath.

At little cost, the route through Calthorpe Park could be linked to the Basingstoke Canal towpath using an existing track across Calthorpe Park. This would then extend the off-road cycle route network to Pondtail, where it would connect to the Kings Road route and the route to Farnborough. Also, a series of pedestrian paths lead from the end of the route in Victoria Road to Stockton Drive, from which there is space for a shared pedestrian and cycle route to the station. This would require some land purchase to widen the existing paths, which is considered in Annex C, section C.3 of the Town Plan (available on the [Fleet Future website](#)).

In the Fleet Future consultation, residents called for cycle routes along Minley Road to Fleet Station from both Ancells Farm and Elvetham Heath. The new route from the town centre to Calthorpe Park School and Hart Leisure Centre is demonstrating the value of a safe off-road cycle route, and showing that future routes should, wherever possible, be off-road. Plans are well under way for additional routes, although the Kings Road on-road route has been criticised as offering insufficient safety for cyclists.

RECOMMENDATION:

More off-road safe cycle routes should be developed to improve access around the town and encourage people to use alternative methods of transport to the car.

ACTION:

Encourage Hampshire County Council to implement a network of off-road cycle routes to cover the whole Fleet area.

7.4.2 Information about bus services

Comments from the Fleet Future public meeting in November 212 show that for residents who do not have a car available, a better bus service is the most important single improvement that would make it easier to get about in Fleet.

It is clear that many residents do not know what bus services are available, and the information at bus stops is very poor. Shelters do not display maps of the bus routes, and along major corridors such as Fleet Road, timetables are for individual services and do not display all the services along the corridor in a single list.

Since Fleet Buzz was acquired by Stagecoach, some aspects of the information provided for passengers has deteriorated. No maps of bus routes are displayed at bus shelters and stops, only individual service timetables, with no route map to show where the service goes. We recommend that Fleet Future works with Stagecoach, the local authorities and the commercial organisation that owns the local bus shelters to get better service information displayed.

Given that most services are on 30- or 60-minute headways, and not infrequently run 10 minutes late, real-time information is particularly important for passengers. A second proposal is to encourage Stagecoach to provide real time bus running information on its website and, if possible, on a dedicated telephone line for access by mobile phone from bus stops.

RECOMMENDATION:

Information about local bus services should be improved to provide clear directions for passengers.

ACTION:

Fleet Future to work with Stagecoach, Fleet Town Council, Hampshire County Council and any commercial organisations that own the bus shelters to get better information displayed and maintained.

7.4.3 Improving bus services

Comments from the Fleet Future public meeting show that for residents who do not have a car available, a better bus service is the most important single improvement that would make it easier to get about in Fleet. Although existing services do cover the main roads on 30- or 60-minute headways, there are destinations such as Fleet Hospital and Fleet Medical Centre that are not served at all. The consultation produced requests for better services for the Pondtail area. There were a significant number of requests for a circular bus service around Fleet and Church Crookham, and such a service (service 77, running at a 30-minute headway) was introduced in April 2013. Since April 2013 there have been no direct bus services from Fleet to either Yateley or Farnham, but a direct service to Basingstoke via Odiham has been introduced.

Bus services are mainly provided by FleetBuzz, a subsidiary of Stagecoach. In addition, there is also a community bus service in the Fleet area Monday to Saturday called Fleet Link for residents of Fleet, Church Crookham and Elvetham Heath. Although FleetBuzz services start early in the morning (between 6am and 7am), they finish early (between 6.30pm and 7.30pm). There are no services on Sundays.

Comments by residents about bus services focus on the lack of buses in the evenings and on Sundays, poor timekeeping, high fares (e.g. £2.50 single or £2.70 return from Fleet Station to Calthorpe Park School), failure to link to the times of some trains, and lack of information at all levels. Lack of evening services mean that buses cannot be used for trips to cinemas and other evening activities, and also that they cannot be used by commuters who return to Fleet after about 7pm.

Both the Hampshire Local Transport Plan and the Fleet Station Travel Plan contain policies to improve bus services and extend operations later into the evening.

RECOMMENDATION:

Local bus services should be extended to cover weekday evenings and should coordinate with the train timetable to support commuters and other users.

ACTION:

Fleet Future to support Hampshire County Council initiatives to extend bus services later into the evenings, and to seek other improvements within available budgets.

7.4.4 Access to Fleet railway station

In addition to lack of car parking capacity, problems at Fleet Station include delays leaving the station at peak times because of the continuous flow of traffic onto the roundabout from the railway bridge, unsatisfactory routes for pedestrians to the station from Fleet Road (crossing the road at the roundabout and access to platform 1 for people pushing baby buggies were specifically mentioned in the consultation), and crowding and disorganisation in the drop off/pick up area. Another frequently raised topic was bus services at the station. Bus times do not match train times particularly well and information about bus services is very poor.

Rebuilding Fleet station started in May 2013 and the project includes a new bridge across the tracks with lifts. The forecourt is to be re-modelled as part of this project and a second deck of car parking built. It is not clear what improvements are planned for the station forecourt, but the Fleet Town Access Plan contains a plan for an improved forecourt, which would provide much better pedestrian and cycle access, and traffic flow within the forecourt. Improved bus services, better coordinated with the train timetable, would greatly improve access to the station.

Detailed proposals to improve access to Fleet Station are given in Annex C, section C.1 of the Town Plan (available on the Fleet Future [website](#)).

There is serious congestion at Fleet Station roundabout during the morning and evening peaks. This is a result of the steady flow of vehicles onto the roundabout from the bridge over the railway, which prevents vehicles from the station car park entering the roundabout. When the capacity of the car park is increased, this problem will become more severe. A study by consultants for Hart District Council [20] considered six options for improving the junction, one of which was for a gyratory with traffic signals, which would much reduce delays for traffic leaving the station. It would also reduce delays for traffic along Elvetham Road to the M3 as well as to the station, which will grow with further development to the west of Fleet.

Without a major reconstruction of the roundabout, there are at least two possible approaches to reducing congestion. The first, which could be done at very low cost, is to route all traffic from the station through the Waterfront Business Park by providing a protected left turn at the roundabout from the station into the Business Park. The difficulty is that the roads through the Business Park are privately owned, and the highway authority would need to obtain permission to route traffic as suggested. A second technical possibility would be to use a traffic signal on the A3013 from Minley at the exit from the northern station car park to allow exiting vehicles to turn right out of Fleet and also to stop traffic approaching from Cove, to create gaps on the roundabout and allow vehicles out of the station approach road. With careful design, this could also protect pedestrians crossing Minley Road from Fleet Station to Elvetham Road, requested during the consultation.

RECOMMENDATION:

Local authorities and key stakeholders should work together to improve access and relieve congestion at Fleet Station.

ACTION:

Fleet Future to encourage local authorities and South West Trains to improve the layout of the station forecourt and to explore ways to reduce congestion at the exit from the station.

7.4.5 Parking at Fleet Station

Residents' views and a South West Trains survey of passengers [19] show that there is insufficient car park capacity at Fleet Station. In November 2008 the number of passengers entering Fleet station daily was 2,531, of which about 1,470 were between 7am and 9am. The station has 374 parking spaces, plus 37 premium spaces. The car park is usually full by around 8am. The large numbers of commuters using the station means that there is little turnover of parking spaces during the day, and people arriving later on are unable to park.

In January 2012 travel by walking, cycling and car accounted for 90% of all trips to the station, with very little use of public transport or taxi [19]. 53% of all rail users (1,340 passengers) travelled to the station by car; 47% of car users (630) drove alone, 13% shared cars and 40% were dropped off. Given that the total parking available is 411 spaces, at least 220 cars are parked outside the formal station car parks. The planned increase in car park capacity by the provision of a multi-story car park is only 153 places, so demand will continue to exceed supply.

There may be spare office parking in Waterfront Business Park or Ancells Farm Business Park, and an existing leisure car park for Fleet Pond, accessed from Cove Road, is within walking distance of the station. Options for additional parking within walking distance of the station that do not cause problems in residential streets or quiet recreational areas should be explored.

RECOMMENDATION:

Local authorities and key stakeholders should work together to provide additional parking near Fleet Station.

ACTION:

Fleet Future works with the local authorities and key stakeholders to seek additional parking within easy walking distance of Fleet Station.

7.4.6 Pedestrian issues

Residents have identified a number of places at which it is dangerous or difficult to cross the road, and where they would like pedestrian crossing facilities to be provided. Other comments in the consultation reflected intimidation by traffic, both the speed and amount of vehicles. A pilot 20mph limit is to be introduced shortly to the roads bordered by and including Albert Road, Connaught Road and Albany Road. There were also a number of comments supporting the pedestrianisation of Fleet Road through the town centre (see also Section 5.8.1).

Junctions without light-controlled pedestrian crossings or pedestrian phases at traffic signals mentioned most frequently are the Oatsheaf crossroads, Kings Road at Fleet Road, Fleet Station roundabout and the approach to Fleet Station, Reading Road South/Aldershot Road at the canal bridge, Kings Road at Aldershot Road, and the twin roundabouts at Elvetham railway bridge.

Several of these junctions already cause congestion at peak times because traffic demand exceeds their capacity. It is likely that the highway authority would resist the provision of pedestrian phases, because this could reduce the junction capacities below their current levels. This could be an example where Fleet Town Council should argue for the application of the sustainable priorities of the former Planning Policy Guideline 13 'Transport', that the needs of pedestrians should take priority over the needs of motor vehicle traffic.

RECOMMENDATION:

Consider pedestrian priority measures at certain junctions in the town.

ACTION:

Fleet Future to support Fleet Town Council initiatives to improve safety and mobility for pedestrians, particularly at major road junctions.

7.4.7 Signposting pedestrian and cycle paths

Fleet and Church Crookham has many off-road pedestrian routes which have the potential to serve a useful role in the transport network but which are not well known and poorly signposted. Some of these, such as the canal towpath and the path round Fleet Pond, are also available for cycle use. A response to the Fleet Future consultation suggests signposting a pedestrian route from Fleet town centre to the Basingstoke Canal to publicise the existence of the canal. Providing signs and public maps of pedestrian routes in general would publicise their existence.

Similar signing could indicate the major parks that are within walking distance of the town centre. Fleet Future could map the off-road pedestrian and cycle routes and arrange with Fleet Town Council to display these maps where they will inform potential users. In addition, where signposting is lacking or ineffective, Fleet Town Council could add signage as needed. Further initiatives could include auditing the routes and informing Fleet Town Council of improvements, repairs and maintenance required. In the course of the audit, places where signposts are required could be identified. Promoting pedestrian routes would emphasise the 'green' nature of Fleet.

RECOMMENDATION:

Clear information and appropriate signposting of the network of off-road pedestrian and cycle paths should be introduced.

ACTION:

Fleet Future to map and audit the network of off-road pedestrian and cycle paths, and encourage the Town and Parish Councils to display these maps and signpost routes as necessary.

7.4.8 Additional recommendations

The following two recommendations are proposed as a result of comments made during the Fleet Future consultation.

7.4.8.1 Traffic congestion

The number of cars in Fleet and Church Crookham has increased by 67% between 1991 and 2011 [4]. Significant peak-time congestion occurs on the approach roads (Cove Road, Reading Road North, Reading Road South) and at the Oatsheaf junction, and serious peak-time congestion at Fleet Station roundabout. There is also local congestion at schools when pupils are arriving and leaving, and occasionally in Fleet Road caused by delivery vehicles.

The Fleet Town Council housing development survey [3] showed that a high proportion of residents had concerns about traffic congestion both at junctions and in the town centre, and that 93% included road improvements to reduce congestion in their top three priorities for spending on infrastructure. The Fleet Future consultation [2] showed that a significant number of residents are concerned over this congestion, although in comparison with congestion in larger towns such as Reading, it is relatively minor.

The widths of the main roads in Fleet date from the 1930s and, without extensive land purchase and some property demolition, it is difficult to see what can be done to reduce this existing congestion. As the population grows because of further development at Queen Elizabeth Barracks and other sites in Church Crookham, congestion in Fleet can only increase. If new housing is built to the west of Fleet, traffic from this direction crossing Fleet to the railway station and M3 junction 4a is likely to increase, though it may well use Elvetham Road or Elvetham Heath Way to bypass the town centre. As the Highways Authority, Hampshire County Council is already considering ways to reduce congestion in the Fleet area. If land at congested junctions becomes available, the appropriate local authority should consider purchasing it to provide space for junction improvements.

Many residents already use minor roads as informal bypasses, although they are only suitable for light vehicles and several have vehicle width limits of 6ft 6in. These existing minor roads allow residents to circle Fleet away from the congested junctions and approach their final destination using uncongested roads. Their significance has been demonstrated recently by the effect on traffic in Fleet of the closures of Hitches Lane and Gally Hill Road in the latter half of 2013. Roads to the south east of Fleet are due to be improved as part of the Hartland Park distribution centre development, although it is not yet clear whether these will provide an effective eastern bypass for Fleet.

Draft RECOMMENDATION for future consideration:

Support local councils in maintaining contact with Hampshire County Council in the study of ways to reduce traffic congestion in the Fleet area, and support infrastructure improvements where they can be made without damage to the environment.

Draft ACTION for future consideration:

Fleet Future to support local councils in pressing for road improvements to reduce congestion, where this can be done without extensive compulsory purchases or environmental damage.

7.4.8.2 General access and transport improvements

Some comments in the consultation stated that access within Fleet was easy only for those with cars. Others identified difficulties reaching particular locations such as Fleet Hospital, Fleet Medical Centre, Hart Leisure Centre, Yateley, Farnham and Crondall.

Fleet town centre provides reasonably easy access for people with disabilities. It is noticeable how many elderly and disabled people one sees in Fleet Road, and this is a good indicator that it is an accessible area, as well as one with a high percentage of elderly people.

A number of people responding to the Fleet Future consultation suggested that Hampshire County Council and Hart District Council have in the past allowed developments or missed opportunities to purchase properties that have subsequently blocked improvements to roads, pedestrian paths and cycle routes. Fleet Future encourages local authorities to follow a long-term programme of acquiring land for rights of way that would permit improvements to transport infrastructure. One example is at Basingstoke Canal where land will be required to provide an off-road or minor road cycle route from Fleet town centre to the Pine Grove area. Another is the purchase of narrow strips alongside existing pedestrian paths from Victoria Road to Stockton Avenue to permit an off-road shared pedestrian and cycle route across most of Fleet.

The primary challenge for transport planners is to make Fleet and Church Crookham work as well for those without cars as it does now for those with cars. If, as seems likely, financial restraint will make it impossible to significantly improve bus services, the next best help for people without car access is a town-wide network of safe, preferably off-road, cycle routes

and pedestrian paths. These will require long-term planning and some land purchases to achieve.

Draft RECOMMENDATION for future consideration:

Agree a long-term vision of transport improvements for Fleet and take opportunities to purchase property to provide rights of way to implement that long-term vision.

Draft ACTION for future consideration:

Fleet Future to work with Fleet Town Council and Hart District Council to develop a long-term vision for transport in the Fleet area.

8 Action programme

8.1 Fleet's town centre economy

RECOMMENDATION 1: Businesses in Fleet Town Centre should work together to establish a business-led 'Fleet Centre Business Team' which has a vision for the town centre and a plan for working with others to deliver this				
<i>Action</i>	<i>Key stakeholders</i>	<i>Fleet Future action</i>	<i>Lead person</i>	<i>Next steps</i>
The current Fleet Future-led meeting of town centre businesses should evolve into a business led Fleet Centre Business Team by the end of 2013	Fleet centre businesses	Fleet Future to facilitate a meeting with town centre businesses to progress the recommendation	Town Centre Action Team Leader with support from Hart District Council Economic Development Officer	Continue to work on the proposal with businesses Discuss what support might be available from Hart District Council and Fleet Town Council
RECOMMENDATION 2: A Fleet Town 'brand' needs to be created to promote and market the town as somewhere to visit during the day and evening.				
<i>Action</i>	<i>Key stakeholders</i>	<i>Fleet Future action</i>	<i>Lead person</i>	<i>Next steps</i>
Fleet Town Council, Hart District Council's Economic Development Officer and the proposed Fleet Centre Business Team work together to undertake further research and consultations on what is an appropriate 'brand' for Fleet	Fleet Town Council and Fleet centre businesses	Fleet Future to facilitate meeting between Fleet Town Council and town centre businesses, and offer some ideas for brand development including a map of the town centre showing where all the businesses are, similar map at car park exits to town; improving coordination of different website about Fleet	Town Centre Action Team Leader with support from Hart District Council Economic Development Officer	New Action Team to address 'brand' issue Seek advice from other places where a 'brand' has been successfully developed Fleet Future to offer to consult with local people again when a brand proposal is developed and test this out on town residents and businesses

RECOMMENDATION 3: There needs to be better information, signage and publicity about the town centre businesses to increase visitor numbers				
<i>Action</i>	<i>Key stakeholders</i>	<i>Fleet Future action</i>	<i>Lead person</i>	<i>Next steps</i>
Fleet Town Council should work with the Economic Development Officer at Hart District Council, the proposed Fleet Centre Business Team and, where appropriate, Hampshire County Council, to deliver this recommendation	Fleet Town Council and Fleet centre businesses	Fleet Future volunteers to participate in development of this recommendation as 'representatives' of town centre users	Town Centre Action Team Leader with support from Fleet Town Council	Ensure that this is seen as priority for Fleet centre businesses following the meeting on 4 October and encourage them to have a programme for dealing with this by the end of the year
RECOMMENDATION 4: There should be a consultation with town centre businesses to explore the feasibility of flexing businesses rate to incentivise economic development				
<i>Action</i>	<i>Key stakeholders</i>	<i>Fleet Future action</i>	<i>Lead person</i>	<i>Next steps</i>
Hart District Council identifies, in discussion with the proposed Fleet Centre Business Team, options for flexing business rates in order to help economic development and makes a proposal for any resulting changes to Council members by April 2014	Fleet centre businesses	None at this stage as there is a lack of support from town centre businesses to progress at this point	Town Centre Action Team Leader	Discuss if Fleet centre businesses want to offer their support to a growing national campaign relating to business rates when Fleet Centre Business Team is established

RECOMMENDATION 5: ‘Pay as you leave’ arrangements should be introduced for all town centre car parks to encourage people to stay longer in town				
<i>Action</i>	<i>Key stakeholders</i>	<i>Fleet Future action</i>	<i>Lead person</i>	<i>Next steps</i>
Ask Hart District Council to investigate the community’s recommendations that a ‘pay as you leave’ arrangement should be implemented	Hart District Council	Together with Fleet centre businesses, press Hart District Council for early implementation of this recommendation	Town Centre Action Team Leader	Set up an action team on parking issues, inviting senior Hart District Council officer to join the group Present evidence from the Town Plan consultation exercise in support of this to Hart District Council
RECOMMENDATION 6: Free car parking in all town centre car parks after 6pm and on Sundays should be introduced to increase the number of people visiting the town during weekend daytime and evenings				
<i>Action</i>	<i>Key stakeholders</i>	<i>Fleet Future action</i>	<i>Lead person</i>	<i>Next steps</i>
Ask Hart District Council to introduce, on a trial basis, free car parking in all council-owned town centre car parks after 6pm and on Sundays at the earliest opportunity, and monitor the effect of this on the town’s economy	Hart District Council	Together with Fleet centre businesses, press Hart District Council for early implementation of this recommendation	Town Centre Action Team Leader	As for recommendation 5
RECOMMENDATION 7: Town centre leisure activities should be created, maintained and improved to bring more cultural and leisure activities into the town				
<i>Action</i>	<i>Key stakeholders</i>	<i>Fleet Future action</i>	<i>Lead person</i>	<i>Next steps</i>

Ask Fleet Town Council to facilitate a meeting of the various groups in Fleet to coordinate and promote a substantial programme of events in the town for all sections of the community	Fleet Future, Fleet Town Centre and Economic Development Officer at Hart District Council	Identify the various community groups and relevant businesses that should be involved and invite to initial meeting	Events and Activities Action Team Leader	Set up an action team, stage a launch event at the Harlington with event and activity providers, and work with the 'brand' group to coordinate publicity about Fleet activities
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8.2 Transport and accessibility around Fleet

RECOMMENDATION 8: More off-road safe cycle routes should be developed to improve access around the town and encourage people to use alternative methods of transport to the car				
<i>Action</i>	<i>Key stakeholders</i>	<i>Fleet Future action</i>	<i>Lead person</i>	<i>Next steps</i>
Encourage Hampshire County Council to implement a network of comprehensive off-road cycle routes to cover the whole Fleet area	Fleet Future Transport Group and Fleet Town Council	Fleet Future to use the comments from the consultation exercise to identify the community's priority cycle routes and discuss these with Fleet TC and HCC	Transport Action Team Leader	Set up a Transport Action Team Investigate the feasibility of priority cycle routes, bike storage facilities in the town and continue to progress the cycle network concept
RECOMMENDATION 9: Information about local bus services should be improved to provide clear directions for passengers				
<i>Action</i>	<i>Key stakeholders</i>	<i>Fleet Future action</i>	<i>Lead person</i>	<i>Next steps</i>

<p>Fleet Future to work with Stagecoach, Fleet Town Council, Hampshire County Council and any commercial organisations that own the bus shelters to get better information displayed and maintained</p>	<p>Stagecoach and bus shelter owners</p>	<p>Fleet Future to open discussions with stakeholders to explore current responsibilities and develop a plan to improve information for customers</p>	<p>Transport Action Team Leader</p>	<p>Encourage Stagecoach to provide real-time bus running information on its website</p> <p>Conduct a users' survey to check preferred information methods</p> <p>Investigate the feasibility of having maps and timetables at each bus stop and a list of buses that go along Fleet Road</p> <p>Encourage Stagecoach to have a dedicated telephone line for access by mobile phone from bus stops</p>
<p>RECOMMENDATION 10: Local bus services should be extended to cover weekday evenings and should coordinate with the train timetable to support commuters and other users</p>				
<p><i>Action</i></p>	<p><i>Key stakeholders</i></p>	<p><i>Fleet Future action</i></p>	<p><i>Lead person</i></p>	<p><i>Next steps</i></p>
<p>Fleet Future to support Hampshire County Council initiatives to extend bus services later into the evenings, and to seek other improvements within available budgets</p>	<p>Hampshire County Council</p>	<p>Provide evidence to Fleet Town Council, Hart District Council and Hampshire County Council of requirement for improvements to and extension into the evening of local bus services and ask for their response</p>	<p>Transport Action Team Leader</p>	<p>Action Team to discuss with local authorities to see how this might be progressed</p> <p>Explore how Fleet Future could identify bus service demand and develop a business case for bus companies to consider</p> <p>Conduct users' survey to establish 'the missing market'</p>

RECOMMENDATION 11: Local authorities and key stakeholders should work together to improve access and relieve congestion at Fleet Station				
<i>Action</i>	<i>Key stakeholders</i>	<i>Fleet Future action</i>	<i>Lead person</i>	<i>Next steps</i>
Fleet Future to encourage local authorities and South West Trains to improve the layout of the station forecourt and to explore ways to reduce congestion at the exit from the station	South West Trains and Hampshire County Council	<p>Seek meeting to view plans for improved forecourt</p> <p>Offer the findings of our Town Plan to South West Trains and Hampshire County Council and ask what they can do about it</p> <p>Ask if there is any way Fleet Future can be of further help to local authorities and South West Trains</p>	Transport Action Team Leader	Feed responses from South West Trains and local authorities to AGM
RECOMMENDATION 12: Local authorities and key stakeholders should work together to provide additional parking near Fleet Station				
<i>Action</i>	<i>Key stakeholders</i>	<i>Fleet Future action</i>	<i>Lead person</i>	<i>Next steps</i>
Fleet Future to work with the local authorities and key stakeholders to seek additional parking within walking distance of Fleet Station	Local authorities and South West Trains	<p>Provide findings of Fleet Future consultation to local authorities and South West Trains and ask them to provide a response to Fleet residents</p> <p>Discuss options for additional parking with local authorities and South West Trains</p>	Transport Action Team Leader	<p>Transport Action Team to send Information to relevant officers in November/December 2013</p> <p>Seek update in December</p> <p>Report to AGM with next steps</p>
RECOMMENDATION 13: Consider pedestrian priority measures at certain junctions in the town				
<i>Action</i>	<i>Key stakeholders</i>	<i>Fleet Future action</i>	<i>Lead person</i>	<i>Next steps</i>

Fleet Future to support Fleet Town Council initiatives to improve safety and mobility for pedestrians, particularly at major road junctions	Hampshire County Council	Discuss the priorities for pedestrian improvements coming forward from the consultation exercise with the relevant local authorities and ask for a response	Transport Action Team Leader	Transport Action Team to investigate the cost, feasibility and practicality of improvements requested in consultation
RECOMMENDATION 14: Clear information and appropriate signposting of the network of off-road pedestrian and cycle paths should be introduced				
<i>Action</i>	<i>Key stakeholders</i>	<i>Fleet Future action</i>	<i>Lead person</i>	<i>Next steps</i>
Fleet Future to map and audit the network of off-road pedestrian and cycle paths, and encourage the Town and Parish Councils to display these maps and signpost routes as necessary	Fleet Future, Fleet Town Council, and neighbouring parish councils	Map and audit off-road pedestrian paths	Transport Action Team Leader liaising with Town Centre Action Team Leader	Transport Action Team to find volunteers to lead this effort and start mapping paths Find costings of map production – December Seek funding to meet costs – January Report back to AGM

8.3 Fleet’s community

RECOMMENDATION 15: The vacant offices in the area bounded by Fleet Road, Kings Road and Albert Street should be redeveloped to provide mixed housing, with green spaces and play areas				
<i>Action</i>	<i>Key stakeholders</i>	<i>Fleet Future action</i>	<i>Lead person</i>	<i>Next steps</i>

<p>Hart District Council, Fleet Town Council and Fleet Future work proactively with property owners and developers to secure the appropriate type of coordinated development for future and similar sites so that a cohesive, rather than piecemeal, approach can be developed. This joint approach should be acted upon as soon as possible (Spring 2014)</p>	<p>Hart District Council</p>	<p>Fleet Future to provide the consultation feedback on this issue to Hart District Council and Fleet Town Council and ask for feedback to community in time for AGM</p>	<p>Chair of Major Projects action team</p>	<p>Send information to councils (November/December) Seek a joint meeting with councils by end December 2013 Feedback to the community at AGM in January 2014</p>
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RECOMMENDATION 16: The land centred on the civic offices, the Harlington, library and Gurkha Square is redeveloped for mixed use which might include residential, commercial, community, entertainment and cultural activities while preserving a town square and links to The Views.

<i>Action</i>	<i>Key stakeholders</i>	<i>Fleet Future action</i>	<i>Lead person</i>	<i>Next steps</i>
Working in partnership with current and future stakeholders, Fleet Future to facilitate the development of viable options for the use of the land	Current stakeholders are local authorities and the wider Fleet community Future stakeholders include the above and development companies and Enterprise M3 – the Local Economic Partnership	Seek a meeting with local authorities to explore their views on this recommendation and offer the support and expertise of Fleet Future members to progress this issue	Chair of Major Projects Action Team	Phase 1 (discovery phase) – partnership to identify the desires and aspirations of current stakeholders, the financial imperatives and they key issues that need to be addressed and resolved Phase 2 – develop minimum of two, maximum of three, alternative viable options for the use of the land for consideration by the wider community Phase 3 – consult the community Phase 4 – timely delivery of the community’s preferred option

RECOMMENDATION 17: The Views should be improved as a central place for residents to gather and events to be held				
<i>Action</i>	<i>Key stakeholders</i>	<i>Fleet Future action</i>	<i>Lead person</i>	<i>Next steps</i>
Fleet Town Council to encourage the formation of a 'Friends Group' for the Views to explore and address the issues raised	Local Fleet Town Councillors, Chair of the new Friends, Group	Fleet Future to provide consultation feedback on this issue to Fleet Town Council and suggest setting up a Friends Group	Chair of Events and Activities Action Team	Set up action team Chair of group and town councillors to generate interest, publicise ideas to local people, organise survey, involve local schools, involve regular users including teenagers on the skatepark

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