DRAFT

ACTION PLAN LOWER HIGH STREET IMPROVEMENTS, MALDON

Including an 'Area Strategy' for the town centre



Maldon and Heybridge Central Area Masterplan SPD **Project 2 Lower High Street Improvements**

Autumn 2019

Contents

1 Intro	oduction	3
2 Lowe	er High Street Defined Area	4
3 Proje	ect Objectives and Approach	mark not defined.
4 Lowe	er High Street Appraisal April 2018	7
5 Busii	ness Engagement	8
6 Lowe	er High Street Appraisal July 2019	11
7 Malo	don Town Centre Key Challenges	12
8 Wide	er Town Centre Area Strategy	14
9 Lowe	er High Street Action Plan	16
Figure 1	Maldon and Heybridge Central Area Masterplan SPD, Nov 201	7, page 36 4
_	Lower High Street Defined Area (Larger plan Appendix 1)	
Figure 3	Combined workshop material outcome	9
Table 1 L	Lower High Street Appraisal April 2018	7
Table 2	Lower High Street Appraisal July 2019	11

1 Introduction

- 1.1 A development and regeneration strategy for the Maldon and Heybridge Central Area ['Central Area'] is set out in the Maldon and Heybridge Central Area Masterplan SPD ['the Masterplan'] adopted November 2017. The objectives for the Central Area emerge directly from policy and have been refined by stakeholder input. The Masterplan has 18 key projects and a project priority programme to deliver economic growth and environmental enhancements over the next 10 years to 2029.
- 1.2 Maldon Central is one of 3 sub-areas in the Masterplan area focussing on the retail function of the High Street. The Masterplan promotes Maldon's town centre as a 'market town' that serves a wide catchment area. The Lower High Street has the potential for improvement as it has lower footfall and the retail offer is not as vibrant as the middle and upper sections. The Lower High Street is a pivotal connecting point between the popular Hythe Quay and Promenade Park area with the High St.
- 1.3 The Masterplan Project 2 'Lower High Street Improvements' is a short-term project (1-5 years) to prepare an Action Plan to encourage investment in the quality of the environment; the type and quality of retail activity; a food and drink offer and improving the evening economy. In effect, responding to the Policy S5, LDP requirement for 'regeneration and diversification' in the town centre.
- 1.4 This Action Plan is the result of working collaboratively with local businesses, local groups and key stakeholders to propose actions that the business community, the Council and its partners could take forward to enhance and improve the Lower High Street. It aligns with Policy S5 objectives, wider town centre challenges and communicates actions to stakeholders.
- 1.5 The Action Plan intervenes to advance the local economy, enhance the public realm and improve signage and wayfinding to tackle changing consumer habits affecting footfall and allowing the Lower High Street to diversify, adapt and revive to improve its offer.
- 1.6 A wider 'Area Strategy' is included for the town centre to meet other challenges: to keep it viable and vital as expressed in national policy; to address an air quality management area that may have implications for traffic flows; and monitoring the impact of out of centre retail parks and supermarkets on the High Street.

2 Lower High Street Defined Area

- 2.1 The preparation of this Action Plan has considered previous stakeholder engagement and public consultation through the masterplanning process including the 'Area Strategies' within *Intermediate Study*, Allies and Morrison, 2014, the 'Options Workshop' in June 2016 for the final Masterplan and the Masterplan public consultation for 6 weeks during March and April 2017.
- 2.2 The Masterplan sets out the Lower High Street area in terms of environmental enhancements, gateway locations and public realm improvements to increase footfall and improve the retail offer:

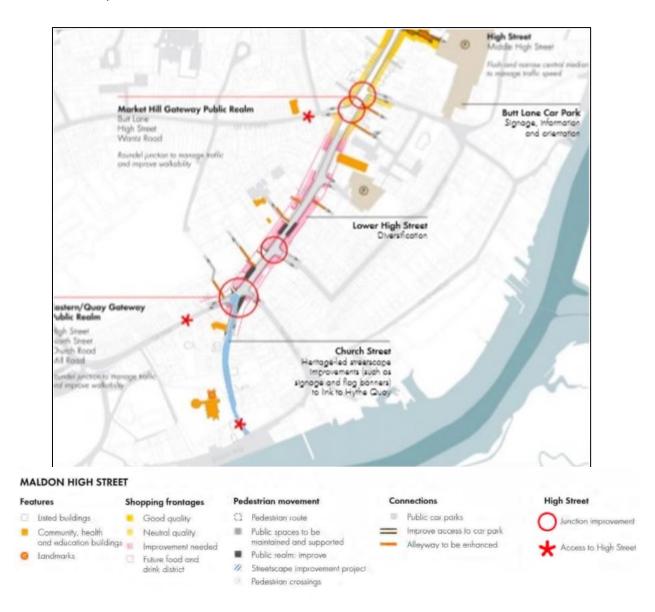


Figure 1 Maldon and Heybridge Central Area Masterplan SPD, Nov 2017, page 36

- 2.3 The Lower High Street area was defined in April 2018. Maldon's High Street is facing key challenges through changing consumer habits and the impact of edge of town retail areas and supermarkets offering free parking away from the High Street.
- 2.4 This Action Plan addresses LDP Policy S5 requirements for the Lower High Street to improve its retail offer in comparison with the retail offer on the upper and middle sections of the High Street and to increase footfall. By capitalising on the Lower High Street's relationship with the visitor footfall at Hythe Quay and Promenade Park (the District's main leisure and recreational area on the Blackwater Estuary) a gateway entrance to the High Street from the lower end at North St/Church St junctions is envisaged.



Figure 2 Lower High Street Defined Area (Larger plan Appendix 1)

- 2.5 The Lower High Street defined area centres on the road layout, bordered by Butt Lane to the West and Church Street to the East. The northern and southern boundaries are at the rear of High Street units generally following property boundaries. There are 63 premises fronting the Lower High Street, Quest Place, Wantz Road, Mill Road and Church Street in the defined area.
- 2.6 The defined area contains the High Street East 'pay and display' car park with 67 spaces and bus stops located at Victoria Road and Wantz Road serving the 31 (plus 31B, C and X), 33, 75, 90, 95, 288 and 673. The bus routes serve settlements from the north, east, west and south of the District to Maldon's town centre. The 288 is a free bus service from the Tesco store at Fullbridge, Maldon.

3 Project Objectives and Approach

3.1 The Lower High Street Action Plan will address identified issues to improve the retail offer and increase footfall. The Maldon Retail Study of July 2015 (White Young Green – Evidence Base to Masterplan) found that "the bottom end of the high street has a high turnover rate of retailers and the units have a more run-down look than their counterparts further up the high street." It is acknowledged that the lower rents in this part of the High Street have provided an opportunity for new businesses to test the market. However, successful businesses at the lower end tend to move up to the middle and upper sections of the High Street.

A key objective is to attract and retain high quality new businesses at the Lower High St.

3.2 The Lower High Street has a pivotal role linking the middle and upper sections of the High Street with Hythe Quay and Promenade Park. Linking activities, events, a local food heritage offer and the evening economy at the Lower High Street will encourage a coherent visitor offer.

A key objective is to establish a local food and drink offer at the Lower High St.

3.3 Encouraging customers to 'park and stride' from Promenade Park car park and the edge of town retail areas via the 'riverside route' with new signage and wayfinding infrastructure will change the dynamic of arrival in the town centre to increase footfall at the Lower High Street.

A key objective is to increase dwell time and consumer spend at the Lower High St.

3.4 Improving the look and feel of the Lower High Street and finding space for events and potentially a street market requires enhancement of the public realm and investment in the townscape with wayfinding signage, information points and resting places with street furniture and cycle storage points.

A key objective is to prioritise the pedestrian and cycle movements at the Lower High St.

3.5 The Lower High Street could accommodate 'Pop-up' shops representative of the seasonality of food and drink and the festivals and occasions established and celebrated in Maldon and the wider District.

A key objective is to revive, adapt and diversify the Lower High St.

4 Lower High Street Appraisal April 2018

4.1 The use of the **63** premises in the Lower High Street Defined Area were appraised in April 2018 and detailed in Table 1 below:

Table 1 Lower High Street Appraisal April 2018

Use Class	Number	%	Combined Use
		NDP	Percentage
			Food and Drink
Restaurant and Café (A3)	8	13%	
Takeaway – hot food (A5)	6	9%	
Public House (A4)	2	3%	25%
			Retail
Retail (A1) including hairdressers	29	46%	46%
Retail (A1) excluding hairdressers (4)	(25)	(40%)	(40%)
Guest House and Motel (C1)	2	3%	
Places of Worship, Clinics (D1)	4	6%	9%
			Beauty Services
Sui Generis (nail bars, beauty salons and tanning studios)	8	13%	13%
Sui Generis plus hairdressers (4)	(4)	(6%)	(19%)
			Vacant
Vacant (previous use class A1 & D1)	5	7%	7%

NB: 64 uses recorded because the Motel (C1) has a café attached (A3)

- 4.2 The April 2018 Appraisal remains reflective of the LDP evidence base and the Policy S5 objective to improve the retail offer at the Lower High Street.
- 4.3 Townscape enhancements and opportunities were identified to improve the look and feel of the Lower High Street and to meet the LDP Policy S5 objective to increase footfall at the Lower High Street.
- 4.4 The analysis and findings of the April 2018 Appraisal were used to inform engagement with the High Street business community to progress this Action Plan.

5 Business Engagement

- 5.1 Business Engagement commenced in November 2018 with presentations and meetings with local business groups, individual businesses and employers and local groups and societies. The presentations and meetings focussed on the Masterplan requirements to increase footfall and improve the retail offer at the Lower High Street and to understand the business community's appetite to support change.
- 5.2 The business community and local groups raised concerns over town centre car park capacity, congestion, traffic flows and the impact of edge of centre retail on the High Street. However, there was an ambition to make a positive impact to deliver tangible improvements on the High Street as a whole.
- 5.3 A dedicated Masterplan platform was launched in January 2019 to communicate Lower High Street project activity and for businesses to register an interest in the project through an Expression of Interest Form. A focussed engagement workshop for the Lower High Street was planned and held on 27 February 2019 supported by the Maldon Business Hub.
- 5.4 Workshop attendees were placed in groups with a map, pens and sticky notes and asked how they would like the Lower High Street to look and function within the following guidance to support increased footfall and an improved retail offer:
 - Claiming back pavements with outdoor areas
 - Bringing the outdoors in with shopfront design
 - Champion the pedestrian with wayfinding and signage
 - Traffic flows / Bus route impacts
 - Vacant buildings for community use, pop-up's, seasonal food & drink
 - Attractions and Events, public art installations,
 - The evening economy

In addition, workshop attendees were asked to consider the Sense of Place guidance:

- Creating an identity
- Building Community Spirit
- Celebrating local food and drink
- Designing a High Street

- 5.5 Based on the business engagement and workshop for the Lower High Street the three main outcomes for the Lower High Street are:
 - 1. Working with ECC Highways to change pedestrian pavement widths, re-routing bus routes, introducing new one-way routes and creating a 'pedestrian friendly zone' with space for events, festivals and a street market.
 - 2. Working with existing businesses, landlords and landowners to improve the Lower High Street retail offer with shopfront upgrades, street furniture, street trees, redeveloping 'Gateway' sites, art installations, sponsored wayfinding and signage.
 - Targeting local businesses to have a presence at Lower High Street to tap into the visitor economy and Hythe Quay/Promenade Park activity including global and international brands, wine and beer makers with spin off retail, food and drink
- 5.6 The following plan captures the outcomes from the workshop material:

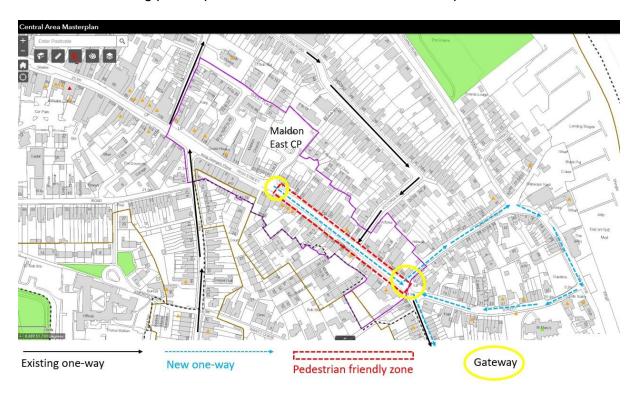


Figure 3 Combined workshop material outcome

5.7 In consideration of the business engagement and workshop outcomes it is concluded that Outcome 1 above is not achievable through this Action Plan and should form part of a wider area strategy for the town centre.

5.8 Ideas and suggestions from the workshop for the Lower High Street:



WINE BOR - EVENING DEINLING FOR

BACK FROM

PEOPLE

more cafes with drinks licensing

APPENDIX 1 – page 10

6 Lower High Street Appraisal July 2019

6.1 Following the business engagement and capturing the support and enthusiasm for change with the business community, a re-appraisal of the current uses and vacancy rates in the 63 premises within the Lower High Street Defined Area was assessed in July 2019:

Table 2 Lower High Street Appraisal July 2019

Use Class	Number	% NDP	Combined Use
			Percentage
			Food and Drink
Restaurant and Café (A3)	11	17%	
Takeaway – hot food (A5)	5	7%	
Public House (A4)	2	3%	27%
			Retail
Retail (A1) including hairdressers	28	44%	44%
Retail (A1) excluding hairdressers (3)	(25)	(40%)	(40%)
Professional Services (A2)	1	1.5%	
Guest House and Motel (C1)	2	3%	
Places of Worship, Clinics (D1)	3	5.5%	10%
			Beauty Services
Sui Generis (nail bars, beauty salons and tanning studios)	7	12%	12%
Sui Generis plus hairdressers (3)	(10)	(16%)	(16%)
			Vacant
Vacant (previous use class A1 & D1)	5	7%	7%

NB: 64 uses recorded because the Motel (C1) has a café attached (A3)

- 6.2 Comparison of the appraisals shows a 2% increase in food and drink premises and a 2% drop in retail uses within the intervening year. A C2 professional services use is within the defined area for the first time.
- 6.3 Vacancy rates are static at 7% (5 premises) although not the same units are vacant illustrating the high turnover rate. One business has located to the middle section of the High Street.

7 Maldon Town Centre Key Challenges

- 7.1 The key challenges for Maldon's town centre are:
 - Congestion and Air Quality
 - Pedestrian flow and footfall trends
 - Accessibility
 - Impacts of 'edge of centre' retail
 - Vacancy
- 7.2 An Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) has been declared on Market Hill in December 2018. The culmination of reliance on the motor vehicle, congestion in the town centre and accessibility to the town centre via Market Hill has raised Nitrogen Dioxide levels to unacceptable levels.

The challenge is addressing the impacts of the AQMA and working on the Air Quality Action Plan due in December 2019 to ensure any actions are not a barrier for vehicular access to the High Street and/or consumers accessing the High Street.

7.3 The High Street is approximately 800m long and is a vehicle highway with pedestrian footpaths either side. The High Street has access roads to it from the north, south and west of the District for all modes of transport.

The challenge is to marry an offer at the lower end of the High Street to draw down footfall from the middle and upper sections and draw up footfall via the lower section from the activities and attractions at Hythe Quay and Promenade Park to the middle and upper sections.

7.4 Arrival to the town is mainly by motor vehicle. The town centre car parks are located to the rear of both sides of the High Street and accessed via the roads that lead into the town centre. The car parks are at capacity daily accommodating community and visitors to the current uses on the High Street plus the employers and employees.

The challenge is to maintain access to the town centre for all modes of transport and encourage footfall to the High Street for existing and new residents and maintain footfall from the wider catchment area. In the spirit of sustainable places, public transport infrastructure should be enhanced, and the pedestrian and cyclist should be able to access the town via safe and attractive routes.

The challenge is to make the Lower High Street the pivotal point for accessing the High Street from two new parking areas: encouraging footfall from the out-of-centre retail free parking areas via direct and attractive pedestrian/cycle routes; upgrading Promenade Park car park to a 'town centre' car park, and delivering a 'park and stride' facility, and utilising an existing free bus route from Tesco to a 'park and ride' facility at Blackwater Leisure Centre. This will change the High Street dynamic to the lower end to give the High Street a new emphasis.

7.5 The High Street cannot accommodate larger floor space retailers because of its historic buildings and historic townscape. However, the out-of-centre retail should integrate with the High Street offer to encompass a whole retail offer for the town centre. The free car parking at the out-of-centre retail stores and access to a free bus route into town can relieve Market Hill of congestion and its air quality issues and provide a convenient access to the High Street. Also, signposting and wayfinding routes to and from the out-of-centre retail to and from the High Street are self-supporting for both consumer choices.

The challenge is to integrate the out-of-centre retail offer with the High Street offer and the connections to and from each for all modes of transport to ensure they essentially act as a whole 'town centre' offer. The 2-year monitoring of the impact of out of centre retail (Blackwater Retail Park) on the High Street commenced in November 2018 and needs to address the High Street business community's fears which see free car parking and out-of-centre retail as a threat to the future of the High Street for their businesses.

7.6 There are two vacant floorspaces at Upper High Street within the 'Primary Retail Frontage' that have remained empty for several years: the [built for purpose] former 2 storey Police Station empty since 2017 and the ground floor of the former Post Office empty since 2015 (upper floors converted to residential). Both buildings are within the Maldon Conservation Area and the former Post Office is also listed Grade II. The premises are too large and expensive in terms of rental for independent retailers and are too small with access issues for corporate chains.

The challenge is to find new uses for these vacant premises and explore current Government grants to assist local authorities or charities to CPO premises in the core retail area to support the High Street's future.

8 Wider Town Centre Area Strategy

- 8.1 The 'Wider Town Centre Area Strategy' is based on key town centre challenges in Section 7 above and the following Masterplan Projects and Masterplan Programme:
 - Parking Strategy
 - Movement and Connectivity Framework:
 - Project 1 Upper High Street Improvements
 - Project 2 Lower High Street Improvements
 - Project 3 Butt Lane Car Park Improvements
 - Project 4 Hythe Quay Improvements Initiative
 - Project 5 Maldon Riverside Route
 - Project 15 Destination Hub
 - Project 16 Promenade Park Management Plan

Strategy/Action	Town Centre Objective	Commenced/ Commence	Target Date for Completion
Lower High Street Improvement Action Plan	Increase footfall, improve retail offer, reduce vacancy rates and establish 'Gateway entrance' to High Street at lower end	March 2018	Autumn 2019
Upper High Street Improvements	Monitor impact of out of centre retail on High St. De-clutter Market Hill/High Street junction and enhance public realm	November 2018 May 2021	November 2020 November 2021
Air Quality Management Area Action Plan Steering Group	Ensure town centre is accessible for all modes of transport	December 2018	December 2019
Butt Lane Car Park Improvements	Town centre information boards, wayfinding and signage, car park enhancements as key arrival point	June 2019	May 2021
Destination Hub	Visitor destination and attraction	July 2019	October 2020
Prom Park Management Plan	Rationalise existing car parking and deliver park and ride and park and stride	July 2020	May 2021
Hythe Quay Improvements	Visitor destination and attraction	October 2020	January 2021
Maldon Riverside Route	Walkable and cyclable route from out of centre retail to Butt Lane (Middle High Street)	January 2022	June 2022
	MDC owned land		

- 8.2 The town centre strategy aligns with national planning policy and guidance in terms of promoting a positive vision through masterplanning and bringing together stakeholders to support sustainable economic and employment growth.
- 8.3 The town centre strategy considers the wider issues of changing shopping / leisure patterns, retail formats and the impact these are likely to have. Complementary uses including healthcare, educational or specialist housing can help to support the vitality of the town centre along with temporary activities such as 'pop-up' shops and restaurants. Evening activities have the potential to increase economic activity within town centres and provide additional employment opportunities.
- 8.4 The Parking Strategy in the Masterplan has considered sustainable transport modes (public transport, walking and cycling) to and from the town centre and vehicle access to town centre car parks. The Masterplan Projects support safe and attractive walking and cycling routes away from the main vehicle highway and prioritise the pedestrian on the High Street in a 'shared space' manner by removing defensive barriers that give motor vehicles priority.
- 8.5 The Movement and Connectivity Framework in the Masterplan has considered the existing public transport routes and bus stops. It is important for the town centre strategy to maintain these routes and bus stops to ensure public transports is effective and efficient in bringing customers to the High Street from the wider catchment area and, where possible, extending the Tesco free bus route to pick up at the new South Maldon Garden Suburb on Limebrook Way (it already stops at Holloway Road at North Heybridge Garden Suburb) to bring new customers to the edge-of centre retail and the High Street.
- 8.6 The Government's High Streets Task Force can assist local authorities to realise the potential of their High Streets. To help support change on high streets, new permitted development rights came into force on 25 May 2019 allowing more changes of use between premises to enable them to adapt and diversify to respond to consumer demand and avoid premises lying empty. A register of empty commercial properties is being piloted that may be rolled out nationally.
- 8.7 Funding for the changes in the town centre strategy should take advantage of local authority compulsory purchase powers for vacant buildings; Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) for community-based projects and S106 obligations through re-development proposals.

9 Lower High Street Action Plan

Project 2 Lower High Street Improvements, Masterplan aims to increase footfall and improve the retail offer at the Lower High Street. Based on the engagement with local businesses and local groups set out in Section 5, the following actions will realise the potential of the Lower High Street to contribute to the Masterplan objectives: supporting the Market Town focus of Maldon; encouraging a diverse town centre economy

and promotion of visitor attractions and the visitor economy.

ACTION	MASTERPLAN OBJECTIVE	ACCOUNTABLE	Phasing/Funding/Support
LHS1 Set up the Maldon High Street Focus Group through 'Sense of Place' incorporating representatives from those 'accountable' championing the best interests of the High Street for the community, visitors, local economy, transportation (all modes) with digital technology at the forefront of partnership working and decision making.	CA1 Masterplan: Support the Market Town focus of Maldon and encourage a diverse town centre economy	Maldon DC via Sense of Place Board, Essex County Council, The Maldon Society, Maldon Town Council, Lower High Street Business Group, Car Park Liaison Group, Local Highways Panel, Maldon Business Group, Maldon Business Hub, Tesco, Lidl, Aldi, Morrisons, Blackwater Retail Park, Travelodge	Maldon High Street Focus Group to be set up with inaugural meeting. A sustainable partnership determining its membership, representation, brand and drawing up its Terms of Reference at inception.
LHS2 The Maldon High Street Focus Group will facilitate a programme for information points and wayfinding signage for all modes of transport at key arrival points, key locations and gateways to encourage footfall to and from the Lower High Street	CA3 Masterplan: Promote the Maldon Central Area as a focus for culture and visitor attractions with a range of accommodation to support the visitor economy	Maldon Town Council, Maldon District Council, Essex County Council and local business community	Community Infrastructure project with business sponsorship and external funding CIL ECC Path to Prosperity
LHS3 The Maldon High Street Focus Group will prioritise pedestrian movement and safety, and facilitate a programme of cycle and mobility scooter parking and street benches at key locations	CA3 Masterplan: Promote the Maldon Central Area as a focus for culture and visitor attractions with a range of accommodation to support the visitor economy	Essex County Council, Maldon District Council, Maldon Town Council Business Community	Community Infrastructure project with business sponsorship and external funding CIL ECC Path to Prosperity

LHS4 The Maldon High Street Focus Group will utilise the Lower High Street to showcase events and attractions and support main events in Promenade Park and Hythe Quay and Upper and Middle High Street to encourage and increase footfall.	CA3 Masterplan: Promote the Maldon Central Area as a focus for culture and visitor attractions with a range of accommodation to support the visitor economy	Essex County Council (for highways requirements) Maldon District Council and Maldon Town Council	Visit Maldon and Maldon District Council websites Maldon Town Council through Tourist Information Point
LHS5 The Maldon High Street Focus Group will facilitate a programme of public art, heritage trails, street events and festivals at the Lower High Street to celebrate the seasonal and local food and drink offer as a focus for visitor attractions, reducing shop vacancy and supporting an evening economy	CA3 Masterplan: Promote the Maldon Central Area as a focus for culture and visitor attractions with a range of accommodation to support the visitor economy	Essex County Council (for highways requirements) Maldon District Council and Maldon Town Council	Visit Maldon and Maldon District Council websites Maldon Town Council through Tourist Information Point District-wide businesses and sponsorship Future High Streets Task Force
LHS6 The Council will liaise with the Maldon High Street Focus Group on re-development opportunities and parking improvements to lift the profile of the Lower High Street	CA1 Masterplan: Support the Market Town focus of Maldon and encourage a diverse town centre economy	Maldon District Council	Maldon District Council Future High Streets Task Force ECC Path to Prosperity
LHS7 The Council will update the Maldon Focus Group on progress with an Area Strategy for the Town Centre and the opportunities or outcomes from the Air Quality Management Area Action Plan due December 2019	Working with the outcomes of the Air Quality Management Area Action Plan and Government Agenda for High Streets and access to Town Centres	Essex County Council Maldon District Council	Air Quality Management Area Action Plan Future High Streets Task Force CPO CIL National Bus Strategy 2019

Stakeholder input

Maldon and Heybridge Central Area Masterplan Contextual Study, 2012 Maldon and Heybridge Central Area Masterplan Intermediate Study, 2014 Consultation Statement Maldon and Heybridge Central Area Masterplan SPD Lower High Street Business Engagement

Websites and links referred to:

Maldon and Heybridge Central Area Masterplan SPD:

https://www.maldon.gov.uk/info/20048/planning_policy/9226/urban_design/5

Future High Streets Task Force:

https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-task-force-to-help-revitalise-high-streets-and-town-centres?utm_source=4d9421b9-17c6-45c8-816c

30468365cc4c&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=govuk-notifications&utm_content=daily

National Bus Strategy:

https://www.transport-network.co.uk/Ministers-promise-a-national-bus-strategy/16185