

7 November 2022

## **Town Team response to the Draft Masterplan for St Ives**

### **About St Ives Town Team**

St Ives Town Team was originally set up by St Ives Town Council in 2013 to use the funds that St Ives was awarded from the Government's Mary Portas campaign to reinvigorate high streets. In 2014, following considerable research on the history of the town and its relationship with the River Great Ouse, the Team proposed renaming the conservation area in the town centre as The Old Riverport to recognise the Town's importance as a port over several centuries.

The Town Council agreed and added The Old Riverport to its address and this designation has been used since 2014 to help promote the Town. It is now used widely by residents who have added it to their house name or address and by new businesses that incorporate Riverport in their name, such as Riverport Vets.

The Town Team's aim is to promote the Town and help keep it vibrant by attracting visitors, improving its appearance and adding to the cultural life. It has done this in a number of ways including:

- Providing leaflets, such as the complimentary guide to the Town
- Putting on events, such as The Old Riverport Jazz & Blues Festival now in its ninth year
- Working with businesses, such as Stagecoach and The Taproom to provide special offers to visitors
- Informing and educating the public. This has taken many forms including providing exhibitions, discovery days and permanent displays such as the notice boards about the history of the Railway Station.

The Team has also been instrumental in encouraging residents to be engaged in discussions about the Town. In 2018 a questionnaire was produced that sought the opinion of residents, business leaders and visitors about many aspects of the town. As a result the Team produced a report called *a Vision of St Ives*, an updated version of which is enclosed with this response.

### **General comments about the Masterplan process**

The Town Team has been very disappointed with the entire Masterplan process that began with the Prospectus For growth (PFG) in 2019. Our primary concern has been the consultation process, which has been poor.

A limited number of people and groups were invited to contribute and significant groups in the Town were not invited. Indeed the Town Team had to request to be involved in discussions. Despite considerable concern about the quality of the PFG, raised by those being consulted, HDC's Cabinet ratified it. Our concerns ranged from a proliferation of factual errors, such as incorrect street names, to significantly out-of-date data and contextually inappropriate proposals for an historic market town. In general, it seemed that decisions had already been made by HDC and that the process was designed to implement those decisions regardless of the concerns of St Ives residents.

The Masterplan document has continued in a similar fashion. The way it was presented, online only, disenfranchised many people and even computer savvy people found it difficult to read due to the layout. Had the Town Team not provided a large printed version and encouraged residents to see it, and had the Town Council not organised a meeting, many residents may not have had the opportunity to comment on the plans.

We consider the Response Form to be poor. The use of selected answers does not allow for a tailored response and we will not, therefore, be commenting in that way.

### Comments on the Masterplan's supporting documents

The supporting documents have not been available until recently. Having now seen them, it is apparent that much of the data is unreliable. We refer below to just a few of the issues:

- The majority of the data is out-of-date, e.g. Baseline Report p7 transport data is for 2011 before the Guided Busway was fully operational, which badly skews the data on public transport.
- A significant amount of the data does not refer solely to St Ives but to a much wider area, e.g. Baseline Report p6 uses District wide data, which may not be appropriate for St Ives.
- Some comments are subjective without reference, such as '*St Ives isn't fulfilling its potential*'. A statement like this would be acceptable if there was an understanding of what the potential might be, but there is no attempt to measure it or state why any potential isn't being reached.
- The data contains many factual errors, e.g.: roads named incorrectly; references to a Metro CAM in the Baseline Report, which has been dropped; footfall figures from August 2021 in the Evidence Review p11, that refer to a Wednesday Market - again this does not exist. The footfall figures seem to have been taken when many people were still reluctant to venture out in the aftermath of the Pandemic and cannot be relied on to be relevant today.
- Some of the comments are contradictory or ill informed. It is stated that there is a lack of office space and yet recently there have been four cases at Meadow Park, Harrison Way of purpose-built office blocks being converted to residential use.

It is stated that the nightlife is better than all the other towns and opportunities exist to increase it with the creation of housing for young entrepreneurs. This is unproven as they are just as likely to be drawn to Cambridge. An increase in the number of young people out and about in the evening is likely to exacerbate the problems related to drugs and antisocial behaviour, which already deter older residents from venturing out after dark.

Older residents are more likely to shop in the Town, support the markets and social events and get involved in the community. They also have a greater spending capacity, particularly in restaurants and cafés and they need to be encouraged to come out more, and not seen as the problem.

- There is a reference to increasing mooring facilities (Baseline report p16) but the solution would actually restrict mooring and would prevent boats from passing under the bridge.
- The Urban Design assessment says that St Ives is an historic centre, attractive and vibrant with a successful mix of residential and commercial uses. It continues . . . '*the views around the Bridge and The Quay are spectacular*'. All of this will be put at risk by the proposals that are designed to make significant changes to the townscape rather than enhance what we already have.
- There are references to a bus station and to busy market days, both important for the town, and yet no bus station is shown and limited market space allowed for in the plans, which would restrict the size of the market, rather than allow for expansion.

The data provided consists of figures captured from several sources. Relying on this data is very misleading without detailed knowledge of St Ives. There have been considerable changes recently, including shop closures, a number of town-edge and town-centre infill developments and a revamped Corn Exchange, which provides a busy programme of entertainment and Arts sessions as well as community events.

The opportunity for St Ives to improve its economy has been restricted for many years by the lack of hotel and bed & breakfast accommodation. The situation has recently been made worse due to the largest hotel, The Dolphin, being used to accommodate refugees. None of the proposals address the important requirement for more hotel accommodation.

## Comments on the Masterplan's projects

### S1 Riverside Activity:

The Town Team consider these proposals are wrong for many reasons including:

- The pontoon restricts boats mooring and travelling beyond the Bridge and makes passage through the sole navigation arch impossible.
- The historic view of the Chapel Bridge and Quay is completely blighted.
- The river is not suitable for swimming due to variable currents and poor water quality.
- Whilst The Quay is not large and the number of people than can access it at certain times is restricted (e.g. the Illuminated Boat Display), it accommodates the public most of the time and remains popular for all ages.
- The pontoons would need constant cleaning to remove bird guano.
- Such large pontoons could cause problems during flooding and they would need to be stored during the winter, which would be expensive.

### S2 New Public Square:

We agree that this area should be improved by removing the parking and creating a pedestrian area. But if parking is to be removed or reduced, then close-by parking adjacent to the bus station must be retained. There have been proposals in the past that failed to materialise when the District Council on the one hand and the Town Council and stakeholders on the other could not agree on the proposals.

#### The Town Team support in principle:

- Pedestrianisation and some seating.
- Market stall area with water and electricity points.
- Access from Crown Street, but for buses only.
- Cleaning and repairing the Cromwell Statue and War Memorial.
- Cycle parking and information boards.
- Some limited loading bays and disabled parking.

#### We do not support:

- The creation of a garden or grassed area, although the addition of carefully sited trees may be acceptable.
- A secluded garden space.

The Town Team do not wish to see this historic centre changed beyond recognition and become a 'park' rather than the busy working centre of the Town. St Ives is endowed with open spaces and 'green' areas, such as The Waits, Holt Island Nature Reserve, The Thicket riverside walk, Berman Park, Warners park and of course the unique Hemingford Meadow, all just a short walk from Market Hill.

Market Hill should be redesigned to allow the weekly markets on Mondays and Fridays and the twice-monthly Farmers markets on Saturdays to be revitalised, encouraging traders to come here. It should not restrict the larger Bank Holiday markets or the Michaelmas Fair, or the Civic Parades and Christmas Lights Switch-One and other large community events. It should also allow sufficient access for delivery vehicles.

The opening of the access from Crown Street for buses will necessitate keeping the road on the North side of Market Hill open. Market stalls that usually line that side of the street will need to be moved towards the centre of the square. This will have an added benefit of making the pavement on the north side less congested on market days, when pedestrians are often in conflict with people on mobility scooters or pushing prams and pushchairs.

The "Round Town" bus service and buses coming from Huntingdon will be able to travel from Ramsey Road along The Broadway and through Market Hill.

This offers several benefits including:

- removing two-way bus traffic from North and East Street;
- encouraging passengers to alight in the Broadway would improve footfall in this part of the town centre;
- preventing taxis from parking on the pavement in Crown Street and thereby reducing the danger of pedestrians being hit by vehicles mounting the pavements;
- avoiding buses obstructing the junction at Station Road and Market Road.

Generally seeing buses bringing travellers into the centre of the Town is likely to encourage more people to use public transport.

### **S3 Innovation & Incubator Hub**

The Cattle Market area does need to be revitalised but not at the expense of totally changing its character and its use as the main car park and public transport hub. The case for an Incubator Hub requires clear and convincing justification that is less dependent on the building of so many flats and houses. These proposals do not take into account the unique nature of St Ives and would make the Town look and feel like many other places not so far away.

**We do not agree with:**

- The loss of the Guide hut.
- The loss of the bus station.
- The loss of parking so close to Market Hill.

There are a number of buildings in the Town centre that would be suitable for conversion to an Innovation Hub if the business case could be justified. This could be less costly to set up and would make good use of buildings that are currently empty.

### **S4 Apartment led residential**

We consider this over-development of a critical area of this market Town.

**We do not agree with:**

- The loss of the Octagon. Even if plans were adopted that retain the Octagon building these proposals could severely restrict its potential use as suggested in the '*a Vision of St Ives*' document attached to this response.
- The density and type of housing would exacerbate traffic congestion and result in the loss of this historic and widely used area of the Town.
- It would necessitate the building of a multi-storey car park much larger than that shown.
- The scale and height of the buildings would adversely affect the private homes and gardens in Cromwell Terrace.

### **S5 Retail and parking**

We consider the opportunity to increase the size of Waitrose by using the Library building may have passed, following the building of Morrisons and Aldi stores on the ring road, where parking is free. The Library could have been accommodated in the Town centre when Waitrose was looking to expand, but the current retail climate may not allow this to happen, and it is doubtful if the County Council would be able to afford the relatively high rent required for a Town centre location of a suitable size.

**We agree with:**

- Redevelopment of the Antiques Centre and betting shop. The current Courtyard development with the Antiques Centre is popular and the provision of a larger building, designed to complement the listed buildings nearby, could allow this activity to expand, especially if the betting shop were relocated.

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- Such a development could establish St Ives as the premier centre for auctions and antiques in Cambridgeshire and increase the opportunities for more antiques traders than currently do so to use the existing courtyard. A slightly taller building could also accommodate some apartments. Linking it with the Octagon - originally the Cattle Market Auction Ring - could provide a focal point for auctions, tourist information, regular indoor produce markets and more stalls for Courtyard traders.

### We object to:

- The need to build a multi-storey car park as the likelihood would be that visitors would be deterred from using it. It is further from the Town centre, which would discourage shoppers who want to pop into Town centre shops and would inevitably result in an increase in on-street parking.
- The loss of a much needed bus station, which also provides space for coaches delivering visitors for daytime stopovers in the town.
- Whilst we understand that the images used in the Masterplan are only indicative of potential development, the examples used do tend to illustrate buildings more suitable to a new town, rather than being integrated into historic St Ives.

### Conclusion

The Town Team accept that St Ives needs a plan that will improve the Town's prosperity, which is essential to halt the decline that little or no investment will undoubtedly cause. To address this the Town Team produced *a Vision of St Ives* that was designed to help the town discuss a way forward.

For the reasons we have outlined above, we feel that the Masterplan does not achieve a better outcome for the Town, its residents or businesses and could be detrimental to attracting visitors, who contribute greatly to the Town's economy.

It is extremely disappointing that after so much money has been spent on reaching this stage the plans are generally so poor. This view seems to be very widespread among residents and other groups. Our *Vision* document offers alternative options and deals with some important issues that are ignored by the Masterplan.

Some, such as dealing with traffic flow and parking arrangements, could have a greater impact on improving the Town in a relatively short time at a lower cost and would resolve an issue that is uppermost in residents' minds.

We attach our *a Vision of St Ives* document which we hope will demonstrate that we have constructive ideas to put forward. They are not based on detailed financial analysis but on knowledge of the Town and responses to a questionnaire that businesses, residents and visitors completed, something that the Masterplan is clearly missing.

Yours Sincerely



Sheila Stones, Chair, St Ives Town Team