

6. area wide design priorities

CONTEXT

A high quality of urban design, encompassing buildings, streets, squares and parks contribute greatly to the local environment – and work effectively to instil local pride, attract investment and successfully draw-in new residents and visitors. Central Bletchley today exhibits a generally poor quality of design. This does not stem from any inherent weakness in the way that the town has evolved and developed, but from the major building and transport interventions of the late twentieth century, and a lack of maintenance and investment thereafter.

Buildings

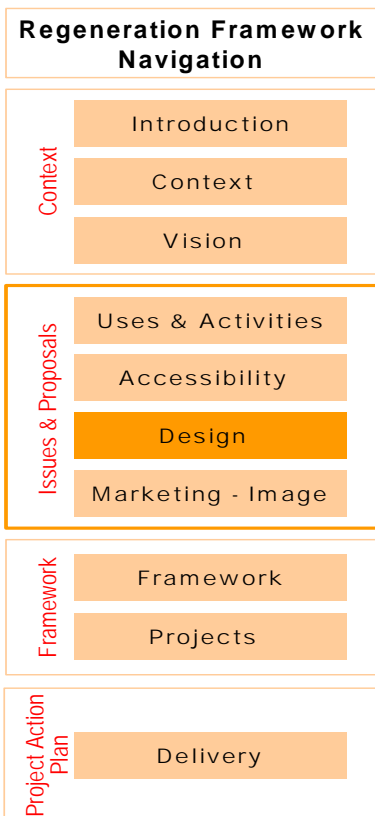
Building design within the town centre fails to inspire. There are some pleasant buildings from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when Bletchley was growing from a village in to a railway town. The key issues lie with the larger buildings built out of context with the town’s form or scale, governed by factors that have resulted in either large, placeless forms (such as Stephenson House and most of the Brunel Centre) or inappropriately scaled pastiche vernacular.

Whilst the Leisure Centre’s pyramid and the Music Centre to the south of the college site were previously identified as ‘interesting one-off buildings’ that could contribute to improving the urban form, they fail to do so either because of their age and obsolescence or because of their setting. The Leisure Centre is now nearing the end of its functional life and to the people of the town its neglected appearance symbolises the recent years of decline the town has faced. The Music Centre, one of the better buildings within Bletchley, is hidden away from public life, seen only by those who use it.

Streets and Squares

Pedestrian connectivity across the town centre is still mostly dictated by the axis of Queensway as the ‘high’ street. With the Brunel Centre sitting across the street, there is reasonable access to the east, yet connectivity westwards remains a huge problem, with Saxon Street and the railway ensuring that the only westwards pedestrian route is unsafe and illegible. Movement is severely hampered by highway infrastructure and there is a lack of structure to the streets and public places that fail encourage people to move through the centre.

Furthermore, introduction of significant highway infrastructure has given rise to a large proportion of meaningless and ‘left over’ space within the town centre. Buildings continue to have a weak relationship with the street or with each other or with the space that surrounds them. Where there is a relationship this is most often car parking, ensuring there is an over-dominance of the car in the town.





Elizabeth Square: community led public realm improvements approved

In terms of design and public realm, the challenge is still to create a more coherent, user-friendly and stimulating town centre. This should entail a new identity, including not only buildings but new uses and public spaces which are well connected to other parts of the central area, such as the rail and bus stations and the retail core. Overall, the town needs to offer a new dimension of place-based quality which is compatible with the best urban design practice elsewhere.

The public realm priority in the 1999 Study was to give greater emphasis to the street and other elements of public realm to create a sequential pedestrian experience. The result would be a more co-ordinated and seamlessly legible townscape with a series of linked public squares and spaces.

The only significant change since this time has been approval to improvements to the old market site to create **Elizabeth Square**, spearheaded by the Bletchley and Fenny Stratford Town Council with funding support from SRB5 *Spotlight Bletchley* and Milton Keynes Council.

OVERVIEW OF THE 1999 STUDY ISSUES

The 1999 Study set out a number of strengths and weaknesses in terms of design and public realm with Central Bletchley.

Strengths

- Landscape setting – to the west
- Sense of safety
- Links to neighbouring areas
- Central location of the bus station
- Traditional street forms to the east

Weaknesses

- Weak, uncoordinated architecture
- Lack of active ground floor uses in some areas
- Weak civic 'heart'
- Lack of quality public realm or local features
- Weak pedestrian and open space network or spaces
- Few water features
- Saxon Street and railway as cause of severance
- Poor connection on arrival from rail station
- Cyclists not well catered for
- Scale and impact of car parks
- Weak sense of boundaries



Stannier Square: Lack of quality public realm or local features

The Regeneration Framework recognises the need to substantially improve both the quality of public realm and buildings in Bletchley. The key urban design challenge is to create new streets fronted with buildings and move away from the 'by pass' character of roads in the town centre. The priority is to substantially improve both the visual legibility and physical permeability for pedestrians in the town, particularly by re-opening the Queensway 'axis' as



Buckingham Palace Road:
Streetscape improvements needed



Active groundfloor uses



Signage at gateway locations to
advertise arrival into the town

and when the Brunel Centre comes forward for remodelling or development. Buildings need to be of good quality, with key public buildings and facilities (particularly) leading the way to raising the overall quality and expectations for Central Bletchley.

The overall aim is to create a co-ordinated public realm including key components as part of a wider strategy:

- along Queensway building on the impetus created by the Elizabeth Square improvements;
- improvements to Leon Recreation Ground to create a new Central Park and entrance onto Queensway;
- the development of quality public squares at the key transport arrival points into the town;
- streetscape improvements along Saxon Street, Buckingham Road and the new Bletchley Park Avenue; and
- quality public realm to be a feature of all new development.

DESIGN PRINCIPLES

Underpinning each of the detailed projects that form the Regeneration Framework is a series of urban design, public realm and accessibility and movement principles. These principles will help to link together the various town centre functions that the projects will deliver, and where necessary are described in specific projects. However, these principles should underpin development in Central Bletchley and be drawn into both developer-led projects and the work of public agencies responsible for much of the public realm in the town centre.

To increase visitor and investor confidence in Bletchley, the town needs to both look and work well, with buildings and spaces working together to offer an attractive and enjoyable environment. Proposals are to:

- **Improve existing buildings** - through environmental improvement schemes, upgrade rundown buildings of townscape interest, continue the ongoing programme of shop front improvements and optimise the use of architectural lighting.
- **Encourage quality urban design** - new buildings should, where possible, offer ground floor active uses to enliven streets and front onto public spaces, retain existing townscape along Queensway, with private parking/service areas to the rear.
- **Use landmark buildings and structures** - to create gateways and orientation features particularly located near to the station gateway and retail core and utilise opportunities for a landmark development /kiosk at the Buckingham Road / Saxon Street junction.
- **Improve sense of arrival** - advertise arrival into Central Bletchley through improved image and identity, environmental improvements, landmark buildings and structures and signage at gateway locations on Saxon Street / Dukes Drive and Buckingham Road.

PUBLIC REALM AND OPEN SPACE

New development within Central Bletchley provides a tremendous opportunity to improve the physical quality of the town, through new built development but also through investment in the public realm. The public realm within the project area needs improvement to encourage a sense of pride and place for the residents and visitors to the area particularly within the central retail area. The public realm should aim to;



Quality street furniture to reinforce image and identity

- **Reinforce the image and identity** – celebrate the history of Bletchley through a strategy of public realm improvements concentrated upon new lighting, street furniture and public art.
- **Focus public realm** – public realm interventions should be co-ordinated at key activity focal points, gateways and landmark areas to aid permeability and legibility.
- **Establish meeting areas** - seating and meeting areas should be established at key points between Leon Recreation Park and Bletchley Park, providing spaces for public animation and human interaction.
- **Prioritise pedestrians** - greater priority for pedestrians at road junctions to increase safety and ease of circulation movements in the centre, particularly focussing upon Saxon Street and Buckingham Road.
- **Enhance public safety** – public spaces should be well lit and where possible receive passive surveillance from surrounding buildings and uses.
- **Green the town** - through tree planting and environmental improvements, bring the tranquil atmosphere and setting of Leon Recreation Ground and Bletchley Park into the heart of urban built form.
- **Disguise car parks** - car parks will be sensitively designed to enhance rather than detract from the quality of the public realm, particularly in the Bletchley Park area and in the heart of the town centre where the impact of car parking should be minimised for commercial and residential environments.



Innovative street lighting to enhance public safety

Co-ordinated Approach

It is important that the approach to design and procurement of the public realm is co-ordinated and well thought through – to deliver a common approach that is identified as being ‘of’ Central Bletchley and should apply to the use of street furniture including lighting and seating and influence the approach to design of gateways and street finishes.

At the collaborative design workshops undertaken to evolve the Regeneration Framework, a strong association with the rich history and past achievements of the town emerged as a binding element for design of the public realm.

Two elements were strong themes:

- First, the interwar period (early to mid twentieth century) was the “golden age” for Bletchley and many of the more attractive buildings and spaces in the town date from this period. The end of this period also identifies with many of the achievements at Bletchley Park.
- Second, is the association with brick production at Bletchley and Newton Longville. This industry underpinned the economy of the town and materials used in building prior to arrival of the railway.



Quality public realm through the use of planting, lighting, street furniture and the use of quality materials.

As part of a co-ordinated approach to public realm and in particular street furniture across the town centre, the package of lighting, seating, and other elements should reflect the underlying design elements of this period – but not be overly retrospective in its design. This could be in the form of a contemporary interpretation of art deco and early Modernist design in street furniture.



Public realm and street materials to celebrate the town's past achievements

Similarly, paving and street treatments can use brick as a dominant element or as a finish. The key is to employ an overall approach –not necessarily dictate that all streets or spaces should be entirely of brick, but to encourage contemporary design and exciting use of materials in the streets of Central Bletchley.

Public Realm Strategy

Such street furniture systems and paving packages are commercially available but in deciding on a package of elements or commissioning design, care must be taken not to expose the local authority to excessive long-term management or replacement costs. Choice of a package of street furniture will need to be developed and agreed with Milton Keynes Council's highway and lighting engineers.

The choice of materials is, however, only one element of a Public Realm Strategy that sets out the design principles for key spaces and streets in the town and provides guidance on how materials should be employed in specific areas. The aim would be to provide a tool for both developers and public agencies to ensure that a co-ordinated approach is employed to deliver public realm projects in Central Bletchley.

SPECIFIC PUBLIC REALM AND OPEN SPACE PROJECTS

Whilst design of the public realm should be established in an overall **Public Realm Strategy** and, in many instances, be related to specific development projects, the Regeneration Framework sets out a network of inter-connected spaces and streets which set the framework for built-development projects.

These are 'anchored' by seven key public realm and open space projects.

Western Station Approach – Turing Square

The Western Station Access will provide a gateway public space for people arriving by train and travelling either to the wider Bletchley Park environs, the Milton Keynes College site or on to West Bletchley.



Turing Square will act as a focus for surrounding uses

The square – nominally named after Alan Turing a wartime cryptology pioneer at Bletchley Park – will be of an innovative layout with street furniture to reflect its location as a gateway to the 'birthplace of computing and the information age' - Bletchley Park. The square will provide an identifiable meeting place that will act as a focus for the surrounding commercial, residential and educational uses. Where possible, the space will be animated by groundfloor uses associated with its location at the station, college and growing mixed-commercial quarter. The surrounding residential developments will offer passive surveillance, particularly increasing safety for evening travellers.



Active uses will help to frame Station Square

Eastern Station Approach – Station Square

Creation of the Eastern Station arrival point is intended as a focal public space and a transport interchange. It will be of a design that is robust and facilitates easy access, whilst creating a distinctive public space that forms a focus for the station entrance, the bus stops on a realigned Saxon Street and surrounding development which will 'frame' the square.

The space will equally accommodate the pedestrian and the functional requirements of the transport interchange. The space will need to:

- accommodate the significant level change from station platform level to Saxon Street;
- be orientated towards Queensway to deliver visitors into the heart of the town centre;
- provide legible connections offering routes north, south and east; and
- accommodate commercial and residential development with active uses at ground floor level.



Stephenson House space must allow people to sit out and enjoy the environment

Key to the success of the space will be its interaction with surrounding elements of residential and commercial development, and the potential for active uses fronting onto it. The residential uses along Queensway and potential conversion of Stephenson House with active ground floor uses will add an important dimension to the space ensuring that the area is afforded a high level of natural surveillance.

Stephenson House Setting

The current environment surrounding Stephenson House is dominated by concrete and inconvenient level changes. The conversion of Stephenson House must address its setting and the quality of public realm surrounding the building – successfully integrating the café-bar uses at ground floor and residential uses above with surrounding development – including providing access to future development and car parking to the north.

The new public space will be enclosed by Stephenson House, the Wilkinson Store and the Co-op Department store. The design of the space will need to reflect the predominant retail uses that bound it, and respect the high level of pedestrians that will be navigating through it. The intensive pedestrian use would require hard surface materials to be used. The space will need to be well designed to allow people to pass through it but importantly allow people to sit out in and enjoy the urban environment.

Queensway



Queensway should become a focus for festivals, events and outdoor performances

Queensway, as the main retail street through the heart of Bletchley town centre, will offer a quality public space linking the eastern end of the town centre to the western end. It will be a predominantly pedestrian-oriented route, with street furniture and tree planting reinforcing the existing thoroughfare. However, Queensway will also need to accommodate short term car parking and be designed to properly accommodate the street market - enabling it to flourish – without inhibiting pedestrian access to surrounding shops and facilities.

A key aspect of the design of Queensway will be the potential to use the space for street festivals, events or outdoor performance. The street is wide and lined with mature trees. This setting has the preconditions for

Queensway to be an increasingly active space – supporting existing and new retail and other facilities.

The active shop fronts that already exist at groundfloor level should be encouraged to embrace Queensway as a boulevard, bringing life out onto the streets to create a continuous stream of activity.



Elizabeth Square will offer a space for children to play

Elizabeth Square

Elizabeth Square, as an important part of the public realm along Queensway, will provide a public space that will act as the key focus in the eastern end of the town centre. Designs for creating the Square are well advanced but are flexible to enable nature and appearance of the square to be complementary with an overall public realm vision for Central Bletchley.

The square should be designed as a place that is welcoming to all citizens, workers and visitors, including places to sit out in and places for children to play. Reflecting the overall proposals for public realm in Central Bletchley, it will be of a contemporary layout using high quality and robust materials.

Eventually, the new leisure centre will have its front door onto Elizabeth Square. Reflecting this, there should be a mixture of hard and soft spaces within the square, offering the opportunity for use as informal performance space, providing the setting for programmes of urban cultural animation. Key to the success of the square will be its interface with the leisure and healthy living activities, with the active commercial and café/bar frontages generating a high level of activity to animate the perimeter of the square.



Attractive entrance into Leon Park will act as a focal point

Leon Park

Leon Recreation Ground is a major element of urban greenspace in Central Bletchley yet it has little relationship with it, nor provides an amenity for the town centre. The potential is for the 'rec' to be opened up to the centre and provide a valuable open space component as Leon 'Park' on Queensway.

A key part of the public realm infrastructure will be the management and design of the Park entrance onto Queensway. The entrance should act as a focal point to the public park, displaying maps and information on boards, informing the users on programmes and projects being held in the park.

The entrance should be broader and relate well to Queensway. This will require some of the land currently within the Knowles Schools site that may become available through reorganisation of the educational uses there.

Street furniture, particularly benches, should be located near to the entrance and around the existing children's playground. The treatment of the Rec in general will be largely informal, with loose surface finishes and defined planting areas.



Princes Way will offer quieter elements of public space

Princes Way Gardens

A final component of the public realm infrastructure is a quieter and more reflective space created as part of the realignment of Princes Way and related to new residential development in the eastern part of the town centre.



Saxon Street will offer safe and attractive pedestrian link, with supplementary tree planting

This space is intended to be more for local people and residents of Central Bletchley as a place to sit and relax and for children to play. Its design should be closely related to that of the surrounding residential development.

STREETS

The need to improve accessibility and movement into and within Central Bletchley has been explored throughout this Framework Document.

Proposals to:

- expand pedestrian and cycle network;
- prioritise pedestrian and cycle access; and
- improve access to open spaces.

all require particular attention to the design treatment of streets in the town centre. Key projects include

Saxon Street

The realignment of Saxon Street to become an urban 'boulevard' in Central Bletchley will provide a key opportunity to deliver a safe and attractive pedestrian and cycle link from Bletchley town centre to the retail warehouses and other facilities on Watling Street, the residential communities and employment areas of Denbigh to the north of the centre.



Street furniture and lighting will aid legibility

Street furniture and lighting along the route will aid legibility and increase safety, with the new developments fronting the street providing a high degree of surveillance. Supplementary mature tree planting along the street will enhance the street character, improving the approach for visitors into the town. The street character will be of an urban nature, announcing to visitors that they are travelling into the heart of a substantial town centre.

A quality pedestrian crossing will need to be developed in the southern part of Saxon Street, providing an at-grade crossing to link the railway station and transport interchange to Queensway and the Central Mixed Use Quarter.

Stadium Way

An important function of Saxon Street in the future will be as the primary walking and public transport route to the proposed StadiumMK at Denbigh North. Whilst the stadium will be approximately a fifteen minute walk from the station, football matches and events will introduce many visitors to Bletchley who will arrive by train and a number will walk to the venue.

To capture some of the spending potential of the stadium visitors in the town centre (before and after the event) and to dissuade them from using a western pedestrian access to the station via Bletchley Park Avenue, the route via Saxon Street must be attractive and safe. The realignment of Saxon Street together with intensification of development along its length will assist in this requirement.

However, there must also be routes that draw stadium-goers to the facilities of the town centre and for the walking route to be linked with other public realm and development initiatives in the heart of Central Bletchley.

Although realignment and development along Saxon Street will take some time to complete, it is important that the walking route to StadiumMK is in



Public art incorporated as paving

place before the facility is opened. Establishing travel and movement patterns is important from the outset. Saxon Street is currently a broad corridor giving a key opportunity for distinctive paving, lighting and public art to be employed in creating **Stadium Way**, whilst defining plots for development in the future.

Bletchley Park Avenue

The increased importance of the new route from Granby Roundabout in the north to Buckingham Road in the south, will require careful treatment of both the pedestrian and cycle environment and to prevent cars from using this route as a way of cutting through West Bletchley residential communities.

Streetscape improvements will need to reflect its enhanced role. The character should build on the Avenue's association with Bletchley Park and reflect the less urban nature of the environs. The protected mature trees that already align the road should be retained and complemented with new planting and street furniture.

Key public realm elements are related to the design of the Avenue and the building developments it will access. Key elements will be:

- The **design of the 'Link' bridge** must be of high quality as a gateway to Bletchley from the north – yet minimise visual impact on surrounding communities
- The **junction with Sherwood Drive** to the north needs to be designed carefully to prevent through traffic from entering West Bletchley residential communities yet not preventing local traffic from using the new route.
- A new **entrance to Bletchley Park** is required onto the Avenue. This should be an opportunity to create a high profile gateway to the activities and life within the Park (which is predominantly hidden behind mature trees) and to the town as a whole.
- A key component along the Avenue will be the pedestrian route that links the railway station and **Turing Square** with Bletchley Park, the College sites and its surrounding developments. The form of the crossing will need to give pedestrian priority over road traffic, easing pedestrian movements between the two locations.



Bletchley Park Avenue should be less urban in character

Buckingham Road

Key to achieving good east-west connectivity within the town centre will be the treatment of movements under Buckingham Road Bridge. Street lighting will need to be greatly enhanced along this route to increase safety for both pedestrians and cyclists, particularly in the evenings. The key priority for this pedestrian route is that it is raised above the carriageway - separating pedestrians from vehicle traffic and providing a more at-grade route to aid legibility. This issue is further explored with regard to accessibility and movement.

Princes Way

The realignment of Princes Way provides the opportunity to create a more pedestrian friendly route that is not dominated by highway infrastructure. New developments along the street will provide a better quality setting for the street, with active frontages and surveillance offering a safer environment.