

4.1 INTRODUCTION

4.1.1 The masterplan seeks to create a high quality, vibrant and thriving town centre and a new urban quarter in Milton Creek. It incorporates a clear urban structure for the area, with simplified routes, a better quality of public realm and new links within the town centre and across to Milton Creek. The masterplan includes new shops, civic, culture and leisure facilities, homes and businesses. It also makes provision for new social and community facilities, including a new Learning Campus and possibly a new Town Hall. The setting of the Creek will be transformed and reconnected to the town centre. A new

station gateway provides a welcoming new arrival space and new retail development revitalises the heart of the town.

4.1.2 This section of the SPD presents the overarching structure for the masterplan area and the guiding principles that have been established, covering:

- Urban structure and layout;
- Density, grain, height and scale;
- Activities, land uses and facilities;
- The overall quantum and mix of proposed uses; and
- Landscape and the public realm.

4.1.3 Further detail with regard to districts in the masterplan area is then set out in section 5 of the SPD.

Figure 4.1 3D visualisation of masterplan, looking east through the town centre, with the High Street to the right and new station square to the left



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Figure 4.2 Illustrative Masterplan



4.2 URBAN STRUCTURE

URBAN STRUCTURE AND DESIGN PRINCIPLES

GENERAL LAYOUT

4.2.1 The masterplan highlights the key structural elements that must be created in Sittingbourne and which new development must observe. These include:

- a strong north south route that links Milton Creek with the town centre via a new publicly accessible pedestrian bridge that integrates with the railway station;
- a new square in front of the station;
- an improved retail offer in the town centre and strengthened civic facilities.
- a permeable and legible route network that allows for east west movement through the town for pedestrians and cyclists;
- Allow for a wider range of uses to the south of the High Street.

4.2.2 These structural changes allow for a greater mix and range of retail accommodation, including allowance for larger and medium sized units to accommodate modern retailer needs and demands. The arrangement of new retail development must be strongly integrated with the High Street through a series of north south links and pedestrian spaces that respond to the historic character and identity of the town.

ACTIVITIES AND USES

4.2.3 Street character and image is strongly influenced by ground floor activity. All buildings, particularly those in the town centre, should provide activity and interest at street level. Depending on the area, this may be achieved by retail frontage, (entrances and display), spill out spaces for cafés and residential overlooking and entrances. It is essential that buildings front and define the street and that main

entrances are on the streets. The important streets in the town, such as the High Street require a greater level of activity and will be appropriate locations for ground floor uses accessible to the public, including retail, restaurants, culture, leisure and other appropriate town centre uses.

The Masterplan provides for a mix of uses across the town centre and Milton Creek area

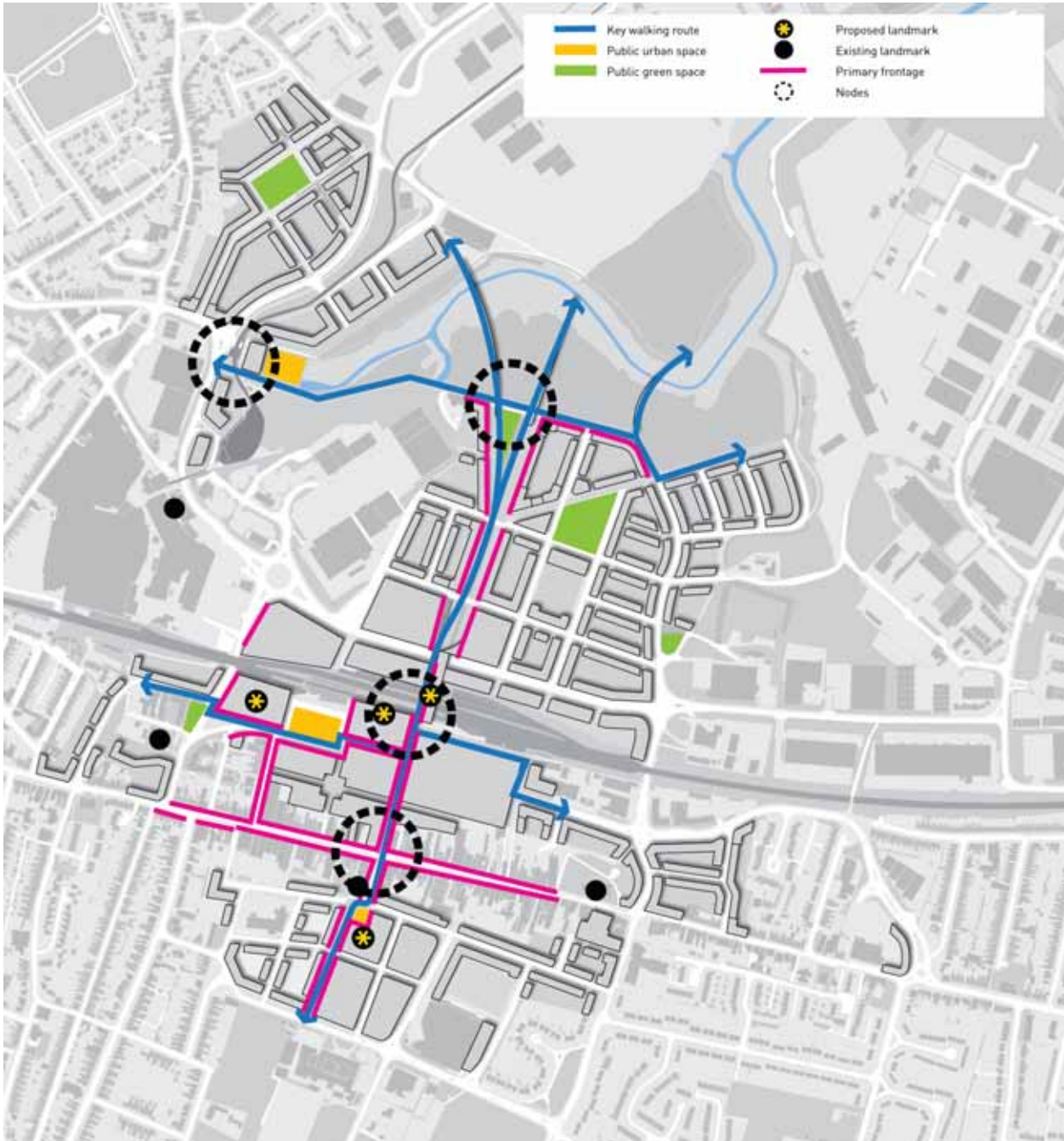


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4.2.4 Achieving the right scale, sense of enclosure and street level activity will require suitable uses including residential accommodation, leisure and office space

to be established on the upper floors of retail buildings. In some cases, retail will be accommodated on more than one floor.

Figure 4.3 Structuring Plan



PERIMETER BLOCKS

4.2.5 Development should normally take the form of 'perimeter blocks' in which buildings front the street in a continuous building line on every frontage, creating a series of traditional streets. Across the town centre, it is essential that buildings contribute to the quality and vitality of the public realm. This requires careful consideration of entrances, servicing, windows at upper floors and the ground floor uses of buildings.

4.2.6 All buildings should have street level entrances and a strong relationship to the street, with entrance scale and presence reflecting the identity and scale of the building within the street hierarchy. The perimeter block structure provides for active frontages with buildings facing the street, clear street definition, strong building lines and a good sense of enclosure. At the same time, it allows as much or little subdivision as is appropriate for the scale of activities in the particular street or district. It can also accommodate internal servicing and parking.

4.2.7 Within the town centre the organic development of Sittingbourne over time has left behind a legacy of numerous north-south passages and alleyways. This lends the town centre much of its character and distinctiveness. Whilst continuing these routes would ensure the creation of a highly permeable town, it would not necessarily accommodate the larger footplate retail stores that are now required for modern commercial and retailing activities. The block structure illustrated within the masterplan thus picks up on the key routes within the town that developers should adhere to. This will ensure that new retail development can be accommodated, but also ensures that development respects the scale and form of the town centre.

4.3 DENSITY, GRAIN, HEIGHT AND SCALE

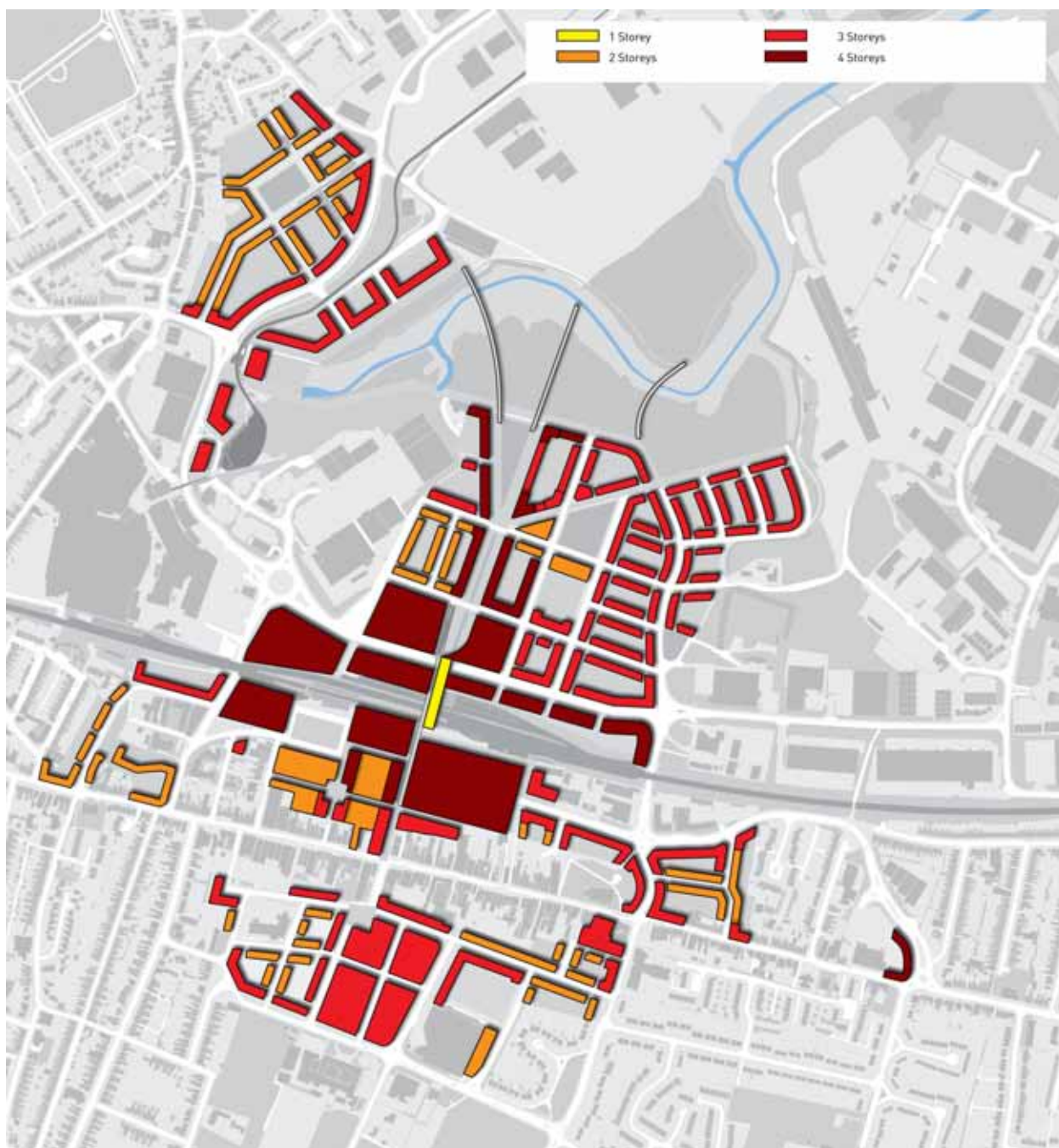
4.3.1 Providing for the future increased density of activity in the town centre is central to the masterplan. Development at higher densities appropriate for the scale and importance of a place not only makes better use of land, it also brings more people on to the streets, makes a place feel more vital and interesting, concentrates spending power, increases the patronage of shops, leisure and social facilities and other services, provides a high level of surveillance and security, reduces the need to travel and supports greater use of public transport.

4.3.2 Sittingbourne Town Centre consists of a mix of predominantly two and three storey developments. However there are instances of greater scale, particularly along the High Street. New buildings in the High Street can provide important landmarks and give greater legibility to the street without undermining its quality as a street. This will need to be tempered by the desirability to respect the character of the Sittingbourne High Street Conservation Area and local landmarks such as church spires.

4.3.3 Outside of the conservation area, there is a variety of building heights and new development will need to respect the scale of this, but need not necessarily be constrained by existing building heights. The opportunity to increase height at important points and in relation to particular spaces will be encouraged. The space between buildings will be an important determinant of scale and, for example the new Station Square will require buildings of greater scale, up to four storeys with potentially some taller elements to articulate corners and key facades. This will help to create new landmarks and townscape with character.

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Figure 4.4 Heights



4.3.4 The grain of proposed development should be based on the following principles, which should be read in conjunction with the information on districts presented in Section 5. The quality of the proposals are to be judged within a strict criteria of good urban design principles which include:

- The arrangement of buildings within plots should clearly define the public realm focused on the street and major movement patterns, and private space on the inside of the block;
- The promotion of fine grain developments along the main pedestrian retail routes with buildings clearly articulated with entrances and windows at regular intervals;
- The entrances of all buildings should be reflected both in scale and form to establish a clear identity to the building. This should be achieved by use of vertical elements which project beyond the building set back line, different façade treatments or larger openings on the façade;
- A variety of building typologies will create a robust and adaptable built fabric. Buildings should be designed to permit their adaptation for other uses over time;
- The ground floor of buildings, particularly those with commercial or retail uses, should contrast with upper levels and have a higher floor to floor dimension of at least 4m. In residential areas where there is potential for future ground floor commercial use, ground floors should also have a 4m floor to ceiling height to allow for ease of conversion;
- The spaces between buildings are of great importance to the character of the town and should be considered with equal care and design excellence as that given to the surrounding buildings;
- The character and scale of buildings should reflect the use of the building. Where appropriate, façades should be articulated with balconies, bay windows or minor set backs to reinforce the vertical impact of the building;
- Corners shall be treated with special features or with zero set backs at upper floors to promote the overall legibility of the place;
- Servicing areas for plots will be essential, but negative impacts need to be minimised. Where plots only have a single face to the public realm, servicing should be required to occur outside typical business hours. Where multiple faces front the public realm, the primary and secondary facades should not be used for servicing. Where below grade parking facilities exist, servicing facilities should be incorporated within them where possible;
- The use of indigenous and local materials will allow the local condition and regional character to filter through at the most fine of scales. Materials and detailing should reflect the relative importance of the building. However, there should be no restriction to use only traditional materials. Innovation should play a key role in the design and detailing of the buildings and enhance local existing features.

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4.4 SERVICES AND FACILITIES FOR ALL

RETAIL

4.4.1 Sittingbourne leaks a significant proportion of its retail spend into competing towns and shopping centres due to the limited offer of poor quality, quantity and attractiveness especially for comparison goods. The SPD allows for a major restructuring of the town's retail provision, addressing the current shortage of buildings with larger footplates to accommodate and attract larger multiple stores. This could involve the closure of St. Michael's Road (between Crown Quay Lane and Dover Street) to make a larger area of land available for new retail floorspace, and include the redevelopment of the Forum Centre and under-utilised land around it. This will allow for a mix of multiple and independent shops with medium and larger sized footplates to be provided. Interventions will also be promoted along the High Street, linking the new retail development into this and creating a new retail circuit with the High Street at its heart. The retail circuit will include the redeveloped Forum Centre and link with the new Station Square and civic uses focused within the central area.

4.4.2 Accommodation for smaller, specialist stores and traders could include the reuse of currently vacant buildings in the High Street, particularly in the Sittingbourne High Street Conservation Area, which presents an attractive environment for people to shop.

4.4.3 The weekly market that takes place in the Forum Centre car park could be relocated to a more central location such as the new station square, acting as a focus of community life at the heart of the town.

4.4.4 In line with the Local Plan (2008) this SPD provides for retail development to take place both north and south of the railway line, forming a retail core that is

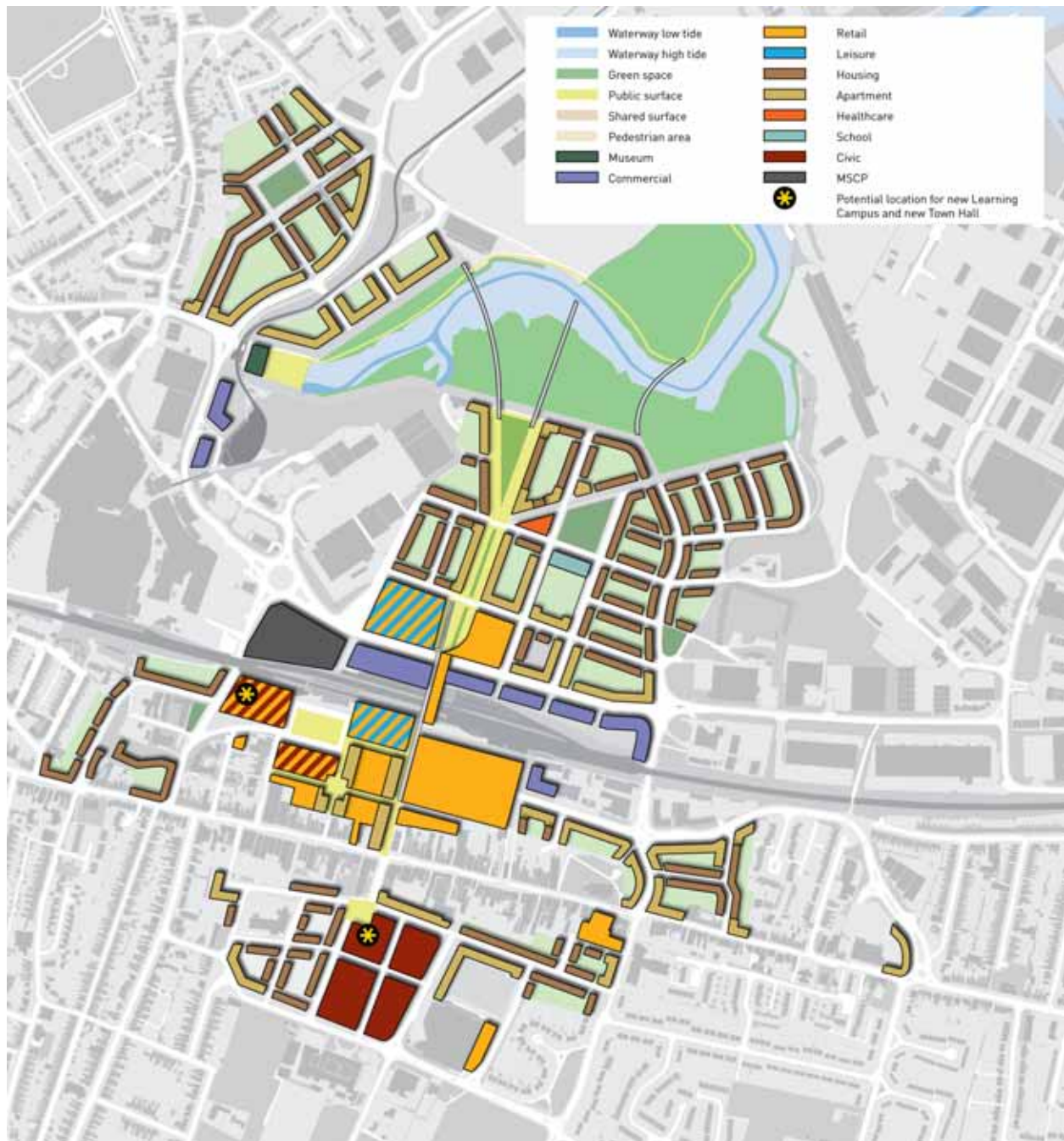
linked by a retail lined bridge. This retail development would need to take place either in one phase (so that both the north and south elements of retail come forward together) or in two phases with the retail to the south of the railway coming forward first followed by the retail lined bridge and retail development to the north.

A mix of retail types and unit sizes should be accommodated in the town centre



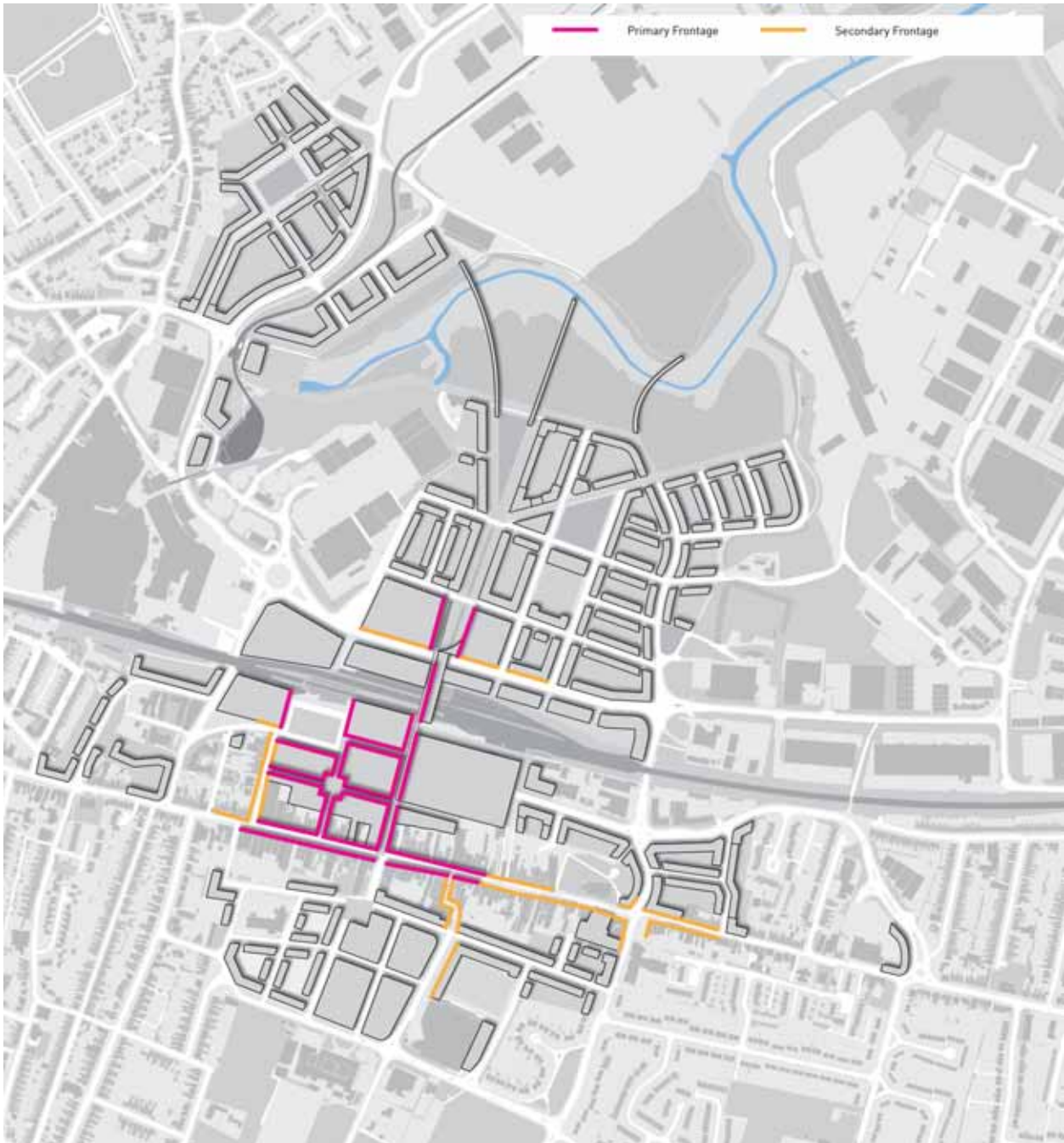
4.4.5 A successful town centre requires a good mix of local independent stores with larger regional and national multiples. The provision of larger named stores will draw trade back into the town. This offers an economic opportunity for existing traders to benefit from spin-off investment. In order to maximise the benefit of new investment to existing retailers an active town centre management programme should be created. Developers would be expected to play a role in setting up and promoting such activities, including measures to improve the promotion and marketing of the town centre as part of a pro-active approach to encourage visitors and shoppers.

Figure 4.5 Land Uses



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Figure 4.6 Retail Frontage



CIVIC, LEISURE AND CULTURAL FACILITIES

4.4.6 Sittingbourne currently lacks an evening economy that appeals to all ages. Whilst there are numerous pubs in the town centre and along the High Street a leisure offer that is more inclusive is sought. This should include a broader range of cafes, restaurants, cultural and recreational activities. The Borough Council's feasibility study on cultural infrastructure (2009) identifies the need for a four screen cinema; a heritage centre; a civic square and function space at the core of the town (minimum of 50 metres between the station and retail frontage); and a performance space (300 - 500 seating capacity). These could either be achieved through private investment; be integral to the redevelopment plans for the town centre and rationalisation of public and civic facilities; and or external and developer funding .

4.4.7 The SPD seeks to protect and improve the quality of civic and community uses in the town clustered on Central Avenue, which currently include the library, Swallows leisure centre and the well used but outdated Phoenix House. Aspirations exist to improve the library facilities and provide modern, flexible, multi-purpose facilities, including new performing arts and meeting space. The civic quarter will form an important anchor to the new north south route through the town, linking the High Street and retail core via the new bridge across the railway line to Milton Creek.

4.4.8 Work is ongoing to explore the possibilities of clustering a range of complementary civic and public uses together in modern purpose built accommodation which could offer a focal point within the town centre core area. The area to the south of the High Street could then be released for a range of uses which could include residential and retail.

4.4.9 The range of cultural and leisure facilities in the town should be widened with the provision of a new multi-screen cinema building. However, such uses often have blank facades and therefore their location and design must be treated carefully so that the impact of these blank facades will be minimised. Where possible these uses should be located in close proximity to cafes and restaurants in order to encourage an evening economy. An ideal position, if it could be accommodated, would be fronting onto the station square as it would ensure vitality around the square and also complement the new larger footplate retail units in the town centre. Also by the Station Square, potential may exist for the provision of new premises for the Council, which will then enable the current site on East Street to be released for redevelopment ⁽³⁾.

4.4.10 In the Milton Creek area, the heritage of the town should be celebrated. The steam railway could be the focus for a cluster of cultural uses including a new heritage centre. Retention of the steam railway is subject to viability. If the railway proves to be unviable in the longer term then the corridor should be maintained as a green walking and cycling route. The provision of heritage and cultural uses is subject to external funding and partnership working arrangements. Work on the Milton Creek Parklands linking to the Church Marsh Country Park is already under way.

3 Subject to a full options appraisal and feasibility study to be undertaken by the Council

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The SPD promotes a mix of new and improved civic facilities in the masterplan area



LEARNING AND SKILLS

4.4.11 The SPD seeks to support the aspirations of the Council and the Local Strategic Partnership to deliver a significant improvement in the provision of learning and skills opportunities in central Sittingbourne. Sittingbourne is currently the largest town in Kent without further education provision, and the regeneration of the town centre offers an opportunity to provide a new Learning Campus that will raise local aspirations and bring new footfall into the town centre.

4.4.12 The Learning Campus will ideally be located either close to the station or in the civic quarter, and will provide further education and some higher education provision in subjects suited to a town centre location. Canterbury College is leading the development of proposals for the learning campus. Funding is however, dependent on external bodies.

HEALTH AND SCHOOL PROVISION

4.4.13 The SPD provides a framework for the creation of a new community in the Milton Creek area and the flexibility for the provision of new housing to the south of the High Street. Comprising a range of family and lifetime housing a mix of supporting facilities and services will be provided. This is likely to include the need for a new primary school with appropriate play space provision and linked to the surrounding community through safe and secure routes. Accommodation for new health care facilities should also be made in accordance with the PCTs requirements.

The SPD promotes provision of a range of new learning and health facilities:

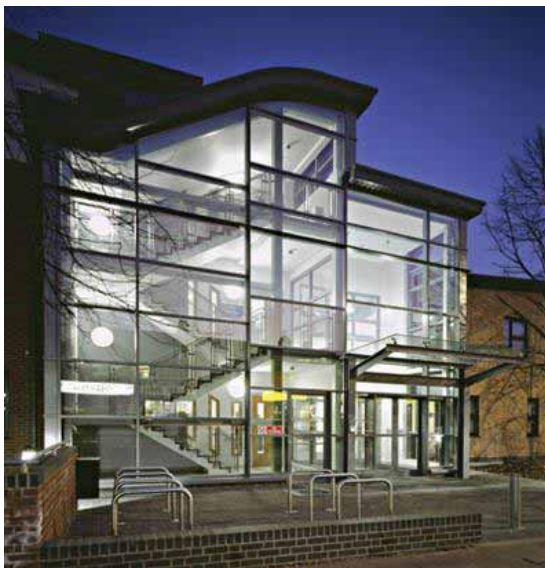
Learning campus



Primary School



Health Centre



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4.5 OVERALL MIX AND QUANTUM OF USES

4.5.1 The Local Plan sets out broad requirements for the quantum and mix of uses to be accommodated within the SPD masterplan area. The potential quantum of development identified in the masterplan is broken down by use type below (and in the table in Appendix C) although this will need to be explored and refined further through the detailed design work required by the planning application process for individual sites in the area. Further information with regard to uses and locations is provided in Section 5 of the SPD, which breaks the masterplan area into a series of districts.

RETAIL

4.5.2 Potential for approximately 63,000 sqm of new gross floorspace ⁽⁴⁾ located either side of the railway line with a bridge linking the two sides. To maximise the use and efficiency of land the Council will encourage developers to think innovatively, providing mezzanine and multiple retail floors.

RESIDENTIAL

4.5.3 Potential for approximately 2,519 new homes in stand alone development, comprising a balanced mix of houses and apartments. The Milton Creek, Mill Way and Gateway areas offer an opportunity to provide a high proportion of houses, though with some apartments close to the station, in corner blocks and on main routes. In the town centre, potential exists to provide up to approximately 540 new residential units comprising primarily flats, though with some housing to the south of the High Street.

4.5.4 Potential also exists to accommodate residential units above new retail developments in the town centre core and also along Eurolink Way. This potential should be explored in more detail through the design process for development proposals. Where residential can be accommodated above retail floorspace the height of the building should not exceed that presented on the heights plan. The mix of housing tenure types provided across the masterplan area should be in accordance with the Councils Strategic Housing Market Assessment

CIVIC AND LEISURE USES

4.5.5 The masterplan allows for the retention and enhancement of the civic cluster on Central Avenue, provision of a multi-screen cinema and or a performance arts centre adjacent to new Station Square, retention of the Steam Railway and strengthened cluster of heritage attractions in Milton Creek area. Potential also exists to accommodate new hotels, potentially in the town centre by the station square or by the Creek. A new Town Hall could be provided, preferably in close proximity to the station square.

HEALTH AND EDUCATION

4.5.6 A new Learning Campus facility should be accommodated in the town centre, preferably by the new station square. A new primary school and health centre would be needed to support a new community at Milton Creek.

COMMERCIAL / EMPLOYMENT

4.5.7 Potential exists to accommodate new floorspace for B1, B2 and B8 activities along Eurolink Way and Mill Way. Given current market conditions these may represent a longer term opportunity.

4 This needs to be balanced against the loss of floorspace through the redevelopment of the Forum Centre, Bell Centre and other High Street interventions. This reduces the total new floorspace to approximately 50,000 sqm gross retail floorspace. Based on a gross to net ratio of 70% this equates to a net retail floorspace figure of 35,000 sqm. More information is provided in Appendix C.

4.6 LANDSCAPE AND PUBLIC REALM

4.6.1 The masterplan aims to create a network of hard and soft open spaces connected by a hierarchy of streets, linking to the Town Centre and Milton Creek with each other and to adjacent neighbourhoods, including, for example, Milton Regis. The overall network will create a variety of settings for different uses throughout Sittingbourne, including park space, play space, squares, green corridors and streetscapes. Combined, these places will provide for active and passive outdoor leisure, visual amenity, improved air quality, increased biodiversity, social interaction, physical character and structure for Sittingbourne, as well as a living landscape to reflect the history and culture of the town and historic legacy of the Milton Creek area.

4.6.2 This concept, which we term the 'Paper Trail', is central to the proposed green structure of the masterplan area and is informed by the recent Green Clusters work (CLG/Green the Gateway Kent and Medway 2008) and wider Thames Gateway Parklands Vision (Terry Farrell for CLG, 2008). The Paper Trail concept, illustrated below, builds upon the historic legacy of paper making in Sittingbourne and the use of the creek and could also cross refer to brick making which is another key part of the heritage of the Borough. The masterplan seeks to maximise the setting of and access to the creek, which is a unique local feature of the town to be celebrated and enjoyed by all. Much stronger connections are envisaged along the Creek, linking with the Church Marshes Country Park and out to Kemsley, enhancing the Saxon Shore Way as a leisure and recreation opportunity. This will be managed in such a way as to direct most recreational activity to the park area and away from those areas on the Creek which are sensitive in biodiversity terms. Within the masterplan site this concept includes the treatment of the Creek edge

and integration of SUDs and swales within the development. At the southern end of the Milton Creek area this concept of the Paper Trail is continued into the town via the new landmark retail lined bridge structure linking with the railway station and new station square.

4.6.3 New public spaces in the town centre and Milton Creek will provide for a range of activities and represent focal points within the masterplan. A defined palette of materials and public realm treatments will be adopted that should include ground treatments, street furniture, semi-mature street trees, planting and signage to create high quality streetscapes along primary routes. While there will be common elements composing streetscapes, designs will create a unique sense of place for each corridor based on street hierarchies, varying widths, street land uses, material choice, material detailing, views, etc. The street typology network outlined will also relate to the selected public realm treatment with a focus on higher specification of materials and products on the higher order street types.

4.6.4 While the masterplan aims to revive the town centre and create a new urban quarter with a mix of uses at Milton Creek, it will be important to provide natural vegetation where possible for visual continuity along corridors: one of the key drivers here is the Creek itself. This is a unique feature and will be opened through carefully managed access, with strong green routes focusing on the park and recreational areas and linking back into the town centre. Additionally, in the context of climate change adaptation measures, it would be prudent to include as much shading as possible, especially in public spaces. This is an opportunity to increase tree cover in the area with large feature trees, preferably with a large proportion of local provenance, or at least species native to the UK. Larger tree canopies make a good contribution to the enhancement of

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biodiversity in urban areas, and the planting of native feature trees should also be complemented by suitable ground cover

species in parks and green spaces.

Figure 4.7 Paper Trail Concept

