

# TOWN CENTRE OVERALL REVIEW

This report draws from a large number of other reports, some produced professionally as part of the 'rtown' project, some produced by local people using methods provided by the consultants. Between them, they provide underpinning information on a large number of the issues around the future of Ross-on-Wye Town Centre. This report deliberately brings them together, in part because different aspects are picked up in different parts of the Neighbourhood Plan itself. There is no particular sequence to the subjects covered. Drawing from all of this material, this Review concludes with a section outlining, with a map, the area now considered to be the overall town centre. All Neighbourhood Plan mentions of the town centre refer to this area. (There are also other elements of the Neighbourhood Plan, and other evidence, that include material relevant to the town centre, for example the Character Portfolio.)

*(The specific reports summarised here are available on the Town Council website at ....)*

## EVIDENCE REPORTS

### 1. Signage to Town Centre Car Parks

This report, by local residents, describes and comments on the signs around the edge of the town as a whole, and then into the town centre, that direct people to the main car parks.

#### Key points about town edge signs

The town has 4 Ross-on-Wye Threshold signs, one each on the 4 main roads towards the town. These all incorporate the town name and names of twin towns. Brown signs for the town and its facilities were recorded on the A40 to the east travelling from Gloucester, north travelling from the M50 and west travelling from Monmouth, also on the A49 from the Hereford direction. There are directions to coach parking on all 4 main routes into town.

Although it is likely to be infrequent, visitors arriving in Ross-on-Wye from the A40 dual carriageway, travelling towards Gloucester on the A40 and then into Ross-on-Wye along Gloucester road, do not pass a town sign. The sign currently outside the Fire Station in Hildersley would be better placed on Gloucester Road on the left hand side before the turning for Ashburton Industrial Estate on the right. There is already a sign in this area directing people towards town centre car parks.

#### Key points about signs to car parks

Most car parks are well signposted, although some are better signposted than others. There is some inconsistency in signs for car parks. Not all signs show whether car parks are long or short stay. Some signs also show the number of spaces available, but some don't. Most, but not all car parks are signed at their entrance.

It would be good to have a consistent approach to car park signs throughout town.

### 2. Public Transport Report

This report, by a local resident, describes and comments on the overall range of public transport services to and from Ross (i.e. buses, as there is no longer a train service).

#### Key points

Reductions in funding for bus services across Herefordshire have led to reductions in the number of routes and the frequency and timing of services. There is no evidence that Ross

has suffered disproportionately from these reductions. Although it is not clear what Herefordshire Council mean by a 'Core Bus Network' of routes, out of 9 such routes in the county, 2 to/from Ross are regarded as 'core'. In terms of usage, Herefordshire came 82nd out of the 88 local authorities outside London in the ranking of bus passenger journeys per head in 2014/15.

13 bus services run to/from Ross, 4 provided by local companies, 9 by Stagecoach, a national company. Some run to places such as Hereford and Gloucester, others are more local (one being a circular route mainly within the town). On Mondays to Fridays, the most frequent service (to Hereford and Gloucester) offers 13 trips per day, the least frequent are on Wednesday or Thursday only with 1 trip. The timings are such that it is not possible for people from Ross, especially young people, to go to places such as Hereford or Gloucester for an evening out. All services use the informal 'bus centre' in Cantilupe Street.

Long distance buses to London, Birmingham and Swansea also stop in Ross and there is a local Community Transport service – Ross Area Transport – run by volunteers on Mondays to Fridays within and around the town.

### **3. Ross Benchmarking Report**

Some people in Ross secured funding around 2010 to undertake a medley of research projects and other activities mainly about the current and potential future vitality of Ross town centre. The studies, published in 2015 addressed (inter alia):

- Parking provision, use, occupancy etc.
- Business uses and business opinions.
- Footfall in key locations.
- Town centre user views on improvements.
- Incentives for businesses.
- The role of e-commerce.

There is one key, overall report that draws on all the work undertaken – the 'Ross Benchmarking Full Report'. Key points from this are as follows:

- 280 non-residential businesses were noted, of which 156 were retail. There were 18 vacancies.\*
- 88% of the retail units were selling comparison goods, 12% convenience goods. There was concern about the number of charity shops (see later).
- The retail numbers had declined overall since 2012, the main loss being of independent stores.
- Though there were still 2 markets operating per week, the number of stalls had declined and the total was less than in comparable towns.
- Unusually in national terms, rent levels had risen in recent years.
- Footfall at key locations had risen since 2012 but figures were still below those from comparable towns.
- In terms of business confidence, 49% reported increased turnover and 44% reported increased profitability. Only 8% expected a decrease in turnover. All these figures were far better than in the national picture.
- Levels of crime related to businesses were reported as decreasing.
- In terms of users (other than visitors), the numbers visiting more than once a week had risen (a had the use of cars to do so) but the number spending all day in the centre had declined.
- The retail mix was regarded as being poor other than in terms of the number of cafes and restaurants, which fared better.
- It appeared that the increase in usage was linked to an increase in tourists, with fewer local people using the centre.

- The study noted a total (before the Aldi store was built) of 858 parking spaces in car parks, of which 324 were short stay, 502 long stay.
- The number of vacant spaces in car parks – 291 (34%) on market days and 390 (46%) – was considerable.
- 440 on-street spaces were noted, with noticeably lower vacant spaces.

(\* On the Town Council website there is a spreadsheet from 2016, produced by a team of local residents, of all uses in the town centre as then defined: 'Shops and Flats Survey'. This includes not only ground floor uses but uses on upper floors, details of access to upper floors and so forth. There is also a detailed report entitled 'Vacant Units', and one entitled 'Charity Shops', both from 2016.)

#### 4. Visitor Interview Report

Two short surveys were undertaken in the town centre in 2016/7 of almost 200 people who were visiting Ross. The key results were as follows:

- **Where did you come from?** A few from nearby places, most from other areas of the UK and a few from overseas.
- **How did you travel?** Almost all by car.
- **Have you been here before?** Around half had been before, some several times.
- **Why visit Ross?** The most common reason was as part of a trip to the wider area. Other than that, people stated that they were visiting the town (maybe also the area), coming for shopping or eating/drinking or to visit friends.
- **How long are you staying?** Most for up to half a day, some for a full day, with a few staying one or more nights (not necessarily within the town).
- **Why Ross?** Typical comments were about the visual quality of the town, the general location (near the river etc.), the shops and cafes/restaurants and the general friendliness.
- **Anything unattractive?** There were only a few comments, almost all about traffic and parking.

#### Other Information

Also on the Town Council website are two files entitled 'Pedestrian Movement'. It had been hoped to do more such studies but these were the only two completed so a summary report is inappropriate.

#### REDEFINING THE TOWN CENTRE AND RETAIL FRONTAGES

Since the Herefordshire Council Local Plan was adopted, there have been a number of changes to the pattern and nature of uses in the town centre. In general, the area that includes what might be considered town centre uses and most (but not all) of the centre car parks, has expanded. In particular, the large Morrison's store has been built, so it is the view of the Steering Group that this should now be included within the town centre to maximise control over future changes.

Within the centre, the location and nature of shopping uses has changed, including with the development of the Sainsbury's and Aldi stores. Shops now stretch into Cantilupe Road and further down Brookend Street. As a result it is proposed to introduce new definitions of primary and secondary frontages.

Both the revised overall town centre area and the revised primary/secondary frontages are shown on the map overleaf.

# Ross on Wye NDP Town Centre Boundary and Retail Frontages

## Legend

- NDP Town Centre Boundary
- NDP Primary Shopping Frontage
- NDP Secondary Shopping Frontage

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