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2.1 Sleaford Context

Sleaford is the main Market Town within the North Kesteven District of Lincolnshire, located approximately 30km south of Lincoln. Its population is approximately 18,000 today.

As with many of Lincolnshire's towns, Sleaford developed to serve the surrounding agricultural economy, with a particular niche in the seed industry, and still maintains an important role as a service centre for its surrounding rural hinterland. The town has undergone significant growth in the past two decades, which has resulted in a population growth rate increase well above national levels. Sleaford is an attractive residential location due to its - good education, pleasant environment, good access to several employment locations, low crime and road/rail links to strategic networks. Subsequently, there is ongoing development pressure for growth to continue.



▲ View of Sleaford from the National Centre for Craft & Design roof terrace

2.2 What Makes Sleaford Special

Section 2.2 and 2.3 describes Sleaford Today using the key themes that have been identified by the masterplan team in tandem with stakeholder/public consultation undertaken throughout the development of the scoping study/masterplan (refer to Section 5 for details of the consultation process) . This sets the rationale for the masterplan proposals described later in the report.

A Popular, Attractive, Market Town with Strong Communities and Excellent Schools



▲ Excellent schools



▲ Westgate



▲ Market Place



▲ Sleaford Riverside

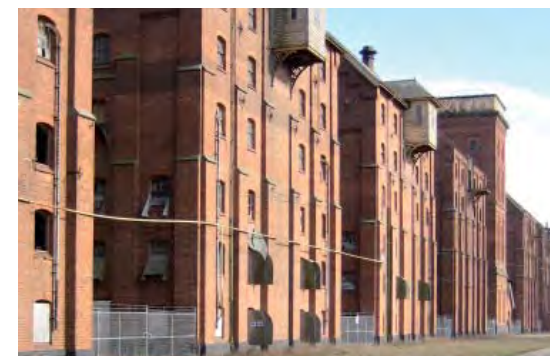


▲ Sleaford Riverside



▲ Landmark building

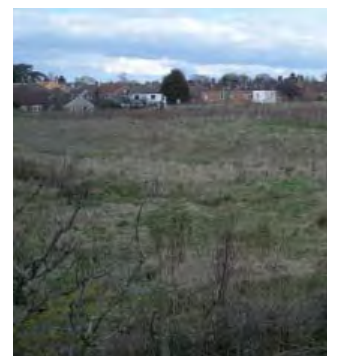
A Surprising Place with Features of National Importance



▲ The Maltings



▲ National Centre for Craft & Design



▲ Castlefield

What you said

"An attractive market town with a wonderful river walk"

"The youth club is brilliant"

"A little haven of the past. People are friendly and helpful and there is a strong sense of community"

2.3 Sleaford Masterplan Scoping Study Findings

A team led by GENECON, prepared a Sleaford Masterplan Scoping Report (May 2010), which identified the key issues for the masterplan to address including:

- The role of Sleaford and the scale of future growth - Sleaford will need to cater for further significant population growth. The location of this and how it is integrated into the existing fabric of the town is key.
- Enhancing the town centre - Sleaford Town Centre lacks quality in its retail and commercial provision and therefore is not performing its role as a strong Market Town service centre.
- Accessibility - linked to the above, the town has significant parking, traffic movement and pedestrian accessibility issues. Addressing these are fundamental to the town facing up to its future.
- Local involvement - a masterplan sets out the framework for the long term development of a 'place'. Involving local residents, businesses and local authorities is key to achieving this.

In relation to the town centre the scoping study highlighted the following projects to allow the town centre to fulfil its potential:

- A circle of town centre perimeter car parks to encourage a 'park and walk' culture into the town centre. This not only reduces the dominance of cars, but also releases development opportunities.
- An environmental strategy to improve people's experience, focusing on public realm to create improved links and settings for key attractions and heritage assets
- A series of anchor projects to create stepping stones along Northgate and Southgate.

Refer to Appendix 1 for the full Sleaford Masterplan Scoping Study

The following pages develop the key themes that have been identified by the masterplan team in tandem with stakeholder/public consultation undertaken throughout the development of the scoping study/masterplan:



▲ Sleaford Masterplan Scoping Study

2.3.1 The Role & Scale of Future Growth

In the 1981 Census the population of Sleaford was 8,000, this rose to 14,500 by 2001 and is estimated to be approximately 18,000 today. The town's infrastructure and services have not kept pace with this significant population growth and as a consequence this has led to residents going elsewhere for shopping, jobs and leisure. For example, 85 pence in every pound spent by residents on comparison goods goes outside of the town.



▲ The town has grown fast in the last 20 years



▲ Services and infrastructure need to be improved



▲ Future opportunities for growth need to be planned for

What you said

“Historically there has been ‘patchwork’ development in Sleaford. I hope the masterplan will address this issue”

“There is a real infrastructure issue in Sleaford that needs to be sorted now before any further residential development takes place”

“I go to college in Lincoln and will probably have to get a job there”

“So far housing being built in Sleaford is good and attractive. Any new housing needs to be built around the edge and as close to the town centre as possible so that we can walk to the shops”

Sleaford sits within the Central Lincolnshire Housing Market Area (HMA). This HMA covers the districts of City of Lincoln, North Kesteven and West Lindsey. The HMA influences development across the whole area. In relation to housing, the HMA has three distinct but interrelated housing hierarchies:

- 1. Lincoln Policy Area (LPA) this is the principal urban area for the HMA. It comprises the whole of the City of Lincoln and the surrounding settlements within North Kesteven and West Lindsey. This is the main focus of development for the HMA.
- 2. Market Towns - these are the secondary settlements for development within the HMA. The market towns of Gainsborough and Sleaford are the principal towns. Residential development is encouraged within these settlements to support and enhance their roles as market towns serving rural hinterlands.
- 3. Rural Areas - this covers all of the villages and settlements outside of the LPA and market towns. These areas, whilst experiencing some development, will not be the focus for development.

The Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) states that Central Lincolnshire should provide 40,600 dwellings in the period 2006 to 2026. The majority of these new dwellings will go to the LPA and Market Towns, with North Kesteven, outside of the LPA, scheduled to provide 11,200 dwellings. Within this context, the Sleaford Masterplan Scoping Study concluded that Sleaford would be expected to accommodate in the region of 4,000 dwellings over the next 25 years. The study suggested that this represented a sustainable and spatially achievable level of growth. Further to this, it highlighted that supporting infrastructure would need to be brought forward such as employment, transport and roads, leisure, open space, schools and town centre services.

The build rate required to achieve this scale of housing is approximately 160 dwellings per year. Over a 25 year period this is seen as deliverable both in terms of future market demand and in consideration of Sleaford’s build rates over the last decade.

Growth Options Considered:

No Growth

A ‘no-growth’ scenario for Sleaford would significantly impact on the ability of the HMA to deliver its housing numbers in a sustainable manner. Land for new dwellings would need to be identified in rural areas outwith the major settlement of Sleaford, raising the real prospect of large scale village expansions and the need for associated infrastructure and community investment to deliver new living environments. Transport would be a key factor, with many of these other locations not well served by public transport. This not only represents an unsustainable solution, but also has implementation challenges, given the need to review settlement boundaries and deliver significant development in rural locations.

High Growth

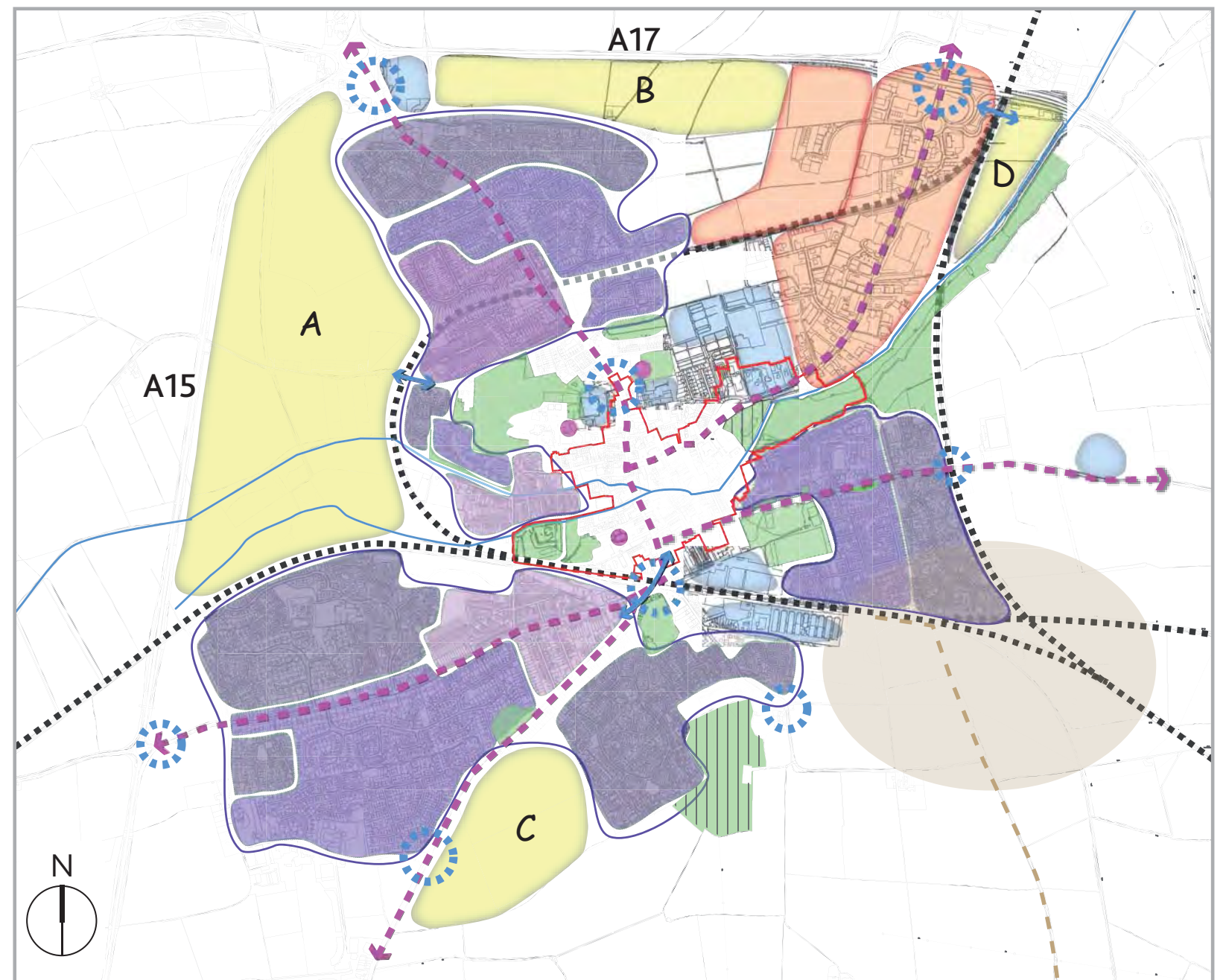
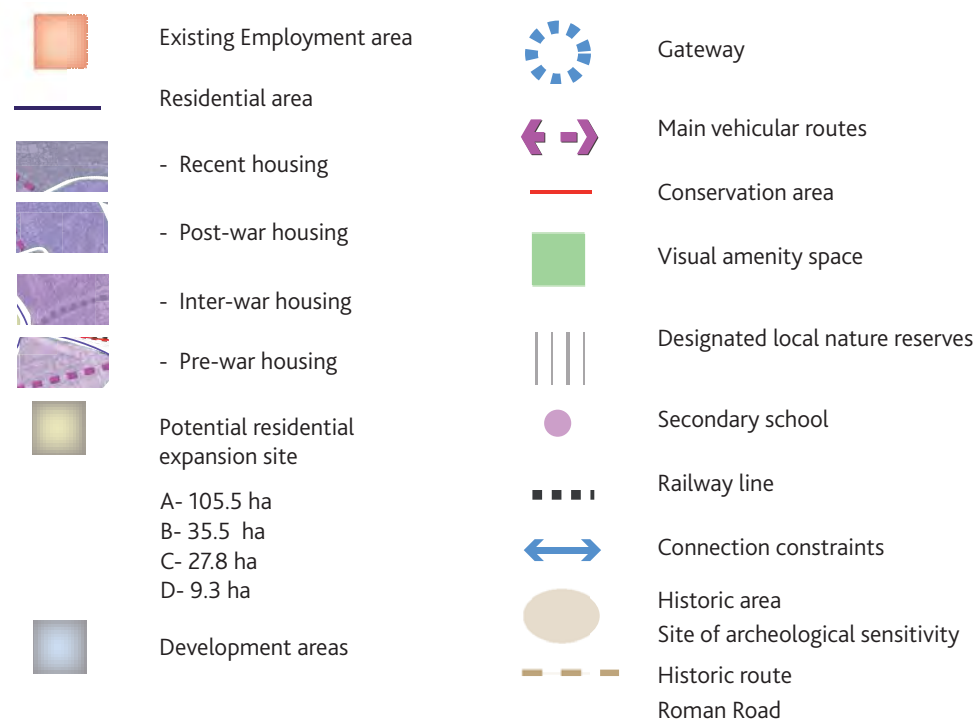
A high growth option has also been considered, through mapping of the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) sites in the Sleaford area and then undertaking a ‘sieve’ to rule out those that appear unrealistic in planning, infrastructure, environmental or market terms. The remaining sites then form the ‘maximum’ growth option, and based on an appropriate density, the identified sites indicated capacity for c6,500 dwellings. Market advice indicates that this is a high number of dwellings to deliver in the 25 year lifespan of the masterplan and realistically represents a 40-50 year growth programme

Medium Growth (Preferred Option)

The approach to growth within the masterplan therefore reflects a ‘medium’ level growth option, focused on achieving c4,000 dwellings over the masterplan period. Market advice considers this to be an appropriate level of residential development activity. The sites within the SHLAA have been refined further, based on a variety of criteria to identify specific areas/quadrants of the town where development is most appropriate. This growth option would still represent a further major expansion of the town over the course of the next 25 years, which could increase the population in excess of 8,000 people.

Figure 1 highlights existing areas of housing in shades of purple, which form three clear zones. Most recent growth has occurred on the edges of the town. The yellow areas were identified in the Sleaford Masterplan Scoping Study as potential growth areas to be considered for housing as part of the masterplan process. (Refer to Section 3.2 for the resulting masterplan proposals)

Key



▲ Figure 1 Strategic Issues Plan (Extract from Scoping Study)

Issues for the masterplan to address

- Residential growth is required to create a critical mass for investment in the town centre and community infrastructure throughout the town
- Community infrastructure is lacking and needs to be brought in line with recent and future planned growth
- Sleaford is a popular town and growth should enhance its existing characteristics (walkable town centre, compact form, rural aspect, market town character, heritage rich)
- New communities need excellent connections to local services to avoid being disconnected from Sleaford Town Centre
- Strategic contributors to traffic congestion (for example the centrally located schools) should be considered in tandem with planned residential growth

2.3.2 Accessibility, Movement & Parking

The town centre is dominated by traffic often trying to find parking or just cutting through. This creates an unpleasant environment for pedestrians and a frustrating experience for all visitors.



Access to central car parks adds to congestion in the town centre



Congestion on Southgate. Main streets are dominated by cars which pushes people to the edges

What you said

"Southgate gives a very poor impression to visitors entering the town and needs to be much more welcoming and attractive"

"We have great schools but parent's dropping their children add to the congestion in the town"

"Car is 'King' in Sleaford and until this changes the town will suffer"

"Congestion and problems at the level crossing are caused by new traffic lights that were introduced at the junction and not so much the level crossing itself"

"Why was the one-way system introduced? It increases journey lengths and increases congestion, pollution and noise in the town centre"

"There is a perception that older people do not go out at night. They do; and need public transport, safety, good lighting and opportunities to share transport."

"There is a need for behavioural change. Sleaford is a small town and can be covered on foot very easily but the people of Sleaford are used to using their cars, which needs to change to relieve the town of its congestion"

As part of the process a transport study of the current situation has been observed to allow a baseline situation to be established. This sets out how people access, move and park within the town at present and what challenges are faced. The full baseline study is included at Appendix 2 of this report.

Summary issues from the transport baseline:

- There are large volumes of traffic within Sleaford causing congestion and resulting in slow moving traffic through the town centre. The road network in the centre of the town is dominated by a one-way system which is congested for most of the working day.
- The combination of Southgate level crossing and its signalised junction creates periods when vehicles are held up on Southgate and London Road. This held up traffic can often back up into the heart of the town, intensifying the congestion on the one way system.
- Large levels of at-grade car parking spaces are provided within the centre of the town. Many of these spaces are free for the first half hour and inexpensive thereafter, which means people that reside within 2km of the town centre tend to drive rather than use public transport, cycle or walk.
- Cycle routes are provided on the arterial routes but these terminate in advance of the town centre.
- Pavements tend to be narrow on the streets within and surrounding the town centre and pedestrian desire lines are obstructed in many areas. This is through infrastructure such as rail lines but also by street furniture such as bollards and pedestrian barriers.
- Buses do not have priority over private vehicles, which makes them a less attractive alternative to private car use.
- The railway line to the south of the town centre effectively divides the town in two. With only two connections over the line, the area to the south is somewhat disconnected from the centre.

Issues for the masterplan to address

- The town centre needs to be relieved of the pressure placed on it by private cars so that the space can be utilised by pedestrians
- A shift from private vehicles should be encouraged by providing:
 - Improved pedestrian links; provide wider more generous pavements (where possible), which are clean, high quality, durable, easy to negotiate and secure
 - Improved cycle links
 - Rationalise parking and improve enforcement to allow priority to be given to sustainable transport to the town
 - Improve local transport services (both rail and bus), making them more efficient and better connected
- There is a need to improve the efficiency and movement opportunities throughout the centre of the town for vehicles
- Shared surfaces should be introduced in Sleaford town centre so that it can be enjoyed by people on foot but also be accessed by vehicles to allow important functions to continue

2.3.3 Fulfilling the Town Centre's Potential

The town centre has some great assets, interesting spaces and strong architectural character, but it let's itself down with a poor and confusing experience for people. Whilst there are success stories, the town centre retail and service offer is generally poor when compared to other similar sized market towns. The desirable assets in the town centre are currently undervalued by their settings and a lack of footfall. Theses factors are some of the major contributors to local people going elsewhere for everyday leisure and shopping needs.



▲ Money's Mill is surrounded by cars and poor quality buildings



▲ High quality buildings but poor quality environment



▲ Highly desirable character but the retail offer is lacking



▲ The town often turns it's back on the waterfront

What you said

"It is important that the town centre is 'buggy' friendly so that moving about is easy when walking with and pushing young children"

"My son is a furniture maker/cabinet maker and works in a small industrial unit on the edge of town. It might be better if this type of craft activity were closer to The Hub"

"The market place should be a real focal point for the town"

"The historic buildings and churches are important features"

"The waterways in the town centre are attractive but need to be kept clean. Also they could be much more imaginatively lit at night"

"We need up to date facilities, there is no cinema, no bowling alley and no real venue for music concerts, drama etc"

"The Hub is hidden"

"We need more up to date shops in the centre"

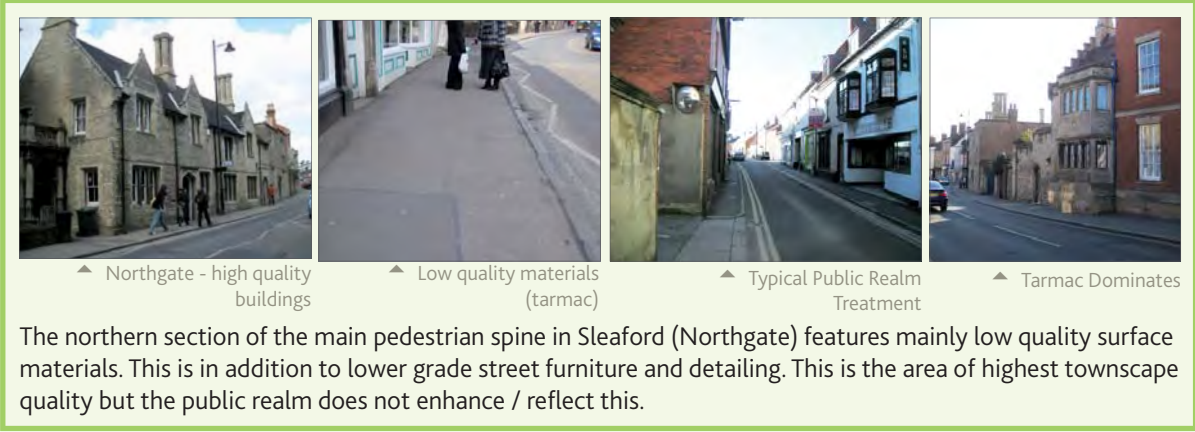
The conservation area benefits from individual buildings and townscape character of the highest quality, this is particularly evident on Northgate and Market Place. The tight urban grain, high density and irregular street pattern create a desirable appearance which, as a 'selling point' should be conserved and enhanced. Currently this is undervalued by some poor quality public realm and building uses, highway clutter and traffic congestion. Southgate's potential townscape quality is reduced by poor shop fronts and a series of gaps and visual scars especially at its southern end. This creates a poor first impression at a key gateway into the town centre. Northgate and Southgate form a strong spine through the town centre, with clear gateways marked by a tightening of urban grain – Carre's Grammar School to the north and the railway crossing to the south.

High quality public realm, including natural paving, is largely absent within the town centre, which appears at odds with the high architectural quality and the charm and character that the town centre possesses. Market Place in particular would benefit significantly from upgraded surface materials. Refer to Figure 2.

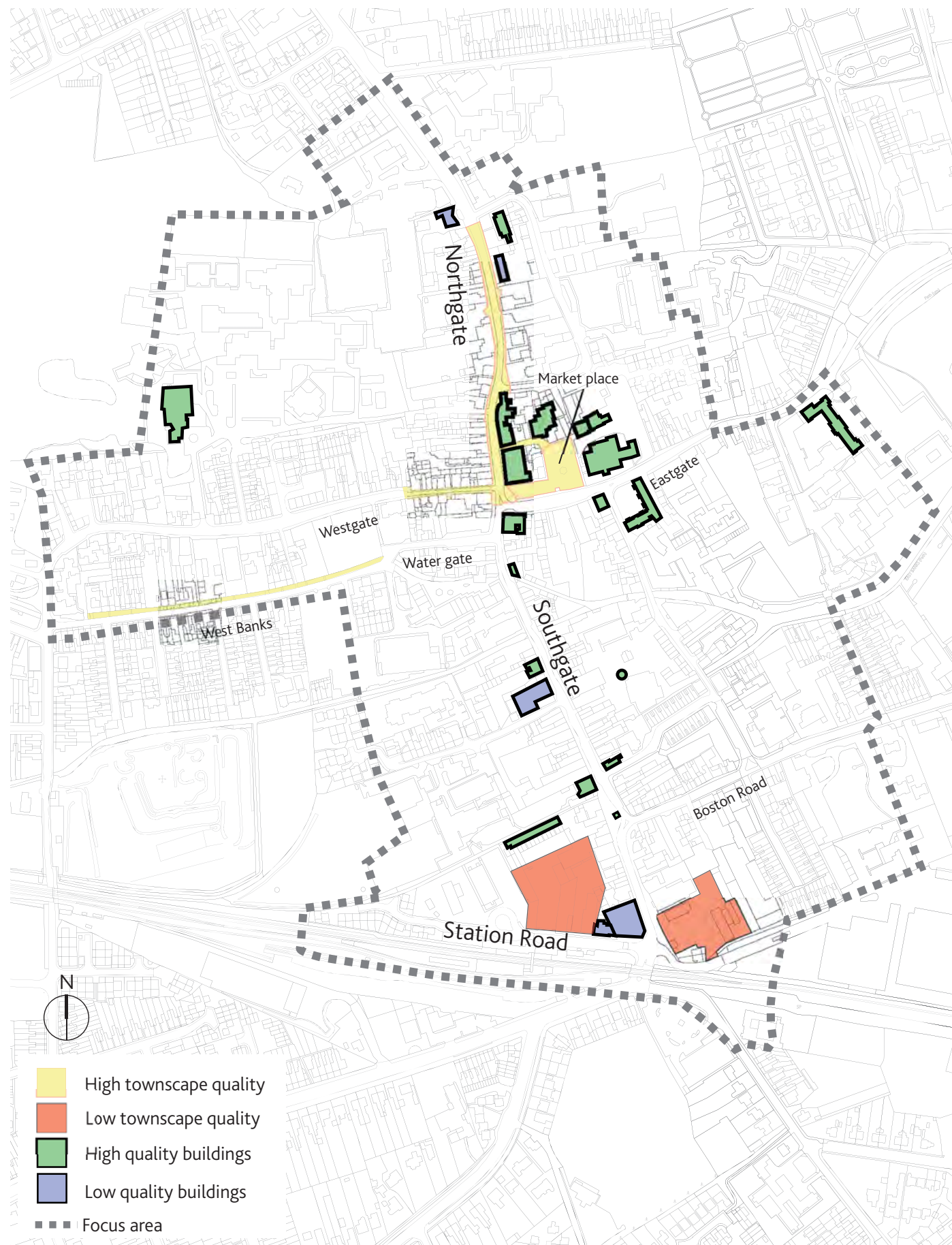
Overall, the town centre is an intriguing place to explore with a series of east-west links and destinations off Northgate and Southgate. However the quality of pedestrian links is poor and the urban grain often breaks down creating barriers and a lack of continuity, resulting in a confusing experience for visitors. This is amplified by the impact of traffic congestion throughout the town centre. Key attractions and heritage assets are also hidden including the river, Money's Mill, the National Centre for Craft and Design (the Hub) and Castlefield. In most cases the setting undervalues these destinations - for example Money's Mill being located in a busy town centre car park. In contrast, the National Centre for Craft & Design (the Hub) and the improved riverside are high quality settings, yet the pedestrian link from the town centre is convoluted and unappealing. Refer to Figure 3 for townscape analysis.

Sleaford's location at the heart of the district should permit it to draw visitors from the surrounding hinterland and beyond. At present the opposite happens, whereby Sleaford residents travel out of Sleaford. There is clearly an opportunity to reverse this trend, retain those that reside within Sleaford and attract others to enhance the business and retail activity in the town. The town centre train station (currently being refurbished) and good radial routes into the town provide great infrastructure that should be better utilised to complement the town and allow it to operate more effectively and efficiently.

The conclusion from this analysis is that Sleaford Town Centre needs to 'fulfil its potential' as a market town destination. The masterplan needs to focus on improving the quality of the Town Centre, to maximise its use by residents and visitors, and also to identify opportunities for increasing retail space to reduce catchment leakage (refer to Section 3.3 for further retail analysis).



▲ Figure 2 Surface Materials Analysis (Extract from Scoping Study)



An assessment of high and low townscape and building quality

▲ Figure 3 Townscape Analysis (Extract from Scoping Study)

Northgate Area - high quality townscape and buildings



▲ Strong spine and urban grain

▲ Townscape of the highest quality

▲ Tight urban grain

Market Place Area - potentially good townscape quality and good quality buildings



▲ Key corner building

▲ Cars detract from Market Place townscape

▲ Good quality frontage onto Eastgate

Southgate Area - average townscape quality with good quality buildings



▲ The memorial provides a strong focal point

▲ Links off the main spine create an intimate scale

▲ Interaction with river creates interesting features

Station Road/ Lower Southgate area - poor townscape quality and poor buildings



▲ Gap sites break up townscape

▲ Poor quality frontage

▲ Station Road lacks enclosure and definition

Figure 4 shows how visitors navigate and experience the town centre highlighting likely start points (such as car parks and the train station), key vehicular and pedestrian routes, gateways, views, landmarks, barriers and destinations. This exercise identifies the importance of the Northgate/Southgate spine and the disjointed nature of links off this. In addition it illustrates the potential barrier effect of the railway, the importance of the river and the many high quality landmarks.



▲ Figure 4 Legibility Analysis (Extract from Scoping Study)

Issues for the masterplan to address

- The town centre has many high quality heritage and townscape assets and they need to be celebrated by their settings
- The town centre is currently an intriguing place to explore but the visitor experience should be improved to fulfil its potential, including the creation of attractive routes into the centre
- Sleaford needs to attract a range and quality of shops and facilities that would be expected in a market town of its size.
- The town centre fails to engage and serve its population. For every pound spent by residents on comparison goods 85 pence is spent outside of Sleaford
- The number of residents and visitors using the town centre needs to increase along with time spent on each visit by improving leisure, heritage and cultural opportunities

2.4 Masterplan Vision & Strategic Aims

Based on the findings of the masterplan process the following vision has emerged:

“In 2036 Sleaford is a bigger, better, more confident place with a thriving retail centre, a keen sense of history and a clear idea of where it is going”.

“People are proud of their town because they know it’s a great place to live, work and visit. Sleaford has kept its friendly atmosphere but also offers well run services and amenities of high quality to all of its residents, as well as acting as an important hub for the rural communities that surround it. The new town centre has all the shops you could want and all the facilities you’d expect from a place of this size and importance. Today Sleaford is surprisingly well connected - it’s easy to find your way around - and because local economic growth has kept pace with population growth, the town can offer a wide range of skilled employment opportunities”.



▲ Residential inspiration images

- To achieve this vision, two strategic aims underpin all masterplan proposals:
1. Plan positively for future growth by investing in infrastructure and creating well connected communities
 2. Fulfil the town centre’s potential by creating a high quality environment and opportunities for new retail and attractions

Town Centre



▲ Town centre public realm inspiration images

2.5 Big Ideas

The masterplan has developed an aspirational yet deliverable set of projects for Sleaford (refer to Sections 3 and 4 for details). The comprehensive approach is tailored in response to the key issues highlighted throughout the process (refer to Sections 2 for details) and are based on current best practice and innovation. Examples from throughout the UK have been used to support these proposals.

Three 'big ideas' have emerged through this process :

A movement strategy that will transform the way people use and perceive Sleaford.

Traffic congestion is widely considered to be the key issue that holds Sleaford Town Centre back from fulfilling its potential. A radical set of proposals have been developed to not only transform the way the town functions but crucially aims to tackle the root cause (levels of private vehicle use):

- Refocus parking to town centre perimeter locations, providing easily accessible car parks within walking distance of the centre and its retail offer
- Promote the use of the A15 and A17 as the primary routes when moving around Sleaford to reduce unnecessary movement across town
- Reconfigure the town centre one-way system to two-way where possible, creating more flexible movement
- Transform the public realm and create a pedestrian dominant experience
- Promote sustainable alternatives to the private car and improve links with Sleaford's residential areas and its hinterland



▲ A vision for Southgate

The reinvention of Money's Yard, a lost asset that provides the key to a number of wider proposals

This emerging idea has become central to the town centre proposals and delivers a wide variety of benefits through the transformation of a car park into a new public space. These include:

- Improved pedestrian links to town centre destinations
- A new setting for a listed mill and well known landmark
- A reduction in town centre traffic congestion
- A wider range of retail and leisure in the town centre
- An opportunity to animate the public realm
- Improved connections to the waterfront



▲ A vision for Money's Yard

A consensus building approach to public consultation, which supports the formation of the Sleaford Regeneration Group and provides a focus for sustained community involvement in masterplan delivery

- The perception and reality of a more intimate and personal involvement through the 'warm up' workshops that generates real community interest and involvement coupled with providing high quality information.
- Initial targeting and then taking the masterplanning message to where groups and people already meet, rather than expecting them to attend a central venue.
- The benefit of not being a local authority employee and bringing demonstrable objectivity and professionalism without being risk averse.
- Giving practical guidance and supporting a district council that is keen to demonstrate true and effective partnership working and that 'arms length' can work.
- Gives confidence and credibility to the Sleaford Regeneration Group (SRG) by demonstrating that positive consensus building is possible within the group and that broad community buy-in to new ideas is achievable.
- It provides the opportunity to grow and develop the SRG in the future with additional new members creating a dynamic rather than static organisation.



▲ The Sleaford Regeneration Group