

PRESENTATION OF THREE CONCEPTS FOR THE CREATION/ESTABLISHMENT OF A TOWN SQUARE IN HUNGERFORD

by Adrian Gilmour, to the Hungerford Town Centre Steering Committee 9TH May 2024

Concepts - Benefits:

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All meet the requirements for the creation of a functional and visual Town Square. Importantly, these Concepts retain all the car parking spaces in the heart of Hungerford High Street

All the concepts enable a space capable of being utilised for a variety of innovative civic and community events, such as specialist markets, pop-up shops and for all the traditional events such as the Town and Manor's Weekly Market, the Victorian Extravaganza, Christmas Lights Ceremony and Christmas Tree, the Constable's Parade and many more.

A newly proposed feature of Concept 2 and 3, which greatly enhances the town square benefits is the extension of the square completely across the High Street, drawing in the wide pavement area on the east of the High Street.

All the Concepts involve creative and imaginative use of current assets as "Shared Spaces" particularly offering flexibility as to the extent of the area requisitioned and time of day/week.

Development of all the concepts considered "What are the Harms" of any particular concept, as well as "What are the Benefits" to the residents and businesses in Hungerford.

Harms – permanent and temporary:

Whilst creating a new Town Square to attract increasing numbers of visitors is an excellent aim, eliminating some of the most valuable car parking spaces adjacent to the retail jewels in the town centre is unnecessary. All the concepts retain or modify or increase the existing car parking. These can be seen in Map 1 and 2 marked as App "A", "B", "C" and "D"

Even though the concepts protect the parking spaces, considerable temporary disruption would be caused by Concept 1 and 2 through displacement of car parking to Tesco Car Park, Bridge Street, parking on the High Street adjacent to the Co-op Supermarket, Coffee No1, Boots etc., all of which are essential parking for the retail outlets, (some of which provide critical services eg. Boots Pharmacy and the Post Office) and into more residential areas.

Disruption to businesses located directly adjacent to building works and all other businesses affected by parking displacement could be months long and have a significant negative effect on the viability of the businesses.

A BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF EACH CONCEPT

Current situation: detailed on Map 4, with measurements of all significant features

Concept 1: The "Town Hall Square" – See Map 1 Town Square centred on the Town Hall.

Concept 2: The "Across High Street" Town Square – See Map 2

Concept 3: – The "Flexible Boundary, Across High Street" Town Square – See Map 3

ACTIONS

1. It would be beneficial for the Steering Committee to walk the site to assess the concepts in situ, prior to the committee meeting on the 9th May 2024.
2. Each of the concepts is a stand-alone description, so some text duplicated.
3. All sketches and any measurements are for a rough guide only and not to scale.
4. To proceed with the concept, a topographical survey of the area is a must so we have the correct measurements and give us a clearer view.
5. The choice of architect or designer who has carried out this sort of work before is very important and perhaps visit projects they have already done. For instance, getting a design engineer who knows about the concept of shared space based on the Ben Hamilton Baillie approach. <https://hamilton-baillie.com/about-hamilton-baillie-associates/>
6. These concepts act as good guidance and by getting comments from retailers and the rest of the town and offering all three concepts for discussion would show that we trust our community and that they can trust us. We can iron out any worries that people may have and maybe include other ideas, we can find ways to solve any disagreements and bring the whole town behind the project.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

Here are some contacts and references I have used in compiling these Concepts which you may find interesting to peruse.

1. It is interesting to read about Frideswide Square in Oxford which was an award winning shared-space installation in 2015 but by 2019 was reported as quite shabby. Eg. <https://www.oxfordmail.co.uk/news/17506979.frideswide-square-changed-years/>
2. An online guide demonstrating the difficulty in removing highway rights. This document is produced by Essex Highways department as I could not find an equivalent on the West Berkshire Highways website. The complex and time-consuming process is likely to be similar to West Berkshire's. https://www.essexhighways.org/uploads/lhp/mg/13_ecclhpmembersguideremovehiclehighwayrightsb.pdf

CONCEPT 1

TOWN HALL SQUARE

Refer Map 1

The Town Hall and The Square are the main focus of Concept 1.

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Boundary and extent of the Square

The boundary of Concept 1 starts at the Crown Passageway, which is ideal because it gives pedestrian access to the Courtyard by the dry cleaners, and ends at Church Street roundabout. It incorporates the hammerhead turning area and the trees.

Generating benefits from the Square generally:

The Town Hall and the Square will work in tandem, and allow events in the Town Hall to extend out onto the square.

The Town Hall steps make a great theatre and concert space which the square can use on many different types of occasions.

This concept will envisage the square being used for theatre, street music, arts, markets and fairs (this is what happens in Bath who have street music/arts on a regular basis) which will be a great addition to the traditional events already held in the town. These will not be affected because the rest of the High Street will still be available for pre-existing events and of course, also for just sitting enjoying a cup of coffee.

When not in use for events, appropriate seating and possible informal spill out from adjacent coffee and other shops will be enabled.

Just because we have a town square, it does not mean footfall will automatically increase. A concentrated effort would have to be made to create events in the square which will create footfall and make the town even more lively.

Specifics:

The whole square to have suitable bollards at road entry and exit points so that people can walk into the square, but private vehicles cannot use it as a cut through, making it a safe area for pedestrians, whilst maintaining the highway access. Manual or automatic bollards, controlled by whoever manages the square, allow access to vehicles only when required for eg. events, maintenance etc. Northbrook Street in Newbury is a good example of how this works. Keeping the highways provision allows access for maintenance, emergency vehicles and deliveries etc. This has the advantage of not getting

involved in long drawn out discussions about the removal of Highway Rights. (See Note 2).

Please note. When appropriate, vehicles would enter the square next to the dry cleaners and exit at the roundabout.

The trees within the square are a natural resource and are well loved by Hungerfordians. A good idea maybe, is to arrange seating around them. No doubt there will be many different views on the types of street furniture. Whoever does the designs can maybe come up with some good ideas.

It is important at this point to point out that this area could be taken over by rowdy youths both day and night (as has happened in other towns) and therefore, the planner should incorporate lighting and any other type of measures into the design to avoid this type of behaviour occurring.

PARKING

The original improvements of Hungerford High Street some years ago, allowed for an extra-large opening to allow buses to turn in and pass through to a bus stop at the Town Hall. (Please note, this entrance is actually wider than both the lanes of the main High Street.) Logically, now buses no longer use this opening, it does not need to be so large.

Therefore, this offers an opportunity to create a permanent parking space by the tree. (See App A, Map 1 and 2). As a demonstration of the practicality of this, cars already park by the tree at times (although they are not meant to).

With a clever architect, the number of parking spaces would stay the same, or increase by one, and a hammerhead turning area be retained. This can be achieved partly by re-locating the pay meter and the cycle rack (see App D, Map 1 and 2) which would increase the possibilities for parking options considerably. The Pay Meter and cycle rack could possibly be incorporated in the new town square. (Please see Map 1 and 2).

As outlined in Map 1 and 2 there are two options for retaining the car parking:

Option 1. (see App B, Map 1) shifting the whole hammerhead and 6 parking spaces southwards as a block, utilising the excess road width at the old bus entry point, or

Option 2. (see App C, Map 2) shifting the whole hammerhead and 5 parking spaces in the block southwards, replacing the lost parking space in the block by adding a parking space next to the tree, utilising the excess road width at the old bus entry point.

CONCEPT 2

Refer Map 2

THE “ACROSS THE HIGH STREET” TOWN SQUARE

Concept 2 is basically the same as Concept 1, but most importantly it gives the town a town square which incorporates both sides of the street which visually to visitors will truly make it a town square.

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Boundary and extent of the Square

The boundary of Concept 2 starts at the Crown Passageway, which is ideal because it gives access to the Courtyard by the dry cleaners, and end at Church Street roundabout incorporating the hammerhead turning area and the trees. It then extends across to the other side of the High Street incorporating the wide pavement outside the shops and the Three Swans on the other side of the High Street. Fortunately, the Three Swans' Hotel area has already been paved so all that will need to be done is for the bollards, trees, planting and street furniture to be in keeping with both sides of the square.

Generating benefits from the Square:

The Town Hall and the Square will work in tandem, and allow events in the Town Hall to extend out onto the square.

The Town Hall steps make a great theatre and concert space which the square can use on many different types of occasions.

This concept will envisage the square being used for theatre, street music, arts, markets and fairs (this is what happens in Bath who have street music/arts on a regular basis) which will be a great addition to the traditional events already held in the town. These will not be affected because the rest of the High Street will still be available for pre-existing events and of course, also for just sitting enjoying a cup of coffee.

When not in use for events, appropriate seating and possible informal spill out from adjacent coffee and other shops will be enabled.

The Three Swans Hotel already has considerable outside seating and planters utilising a good part of the pavement width.

Just because we have a town square, it does not mean footfall will automatically increase. A concentrated effort would have to be made to create events in the square which will create footfall and make the town even more lively.

Specifics:

The whole square to have suitable bollards at road entry and exit points so that people can walk into the square, but private vehicles cannot use it as a cut through, making it a safe area for pedestrians, whilst maintaining the highway access.

Manual or automatic bollards, controlled by whoever manages the square, allow access to vehicles only when required for eg. events, maintenance etc. Northbrook Street in Newbury is a good example of how this works. Keeping the highways provision allows access for maintenance, emergency vehicles and deliveries etc. This has the advantage of not getting involved in long drawn-out discussions about the removal of Highway Rights. (See Note 2).

For ideas on the many options for removable bollards see <https://www.broxap.com/bollards/removable-bollards.html>
<https://www.furnitubes.com/street-furniture/bollards/>

Please note. When appropriate, vehicles would enter the square next to the dry cleaners and exit at the roundabout.

The trees within the square are a natural resource and are well loved by Hungerfordians. A good idea maybe, is to arrange seating around them. No doubt there will be many different views on the types of street furniture. Whoever does the designs can maybe come up with some good ideas in keeping with the heritage nature of the town.

It is important at this point to point out that this area could be taken over by rowdy youths both day and night (as has happened in other towns) and therefore, the planner should incorporate lighting and any other type of measures into the design to avoid this type of behaviour occurring.

PARKING

The original improvements of Hungerford High Street some years ago, allowed for an extra-large opening to allow buses to turn in and pass through to a bus stop at the Town Hall. (Please note, this entrance is actually wider than both the lanes of the main High Street.) Logically, now buses no longer use this opening, it does not need to be so large.

Therefore, this offers an opportunity to create a permanent parking space by the tree. (See App A, Map 1 and 2). As a demonstration of the practicality of this, cars already park by the tree at busy times (although they are not meant to).

With a clever architect, the number of parking spaces would stay the same, or increase by one, and a hammerhead turning area be retained. This can be achieved partly by re-locating the pay meter and the cycle rack (see App D, Map 1 and 2) which would increase the possibilities for parking options considerably. The Pay Meter and cycle rack could possibly be incorporated in the new town square. (Please see Map 1 and 2).

As outlined in Map 1 and 2 there are two options for parking:

Option 1. (see App B, Map 1) shifting the whole hammerhead and 6 parking spaces southwards as a block, utilising the excess road width at the old bus entry point, or

Option 2. (see App C, Map 2) shifting the whole hammerhead and 5 parking spaces in the block southwards, replacing the lost parking space in the block by adding a parking space next to the tree, utilising the excess road width at the old bus entry point.

CONCEPT 3

Refer Map 3

THE FLEXIBLE BOUNDARY, “CROSS HIGH STREET” TOWN SQUARE

Concept 3 has the huge advantage in that it demonstrates that a functional and visually appealing town square can be achieved with a very small amount of structural change. This Concept can be in place with minimum disruption and harm to shops, residents and visitors.

Boundary and extent of the Square

It envisages using both sides of the street, starting from the north edge of the hammerhead (adjacent to the south side of the Town Hall), and up to the Church Street roundabout. It then extends across to the other side of the High Street incorporating the wide pavement outside the shops and the Three Swans on the other side of the High Street.

The key difference to Concept 1 and 2 is that the current hammerhead is not part of the permanent town square, but is easily included as an extension when needed. To improve the visual effect as a square and to make it a more useable surface, the hammerhead, which is otherwise unmodified, could be raised level.

Fortunately, the Three Swans' Hotel area has already been paved so all that will need to be done is for the bollards, trees, planting and street furniture to be in keeping with both sides of the square.

Designed-in shared-space flexibility:

The hammerhead is intended to be incorporated into the square only as and when it is needed on a temporary basis. When required, access to the hammerhead can be closed with bollards. This allows events requiring more space, such as theatre and concerts to be held on the Town Hall steps and Town Hall events can roll out on to it.

Fortunately, an attractive tree is virtually in the centre of this area, making it a focal point of the square, especially if it had seating around it. This area is large enough to hold a wide variety of events on its own, and/or street music, an ideal comfortable space for people to sit having their sandwiches and a chat with their friends. (This is what happens in Bath on a regular basis).

Generating benefits from the Square:

The Town Hall and the Square will work in tandem, and allow events in the Town Hall to extend out onto the square.

The Town Hall steps make a great theatre and concert space which the square can use on many different types of occasions.

This concept will envisage the square being used for theatre, street music, arts, markets and fairs (this is what happens in Bath where they have street music/arts on a regular basis) which would be a great addition to the traditional events already held in the town. These will not be affected because the rest of the High Street will still be available for pre-existing events and of course, also for just sitting enjoying a cup of coffee.

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PARKING

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As a welcome bonus, Concept 3 therefore offers an opportunity to create an extra permanent parking space by the tree, utilising the excess road width at the old bus entry point.

(See App A, Map 1). As a demonstration of the practicality of this, cars already park by the tree at busy times (although they are not meant to).