



Rutland
County Council

Consultation Document

Oakham Town Centre Action Plan

A strategic vision for place shaping in
the town centre

March 2025 | Rev. 0

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Top image: The Grade I Listed Butter Cross and All Saints Church, viewed from Market Place. *Source: Discover Rutland*

Bottom image: Looking north along Mill Street. *Source: Placemake*

Cover image: View of All Saints Church over the Castle embankments at Cutts Close. *Source: Placemake.*



This document was prepared by Placemake in association with Rutland County Council and Oakham Town Council in March 2025. Sourced figures and images are copyright protected.

1. Purpose

Oakham's town centre is the bustling heart of the county. With a wealth of heritage assets, a pleasant, informal character and good connectivity through the mainline train station and the Mobi-Hub, it is itself a representation of the county's '*Multum in Parvo*' (much in little) motto.

However, there are also challenges for growth and activity in a compact, historical settings and unless checked, these threaten to hold-back the immense scale of opportunity that exists in the town centre.

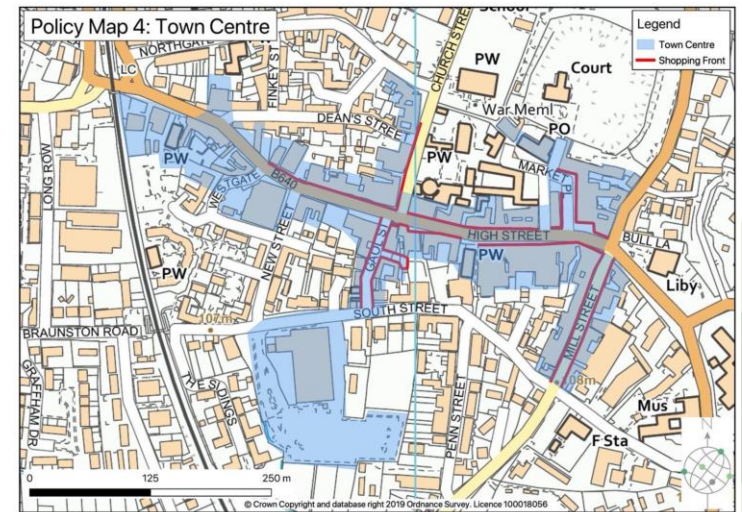
Recognising the need for a clear strategy and an integrated approach, this document has been prepared in association with both Rutland County Council (RCC) and Oakham Town Council (OTC).

It has been facilitated with funding from external grants, including the Government-led Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) and represents one of a number of transformational strategies that were identified in RCC's Corporate Strategy of 2022-2027.

Overall, the document presents a framework for place shaping in the town centre through identifying a vision, core objectives, action areas and possible mechanisms that could bring about change. Upon adoption, it will provide a road map to direct future investment, attention and consultation for the improvement of the town centre in a managed and coordinated manner.



A historical photo of a sheep market at Market Place.
Source: RCC historical archives



Town Centre Area
Source: Oakham Neighbourhood Plan, Oakham Town Council

2. Vision

“A thriving market town where history comes alive, communities meet over great food and drink, shopping delights and markets flourish.”

In the first instance, it is important to establish a holistic vision for the town centre over the Plan period.

This provides a clear direction for all stakeholders to work towards and an opportunity to achieve consistency in the message that is being relayed in branding and promotional material by different partners.

The vision should also be aspirational and encapsulate the town centre's strengths and character. The above statement does this through recalling aspects that are particular to Oakham and in many aspects, to Rutland also - history and heritage, a relaxed, semi-rural character and a strong health and leisure offer.

It is also intended to reflect the dynamism and diversity of the county's principal retail and commercial centre.



Cyclists meet in front of the Grade I Listed Castle.
Source: Discover Rutland



Market day at the Market Place.
Source: Discover Rutland

3. Objectives

Studies and engagement undertaken for the new Local Plan have indicated the impact of wider trends on the character and make-up of the county's town centres.

These might be presenting because of social, economic or strategic factors that are largely out of the control of Local Government. For instance, the state of the wider economy, the emergence of internet shopping and banking and the flows of external traffic on the county's roads at peak times.

However, it is the aim of this Action Plan to build a toolkit that can be used to minimise and if possible, reverse the impact of negative trends overtime.

To achieve this, the Plan is based around five core objectives that are listed on the following page. Numbers '1' to '3' are specific to Oakham town centre and relate to the ambitions of the Neighbourhood Plan, while '4' and '5' are county-wide aspirations that link to the Corporate Plan and the Local Plan. Each objective targets a particular aspect of the town centre, while all aim to stimulate footfall, activity and the frequency of visits.

Given the complex and multifaceted nature of town centres, there is no silver bullet for place shaping that will have an immediate and everlasting effect. However, through this Action Plan approach and the support of all public, private and community stakeholders, it will be possible to gradually improve conditions in a sustainable way.



The Grade I listed All Saints Church – in total, the town centre is blessed with five Grade I listed buildings and structures and 121 heritage listings overall. *Source: Discover Rutland*

3. Objectives

The five objectives that underpin the Action Plan are listed in the following table:

These are our objectives:	This is what they aim to influence:
1 Establish a clear and consistent identity.	Appearance; branding and promotion; frequency of visits; dwell time; conservation of heritage assets; sense of community.
2 Enhance the visitor experience.	Frequency of visits; dwell time; retail offer; conservation of heritage assets; sense of community.
3 Reinforce the gateways and approaches to the town centre.	Appearance; frequency of visits; dwell time; retail offer; sense of community; sustainable mobility (active travel and public transport).
4 Encourage access by public transport, walking and cycling.	Frequency of visits; dwell time; retail offer; sense of community; sustainable mobility (active travel and public transport).
5 Harness opportunities to grow the visitor and nighttime economies.	Branding and promotion; frequency of visits; dwell time; retail offer.

4. Action Plan

For the Plan to have a meaningful impact, it is important to identify a range of initiatives and interventions that will help to deliver the core objectives.

As the objectives represent high-level aspirations, there are many different ways to achieve these. For instance, '*establishing a clear identity*' includes branding and marketing (operational), signage and planting (physical) and how public spaces like the Market Place and Cutts Close might be used (social).

While these aspects are contributing to the same overall goal, each has different considerations, consultation and funding requirements. Using the same example, coordinating the branding and marketing message will have an immediate impact and could be achieved more quickly and cost effectively than replacing street surfaces and furniture. While, some physical interventions, such as improving a traffic junction or creating a new pedestrian crossing will have a greater capital cost and involve multiple stakeholders and regulatory consents to deliver.

It is therefore necessary to break down each objective into more manageable components - this is achieved in the tables on the following pages, which arrange possible actions into short-, medium- and long-term timelines.

It should be emphasised that the following programmes and initiatives are presented as the basis for further engagement and study. In this respect, they represent a first step for identifying what might be financially and technically possible with the support of the community and the involvement of public and private stakeholders.



Above: Glimpsed views along passageways are a characteristic of the town centre and a link to the past. *Source: Placemake.*

Possible ways this could be achieved:

Short Term:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Align the messaging of marketing and promotional material with the adopted vision statement. • Public realm audit to identify the character and location of street furniture and visitor signage. • Begin the removal of temporary, redundant and unauthorized signs and notices. • Review and if necessary, update the adopted Shop Frontages SPD (2015). • Design statement to coordinate the treatment of surfaces and street furniture, possibly involving a particular motif, style or colour. This might also include a system for reporting and removing unauthorised signs. • Identify opportunities for town centre rewilding to support a rural character and biodiversity. • Increase awareness of and participation in the Oakham-in-Bloom campaign. • Renew and promote Green Flag accreditation of Cutts Close. • Engage with stakeholders to enhance the setting and experience of the Grade I listed Butter Cross and Castle.
Medium Term:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Install planters and sign boards around the station to soften the first impression for visitors. • Gradually remove and/or replace unique items of street furniture and patched paving from the High Street, Market Place and Butter Cross. • Review highways signage around listed buildings to identify opportunities to minimise visual impact. • Engagement with stakeholders to improve connectivity between Cutts Close and the Castle and explore the possibility of using the Castle grounds for some leisure and recreational activities. • Expansion of the heritage plaque scheme and map sites for visitors.
Long Term:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gradually begin removing or replacing unique items of street furniture and replacing patched paving away from the High Street, Market Place and Butter Cross. • Resurfacing of the Market Place and Butter Cross to reinstate a traditional character. • Installation of small brass horseshoe studs in surfaces along a circular walk of the centre or the High Street. • Production and sale of products celebrating figures of national interest, for instance, the Castle, Sir Jeffery Hudson and the Tomb Thumb stories, the Hornby signal box, Samuel and Titus Oates and the Ichthyosaurus.

2

Enhance the visitor experience

Possible ways this could be achieved:

Short Term:

- Extend the limits of the town centre to include the Mobi-Hub and the museum at either end.
- Review and if necessary, update tourist information maps at all arrival points – public car parks, the coach and train station and the Mobi-Hub.
- Local street performers on weekend afternoons at a variety of locations with space and good footfall.
- Ensure the Hopper route connects main hubs and destinations, including the train station and Mobi-Hub.
- Review opportunities to improve the availability of taxis at weekends, on public holidays and in the summer.
- Expand promotion of the 'Shop Local' campaign.
- Engagement with operators and stakeholders to provide temporary locations for tour coaches to drop-off, wait and collect.

Medium Term:

- Improve internet coverage, initially along the High Street and at Market Place and then at Mill Street and Gaol Street.
- Install temporary window displays in the most prominently located vacant shops along the High Street.
- Dedicated Hopper stops at a few key locations, combined with signage, a bench and a bin.
- Expansion of the Hopper services to provide three or four services per day to Rutland Water and nearby tourism offers during the summer.
- Install planters and sign boards around the station to soften the first impression for visitors.
- Engagement with stakeholders to improve connectivity between Cutts Close and the Castle and explore the possible use of the Castle grounds for some leisure and recreational activities.
- Engagement with operators and stakeholders to develop a programme of monthly events at Cutts Close in the summer.
- Trial of pedestrian-only access to Market Place on Sundays to understand the impact on footfall and sales.
- Introduction of town centre wardens on Saturdays to monitor activity and provide advice to visitors.
- Engagement with stakeholders to review opportunities to reduce the physical and visual impact of cars, trucks and vans around the Market Place on market days.

2

Enhance the visitor experience

Possible ways this could be achieved:

Medium Term:

- Expansion of the heritage plaque scheme and map sites for visitors.
- Trial the opening of the Castle and Museum between 10am and 4pm on Sundays to determine if there is sufficient demand.
- Trial incremental parking charges at a public car park (rather than charges for each full or half hour).
- Identify and gradually restore historic signs and items of street furniture.
- Engagement with possible operators and providers to trial a programme of historic, ghost and literary walks on summer evenings, starting and finishing at the Butter Cross.
- Establish a Town Centre Steering Group made-up of individuals from public and private organisations with a focus on stimulating the retail, hospitality and commercial offers.
- Trial a programme of dedicated 'loading-only' times or parking spaces along the High Street.

Long Term:

- Installation of cycle stands and repair kits at the train station and at one or two other locations, for instance, Cutts Close and one of the public car parks on Catmos Street.
- With stakeholders and operators, establish designated loading and waiting area for tour coaches in a location at the edge of the town centre that is close to a public convenience.
- Centrally located town council hub to provide tourist information and promote community events.
- Engage with providers and stakeholders to introduce a culture/ arts hub or a boutique cinema in the future.
- Extension of dedicated foot and cycle routes between the town centre and Rutland Water.

Possible ways this could be achieved:

Short Term:

- Extend the limits of the town centre to include the Mobi-Hub and the museum at either end.
- Install a tourist information map at the train station and signage to the High Street and the Castle.
- Wildflower planting of verges along Stamford Road to ease the transition from open countryside.
- Review the style and placement of furniture and signage in the small square in front of the library to identify opportunities to simplify and coordinate the overall impression.

Medium Term:

- Sensitively located signs to denote the eastern and western gateways to the town centre.
- Install planters and sign boards around the station to soften the first impression for visitors.
- Scoping study to review pedestrian connectivity across the south end of Station Road (at Melton Road), possibly involving a wider traffic island, variation in surface treatment or reducing the width of the carriageway at Northgate.
- Review opportunities to minimize the visual impact of highways signage near heritage assets around the Barleythorpe Road level crossing.
- Clean cobbles, refresh planters, coordinate street furniture and remove old or duplicated signage around the Catmos Street - Burley Road roundabout, relocating bins to the back of the pavement.
- Replace the white-painted island of the Catmos Street - Burley Road roundabout with cobbles to match those in the surrounding pavement, coupled with a slight elevation to maintain lower travel speeds.

Long Term:

- Clean cobbles, renew planters, coordinate street furniture and remove old or duplicated signage around the Catmos Street - Stamford Road roundabout, relocating bins to the back of the pavement.
- Replace the white-painted island of the Catmos Street - Stamford Road roundabout with cobbles to match those in the surrounding pavement and possibly some central planting to reduce the sense of openness.
- Introduce a pedestrian crossing at the museum entrance on Catmos Street to provide a threshold to the town centre and facilitate access between the museum and the car park at Catmose House.
- Through engagement with stakeholders, upgrade the main entrance to the station with new surfaces, furniture, signage, lighting, cycle stands and lockers.

Possible ways this could be achieved:

Short Term:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Campaign to increase awareness of the mental, physical and community benefits of active travel with maps of existing routes - the Town Walk, Oakham Loop and the Rutland Circular. • Identify dedicated 3km and 5km routes that could be used for a regular parkwalk or parkrun event. • Consultation with stakeholders to review the impact of level crossing closures on High Street connectivity. • Review pedestrian and cycle access between the Mobi-Hub and the train station, particularly for those with impaired access or carrying luggage. • Review opportunities with stakeholders to maximise print and digital awareness of local and regional bus, shuttle and train connectivity.
Medium Term:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop an advertising campaign to promote Oakham's one- and two-day visitor offers at train stations with direct connections - particularly those in centres with a more urban character. • Trial an expansion of the Hopper services to provide three or four services per day to Rutland Water and nearby tourism offers during the summer. • Trial monthly parkwalk and parkrun events on Saturday or Sunday mornings, starting and ending at a central location (engagement with local retailers and services for promotion). • Increase awareness of the Braunston Road-South Street bridge as an alternative route to the level crossings. • Trial a programme of adult and child cycling proficiency courses for a fixed period.
Long Term:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual Oakham half-marathon on a dedicated route around the town centre and Rutland Water. • With stakeholders, upgrade the station's western entrance to provide a more direct link to the Mobi-Hub. • Review opportunities for a second foot and cycle bridge between Land's End Way and Kilburn Road. • Incorporate stops for taxis, bus and Hopper services along Station Road. • Installation of small brass horseshoe studs in surfaces along a circular walk of the centre or the High Street. • Engage with stakeholders to upgrade the main entrance to the station with more amenities. • Extension of dedicated foot and cycle routes between the town centre and Rutland Water. • Identification of potential operators and sites for a subsidised health & fitness club at the edge of the centre.

Possible ways this could be achieved:

Short Term:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initiate a review of the type, quantum and availability of overnight accommodation in the town centre. • Identify opportunities for targeted promotions based on the offer and visitor demographics, for instance, cycling, food and drink and wellness magazines and posters at the train stations of cities with direct services. • Coordinate the messaging and branding of the core offer with partners to ensure consistency. • Establish a communications steering group where key stakeholders and partners can share details of offers and events in advance to coordinate promotion and organise synergic activities. • Engagement with stakeholders to provide temporary locations for tour coaches to drop-off, wait and collect. • Review opportunities to improve the availability of taxis at weekends, on public holidays and in the summer.
Medium Term:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engagement with nighttime economy offers to establish popularity at different times/ days and if there are any aspects that are deterring or prohibiting customers. • Trial a poster campaign to promote Oakham's offer at a couple of mainline train stations with direct services. • Trial a targeted campaign in a couple of print publications that are relative to Rutland and Oakham's USP. • Build a one-, two- and three-day programme of activities with transport links to out-of-town destinations. • Review opportunities to host regional and nationally recognised events with a particular relevance to the town and county's history and offer – for instance, Norman/ medieval history, food and drink and cycling. • Secure Purple Flag accreditation to demonstrate a safe nighttime economy. • Engagement with large out of-town hospitality offers to see if there would be demand to extend the Hopper service at peak seasonal times. • With operators, review the times of bus and train services to ensure these support the nighttime economy.
Long Term:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop physical and interactive digital maps (linked to a main website) chronicling the involvement of prominent figures – Sir Giles Gilbert Scott, John Louis Petit, Samuel and Titus Oates, Sir Jeffrey Hudson etc. • With stakeholders and operators, establish dedicated a loading and waiting area for tour coaches at a location at the edge of the town centre that is close to a public convenience. • Engagement with nearby academic institutions to establish a college with a focus on hospitality and tourism.

5. Action Areas

Action – or priority - areas represent locations where catalyst investment will have the greatest impact.

These might be locations that are strategically located, particularly visible or have high levels of footfall. Overall, the following five action area have been identified for focus over the Plan period:

1

Market Place

The heart of the town and community - most regular and first-time visitors to the town centre will probably pass through the Market Place at least once.

2

Church Street - High Street - Gaol Street junction

Formerly outside of the city gates, the intersection of these routes represents an important node at a mid-point along the High Street. Strengthening this will encourage footfall along the High Street and on connecting roads to create a more expansive town centre experience and extend dwell times. It will also encourage movement towards the Braunston Road – South Street bridge as an alternative route to the level crossings.

3

Catmos Street - Burley Road roundabout

This is the first impression of the High Street and Market Place when arriving from the south and east. It is also an important node for encouraging a wider circuit of activity along Mill Street and Burley Road.

4

Catmos Street - Stamford Road roundabout

The gateway to Oakham from the south and east - at the end of the gentle, tree-lined sweep of Stamford Road, it also represents the transition from the countryside to the town.

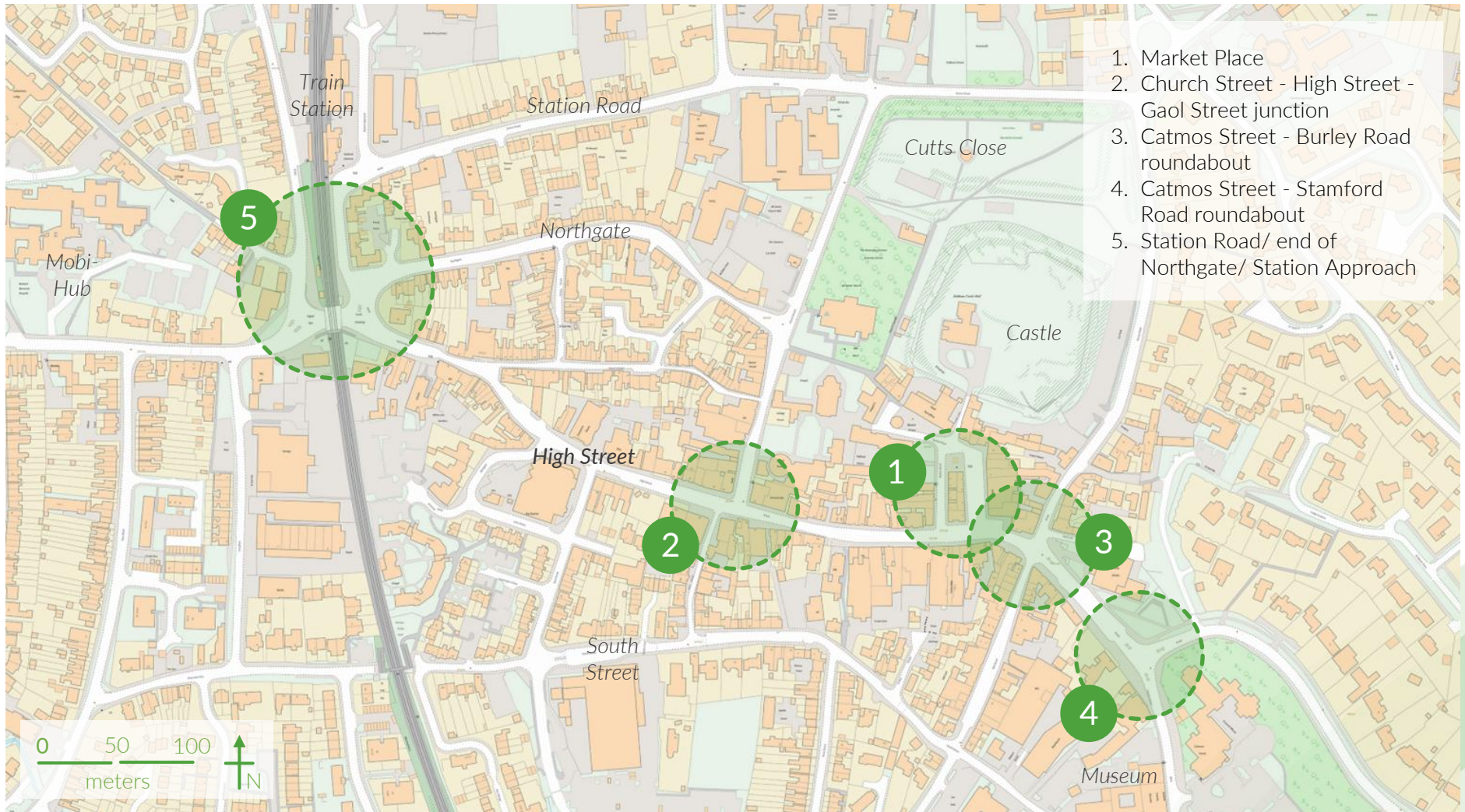
5

Station Road/ end of Northgate/ Station Approach

This area represents the northern and western gateway to the centre and is the first impression for those arriving from the train station and the Mobi-Hub. Given the significance of sustainable mobility for reducing congestion and carbon emissions, coupled with Rutland's cycling, health and wellness offer, the western end of the town centre is likely to experience greater arrivals over time, possibly becoming the most used gateway to the centre in the future.

A plan showing the distribution of action areas across the centre is included on the following page.

5. Action Areas



Above: Plan of the five town centre action areas.

6. Delivery

Town centres are complex places with many interrelated aspects, so there is rarely a silver bullet for place shaping – a single intervention that will immediately resolve all blockages and capture all opportunities.

Instead, sustainable change occurs gradually, often involving the reversal of trends that have built-up over years – sometimes decades.

Fortunately, physical and social indicators show that the centre is already operating effectively – there is a diverse mix of retail activities, a strong leisure and services offer, vacancy rates are below the national average and footfall is evenly spread. Additionally, the historic core is well preserved and supplemented by an enviable collection of heritage aspects, many of which are of National significance.

In this respect, there is certainly no requirement for a major overhaul of existing conditions and transformation can occur incrementally through developing some of the programmes and initiatives that are included in this Plan.

Successful place shaping also requires the contribution of all stakeholders – residents, community and commerce groups, private landowners and local authorities, all working together with a common objective. The importance of an integrated and collaborative approach is recognised by the town and county councils through the preparation of this shared vision.



View of the Butter Cross (17th C.) and All Saints Church (15th C.) – both Grade I listed – from Market Place.

Source: Discover Rutland



The collection of horseshoes – a unique feature of Oakham's history and heritage – on display at the Castle.

Source: Placemake

6. Delivery

Once adopted, the Plan will be used to:

- Establish a common goal and objectives for all public and private stakeholders that have an involvement in the town centre.
- Undertake community consultation on particular initiatives.
- Identify possible funding mechanisms, grants, investors, operators and delivery partners.
- Support funding and grant applications.
- Focus attention on areas that will have the greatest immediate impact.

It should be echoed that it is not the objective to deliver all of the programmes that are listed in the Action Plan at the same time – this would be unreasonable owing to budget and technical constraints, together with the logistics of implementing transformational strategies with multiple stakeholders.

Rather, the Plan identifies some interventions that could be initiated (and hopefully realised) in the short-, medium- and long-term and provides the basis for further engagement, funding and study to develop these.

For any comments on the possible programmes and initiatives that are identified in this document, please send an email to the address that is noted on the back page or contact either the Town Clerk at Oakham Town Council or the Economic Development team at Rutland County Council.



A view towards the High Street and Market Place from the small square in front of the library.
Source: Placemake



The approach to the Castle from the Butter Cross.
Source: Placemake

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March 2025



Rutland County Council

Catmose House
Catmos Street
Oakham LE15 0SN

Tel. 01572 722577
www.rutland.gov.uk



Oakham Town Council

Rol House
Long Row
Oakham LE15 6LN

Tel. 01572 723627
www.oakhamtowncouncil.gov.uk

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