



*Basingstoke
and Deane*



Top of the Town, Basingstoke

**Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council
Department of Planning, Environment and Transport
January 2002**

Introduction

The 'Framework for Action', revised in the autumn of 2001, establishes a vision for the future of the Top of the Town area as follows:

'The Top of the Town should develop its special appeal as an attractive, lively and accessible area, with specialist and independent retailers, cultural facilities, a strong evening economy and a distinctive character'

This Streetscape Manual will help realise the vision by appraising the area. It sets out ideas for co-ordinating design and choice of materials for the streets, pavements

and public spaces. Its aim is to improve the appearance of the area for the benefit of customers and businesses, and encourage economic growth and competitiveness.

Consultation took place in the summer of 2000. This involved targeted consultation with local groups, and a public exhibition. Over 100 responses were received, setting out broad support for the manual.



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Top of the Town in the Nineteenth Century

Basingstoke has evolved from a small market town to a thriving urban economic centre. The fabric of the town has seen tremendous change, and it now has a variety of characteristics. The Top of the Town is the only area that remains of the historic commercial centre of Basingstoke. It is still recognisable by its street pattern and narrow plots, which give a vertical emphasis to the street scene.

There are many listed buildings dating from the 17th to 19th centuries on London Street, Wote Street, Church Street, Cross Street and Winton Square. These buildings are of historic importance. However, many other buildings from the 19th and 20th centuries also make

an important contribution to the area. There is a huge variety of styles among the traditional buildings of the Top of the Town. Common features can be found, such as brickwork patterns, arched windows, wooden framed sliding sash or casement windows, chimneys, and detailing of the façade relating to the buildings' importance. Common materials are brick, timber frame and render or stucco.

In 1977 the area was designated as the Basingstoke Old Town Centre Conservation Area. This was in recognition that the remaining part of the historic town centre had a character and value that should be conserved.



Market Place 1903



Winchester Street 1880



London Street 1880

Top of the Town in the Twenty-first Century

The Top of the Town is a major resource for the town as a whole - both for the businesses and services it accommodates, and as a reminder of the heritage of Basingstoke.

It has a well-established character, which distinguishes it from the rest of the town centre. Recent changes, have included the repaving of Wote Street and Church Street, and the introduction of new lighting columns. This demonstrates a continuing commitment to invest in the area, and ensures that it remains an attractive, accessible and safe place in which to shop, work, live or spend leisure time.

One of the major aims of the vision for the Top of the Town is that it should appear cared for - clean, tidy and well-maintained. Streets should be inviting to pedestrians, and deter crime. This is an essential element in encouraging further business expansion and employment.

When replacing any paving or street furniture, it is essential

that only appropriate and good quality materials are used. The quality and design of new development will also need to be carefully controlled, to prevent erosion of the area's historic character.

In addition to the physical appearance of the area, the Framework for Action identifies a number of other issues, which will be important to the continued success of the Top of the Town. For example;

- Encouragement of new uses (such as residential accommodation above shops) will add to the vitality of the area at all times of day.
- The emphasis on sustainable methods of transport is likely to have an effect on the Top of the Town over coming years. In order to ensure its continued vitality and competitiveness, the issues of transport and movement, and access for all, should be given a high priority.



The market is an important part of the vitality of the Top of the Town



London Street through the Gateway



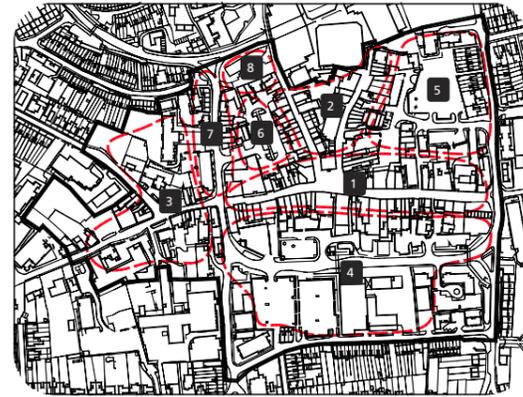
Traffic in Winton Square - the emphasis on sustainable methods of transport is likely to have an effect on the Top of the Town in the future

Appraisal of External Areas

The Top of the Town can be divided into several different character zones.

1. The main pedestrianised area of London Street and Winchester Street, with their historic buildings, and the Market Place.
2. Wote Street and Church Street are both pedestrianised, but narrower and sloping, with modern buildings as part of the street scene.
3. Winton Square is more traffic dominated, and in need of environmental improvement.
4. The New Road car parks area - Albert Yard, Caston's Yard and Jacob's Yard - are characterised by backs of buildings and pedestrian railings. All need tidying up, and routes through to London Street and Winchester Street need enhancing.

5. The Central Car Park is an interface between the London Street and Wote Street areas of the Top of the Town, and the new Festival Place development. Currently, it consists of primarily car parking and backs of properties. It has good links to shopping areas.
6. Joices Yard is another car park and yard area with untidy backs of properties, but good links to the shopping areas.
7. New Street is traffic dominated and because it is on the edge of the area, there is little to draw pedestrians along it. It is in need of some tidying up, particularly shopfront improvement.
8. Cross Street is quiet (in terms of pedestrian movement) and under-used. It has well-kept buildings on one side, and public art and landscaping on the other.



A map showing the Top of the Town study boundary and the different character zones of the Top of the Town



New Street



Church Street

Moving around the Top of the Town

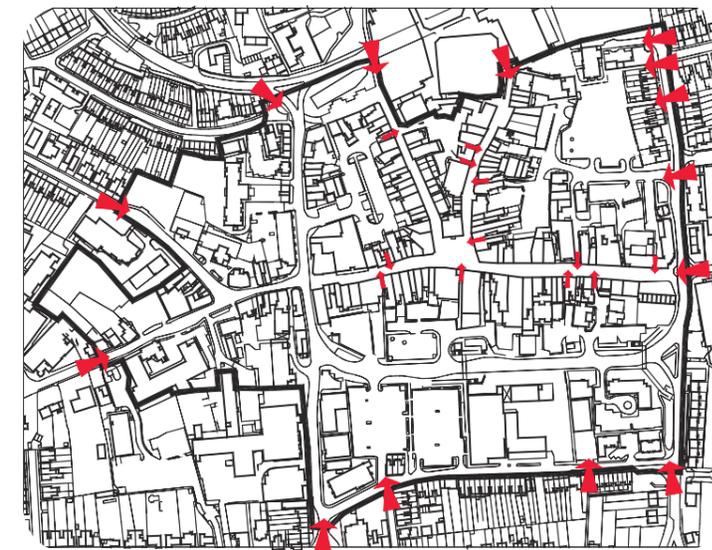
The Top of the Town has its own very distinct character and boundaries. It can be approached from many different directions, but it is immediately apparent when arriving in the area. Some of the pedestrian routes into the area are attractive and well cared for, but others are in need of improvement.



Jacobs Alley could benefit from some improvements, just taking away this low, apparently redundant wall would open up the route, and a new surface would guide people through



These three pictures show the pedestrian route from Jacobs Yard car park, through Mark Lane to London Street. To improve the route, a change in surface could guide the way through the short cut. The bins could be housed in the bin store, and parking and signage tidied up.



A map showing pedestrian routes into, and through, the Top of the Town



Victoria Street - a lesser used but well overlooked and cared for alleyway

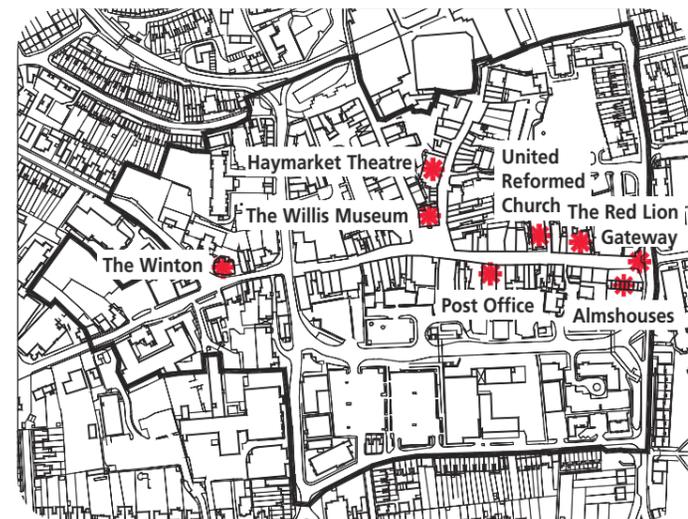
Local Landmarks and Focal Points

The gateway, the Almshouses, the United Reformed Church, the Willis Museum and the Haymarket Theatre, and other landmarks help form a unique identity for the Top of the Town. They provide links with Basingstoke's past and also help visitors and residents find their way around.

Focal points, such as the areas outside the Post Office, Market Place, and public art also add to the identity of the area.

The appearance of all these details has greater relevance because they provide the setting for important landmark buildings.

Shop-fronts and shop signs provide added interest, and there is an opportunity for them to be examples of art and craftsmanship in their own right.



A map showing landmarks in the Top of the Town



The Almshouses - shabby street furniture in the foreground spoils the setting of these listed buildings



The Winton (formerly the Wheatsheaf) in Winton Square - unfortunately traffic dominated



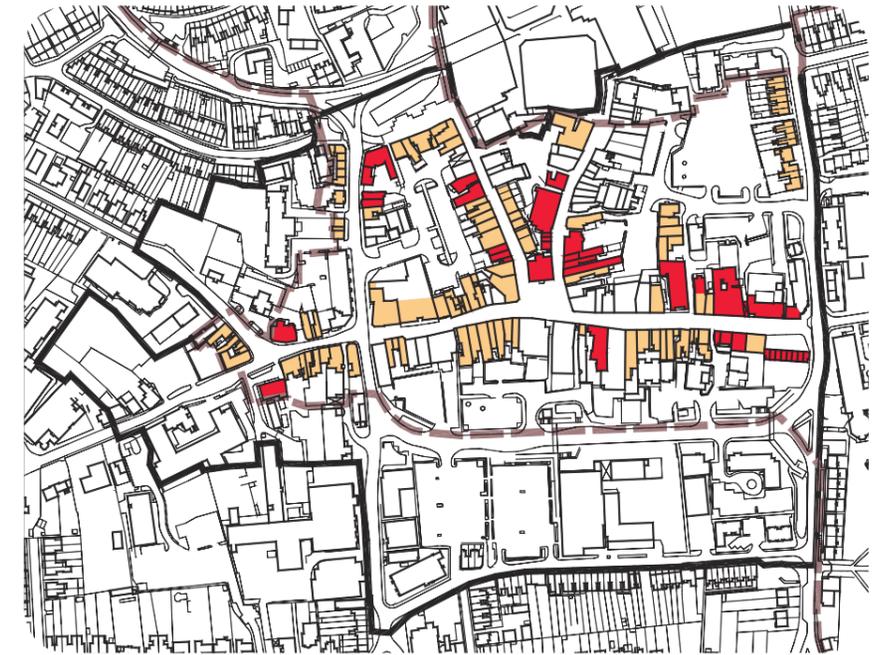
The area outside the Post Office is a hub of activity with its benches, telephone kiosks and post boxes



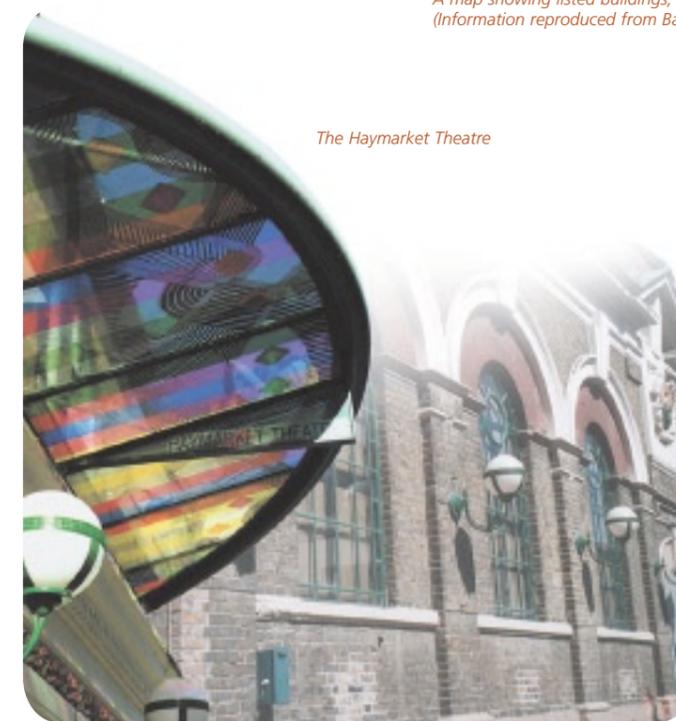
The Willis Museum in Market Place is possibly the most significant building in the Top of the Town

Conservation Area and Listed Buildings

Most of the Top of the Town area is part of the 'Basingstoke Town Conservation Area' (denoted by the brown dashed line) because of the special architectural and historic interest. Listed buildings (shown in red) contribute significantly to the character. There are also many notable unlisted buildings (shown in yellow).



A map showing listed buildings, notable unlisted buildings and the Conservation Area. (Information reproduced from Basingstoke Town Conservation Area Appraisal, 1999)



The Haymarket Theatre



Natwest Bank



The Feathers Pub

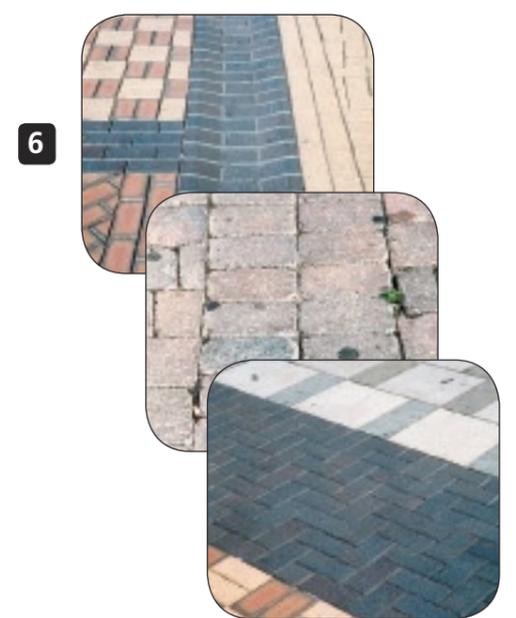
Positive Attributes

- 1 Original street nameplate
- 2 Decorative gates and railings contribute positively to the streetscene, as well as performing a function
- 3 Tables and chairs outside in the summertime
- 4 Imposing buildings with strong features
- 5 Features such as this drinking fountain
- 6 3D Fascia design
- 7 Flower baskets that are well kept and do not interfere with architectural detail
- 8 Independent, individual shopfront



Negative Attributes

- 1 Surfaces which attract graffiti need to be regularly cleaned
- 2 Large cumbersome poles used for CCTV cameras attract flyposters
- 3 Size of the planter is out of scale for the type of planting
- 4 Standard 'Victoriana' style plastic bin
- 5 How necessary is this 'No Entry' sign in a pedestrianised street with limited vehicular access?
- 6 Many different materials, colours and styles of paving



Other Issues



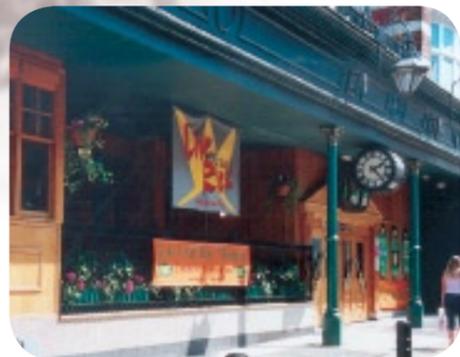
Both these buildings back onto car parks, New Road and footpaths through to the town centre. In areas that are open to the public. The rear of the buildings are just as important as the fronts. Some businesses have taken the opportunity to tidy up and utilise the space to the rear of their premises by laying out tables and chairs for their customers, thus contributing to, rather than detracting from the public domain.



Bicycles left locked to railings or furniture may indicate a lack of cycle parking facilities. To encourage people to use their bikes, adequate and convenient cycle parking facilities need to be provided at several different locations throughout the Top of the Town



Well used, covered cycle parking facilities at the bottom of Church street



Excessive advertisements can detract from the pleasant frontage of this establishment

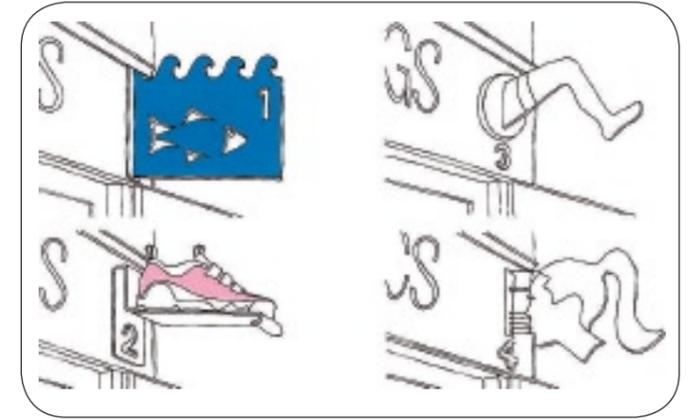
Shopfronts and Advertisement Control

Shopfronts are an important part of the street scene. They should visually relate to the overall design of the building. Changes to the façades of town centre buildings are sometimes inevitable and often necessary. Such changes should respect the traditional architectural and historical character of the street scene. The

new shop front will be expected to contribute to the existing architectural character of the area.

Further advice and guidance on the design of shopfronts is contained in the Council's adopted, 'Shopfronts and Advertisements' design guide.

The street section on



Three dimensional shop signs can be pieces of art and craftwork in themselves. They can add interest to the streetscene, especially in an independent shopping area



Large plastic brightly coloured fascia boards and shop signs detract from the overall building and do little to add to the attractiveness of the street scene



Good quality shopfronts with painted or relief lettering add more to the character of the area



Environmental Improvements

Pavements form the foreground to nearly every scene. Therefore, worn and uneven paving, together with litter and neglected fly posters spoil the appearance of an area. Uneven paving can also present a tripping hazard. The task of maintaining the streetscene should, therefore, be given a high priority.

In addition to an improved standard of maintenance, environmental improvements

are necessary in order that the area's cultural identity is recognised. They should enhance the character of the area, as well as attract people to use the services and facilities it has to offer.

The types of improvements that have been identified are repaving, replacement of street furniture, and tree planting. Such improvements will have to be phased, as and when funding becomes available.

An imaginary street in need of more care



The same street but following environmental improvements and removal of street clutter



Graffiti needs to be regularly cleaned off



Signposts need to be kept pointing in the right direction, free from stickers, and at a height above arms length, so they cannot be swung on



The appearance of these functional railings could be

Access and Movement

the right shows how the pedestrianised streets in the Top of the Town could be zoned to provide a clear, clutter-free route down the middle. Street cafes and 'A' boards could be confined to the edges, and street furniture used to demarcate the boundaries.

Clutter-free zones are very important for wheelchair users and the visually impaired. They help them move about freely, without risk of bumping into obstacles.

Further advice and guidance on designing external public areas can be found in the Council's adopted guide, 'Designing for Accessibility'.

Paving

Quality in the design and construction of pavements often sets the tone for an area. High standards of workmanship in the laying of paving materials is essential.

The appearance of traditional private access crossings over a pavement often adds to

the visual interest of a road. This characteristic can still be retained, even if a continuous smooth surface is required, by raising the level of the crossover to the level of the pavement. It has the added advantage of reminding drivers that they should give way to pedestrians on the pavement.

Paving materials to be considered for use in the Top of the Town should generally include:

- Purbeck Stone
- Yorkstone
- 'Tegula' concrete pavours

For smaller decorative areas:

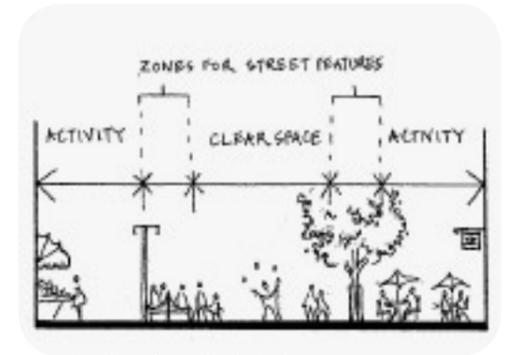
Cobbles, flint and bricks across entrances (stack bond and stretcher bond) or granite setts (single or multiple rows)

Kerbs:

Stone (granite/mudstone)
'Conservation' Kerbs

Walls:

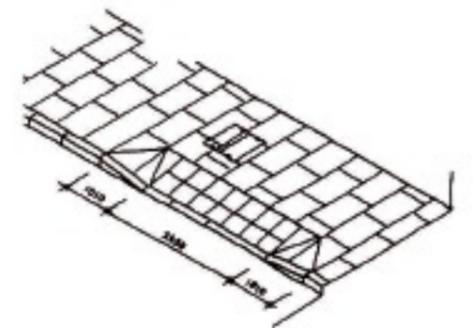
Brick and flint - with brick coping and hooped or vertical iron railings.



Section through a pedestrianised street



To reduce the discomfort of wheelchair users, the upstand should be no more than 6mm and preferably level



The construction of dropped kerbs has to accommodate the needs of people with disabilities and pushchairs

Street Furniture Ideas

These ideas are not meant to be prescriptive, just examples of the type of quality and individuality that can be achieved, particularly if artists are commissioned to design street furniture, lighting and paving.



Example of a 'joined up approach' to street furniture



Seating designed as a feature



An example of lighting columns that are a contemporary interpretation of a traditional style



Distinctive seating



Detail of a design in iron railings



Attractive containers for trees



Paving Ideas



An example of well laid and good quality Yorkstone paving



An example of 'conservation' kerbs, gutter detailing and good quality workmanship



A good example of paving in a narrow street or alleyway



An example of how interesting paving patterns can be achieved picking out a well used route



Well laid paving with good detailing and an unusual size and unit type



Above and below - cobbles and setts used as detailing around bollards



Streetscape Manual



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE



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