

## **2            The Site**

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- 2.1        The site is identified in Figure 1, of this report.
- 2.2        The opportunity site is linear in character stretching north to south through the centre of Hemel Hempstead. It is situated at the base of a valley, which rises steeply east and west.
- 2.3        The main retail focus of Hemel Hempstead lies to the south of Market Square and includes a pedestrianised “High Street”, known as the Marlowes, as well as a covered shopping centre of the same name. A food supermarket, Asda, is located adjacent to the retail area. However, it is virtually invisible from the Marlowes.
- 2.4        Within, and close to the two key sites of the existing Civic site and Market Square, there are three separate “campus” zones. A civic quarter incorporates the Civic Centre as well as a Public Library, Police Station, Magistrates Court and Health Centre. To the north, is the Dacorum campus of West Herts College; and to the east of the area is the Hemel Hempstead Hospital site.
- 2.5        Located at the northern end of the spine is the core of the old town with its traditional High Street, which retains a secondary retail function and focus of leisure A3 uses.
- 2.6        Car parking is provided in several locations around the perimeter of the central area offering a total of approximately 2500 car parking spaces (see Figure 4).

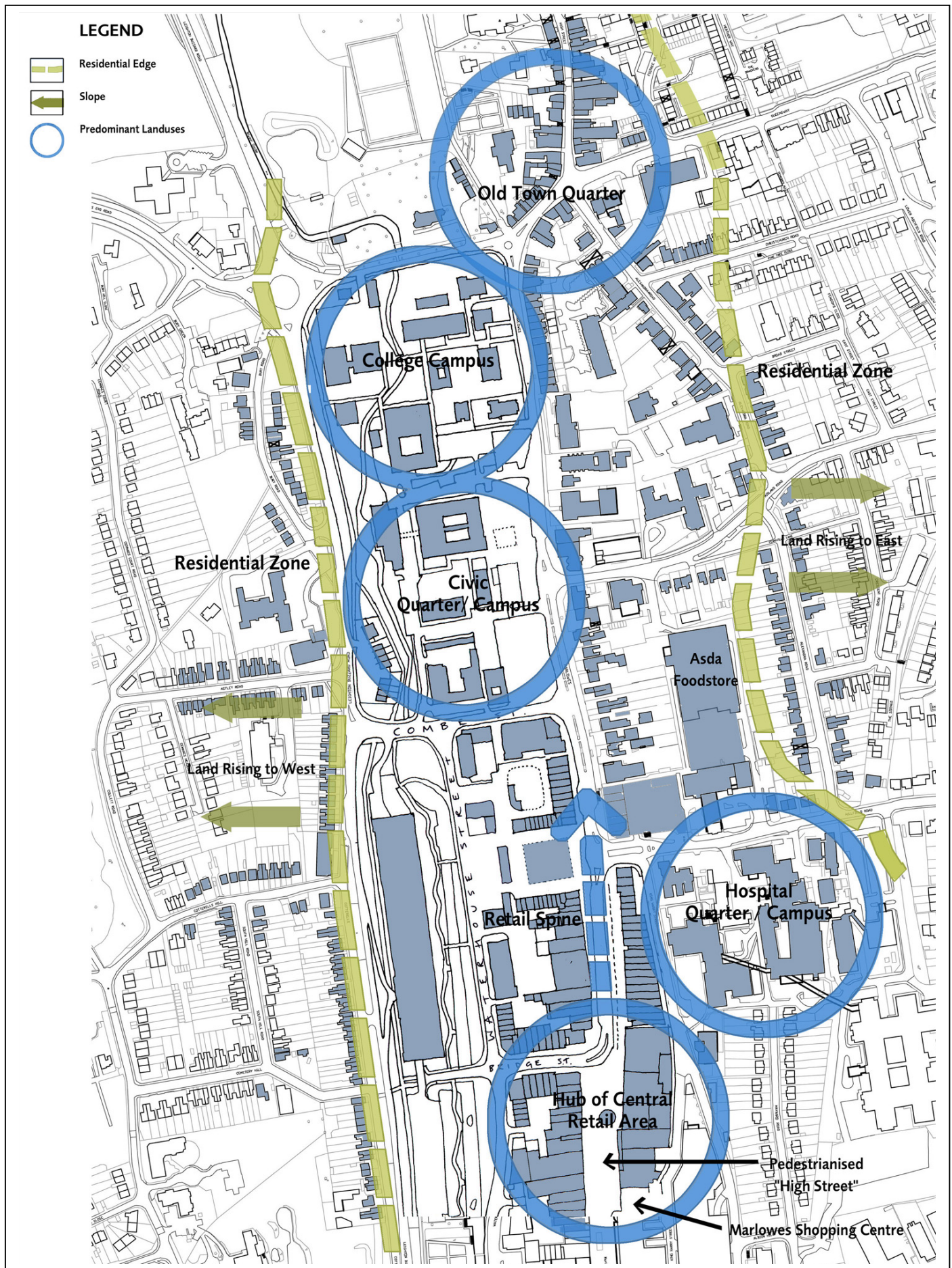


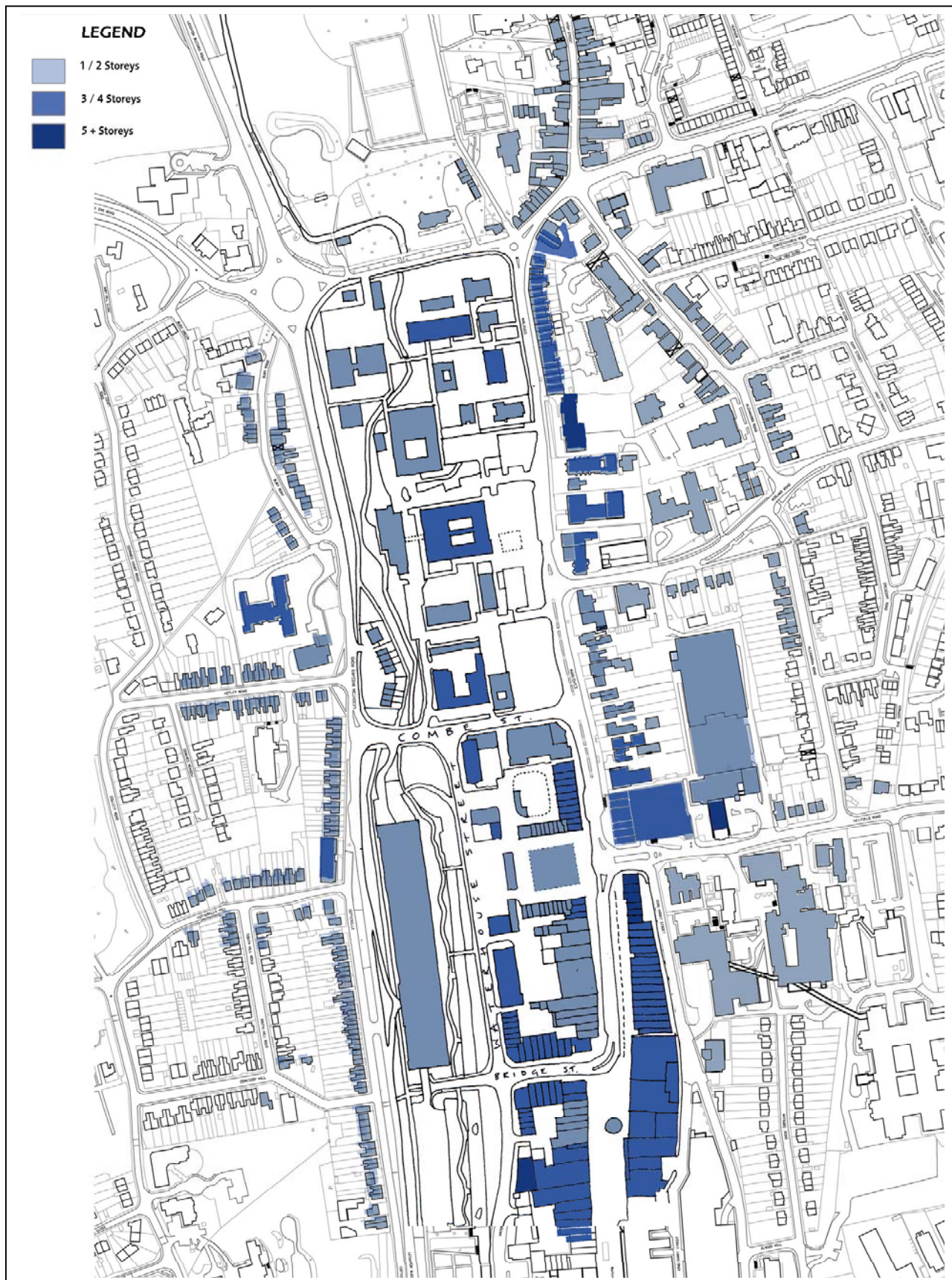
Figure 2 – Land Use Patterns

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- 2.7 The scale and density of the development within the area is characterised by predominantly two, three and four storey development, even within the central core of the town centre. There are however a number of taller buildings located within the DBA and nearby to it.
- 2.8 Whilst the retail area of the Marlowes has a well defined, albeit rather broad and open, streetscape, the two campus areas of the Civic and College quarters form an ill-defined and very weak edge to the street. This is due to both the low-rise nature of the buildings, their general lack of architectural merit and the siting of individual buildings within a bland and featureless landscaped setting. Service access roads and car parking areas fragment the two sites further, resulting in a disjointed network of pedestrian routes between and around buildings and a general lack of legibility and clarity of internal site circulation.
- 2.9 As a contrast the western boundary to the area is defined by the watercourse, associated open space and tree planting, which provides a buffer and softens views from the A4146, Leighton Buzzard Road.
- 2.10 The DBA is lacking in landmark buildings or features. However, those feature which are evident, include:
- The town centre;
  - Views into the site
  - The old town, including significant views to the spire of St Mary's Parish Church;
  - The sides of the valley to east and west of the central core of the town;
  - Listed buildings adjacent to the DBA;
  - The taller buildings, which although undistinguished architecturally are inevitably visually more prominent; and
  - The watercourse and the mature vegetation alongside it that forms a distinctive edge to the western side of the study area.
- 2.11 In the past, the DBA has been developed in an ad-hoc basis over a significant period of time. This has resulted in the present lack of identity and cohesion between the various uses and is a classic example of how 'piece-meal' development and the absence of a comprehensive masterplan can have a detrimental impact on the character and appearance of an area. As a consequence, the site provides an opportunity to achieve a comprehensive development that will transform this part of Hemel Hempstead and give it real identity.







- 2.12 The area covered for the purpose of this SPD includes the Civic site and Market Square as set out in the Council's Town Centre Strategy document.

### **Civic Site**

- 2.13 The Civic site includes a range of uses comprising the Civic Centre, health centre and educational and professional uses and housing.
- 2.14 The existing Civic site area is architecturally undistinguished and lacking in character. There is poor legibility, permeability and internal circulation. Furthermore, the new residential development in the south-west corner of the site is poorly related to the surrounding area.
- 2.15 To the west of the existing Civic site there is a physical and visual barrier created by Leighton Buzzard Road with residential development beyond. To the north, the layout of the College campus is weak and fragmented. To the east there is a strong north-south axis created by the Marlowes. To the south of the existing Civic site, Combe Street has little identity. The Police Station and library front on to the road.
- 2.16 Constraints to the use of the Civic site include the retention of the existing watercourse and vegetation and the poor quality setting adjacent to the college site.

### **Market Square**

- 2.17 The Market Square comprises low-density development incorporating a bus station and market area. The site lies at the northern end of the main retail core of the Town Centre and affords good access/linkages for vehicles and pedestrians between the two locations.
- 2.18 To the west of the site there is a linear park which is severed from the shopping area by Waterhouse Street. To the north and south there is low-rise retail development fronting onto the market area and to the east Market Square fronts onto the strong north-south axis of the Marlowes.
- 2.19 The low-rise, low-density buildings adjacent to and facing into the site do little to add to the character of the town centre. Due to the nature of the existing buildings within the Market Square, this area provides a significant opportunity for redevelopment and the creation of landmark buildings and features built round a high quality public space.



### **Principal Circulation Routes and Car Parking**

- 2.20 Figure 4 provides details on the existing principal circulation routes within the DBA. The plan demonstrates that pedestrian-only movements within the DBA are limited to a few identified and marked routes. Furthermore, the route on the north south axis has no direct linkage with the old town.
- 2.21 In terms of vehicular movements, the principal vehicular circulation provides linkages to various parts of the rest of the town. The main routes allow vehicular access into the majority of the town centre.
- 2.22 Car parking spaces are also shown on the plan over, demonstrating that there are a number of significant car parking areas within the DBA.

### **Landmarks and Features**

- 2.23 Figure 5 provides details of the landmarks and features within the site.
- 2.24 Running to the west of the DBA is the River Gade. This is considered to be an important feature of the area. Alongside the river is a line of mature vegetation, as identified above, this vegetation is an important screen between the town centre and the residential development to the west.
- 2.25 There are a number of tall buildings (i.e. over 4 storeys) on the edge of the DBA as identified on Figure 5.
- 2.26 The figure identifies that there are long views from the town centre to the church spire within the old town. This is considered to be an important visual link and consequently should be retained and built upon.
- 2.27 At present the main route, particularly for vehicular traffic, is between the old town and the town centre is achieved via the Marlowes.

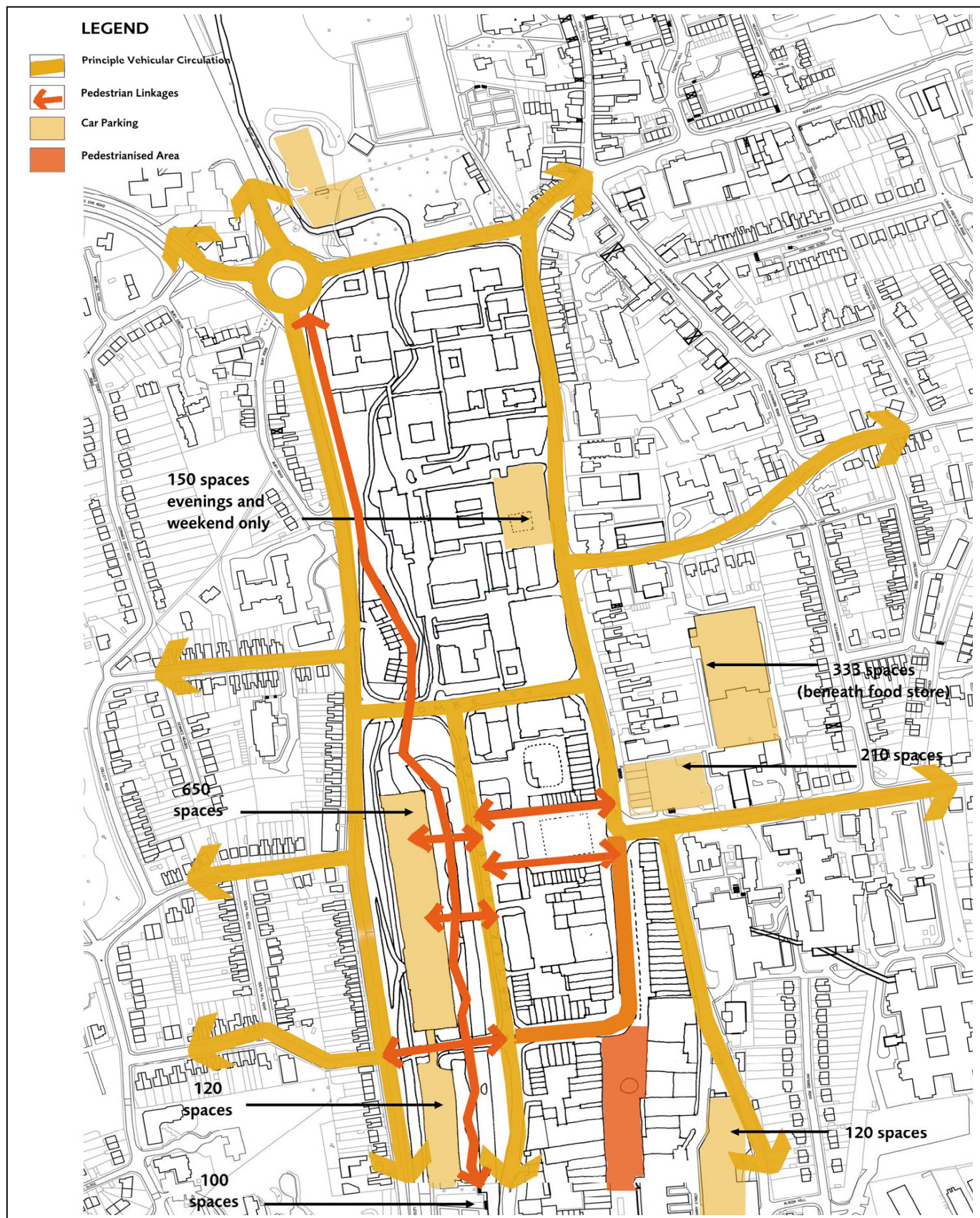


Figure 4 Existing Circulation Routes and Car Parking

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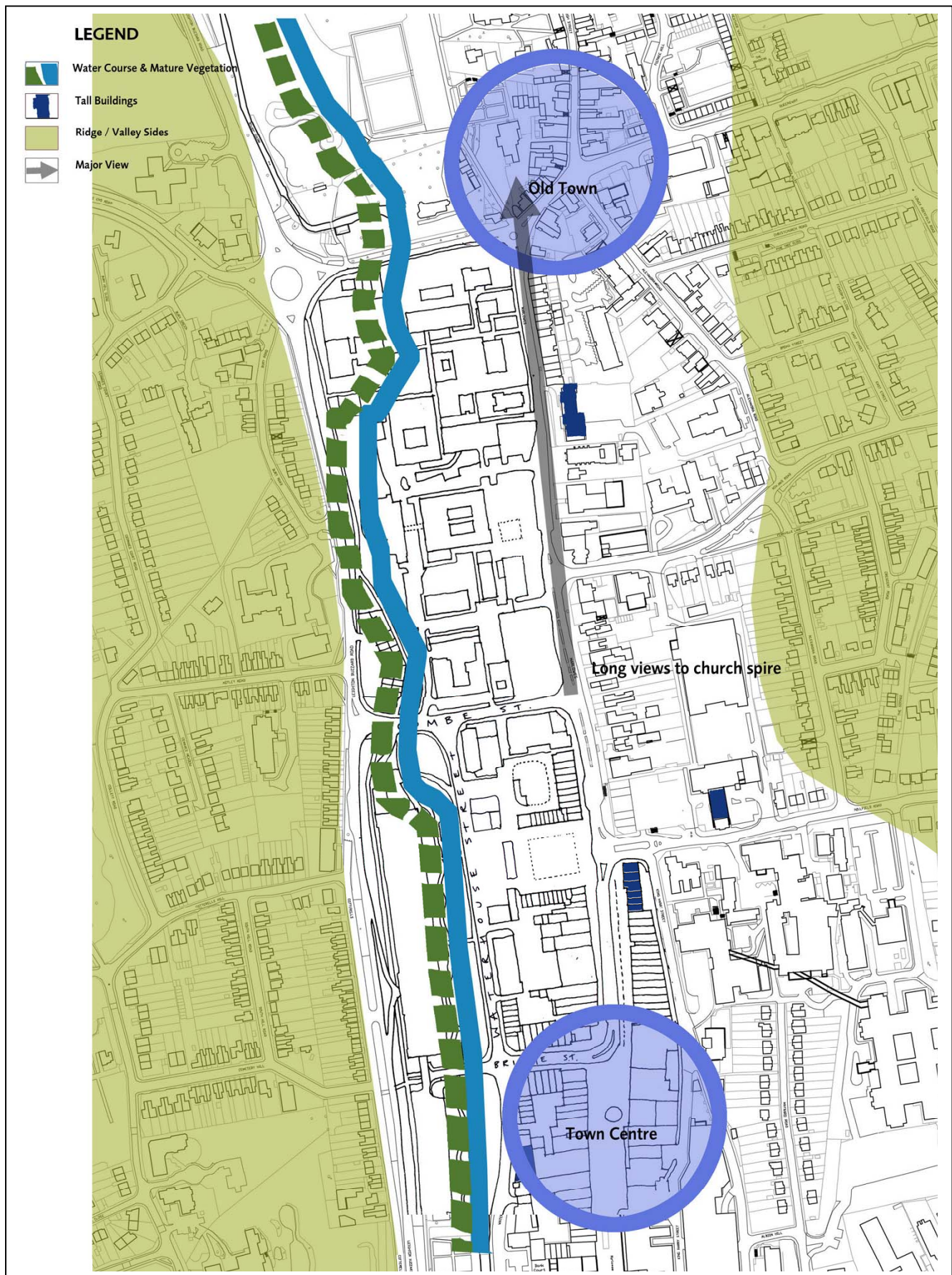


Figure 5  
Landmarks / Features

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## **Opportunities**

2.28 Comprehensive redevelopment will transform Hemel Hempstead and as a result of the review undertaken above, the opportunities for the site are considered to be:

- Improving the streetscape;
- Improving the townscape character;
- Improving legibility;
- Improving the market area with a landmark building;
- Improving pedestrian movements;
- Ensuring the visual link with St Mary's Church spire and the old town is retained and built upon; and
- Enhancing the River Gade