

CONTINUITY AND ENCLOSURE

BUILDING ORIENTATION

Active building frontages can be a key factor in the success of a commercial street, providing both vitality and 'eyes on the street'. A site survey was conducted to establish which buildings fronted onto the High Street, the Marlowes, Waterhouse Street and the cross streets.

Waterhouse Street

Waterhouse Street has several inactive frontages which have a negative impact on the vitality of the street. While some buildings have minor entrances on Waterhouse Street - such as Woolworth's - the architectural effect is one of neglect.

Marlowes

Buildings clearly front onto the Marlowes even when they are set back from the street.

High Street

Buildings clearly front onto the High Street. The buildings were designed with entryways to allow stagecoaches and market deliveries to park and unload in the rear.

Cross Streets (Bridge Street and Combe Street)

Bridge Street has entirely active frontages, creating an active block perimeter. Combe Street has few active frontages.

KEY ISSUES

CE4: BUILDING ORIENTATION

CE4A

Waterhouse Street operates primarily as a service street for the Marlowes and has few active frontages.

CE4B

Both the Marlowes and the High Street have almost entirely active frontages along their length.

CE4C

Bridge Street has active frontages, creating a positive block perimeter.

CE4D

Combe Street has few active frontages, and the existing frontages are for institutional buildings.



1



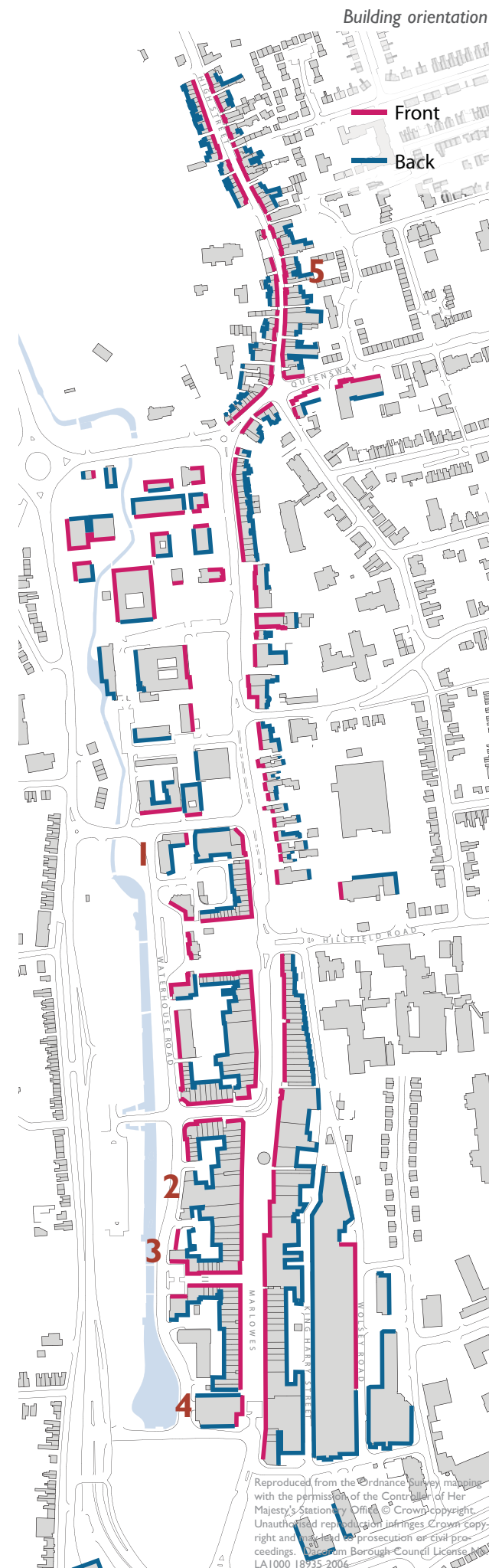
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CONTINUITY AND ENCLOSURE DESIGNATED OPEN LAND

The urban area of Hemel Hempstead extends onto the high ground surrounding the river valleys. As a result, much of Hemel Hempstead and its open spaces are undulating.

Hemel Hempstead has numerous areas of designated open land. Some of these spaces have been designated open spaces since the early twentieth century, such as Gadebridge Park (1) which has sites of historical interest and (what was then called) Highfield (2). Gadebridge Park was purchased by Hemel Hempstead Borough Council in 1952.

Many of the open spaces became designated during the construction of the Hemel New Town neighbourhoods. Initial concepts of the 'neighbourhood unit' typically asserted that each neighbourhood should have five acres of open land associated with a primary school. While Hemel Hempstead does not rigidly follow this principle, many of the neighbourhood open spaces have schools contained within them. The area now referred to as Highfield Park, which has a primary school in it, is approximately 6.5 acres.

There is a significant footpath that has been developed along the defunct Nicky Line which runs from the north-east edge of the town toward Highfield Park (4). Boxmoor forms another significant area of open land just north of the train station (5). The area along the Water Gardens is not designated as open land within the Local Plan (6).

KEY ISSUES

CE5: DESIGNATED OPEN LAND

CE5A

There are key areas of open land which have sites of historical interest.

CE5B

Many of the open spaces in the neighbourhoods have schools in them and conform to the initial 'neighbourhood unit' principles of being at least five acres.

CE5C

Boxmoor forms a significant area of open land that bridges the Town Centre and the station.

CE5D

The Water Gardens and adjacent green space are not officially designated open land.



N.B. green shading signifies green belt as well as designated open land

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MAKING CONNECTIONS LAND USE

The land use drawing to the right classifies each building by its ground floor use. The map will be used for the purposes of this urban design assessment to analyse the movements of people based on the existing land uses.

Waterhouse Street

Waterhouse Street has a mix of uses, including shops, restaurants, financial services, and institutional buildings.

The Marlowes

The Marlowes is predominantly shops from Hillfield Road to Moor End Road. There are only a few restaurants in this part of the town centre. From Hillfield Road to Queensway, the Marlowes is primarily civic and educational institutions on the western side and a mix of dwellings, estate agents, shops and restaurants on the eastern side.

Old Town Centre

The old town High Street is a mix of shops (many of them specialist), restaurants and pubs, and financial services. There is at least one vacancy.

Cross Streets (Bridge Street, Combe Street, Market Square, and pedestrian passage off of Marlowes)

Bridge Street and the side of Market Square are primarily shops. There is also a key pedestrian opening (Bank Court) between the Marlowes and Waterhouse street that has shops and financial services. Combe Street is largely institutional.

KEY ISSUES MCI: LAND USE

MCIA

Waterhouse Street is an incoherent mix of land uses.

MCIB

The Marlowes is primarily shops and has very few restaurant and pub options.

MCIC

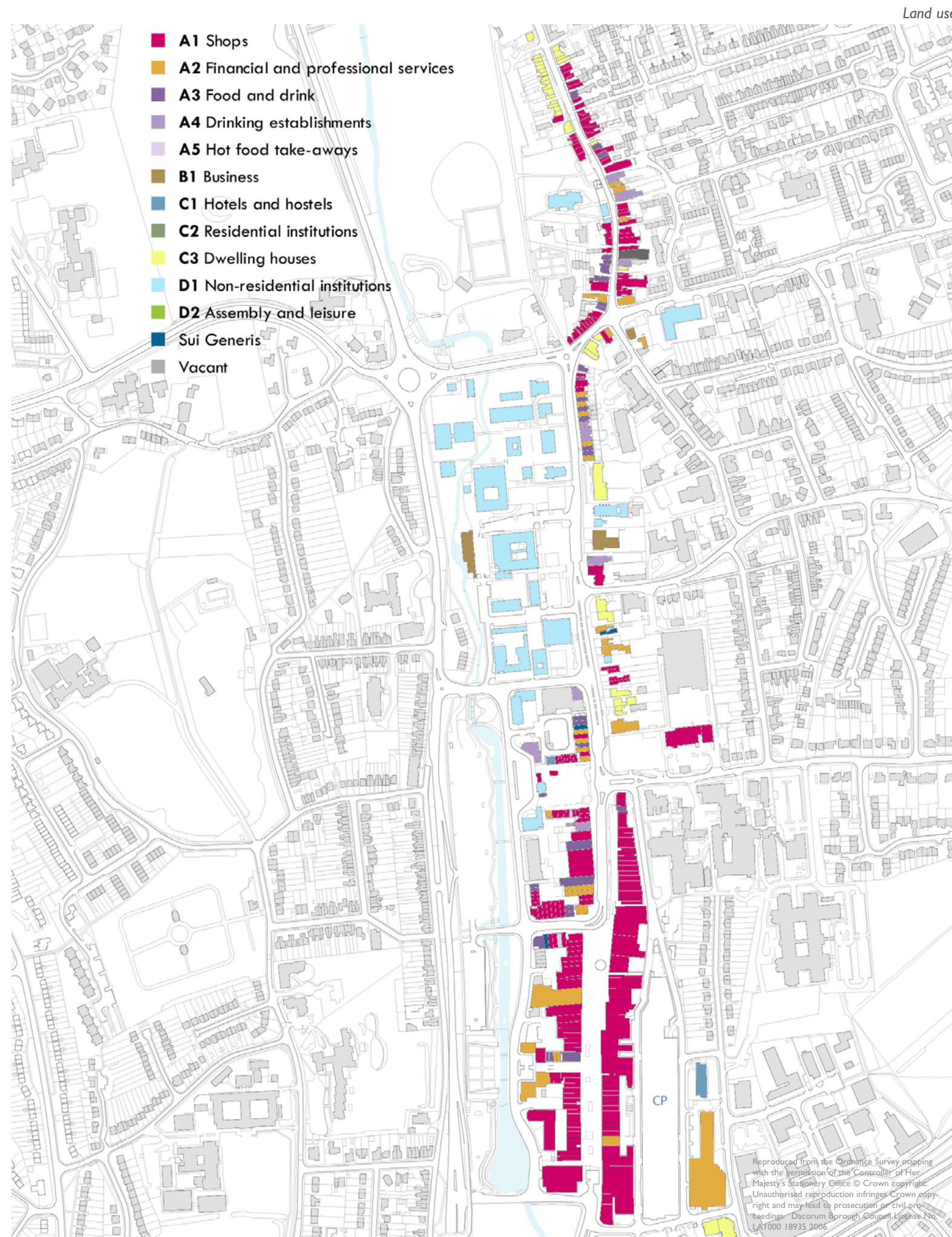
There are no major food retailers on The Marlowes.

MCID

There are no major community, leisure or cultural buildings in the town centre.

MCIE

The eastern side of The Marlowes between Hillfield Road and Queensway is an incoherent mix of land uses.



MAKING CONNECTIONS CIRCULATION, DEMAND AND LINKAGES

The circulation diagram to the right represents an analysis of existing circulation conditions with contributions made by local residents at the consultation event. Heavier lines denote heavier usage and thinner lines signify less frequent use. The drawing has been simplified to highlight the predominant paths.

Roads have been fundamental to Hemel Hempstead's growth. The 18th century saw great improvements to the standards of roads, and Hemel Hempstead received funding by tolls levied at turnpikes. Hemel's main link was the Sparrows Herne Turnpike that ran through Two Waters.

Pedestrian routes

The significant long footpaths and highly-travelled pedestrian pavements include The Marlowes and the High Street, the Water Gardens, Gadebridge Park, the old Hemel Hempstead Railway (Nicky Line), the Grand Union Canal, and Boxmoor.

Vehicular routes

Hemel Hempstead is well-served by major roads and local distributor roads. The neighbourhoods were designed to have local distributor roads along the neighbourhood peripheries, thereby minimising cut-through traffic. Congestion was cited by consultation participants as significant along the A414 and within the neighbourhoods during school opening and closing times.

KEY ISSUES

MC2: CIRCULATION DEMAND AND LINKAGES

MC2A

There are several significant footpaths and highly-trafficked pedestrian pavements.

MC2B

There is a significant disconnection between the town centre and the area to the south (Boxmoor, Grand Union Canal and the station).

MC2C

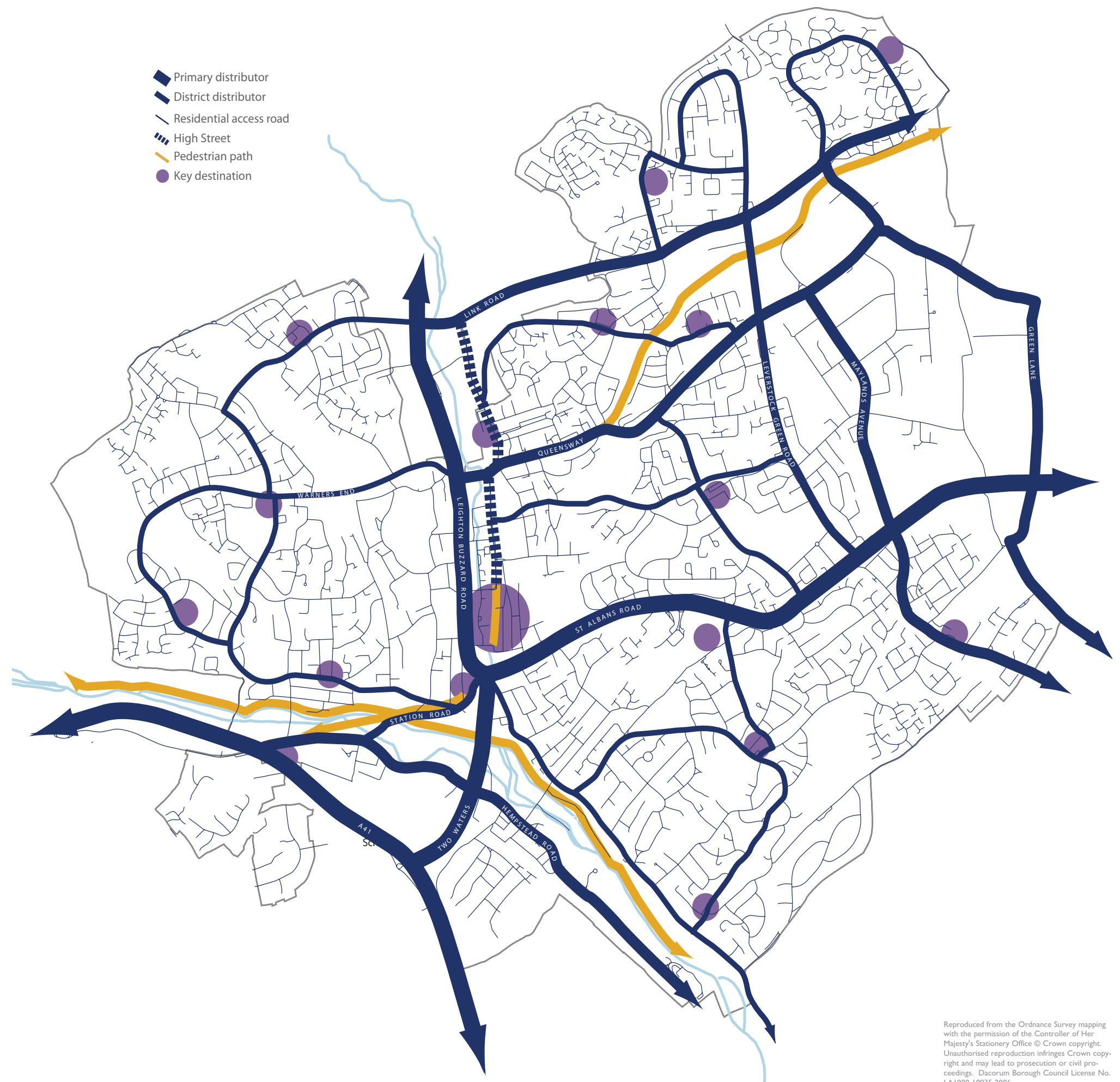
There are no clear connections from the town centre to the Nicky Line.

MC2D

Hemel Hempstead has a well-planned system of major roads and local distributor roads.

MC2E

Hemel Hempstead can become subject to local congestion during school opening and closing times and regional congestion during rush hour times as commuters look for cut-through routes between the A41, M1 and M25.



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MAKING CONNECTIONS CIRCULATION, DEMAND AND LINKAGES (Town Centre)

The drawing to the right examines the circulation movements of pedestrians and vehicles through the town centre. It also includes routes to the station.

Pedestrian network

The pedestrian network is defined by major paths moving north-south through the town centre and minor paths moving east-west between the Marlowes and Waterhouse Street /the Water Gardens. The Marlowes is a strong north-south route through to both Gadebridge Park and the High Street. The north-south route along the River Gade essentially ends at Combe Street. There are also no defined east-west paths north of Combe Street. South of Combe Street, the existing east-west paths are either pedestrianised or along Bridge Street. There is also a pedestrian path to the station from the 'Magic Roundabout', and pedestrians have the option of walking across Boxmoor. Currently there are no viable pedestrian connections from the town centre to this station path. The flyover to the Kodak Building is an additional impediment to pedestrians movements.

Vehicular network

The roundabout south of the town centre is a significant nexus for Hemel Hempstead's major roads and a barrier to pedestrian movement. Leighton Buzzard Road is an important through route. Most town centre traffic and servicing arrives off of Leighton Buzzard Road, primarily from Moor End Road, Bridge Street and Combe Street. Bridge Street and Combe Street both connect to large car parks. The servicing for the western blocks of the Marlowes arrives on Waterhouse Street. Buses terminate on Waterhouse Street south of Combe Street. The Marlowes above Bridge Street has a lane for taxi ranks and is not heavily trafficked. Station Road links to the train station.

KEY ISSUES

MC3: CIRCULATION DEMAND AND LINKAGES (Town Centre)

MC3A

There are weak east-west pedestrian connections between the Marlowes and Waterhouse Street /the Water Gardens, particularly north of Combe Street.

MC3B

There are poor pedestrian connections between the town centre and the area to the south of the Magic Roundabout.

MC3C

Waterhouse Street is used primarily as a service road for the Marlowes and the bus terminal.

MC3D

Bridge Street and Combe Street are used as access points to car parks.



1



2



3



Circulation, demand and linkages (Town Centre)

- Vehicular path
- Pedestrian path
- Key destination
- Shops
- Restaurants, bars, cafés, takeways

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MAKING CONNECTIONS PARKING (Town Centre)

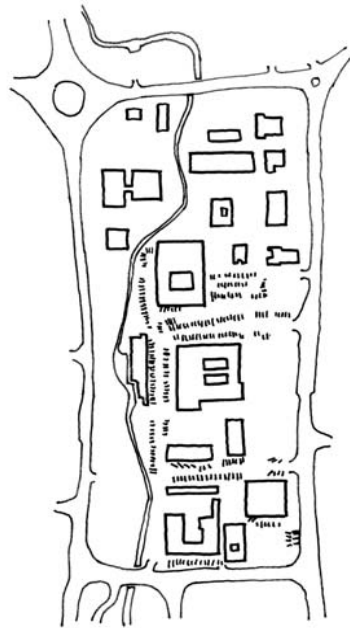
Car parking issues are significant in Hemel Hempstead's town centre, accounting for considerable land space.

Public car parks

There are two major car parks between Waterhouse Street and Leighton Buzzard Road. These car parks are heavily used, frequently creating a queue onto Bridge Street. They occupy prime sites adjacent to the Water Gardens. There is a large multi-storey car park on the Marlowes. There are also two small car parks for disabled access on the eastern side of Waterhouse Street.

Institutional parking

Dacorum Borough Council and West Herts College occupy significant parking space between Queensway and Coombe Street. The sketch below indicates the barriers created by the car parking.



Parking spaces located on the upper deck of a large multi-storey car park.



There is a large multi-storey car park located in the The Marlowes.

KEY ISSUES MC4: PARKING

MC4A

Town centre car parking occupies significant valuable open space and areas along The Marlowes.

MC4B

The public car parks are heavily used.

MC4C

A disabled car park occupies a key pedestrian gateway between Waterhouse street and The Marlowes.

MC4D

Institutional parking on the western side of the Marlowes creates a significant barrier to the River Gade.



Only 11 parking spaces for disabled drivers are offered on this key site.



Dacorum Borough Council occupies significant parking space in an areas which could potentially be a path to the River Gade.

MAKING CONNECTIONS WAYFINDING SIGNAGE

Wayfinding signage is a critical aspect of navigating the urban landscape and can be significant in forming distinctive urban or rural character.

Creating gateways

The train station represents a significant gateway into Hemel Hempstead. There is no substantive sign here that marks an entrance to the town.

Marking critical paths

Hemel Hempstead town centre relies on an old wayfinding system which does not project a modern identity nor does it present particular paths as key gateways.

Distinctive signage

Despite the significant history of Hemel Hempstead's old town, there is little wayfinding and heritage signage en route to and within the old town.



The train station lacks a substantive sign to mark the gateway to the town.



The traditional wayfinding system does not identify particular paths as key gateways.

KEY ISSUES

MC5: WAYFINDING SIGNAGE

MC5A

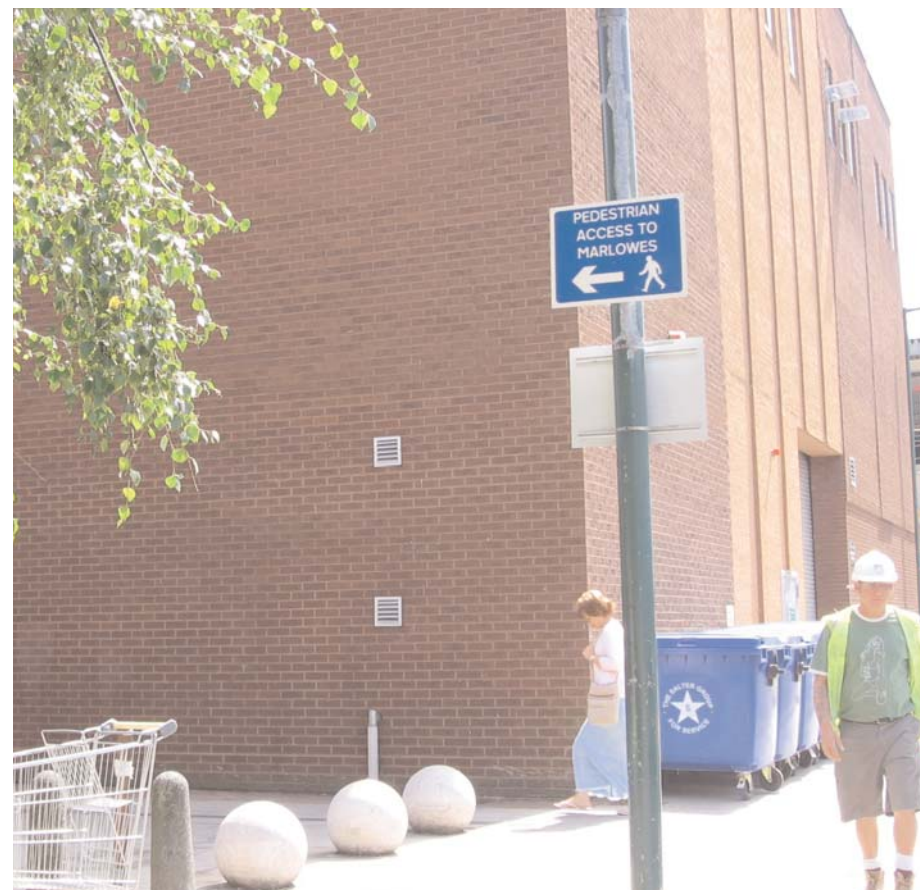
Hemel Hempstead's key entrypoints lack gateway signage.

MC5B

The town centre's wayfinding signage is outdated and underplays key pedestrian gateways.

MC5C

The High Street and Gadebridge Park has little wayfinding and heritage signage that focuses on the area's history.



Wayfinding signage in the town is inadequate.



There is little heritage signing within the town centre.

QUALITY OF THE PUBLIC REALM STREETSCAPE ELEMENTS

Hemel Hempstead's streetscape elements can perform several roles, including affirmation of the town's identity, improved vitality and retail success, and neighbourhood distinctiveness.

Town centre

Consultation participants described the town centre's streetscaping elements, with its unified green bent steel furniture and sculptural additions, as outdated.

Neighbourhoods

The New Town local centres were described by consultation participants as 'bland'. Additionally, many of the local centres use the same style town centre streetscaping elements. The town centre elements should be particularly distinctive, and the local centres could apply streetscaping elements which distinguish them from each other.

Newer streetscaping elements, such as the public toilets in Apsley, are of much better quality and provide important public amenities.



Streetscape elements can perform several roles including affirmation of the town's identity and improved vitality.



New local town centres were described as bland by consultation participants.

KEY ISSUES

QPRI: STREETSCAPE ELEMENTS

QPRIA

Consultation participants described the town centre's streetscaping elements as outdated.

QPRIB

The New Town local centres were described by consultation participants as 'bland'.

QPRIC

Newer streetscaping elements, such as the public toilets in Apsley, are of much better quality and provide important public amenities.



Consultation participants described the unified green bent steel furniture as outdated.



Newer streetscaping elements of of much better quality and provide important public amenities.

QUALITY OF THE PUBLIC REALM NATURAL ELEMENTS

There are a number of significant open spaces within Hemel Hempstead, many of which are designated as open land within the local plan.

Boxmoor

Boxmoor forms a significant gateway to Hemel Hempstead as one approaches the town from the train station or the roadway. Grazing horses and cows create a distinctive setting that is both rural and urban.

River Gade

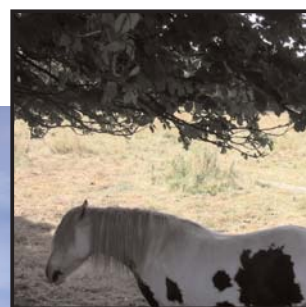
The Water Gardens are a significant feature of the town centre, although Marlowes has poor connections to it and it is often ill-maintained. The river provides an attractive, rural environment as it flows through Gadebridge Park, however it is neglected north of Combe Street.

Grand Union Canal

The Grand Union Canal is an important regional landscape feature. The connections to the canal from the town centre are weak.

The Nicky Line

The Nicky Line is relatively well-kept, although the path lacks gravel treatment along its entire length. There are no signs or clear connections to the path from the town centre.



Boxmoor forms a significant gateway to Hemel Hempstead as one approaches the town from the train station or roadway.



The Water Gardens are a significant feature of the town centre.

KEY ISSUES

QPR2: NATURAL ELEMENTS

QPR2A

Boxmoor forms a significant gateway to Hemel Hempstead from the south.

QPR2B

The Water Gardens is a significant feature in the town centre but there are poor connections to it from Marlowes.

QPR2C

The River Gade is a neglected natural feature north of Combe Street.

QPR2D

The Nicky Line is an important amenity which lacks signage or connections from the town centre.



The Grand Union Canal is an important regional landscape feature.



Highfield Park is one of a number of significant open spaces within Hemel Hempstead.

QUALITY OF THE PUBLIC REALM SAFETY/SECURITY

Security features

There are a number of places where both streetlighting and CCTV cameras have been installed to improve a sense of safety. It should be noted that in a few particular instances the CCTV cameras have been installed in such a way that they detract from the quality of the public realm.

Lighting

Lighting along the Marlowes provides a sense of security, although their design lacks distinctiveness.



CCTV cameras can detract from the quality of the public realm.



Street lighting in the town centre lacks distinctiveness.

KEY ISSUES

QPR3: SAFETY AND SECURITY

QPR3A

Security CCTV cameras often detract from place-making as currently located.

LEGIBILITY VIEWS, VISTAS, GATEWAYS

Due to its hilly nature, there are a great number of views within Hemel Hempstead, from the edges of the settlement out to the surrounding hills, and from the edges of Hemel Hempstead into the town. Hemel Hempstead has two critical orientation points - St Mary's Church and the Kodak Building.

Views to the St Mary's Church

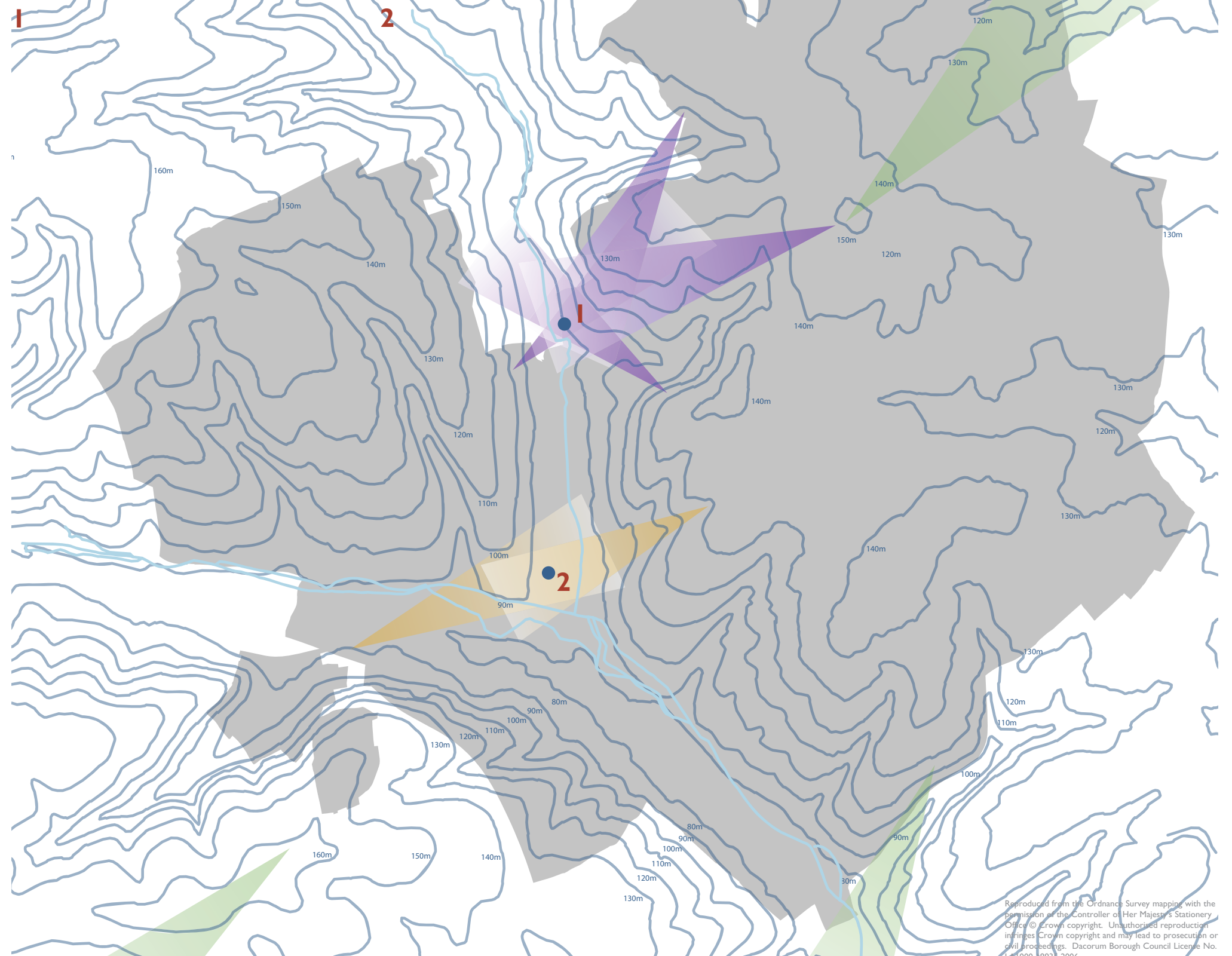
The church spire can be seen from many different places, including from the Marlowes and from the Victorian residential areas to the east (1).

Views to the Kodak Building

Hemel Hempstead's major roads were designed to promote views of the Kodak Building, promoting the modernist conception of high-rise buildings floating in the landscape. Key views to the Kodak Building include the vista from the train station and Station Road (2).

Views into the countryside

There are several strong views from Hemel Hempstead's residential neighbourhoods into the surrounding Green Belt.



KEY ISSUES

LE1: VIEWS, VISTAS AND GATEWAYS

LE1A

St Mary's spire is a critical orientation point and is important from all directions in its vicinity.

LE1B

The Kodak Building can be viewed from the major approach roads to Hemel Hempstead, with particularly strong views across Boxmoor.

LE1C

Due to the topographical changes there are good views from Hemel Hempstead into the surrounding countryside.

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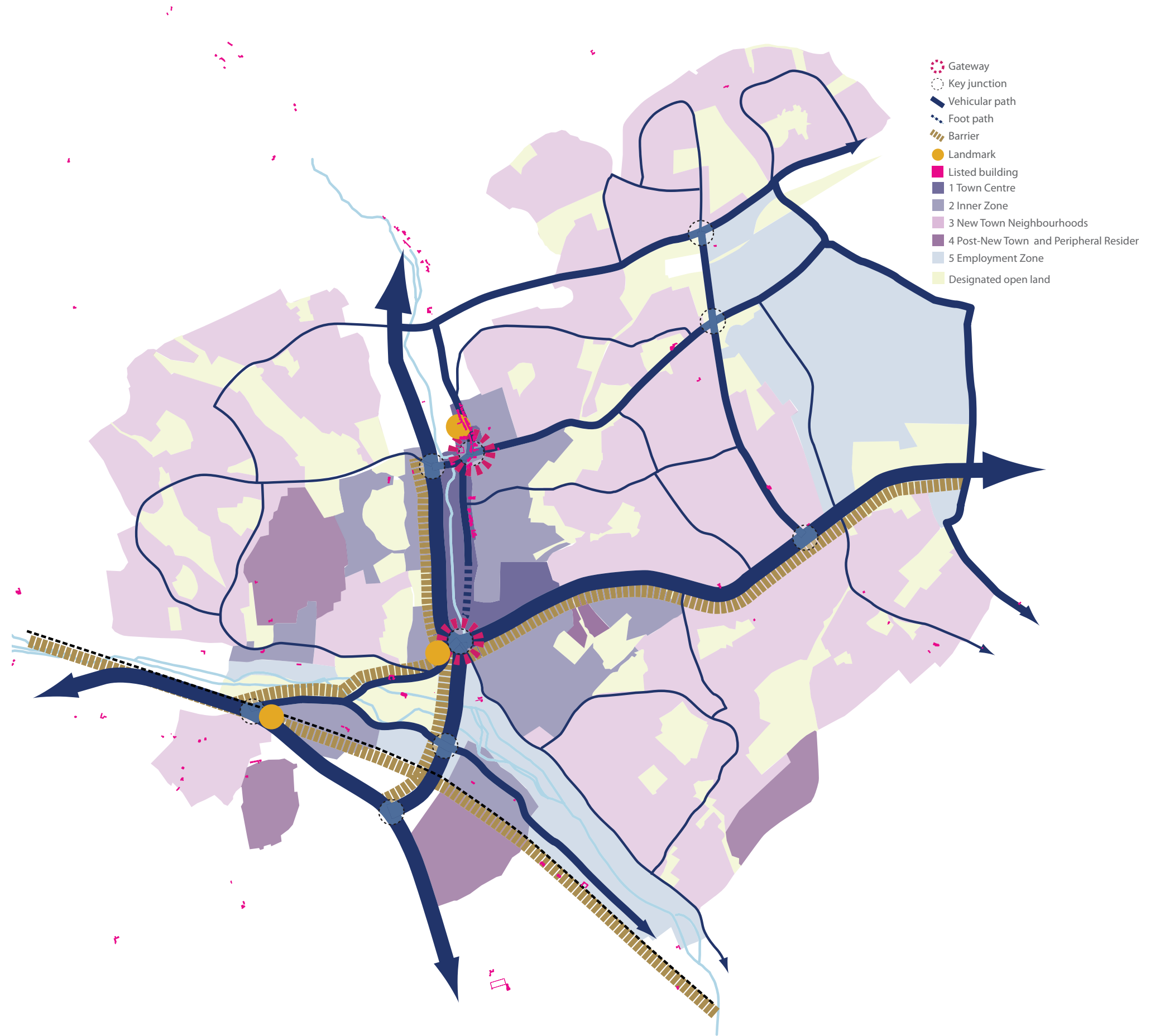
LEGIBILITY EDGES, PATHS, AND LAND- MARKS

Landmarks, gateways and orientation points

St Mary's Church and the Kodak Buildings are the critical orientation points at the scale of the entire town of Hemel Hempstead, creating clear poles marking the two ends of the town centre and the Gade Valley floor. Adjacent to those two landmarks, are the critical gateway junctions - the Magic Roundabout and the intersection of Queensway, the Marlowes and the High Street.

Paths and edges

Leighton Buzzard Road and the A414 form the two most significant vehicular paths through Hemel Hempstead. These two roads also form significant edges and barriers to pedestrian movement, with the flyover and the roundabout creating particular difficulties. These roads and related infrastructure create a major physical and psychological impediment between the town centre and the open space, character areas and station to the south. The Marlowes is currently the most significant pedestrian path in Hemel Hempstead but remains cut-off from the open spaces to the west and south.



KEY ISSUES

LE2: EDGES, PATHS, LANDMARKS AND CHARACTER AREAS

LE2A

St Mary's Church and the Kodak Buildings are the two critical orientation points for hemel Hempstead.

LE2B

Leighton Buzzard Road and the A414 are Hemel Hempstead's two most significant vehicular paths which - as currently laid out - cut off the town centre from the Bulbourne Valley to the south.

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LEGIBILITY EDGES, PATHS, LAND- MARKS (Town Centre)

Landmarks and gateways

The intersection of Bridge Street and Waterhouse Street is a key gateway for both pedestrians and vehicles to the Marlowes Shopping Area. There are three additional gateways to the Marlowes for pedestrians (as marked by the blue dots) (1). The intersection of Queensway, the High Street, and the Marlowes is the critical gateway to the Old Town Area.

Paths

The Marlowes is the key pedestrian path in the town centre. Bridge Street is a critical connector to the car parks and the Water Gardens open space. There are also key connector paths through the Marlowes Shopping Area and along the Market Area.

Edges and barriers

At the scale of the town, Leighton Buzzard Road and the A414 form significant edges. At the scale of the town centre, the flyover to the Kodak Building and the Magic Roundabout are the major edges. Waterhouse Street is a barrier to pedestrian activity due to a number of architectural treatments. These treatments include major elements, such as blank walls and large service entries and minor elements, such as building vents that point onto the pavement and stairs (2) that separate building entrances from the pavement. The station design does little to promote bicycle use forcing cyclists to lock their bicycles to railings. (3)

KEY ISSUES

LE2: EDGES, PATHS, LANDMARKS AND CHARACTER AREAS (Town Centre)

LE3A

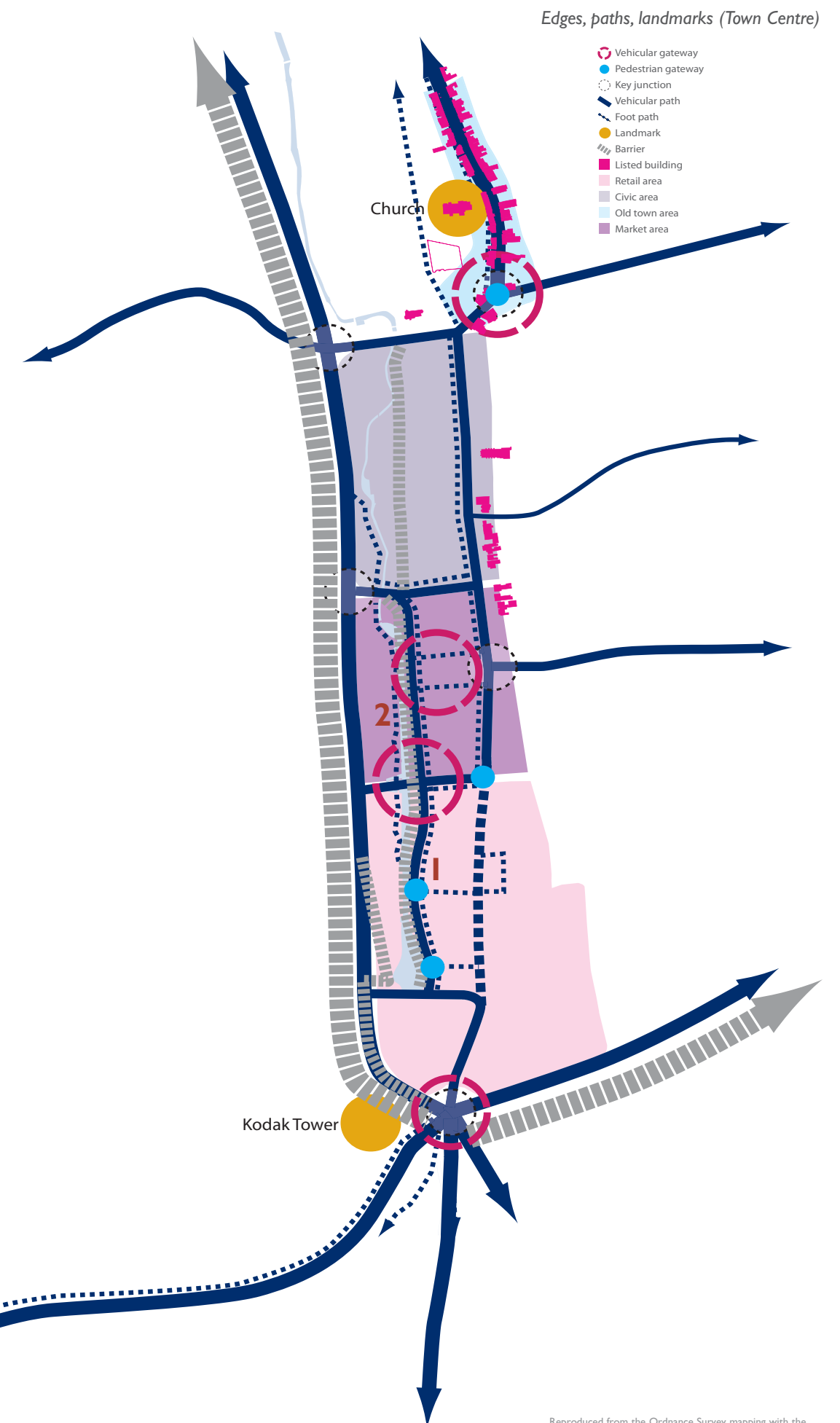
The key gateway to the Marlowes Shopping Area at Bridge Street and Waterhouse Street privileges vehicles over pedestrians at the roundabout.

LE3B

The flyover and the Magic Roundabout present major barriers to movement south of the town centre.

LE3C

Waterhouse Street has several architectural edges which discourages users.



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