

# WITHAM TOWN PLAN

**2017 - 2037**



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21.10.15.

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## 1. Introduction

Witham is a mid-Essex town of some 27,000 people. The town logo “Stage by Stage” is most appropriate in that not only was Witham a staging post in former times, but the town has developed over many years “in stages”. The logo complements that of Braintree District Council - “By wisdom and foresight”.

The purpose of this Town Plan is to set out a vision for the town in 20 years’ time together with the steps needed to deliver it. It is important that a long term strategic vision is now created to inform the town’s future development and ensure that the appropriate infrastructure is planned for and put in place to support this.

The Town Plan does not cover the land use policies and planning in the District Council’s Local Plan but instead is concerned with what is needed in every other area. Witham Town Council is aware of its powers under the Localism Act 2011 to fine-tune the Local Plan but at present the need to activate them is not seen as the way to deliver the aims of this Town Plan.

The Town Plan is based on evidence collected from residents and builds on the original town plan of 2003. It starts with an executive summary bringing together the main points that are expanded upon later in the document. Subsequent topic sections form chapters dealing with the various areas requiring action. An Appendix includes the evidence on which the Town Plan is based. The document is seen as a planning framework that should be regularly reviewed and updated.



The topic sections in this Town Plan are devoted to only those areas that representative Witham residents' groups wished to review at the Town Plan workshop and general considerations and aspirations that have been expressed to Witham Town Council over a number of years. An additional 'Youth' section has been added (and is the largest report) as the younger generation will undoubtedly have the greatest sway over the long-term future of the town.

Each of the topic sections contains the following information:

Witham today – detailed information and statistics in the Appendices

The Twenty-Year Vision – what should Witham be like?

The Issues – what do we have to do?

The Outcomes – what do we want to happen?

Actions and projects – how will we get there?

Inevitably many of the actions and projects overlap across various topics, and all interlink to some extent. Many of the actions can be instigated and developed by the Town Council or in local partnership. Others are dependent on other responsible bodies, where vigorous lobbying will be needed.

Common abbreviations in this Town Plan are as follows:

Witham Town Council (WTC)

Braintree District Council (BDC)

Essex County Council (ECC)

National Health Service (NHS)

Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG)

This Town Plan is a live document and will be reviewed on an ongoing basis - at least annually.

Ultimately the scale of success will be measured by how many of these goals are achievable and achieved.

## 2. Executive Summary

The vision for Witham in 2037 is as the destination of choice for families, businesses and visitors because of its welcoming and neighbourly character, the range of accommodation and services available, and its location. This vision centres on services delivered at a higher standard than now to a notably greater population, while keeping and enhancing its attractive natural and historic character.

Within that vision, it will be easier to access health services both in the town and at centres of special care. Residents will be fitter and healthier, and more able to take on their own care. While the NHS and social services have prime responsibility, WTC can promote the shift towards prevention rather than treatment. WTC can monitor the actions of the NHS and its partner organisations (particularly ECC and BDC) and push for the best collaboration. WTC can also push for the delivery of health service commitments under S106 planning agreements.

Fitter and healthier residents will benefit from cared for and plentiful open space for formal and informal recreation, with greater tree cover. The open space will be better looked after, with less litter and dog fouling. The appearance of the town with floral arrangements will raise pride in residents and attract visitors. Wild life will be protected and contribute to healthy open spaces. WTC will be the prime provider and maintainer of green and open space in the town. WTC can take steps to safeguard open space from encroachment and inappropriate development.

Residents will have a wide range of well-maintained housing available to them. The older housing will be modernised to improve insulation, while new housing will match local needs as to accommodation and affordability. Housing will be supported by necessary infrastructure, both physical and social, particularly so that new developments will house communities that have a degree of self-sufficiency while clearly being part of the town.

WTC will watch over the delivery of S106 planning agreements and monitor development proposals both at Local Plan and individual levels. WTC will press for a fair share of NHB (new homes bonus), and CIL (community infrastructure levy) when it is brought in. WTC will encourage residents to take part in collective bids for energy supplies.

Witham's town centre will be vibrant, serving local needs in safe and pleasant surroundings. Street furniture including seating will be well-maintained, relevant, and consistent in design with unnecessary signage removed. Shop fronts will successfully combine tradition with today, avoiding advertising of products but recognising the need for brands, within a distinctively "Witham" theme. It will accommodate a variety of retailers and service businesses, with housing for residents, and prove a magnet for visitors and residents alike. Traffic will flow freely with affordable car parking sufficient for visitors, shoppers and employees. Town centre streets will continue to offer short-term free parking.

WTC with its partners will seek solutions to concerns over litter, bird droppings, uneven pavements, traffic congestion, and struggling shops; WTC will encourage a "niche" retail/service offer complementing major stores in larger neighbouring centres. Witham's town park will be visibly part of the town centre through better access, improved facilities and a programme of regular events.

Witham has benefited from a diverse economy of manufacturing and service businesses, mainly small to medium sized but with some at world-class. The town's industrial estates are well-placed and cared for but suffer increasingly from parking problems. Businesses have joined in measures to reduce crime. The vision for Witham's economy builds on that sound base, looking to capitalise on a flexible workforce, the A12, good rail links, proximity to major airports and seaports, modern telecommunications and other infrastructure, as well as moves to decentralise office-based operations. This environment will see a stream of business start-ups with above-average success rates, some growing locally and nationally into significant concerns. Residents will have access to well-paid local jobs, with a much reduced need to commute.



Economic development is the responsibility of the district and county councils, and WTC's role will be essentially scrutiny, support and lobbying.

Traffic and transport is a major concern for residents and visitors, citing:

- highways improvements lagging developments
- peak-hour congestion in and out of the town at pinch points
- inconsiderate parking by commuters and some shoppers and town employees
- congestion and safety issues at schools morning and afternoon
- reasonably priced parking provision for employees
- perceptions that bus services are poor
- routing and signage for local and through traffic
- use of Newland Street as A12 relief route
- impact of traffic on the town centre conservation area.

By 2037 Witham will have better road and transport links to Braintree, Maldon, hospitals in Braintree and Chelmsford, the airports, and the junctions with the A12, with local traffic routing clearly marked. The town will be free of congestion with solutions in place around current pinch points. Regular, affordable and flexible bus routes will serve key destinations in and outside the town, able to attract a wider range of users. Good pavements and foot-paths, a well-linked and comprehensive cycle network with secure parking, and the improved bus services will offer practical and attractive alternatives to the car. Good information in real time and readily available will further encourage a range of transport options.

WTC will identify and propose highways schemes for delivery by the county council through the local highways panel, the parking partnership or through S106 planning agreements. WTC will monitor bus timetables to ensure services run when needed, including evenings and weekends, and can provide through routing without undue delays or cost. WTC will investigate alternative ways of providing bus services such as on-demand, use of minibuses, volunteers or community provision. WTC will promote walking and cycling to school, parking management near schools, and adjusting school hours especially for parents with children at different schools.

A secure HGV parking facility especially for overnight use will relieve some congestion and at the same time bring customers for local services such as accommodation, meals or entertainment into the town.

By 2037 Witham will be a safe and caring place in which to live. An active, better skilled, self-confident and knowledgeable younger generation will enjoy greater opportunities for work, leisure and personal development than ever before. The town will be known for its performing arts, attracting talent and invention. Residents young and older will have affordable access to a wide range of sports and recreation throughout the year, both indoor and outdoor.

Perceptions and fears of anti-social behaviour and crime exist, while the Police presence and ability to respond has been drastically reduced. WTC's CCTV by 2037 will be linked to other installations in the town and actively monitored to complement Police intelligence gathering and ability to respond. WTC's other work in the area of community safety will positively support Policing with local volunteers, by promoting awareness, prevention, and information collection and sharing. WTC's small grant scheme will focus on enabling local groups to work effectively to meet local needs and aspirations that are not covered by others.

With the town's vision for its future, with public bodies and voluntary community groups acting together, good planning based on evidence, capable residents and a prospering economy, Witham will indeed be a destination of choice for families, business and visitors alike.

### **3. Topic Sections**

#### **3.1 Health**

##### **Witham Today**

Primary care is under pressure as GP services have struggled to keep up with housing and population growth along with more elderly people experiencing disabling conditions. With hospitals at a distance, residents have difficulty in getting the treatments they need.

There are a range of pharmacies, and dental and ophthalmic services readily available. Other services such as mental health or physiology are patchy.

Obesity, particularly in children, minor injuries, injuries particularly falls and hip damage in the elderly, are significant issues.

There are opportunities to alleviate pressures on NHS services by greater use of pharmacist skills and more self-care, together with healthier eating and appropriate exercise.

##### **The Twenty-Year Vision**

Witham residents will benefit from a bespoke healthcare centre to meet the needs of local residents for minor health problems. There will be satisfactory public transport links to and from hospitals for more major health problems.

There will be good local access to high quality medical care, with special attention given to mental health.

The reduced patient/doctor ratio will enable reasonable waiting times to meet with GPs.

Children and adults will be fit, healthy and active.

##### **The Issues**

- Current shortage of healthcare provision within Witham (i.e. high patient/doctor ratio) which has not kept pace with the growth of the town especially in the last two decades, leading to the sub-standard provision of healthcare to the town's citizens.
- Doctors surgeries at capacity and concentrated in town centre & Witham West with an inequitable distribution of doctor's surgeries throughout the town.
- Healthcare provision - major shortage of funding and resources for the National Health Service (NHS). Problem exacerbated by an ever-growing ageing population.
- Whilst a new hospital maybe unrealistic, given the financial resources of the NHS, some smaller specialist local services are needed e.g. minor injuries treatment centre.
- Inadequate public transport system to main health centres in the district e.g. Broomfield Hospital, Chelmsford.
- 8% of residents consider that their bad health limits their activities a lot.
- Obesity, especially in children, is a problem.
- Higher (than national average) incidence of heart & kidney disease.

##### **Outcomes**

- Adequate transport facilities to main healthcare centres in the District.
- i.e. Improved public transport to hospitals Broomfield /Braintree /Maldon e.g. Black Buses from park & ride/small buses.
- Local residents now encouraged and empowered to take personal responsibility for their health.
- Levels of childhood and adult obesity significantly reduced corresponding with increased levels of activity for both children and adults alike.
- Abundant healthy eating options in the town



- Healthy food choices close to schools
- Life expectancy improved
- Improved access to sporting activities for disabled people
- Adequate healthcare provision meeting the needs of the growing and ageing population
- New developments providing sufficient medical facilities secured
- Improved facilities at existing surgeries, providing out-clinic services to ease pressure on hospitals e.g. orthopaedics, diabetics.

## **Actions and Projects**

### **Witham Town Council Actions**

- WTC to continue to hold healthcare working group meetings with all major stakeholders, NHS England, local GPs, local MP, District Council, County Council and any other relevant parties
- WTC to influence and shape the new BDC 'Local Plan' to ensure greatest impact on health and encourage adequate health provision commensurate with the large increase in housebuilding envisaged. Witham's vision to be reflected in Local Plan.
- WTC to engage and influence the S106 planning agreements
- WTC to continue to monitor progress made at Town Council, Community Committee level
- WTC to engage local MP, Priti Patel, to be an advocate for the Witham Town Plan.
- WTC to support and promote healthy lifestyles and wellbeing initiatives. E.g. BDC's 'Live Well' programme.
- WTC to promote walking, cycling and running groups
  - Drop in's for health leaflets/A new WTC Information Centre screen could be used to advertise healthy living and provide advice.

### **Potential joint projects**

- To secure a new site within Witham for healthcare facilities.
- To secure an adequate healthcare building that is fit for purpose.
- Minor injuries unit for minor breaks/x rays/stitching
- Extension of Helen Court to provide basic medical care to elderly/falls/check drugs/infections etc.
- Prevention of illness advice centre with computers and volunteers (CCGs & NHS England).
- Short term achievable project – Local organisations, businesses and schools to sign up to a Healthy Food Commitment and improved standards.
- Need to develop healthy living groups and promotion of how to cook healthily

## 3.2 Environment

### Witham Today

Witham is fortunate to have a large number of green and open spaces, with easy access to attractive countryside. Volunteers help conserve and improve the natural environment.



### The Twenty-Year Vision

That Witham, although greatly expanded will still be known as a town with lovely green spaces, tree cover and areas of environmental value.

That residents and visitors continue to use the River Walk, Whetmead Nature Reserve, James Cooke Wood and Closed Churchyard and maintain a love for the local environment

### The Issues

- Sporadic complaints about the quality of general maintenance services such as grass cutting, road sweeping and hedge cutting continue. These services, provided by BDC and ECC are important to the general appearance of the town, and are centrally and remotely controlled, which is reflected in the general standard of care taken.
- Dog fouling remains a problem throughout the town, at various times and various places. The Town Council works closely with the District Dog Warden and Street Warden to identify hotspots and offenders. The Town Council has been proactive in the siting of dog litter bins, and in the provision of dog litter bag dispensers, and free dog litter bags, following their withdrawal by the District Council. Residents are regularly urged to make reports of offenders so that the Dog Wardens can target their resources more effectively.

- Threat of high levels of development under the Local Plan
- Declining green space for leisure and environmental activities.

### **Outcomes**

- Increased numbers of visitors to the River Walk, Whetmead Nature Reserve, James Cooke Wood and Closed Churchyard and wider interest in the environment
- Maintain, protect and preserve adequate green and open spaces for residents, especially given the envisaged increase in building and construction in the town, and provide new green spaces within the new developments.
- Tree cover in Witham safeguarded and listed trees protected (and unlisted where appropriate).
- Endangered wildlife protected and appropriate balance between users and wildlife in green spaces achieved
- Local population educated to take a greater interest and understanding of their local environment and environmental issues.

### **Actions and Projects**

#### **Witham Town Council Actions**

- WTC to be vigilant on all planning applications that may potentially have adverse effects on the environment.
- WTC to influence and shape the 'Local Plan' to strike a balance between housing and environmental needs.
- WTC to continue to work at Town Council Environment Committee level
- WTC to continue tree planting and implement Witham Tree Group's Survey
- WTC to work towards preservation of Greenspaces on estates via. Residents Groups and close consultation with residents on planning applications. To continue to promote and support all Environmental working groups and Community Groups within the Town who are committed to protecting the environment. For example, providing support for:
  - Witham's River Walk and Nature Reserves Management Working Group
  - Friends of the River Walk
  - Tree Group
  - Witham & Countryside Society
  - Essex Wildlife Trust
- WTC to raise the profile and to improve awareness and public access to open spaces areas looked after by WTC (such as the River Walk, Whetmead Nature Reserve, James Cooke Wood and the Closed Church yard) and also the Blackwater Rail Trail and John Ray Walks.
- WTC looking to improve access from the River Walk to the Whetmead Nature Reserve.
- WTC looking to retain green spaces for recreation /health activities. e.g. green gyms

#### **Potential Joint Projects**

- Extend River Walk so it becomes a complete cycle path around the town.

- Environmental features in newsletters and publications
- Organise educational visits for school children to these areas.
- Development of the Witham Town Park by BDC.

## 3.3 Housing

### Witham Today

Witham is a popular choice for commuters because of its good transport links to London, Chelmsford and Colchester. That brings high prices for housing to buy or rent. Affordability is a big issue.

Due to the post-war development agreement with the Greater London Council, there is a legacy of former council housing, now mainly owner-occupied or managed by Greenfields Community Housing. The housing stock offers a good variety of all types, in generally good condition and sited near amenities.

BDC's Local Plan envisages a significant expansion of housing, but there are concerns whether necessary supporting infrastructure will be provided and exactly when.

### The Twenty-Year Vision

- Witham residents will benefit from a wide range of inclusive housing stock suitable for all ages and demographics within the community.
- There will be a good mix of types of property with designs to be proud of.
- Buildings will be fit for purpose with adequate living space and adequate surrounding highways infrastructure (highways, parking facilities)
- Witham will have expanded sufficiently to meet housing needs, without destroying the character and ambience of the town itself.

### The Issues

- Inadequate provision of social housing to rent– huge waiting lists
- Inadequate pipeline provision for an ageing population
- Older and ageing existing housing stock
- Some estates lack a community hall as a focus for activity.
- Concerns that Government building targets for large scale housebuilding in Witham may well increase beyond the town's capabilities to cope: poor transport and infrastructure, insufficient schools and healthcare provision.
- Obligations under S106 planning agreements in many cases remain undelivered or incomplete.

### Outcomes

- Housing provision (private and social) meets the needs of the population (e.g. bungalows for ageing population, adequate social housing / affordable housing; housing for young people).
- Housing development is of high standard in terms of design and energy efficiency
- Community facilities (doctors, community hall, shops) are provided and integrated into any housing development
- Infrastructure (e.g. road capacity) is assessed and upgraded to cope with additional development, and delivered early in any development
- Prompt delivery of S106 planning agreement commitments

## **Actions and Projects**

### **Witham Town Council Actions**

- WTC has set up a new Working Party to work with the District Council to deliver the S106 commitments at Maltings.
- WTC to continue to lobby and influence all relevant parties including developers, BDC, ECC and Government to build sufficient housing (including social housing/affordable homes whilst maintaining a proper infrastructure and the integral character of the historic town of Witham.
- WTC to keep on top of new Government Plans/Right to buy/Use of Community Housing BDC/part own schemes long term
- WTC to play a key role in influencing and shaping the Local Plan housing aspirations of both BDC and Government in the best way possible to benefit the residents of Witham.

### **Potential Joint Projects**

Working with local residents groups to coordinate: -

- development of new community halls and best use of existing buildings.
- and assist in the management of Community Halls
- and retain assets of community interest

Working with appropriate bodies to:-

- be more innovative to help young people into housing.
- upgrade housing stock e.g. with insulation.

## 3.4 Town Centre

### Witham Today

Witham is a relatively stable and well performing historic market town with its own unique character and charm. It has an established occupier base, growing catchment and strong urban fabric. It has an attractive town centre with many fine historic buildings. It is important to the people of Witham that this character and historical image is retained. These assets provide a solid foundation for future improvement.

A good town centre may be judged by the variety and quality of its shops and places for people to socialise. The town has some niche retail but lacks 'big' High Street names.

Many arts and entertainment events take place that support the local economy e.g. Annual Puppet Festival that attracts thousands of visitors to the town centre.

Witham has one of the oldest market charters in Essex, dating back over 800 years. The town's Saturday market is appreciated, but residents feel that it needs to be improved and enlarged to offer a wider choice. The viability of a larger street weekday market in Newland Street is being pursued by BDC, although a major obstacle is that the High Street is used as an overflow route if there are traffic problems on the A12.

In February 2014, the GVA Witham Town Centre Strategy commissioned by BDC was published. GVA Consultancy, supported by Studio REAL and MVA Consultancy, have identified a range of interventions to strengthen the retail offer in Witham, enabling it to maximise its strengths and secure greater levels of footfall and spend in the future. Their proposals centre around leveraging existing assets to rejuvenate the town centre. A core objective is that a Town Centre square/market place is created around the Newland Street/Guithavon Street junction.

The ideas met with widespread approval during public consultation.

Much of the form and structure of the town centre as it is today can be traced back to its past. One of the key assets of the town is the impressive collection of surviving medieval, Georgian and Victorian buildings which greatly contribute to the town centre's distinctive character.

### The Twenty-Year Vision

The Town Centre will have a vibrant day and night time economy, with the Town Park, the Public Hall, the Market and the historic character of the High Street playing a vital role in the town's unique offer.

The Town Centre will be free from HGV vehicles, and traffic around the town will be free flowing with easy access to parking and public transport links

### The Issues

- Tired shopping centre and frontages
- Issue with parking and access
- Would like free parking in town centre where possible e.g. Newland Centre, Tesco's and old sports centre site.
- Proper directions to the car park
- Need covered shopping malls
- Need to make good use of business rates income
- Witham Strategy Group would like to see market on the edge of the Town centre or in the Newlands precinct.



## **Outcomes**

- Provision of a range of “pop up” and local shopping opportunities to meet the needs of each element of the catchment
- Expansion of independent “niche” retail offer
- Leisure and dining offer enhanced
- Civic and events role reinforced
- Accessibility and parking maintained and improved.
- Occupation of town centre shops and flats increased
- Full integration and community use of the Town Park

## **Actions and Projects**

### **Witham Town Council Actions**

- WTC to continue to lobby and influence all relevant parties including shopping centre owners, individual retailers BDC, ECC and government to ensure sufficient retail / entertainment entities exist to build a prosperous Town Centre.
- WTC to manage town centre floral displays.
- WTC to keep town seats in good condition and clean
- WTC to continue to strive for litter reduction

### **Action on five key projects is suggested by the GVA Report**

1. A new Heart for Witham
2. Upgrading Newlands and the Grove Shopping Centres
3. Integration of the Town Park
4. Transport Improvements
5. Town Centre Promotion

### **Other Potential Joint Projects**

- Support to CIC (Community Interest Company) for Newland Street market
- Regeneration of the old Co Op Building in Newland Street to provide an “anchor” for that end of town
- Attain free car parking within range of town centre (in place of former Bramstons Sport Centre’s free parking)
- Establish multi storey car parking behind Newlands precinct and part of Tesco site.
- Car park – landscaped on ‘Bellfield’ site between Church Street and Braintree Road.
- Covered shopping mall and uniformity of street furniture
- Lower business rates to encourage small shops.
- Central area to retain its historical character.

## **3.5 Business Development and Economic Prosperity**

### **Witham Today**

Witham has a diverse economy of manufacturing, distribution and service businesses ranging from the very small to a few at world-class. It benefits from good transport links to the north, east and south and proximity to major air and sea ports. Telecommunications and utilities function well. The workforce is varied, flexible and reasonably skilled.

The main street has some empty shops but less than elsewhere. There is a transition from selling goods to selling services, particularly meals. High Street banks are gradually withdrawing their branches from Witham.

Business start-ups have a good survival rate but do not always grow quickly.

Local employment is not as well remunerated as in other centres leading to a high level of commuting.

### **The Twenty-Year Vision**

Witham will have a diversity of job opportunities with appropriate salary levels to enhance the wellbeing of employees in the town and reduce the need to commute. It will be a balanced community and town where people are proud to live and work.

Witham will be a location of choice for business and business start-ups, taking advantage of a local skilled workforce.

Sufficient employment opportunities within Witham itself to strike an appropriate balance between 'employment centre' and 'commuter town'.

### **The Issues**

- Career advice for school leavers
- Relatively low skills levels in the workforce: access to training
- Absence of local business schools
- Need to exploit location, quality industrial areas, world-class businesses
- Expanded employment opportunities in the town, with wide ranging jobs and skill sets
- Ensure that the town remains attractive to encourage large employers to move here, with sufficient facilities (e.g. parking) to ensure their impact is positive
- Provision of job opportunities for younger people.

### **Outcomes**

- Ensure infrastructure and job opportunities match the projected growth in housing and population in Witham
- Successful retail shops to make Witham a shopping magnet & destination of choice
- Shop rents that retailers can afford -start up reduced rents & rates
- Better quality careers advice
- Increased apprenticeships and technical training opportunities.

## **Actions and Projects**

### **Witham Town Council Actions**

- WTC to continue to review progress made in Town Council and Community Committee meetings
- WTC to continue to lobby - District Council, County Council and National Government and all relevant stakeholders on behalf of Witham residents
- WTC to continue to lobby Witham's local MP to press for new and improved employment opportunities and developments in Witham
- WTC to organise 'Pride in Witham' initiative to recognise local businesses and to connect them to the academies
- WTC to organise a Scheme to award 'excellent' status to our excellent businesses
- WTC to raise Witham's profile within BDC/ECC.

### **Potential Joint Projects** (as suggested by residents)

- Speak to local employers – what do they need/want from our education system to make local young people employees choice
- Encourage local employers to recruit from local schools. Work provision linked to local schools offered by local businesses
- Development of workplace skills for young people especially in our local schools
- Business Marketing unit (to help attract new investment into Witham)
- Employ a marketing manager to 'sell Witham' to Business Development groups and retailers. Business incubator units (to support business start-ups for 'Small to medium business enterprises (SMEs)
- More parking for shoppers (to support town centre shops). Employers to provide parking for their employees
- Check fast broadband service on industrial estates
- Monitor A12 to Braintree Road link
- Hotels / Conference facilities. e.g. hotel at Cressing Temple/feasibility study.

## 3.6 Traffic, Transport and Parking

### Witham Today

The town experiences congestion at peak hours and at “pinch points”. There is no clarity on local and through traffic routing and signage.

Local bus services suffer from negative perceptions around time-keeping, lack of flexibility in matching residents’ needs, lack of real-time information, and no coordination of services to minimise waiting. The train service generally copes although high ticket prices exclude young people from much travel. There are no through services to destinations such as airports, ports, hospitals and sports or recreation centres.

The cycleway network is not linked up with little recent development. There are limited facilities for cycle secure storage when out.

Inconsiderate commuter parking causes conflict with residents with constant changes to regulations and limited enforcement. Parking for employees and shoppers is limited and perceived as costly, although Newland Street enjoys stretches of free on-street parking that attracts shoppers.



### The Twenty-Year Vision

There will be new alternative routes to Braintree, and around Witham, enabling the town to be free from ‘through traffic’. The extended cycle network will provide clean green access to all areas of the town.

Public transport will be affordable, clean and reliable and provide access to key destinations – London, Stansted airport, hospital, large town shopping centres, work places, schools and housing areas.

There will be plenty of parking spaces for commuters, shoppers, employees and visitors

### The Issues

- Traffic congestion is a huge problem (sometimes gridlock) particularly at peak hours
- The problem of large HGVs driving through Witham Town Centre has been highlighted. Proposals for improved routing and signage was first submitted to ECC Highways in 2014(followed up with subsequent meetings). Their consideration and implementation of the recommendations is still long awaited

- Speed of traffic, especially on housing estates has been highlighted, but ECC Highways have indicated that they will not introduce lower speed limits on estate roads whilst there is no likelihood of these being enforced
- The bus service is seen as unreliable, expensive, infrequent and absent in the evenings. Some local “town” services have been withdrawn or reduced, causing considerable distress to vulnerable groups who rely on the service to get into town for shopping, pensions and visits to the doctors
- The lack of town centre parking, both for commuters and local employees means that all day parking is spreading into adjacent residential areas (e.g. the Grove, Greenfields and Barleyfields) which is causing problems for residents. Areas are seeking to introduce resident permit parking, which simply moves the problem on, rather than resolving it
- The cost of and insufficient provision of commuter parking at the railway station means that commuters are increasingly parking in residential areas all day and walking to the station, creating problems for local residents
- Residents are increasingly suffering problems from inconsiderate parents at drop off and pick up times around schools in Maltings Lane, Howbridge Road, and Bronte Road
- Parking by town centre employees on the industrial estates is causing a problem, and on occasion the industrial estates can become gridlocked, with HGV's being unable to move around freely
- Public transport needs to be better integrated, to encourage commuters onto public transport, to relieve the serious commuter parking problems in Witham

### **Issues/Ideas from residents included**

#### Traffic congestion

- Witham badly needs a relief road, to reduce HGV traffic and reroute it away from the town centre, i.e. through Eastways and Forest Road to Braintree and around Lodge Farm to the North. Alternative route to the A12: NW bypass – Motts Lane.

#### Buses –

- better coordination is needed between services
- Access to on demand transport
- Use of own Community transport
- More Sunday bus services
- Extend timetable of local buses
- A particular need identified regarding a direct bus link to local hospitals in Chelmsford and Braintree.

#### Rail

- Direct rail provision to Stansted (via Braintree)
- Improvement of rail link to Braintree to stop driving from Braintree to get the train at Witham. May reduce the number of commuter' parkers from outside Witham
- Braintree to allow 2 ways with loop
- Reduce cost from Braintree to Witham for residents only, to encourage use
- Faster train links from London will attract business to Witham and improve local economy
- Reinstate Maldon branch line.

#### Cycling –

- Hire cycles. 'Boris bike' scheme.

## Parking

- Public transport needs to be better integrated to encourage commuters into public transport, to relieve the serious commuter parking problems in Witham
- Increase the number of parking spaces in town centre by multi storey car park if necessary
- Reasonable parking charges – consider the display of blue badges and charges
- Increased parking for shop employees.

## School Parking

- School parking on site for staff and visitors
- No parking within ¼ mile of school with the exception of residents/disabled access
- School drop off zones – drive to drop off zone/teacher lead to school by walking.

## Other

- Volunteer drivers to support the elderly, infirm and disabled
- Better use of Freebournes taxi stand.
- With the growing number of people using single seat mobility vehicles consideration needs to be given to increasing the number of dropped kerbs.

## **Outcomes**

- Improved flow of traffic through Witham and relief of the congestion at the 'pinch points'
- Reduced volumes of HGV's accessing the town centre unnecessarily and clarification of most efficient routing
- Monitored reduction of traffic speed within housing estates
- Increased number of dropped kerbs, to facilitate increased use of mobility vehicles
- Improved integration of public transport to encourage commuters onto public transport and relieve the commuter parking problems in Witham
- New and improved cycle routes
- Provision of a direct bus link to local hospitals in Chelmsford and Braintree
- Provision of adequate and affordable town centre parking for employees and visitors, to relieve issues in both residential areas and on the industrial estates
- Increased supply of affordable commuter parking at the station, to relieve issues in residential areas
- The solving of the issues of inconsiderate parent parking at drop off and pick up times in residential areas, particularly around schools.

## **Actions and Projects**

### **Witham Town Council Actions**

- WTC to enlist the support of local Groups to monitor traffic speeds
- WTC to respond to monitor proposals and delivery of the new road schemes for A12 and A120
- WTC to lobby Highways England and ECC for an exit slip road southbound into Witham at junction 21 on A12
- WTC to lobby bus companies and ECC to provide better/direct transport facilities to local major hospitals

- WTC to continue to lobby and influence all relevant parties including BDC, ECC Highways and Government departments
- WTC to investigate a 'Boris' bike scheme for hire
- WTC to lobby for greater enforcement of traffic regulations.

### **Potential Joint Projects (Ideas from residents)**

- To engage ECC to commission full traffic flow surveys of all traffic corridors in and around Witham and to understand the causes of delays and potential gridlock hot spots, and to assist in identifying possible solutions
- Commuter parking to be addressed by Network Rail, BDC and the Parking Partnership
- Improve parking - Multi storey car park at railway station in partnership with Network Rail
- Encourage green transport
- Promote and increase walking and cycle path usage
- Develop app for on demand Transport
- Liaise with landowners to release un-utilised land for parking on edge of town
- Improve HGV overnight parking (dedicated area on outskirts of town – not industrial estate)
- Develop Park & Ride between Braintree and Witham
- Engage transport commissioning company that connects all transport providers
- Encourage new rail link via Network rail Network Rail loop/direct rail link to Stansted/Transport goods by rail
- Encourage school projects on the issues. Educate schools/parents re the problems caused by inconsiderate parking – could be a school project.



## 3.7 Wellbeing of Local Residents

### 3.7.1 Community, Safety and Crime

#### Witham Today

Witham is generally a safe place and as elsewhere crime and antisocial activities have fallen over the years. Perceptions however lag behind the facts, and measures to reassure residents and visitors remain essential.

Reduced Police resources have caused a lower level of response to activities seen by the Police as of lower priority.

CCTV covers much of the town centre but the installations are not linked and the standard of recording and monitoring varies widely. WTC CCTV comprises 11 cameras at the 2017 spec for 4k resolution, monitored 24 x 7 by the Chelmsford CCTV station. The Grove maintains their own CCTV system as does the Newland precinct. The other major CCTV operator is Witham Industrial Watch (WIW) who maintain their own system on the industrial estate, which has significantly cut crime levels, making it a better base for businesses.

Community self-help is undeveloped and represents an opportunity to combat crime.



#### The Twenty-Year Vision

Witham will be a safe and caring place to live in.

#### The Issues

- There is a feeling that low level crime is not being dealt with as it should e.g. alcohol abuse and anti-social behaviour
- There is scant policing (if any) with local knowledge
- Police response time is slow and sometimes arbitrary.

## **Outcomes**

- Re-establish a local police presence in Witham with officers who know and understand their local environment
- Improve police response times and willingness to deal with specific incidents
- Establish a more efficient, cost effective and holistic CCTV system throughout Witham, one that provides confidence to local residents and businesses alike
- Residents and businesses aware of risks and how to effectively handle them.

## **Actions and Projects**

### **Witham Town Council Actions**

- WTC to continue lobbying of Essex Police at senior level from the Town Council and all interested Witham community groups
- WTC is committed to the promotion and recruitment of Police Specials
- WTC will provide greater publicity to crime prevention and awareness, e.g. Neighbourhood Watch Schemes
- WTC will be purchasing an electronic information screen for public information purposes and to highlight crime prevention measures
- WTC will explore the merits and potential economies of scale in establishing one CCTV central system for Witham. The existing entities in Witham who operate CCTV will need to evaluate whether joining such a scheme is viable both financially and in terms of resources. Are more cameras needed in other specific hotspots within the town?

### **Potential Joint Project**

- Introduce ANPR checking at the southern end of town.

## **3.7.2 Education and Skills**

### **Witham Today**

Witham's educational facilities provide a variety that can meet the needs of all age groups. Provision of school places generally matches changes in population. The quality of provision has fluctuated in the past but the move towards academies, external inspections, and local management has helped a slow rise.

### **The Twenty-Year Vision**

Witham will be a centre of high standards of aspiration and of educational attainment.

### **The Issues**

- Capacity now and in the future (with new residential development), particularly pre-school and primary
- Ensuring that provision of high class education in Witham is evenly distributed throughout the town
- Ensuring access for all to further education facilities in neighbouring towns
- Affordable housing is available to assist teacher recruitment – these provisions to be included in the Local Plan.

### **Outcomes**

- Improved standards and performance at all key stages of education from primary level to adult education, which in turn will uplift the level of adult qualifications and positively impact on new schools and teacher recruitment
- Ensure that capacity now and in the future (with new residential development), particularly pre-school and primary, meets the demand (and is evenly distributed) within the town
- Ensure adequate access for all to further education facilities in neighbouring towns
- Improved education in life skills (from early age and continuing) and education in health.

### **Actions and Projects**

#### **Witham Town Council Actions**

- WTC to continue to review progress made in Town Council and Community Committee meetings.
- WTC to continue to lobby on behalf of Witham residents to all Government levels, National (local MP), County, District to press for new and improved education opportunities and developments in Witham.

#### **Potential Joint Projects**

- Potentially via ECC to promote life education/skills in schools for young adults (Coram led) The Thomas Coram Foundation for Children is a large children's charity in London which uses the working name Coram.
- Potentially via ECC, WTC to promote life skills for young adults with learning disabilities.
- Promotion of 'Information About Me' - a self-learning scheme and partnership project. IAM forms about individual needs to be monitored with IAM cards to all residents.

- The Town Council to support and promote Community Centres, highlighting :-
  - the importance of the purposes of the objectives for these centres.  
the community helping each other to attract and train volunteers
  - Inter- generational communities /activities
  - Development of community centres in all areas.

### 3.7.3 Entertainment and the Arts

#### Witham Today

There is a thriving local entertainment and arts scene in the town, mainly centred on the Public Hall, as well as other venues.

Performing arts are led by the local amateur dramatic and operatic societies, with the Witham Operatic Workshop for younger performers. Less formal groups such as the Big Sing also perform regularly. The annual puppet festival provides street art with visiting acts each September. There are regular recitals in St Nicolas and the United Reformed Church.

A wide range of clubs and societies meet at Spring Lodge (run by the Witham Community Association) covering interests such as photography or painting and much else.

There is a long-established Town Council Information Centre to provide information in the High Street.



#### The Twenty-Year Vision

Witham is known for its diversity of entertainment and community events, its excellent venues, and a vibrant programme of performing arts, attracting residents from surrounding areas to the town.

#### The Issues

- The ability of residents and visitors to find out what's on and where.
- To maintain the diversity of entertainments and arts in line with the expectations of local residents, of all age groups.

## **Outcomes**

- Ensure that there is good entertainments and arts provision in Witham to meet the needs of all of the town's population and surrounding areas
- Ensure that Witham keeps up with new trends and provides appropriate facilities particularly for young people where entertainment needs may be different from older generations.

## **Actions and Projects**

### **Witham Town Council Actions**

- WTC to continue to monitor developments at Town Council and Community Committee meetings.
- WTC to continue to lobby on behalf of Witham residents to all Government levels, National (local MP) - District Council, County Council and to press for new and improved entertainment and arts opportunities and developments in Witham.
- WTC to continue to organise quality annual community events such as the annual 'Puppet Festival', 'Community Day' and 'Dickensian Christmas event'.
- WTC to continue to use grant funding to support the continuation of Community Groups .e.g. Witham Carnival, Boys Brigade, Majorettes etc.
- WTC to support the continuation of Community groups/clubs/ venues etc. e.g. the town Luncheon Club, bowls club etc. for an ever-increasing percentage level of elderly residents.
- WTC to ensure that the Public hall maintains its Assets of Community Value status.
- WTC to regenerate the Information Centre to ensure that the variety of arts and entertainment available is more visible, accessible and appealing to local residents e.g. configuration of a new information screen and increased use of interactive social media.

## 3.7.4 Sport and Recreation

### Witham Today

BDC provide a recently built swimming pool with indoor sporting and exercise facilities, good quality playing fields across the town for football and cricket on their own grounds. Clubs exist for hockey, rugby and bowls, with the Witham Town Football Club in the national leagues.

The River Walk and other open spaces provide for informal recreation including pet exercising.

### The Twenty-Year Vision

Witham will have first class provision of sporting and recreational facilities to meet residents' needs.

### The Issues

- New Leisure Centre may prove insufficient for the population it now serves
- Inadequate sporting facilities on 'new build' housing estates
- Need to achieve a wider range of sporting opportunities, e.g. there are still no tennis courts in Witham
- Standards set out by the National Playing Field Association state that there should be 2.4 hectares of outdoor playing space per 1000 population. Given that open space facilities are expensive to maintain to a high standard, it may be unrealistic to aim to bridge the gap between what we have and NPFA ideals with such additional facilities, especially as high-class athletics facilities are available in Chelmsford and Braintree
- A need for a floodlit synthetic pitch for hockey and soccer serving clubs and schools.

### Outcomes

- Sporting and recreational facilities are expanded and enhanced to accommodate the population and housing growth in Witham
- Local residents take the opportunities available to improve health and wellbeing
- Increased footfall and usage of public open spaces and sports venues and recreational facilities
- Move toward joining up the River Walk and the Blackwater trail more effectively, to promote better recreational use of our green spaces.

### Actions and Projects

#### Witham Town Council Actions

- WTC to continue to lobby and influence all relevant parties including developers, BDC, ECC and government to ensure good sporting and recreational facilities are in place and accessible to all residents
- WTC to ensure that the Section 106 funds left by developers to BDC are spent to designated projects to include sufficient sporting and recreational facilities
- WTC to publicise sports facilities available in Witham.



## Potential Joint Projects

- Ice skating & tennis courts provision.

## 3.7.5 Youth

### Witham Today

Witham's young people generally are engaged, active, curious, and acquiring knowledge and skills as they grow up

They enjoy opportunities to pursue their interests and to socialise

They have aspirations for themselves in the future

There is a minority that are disengaged and indulge in misbehaviour.

### The Twenty-Year Vision

- The young people of Witham will be confident, capable and articulate. They will be aware of local challenges and opportunities, and have the knowledge, contacts, health and base skills to irrepressibly lead the future of both their own lives and the life of Witham.
- Witham to be:
  - a place where children and young people realise that they have talents.
  - a safe place where they have a chance to realise and enhance these talents.
  - an adventurous place where they recognise and are given opportunities to use those talents in service to their community and beyond.

### The issues

- Knowing what activities are available
- Ability to access activities (mainly around cost and transport)
- Safety concerns, especially street and footpath lighting
- Nature and extent of support from ECC's Youth Service, including Parkside Centre.

### The Aims

- Ensure that young people are aware of the opportunities that are available in Witham – the clubs, the activities, the support services
- Provide places where young people can meet together and engage in a range of fun and developmental activities
- Empower young people to be involved in decision making
- Increase the work confidence of young people and provide them with the tools and skills to enter into employment or self-employment and lead fulfilled lives
- Ensure that there are wide ranging youth activities for both girls and boys.

### Actions and Projects

#### Witham Town Council Actions

- WTC to encourage participation in its decision-making by young people
- WTC to continue to support youth group initiatives in Witham through grant funding.