



Reepham Economic Strategy

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The background image shows a red brick building with a dark tiled roof. A white-framed window is visible on the left. A black sign with gold lettering and a white central panel is mounted on the brick wall. The sign reads 'The Old House' in a stylized font, and the central panel reads 'HOTEL RESTAURANT AND FREE HOUSE'.

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1. Introduction

1. Introduction

Ingham Pinnock Associates was appointed in December 2012 to prepare an economic strategy for Reepham in Norfolk.

Reepham is one of three main settlements within the Local Authority area of Broadland. It lies approximately 15 miles north west of Norwich and 20 miles south of the north Norfolk coast. The town is set within a peaceful area of beautiful countryside equidistant between the Holt and Fakenham Roads which are each around 3 miles away to the east and west and are major arterial routes out of Norwich.

Reepham is a traditional rural market town. It has a long and fascinating history which has left a legacy of unique urban morphology, numerous Listed buildings, wonderful public spaces and a strong sense of community.

However, this strategy has been prepared at an important moment in the history of Reepham as local development framework sets out plans for housing growth and the traditional town centre is seeking to adapt to new consumer trends. These issues, and others, have generated concern amongst residents and businesses who cherish the town and are determined to ensure that it has a successful future.

The preparation of the economic strategy has been overseen and supported by a number of important local groups who worked in partnership to create a Town Team, including:

- Reepham Chamber of Commerce
- St Mary's Church
- Realistic Reepham
- The Reepham Society
- The Salle Estate
- Reepham Green Team
- Reepham High School and College
- Reepham Town Council
- The Bircham Centre
- Broadland District Council

The objective of the economic strategy is simply to identify a range of deliverable projects and initiatives that can help to maintain and grow the economy of Reepham over the short, medium and long-term. There is no fixed timescale or deadline by which the strategy must be delivered. Rather it is designed to contain projects that can be implemented immediately, projects that can only be delivered over the next two or three years and projects that will take much longer to implement but for which the strategy provides an important starting point.

The outputs of the strategy are deliberately designed to be practical with only minimal requirements for financial investment and to be deliverable by members of the Town Team. Broadland District

Council prioritises practical outputs over high-level advice and the strategy has been prepared with that preference as a guiding principle.

The process of preparing the strategy can be broken down into three stages as follows:

1. **Research:** Undertaking extensive statistical research, reviewing relevant strategies, policies and other literature, undertaking stakeholder and community consultation
2. **Strategy development:** Identifying issues that currently inhibit the economic success of Reepham and identifying and testing a series of projects and initiatives that can deliver this address these issues
3. **Implementation:** Assigning responsibility for individual projects and delivering them. This third stage is on-going.

The remainder of this document comprises the Reepham Economic Strategy. It is made up of the following sections:

- **Reepham in 2013:** Illustrating a number of key characteristics of Reepham
- **Strategy:** Outlining key issues which provide the building blocks of the strategy
- **Projects and initiatives:** Highlighting tailored deliverable projects and practical next steps capable of addressing issues identified in Reepham and overcoming the issues identified
- **Projects summary:** Illustrating in summary the full suite of projects contained in the strategy.

2. Reepham in 2013

2. Reepham in 2013

The population of Reepham in 2013 is approximately 2,700. However, the town acts as a service centre for a much larger rural hinterland which encompasses many small villages and hamlets.

The population of Reepham is notable for the above average proportion of residents aged between 40 and 60, many of which, consultation would suggest, have moved to the town from elsewhere because of its charm, access to the countryside and Norwich and a strongly performing secondary school.

The population of Reepham is generally well educated, particularly relative to Norfolk as a whole, and employed in higher level occupations. Unemployment in Reepham is roughly half the national average and in spite of the rural location, there is little evidence of any acute issues of deprivation.

Comments provided at a public consultation event demonstrated that residents value highly their local shops and amenities and the strong sense of community that exists in the town. However, concern was expressed about a lack of certain community facilities, poor public transport links and a lack of car parking.

There are around 500 jobs located in Reepham. The level of employment in the town has grown steadily since the early 2000's, by around 14% in total, although there has been a small reduction in total employment since the start of the financial crisis in the late 2000's. In spite of on-going public sector austerity measures, much of the losses have been in the private sector with the effect that the public and private sector now employ an almost equal number of people in the town.

Employment is focussed in two principle locations (excluding the school); the town centre which contains a range of retail and professional services and the Collers Way Industrial Estate which contains a mix of light industrial activities.

The business base in the town is characterised by the presence of two large employers (the High School & College and Norfolk Country Cottages), very few SMEs and a very large number of micro-businesses. Of the 114 businesses located in the town in 2008, over 100 of these were micro businesses.

There is a relatively high concentration of micro businesses engaged in knowledge-led service sectors such as ICT, creative and professional industries although in aggregate, these businesses employ very few people.

Physically, Reepham has a wealth of fantastic qualities. The market place is surrounded by well-preserved Georgian frontages, there are a number of landmark buildings in and around the town centre such as the Bircham Centre and the fascinating St Mary's Church. The Marriot's Way footpath skirts northern edge of the town which is on the National Cycle Route 1 and more widely Reepham is set within an extremely high quality rural landscape.

Notwithstanding the above, there are challenges to the appeal of Reepham in the form of a number of weak and unattractive 'gateways', poor linkages and wayfinding, a market place which is difficult

to read and some examples of insensitive development outside of the town centre. Cumulatively these have a distorting impact on the genuine attractiveness and appeal of Reepham.

3. Strategy

3. Strategy

Having undertaken a significant programme of research, community and stakeholder consultation, three main issues were identified that are undermining the economic success of the town. These three issues are at the core of the strategy and form the basis for designing mitigating projects and initiatives. They are summarised in the tables below.

ISSUE 1: CONSUMER LEAKAGE
<p>Causes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• consistent growth in online retail• historic growth and establishment of out of town retail parks elsewhere• the proliferation and growing offer of supermarkets in surrounding towns• changes in lifestyles where people increasingly work away from Reepham and only return in the evening outside of shopping hours• limited and inconsistent opening hours of local shops• a cluttered environment in the town centre• weak public transport links to neighbouring villages and hamlets.
<p>Effects:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• reduced revenue for local retailers ultimately ending in failing businesses• fewer employment opportunities for local residents• reduction in social interaction resulting from fewer trips into the town centre• dwindling local choice forcing people to travel elsewhere with associated environmental impacts• a diminution of local character and sense of place through the loss of historic and independent businesses.

ISSUE 2: CONSTRAINED BUSINESS BASE
<p>Causes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• lack of <i>suitable</i> employment space for businesses wanting to benefit from the attractiveness of Reepham and the surrounding countryside• mismatch between policy-led supply of employment space and market demand• micro businesses unwilling to grow and take on employees• limited scale of the local market for goods and services• poor electronic infrastructure, particularly mobile phone reception.
<p>Effects:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• potential inward investment is frustrated by the lack of suitable premises• indigenous business growth is stifled by a lack of space or desire to expand• where businesses do grow, they are often forced to relocate away from Reepham• structural vulnerability resulting from a heavy reliance on a very small number of large employers with very few SMEs• lack of local employment opportunities.

ISSUE 3: POOR RECOGNITION AND PERCEPTION
<p>Causes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• some recent development has been insensitive to local character and dilutes the overall

attractiveness of the town

- the decline and / or loss of community events and festivities
- undeveloped brownfield sites
- poor linkages between visitor assets such as the Marriot's Way and town centre or cluster of churches and green spaces
- unappealing gateways
- lack of any obvious 'honey pot' helping to promote a positive image of the town.

Effects:

- weak image and perception of the town
- opportunity cost of lost visitor spend
- opposition and hostility towards new development
- limited awareness & visibility of the most attractive parts of the town.

4. Projects and initiatives

4. Projects and initiatives

The three issues identified in the previous section provide a basis for the development of a programme of projects and initiatives that can help to support and grow the economy of Reephham. In order to address each issue the strategy sets out three ‘baskets’ of related projects that results in the three-by-three matrix below.

1: CONSUMER LEAKAGE:	A. Creating a retail renaissance	B. Preparing a public realm Masterplan	C. Thickening public transport
2: CONSTRAINED BUSINESS BASE:	A. Improving business infrastructure	B. Growing the indigenous base	C. Optimising land and property
3: POOR RECOGNITION & PERCEPTION	A. Improving quality of new development	B. Optimising buildings and land	C. Improving visitor experience

Issue 1: Consumer leakage

Initiative 1A: Creating a retail renaissance

Aim: The aim of this basket of projects is to generate a renaissance in local retail in Reepham

Objectives:

- to reinforce and strengthen the performance of local retailers
- to re-connect local retailers with local residents
- to expand the retail catchment of the town

Background:

Reepham has a good range of local retail businesses concentrated in and around the town centre. A number of these have been in Reepham for generations and are an important part of the character and economic base of the town. When asked, the local community have frequently commented that they value these retailers and that they add significantly to the attractiveness of the town.

However, common to many town centre or high streets, a number of the traditional retailers in Reepham are struggling to survive and the situation has become increasingly fragile in recent years.

The fragility of the retail sector in Reepham was demonstrated in 2012 when the only bank in the town was closed for a number of months following a robbery. With the loss of this one activity, retailers reported a significant drop in footfall and trade as fewer people came into the town centre to bank and undertake other linked activities. The impact of the temporary loss of this one part of the retail mix in Reepham demonstrates how vulnerable the sector is.

Project 1: Reconnecting residents and retailers

Research and consultation highlighted that there is a mismatch between the traditional opening hours of retailers and the availability of free time of residents in Reepham to shop. This trend is driven by changing the work / life balance of residents and a lack of adaptation amongst retailers.

The mismatch has led to the connection between local residents and their local retailers being lost and significant consumer leakage with residents shopping in other locations where shops are open on a more convenient basis.

This project therefore seeks to trial a number of measures that will result in residents reconnecting with local retailers and reducing the level of consumer leakage. If the trial is successful it is hoped that local retailers will start to re-capture a proportion of spend currently being lost to other areas by building new relationships with residents. The model could potentially be sustained or expanded subject to demand.

It is proposed that retailers trial evening openings for four predetermined evenings in a month during 2013. The trial would be preceded by significant marketing and publicity. The first of the four evenings would be deliberately described as a 'Meet your Retailer' evening with shop owners and employees working hard to engage shoppers promote their business.

Each of the four trial evenings would include appropriate retailers spilling out onto the street and Market Place with demonstrations, tastings and exhibitions, activating the Market Place and creating a high level of interest. The trials could be accompanied by an evening market (see project2) and the implementation of the electric mini bus project bringing residents from surrounding villages into Reepham (see project 5).

Lead and support:

Reepham Chamber of Commerce would take the lead in this project with support from Broadland District Council and Reepham Town Council.

Next steps:

- set up a meeting with all local retailers and establish whether there is appetite to progress the trial, at this meeting the following will be discussed and agreed:
 - dates for the trial
 - marketing strategy
 - special events/activities that could be held as part of the trial to encourage people in to the town centre
 - method for capturing the success of the trial.

Project 2: Become a rural market exemplar

Reepham has had a market of some description for centuries. Today, Reepham holds a general market in half of the Market Place every Wednesday morning. It is attended by a range of market traders and is a well-used resource. As is the case with many markets, the appearance and layout of the market in Reepham could be improved, with traders vehicles taking up limited space, blocking views and diminishing the overall attractiveness of the event.

High quality and specialist markets are increasingly recognised as an important attraction. They are capable of generating increased levels of footfall and increased levels of spend at the market itself and in existing fixed retail units.

Over the last 12 months, Reepham's market has benefitted from the attendance of a number of new high-quality traders and enquiries from new businesses wishing to take space, this is fantastic for the town and this momentum can be built upon.

This project proposes to take the opportunity to review existing market arrangements, prepare a strategy for the future and grow the range and quality of the offer so that Reepham becomes an exemplar for rural markets in Norfolk. If the project is successful, it will attract new visitors to the town, re-capture spend that is currently lost, raise the profile of the town and improve trading conditions for existing retailers as well as market traders.

Working with the Town Council, the review and strategy would focus on a number of issues such as:

- the possibility of creating a Market Trader Charter setting out requirements in relation to the parking of goods vehicles, the appearance and layout of stalls and hours of operation
- the need to define and identify a target mix of traders that provides a comprehensive and attractive offer. This could include the identification of a core range of food retailers such as fruit and vegetables, meat, fish, bread etc and the identification of secondary activities such as hardware, plants, pet food, clothes etc
- the opportunity to create a masterplan (to scale) showing a number layout options. This would also detail how new market stalls could be accommodated in the future as the market grows
- how the market is publicised, in particular using social media and the internet
- a programme of occasional markets to punctuate and supplement the traditional offer. This could include occasional farmers markets, specialist international markets or evening markets that could be planned to complement project 1
- ensuring a good rapport/communication between market traders and local retailers
- establishing ways in which existing businesses could play a bigger role in the market should they wish to do so, such as taking space within the market or enabling their goods to spill out on to the pavements/Market Place during market days
- establish clear roles for all interested parties going forward.

Lead and support:

- Reepham Town Council would take the lead on this project with support from Broadland District Council and the Reepham Chamber of Commerce.

Next steps:

- Reepham Town Council to empower the Town Clerk to develop a strategy for the market
- Town Clerk to scope the strategy (see above) and meet with the relevant parties such as market traders and fixed retailers and secure their support from an early stage
- establish whether any external funding is required and where possible secure
- prepare strategy in consultation with market traders and fixed retailers, finalise and present to the Town Council and Town Team prior to implementation.
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Project 3: Develop Reepham retailers online presence

Research identified that whilst a proportion of retailers in Reepham have an online presence, it is by no means comprehensive.

The growth of the internet and increasing volume of online marketing and sales represents an unprecedented change in the way that the retail sector operates. This strategy is based on the assumption that adapting to this change and optimising the use of the internet to market, publicise, communicate and trade is fundamental to the future success of the retail sector.

This project therefore proposes that every retailer in Reepham develops some form of online presence before the end of 2013. This could include simply setting up and using accounts with facebook, twitter, linkedin or pinterest, taking space on the Reepham Life website or building a very simple website or blog page. Ultimately, this project proposes that retailers in Reepham explore the possibility of creating some form of online shop for the town but it is recognised that this is a longer term ambition.

The strategy recognises that different approaches are needed for different types of retail and that there will be differing levels of expertise and capacity amongst retailers to deliver this idea. However, the Reepham Chamber of Commerce, Broadland District Council and Reepham College all provide some level of support and there are a range of free and low-cost courses available, including through Broadland District Council that can be utilised.

Lead and support:

- Reepham Chamber Commerce would take the lead facilitating this project with support from Broadland District Council.

Next steps:

- Reepham Chamber of Commerce to audit the level of of internet presence amongst local businesses
- Reepham Chamber of Commerce to meet with Reepham High School and establish whether there is an opportunity for businesses and students to support one another with online development. For example, businesses could offer work experience placements to students and whilst undertaking the work experience students help to set up and train the businesses in some form of online marketing, for example setting up a twitter account, facebook page or even a simple website. This could form part of the mentoring scheme mentioned under initiative two
- Reepham Chamber of Commerce to invite all businesses within Reepham to a briefing provided by an online marketing/social media specialist. This briefing will help to provide businesses with a background to the importance of an internet presence, where there might be gaps in their knowledge and outline the opportunities to undertake further training. The briefing would also allow businesses to sign up to either free or heavily subsidised social media/internet training

- by the end of 2014, Reepham Chamber of Commerce to undertake a second audit of internet presence for local businesses to establish whether the goal has been met.

Initiative 1B: Preparing a public realm masterplan

Aim: The aim of this initiative is to facilitate a number of physical changes that will improve the economic performance of the town centre.

Objectives:

- to bring more visitors into the town centre by improving key gateways
- to increase the visibility and improve the appearance of retailers in the town centre
- to improve the ease with which people access and move around the town centre

Background:

Reepham has a beautiful and well preserved historic town centre. It has a dense network of mediaeval buildings and spaces, originally arranged around Back Street and a fine Market Place surrounded by buildings with impressive Georgian facades which is now the centre of the town.

As the town has grown, changed and adapted and as its role within Norfolk has changed, parts of the town that one functioned perfectly have become problematic and areas that were once highly treasured and well maintained have become neglected. This leaves a situation today where it is hard for visitors or people passing through the town (on bike, foot or in a car) to identify or navigate to the town centre and it leaves a town centre that is in places cluttered and confusing.

Cumulatively, these physical issues undermine the efforts of individual retailers and inhibit the potential economic performance of the town centre.

Project 4: Masterplan projects

Research and consultation has identified a number of physical issues in and around the town centre that could be addressed with the effect of improving the way the town centre functions and the economic performance of businesses.

These issues should be researched further, considered and addressed in detail through the preparation of a masterplan or establishing design policies that could be included in a Neighbourhood Plan. However, it is recognised that a masterplan or Neighbourhood Plan will take time to fund and prepare and whilst some issues will need to be addressed in this way, some issues could be addressed quickly and simply without more detailed work.

Issues identified that could be addressed as part of this project include:

- improving Reepham's 'front door': The crossroads of the Dereham Road, School Lane, Cawston Road and the Market Place / Church Hill is an important gateway to Reepham's town centre, carrying a significant volume of through traffic. However, due to the layout of buildings around the cross roads and the topography of the town it is difficult for visitors to recognise that they are at one of the main entrances to the town centre. This situation could be addressed through a number of measures such as the introduction of improved signage, implementing different surface treatments to the highway and pavements or the activation of building frontages with awnings and signage, helping to draw the eye in to the Market Place
- improving attractiveness and efficiency of car parking (maintaining numbers but improving efficiency and attractiveness, reinstating retailer permits): Whilst large areas of car parking in the Market Place are set out with white lines, parking within these areas is informal with no marked bays. This works relatively well in the two main areas of car parking in the centre of the market place but less well in the areas immediately outside of retail premises which quickly become cluttered with cars and goods vehicles. This has the effect of obscuring attractive retail frontages. This situation could be addressed through the re-ordering of car parking spaces in these areas and the voluntary removal of parked cars belonging to traders. Traders previously operated a permit scheme to allow staff to park elsewhere on private land, increasing the availability of spaces for visitors and shoppers. This scheme could be re-introduced

The Market Place itself is also currently surfaced with black asphalt which is unattractive, draws attention away from the fantastic architecture and creates the perception of the entire area being part of the highway. This situation could be addressed through the delivery of a different surface treatment such as tar, spray and chip, that would brighten the space and make it feel more pedestrian friendly

- improving shop fronts and visibility: Shop fronts in Reepham town centre are relatively low-key and can be difficult to identify. This is in part due to the way that parking is currently

arranged (see above) but also because many shop fronts have lost traditional dressings such as awnings and signage. Recognising the need to work within a conservation area which covers much of the town centre, this issue could be addressed by retailers by making small amendment to shop fronts such as investment in more prominent signage and awnings

- improving key views and spaces: There are a number of important spaces, views and vistas in the town centre that have been lost over time through the introduction of clutter and parked cars. The removal or re-ordering of parked cars (see above) would help to address this as would minor works such as the removal of fences and railings, for example at the 'pound' at the front of St Mary's Church and outside the Spar
- improving way-finding in and around the town centre: There is currently only very limited wayfinding signage in and around the town centre. This makes it difficult for visitors to identify where the town centre is and secondly to find it. This situation could be addressed through the introduction of clear and attractive signage at key locations.

The more detailed work noted above would pick up these issues but also identify others that would all support the performance of the town centre.

Lead and support:

- many of the smaller actions set out above could be led by individual landowners and retail tenants or organisations such as the Reepham Chamber of Commerce, with support from Broadland District Council. If a masterplan or Neighbourhood Plan were to be pursued they would logically be led by Broadland District Council or the Town Council respectively.

Next steps:

- form a small working group with representatives from BDC, RTC, NCC Highways, Chamber of Commerce and IPA to establish a brief for a masterplan. This group would identify projects that can be delivered in advance of the masterplan and those that require specialist input and would form part of the masterplan
- identify and secure funding to deliver the masterplan or Neighbourhood Plan
- procure appropriate mixed discipline team to produce masterplan or Neighbourhood Plan
- identify and secure funding to deliver physical works.

Before...



After?



Before...



After?



Before...



Awnings



Hanging signs



Market Place

Now...



Awnings



Hanging signs



Market Place

After...



Awnings



Hanging signs



Market Place

Initiative 1C: Thickening transport links

Aim: The aim of the two projects under this initiative is to make existing transport assets work harder to benefit the town centre

Objectives:

- to bring more visitors into the town centre from surrounding villages
- to bring more visitors into the town centre from surrounding walking and cycling routes

Background:

The rural nature of Reepham inevitably means that it is only served by a low level of public transport. This limits access to Reepham for those without private cars and channels people in villages outside of the town to larger settlements such as Dereham or Norwich which they may be able to access via public transport – even if these settlements are much further away from where they live. As a result the performance of the town centre is undermined, the catchment for retailers is artificially reduced and the existing model is socially, economically and environmentally unsustainable.

Reepham is fortunate to be criss-crossed by a number of nationally important walking and cycling routes such as the Marriot's Way and National Cycle Route 1. However, these routes do not necessarily carry walkers and cyclists into the town centre and without knowing Reepham many of these visitors would be unaware of the location, quality and attractiveness of the town centre. Any expenditure from this important group of visitors is therefore largely being lost from the town.

Project 5: Re-launching the electric mini bus

By successfully securing funding from central Government the Reepham Green Team was able to purchase an environmentally sustainable electric mini-bus for the use of the town. The original concept was for the mini-bus to be shared by the High School and the community, where it would operate a service between Reepham and local villages poorly served, if at all, by public transport. However, the initial initiative to establish a service for local villages was unsuccessful and the mini-bus is now only principally used by the High School.

This project proposes that a fresh approach is considered and the electric bus service for local villages is re-launched. Working closely with the High School to understand the availability of the mini bus, this project proposes that two or three key villages are identified that lack public transport and local services, a timetable is established and an intensive campaign of awareness raising and marketing is undertaken for a period of time before the re-launch goes live. This could include hard copy and electronic marketing and even simply parking the mini bus in a prominent location in each village with information about the forthcoming scheme.

It is important that the strategy for re-launch is simple and relatively contained. New initiatives such as this often take time to become established and it is important that the project does not over-stretch itself from the outset.

The project recognises that there is a limited availability of volunteer drivers with appropriate licences. This is partly addressed through project 23 but could also be addressed through discussion with Broadland District Council and voluntary organisations from surrounding towns and villages such as Aylsham.

Lead and support:

- this project would be led by the Green Team and the Chamber of Commerce with support from all of the members of the Reepham Town Team.

Next steps:

- Green Team and the High School to meet to understand availability of the mini-bus throughout the year
- Green Team to identify those outlying areas that are lacking public transport and local services and would benefit from a mini bus service
- Chamber of Commerce to establish opening hours of businesses and services (such as the library) to ensure that any timetable developed coincides with opening hours for key services or activities in the town
- Green Team, Chamber of Commerce and Aylsham Business and Enterprise Forum to meet and discuss how the two towns might be able to collaborate to deliver a scheme
- once these initial actions are complete, the team leading the project need to establish a programme for delivery and a marketing strategy

- we propose that initially any new service is operated on a trial basis to establish the level of demand. It is suggested that the initial trials of the service coincide with events and activities in the town, this will ensure that maximum publicity is received for the project and that hopefully an instant impact is noticed by businesses and services in the town.

Project 6: Improving walking and cycling links to the town centre

A review of walking and cycling infrastructure in and around Reepham highlights that the town benefits from being located on the following major walking and cycling routes:

- North Sea Cycle Route which is an orbital route around England, Scotland, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands and Belgium
- Marriot's Way which is a 26 mile footpath, cycle route and bridleway which runs along disused railway lines between Aylsham and Norwich
- National Cycle Route 1 which is a long-distance cycle route between the Shetland Isles and Dover.

In addition to the above the town is also criss-crossed with a number of local footpaths, bridleways and walking routes.

All of the above routes are well used by many walkers and cyclists throughout the year from the UK and overseas. However, many of the above routes do not directly flow through the town centre and where they do come into contact with the edges of Reepham, there is little or no information about, or directions to, the town centre.

This project seeks to improve the visibility of the town centre at key points along these routes and improve the ease of access from these points to the town centre through the provision of improved signage.

If the project is successful, it will result in a greater proportion of the walking and cycling visitors currently passing the town by, travelling into the town centre to use the range of retail, food and drink and services and improving the performance of the town centre economy.

This project is also included under issue three: recognition and perception in relation to improving the visitor experience at project 22.

Lead and support:

- this project would be led by the Chamber of Commerce with support from all of the members of the Reepham Town Team.

Next steps:

- at the outset we advise that the Chamber of Commerce make contact with NCC, the BDC tourism officer and a conservation officer and the Town Council, to ensure that everyone is aware of the project and its objectives and to ensure that there are no overlaps with existing work being carried out and to establish whether any permissions (land owner, planning etc) are required
- the Chamber of Commerce to undertake a comprehensive audit of all town centre signage and map the results

- from the results of the audit, identify key areas that require new, alternative or better signage guiding people in to the town centre and areas of interest
- at the same time as undertaking the audit, form a small group of local specialists (graphic designers, marketing specialists, photographers) to develop a simple branding strategy for the town. This may only consist of a small palette of colours and fonts and some stock photos that could be used for any marketing, signage etc developed for the town. This is particularly important to ensure that any new signage, information boards etc are coordinated. It is important to ensure that conservation officers at BDC are involved from the outset to ensure that anything developed sits comfortably within the conservation area. Once the branding strategy is complete ensure that it is available to all groups, societies, businesses etc within the town to use freely, as per the model adopted by Broads Tourism
- once the audit is undertaken and the branding established, a detailed plan (wayfinding strategy) of all signs to be removed, amended or created is to be developed alongside a programme for their delivery.

Before...



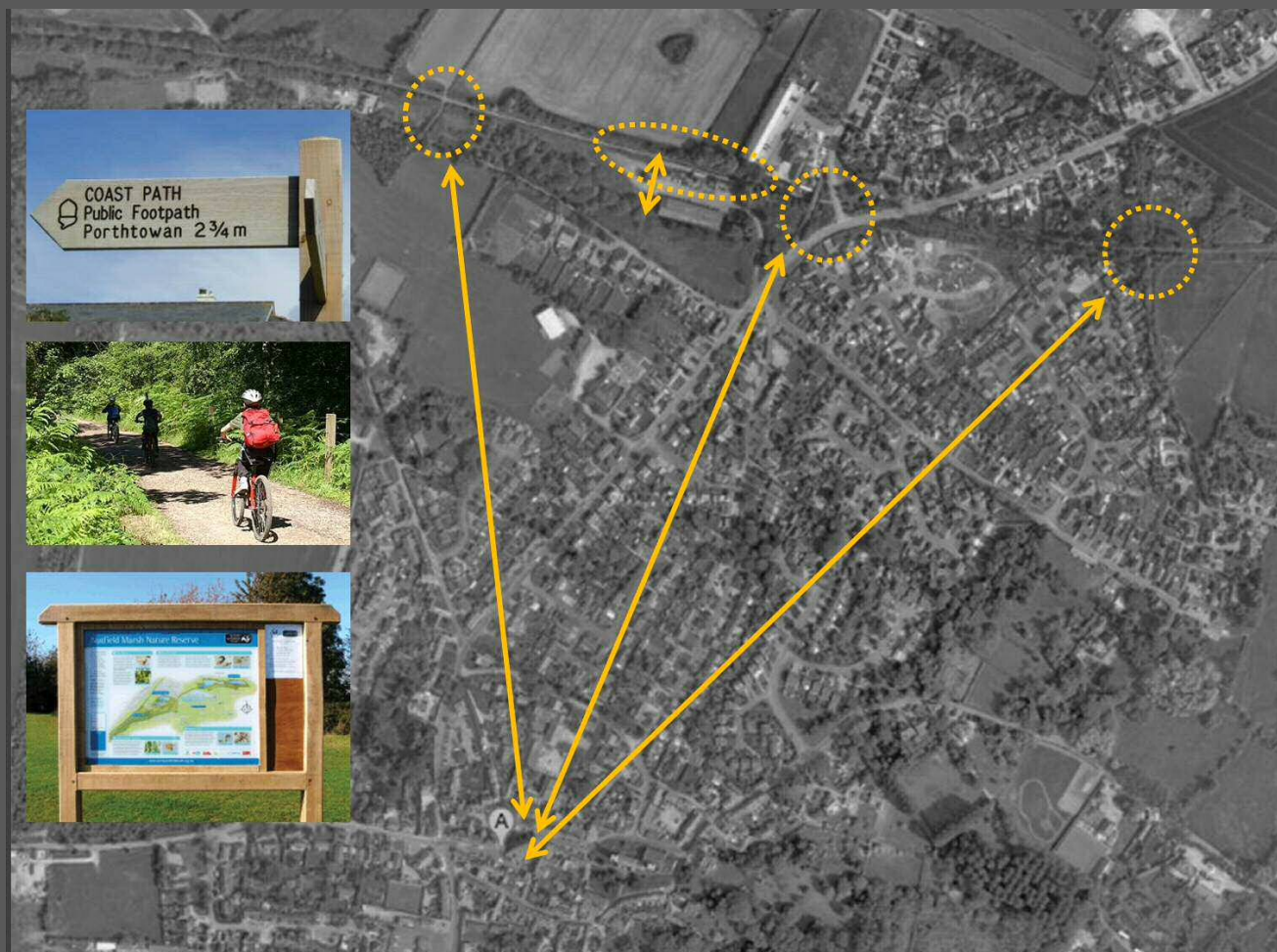
After?



Before...



After?



Issue 2: Constrained business base

Initiative 2A: Improving business infrastructure

Aim: The aim of the basket of projects making up this initiative is to improve operating conditions for all businesses in Reepham by addressing a range of common infrastructure issues.

Objectives:

- to improve the scope and performance of institutional or 'soft' infrastructure
- to improve information and communications technology (ICT) infrastructure

Background:

Reepham is home to a large number of businesses across the retail, business services, leisure and manufacturing sectors. However, and due to largely its rural location, many businesses have expressed concern about the performance of ICT infrastructure with mobile phone reception that is very poor to non-existent and broadband speeds that are relatively slow. These issues represent an impediment to the performance of existing businesses seeking to operate efficiently and effectively.

Reepham benefits from the existence of a good local Chamber of Commerce. The Chamber is organised and well run with a reasonable membership. This strategy is based on the perspective that local chambers of commerce such as that in Reepham are increasingly important in supporting and promoting local economies, particularly for small businesses in rural areas and can do more to drive economic development.

Project 7: Enhancing the Reepham Chamber of Commerce

Reepham Chamber of Commerce is a good, active local chamber. It meets every one to two months and has been an effective body for discussing local issues and putting on a range of events and activities over recent years.

This strategy is based on the perspective that local 'soft infrastructure' such as chambers of commerce and trade associations have an increasingly important role to play in economic development, particularly for small businesses and in rural areas. Their direct understanding of local issues, network of members and flexibility make them an excellent intermediary between businesses and local government and an effective vehicle for delivering small scale local projects and initiatives.

This project therefore proposes to enhance the scope and role of the Reepham Chamber of Commerce and increase its influence in driving local economic development.

The project suggests that the Chamber prepares and implements a three year strategy setting out a series of simple and achievable goals that might contain the following:

- a programme of actions seeking to grow membership and participation such as local procurement pledges, enhanced marketing activity, invitations to free events and links to free skills and training courses and information
- the identification of individual champions who will represent different sectors such as retail, business services, leisure and manufacturing
- the identification of a number of projects that the Chamber can deliver led by relevant champions, some of which could come from suggestions in this strategy
- establishing links with other local chambers and business groups such as the Aylsham Business and Enterprise Forum in order to promote Reepham and share knowledge and best practice with other local groups.

Lead and support:

- this project would be led by the Chamber of Commerce with support from Broadland District Council.

Next steps:

- Reepham Chamber to conduct a review of its existing strategy and programme of projects and initiatives including consultation with members
- Reepham Chamber to meet with Broadland District Council to discuss input and support
- working with Broadland District Council, Reepham Chamber to scope and prepare a new three year strategy, to commence at the end of the 2013/14 financial year.

Project 8: Raising awareness of enhanced broadband

During the preparation of this strategy, Norfolk County Council announced that it had contracted with BT to roll-out enhanced broadband infrastructure across Norfolk by 2015; the Better Broadband for Norfolk programme. Whilst Reepham currently has broadband access, this partnership will result in a faster and more reliable service. The programme is being rolled out in phases between 2013 and 2015.

This project originally set out to lobby Norfolk County Council to ensure that Reepham was included in one of the early phases of the enhanced broadband roll-out. However, programme information has confirmed that the phasing of the roll-out will be based on technical considerations and cannot necessarily be influenced by local communities.

This project has therefore been scaled back to simply raising awareness of the forthcoming enhancements to broadband services.

Lead and support:

- Reepham Chamber of Commerce to lead but all members of the Town Team should endeavour to promote the forthcoming improvements to broadband infrastructure.

Next steps:

- Chamber of Commerce to review information provided by Norfolk County Council on the Better Broadband for Norfolk programme and disseminate to members and other local organisations
- Chamber of Commerce to invite representatives from the programme to come to Reepham to present the detail of the programme to traders (and potentially residents).

Project 9: Delivering improved mobile phone reception

Reepham suffers from an acute lack of mobile phone reception across all networks with only one or two small localised areas where mobile phone users can access a signal. At best this represents an inconvenience for visitors, residents and businesses and at worst it is a simple reason for not visiting or investing in the town.

Consultation with residents and businesses indicated that discussions have taken place in the past with mobile network providers about the installation of an aerial but to no avail and we are informed by local stakeholders that there is no prospect of this situation changing in the near future.

This project therefore seeks to publicise the existing known 'warm spots' and lobby mobile phone networks for the introduction of open/community 'femtocell'/equivalent technology.

Lead and support:

- Reepham Chamber to lead on the production of a 'warm spot' map and subsequently publicise the map with local community groups and in community buildings
- Reepham Life to lead on the survey of residents expressing an interest in improved mobile phone reception
- Broadland District Council to lead on contacting mobile phone networks.

Next steps:

- Reepham Chamber of Commerce to produce and distribute a simple map of Reepham identifying the few localised places where there is currently some level of mobile phone reception
- Reepham Life to canvass the local community and generate a register of residents who would support the installation of an open / community femtocell
- Broadland District Council to write formally to mobile phone networks, providing evidence of demand collated by Reepham Life, requesting the installation or trial of community femtocell / equivalent technology.

Initiative 2B: Growing the indigenous business base

Aim: The aim of the basket of projects within this initiative is to grow the indigenous business base in Reepham.

Objectives:

- to increase total employment in Reepham, particularly amongst local residents
- to improve the performance of local businesses and support their growth

Background:

Reepham's economy is characterised by the presence of a small number of medium sized businesses (between 50 and 250 employees) and a large number of micro businesses (between 1 and 10 employees) with few *small* businesses in between.

The dominance of one or two medium sized employers renders the local economy vulnerable if one of them were to close or move away (recognising that the High School is unlikely to do either). The high concentration of micro businesses not able or not seeking to grow, generates few employment opportunities or job prospects for local people and the employment base becomes static.

These factors serve to create a vulnerable and static business base with little growth other than the churn of micro businesses.

Project 10: Local businesses establishing improved links with Reepham College students

There are around 115 businesses based in Reepham. Relative to other local towns and wider trends across Broadland, Norfolk and England & Wales, a disproportionately large number of these are micro businesses employing less than 10 people. Statistical research demonstrates that actually these businesses in Reepham generally employ less than four people. Many of these micro businesses are unable or unwilling to take on new staff and the employment base in the town has become relatively static.

This project proposes that micro businesses establish annual mentoring relationships with sixth form students at Reepham College. The purpose of the mentoring relationships would be to provide a potential direct pathway to employment for the student, improve softer work-place based experience for the student and to help local businesses test and consider ideas and areas for expansion at very low risk.

The project does not seek to prescribe a set format for the mentoring relationships, rather, it anticipates that the employer and the student will be able to shape the way that they work together within a set of parameters over the course of an academic year. For example, it may be that a student simply shadows an employer in a number of meetings or discussions and benefits from exposure to this sort of an environment, or it may be that a student helps undertake more intensive desk based work, marketing or book-keeping. The most important factor is that the student benefits from positive experiences with a local employer and the employer builds a relationship with a potential employee and tests ideas and possibilities for growth.

There is a need within Reepham for some businesses to increase their web presence and ICT skills. This initiative therefore also proposes that the students are encouraged to become involved with either training or improving the businesses web presence, this could be in the form of the student setting up social media outlets with the business or helping to develop their website where appropriate.

Lead and support:

- Reepham Chamber and Reepham College to lead with support from Broadland District Council.

Next steps:

- Reepham Chamber to open discussions with Reepham College
- Reepham Chamber to canvass members (and other businesses) about establishing mentor relationships.

Project 11: Promoting online trading and marketing

This project builds on project 3 and expands the idea to cover all businesses in Reepham.

There is still, in some sectors, general apathy when it comes to developing a web presence. It is often seen as not relevant, too complicated, time consuming or intimidating. There is now compelling evidence that shows that all businesses can benefit from an online presence, whether it is a plumber, hairdresser, mechanic, writer, engineer or general handyman.

The internet is now one of consumers' and businesses' first points of reference when they consider whether or not to make a purchase or some form of investment, in fact research has shown that 90% of all consumers now research online prior to making a purchase either online or offline. In these circumstances, businesses without any online presence are simply invisible, whereas businesses with a strong and compelling online presence are in a strong position to benefit; a presence online should be seen as a new version of a shop front or calling card. As internet usage continues to expand, this trend will only increase over time.

Traditional printed marketing material is more expensive in the long-run, inefficient and limited in terms of geographic coverage. Businesses relying solely on this are limiting their communication with potential customers to those situated locally or regionally and will have to make a significant outlay every time they want to undertake any marketing. By having an online presence, updates can be made instantly, cheaply and a business can literally reach a global audience.

Not only is it therefore vital for individual businesses to have a web presence, but it is also vital for the success of the town. For example, if a potential visitor is researching where to visit in Broadland, they are likely to look online and if they only discover one or two businesses easily they may well assume that there is little to entertain them in an area and look for another area to visit.

This project therefore aims to ensure that 100% of businesses in Reepham are online by the end of the 2013/14 financial year. This could range from a simple facebook site or twitter account through to a unique blog or full website.

If this project was successful, businesses in Reepham would benefit from increased exposure, competitiveness and ultimately, turnover.

Lead and support:

- this project would be led by the Reepham Chamber of Commerce with support from Broadland District Council.

Next steps:

- see project 3 for implementation and next steps

Project 12: Developing Reepham's professional services sector

Research identified that the economy of Reepham is characterised by a high concentration of small businesses in the professional services sector such as graphic designers, IT specialists, accountants and consultants. These businesses are referenced elsewhere in this strategy as footloose enterprises that have established themselves in Reepham to access the high quality local environment and rural lifestyle.

The significant majority of these businesses are micro businesses, employing between one and four people and whilst they are successful, they are limited by their small scale, whether in terms of access to specific services such as HR or finance or simply resource and capacity to transact business.

This project proposes that these small professional services businesses work more closely together in the future, whether that is in order to benefit from sharing experience and knowledge transfer or to research and develop new joint products and services or simply to market one another and exploit potential supply chain linkages.

The potential benefits of this project if it is successful are varied and but could include increased revenue for individual businesses from contracting with new clients already local to Reepham, increased exposure to new markets, exposure to new ideas, the development of new services or products or simply a forum to discuss and test ideas and discuss concerns.

Lead and support:

- this project would be led by the Reepham Chamber of Commerce with support from Broadland District Council.

Next steps:

- Chamber to scope a number of specific events geared towards professional service business in and around Reepham
- Chamber to invite businesses to a) join the chamber and b) to attend quarterly events and encourage them to establish regular networking and knowledge share for a (possibly an expansion of the existing networking events).

Initiative 2C: Optimising land and property

Aim: The aim of this initiative is to remove a constraint to the business base by making better use of land and property.

Objectives:

- to ensure that there is a good supply of employment space that meets demand
- to ensure that existing land and property with the potential for employment activities is utilised

Background:

Alongside labour and capital, one of the fundamental components of a local economy is the availability of suitable land and premises. Without a sufficient supply of land an economy becomes stifled by a lack of space to grow, churn or new more modern space fit for the changing needs and preferences of business. In these circumstances, potential inward investment can be lost, successful growing businesses are forced to move away and the business base becomes constrained.

Statistical research into the local economy of Reepham and consultation with local businesses has demonstrated that the town is beginning to exhibit trends where the market for land and property is not functioning effectively to meet the demands of business.

Project 13: Improve supply of high quality rural business premises

Research and consultation identified that many businesses located in Reepham chose to establish themselves in the town because of the high-quality environment and attractive rural setting. In fact many of the significant constraints of the location such as limited broadband and mobile phone reception were outweighed by this specific consideration which is testament to how strong an appeal these contextual issues can have, particularly when business is not reliant upon daily face-to-face contact with clients or major infrastructure connections present in larger towns and cities.

The supply of high-quality small scale employment space, typified in converted barn schemes, is however, constrained. Planning policy is broadly focussed on undeveloped employment allocations geared towards light manufacturing estates and there is a significant disconnect between the owners of scattered rural premises and demand from prospective owners or tenants.

This project seeks to improve the supply of high quality rural business premises around Reepham of the type sought by prospective inward investors and growing businesses based within the town.

If the project is successful, it could result in a meaningful increase in the supply of business premises that meet demand side expectations and ultimately increase levels of employment and business start-up in the area. Alongside these direct intended benefits, this project could also bring back into use under-used rural buildings and support the economy of more rural areas outside of the town.

Lead and support:

- this project would be led by Broadland District Council with support from the Chamber of Commerce.

Next steps:

- Broadland District Council to arrange a symposium for the large agricultural landowners around the town such as the Salle Estate, Heydon Estate and others. The symposium will include contributions from Broadland District Council Economic Development, Conservation and Planning teams. The purpose of the symposium will be to provide information and guidance on bringing forward un / under used rural premises for employment generating uses
- where appropriate, Broadland District Council to support landowners accessing funding and advice to implement projects.

Project 14: Bircham Centre 2019

Reepham benefits significantly from the presence of the Bircham Centre. Set up nearly 100 years ago, the Bircham Centre (originally Bircham Institute) has always provided an important community resource whether as a reading room, hospital for injured troops during the first world war or as it is today providing a library, community meeting rooms and venues.

The Bircham Centre provides a much valued venue for groups to meet, for young and old to access information and use the library resources and for local residents to buy and sell goods at the regular indoor markets. Indirectly, the building also performs a vital function in a community like Reepham by providing a focus for the town centre and a place where people meet informally or accidentally, talk, catch up and maintain community ties. Not only is the Centre vital for the sustainability of the local community, but also for the local economy. The various events, activities and services that take place in the Bircham Centre create a significant level of footfall for the Town Centre. The Centre also provides one of the largest areas of greenspace within the Town.

This project suggests that the Bircham Centre continues to play this vital role and where possible and with support from the local community increases its presence and offer, to provide even more space and facilities to meet the needs of the community through the production and implementation of a strategy taking it to 2019 – its 100 year anniversary. It proposes that areas of the building that are currently unoccupied and in poor condition are renovated and brought back into active use and that the gardens and public conveniences to the rear of the property are remodelled to provide a small, informal outdoor community venue.

If successful, this project could provide Reepham with small spaces for new business start-ups, possibly provided below the market rate and on flexible tenancies (i.e., simply renting a desk) or self-catering tourist accommodation or even more formal permanent retail space. All of these uses would add vitality to the building, diversify its income and provide jobs and expenditure for the town centre. The remodelling of the gardens and public conveniences could provide a small intimate outdoor space for meetings and performances, interpretation and interaction with the history of the property and the town and, more broadly, a new community asset for the town.

Lead and support:

- this project would be led by the Bircham Centre Board of Trustees with support from the Broadland District Council.

Next steps:

- the Bircham Centre Board of Trustees to prepare a feasibility study into the restoration of unused parts of the building and the gardens. This would include testing different land uses, initial design work and cost estimates
- the results of the feasibility study would form the basis of the Bircham Centre 2019 Strategy
- Trustees to approach funds such as Heritage Lottery Fund, Architectural Heritage Fund and others to under-write the cost of works.

Project 15: Station Yard site

The 'Station Yard' site is a long-standing allocation contained within the Broadland Local Plan (site Reepham 1). The current allocation is for a mix of residential and employment uses and as such, this is the principle site for new employment development in Reepham.

As noted elsewhere in this strategy, brownfield development land in Reepham is scarce and it is vital that any allocations are developed to meet the needs of the community and in relation to this strategy, the local economy. Consultation highlighted that whilst a scheme is currently thought to be in preparation, this allocation has remained undeveloped for a number of years and it is unclear as to whether or not it will be developed out in the near future.

This site represents the only allocation for new employment development in Reepham and it is important for the delivery of this strategy that it is built out for an appropriate mix of employment uses. This project therefore proposes that Broadland District Council seek to work with the current landowner(s) to identify why the site is not coming forward for development and work towards unlocking this impasse.

Lead and support:

- this project would be led by Broadland District Council.

Next steps:

- Broadland District Council to approach the agents and owners of the Station Yard site in order to begin a dialogue about the constraints and opportunities for employment development.

Issue 3: Poor recognition and perception

Initiative 3A: Improving the quality of new development

Aim: The aim of the basket of projects under this initiative is to improve the design quality of any new development in Reepham so that it adds positively to the image and perception of the town.

Objectives:

- to take proactive measures to require developers to deliver high standards in design
- to increase local understanding of good design and sustainability
- to reward and promote examples of high quality design and environmentally sustainable development

Background:

The development industry, particularly in the current climate, is based on a model that seeks to minimise costs, maximise efficiency and minimise risk. Much commentary has been given to whether or not this model can or should focus more on design quality, whether it is already, whether it pays dividends or is more or less expensive to implement. Drawing upon recent examples of good design around Reepham that do exist, this strategy takes the perspective that well designed new housing or employment space can and should be delivered. It should be the starting point for negotiation, where concessions might be made subject to circumstance, rather than starting from a relatively low base and trying to work quality into a scheme.

The historic centre of Reepham is exceptionally attractive, with an interesting and unique morphology and there are areas and streets that have been built more recently that encapsulate positive design ideas and principles. However, there are areas that, for a variety of reasons, do not contribute positively or respond to the local built environment whether in terms of architectural style, the materials used, density or layout. These areas dilute the overall character and style of the town, particularly for potential visitors and inward investors and could contribute to the decision making process about whether or not to choose to live, visitor or set up a new business in Reepham.

Project 16: Increasing requirement for developers to deliver better architecture and design

Whilst there are many buildings and streets throughout Reepham of a high standard of architecture and design, there are instances of new development that does not have particular regard to local vernacular. This is possibly more evident in Reepham than other settlements due to its exceptional architectural quality and unique morphology. The cumulative result of this is that newer parts of the town, particularly along arterial routes, often do not have any particular identity and in aggregate, dilute the character and identity of Reepham itself.

This strategy builds on the fact that Reepham is a very attractive market town and that any new development should seek to contribute positively towards its character as fully as possible.

This project therefore proposes that new planning mechanisms are introduced that requires new development to be of the highest quality and to reflect local styles, building materials and context. These mechanisms could take the form of supplementary planning guidance that would be prepared by the local authority or, more feasibly, the preparation of a Neighbourhood Plan with specific design policies that could be delivered by the Town Council.

If successful, this project would ensure that the special character and identity of Reepham is preserved and strengthened as the town continues to grow in the future and that it remains an attractive option for inward investment, tourism and new residents.

Lead and support:

- this project would be led by Reepham Town Council with support from the Reepham Society.

Next steps:

- in the short term, Reepham Town Council to make specific and informed design representations in relation to any planning applications for new development. This could draw upon the skills and experience of the Reepham Society, or the Reepham Society could make representations themselves
- in the medium term, Reepham Town Council to consider the development of a Neighbourhood Plan that could include specific policies relating to design that build on the contents of the Broadland District Council Local Plan. Subject to its ultimate status, a Neighbourhood Plan could refer directly to a Pattern Book being produced by Broadland District Council's conservation team which sets out recent examples of local best practice.

Project 17: Re-establishing annual architecture award and creating a new sustainability award

Reepham has a fantastic wealth of civic groups and organisations. In particular, the Reepham Society has been established since the mid-1970s to promote high standards of planning and architecture as well as securing the preservation and improvement of features that of historical interest.

The Reepham Society has a significant archive of local documentary material and has produced a number of high quality publications on the local built environment and community life. However, the Society has recently gone through a period of major transition and many of the excellent roles it has fulfilled and its output have been curtailed.

This project proposes that the Reepham Society is supported and reinvigorated and that its historic activities are resuscitated and strengthened. Specifically, it is suggested that its previous function of recognising and rewarding local building projects for achieving high quality design standards (and marking them with plaques) is reinstated.

If successful, this project will help to increase local awareness of good design and promote development that is architecturally sensitive to the locality.

It is acknowledged that this project is unlikely to convince developers and house-builders to adopt an alternative approach but that is not its primary aim. Rather, the project seeks to build on the history in Reepham of the local community recognising, understanding and rewarding good development and encouraging the community to take ownership in the future of their town.

Lead and support:

- this project would be led by Reepham Society with support from the Reepham Green Team.

Next steps:

- Reepham Society to create a register of buildings that have received awards in the past and put this register on public display, either physically or online. The review of previous winners would be accompanied by the promotion of future rounds of the award
- Reepham Society to review and agree future evaluation criteria for an architecture award and implement at the end of 2013.

Initiative 3B: Optimising buildings and land

Aim: The aim of projects under this initiative is to ensure that land and buildings are optimised to meet the needs of the economy and community of Reepham and add positively to its image and perception.

Objectives:

- to sustain important assets of community value
- to ensure that development on brownfield sites is pursued in advance of or alongside the development of greenfield land.

Background:

Reepham is an historic market town with a dense urban morphology that has grown around Back Street and the Market Place. Available development land is implicitly scarce which has the effect of forcing growth towards greenfield sites. This puts pressure on existing land and buildings to be converted into uses for which is the greatest demand / value; most often, residential. This pattern has created a sense of frustration amongst the local community who see greenfield development taking place whilst brownfield sites remains stalled and valued community assets being lost and converted into residential.

Brownfield sites represent a market failure and an impediment to the efficient functioning of the local economy and the loss of community assets has the potential to undermine social interaction and dilute the attractiveness of the town to potential inward investors and new residents.

Project 18: Activation of the Community Right to Bid

Throughout the preparation of this strategy, a number of important community assets have been lost or are at risk of being lost. The only recourse presently held by the community is the option of intervening in the planning process which can at times be confusing and highly technical for non-experts.

However, the Localism Act (2011) introduced a new power called the Community Right to Bid. This power creates the opportunity for local communities to benefit from concessions in order to decide whether or not they would like to bid to purchase an asset of community value that might otherwise be lost. Assets of community value are defined as a building or land that has recently or is presently used to further the social wellbeing or social interests of the local community and could do so in the future. The definition of social interests include cultural, recreational and sporting interests such as pubs, leisure facilities and recreational green spaces.

This project suggests that Reepham takes advantage of the new Community Right to Bid and puts itself into a position where it could reasonably intervene when the loss of a community asset is threatened.

If successful, this project could result in the future of important community assets that contribute towards the life and image of the town being sustained.

Lead and support:

- this project would be led by Reepham Town Council with support from Broadland District Council.

Next steps:

- Reepham Town Council to build on the work they have already done, publicise the availability of the new power and promote understanding within the local community of the types of assets that could be bid for and the process for doing so
- Reepham Town Council in consultation with the local community to prepare a schedule of 'assets of community value' and submit this to Broadland District Council
- Reepham Town Council to liaise with the Department for Communities and Local Government about available resource and funding support in relation to prospective future bids.

Project 19: Bringing forward brownfield sites

Physical analysis of Reepham identified a number of undeveloped brownfield sites, some of which are close to the town centre. Consultation suggested that there are a number of complex reasons for why these sites have remained undeveloped.

Left undeveloped, these sites create unattractive and unappealing pockets within Reepham. They represent an important un-tapped source of development land for new housing and employment. The sites located in and around the town centre also provide a more sustainable alternative to greenfield sites on the edge of the town.

This project seeks to unlock the impasse that has set in at these stalled sites and bring them forward for development. Their development would contribute positively towards the attractiveness and vibrancy of the town and could provide an important resource for new housing or employment uses.

Lead and support:

- this project would be led by Broadland District Council.

Next steps:

- Broadland District Council to agree sites for consideration and approach existing owners
- Broadland District Council to identify positive planning-led measures that can help to create financially viable schemes and facilitate development. This could be supported by the inclusion specific policies for these sites in a Neighbourhood Plan (which would need to be led by the Town Council or an agreed Neighbourhood Forum).

Initiative 3C: Improving the visitor experience

Aim: The aim of the projects contained within this initiative is to improve and enhance visitors' experience and perception of Reepham.

Objectives:

- to improve the attractiveness of gateways and routes into the town for potential visitors
- to define and promote an appropriate package of assets to attract new visitors to the town
- to re-energise local events and festivities to attract visitors into the town centre

Background:

Reepham is an attractive rural town, with, in particular, a very fine town centre. However, the nature of the road layout means that potential visitors are unable to see the Market Place and only travel along arterial routes which generally do not exhibit the same character and attractiveness of the town centre. There is also no obvious reason for a tourist to visit Reepham, i.e. there is no major tourist attraction or significant tourist accommodation provision, and major annual events that bring people into the town and punctuate the calendar are struggling to survive.

Yet Reepham is close to a major area of UK tourism in the North Norfolk coast and has a wealth of interesting and attractive features to offer. It is currently missing out to a great extent on this source of expenditure and this is to the detriment of local retailers, leisure and food and drink businesses.

Project 20: Beautifying Reepham's green spaces

Like most towns and villages, many of the entrances to the town are lined with grass verges, buffers separating new housing from roads and areas of leftover greenspace. The majority of these informal greenspaces (i.e. not parks or commons) are subject to a maintenance contract that ensures that grass is regularly cut and maintained to the same standards as a municipal park.

These green spaces however are not municipal parks or formal areas for play and recreation. They are actually a continuation of verges and banks which stretch out into the surrounding countryside which are managed in a less intensive way.

The surrounding network of green lanes and rural roads contribute to people's perception of Reepham as a small town deep in the countryside. The immediate transition to neatly clipped verges once a visitor crosses an invisible boundary at the edge of the town presents an unnatural transition.

This project proposes that appropriate green spaces at gateways and along key routes into Reepham are switched to a less intensive maintenance regime and managed proactively to become more natural areas of meadow grassland or 'roadside nature reserves' (as have been developed in areas to the north of the town). It is also suggested that the large margins away from formal sports pitches at Stimpsons Piece are included in the scope of this project.

Throughout the country many towns and cities are bringing wild/meadow type planting in to their centres. This approach is being spearheaded by a team at the University of Sheffield who have been developing meadow mixes that are easy to maintain, have prolonged interest and survive in urban environments.

If successful, this project would help to improve the attractiveness of routes into Reepham, improve biodiversity and reduce the maintenance cost associated with frequent mowing. It will create a landscape that links the urban area with the rural surroundings in a way that would be relatively unique but fitting for Reepham and it would improve the perception of the town to visitors and people passing through.

Lead and support:

- this project would be led by Reepham Town Council.

Next steps:

- Town Council to consider areas that might be switched into a less intensive management regime, potentially on a trial basis at first
- Town Council to conduct a 'conversation' with residents to explain the proposal and highlight the benefits – for example, increased biodiversity or identify a community project that could be funded by savings made in the maintenance contract.

Before...



After?



Project 21: Linking and expressing ‘quiet enjoyment’

Reepham does not benefit from any major tourist attraction and is situated in a relatively remote location between two major regional arterial roads. Other than walkers and cyclists orbiting the town on routes mentioned elsewhere in this strategy, the town is largely invisible to tourists. It is not a question of the perception or image of the town being poor, it is more that from this perspective, the town has no image or perception.

However, Reepham is situated in an area of extremely high quality unspoilt countryside within which are located a number of protected green spaces including Foxley Wood, Booton Common, Whitwell Common and the Marriot’s Way.

Research also demonstrated that Reepham is at the centre of a cluster of remarkable historic churches, some of which are of national or international importance for a range of specific features. This includes:

- St Peter & St Pauls, Salle
- St Agnes, Cawston
- St Peter & St Paul, Heydon
- St Nicholas, Brandiston
- St Michael & All Angels, Booton
- St Faith, Little Witchingham
- The Assumption, Great Witchingham
- St Mary, Sparham
- St Peter, Guestwick
- St Andrew, Wood Dalling
- St Mary, Reepham

For example, the Norfolk Churches website describes a number of the above as ‘*outstanding national treasures and if they were in the V&A we would all enthusiastically head up to London to see them and pay willingly for the privilege of doing so and yet here, they remain in situ lost in the remote Norfolk countryside.*’

Individually each of the churches and greenspace assets mentioned above are of some interest to potential visitors. Collectively however they represent a compelling and coherent package of attractions for quiet enjoyment with Reepham at its geographic centre. This collective organisation and any real promotion is currently lacking.

This project therefore seeks to crystallise and subtly promote the cluster of places for ‘quiet enjoyment’ around Reepham as a coherent package. This could include the creation of a specific website and mobile app’, audio guides, hard copy literature and interpretation material. If the project was successful, it would place Reepham at the centre of this cluster, acting as the hub for visitors from around the UK and potentially overseas.

Lead and support:

- this project would be led by members of the Town Team that have already expressed an interest in supporting implementation with support Broadland District Council and the relevant parochial parish councils and owners / tenants of green spaces.

Next steps:

- scoping of the content of the cluster is already well underway and has identified the churches and greenspaces mentioned above as being at the core of the offer
- define the concept for promoting and communicating the cluster in more detail
- secure funding to implement the concept – likely to include web development, hard literature, a mobile app' and interpretation media
- secure the consent and approval of relevant stakeholders for inclusion in the initiative and the content of the material about their specific asset.

Project 22: Improving key walking and cycling links to the town centre

This project seeks to improve awareness of Reepham town centre at key points on the Marriot's Way (and as part of the wider regional network) and then improve ability of walkers and cyclists to navigate to the town centre from those key points.

The project is common to both this initiative and issue1C: Thickening transport links where it is set out in detail.

Project 23: Reepham volunteers

Consultation with organisations in the Town Team and groups managing local events and services has indicated that many activities and events in Reepham that rely on volunteers are at risk of dwindling or even being lost altogether due to the lack of voluntary support. This would include events such as the Christmas Fair and the Reepham Festival, both of which have encountered challenges in the last twelve months.

Events such as these are a vital part of Reepham's community life and contribute significantly towards social cohesion, creating a sense of place and attracting visitors from elsewhere around the region. They help drive a positive and vibrant image of the town as well as providing an enjoyable series of celebratory occasions for residents throughout the year.

This problem is not uncommon where communities have become increasingly fluid with families moving in and out of the town more than in the past and people having busier lifestyles resulting in large fixed groups of regular volunteers becoming diminished. It is often the case, as in Reepham, that there is a small core group of local residents managing and contributing to a significant number of voluntary endeavours. With more and more emphasis being placed local communities delivering services and programmes, this core group becomes increasingly overwhelmed and exhausted by the sheer volume of tasks they sign-up to – and this is the case in Reepham.

This project therefore proposes to establish, grow and strengthen the pool of volunteers in Reepham by creating a central register of residents willing to support events and activities in a way that does not require people to sign-up to giving over huge amounts of time to open ended tasks.

The project suggests that Reepham Life establishes a specific webpage for local organisations to advertise calls for volunteers and a register of residents who have expressed an interest in receiving volunteering opportunities. Once residents have signed up to the register, they will receive e-mail requests from groups and the residents can decide whether or not they wish to contribute.

If this project is successful, it could provide a useful mechanism to increase voluntary participation in important community events and help to sustain and grow them in the future.

Lead and support:

- this project would be led by Reepham Life with support from the members of the Town Team.

Next steps:

- Reepham Life to establish a database for volunteers to input their details and advertise a call for residents to sign up
- Reepham Life to request local groups to publicise volunteer requirements which would be automatically forwarded to the database of volunteers.

5. Projects summary

5. Projects summary

Issues:	Initiatives and projects:		
1: Consumer leakage	A. Creating a retail renaissance	B. Preparing a public realm Masterplan	C. Thickening public transport
	1: Reconnecting residents and retailers 2: Become a rural market exemplar 3: Develop Reepham retailers online presence	4: Masterplan projects	5: Re-launching the electric mini bus 6: Improving walking and cycling links to the town centre
2: Constrained business base	A. Improving business infrastructure	B. Growing the indigenous base	C. Optimising land and property
	7: Enhancing the Reepham Chamber of Commerce 8: Raising awareness of enhanced broadband 9: Delivering improved mobile phone reception	10: Local businesses establishing improved links with Reepham College students 11: Promoting online trading and marketing (link to Retail Renaissance) 12: Developing Reepham's professional services sector	13: Improve supply of high quality rural business premises 14: Bircham Centre 2019 15: Station Yard site
3: Poor recognition and perception	A. Improving quality of new development	B. Optimising buildings and land	C. Improving visitor experience
	16: Increasing requirement for developers to deliver better architecture and design 17: Re-establishing annual architectures award and creating a new sustainability award	18: Activation of the Community Right to Bid 19: Bringing forward brownfield sites	20: Beautifying Reepham's green spaces 21: Linking and expressing 'quiet enjoyment' 22: Improving key walking and cycling links 23: Reepham volunteers

No collection on Sundays, Public and Bank Holidays
Registered letters and overseas insured items
if intended for collection with a particular collection
they must be deposited at least 10 minutes before
the advertised time of collection



POST OFFICE

LETTER BOX.

**NOTICE. LETTERS CONTAINING COIN, PAPER MONEY OR JEWELLERY
SHOULD NOT BE POSTED IN THIS BOX, BUT SHOULD BE REGISTERED**

WED

Last Collection Time

Monday to Friday

5.00pm

A later collection is made at 7.30pm
from the Postbox at

Royal Mail Sorting Office,
13 - 17 Thorpe Road.

Saturday

12 noon

Other Collections

Additional collections may be made throughout the day
until the last time shown.

08457 740740

www.royalmail.com

0845 6000606

Postbox number NR10 1025

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