

Back to Life

An architectural rendering of a city street scene. The view is from an elevated perspective looking down a street. On the left, there are several multi-story buildings with gabled roofs and dormer windows. Some buildings have solar panels on their roofs. A large, rounded green tree stands in the middle ground. In the foreground, there are more buildings, some with flat roofs and others with gables. A few small figures of people are scattered on the sidewalks and street, giving a sense of scale. The overall style is a clean, illustrative architectural drawing with a muted color palette of greys, browns, and greens.

IDEAS ON CONVERSION, REPURPOSING AND REVIVAL OF NEWPORT HIGH STREET

March 2023

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Urban Design Context

Conversion Guidance

Case Studies

Challenges to Repurposing

Introduction

High Street Heritage Action Zones (HSHAZ) are a heritage-led regeneration initiative led by Historic England, working with local councils and the community to create economic growth and improve the quality of life in our historic high streets. Newport is one of 68 areas of England to receive a share of a £95 million government fund to improve the public realm in conservation areas.

The Newport HSHAZ is part of Shaping Newport's programme of actions to regenerate the town, a partnership between the Isle of Wight Council Regeneration Team, Newport Business Association and Newport and Carisbrooke Community Council.

Newport is the historic market town of the Isle of Wight and is home to some remarkable historic buildings, a medieval street pattern and two market squares.

Sadly, it is suffering from retail decline, empty shops and some buildings are run down and showing serious signs of decay. Traffic dominates many parts of the town, and the quality of public spaces could be much improved.

Through the HSHAZ project the town seeks to build on the work already undertaken by the community to shape the regeneration of the town. Working with partners, the aim is to make the high street a place that everyone wants to use and visit, and to increase residential accommodation within the town centre.

A number of initiatives are being delivered as part of the programme, including improvements to the pedestrian environment, new shopfront design guidance and grant support to restore frontages and bring unused spaces back into use.

The Purpose of this Guide

Working with partners, the HSHAZ will look to make Newport High Street a place that everybody wants to use and visit. Key to this is to increase the variety of types of activity in the town centre including increasing the quantity of residential accommodation.

The team of Feria Urbanism and The Chase Architecture was appointed to produce a four-part design guide that addresses the high street's urban design context, provides conversion guidance for empty properties, offers a range of new use case studies and sets out ways to overcome the challenges when repurposing heritage buildings.

The ideas and suggestions set out in this guide are designed to inspire and prompt property owners and land owners in and around Newport High Street to think more creatively about the assets they own. The drawings illustrating conversion opportunities are not proposals, but ideas designed to demonstrate Newport's potential.

The impact of under-utilised and derelict buildings on the visual appearance of the town centre cannot be understated. The following negative impacts are widely understood:

— **Creates a poor impression for first time visitors:** Newport is the island's county town and should be a showcase for high quality urban design and architecture. A visibly declining high street can be a serious detriment on an island where the economy relies significantly on tourism.

— **Undermines civic pride:** This is felt amongst local people, residents and the business community. The energy, confidence and "can do" attitude required to deliver change at a local level can be negatively affected by the state of disrepair a high street finds itself in.

— **Erodes investor confidence in the town centre:** While a sense of confidence amongst local people is a necessary prerequisite for change in Newport, there is also a need for confidence amongst investors. These investors may be local to the town, to the island or be based elsewhere. Wherever their location, they need to see a high street that not only can accommodate change, but is open to new ideas and innovation.

With this understanding of the psychology at play when a town centre goes into decline, this guide takes a deliberately optimistic approach to the future of Newport High Street. It demonstrates how careful and sensitive interventions to the historic urban fabric can bring about the necessary change in appearance, function and performance of a high street. This in turn can create the necessary shift in mindset, and the flow of confidence at a local level and amongst would-be investors.

Why does this guide take such an optimistic approach? What is it about Newport High Street that makes change possible? Why should it be attractive to investors?

— **Heritage assets:** The wider area has been designated a Conservation Area since the late 1960s and comprises numerous Listed Buildings and shop fronts of merit

— **Urban form:** The attractive urban form is the result of a combination of brick buildings, two to three storeys in height interspersed with narrow lanes

— **Flexibility:** The ground floors are compact yet highly visible to passers-by, while the upper floors can be hard to access, they are a size that offers flexibility for conversion

A more negative mindset would see these three key attributes as obstacles or features that can frustrate change. This guide takes the opposite view — that these key attributes are the qualities that are the keys to unlocking Newport High Street's future revival.

Living over the shop offers the convenience of a lifestyle lived in the heart of a small town centre. The narrow lanes and attractive buildings are precisely the sort of urban environments visitors wish to explore and wander around. Meanwhile, the heritage designations are simply a reflection of the area's outstanding qualities. Any architectural interventions should respond in an appropriate manner to this context to derive the best value uplift obtainable from these existing assets.

This guide considers these positive attributes as the drivers for change. This four-part guide (Urban Design Context, Conversion Guidance, Case Studies and Challenges to Repurposing) is structured and formatted in a way that will help to make the most of these opportunities so the best improvements can be made to Newport High Street in years to come.

Urban Design Context

This part of the guide assesses the key urban design qualities of Newport High Street and provides advice on how new interventions to individual plots and blocks should best respond to this context.

The general layout of the high street is of a strong, linear form that runs west to east. The western end comprises the junction of Carisbrooke Road with Pyle Street. Take the northern fork in the road and you will travel along High Street. The southern fork is Pyle Street.

As you travel along the High Street, either side is flanked with a series of heritage buildings, from the modest to the grand. The western section comprises more modest forms, such as rows of narrow fronted shops with living accommodation above. The junction with St James' Street is where the street first widens out and taller buildings and landmarks are encountered. This width offers the first civic space, St James' Square, with outdoor cafe seating and genuine sense of place. However, not all buildings that frame this space are economically active and the sense of dereliction is visible and obvious.

Continuing eastwards, the next civic space is only a little further along, expressed by the high quality public realm that surrounds the Newport Minster, immediately adjacent to the High Street on its southern edge. Across the street, is the Guildhall, a grand and imposing landmark building.

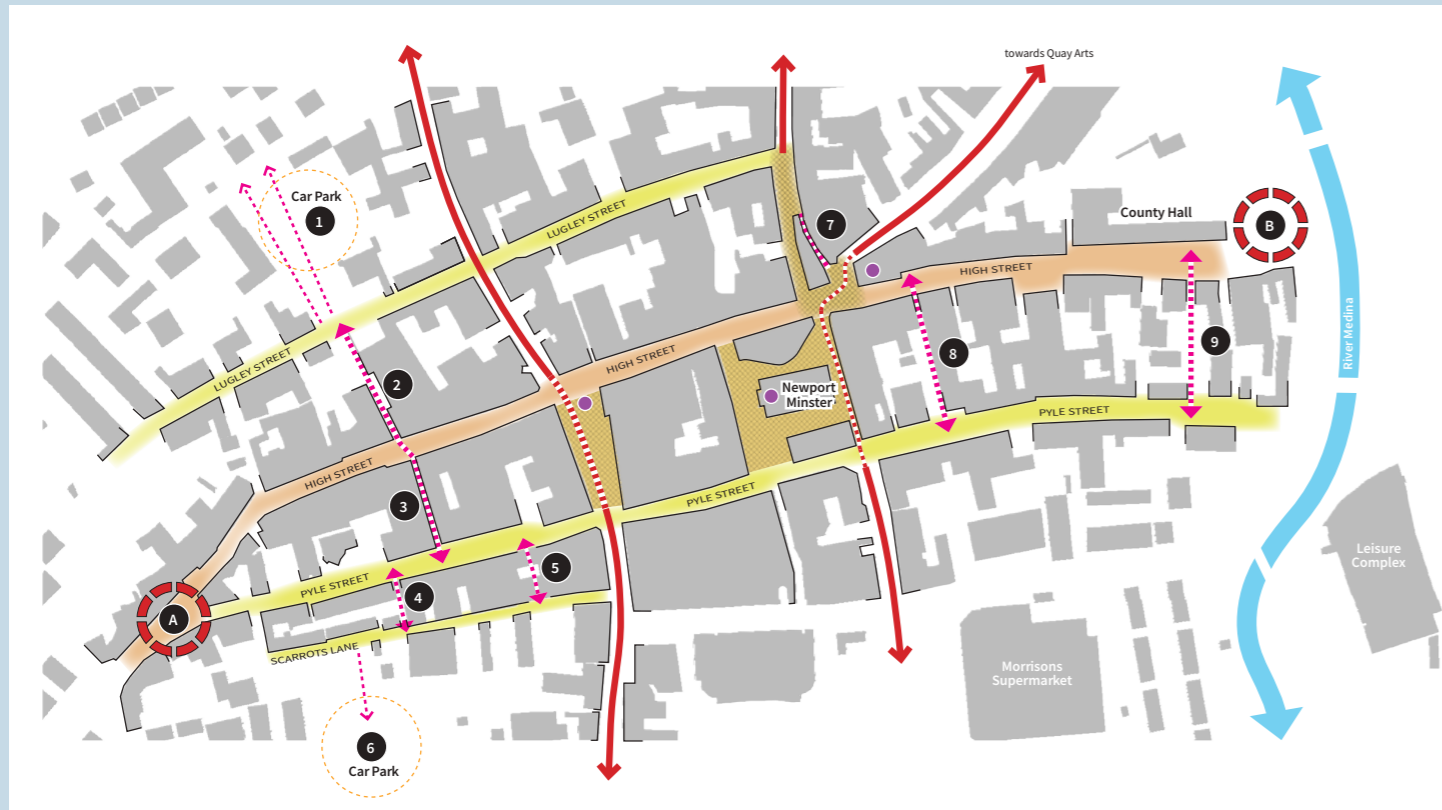
The positive sense of enclosure experienced in the initial western section now returns, with a series of shops, cafés and commercial businesses lining either side of the street. Towards the eastern end of the high street, is the Isle of Wight Council offices, a late twentieth century block on the northern side of the street.

The more continuous western and eastern sections are interspersed with side streets and narrow lanes. These north-south side connections effectively link Newport High Street with its surroundings and provide a counterpoint to the linearity of the street. It is these side streets that this guide suggests are an interesting starting point for urban design and architectural interventions.

High Street Overview

This diagram explores the scale, density, connections and permeability of the central area of Newport, focused around the high street. Three primary routes run in an east to west direction — Lugley Street, High Street and Pyle Street. In order to bring more people, more often onto the high street, it is suggested that future interven-

tions are used to strengthen north to south connections to rebalance the network. The analysis has identified key opportunity sites that can help deliver this rebalancing.



1 — At the present time, the Lugley Street surface car park is an origin/destination for both visitors and local people arriving by car. Over the longer term, the site could be considered a potential development site. Careful restoration of the lost urban grain by infill development will increase the residential density, providing more homes within walking distance of Newport High Street.

2 — The most direct route from this new development site to the high street will be south, along Post Office Lane, a narrow street highly regarded as adding to the distinctive character of this part of the town centre. This site is subject to design considerations in the Conversion Guidance section of this guide.

3 — On crossing the street, a comparable narrow lane in the form of Castlehold Lane leads to Pyle Street. The western flank of this is edged by the former HMV store, soon to be repurposed by the NHS.

4 & 5 — Chalmer's Way and Grey's Walk are two attractive covered arcades connecting Pyle Street with Scarrots Lane, a lively "backland street" with an increasingly interesting mix of retail and business uses.

6 — As with Lugley Street, at the present time, Chapel Street surface car park is an origin/destination for both visitors and local people arriving by car. But it too also offers a longer term opportunity for urban intensification through a residential infill scheme.

7 — Watchbell Lane is referenced here as an example of the narrow urban grain that these new connections can use as a design reference.

8 — The gap to the western side of the Apollo Theatre on Pyle street offers an opportunity to create an activated lane that connects to Newport High Street. This site is subject to design considerations in the Conversion Guidance section of this guide.

9 — Langley Court is currently a car park space, surrounding by business uses but various interventions can draw people between Newport High Street and Pyle Street. This site is subject to design considerations in the Conversion Guidance section of this guide.

A — Western Gateway to the High Street

B — Eastern Gateway to the High Street

Both gateways already offer a sense of arrival. These are decision points where people make their way into the heart of Newport and begin to explore what the high street has to offer. This guide seeks to make what is on offer in the heart of town more diverse, more attractive and make the best use of existing buildings and land.

Conversion Guidance

The principles of good quality conversion are widely understood. How to convert a property from one use to another is a process that occurs regularly across the country. There are many published guidance documents from a variety of organisations and agencies that provide best practice advice and case studies on this subject.

What this guide seeks to do is to alert the reader to the opportunities that exist along Newport High Street and how a creative and capable design team can make the most of those opportunities. These opportunities take two different forms, reflecting the conditions found in Newport:

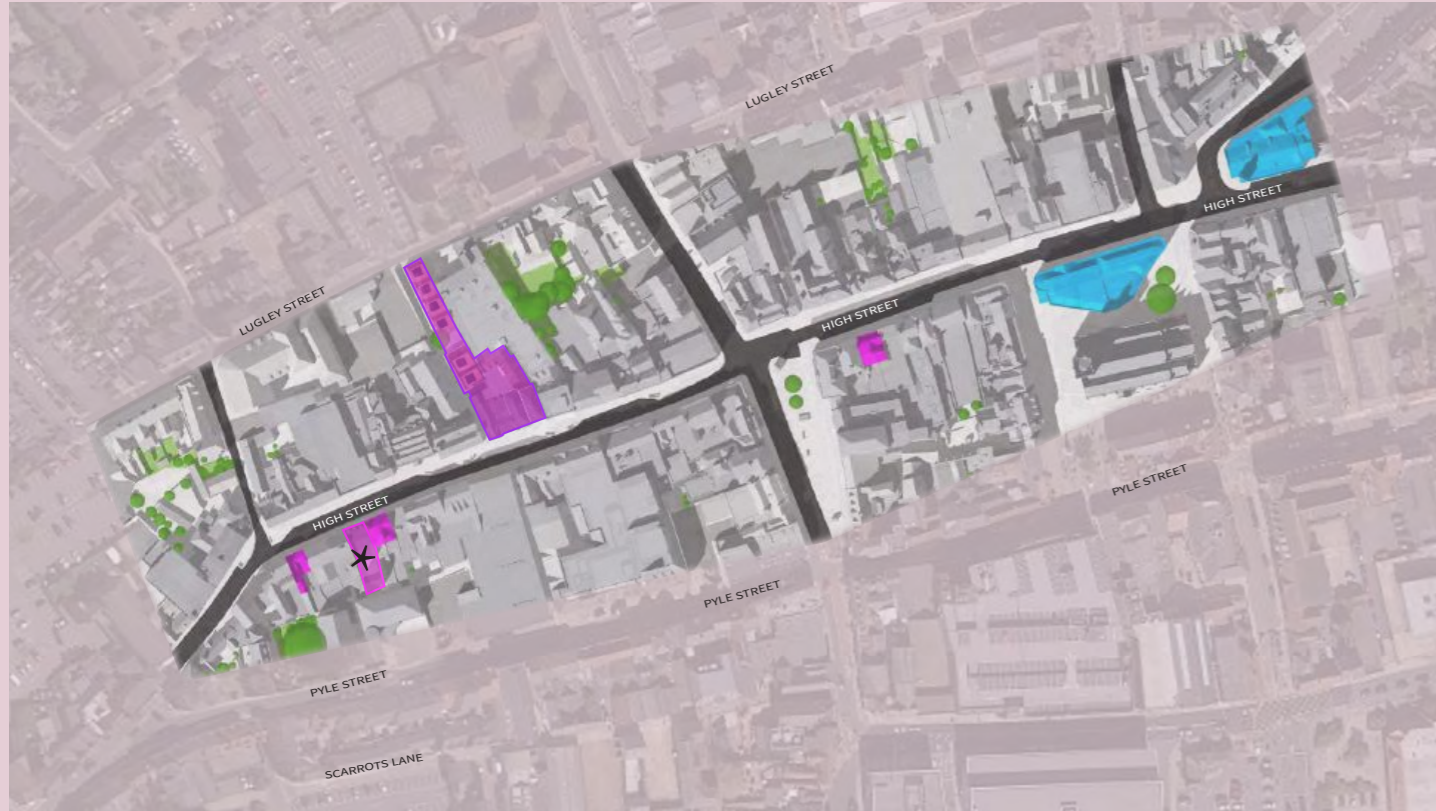
Frontage access: Many properties along Newport High Street have upper storeys that could be readily converted to provide residential accommodation. However, individual properties often lack dedicated access for that conversion. This guide uses selected case studies to show how this access could be delivered in ways that can be replicated in similar build typologies found elsewhere along the street.

Backlands redevelopment: The spaces immediately behind the frontage buildings that edge the high street are considered another starting point for the renewal of Newport High Street's fortunes. With little or no demolition required, these sites offer the opportunity for new contemporary buildings to be introduced relatively quickly.

A further advantage of the backlands approach is that while consideration must be had for the impacts of such schemes on the Conservation Area and on adjacent Listed Buildings, they do not in themselves directly alter a protected structure. This may remove the need to respond to some aspects of planning regulations, reducing costs.

To illustrate these ideas, Post Office Lane in the western section of the street, provides a case study for how a contemporary new development can be "slotted" into a gap site. Meanwhile, public realm treatments at the eastern end, adjacent to the Apollo Theatre and through Langley Court, can help establish new and better links.

Western & Central Section



● Case studies by Feria Urbanism & The Chase Architecture

● Previous case study by other designers

★ The work for No. 68 is a re-interpretation of a previous study by others

The drawing above shows the western and central section of Newport High Street. Sites and buildings that have been informed by the urban design analysis, as well as those which have been previously been used as case studies by other designers, are marked on the plan.

In this western and central section, the design team have explored several different options for re-purposing sites along Newport High Street at three scales:

- 1. Activating or reactivating upper floors for residential purposes where access was separate to the ground-floor shop use or has been removed at some point in the past.
- 2. How individual plots could be altered to achieve two goals described as “maximally beneficial conversion” by reducing retail floor space and thus lowering business rates making shops more appealing to rent. At the same time, new opportunities for residential development on newly created brown field land are created.
- 3. Showing how considered cooperation and a combination of the above can lead to intensive pockets of regeneration that can revive and reinvigorate Newport High Street.

In all instances, conversions should have due regard for regulations in place at the time of the works being undertaken. This includes regulations in England covering fire safety matters within and around buildings, and all other relevant legislation.

Access to upper storeys above retail

Many properties along Newport High Street have upper storeys that could be readily converted to provide residential accommodation. However, individual properties often lack dedicated access for that conversion. The diagrams to the right show how this access can be achieved sensitively and show how upper floors can be adapted to make smaller spaces suitable for conversion.

46 & 47 High Street (Listed)

A second door to no. 47 clearly existed in the past. This can be reinstated providing access to the shop (see the green door). The right hand door (blue) can be used to service communal access to two new flats at first and second floor spanning across both shops. Currently the properties are under separate freeholds with separate owners so cooperation should be encouraged to facilitate the development.

67 & 67a High Street

Altering the shop front to provide a second entrance is relatively simple (see green door). The right hand door (blue) can be used to service communal access to two new flats at first and second floor spanning across both shops.

71 & 72 High Street (Listed)

Alteration of the shop front to no. 72 to provide a new door to the right (blue) servicing a new hallway and stairs for a small flat at first floor level. The existing door to the shop at no.71 could be moved to outside to retain some balance.

Due to the height of the buildings to either side, the addition of a mansard roof extension with twin dormer windows would be perfectly within scale. The dormer windows should correspond to the spaces between the windows on the lower facade to create a hierarchy.

46 & 47 High Street

as existing (below)



as converted (below)



67 & 67a High Street

as existing (below)



as converted (below)



71 & 72 High Street

as existing (below)



as converted (below)



This example looks at a shop which currently fills the site at ground level. The conversion option as shown will attract new, small-scale retailers at ground floor and provide a substantial amount of residential space above and behind, inviting to both landowners and occupants.

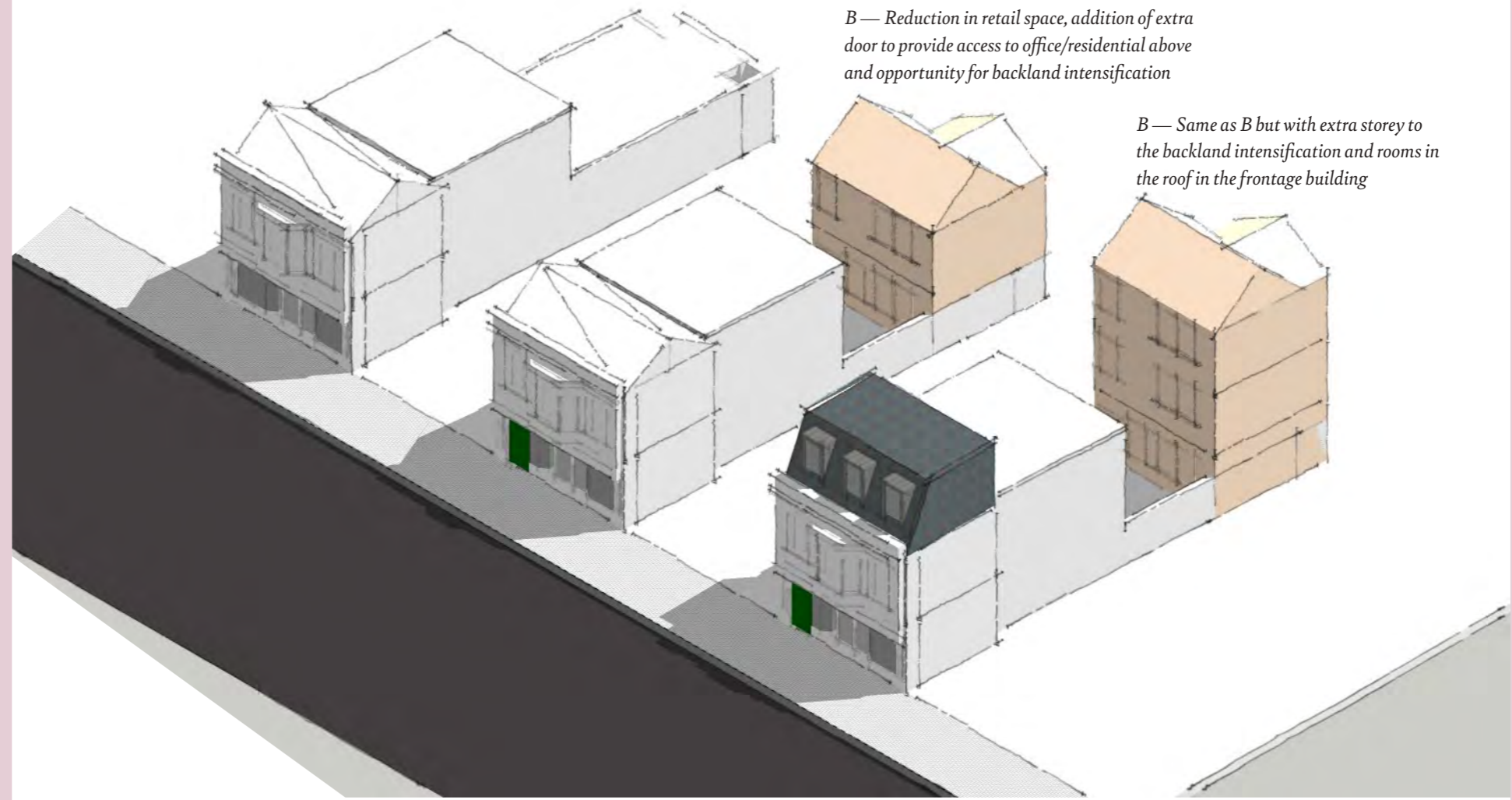
1. Existing property has a fully-glazed shop frontage with no separate entrance to enable independent access to the first floor. It has been extended to a great depth at ground floor level and significantly at first floor also.
2. Such large extensions to the retail or commercial use attracts higher rents, but also higher business rates. Whilst higher rents are appealing to owners, this double-impact makes properties uninviting to retailers or other potential occupants. Demand for large floor-plate retail space is in decline.
3. The shop frontage in the example is wide and can easily accommodate the addition of an extra door to provide access independently from that of the shop. This provides the opportunity for mixed use. In this example, for residential or office above.
4. By reducing the area of the retail or commercial premises the business rates can be lowered or taken below the threshold making a unit more appealing to a small retailer.
5. The reduction in space could be such that a small courtyard (4.8 x 6.1m in the example) is left to the rear of the shop and a two or even three-storey town house built to the rear (60m² two-storey, one-bedroom and 90m² three-storey, three-bedroom options shown). This would require careful design to account for concerns such as outlook, amenity etc.
6. Access to the rear town houses and first floor residential flat or office is facilitated by the addition of the separate door (see point 3.)
7. To maximise this process further, the conversion of the upper floors on the high street with an additional storey that could be added using a sensitively-designed “rooms in the roof” conversion. In such instances, it may also be possible to create a three-storey building to the rear, subject to issues around right to light and overlooking.



A — Current situation

B — Reduction in retail space, addition of extra door to provide access to office/residential above and opportunity for backland intensification

B — Same as B but with extra storey to the backland intensification and rooms in the roof in the frontage building



Case Study: Post Office Lane

Post Office Lane lies on the northern side of the street and its opposite number is Castlehold Lane, a narrow lane that runs off the high street to the south.

Whereas Castlehold Lane is slightly wider and has over the years accumulated a row of homes and small offices to its eastern side (with a blank side wall to an office/storage unit to the west), Post Office Lane is currently occupied by a recently renovated public toilet block and access to an electricity substation.

The shops which front High Street directly to the east of Post Office Lane (numbers 100 — 103 High Street) are to a greater or lesser extent examples of the prioritisation of ground floor retail use. To the rear, all of these properties have been extended to their fullest extent. Upper floors appear to be under utilised if not entirely unused.

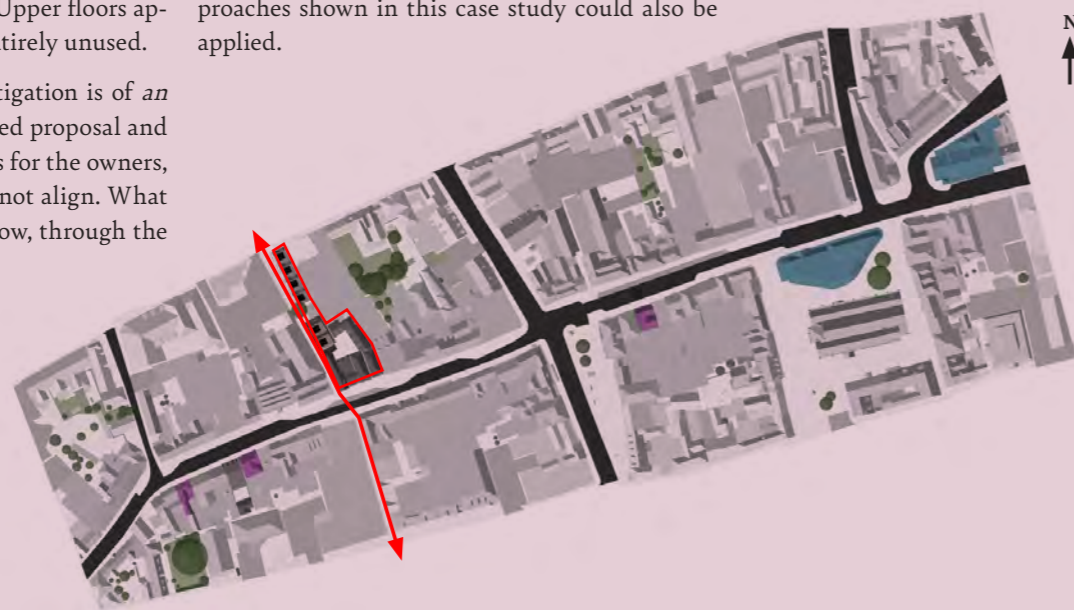
It must be stated that this investigation is of *an idea in principle*, it is not a resolved proposal and recognises that the circumstances for the owners, leaseholders, occupants etc. may not align. What is shown here is an example of how, through the

collaboration of different owners and agencies, there are pockets along Newport High Street where the two previously described principles (new access doors to upper floors and backland intensification) can be applied along with other minor interventions to provide significant uplift in value. This should be attractive to investors and help bring about change.

This scenario seeks to reduce business rates to shops, activate the existing upper floors and provide flexible new space for business, employment or residential.

There are other sites sitting behind Newport High Street that have a similar context to Post Office Lane (e.g. land-locked sites with limited access from the frontage) where the design approaches shown in this case study could also be applied.

Below: High Street (east-west) with routes of Post Office Lane and Castlehold Lane shown with red arrows (north and south of High Street respectively). Case study site outlined in red.



Above, left: Castlehold Lane looking south from High Street



Above, right: the southern end of Post Office Lane, looking towards High Street, the electricity sub station is to the left.



Above: Existing street frontage of 100 — 103 High Street. While improvements could be made here the proposal can be carried out without altering the outward appearance of this building.



Above: An “acrow” temporary structural support visible through a first floor window, implies that not only is the first floor not in use but that the building requires important maintenance.

Design Principles: Post Office Lane

Plan of site as existing



Vacant plot

Single storey building

Public WC

Electricity sub station

Single storey ground floor retail extensions

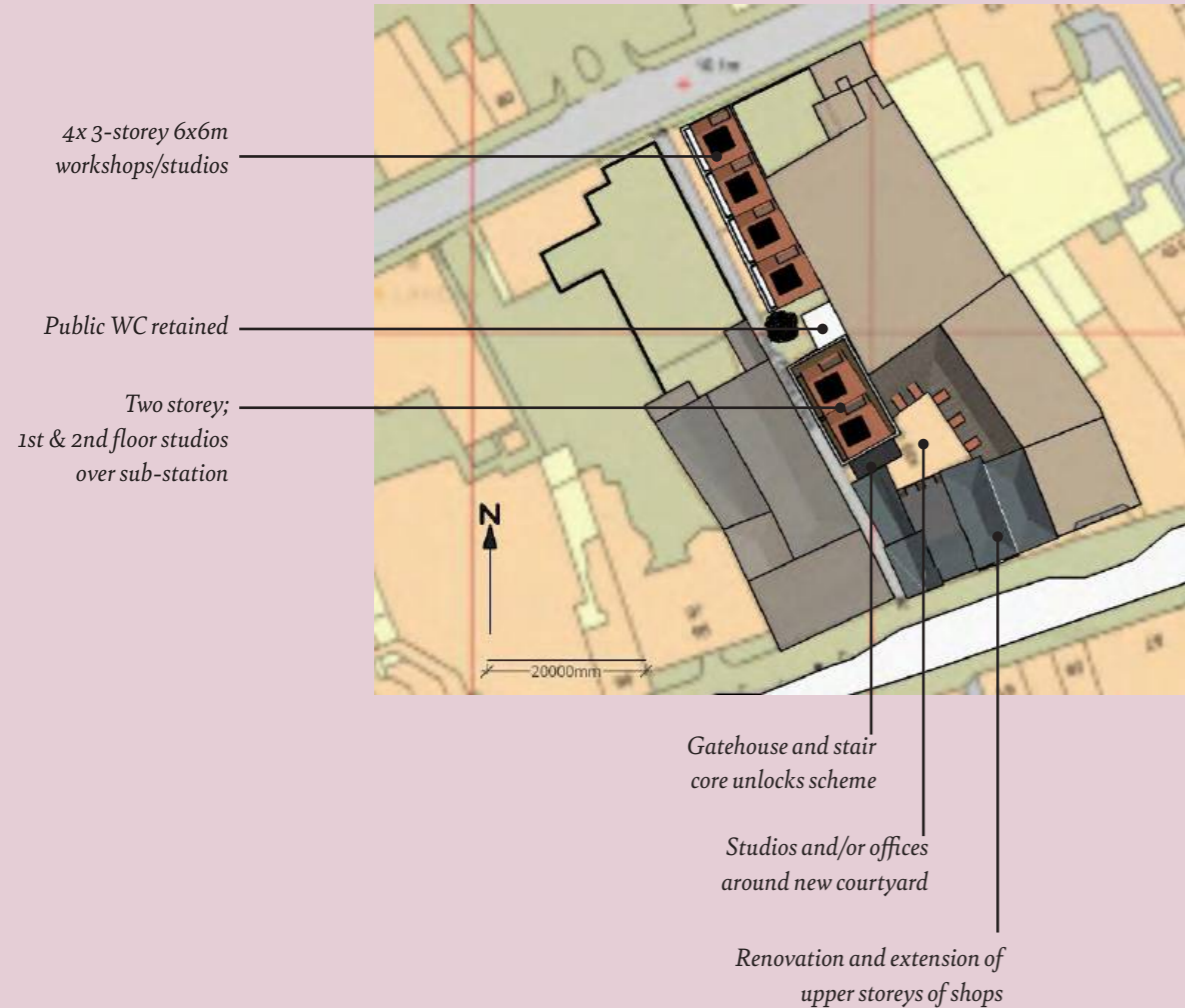
- Structures for demolition
- Structures for retention

3-D of site as existing



Design Principles: Post Office Lane

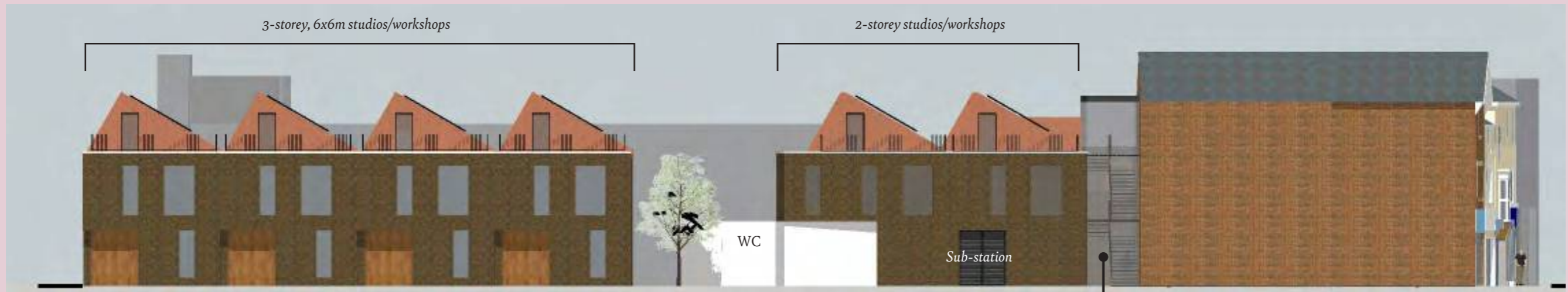
Plan of site as per the change scenario



3-D of site as per the change scenario



Sections: Post Office Lane



Elevation to Post Office Lane as existing (top) and as proposed (above)

Gatehouse and stair core

Stair Core & Gateway: Post Office Lane



The insertion of a circulation core on Post Office Lane as a free standing entity provides access both to the upper storeys of the buildings along High Street but also to the raised studios over the sub-station and public WC.

The structure also acts as a gatehouse, providing access to the studios/offices behind. Staggered half landings mean that a variety of existing and new floor levels can be accommodated.



Top: Elevation to Post Office Lane

Above: Section through proposed courtyard showing the scale and relationship of the proposed structure to the rear of 100 High Street in particular.

Precedent Grosvenor Buildings

Crescent Road, Harrogate, Yorkshire, by Conran Associates

(Architect: Philip Thornton)

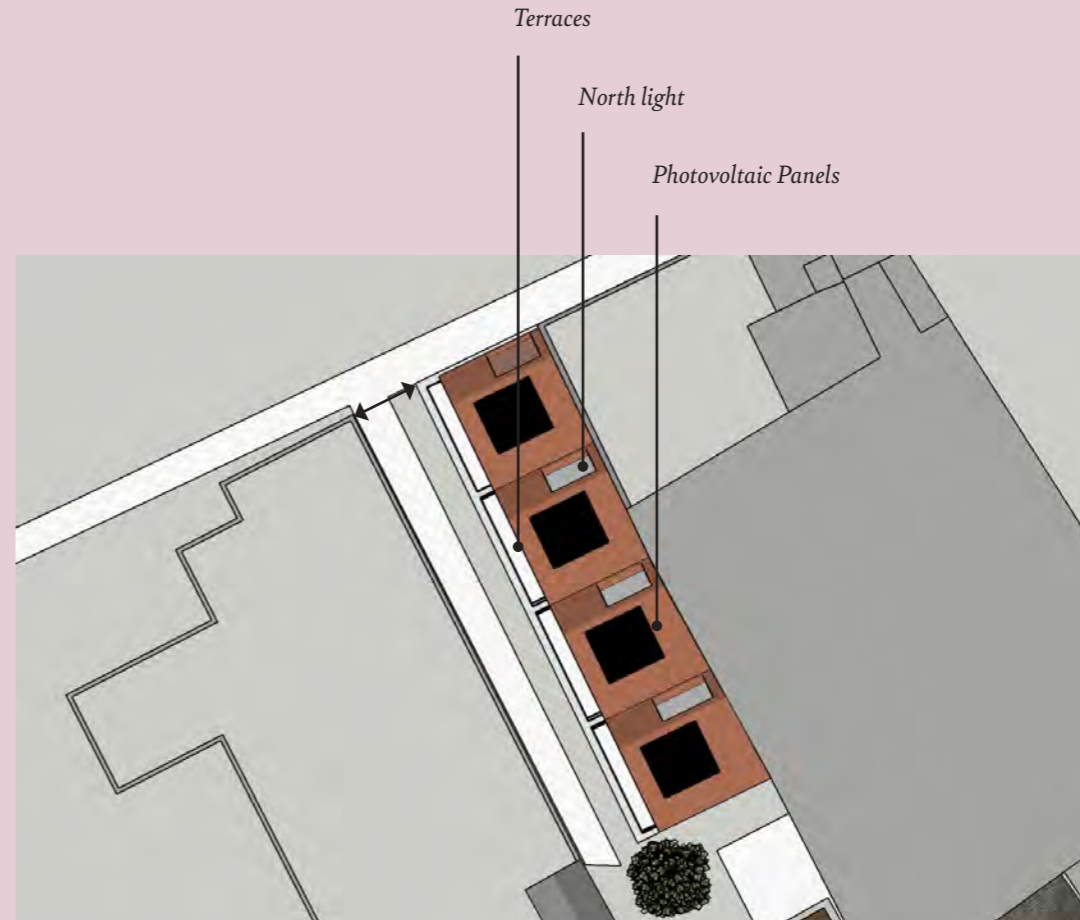
The Grosvenor Buildings are “one of the most impressive and distinctive terraces” in Harrogate.

The sensitive insertion of circulation towers, similar to that suggested for Post Office Lane, to the rear of the terrace opened up the historic buildings to residential conversion without altering the Grade II listed facade facing Crescent Gardens.



Above: Section through the proposed staircase showing different possibilities for gaining access to the proposed raised studios, the same can be applied to the existing buildings and minor changes in level addressed internally.

Workshop Option: Post Office Lane



In this scenario, workshops are aligned along the eastern edge of Post Office Lane. The workshops are set back from the existing edge of the lane to facilitate access for large items of machinery, goods or artworks if used as studios. The front doors are set into larger opening panels for the same reason.

North-light provides maximum natural lighting without over heating or glare and internal light wells allow this to permeate to ground floor. Solar photovoltaic panels provide electricity, small terraces provide external staff amenity space and encourage a community atmosphere. The chosen materials of brick and Corten steel define a clearly contemporary but sympathetic aesthetic within the centre of Newport.

Workshops set 1.5m back from existing edge of alley to improve public realm and access to workshops

Precedent Dovecote Studio



Snape Maltings, Snape, Suffolk

(Architects: Haworth Tompkins)

Snape Malting in Suffolk is a 19th Century former Maltings and the home of Benjamin Britten's Snape Concert Hall.

It is Grade II listed. As part of various works which Haworth Tompkins have designed for the site they inserted this Corten steel music rehearsal studio within the ruined walls of a former dovecote.

It is suggested that the workshops along Post Office Lane can adopt a similar approach to the use of materials, juxtaposing more contemporary steel with established brick structures.

Above, left: Castlehold Lane looking south from High Street

Above, right: perspective view along Post Office Lane to demonstrate how the workshop scenario can deliver a similar positive street level experience.

Overview: Post Office Lane



Sketch showing how the Post Office Lanes ideas could be assimilated into the urban grain of Newport High Street.

Eastern Section: Apollo Lane

The urban design analysis revealed the potential for further north-south links to be established in the eastern section of the High Street. These will help rebalance the strong east-west layout of central Newport.

While currently blocked to through movements, the gap to the western side of the Apollo Theatre on Pyle street offers an opportunity to create an activated lane that connects to the High Street. The desired outcome can be considered as a contemporary mews court or courtyard space.

The northern exit and entrance point connects to the High Street adjacent to the landmark Guildhall, lending further prominence to this new link.

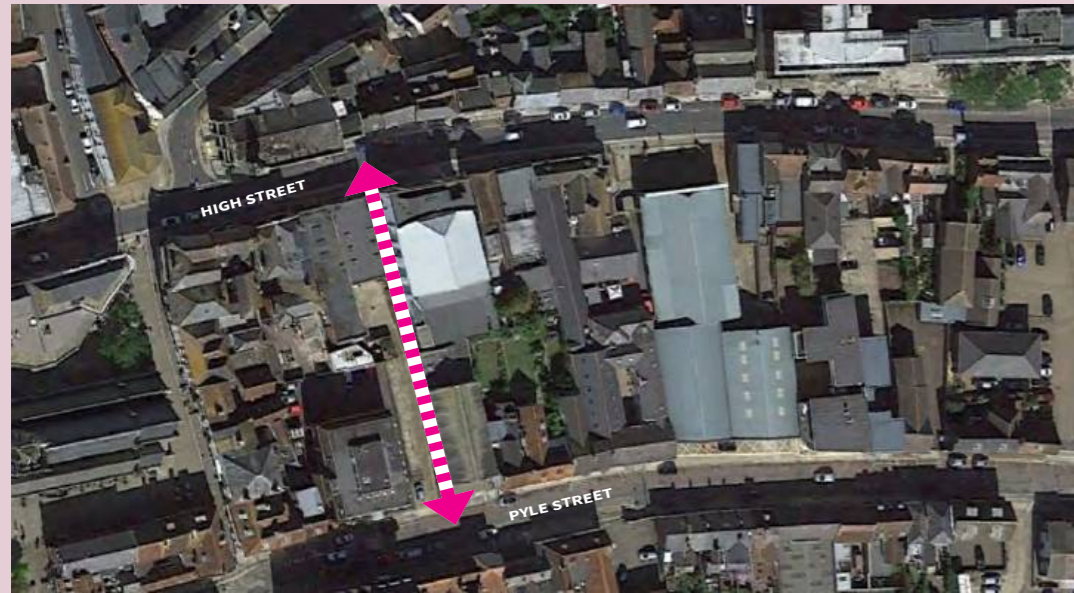
These images explore the potential of this intervention, but further investigations are required around ownership and access rights.

Opposite Page

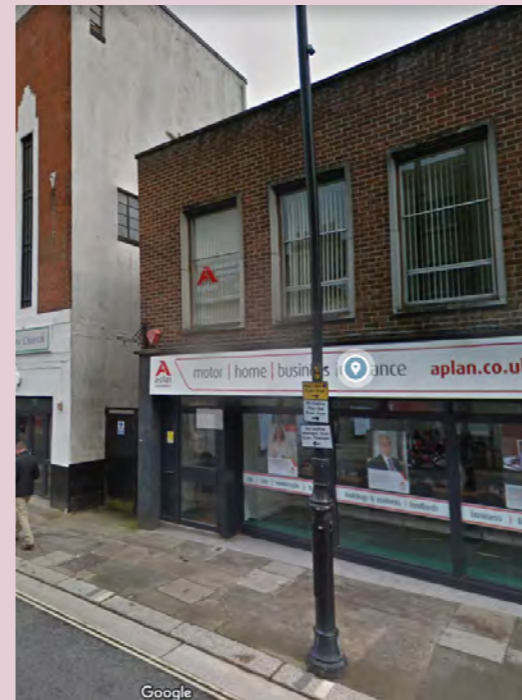
Top: Current View from Pyle Street

Bottom Left: Current access from High Street

Bottom Right: Possible future access from High Street



Location photo





Future View from Pyle Street: There is potential to mark the entrance to this new lane with artwork or gateway features and further celebrate the Apollo Theatre as a local landmark.



View from High Street: This is the narrow entrance and can be marked by artwork or a gateway feature that corresponds with similar features at the opposite end.



Inside the new space: There is sufficient width in the southern section for the lane to accommodate pop-up uses that can activate the space and trade off the new levels of footfall.



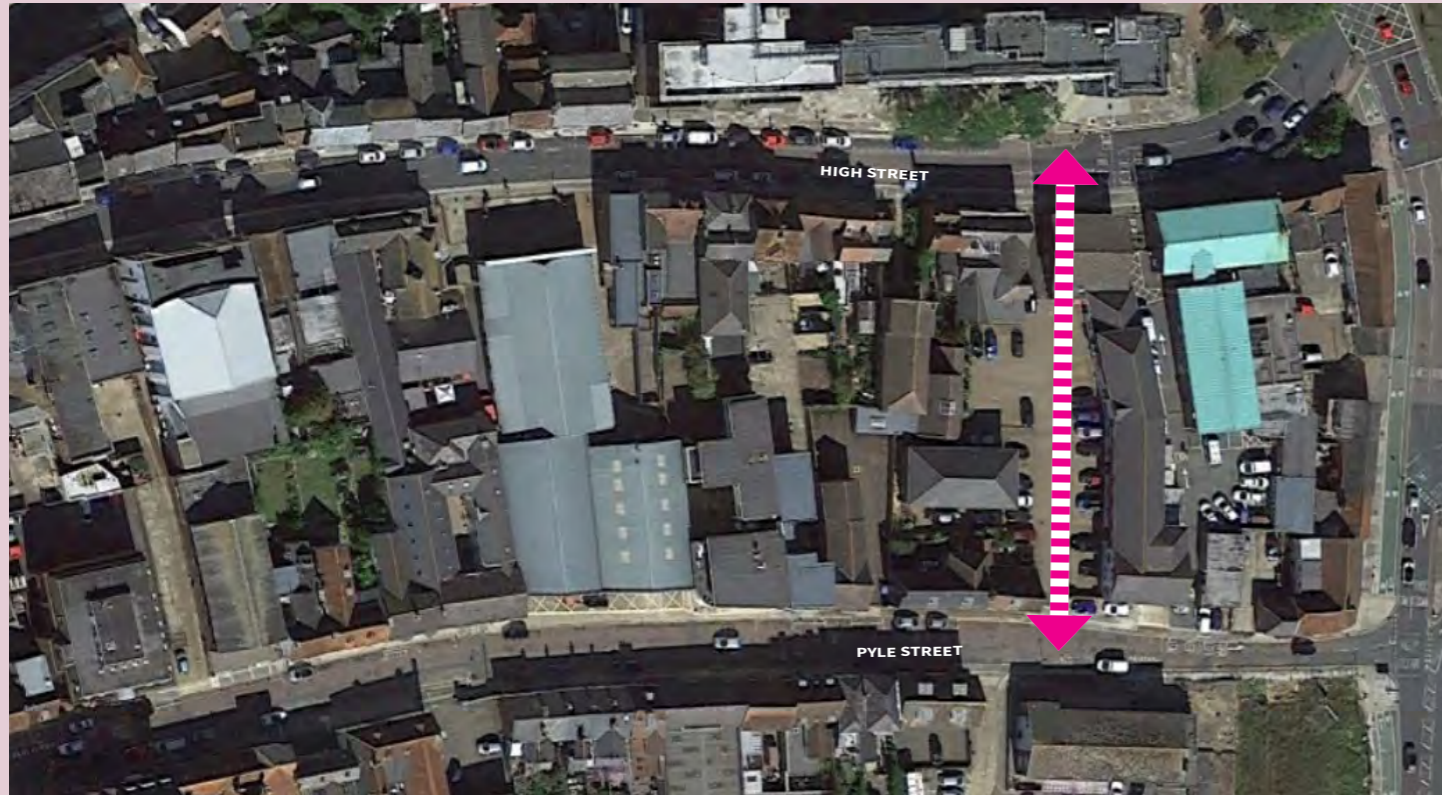
Looking south from the halfway point: This is the widest section of the lane and can deliver a courtyard or mews court atmosphere.

Eastern Section: Langley Court

The urban design analysis further revealed the potential for a second north-south link at the eastern end of the High Street. Langley Court is currently a car park space, surrounding by business uses.

However, various interventions can shift the emphasis of this space towards a landscaped courtyard that can further draw people between High Street and Pyle Street.

These images explore the potential of this intervention, but further investigations are required around ownership and access rights.



Current View from Pyle Street



Current access from High Street



Future View from Pyle Street: Introduction of tree planting, new surfaces and entrance features will encourage through movements that are currently deterred as the place feels unwelcoming.



Future View from High Street: Introduction of planting and entrance features to mark this access into Langley Court



Inside the new space, looking towards the High Street: Car parking is retained but the introduction of landscaping will create a welcome courtyard environment, with clear sight-line to the entrance-exit points.



Looking south from the halfway point

Case Studies

Conversions

This set of case studies looks at how buildings of a similar scale and context to Newport High Street have been successfully converted in other places.

The emphasis here is upon the changes to the building envelope, changes to the internal arrangements and access from the street.

Rock House, Hastings

Redundant office to mixed use space

Rock House in Hastings was transformed from a semi-derelict 1969 office block into a creative, collaborative, capped-rent mix of space for living, working and community action. Two floors were converted into creative workspace, alongside six affordable apartments and community and enterprise space.



Before

High Street, Bishops Stortford

Redundant retail to residential space

This site comprises a strip of deep historic buildings with a 4m frontage and access only from the High Street in the centre of a town centre and conservation area. Buildings were converted and a few minor extensions were added to the rear. Use of existing separate entrance to upper storeys allowed entry from side streets or some

high street units. Further development included rooflights and areas of glazing to the side and rear away from the sensitive façades to allow for greater use of internal spaces. Conversion of upper floors along this parade of shops created more life on the high street.

Now



Market Place, Brackley

Redundant retail to residential space

An old stone building on the high street in Brackley had permission to be converted to flats from a former vacant shop. The designs allowed two new commercial units on the ground floor, with two flats on the upper floors in a sustainable town centre location to increase high street activity and viability.



Former Pack's Store, Ryde

Redundant retail to community space

The former Pack's store, a long-standing shop on Cross Street in Ryde, was a derelict space after closure of the well-known store. It was able to be reopened due to funding from the Architectural Heritage Fund.

The building was converted into a new cultural venue on a "meanwhile" basis and further funding was secured from Arts Council England for a £2m transformation of the building into a space to display and perform, connect local makers with the community, and learn and exchange skills. It has brought more life into a once quieter part of the high street and saved a building which risked falling into dereliction.



The Trampery in Tottenham, London

Redundant council building to community space
This Grade II Listed building was fire damaged during the 2011 London riots. It was used by the local council building control department but was left vacant pending repairs following its damage. The Greater London Authority took possession of the building to turn it into a community centre named The Trampery - providing start up business space for young people, entrepreneurs and creative businesses in the area. Works were completed in 2022.



Moordown, Bournemouth

Redundant office to residential space
Planning permission was granted in 2016 to convert a bank into a ground floor retail unit and three two-bedroom flats on a high street on a key route. Being mindful of the immediate surroundings and neighbouring occupiers, the development features sensitive fenestration arrangements and balcony screens to safeguard privacy. The development was in accordance with adopted planning policies that support economic growth and residential development through the reuse of existing buildings in sustainable locations.



Residential conversion, Islington

Redundant retail to residential space

A former long-term vacant retail space in Islington was transformed into a new home, taking into account that this could change in the future as the street developed. The approach was therefore to create a frontage that could be used for both residential and retail purposes through analysing traditional shop frontages and reinterpreting them in a new way, to create a distinct presence on the street. This brought life back onto the high street, increasing footfall and improving the visual impact of the former empty shop front.



Residential conversion, Rochester

Intensification of residential space

This dwelling lay in a small parade of similar units providing accommodation over three floors, lying in a predominately residential area with local shops along the road. It is situated in a sustainable location nearby to the centre of Historic Rochester and mainline railway station. Permission was granted for conversion to a self-contained flat and two floor maisonette and the adjoining similar property is currently undergoing conversion work to provide three self-contained flats.



Old Christchurch Road, Bournemouth

Redundant office to residential space

These town centre premises occupy an excellent trading location fronting Old Christchurch Road which is one of Bournemouth's principal shopping streets. The property is arranged over 5 floors and comprises a double fronted ground floor shop & office plus basement and offices arranged over 3 upper floors. Planning permission

was granted for conversion from the existing offices to five flats in a highly sustainable town centre location to bring more footfall to the town centre and increase vitality.



High Street, Clapham, London

Redundant retail to residential space

A conversion on Clapham High Street converted ancillary retail space into 28 contemporary residential units with shared amenity space. The proposal resulted in a net loss of A1 (retail) floorspace however this was acceptable as it was at first, second and floor levels and not active retail floorspace. The proposal provided 28 residential units with an acceptable level of residential amenity. Due to the location of the development on a busy high street, nearby to a nightclub, all residential units were subject to conditions requiring applicable internal noise levels to be achieved.



Case Studies

New Uses

This set of case studies explores new types of activity and innovation that can be hosted by the changing high street. The examples draw upon a wide range of pop-up and meanwhile uses, often accommodated within high street conversions, giving underutilised buildings new life, driving footfall and offering new experiences.

If traditional retail is on the decline in Newport, what will take its place, especially at ground floor level? With an island economy that is often geared around tourism and experiences, many of the case studies here align with the concepts of leisure, pleasure and immersive experiences.

Weston Artspace, Weston-Super-Mare

Redundant retail to community arts space

Weston Artspace was founded in 2019 by the arts organisation Terrestrial. After consultations with the local arts community they discovered a need for a space to enable creatives to meet, work and explore their creative practice in an affordable and accessible space. So a free studio was opened which has formed a hub for Weston-super-Mare's creative community at the heart of the High Street. Anyone is welcome to become a member – there is no cost for Weston-based artists.



Ping Pong Parlours

Redundant retail to community play space

Ping Pong Parlours are pop-up spaces (usually empty shop units), filled with table tennis tables to provide a fun, accessible venue for passers-by to play ping pong for free as well as creating a buzz in shopping centres and the high street. They aim to inspire people to get active and lead happier, healthier lifestyles by introducing table tennis into the places they already spend time in their everyday lives.



Sainsbury's Meat Free Butchers

Retail to retail with a twist

A popular and traditional high street use with a twist; a meat free butchers opened for World Meat Free week in Bethnal Green, East London in 2019.

This came as Sainsbury's saw a 65% increase in sales of plant-based products year-on-year. It is estimated that 25% of British people could be vegetarian by 2025 and half as flexitarian.

Therefore, this pop-up store tapped into future market demand and opened people's eyes to a new way of thinking.



Patagonia Activist Café

Retail to activist café

Patagonia launched a pop-up café with a twist in Broadway, London that hosted an array of climate activist training courses. It was seen as a smart way of advocating Patagonia's values, and a good example of how brands can do much more to showcase their commitment to sustainability. It made use of a small vacant shop site on a high street. 100% of café profits went to local UK environmental charities and NGOs.



Transport for London Southwark “Platform”

Industrial building to meanwhile artist’s space

An old industrial building provides an important temporary home for artists and innovators. An old cork factory has been transformed into a meanwhile space providing affordable homes and small work spaces for a collection of artists and small businesses that might otherwise struggle to find space. The land where the building is situated will form part of Transport for London’s plans for commercial development. But for now, it acts as a sanctuary from rising rent prices.



Leesa Dream Gallery

Retail space to pop-up bed store

The online mattress-in-a-box retailer Leesa gave customers a chance to try its product in person. To make it memorable, the brand turned the experience into a statement by holding the pop-up shop in a SoHo gallery filled with art from ArtLifting, an online marketplace of works created by artists who were disabled or homeless.

The event was presented as being a “no-pressure environment,” without pushy salespeople. Customers could lie down on the mattress or simply enjoy a cup of coffee and discover up-and-coming artists.



Polaroid Pop-Up Lab

Retail to Polaroid lab

Photography giant Polaroid opened a store to promote their Polaroid Lab project, a printer that produces physical Polaroid photos straight from your phone's image library.

The lab featured a photography installation with AR content embedded in each image, which was meant to encourage visitors to create their own content. The experience also offered consumers the chance to interact with the brand and the Lab, through a series of immersive storytelling areas, educational and inspirational workshops and retail spaces.

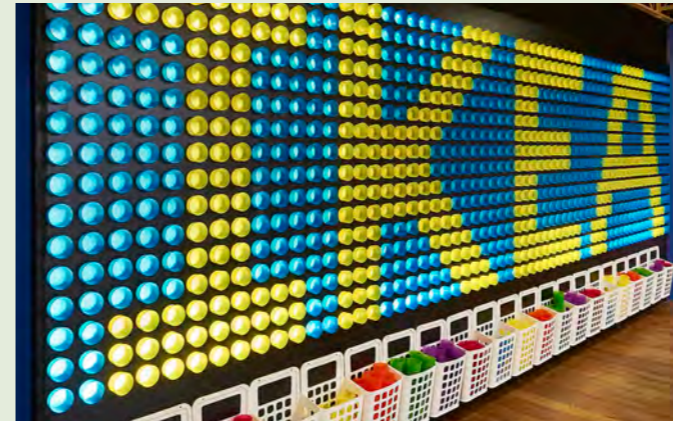


IKEA Play Café

Retail to immersive high street experience

IKEA hosted a pop-up café in Toronto to spotlight its food, giving customers a chance to taste its famous meatballs without having to trek through the giant store. Houseware products related to cooking, eating and entertaining were also available to try out. Guests could play a variety of games including over-sized Pin-Ball, electronic dance battles, an illuminated wall modified with children's drink ware and a spinning prize wheel.

The aim of the café was to start conversations through defying conventions, creating an immersive experience and reminding guests of IKEA's core values and consumer commitment while providing a memorable, gamified retail experience.



Camden Collective

Affordable temporary workspaces in vacant buildings or on vacant sites

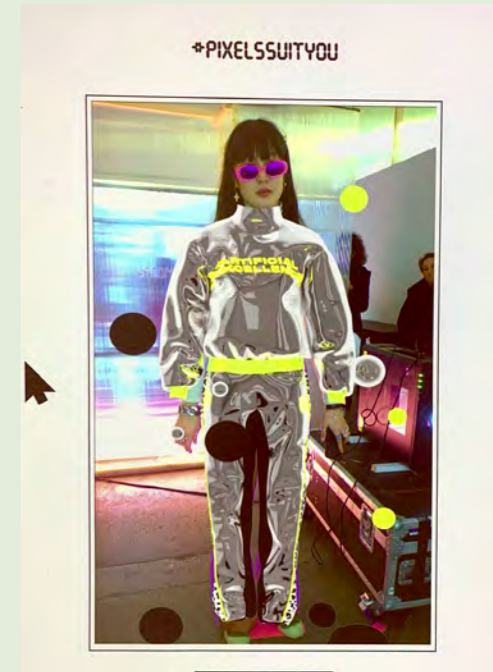
A registered charity supporting local start-up businesses, Camden Collective take on temporary leases of empty buildings and vacant sites providing positive economic and social benefits for the local area, and giving start ups the chance to take risks and grow in a low-cost way. Camden Collective has occupied 18 spaces since 2009 and has introduced various projects, such as: pop-up shops, free courses, accelerators, commissioning public realm projects, free events, and the Camden Create Festival.



Pop up digital garment experience store

Retail to unique pop-up store

A short lived pop-up store in London offered a digital garment experience via the world's first "digital clothes" store. Customers brought in an unused item of clothing and in return could try on a garment in a pod digitally using magic mirrors, but could not purchase it. The pop-up store acted as a testing space for digital clothing, as development is underway in this field. Customisation stations also were present to upcycle the used items customers brought in.



Wrangler Experience

Retail to pop-up recording studio

Jeans retailer Wrangler opened a shop for five weeks in Soho in the style of a 1970s recording studio. The pop-up was to promote the brand's status at a time to coincide with release of its latest collection. The shop featured a real life recording studio, which cleverly tapped into the brand's identity whereby style and music go hand in hand. The space acted more to market the brand rather than sell their products.



Museum of Ice Cream

Pop up experience to permanent experience

A trial of the Museum of Ice Cream turned into a permanent attraction in five global cities including New York. This is a multi-sensory experience with immersive installations that reimagines the way we experience ice cream.

The Museum of Ice Cream is an example of how brands and artists can increase brand visibility and charm the world at large through participation in pop-up stores.



Not on the High Street

Pop up experience

Online only retailer “Not on the High Street” can now be found now temporarily on the high street ... in two locations over the Christmas period in pop-up shops.

These pop-ups allow a physical presence of an on-line business and a chance to showcase its products, giving consumers a chance to see items close up before buying.



Challenges to Repurposing

When converting a redundant high street space into a new dwelling, there will be potential challenges and planning considerations that will need to be considered throughout the process. The challenges and potential obstacles to repurposing and extending buildings are addressed in this section of the guide.

Where appropriate, the relevant policies from the adopted Isle of Wight Core Strategy 2012 have been considered, alongside the emerging draft Island Planning Strategy 2021, which should be given limited weight in decision making until its adoption.

Class E Permitted Development Rights

Much of Newport Town Centre lies within a Conservation Area. So while the recently relaxed Class E permitted development regulations (allowing conversions from commercial and office buildings to residential development without planning permission) are applicable, this does not apply to Listed Buildings.

This may act as the first barrier, as many further planning considerations will be taken into account by the Planning Officer in considering the application, however it may result in a higher quality design and living environment for any future occupants.

Ownership

Conversion of buildings into mixed use residential and commercial uses can cause a range of associated issues relating to ownership. Providing residential units within a former office building, for example, can fragment ownership where the units are for sale. They require different management structures for the commercial and residential elements, even if the residential units are retained for rent. Separate entrances will be required which will also increase costs. Therefore, careful consideration of management options at the planning stage will be required.

Amenity

For occupiers of any new dwelling

In relation to development, amenity is any positive element, or elements, that contribute to the overall enjoyment of an area or building. Amenity can be adversely affected through loss of privacy; loss of daylight and sunlight; through the overbearing scale of built development; noise; vibration; unpleasant odours; or intrusion from artificial lighting schemes.

The design of development should respond to amenity issues through sensitive consideration of the size and position of new buildings, the size and position of features (such as windows, doors and external staircases) in new buildings, privacy screening, hard and soft landscaping, and the layout and distribution of uses. All rooms should have adequate natural light with a window in every habitable room.

Should the proposed dwelling lie in an area with a large number of neighbouring commercial properties, this type of area may cause amenity impacts for residents that would mean the area may not be suitable for residential use. Amenity considerations are set out in the Draft Island Planning Strategy 2021.

For others nearby

Amenity issues will also need to be considered if existing residential premises are in the vicinity of any proposed new dwelling. This will be important in terms of light, their right to privacy and impacts of any proposed extensions to the existing building which may cause overbearing impacts on neighbours.

National Space Standards

Projects must conform to the National Space Standards (NSS), a list of standards described to guide developers into building liveable homes, considering space required for areas such as storage, sleeping, bathrooms and food preparation. This means that a single bedroom flat for one person must have a floor area of at least 39 square metres if the home has a bathroom, or 37 square metres if the space has a shower room.

No references to space standards are made within the Isle of Wight Core Strategy 2012, however the emerging Draft Island Planning Strategy 2021 references how the council expects NSS to be met for residential development in respect of room sizes and amenity space, incorporating appropriate living space relative to the nature of accommodation being proposed.

As well as internal space, The Isle of Wight Core Strategy 2012 and the Draft Island Planning Strategy 2021 both require development to ensure adequate external amenity space is provided for new dwellings. The pandemic has shown the importance of access to private and public green space so there is the potential that this may be a consideration for new homes.

Health

If the proposed new dwellings are in a former industrial building, considerations of industrial contamination will come into play, to ensure that potential contamination is not a health risk to any occupants.

The adopted Isle of Wight Core Strategy 2012 does not contain specific information on contamination. However, the emerging Draft Island Planning Strategy 2021 requires redevelopment proposals in certain locations to demonstrate that potential sources of contamination have been considered and, if necessary, mitigated. It highlights how this can act as a barrier to delivery and attract greater uncertainty before this has been demonstrated.

Conservation Area

A conservation area is an area designated by the Local Authority due to their special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance. The majority of Newport town centre lies within a conservation area.

Section 72 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 sets out the general duty as respects conservation areas in exercise of planning functions, whereby with respect to any buildings or other land in a conservation area, special attention shall be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of that area.

The Isle of Wight Core Strategy 2012 and the Draft Island Planning Strategy 2021 state how when applying for planning permission for a change of use to a building, proposals will be expected to respect the character of the area, particularly when they lie within or adjacent to a conservation areas. If ground floors are proposed to be converted, the planning strategy notes how the council can consider impacts on the change to the character of the conservation area and impacts on historic shop fronts, which are also required to be preserved and enhanced. Consideration should be given for the Commercial Frontage Design Guide, which has now been adopted as a SPD.

Where relevant, proposals will therefore need to consider impacts on conservation areas and their setting to gain planning consent.

Listed Buildings

A listed building refers to a building which is included on the statutory list of 'buildings of special architectural or historic interest'. Any features of historic or architectural importance on or associated with an existing building should be retained as part of any scheme for conversion.

Section 66 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 sets out the general duty as respects listed buildings in exercise of planning functions, whereby in considering whether to grant planning permission for development which affects a listed building or its setting, the planner shall have special regard to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses.

Even minor alterations and extensions or development within the setting of a listed building can potentially adversely affect the significance of a listed building. The original plan form, roof, walls and openings as well as interior and exterior features should be retained. Schemes for the reuse of listed buildings will therefore usually require listed building consent even in cases where planning permission is not required.

The Isle of Wight Core Strategy 2012 and the Draft Island Planning Strategy 2021 both set out how demolition or substantial harm to designated heritage assets and their settings will only be

permitted in exceptional or wholly exceptional circumstances, depending on the significance of the asset. They also note how the demolition or substantial harm to non-designated heritage assets and their settings, which make a positive contribution to the special character and/or local identity of an area, will be resisted. Proposals will therefore need to be highly sensitive towards a listed building or its setting to gain planning consent.

Flooding

Flooding is a key consideration given the coastal nature of the Isle of Wight, the rivers that run through it, and climate change. The River Medina flows along the eastern side of the town centre and the Environment Agency Flood Map for Planning shows how some town centre buildings are located within flood zones 2 and 3. In these locations, flooding will be a key consideration, particularly if a conversion proposal introduces new ground floor residential space.

The Isle of Wight Core Strategy 2012 requires new development to meet the aims and objectives of the Council's Strategic Flood Risk Assessment, providing on site SUDS and ensuring that the proposal does not constitute a net loss of flood

storage capacity. It also notes how an allowance for climate change will be required when undertaking Flood Risk Assessments in flood zones 2 or 3, considering the next 100 years as a minimum.

The Draft Island Planning Strategy 2021 states how where development is located within an area at risk from flooding or future risk of flooding, a site-specific flood risk assessment will be required, alongside compliance with national planning requirements. Development proposals will be expected to be safe from flooding and not increase the risk of flooding elsewhere, using any opportunities with new development to reduce the causes and impacts of flooding and manage residual risk. Proposals can be rejected if they do not provide a sufficient flood mitigation strategy and this is therefore a key consideration.

Environmental Performance

Planning policy is constantly being updated and strengthened with regards to environmental considerations as requirements surrounding the climate emergency are being increased.

Requirements for high standards of environmental performance in new buildings are currently a hot topic in the face of climate change. Conversions in future may be required to meet certain environmental standards which are continuously being rolled out in local plans and in national regulations. Class L of building regulations requires all new dwellings to meet certain environmental standards, and as the climate emergency worsens, the requirements for planning could be strengthened. This may therefore be a future consideration.

Further non-planning challenges to repurposing

Planning is not the only consideration that will come into play with residential high street conversions. Further challenges outside of the realms of planning including those relating to building regulations, including new dwellings requiring proper access to buildings instead of sharing an access with commercial spaces, may need to be considered. Issues with getting buildings insurance and a mortgage can be a key barrier as the lending criteria can be strict.

Another issue with conversions in Newport is the lack of car parking. Commercial spaces in Newport often do not have parking. With conversions, if flats are being created, this might not be such an issue as residents can use parking permits, but for houses, on-plot car parking is often expected and required, according to local estate agents who were interviewed as part of the research phase of this report.

That said, there are already many houses without car parking in central Newport. The car parking SPD allows for zero parking homes in the town centre and Newport currently offers pretty much everything needed for everyday life, with frequent public transport on offer to take people to other destinations

In summary, although there are various issues, which may mean some sites are restricted, these challenges can often be overcome with creative approaches, careful planning, and a good design team in place.

The market for town centre residential conversions

Planning policy context

The Isle of Wight Housing Strategy 2020-2025 recognises that housing affordability and housing supply are and are set to remain the most challenging issues that the Island needs to address during the lifetime of the strategy and beyond.

It sets out the need for small scale housing sites including infill sites, and need for “ordinary homes” that are “affordable” for the younger mostly working generations of islanders who aspire to remain or return to the island to make a living and raise a family.

The emerging Draft Island Planning Strategy 2021 recognises the lack of housing supply on the island and its impacts on many local groups. It also sets out support for infill sites, subject to a proper means of access, adequate parking and not having a detrimental effect on the amenities of adjoining residential properties in terms of loss of light, loss of privacy or disturbance. It states there will be a general support for applications to bring upper storeys of buildings into use, provided they would not adversely impact on the viability of the ground floor use.

There are an increasing amount of locals, particularly of working age, unable to purchase a home for the first time with the island having a higher affordability ratio than many other areas. Therefore, the Isle of Wight Council is positive about development, wants to see it happen on the island in the most sustainable locations and sees

the delivery of housing as essential in helping to tackle the lack of truly affordable dwellings.

Newport High Street represents a highly sustainable location and has the capacity to offer innovative and attractive new homes. In order to further investigate the situation, the study team contacted several local property and letting agencies on the island to enquire about the likely demand for new, converted or adapted property in and around Newport High Street. These inquiries helped establish a sense of the current market conditions. The exercise was useful in proving that there is demand for a variety of dwellings on the Isle of Wight and in Newport specifically, including conversions.

The type of properties likely to result from the ideas in this guide are likely to find themselves in a market segment that is considered less desirable than family homes, and are typically purchased by investors for renting, or first time buyers. These inquiries also looked at challenges to conversion, and the difficulties that can emerge with mortgages for a converted property should there be commercial uses in the vicinity that may cause a fire hazard, including restaurants.

Market demand for flats

In the last few years, there appears to be high demand to live in places close to amenities and heritage because lots of people have changed their lifestyles due to the Covid-19 pandemic, such as

increased working from home patterns. Many people have moved over from the mainland and out of cities to live on the island and to work from home.

However, this demand wanes depends on the sort of activity the conversion sits above. It can be a fairly easy “sell” if above certain types of activity that are quiet, clean and have few deliveries. If the homes are priced correctly, at the moment they will sell, the research revealed. Units with short leases are more problematic to sell and rent.

Newport High Street is currently perceived by some to be in a visible state of decline, with of shops empty and not much else is happening. This makes conversions an attractive proposition to “make change visible” and kick-start a different way of thinking about the high street’s capacity for change.

Who is looking for properties of this type?

It seems that investors are the majority of people looking to purchase this type of housing, alongside first time buyers. This is because they are often cheaper as situated in the centre of town. If the ground floor has also been converted to residential uses, then typically interests older people who have access and mobility issues. Older buyers are often looking for somewhere central to live and downsize after having moved out of a family home. Investors often rent such places out to

young couples or professional individuals. They are often rented to doctors and nurses in Newport and Cowes as the town centres are easily accessible from the main hospitals.

The effect of ground floor activity on demand

The types of activities on the floors below conversions can suppress demand. In particular, restaurants or hairdressers, whether they are directly underneath or two doors down, due to the fire risk they present, there are often difficulties obtaining a mortgage. If the ground floor is also converted to residential, then it is a lot easier to get a mortgage.

Properties above quieter uses, or ones not serving food, are lots quicker to sell from an insurance perspective. If shops are above nightclubs or fish and chip shops for example, they are less likely to sell quickly for these reasons, but if they are priced correctly, they generally will sell.

**Prepared on behalf of Newport
High Street Heritage Action Zone
by The Chase and Feria Urbanism**

For more information, please visit
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