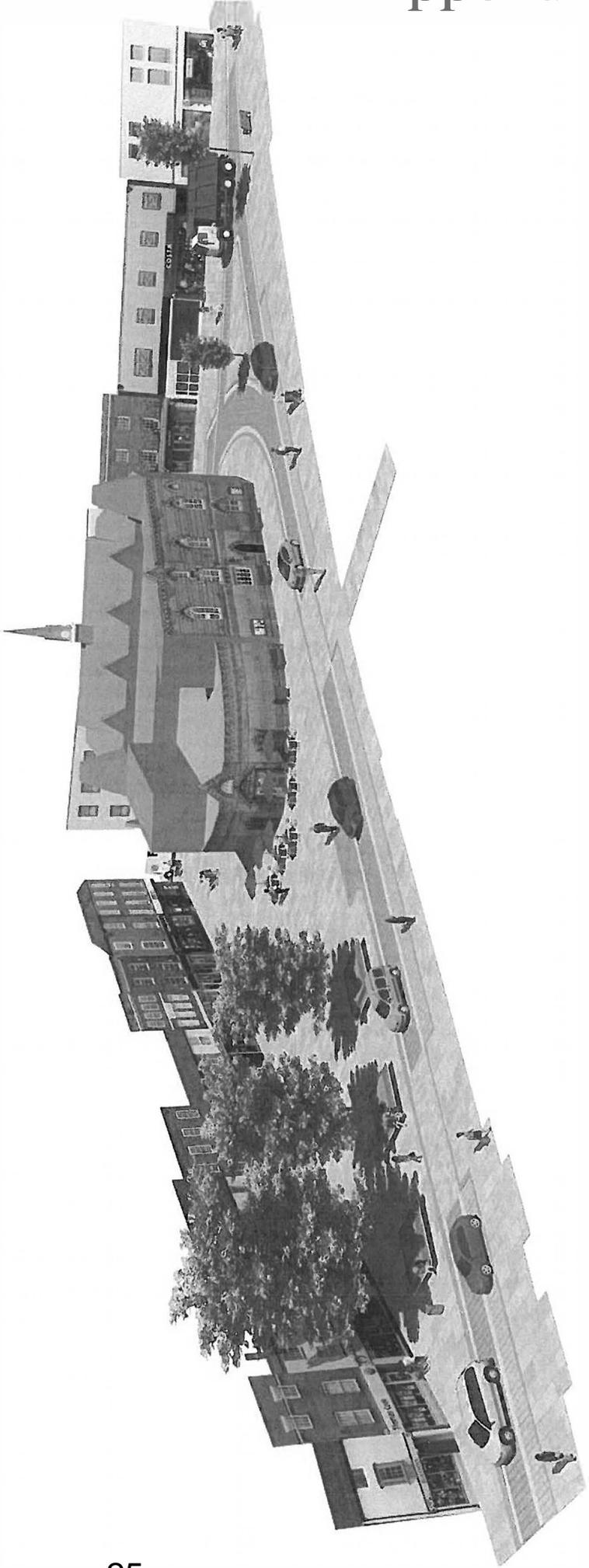


WOKINGHAM PUBLIC REALM DESIGN & DELIVERY STRATEGY



1.3 CONSULTATION

OVERVIEW

Stakeholder, technical and public Consultation has been an integral part in all stage of developing the Public Realm Strategy for Wokingham Town Centre. This consultation builds on the workshop carried out as part of the Town Centre Masterplan SPD and the Public Realm issues and opportunities workshop held on 15th June 2011. It has included the following:

TECHNICAL MEETINGS WITH WOKINGHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL OFFICERS

An open forum for Wokingham Borough Council Officers to share their technical knowledge. The purpose of the sessions was to introduce the project and then listen to the officers to understand the specific strengths, weaknesses, issues and opportunities of the public realm in Wokingham in the context of the early Public Realm Strategy work. The topic areas that were covered are listed below and a full record of these meetings is included in Appendix B.

- Heritage and Conservation
- Town Events
- Traffic and Safety/ Maintenance and Management
- Regeneration
- Development Management: Planning and Highways
- Planning
- Landscape, Trees and Open Space

MEETING WITH THE TOWN COUNCIL

A useful meeting was held on 18th December with the Town Council to share knowledge pertinent to the study. A record of this meeting is included in Appendix C.

OPEN WORKSHOP

The consultation exercises have been undertaken at the earliest possible

opportunity to ensure ideas raised at the events could be integrated into the vision, framework and guidance. The open workshop was arranged on 16th February during the preparation of the public realm framework and guidance; invitations were extended to all local members of the public. The workshop was planned in the context of the public realm issues and opportunities workshop undertaken in June 2011, after an introduction from the design team the group was set tasks which were structured to gain feedback on the vision and initial design ideas for the town centre public realm. A detailed summary of this event is provided in the appendices.

MEETING WITH MARKET TRADERS

An informal meeting was arranged with representatives of from market traders and retailers to understand their thoughts on the issues and opportunities and receive feedback on initial design ideas.

PUBLIC EXHIBITION

An informal manned public exhibition was held in Wokingham Town Hall over two days at the beginning of May, the exhibition was also available to view on the council website for one month. The exhibition comprised a series of presentation boards which described all aspects of the work and was supplemented by video footage to support the highway feasibility work. Members of the consultant team and Wokingham Borough Council were available to discuss the proposals and answer any questions. Feedback was gathered from the event through a questionnaire. Overall there was a positive response from the exhibition, a full breakdown of the responses and the issues raised is provided in the appendices of this report.

The next stages of this work will involve turning this work into SPD, this will include a formal consultation period, feedback from this informal event will inform the preparation of the SPD.

MARKET PLACE

HISTORY

The Market Place and the Grade II* listed Victorian Town Hall are at the very heart of Wokingham. They remain the social centre of the town and historically are where the growth of Wokingham began. A market was granted charter here by Henry III in 1227 and early records suggest there has been a Clock-house or Guildhall here since well before 1583 when Queen Elizabeth I granted the town a Charter. The old Guildhall in the Market Place, with its pillared undercroft, was built in 1612 and was replaced with the current Town Hall in 1858 after falling into disrepair.

It originally housed a police court and prison and beneath the Town Hall are the old police cells and Police Constable's quarters. Built in Victorian gothic style, the Town Hall is a tribute to the skilled craftsmanship of the Reading builders, Wheeler & Woodroffe. From the outside it looks much the same as it did in the 1860s but the courtyard has been covered and a number of changes made to the internal structure.

Public events and gatherings have been well documented in Market Place over the years. These have been diverse as annual bull baiting, ox roasting, fox hunting meets, election announcements, a wartime assembly point for troops, the Peace Day celebrations on 22nd July 1919 and The Proclamation of Kings and Queens.

ROLE AND FUNCTION

The Market Place lies at the point where the principal streets converge, it functions as a flexible multi-purpose space for markets, events (such as the May Fayre), carnivals, remembrance parades and street performance. It also provides an opportunity for informal seating and a pedestrian through route. The Town Hall houses an information centre, main hall and meeting rooms. Dinners, concerts, lectures, displays, meetings, bazaars, sales and civil ceremonies are held in the main hall, with the smaller rooms being used for meetings and other functions.



STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

- The Town Hall is an attractive landmark building built in Victorian gothic style.
- The Market Place provides a flexible space for informal seating, events, larger markets and outdoor cafes, however its full potential is constrained by limited space and a disjointed layout.
- Peach Street to the east of Market Place comprises two lanes of one way traffic, on street parking (principally disabled) and a shared bus route. During peak hours there are often 3 lanes of traffic to this boundary which has a profound impact on the pedestrian quality of the space in terms of noise, air pollution, safety and visual clutter.
- Regulatory road signs and street clutter proliferate at the pedestrian crossing at Peach Street and detract from the distinctive architecture of the Town Hall and the built environment.
- The paving materials comprise red and blue clay brick pavers. The quality of paving is poor, they are slippery when wet and the red colour clashes with the adjacent buildings. A chamfered upstand kerb delineating the access road in the space has been cited as a trip hazard.
- A road is un-necessarily delineated to the north, north east and west of the Town Hall in blue pavers.
- 28 ■ Three large mature trees are located in the Market Square. They provide an attractive green foil and counter to the busy road. The existing tree roots however have caused pavement heave, causing a considerable trip hazard.
- The street furniture is un-co-ordinated in appearance and is located in a haphazard cluttered arrangement. A number of timber benches have been donated by private individuals.
- Unsightly large refuse bins are located to the east of the Town Hall and detract from its appearance
- There is no high quality architectural feature lighting to the Town Hall.
- In general the combination of poor quality paving, street furniture and traffic dominance do not provide a high quality setting for the town hall or reflect the importance of this central town space.

Market Place

The area is currently lit using facade mounted floodlights. These are out of date and glary creating a flat, uninviting environment. The lighting contributes to that area feeling as if the cars own the space rather than the pedestrian.

The aim is to create a welcoming destination space that will encourage people to gather and settle at night. This will help to increase the night time economy and reinforce the role of Market Place as the towns' Central Core. To ensure that people feel safe when walking through from Peach Place to the Market Place.

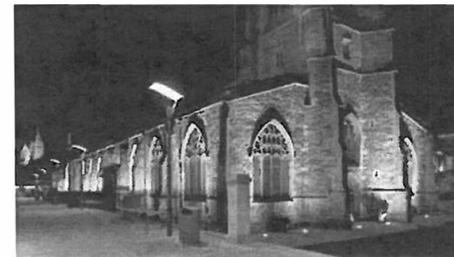
The following proposals are made by the lighting strategy:

29 Uplight surrounding facades to create a bright exciting central space where people are aware of their surroundings. Create a focal point for the town by uplighting the Town Hall. This building acts as a wayfinding aid to draw people into the central core area. It would need to be illuminated from both inground and facade mounted uplights to ensure the full extent of the facade and the spire is illuminated. The detail and texture of the building should be highlighted. It would be preferable for the highway light level requirements to be relaxed for highway surrounding the Market Place to ensure that the pedestrian remains key and the contrast of the lit buildings is higher, however this would need to be discussed further.

Light the alleyway and Bush Walk in an innovative and exciting way to ensure people are happy to use them and they do not get used for antisocial behaviour. e.g. Coloured light, projections, inset linear lights etc.



TOWN HALL EXISTING LIGHTING



EXAMPLES OF LIGHTING DESIGN THAT COULD BE APPLIED HERE

ACCESSIBILITY

The quality of the buildings, streets and spaces of Wokingham affects the quality of life for all groups in society. Therefore, the design of any development must be sensitive to the needs of users with disabilities, parents with young children, people with temporary impairment and the elderly. The public realm of Wokingham needs to be developed to ensure clarity and safety of movements between pedestrian and vehicular traffic.

The design requirements of the public realm throughout the town are as follows:

- The use of tactile and hazard warning paving will be proposed in compliance with British standards. The document 'Guidance on the use of tactile paving surfaces' published by the Department for Transport in 2007 should be referred to for details of the appropriate use and layout of tactile paving. Part of this guidance covers materials and colours for tactile paving and states that in conservation areas and in proximity to listed buildings, relaxation of the colour requirements may be acceptable. Detailed design should therefore explore the opportunity for using matching material for the tactile paving, subject to further consultation with local groups representing visually impaired, rehabilitation and mobility impaired user groups.
- In a traditional street arrangement with a raised kerb, pedestrian walkways must provide a dropped/sloping kerb to ensure easy and safe crossing points or form courtesy crossing as defined below
- Courtesy crossing as suggested in the public realm framework in order to redress the balance between pedestrians and vehicles. Integration of these will require further detailed design to ensure they are implemented in an appropriate environment where drivers and pedestrians are both made aware of other users. They must also be tested and designed to meet the needs of all pedestrian user groups.
- Pedestrian pavements will take into account roughness of material and adequate slip resistance to ensure comfortable and safe walking experience. However, the finish must be smooth cut and workmanship policed to ensure an even surface for walking.
- Street furniture should not reduce the width of the pavement to a degree that the movement of wheelchair users and pushchairs is impeded.
- Street furniture should be strategically placed at regular intervals in order to provide a degree of legibility for the visually impaired. Street furniture should

also be clearly visible and contrast surrounding surfaces.

- Vehicle trafficked parts of the street should be clearly identifiable.
- Nosings of all steps should be highlighted using a contrasting band.
- A range of seating should be offered throughout the town centre, including seating with back and arm rests.
- Signs should consist of clear text and pictograms which contrast with the background to ensure clarity and legibility.
- Stepped areas must ensure that a suitable alternative is provided for disadvantaged users in the form of a ramp.
- Lighting should ensure Visual Acuity and provide security for all users. (VA is acuteness of vision, it is a quantitative measure of the ability to identify black symbols on a white background at a standardized distance as the size of the symbols is varied).
- Any manhole covers should be flush with adjoining surfaces.
- Disabled car parking spaces should always be provided. Parking spaces should be on level ground as close to facilities and amenities as possible.
- Access to new buildings should comply with building regulations 'Part M'. This sets down certain minimum standards for disabled access for such items as steps and ramps, door widths, accessible toilets etc.,
- The Disability Discrimination Act (1995) requires building owners/occupiers to provide dignified access for disabled users. It is essential that new developments integrate such access at the design stages.

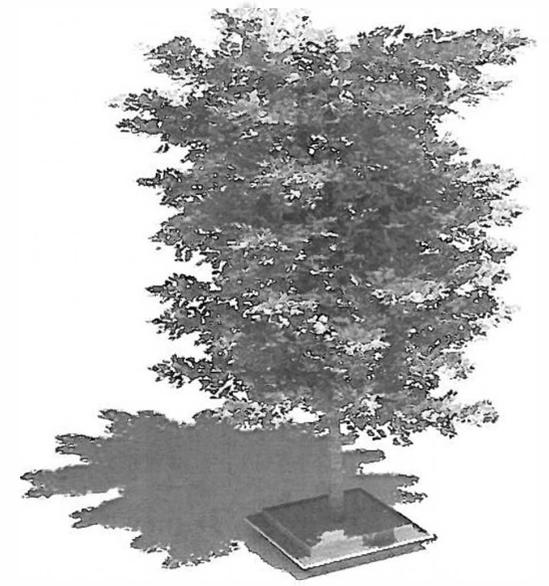
3.2 MARKET PLACE



1. Market Place will remain the main civic space within the town, continuing to host markets and important civic events. The following changes are proposed to maximise the quality and flexibility of the space.
2. Carriageway to the A329 and A321 reconfigured to maximise pavement space while maintaining capacity for vehicles, to reduce the dominance of traffic in the space.
3. Carriageway to remain clearly defined and kerb upstands retained.
4. Consistent paving material shown from building edge to building edge so Market Place appears as a unified space and in turn makes drivers more aware

of their surroundings encouraging them to slow down and to be aware of pedestrians.

5. Dedicated loading/parking/taxi bays provided adjacent to carriageways.
6. Signalised crossings and associated furniture removed (e.g. traffic lights) in favour of more frequent courtesy crossings for improved pedestrian accessibility.
7. Seating positioned around the base of mature trees in the space to provide a sheltered place to sit and look into the space without obstructing pedestrian desire lines or limiting the flexibility of the space.
8. Unnecessary street furniture removed from the space to provide more flexible space for the operation of markets and events.
9. Functional highways lighting provided from adjacent buildings (as per the current arrangement) additional feature lighting provided to key buildings and within the public realm (e.g. uplighting to trees) to reinforce the historic identity of the town and the importance of Market Place as the heart of the town centre.
10. Opportunities to reduce the pavement height in the area to help resolve issues with the damp proof course in the Town Hall building to be explored at detail design stage.
11. Existing cafe spill out space retained.
12. Existing bus lane retained to the north east of the Town Hall building.
13. Existing trees retained with the exception of the existing tree in the main body of the space which could be replaced with a new semi-mature tree adjacent to the A321. This would make more space available for events and market stalls.
14. Vehicle access to main body of space provided via a drop kerb.
15. Pop up power supply to be provided to the space to enable events.



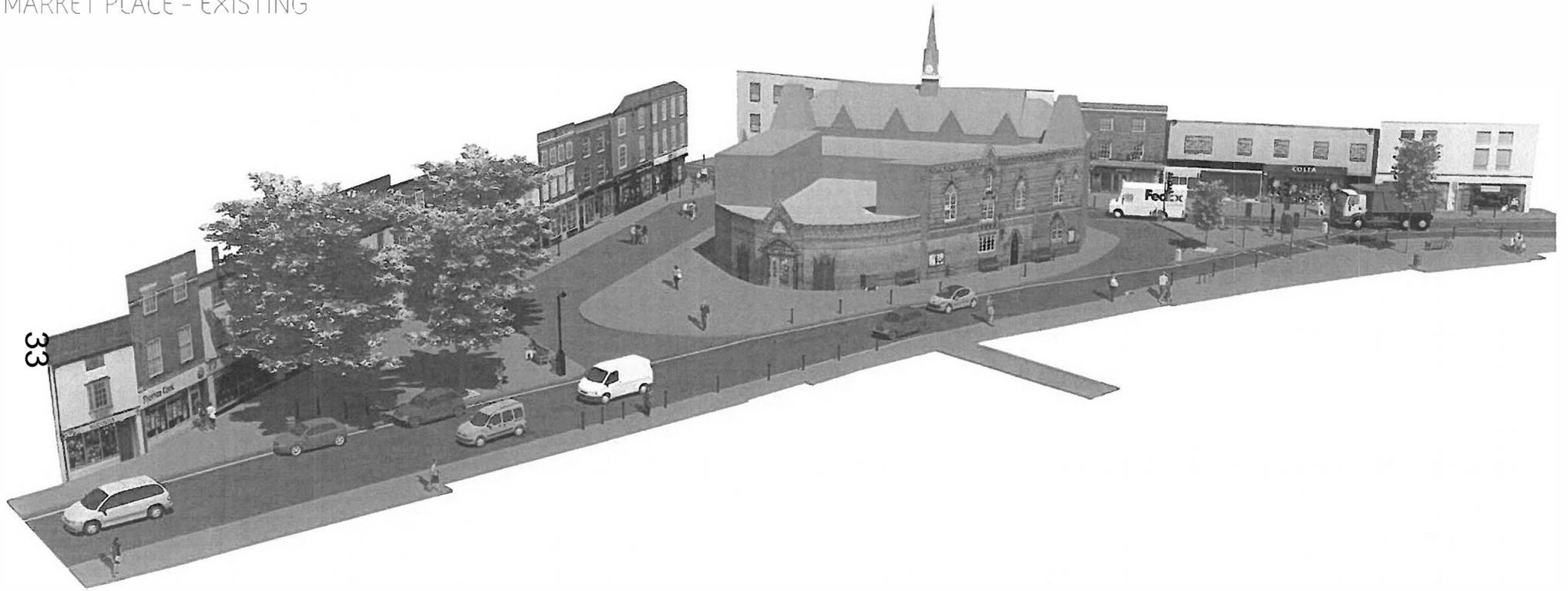
PROPOSED SEATING TO BASE OF EXISTING TREES



MARKET STALL INSET PLAN



MARKET PLACE - EXISTING



MARKET PLACE - PROPOSED

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Market Place

Key Benefits:	Principal Delivery challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sits at the historic heart of the town and at the centre of the town centre regeneration projects • Plays a fundamental role in achieving the vision • Central to life of the town hosting events and market days and containing Town Hall • Improves one of the key commercial spaces in the town • Provides the opportunity to achieve the vision to balance pedestrians and traffic. E.g. Offers the opportunity to apply principles such as dedicated loading bays, courtesy crossings and change of surfacing to encourage safety. • Can fundamentally alter perceptions of the town and improve the identity of the whole town centre • Sequentially is most appropriate • Implements measures intended to remove obstructions for the highway and facilitating potential improvements to Peach Street • Potential to reduce long term maintenance needs through the introduction of the new materials and furniture palette. • Opportunity to interpret Wokingham's historic identity through integrated artwork. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Major project with high outline cost • Potentially disrupts the A329 and A321 routes through the town centre during construction although there may be space for temporary routes through the space to minimise disruption • Alternative location for events and market days required during construction • Reliant on more thorough parking/loading enforcement • Further work required to test options for removing the bus contraflow lane • Potential disruption to businesses during construction including access for both customers and servicing • Further work needed to assess the location of any underground obstacles such as utilities and chambers.

The Plaza

Key Benefits:	Principal Delivery challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will form a crucial link between the Elm's Field development and the town centre area • Improvements to one of the key commercial spaces in the town • Could potentially be completed as part of the Elm's Field regeneration scheme • Tackles one of the more underused and uninviting parts of the town centre public realm • Does not disrupt strategic highways routes • Opportunity to incorporate artwork to provide a new identity. • Plays a fundamental role in achieving the vision 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Land is owned by third party • Potential disruption to businesses which 'spill out' into this space during construction • If delivered after the Elm's Field scheme construction works in The Plaza could significantly disconnect the Elm's Field development from Denmark Street and Market Place • Major project with high outline cost • Further work needed to assess the location of any underground obstacles such as utilities and chambers.

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