

URBAN PANEL - Review Paper

King's Lynn

1 Introduction

- 1.1 Some fifty years ago, King's Lynn underwent one of the biggest periods of growth in its nine-hundred-year history. The result radically changed the character of this fine historic town, destroying one-fifth of its medieval core and encircling its oldest church with blocks of flats. Half a century later, King's Lynn is embarking on yet another period of expansion, one which is intended to result in a further 7,000 new dwellings being added to the settlement over the next 15 years or so. Is this latest phase in the town's development also likely to harm those elements which make King's Lynn such a special place, or is the town (and those who are responsible for passing on the legacy of King's Lynn to the next generation) now better able to plan its growth in a manner which will sustain its historic character than were their forebears?
- 1.2 King's Lynn is not alone in struggling with the thorny issue of how it can meet its future development needs yet, at the same time, safeguard its historic character. Elsewhere across the country, virtually all of England's historic towns are also grappling with this dilemma. How can these places meet the needs and aspirations of their communities without destroying those elements which make those places special? Not surprisingly, in both planning and conservation circles, this question has stimulated much discussion. In 2014, Foster and Partners added to the debate by examining the lessons which we might learn from our European neighbours. Unlike most of the other comparable reports, however, Foster and Partners' *"Cathedral Cities in Peril"* sought to apply its principles to a real historic town. The place that was selected was King's Lynn.
- 1.3 How fantastic it would be if the future growth of King's Lynn were to be based upon the principles propounded in that Report. In fifteen years' time, one would have been able to see whether or not Foster's theoretical suggestions about how historic towns might grow actually worked in practice. We would know whether or not such an approach did provide the development needed to meet the needs of King's Lynn's communities and if it also sustained the town's rich historic core. We would be able to see if this approach also resulted in a settlement which proved attractive to businesses and investors and created places where people wanted to live. Unfortunately, not only was *Cathedral Cities in Peril* produced too late to influence the strategic framework set out the Council's emerging Local Plan, but Foster's Report is not, as yet, a publically-available document.

- 1.4 The Urban Panel were invited to King's Lynn to compare and contrast the approach being taken by the Borough Council with that suggested by Foster and Partners and to consider how the future growth of King's Lynn might best be planned so as to benefit the town, its communities and, especially, its historic core.

2 Executive Summary and Recommendations

- 2.1 In the course of two days of presentations and during its tour around the town, the Panel were immensely impressed by the sheer quality of the buildings and townscape of the historic core of King's Lynn and the sensitive way in which this fine area has been managed. The Council are to be congratulated on the quality and design of the recent public realm improvements, the authority's entrepreneurial spirit and the enthusiasm of their politicians, especially their Heritage Champion. The Panel were enormously impressed by the desire for the Council to use their land acquisitions in a more proactive way and were in general agreement about the huge opportunities that the redevelopment of these sites could provide.
- 2.2 However, this obvious enthusiasm and the Council's opportunistic approach appears to lack a clear, strong and coherent vision of what it is that they are trying to achieve for King's Lynn in the long term. The quality of the town's historic environment is unquestionable. Unfortunately, the design quality of some of the new and emerging developments around King's Lynn is not of the standard one should demand in such an important place. Finally, although the scale of growth of King's Lynn is now established, as are the areas where much of this growth will be accommodated, nevertheless, the Panel considered that there was still much that could be done to ensure that the growth of the town is delivered in a manner which not only reinforces its town centre, but also sustains its impressive historic core.

Summary Recommendations

- The Council needs to set out a Vision for King's Lynn
- There is a need for a strategic parking review
- There is a need for a long-term transport strategy for King's Lynn
- The design aspirations of the Council need to be raised
- The Council should produce a strategy for how West Winch connects with the remainder of the town
- The Council should apply to Historic England for King's Lynn to become a Heritage Action Zone

- Historic England needs to encourage “Cathedral Cities in Peril” to be made publically available

3 The Panel Visit: Coach and Walking tour

3.1 The coach tour

- 3.1.1 The coach trip around the outskirts of the town provided the Panel with an appreciation of the scale of the settlement, the relationship of its outer areas with its historic core, and its rural context. What was particularly notable was how little sense one gets when travelling along its northern and eastern orbital routes that one is skirting the edge of one of the finest historic towns in England. There is little sense of the town’s historic core (even its tallest buildings are not visible from these roads) and the less-than-inspiring suburban housing estates and the ‘big box’ developments are no different to those which can be found on the edge of any large town these days.
- 3.1.2 The tour enabled the Panel to see the three housing allocations which the Council are seeking to bring forward through their Local Plan. In common with so many other historic settlements (and in contrast to the approach that was suggested in *Cathedral Cities in Peril*), over the next decade-and-a-half a large proportion of King’s Lynn’s future housing needs will be met through the development of large, greenfield sites on the edge of the existing built-up area. This approach, according to Geoff Hall the Council’s Director of Environment and Planning, was largely a response to the particular challenges facing King’s Lynn - flooding, viability, and the high construction costs of brownfield sites.
- 3.1.3 What particularly struck the Panel was not so much the distance of the three main allocations from the town centre but their lack of connectivity with its historic core. None of the sites are walkable from the town centre and, despite the flat terrain, (with the notable exception of the Allocation at South Wooton) there appeared few cycle links from these new housing areas to the shops and other facilities in the centre of King’s Lynn. Whilst the Panel could appreciate why the authority might wish to choose the particular development strategy it had done, perpetuating peripheral growth was not only likely to exacerbate the already high car usage (with the consequential worsening of air quality, increasing congestion and demand for even more car parking) but also, more worryingly, to have significant detrimental implications for the viability of its historic core.
- 3.1.4 The proposed Urban Extension of the town at West Winch seemed, in particular, to present a number of challenges. Not only is this area divorced from the town by the busy A47/A10 intersection, but the Panel also noted the severance that the main route

from King's Lynn to Cambridge would cause between the existing residential areas on its eastern side and the new housing areas and their community facilities which are proposed to be built on the western side of this route. Whilst the Panel endorsed the Council's intention to re-route the A10 to the east of these new settlements in order to unite the new and existing communities, the precise mechanism by which this laudable aim might be achieved seemed unclear.

- 3.1.5 The coach tour had taken the Panel past the Hardwick Retail Park at the southern end of King's Lynn, a typically dispiriting, car-park-dominated, big box retail park that one might find on the edge of any large town these days. The Panel had real concerns that a primarily car-dependent development like West Winch would simply use the supermarkets and other facilities at Hardwick rather than the shopping facilities within King's Lynn.
- 3.1.6 The final part of the tour took members through the large Council-led brownfield regeneration project at Nar Ouse which includes the NORA Enterprise Zone. They were shown the new King's Lynn Innovation Centre (the managed office space which it is hoped will attract new businesses into the town) and some of the high-density, housing developments which, as Matthew Henry, the Council's Property Services Manager had explained, proved so unattractive to purchasers (largely, the Panel were told because they only provided one car parking space per dwelling). The coach tour concluded with a trip along part of the bus-only route created into the town centre as part of this development.

3.2 The walking tour

- 3.2.1 Chapel Street - After the rather disappointing journey around the outer reaches of the town, it was a pleasure to be in the more intimate environs of its historic core - even if the walk did begin from one of the town's innumerable surface car parks.
- 3.2.2 As car parks go, however, this one, with its gravelled surface, unmarked bays and perimeter tree planting is not an unattractive space. This was one of the car parks which Fosters used as an example to illustrate how its redevelopment might be used not only to provide the housing that the town needs but also to stitch the gaps in the urban fabric back together again. The narrowing of the street as one approaches Tuesday Market gives one an impression of the sense of enclosure that one must once have experienced on St Nicholas Street in the past and how that lack of enclosure, today, detracts from the sense of arrival that one must once have had when arriving at the impressive open space of Tuesday Market. The Panel concurred with Fosters and

the Council's view that the sensitive redevelopment of this area would offer considerable benefits for the townscape of this part of King's Lynn.

- 3.2.3 Tuesday Market - The scale of this magnificent Georgian market place and the quality and variety of the buildings which surround it make this a very impressive space indeed. Earlier, Chris Bamfield, Executive Director of Commercial Services, had shown the Panel photographs of how the square had, until quite recently, been dominated by traffic and car parking, both within its centre and along its edges. The Panel were greatly impressed by the quality and detailing of these public realm improvements and traffic management measures. Removing traffic from the eastern and southern side of the Market and pulling the parking away from the buildings had immeasurably improved the pedestrian experience of Tuesday Market and the setting of its buildings.
- 3.3.4 King Street/Pur Fleet - From the expanse of the Tuesday Market, the tour progressed along what is perhaps the town's most elegant thoroughfare, King Street, eulogised by John Betjeman as one of the best walks in England. This delightful, gently curving street, once the home of the prosperous merchants of the town is now occupied by offices and estate agents. For a town with so many car parks, it is unclear why the eastern side of this fine route needs to provide short-stay car parking along its entire length. The splendid classical Custom House, considered by Pevsner to "*one of the most perfect buildings ever built*" sits at the head of the rather stumpy harbour on Purfleet Quay, across which the Panel could see the settlement of West Lynn dominated by the fourteenth century tower of St Peter's Church. It was noted how prominent development of the allocated site on the waterfront at West Lynn potentially could be on this prospect from the historic core of the town.
- 3.3.5 Queen Street - The northern end of Queen Street presented a stark contrast to the quality of the townscape that the Panel had seen thus far. Whilst the rather tame Georgian-influenced buildings on its eastern side did, to some extent, reflect some of the scale and rhythm to be found further along this street, the 1980s Granary Court, opposite, presented a rather bleak, somewhat oppressive, rear elevation to this historic thoroughfare. In its favour, the redevelopment has retained the street block and provides what appears to be high-density residential development right in the heart of the town. At its junction with Baker Lane, a new residential scheme is nearing completion on part of a former surface car park. Whilst the Panel welcomed the undoubted benefits to the townscape of the area that redeveloping this site would bring, nevertheless, they felt that the scheme fell short of quality that one might expect given its sensitive location and the importance of the other buildings in its vicinity.

- 3.3.6 Baker Lane - Baker Lane is a particularly bleak backland area of surface car parks and servicing yards for the retail units fronting High Street. Of the car parking seen so far, this was, by far, the least appealing. Poor-quality street repairs, unkempt landscaping, poorly screened re-cycling containers all added to the dispiriting nature of this area. The Panel considered that the re-establishment of the blocks either side of Baker Lane would provide considerable improvement to the townscape of this part of the town as well as providing a more attractive link between the High Street and the other historic routes to the east.
- 3.3.7 High Street - From what the Panel saw of the retail area of the town centre during their earlier walk from the Station through the Vancouver Centre and along High Street, it would appear that the town centre is relatively healthy and, for a settlement of this size, the Panel noted that it supports a very wide variety of retailers. Despite its proximity to Saturday Market, however, the southern part of High Street with its tired-looking block paving, charity shops and money-lending business give the impression of being a marginal retail area. The Panel wondered what impact the additional 20,000m² of new retailing development that was suggested in the Core Strategy might have upon this part of the retail area.
- 3.3.8 Saturday Market Place - The quality of the buildings in the Saturday Market and their delightful range and composition is in marked contrast to southern end of High Street. This triangular-shaped medieval market place is dominated by the twin-towered St Margaret's Minster Church. Like Tuesday Market, the Panel commended the Council on the traffic management and public realm improvements which they had undertaken here. The reduction in the amount of traffic and the extent of car parking has greatly improved the pedestrian experience of this space and given people an opportunity to stand and appreciate its fine buildings. Despite the quality of its architecture, however, it was evident to the Panel that the area is, nevertheless, suffering some difficulties. The northern side of Saturday Market and St James' Street have a number of properties which are vacant and many that are occupied appeared to have underused upper floors. The Panel welcomed the confirmation of a THI for this area and were pleased to learn the high degree of interest there had already been from the buildings' owners.
- 3.3.9 Church Street - From the narrowing of Saturday Market as its eastern end, all sense of enclosure is lost as one moves along Church Street. Although, on the western side of the road, there are fifteenth century domestic buildings associated with the former Priory, the demolition of a former garage on the eastern side of Church Street resulted in, what the 2003 Conservation Area Appraisal described as a "*temporary car park*" (one of the few in the town that is not owned by the Council). 13 years later, this poorly maintained area, just metres from the Minster, still remains.

- 3.3.10 Priory Lane/St Margaret's Lane/Nelson Street - The narrow, granite-setted, St Margaret's Lane at the end of Priory Lane aligned along its northern side by the jettied Hanseatic Warehouse and, on its southern side, by the return of Hampton Court and the late eighteenth century warehouse provided the Panel with a tantalising glimpse of the riverside and the verdant western bank of the River Great Ouse. The Panel could not but concur with the conclusions of Nikolaus Pevsner that the sequence of Nelson Street, St Margaret's Place and Queen Street was, indeed, *"one of the most satisfying Georgian promenades in England."*
- 3.3.11 South Quay – Devil's Alley, the setted pedestrian link between Nelson Street and the riverside runs to one of a number of cleared sites along the bank of the Great Ouse at the southern end of the town. The Panel had been informed that the site of the former silos at the end of this link, which has an extant permission for a retirement complex, has been acquired by the Council as part of the larger Waterside Regeneration Area. The Panel noted the importance of this site to not just the regeneration of the southern part of the riverside, but to the whole approach to, and experience of, the Quayside.

4 Panel Visit – Exploring the Challenges

4.1 King's Lynn

- 4.1.1 Lorraine Gore, the Council's Assistant Director - Finance, provided the Panel with a most enlightening overview of the Authority's financial position. This was the first time in its 15 years of existence that a Council's Chief Financial Officer had made a presentation to the Urban Panel. The information she provided enabled the Members to gain a far better understanding of the financial challenges facing the local authority over the next five years and to appreciate the constraints within which it was forced to operate.
- 4.1.2 In common with most other Councils, the Panel were told that KL&WNC faces challenging times. Although a cost-reduction programme had produced some £7.6m of savings since 2009, the budget for the next four years is based upon continuing austerity and there is an expectation that even more major changes are likely to be required before the end of this period. By the time they reach 2020, when Rate Support Grant from the Government finishes, the position could become even more precarious. Although the Authority will be able to retain 40% of any net gain in its Business Rate, the £2m that they have estimated could come from this source is dependent upon developments coming forward. As the Panel was to learn later, there are particular challenges facing King's Lynn in this respect.

- 4.1.3 The Council's budget strategy is based upon not only exploring how to deliver its services differently or more efficiently but also upon additional revenue generation that it can obtain from its investments in capital projects. In a visit which was looking, in part, at the potential for redeveloping some the numerous car parks within King's Lynn, the Panel were particularly interested to learn that the income from car parking charges was £4.4m – more than is currently raised through Council Tax. As a result the Panel has some concerns that the policy options available to the Council were being skewed as a result of the significant car parking income.
- 4.1.4 Ostap Paparenga, the Council's Regeneration and Economic Manager, provided the Panel with a picture of how King's Lynn functions economically. They were told how, despite only having a population of around 40,000, the settlement nevertheless plays a sub-regional role due to a catchment of almost 200,000 people. This has underpinned the expenditure and housing growth options for the town. Apart from the 30% employed in the public sector, employment in King's Lynn falls into three main sectors – manufacturing, food processing and tourism (the latter of which contributes some £500m to the local economy). He considered that King's Lynn had a lot of technological innovators in their particular industries and pointed out that within the town there were a number of world leaders in their particular sector.
- 4.1.5 At a time of financial constraints, the ability to gain access to funding sources from outside the Council becomes ever more important. The Panel were impressed with the amount of external funding which the Council had been able to draw into the town from elsewhere. The Panel had already been informed by Ostap Paparenga that, despite the challenges of trying to be actively engaged in two LEPs, they obtained a total of £14m of funding from both of them towards capital projects within King's Lynn. Chris Bamfield, the Executive Director of Commercial Services, also detailed a series of public realm improvements, regeneration projects and monies towards the repair and refurbishment of the town's historic fabric that they had also managed to lever into King's Lynn over the past decade or so in from bodies such as the HLF, English Heritage, Norfolk County Council and through S106 monies. These initiatives are still continuing with THI funding already agreed for the area to the north of the Minster and from the HLF towards improvements to the King's Lynn Arts Centre. Even the funding for the series of events around King's Lynn (seen as so important to the continuing well-being of its tourist industry) which currently comes from the Council's coffers is hoped to be funded, in future years, from the town's Business Improvement District pot.
- 4.1.6 The Council's Assistant Director - Finance had already explained the uncertainties of being reliant upon the funding that new development might bring once the Rate Support grant finishes in 2020. Geoff Hall, the Council's Director of Environment and

Planning explained some of the particular challenges facing King's Lynn. King's Lynn is a relatively small town with a large rural catchment, poor public transport links and, inevitably, it is a place that attracts a large number of car journeys. The Local Plan, which is nearing the end of its journey through the Local Plan process, sets a housing requirement for at least 4,000 dwellings over the next fifteen years for King's Lynn alone, a figure which is the result of the settlement being awarded Growth Point status in 2008. Whether, without the offer of Government funding, the Council would have ever accepted a figure as high as this is a matter of conjecture. However, the Authority are where they are and have to make provision for this amount of development through their Local Plan. He considered that the scale of growth was not necessarily a bad thing as the need was undoubtedly there as are the facilities to support this population.

- 4.1.7 King's Lynn has a lot going for it – the quality of its historic core, the Waterfront, access to attractive countryside and the Council's willingness to engage. However, it faces a number of constraints which have reduced the attractiveness of the settlement to potential developers as place to invest. These include viability (which Geoff Hall considered to be the biggest issue), low house prices, low incomes, high construction costs on brownfield sites and the fact that most of King's Lynn is in a flood risk area. In such a development environment, high-quality design and materials were viewed as a cost rather than a benefit.
- 4.1.8 There has long been a recognition by the Council that, if they want to see housing schemes and other developments delivered in King's Lynn, then they would have to take the lead.
- 4.1.9 Given the cost-reduction programme being pursued by the Council, it came as something of a surprise to the Panel Members to be told by the Council's Property Service Manager of the scale of the Council's land ownership in King's Lynn and, in a period of austerity, what appeared to be its appetite for land acquisition. Across the whole settlement, the Council now has an interest in parcels of land where it considers that this will help facilitate their development.
- 4.1.10 The Panel were informed that, though shifting around sports facilities at Lynn Sport, the Council had managed to create pockets of development capable of accommodating 450 new dwellings. In the, Nar Ouse Regeneration Area to the south of King's Lynn, it had delivered a large amount of new housing, the King's Lynn Innovation Centre; and the Council had recently sold off part of the area for a retail/pub/restaurant/Travelodge. The Council had even purchased the land holdings of one of its development partners when that particular company went into administration. Through CPOs, negotiations and auctions they now own the Waterfront Regeneration Area at Boal Quay together with the site of the former grain

silo. They have recently bought a number of buildings and plots around the Southgate Roundabout in order to improve the entrance to the town. And of course, they also own virtually all the town's surface car parks.

- 4.1.11 The Panel were told that the decision about whether or not to acquire a stake in a piece of land was based not only upon whether this might help facilitate development but, as importantly, whether the acquisition was likely to contribute to the Council's future revenue budget. Without the revenue generated from these sites, the anticipated £3m or so of revenue savings the Council needs would not be achieved without a massive reduction in services.

4.2 *Cathedral Cities in Peril*

- 4.2.1 Although *Cathedral Cities in Peril* is not a public document, the Panel had been provided with a copy of the Report as part of their Briefing Pack and were delighted that one of the Report's authors, Bruno Moser from Foster and Partners, was able to join them for their visit to King's Lynn. The Panel were told that the Report was set against a background of increasing demand for housing growth and concern about the impact that this was having upon not just Cathedral Cities but also many other smaller historic towns. The Study looked at European comparators, accepting that they operated under a different planning and political system, but, nonetheless where it was felt that there were approaches from which lessons might be learnt.
- 4.2.2 Whilst *Cathedral Cities in Peril* was essentially a philosophical discussion about how one might accommodate the future development needs of a historic settlement, the Panel were told that Foster and Partners were, nevertheless, keen to test out some of its ideas in a real town. King's Lynn was selected because many of the challenges facing other English historic towns were present here. The Panel were informed that Fosters accepted that the work at King's Lynn was a high-level evaluation (there was, for example, no assessment of issues such as flooding or the economic difficulties that there might be in developing some of the sites in the town centre). However, it did demonstrate that a large proportion of the town's future housing requirements could, theoretically, be met without large-scale peripheral expansion through the redevelopment of a proportion of the town centre car parks, more intensive use of land on the town's retail parks, and densification of the existing 20th Century housing developments around its historic core.
- 4.2.3 If such an approach was pursued, they argued, it would help to stitch the urban fabric of the historic core back together, increase the numbers of people living in the heart of the town, reduce car dependency, assist the vitality and viability of the town centre,

and could also provide opportunities for smaller, community-led models to purchase and develop sites.

5 Panel Analysis

- 5.1 The Urban Panel had been asked by the local Historic England team to advise them on two matters. Firstly, the Panel were asked to review the growth plan adopted by the local authority and compare and contrast it with that put forward by Foster and Partners. Secondly, they were asked to advise on how that growth might best be accommodated in a manner which would benefit the town and its communities.
- 5.2 The Panel's visit came at a time when the Local Plan was nearing completion. As a result, the development strategy and the specific sites chosen to meet the, albeit, rather challenging housing figure were now pretty well established. Therefore, whilst the Panel had some significant reservations about a strategy which, in the main, not only perpetuates past approaches of simply adding new housing to the edges of the settlement but also appears predicated on car ownership, nonetheless, they considered that little would be gained, at this late stage, in debating the merits of the particular strategy that the Council had adopted. However, how that strategy is implemented will have implications for the town centre of King's Lynn and, potentially, upon its delightful historic core. Consequently, the Panel's deliberations concentrated, primarily, on how the delivery of the approach set out in the Local Plan might best sustain not just its historic environment but also benefit the remainder of the settlement.
- 5.3 **Vision** – The Panel were extremely impressed by the entrepreneurial spirit shown by the Council. Despite the difficult financial times and the particular challenges of bringing sites forward for development within King's Lynn, the Panel were struck by the willingness of the Authority to get engaged in, and to help ensure the delivery of, sites in which large-scale volume housebuilders are, at present, not interested. However, the Panel were concerned that the Authority's approach, whilst commendable, seemed to be somewhat opportunistic and did not appear to be guided by any clear long-term strategic vision of what it is they are actually trying to achieve for King's Lynn (i.e. in the next iteration of the Local Plan and beyond).
- 5.4 The Panel felt that there were a number of fundamental questions the Council needed to answer in order to establish a long-term vision for the town. What sort of place do you want King's Lynn to be in 25, 50 or even 100 years' time? How should King's Lynn fulfil its role as a sub-regional centre? Who is likely to live in the new housing areas that are being developed? What sort of lifestyles might they demand –

rural lifestyle, suburban lifestyle or new urban? In terms of housing and affordability, Cambridge, just 45 minutes from King's Lynn, is at crisis point. Is it envisaged that the town will provide homes for people working in Cambridge? If so, what lifestyles are those people likely to want? What should the town's economy be founded upon?

- 5.5 One of the biggest unresolved issues seemed to be the lack of employers to provide jobs at the scale needed to provide work for all the new housing that will be created - a concern which the Council had been very frank in acknowledging. Whilst the Panel could accept the Policy Manager's assertion that not all the town's growth will be driven by incoming people, nevertheless, the scale of new housing development will result in a significant growth in the town's population and hence the employment base needed to support them. Although the town might well have a lot of technological innovators and world leaders in their field, these are not in high-order and knowledge-based companies. King's Lynn's employment base seemed, to the Panel, to be relatively narrow and this could present difficulties in the future. As a result, the Panel felt that the Council needs to consider how the employment offer of the town might be diversified and, particularly, how footloose IT companies might be encouraged to relocate here as opposed to Cambridge.
- 5.6 **The Town Centre** – The walking tour of the town enabled the Panel to appreciate the quality of its townscape and just how important and impressive the historic environment of King's Lynn is. However, it was also evident that, despite its importance and the considerable investment that the Council and others have made to sustain and enhance the area, it still faced a number of challenges.
- 5.7 The settlement may well function as a sub-regional centre and it was clearly evident to the Panel that it supported a wide variety of retail outlets. However, the threat to the vitality of the town's retail area from out-of-town retailing is very real and the Panel had heard from two Councillors how Hardwick was fast becoming the retail area of choice for many of King's Lynn's residents. The Panel feared that, with a development strategy which seeks to accommodate the majority of new housing on peripheral sites with poor connectivity to the town centre, there is a high likelihood their residents will simply drive to the nearest out-of-town retail park rather than venture into, and help sustain, the historic centre of King's Lynn. The Panel had been informed of the considerable investment which had taken place over recent years in developing an events programme which has proved extremely successful in increasing footfall within the town centre. Nevertheless, the Panel felt that there is a need to ensure that what the centre has to offer – a high-quality shopping experience, cultural facilities etc. – are of sufficiently good quality to entice the residents of these new housing areas to make the effort and use the heart of the town in those periods when events are not taking place..

- 5.8 Despite the excellent work that has been undertaken to reduce the impact of traffic upon Tuesday and Saturday Markets, there is still a high degree of car penetration into the historic core of the town. The walk also demonstrated the extent to which the once compact, high-density urban form has been eroded through the large gaps in the urban fabric that have been created by the numerous areas of surface car parking.
- 5.9 **Car parking and traffic** – The Panel warmly welcomed the Council’s intention to review car parking provision in the town and to explore the potential that some of these sites might offer for redevelopment. This would provide both much-needed housing within the heart of the town and also help to stitch the urban fabric of the historic core back together. However, the Panel had been told that there was a reluctance by businesses to see any diminution in the numbers of car parking spaces. As a result, the redevelopment of any of the surface car parks was dependent on alternative provision being made elsewhere around the town centre. Given the fact that car parking is also a key revenue stream to the Authority, the Panel felt that the amount of new accommodation that might potentially come forward from this source is never likely to be anywhere near as much as Foster and Partners had estimated.
- 5.10 The Panel felt that there was a need for a strategic review of car parking provision around the town, firstly to identify the areas where the replacement car parks might be located, secondly, in the case of those car parks close to secondary retail areas, which of them are fundamental to their economic well-being, and thirdly, which car parks might provide the best opportunities for redevelopment.
- 5.11 The Panel accepted that this is a very car-dependent area. However, they were concerned that the proposed urban extensions to the town all appear predicated upon car ownership, especially the Urban Extension at West Winch. They felt that there was an urgent need for a long-term transport strategy setting out how these areas will connect to the remainder of the settlement (especially its town centre) and how the residents of these new communities might be encouraged to use modes other than the private car to access the facilities elsewhere in the town. The Panel pointed out that switching modes often happens when there is congestion so there may be a necessity to look at alternative approaches in future Plan periods.
- 5.12 In terms of reducing the amount of car-borne traffic in the town centre, the Panel felt that the transport strategy should also explore the potential for using some of the retail areas on the outskirts of the town as car parking areas to intercept vehicles coming from outside the town where people can change to shuttle buses or Park and Ride into the centre of King’s Lynn. The Core Strategy also talks about creating a Parkway Station. This, the Panel felt, could also help reduce the amount of cars coming into the town centre.

- 5.13 **Design** – On their tour, the Panel had been taken past Wayne Hemmingway/Alex Ely’s refurbishment of Hillington Square, a development which they considered to be one of the best examples of estate renewal seen in this Country (and not dissimilar to some of the European exemplars illustrated in the Foster Report). However, elsewhere in the town, a lot of the planned and completed new developments fell a long way short of the quality one might expect in a historic place of the importance of King’s Lynn. Even on the sites where the Council was a development partner, such as Lynn Sport, the design of many of these schemes added little to the character of the town.
- 5.14 The Panel were particularly concerned that, for a town of this importance, the design aspirations of the Authority were not higher. Whilst it may well be the case that developers view good-quality design and materials as a cost rather than a benefit and that refusal of schemes because of poor-quality design may have found little support by Inspectors on appeal, nevertheless, the Panel still felt that the Authority should have the confidence to seek, and, indeed, should be actively striving for, better design quality. The Panel suggested the Council should consider the following measures. Firstly, as a major land owner, it should be using designers who are capable of producing high-quality, well-detailed schemes preferably using modern designs (rather than the tame imitation of Georgian buildings which they saw around the town). The Authority can then hold these up as exemplars of the quality of development expected in King’s Lynn. After all, if the Council is not pursuing the best-quality design on its own sites, then why should anybody else bother? Although this might mean that the sites are more expensive to develop, by focusing on quality, it should increase the value of the Council’s asset base. Secondly, the Council needs to bring in design advice (through, for example, establishing a local design review panel) and to put in Design Reviews as a key element of the development process (in line with the advice set out in the NPPF). Thirdly, the next iteration of the Local Plan needs to include strategic messages about the character of the town and set out a clear expectation that only the highest-quality of design will be acceptable in King’s Lynn.
- 5.15 **The Waterfront** – At the time of their original visit, the Panel had expressed some reservations about the Council’s approach to the redevelopment of the hugely-important Waterfront area. Of particular concern was whether or not there was anybody within the Team who were evaluating the submissions who had either the necessary design skills or previous expertise of similar types of Masterplans. Having said this, however, on their return visit it was evident that the architectural practice whom the Council had engaged in the intervening period had successfully delivered a number of redevelopment schemes within sensitive historic contexts. As a result, this allayed many of the previous concerns of the Panel and they were now considerably more optimistic of a successful outcome for this important area.

- 5.16 **West Winch** – Whilst the Panel recognised that this site is identified as an Urban Extension in the Adopted Core Strategy (and, therefore, that the principle of the growth of King’s Lynn in this direction is now established), nevertheless the Panel had a number of reservations about the way in which the area is proposed to be developed. One of them related to the fact that there appeared to be no proper Masterplan for this area. However, on their return visit to the town, the Panel had subsequently been informed that the Prince’s Foundation had been involved in the early stages of the development of this project and that the local communities of North Runcton and West Winch are in the advanced stages in the production of a Neighbourhood Plan which will set out a strategy for how this area should be developed. Whilst this may well address, what appeared to be on their initial visit, the apparent lack of a framework for bringing this area forward for development in a sustainable manner, nevertheless, the Panel still considered that KL&WNC has a key role to play in identifying how this large new area of housing is going to connect to the remainder of the town and, if necessary, identify and safeguard the routes and elements necessary to ensure that, in the long term, the key transport connections can be established. It also needs to set out the mechanism by which the realignment of the A10 (a key component of the scheme if the new and old communities are not to be severed) will be secured (which, to say the least, seemed to the Panel a little vague).
- 5.17 **Archaeology/non-designated heritage assets** – Given the long history of the town, delivering more housing within the historic core through the redevelopment of the surface car parks will almost inevitably have archaeological implications (and costs). The Panel felt that, in order to increase the attractiveness of what are likely to be expensive to sites to develop anyway, there is a need to de-risk them by providing potential developers with a better understanding their archaeological sensitivity. One mechanism could be through though an Extensive Urban Study. In addition, there are a lot of undesignated heritage assets in the town centre. The Panel were concerned that the reuse or more intensive use of these buildings (whilst eminently desirable) may lead to the loss or erosion of important fabric simply due to lack of understanding about what is there. Again, better understanding of these buildings (through, perhaps, the creation of a Local List), would help ensure that important elements of the story of the town are not lost.
- 5.18 **Heritage Action Zone¹** – Given the above, the Panel considered that the Council should apply to Historic England for King’s Lynn to become a Heritage Action Zone. This would draw together the different organisations currently operating in the town - KL&WNC, BID, LEP, King’s Lynn Preservation Trust. It would also enable the resources

¹ Since the original Panel visit, KL&WNC has applied for King’s Lynn to be a HAZ

of Historic England to be used in providing a better understanding of the archaeology and non-designated heritage assets of King's Lynn. By engaging all the key players in the town, the HAZ could also assist in the production of Masterplans, help in the preparation of Design Briefs and help to facilitate the delivery of specific projects in the historic town.

- 5.19 **Cathedral Cities in Peril** - The Panel had been asked by the local Historic England team to compare and contrast the Council's approach to the growth of King's Lynn with that put forward by Foster and Partners. Given that the Council's development strategy and Foster's "*Cathedral Cities in Peril*" were produced wholly independently of one another and that, in any event, the Council's development strategy was already pretty well established by the time that the Foster Report was published, it would be somewhat fortuitous if there were many similarities between the two.
- 5.20 Having said that, however, the Panel noted that it was evident that a number of the ideas contained in the Report are present in the Council's development strategy for King's Lynn. These include densification of the urban area and the prospect of redeveloping at least some of the town's surface car parking. However, whilst the Panel fully endorsed Foster's contention that re-inhabitation of the town centre of King's Lynn was an important goal both in its own right and in respect of maintaining and improving the viability of its historic core, there was general consensus that King's Lynn was probably not the right place to test the principles of *Cathedral Cities in Peril*. In stark contrast to the approaches used in the European case studies, the car is and, from what the Panel were told, will continue to be the primary means of transport into and around King's Lynn. The Panel were also cognisant of the view of the Council's Planning Director that he was not sure that the public actually wanted to live in public transport-dependent developments or that there was the political support in the Authority for high-density housing.
- 5.21 Moreover, the Panel pointed out that the 'big box' retail parks are invariably owned by big institutions. As a result, it appears unlikely that they would be interested in the type of approach being put forward in the Report. However there might be opportunities to safeguard potential public transport and cycle routes from these areas to the town for development in the longer term which would at least assist in better connecting these areas back into the heart of the town.
- 5.22 The Panel considered that places where the approaches suggested by Foster and Partners might be more appropriate would be in higher-density settlements where there are higher land values and a better public transport network.
- 5.23 Having said this, however, they felt that it was a pity that this document was not in the public domain and that there were useful lessons which could be learnt from the

approaches taken to managing growth in the European examples used in the Study. Even if some of the ideas that the Report puts forward might be difficult to deliver in the current economic and political climate, nevertheless, the Panel considered that this Report is a useful addition to the debate about how England's historic towns might accommodate the development they need in a manner which sustains their historic character.

6 Conclusions

- 6.1 In its fifteen years, the Urban Panel had visited few places with a Council with such an appetite for land acquisition or for proactively engaging in and pushing forward the delivery of development sites as KL&WNC. In a challenging financial climate and in a settlement whose constraints would deter most developers, the bold interventions and opportunistic approach of the Authority is to be commended. However, the Panel were not convinced that there was a clear, strong and coherent vision about precisely what the end-result of all this intervention and land acquisitions might be.
- 6.2 King's Lynn has an exceptional historic core. However, based upon what they saw around the town and from what they heard during their visit, the Panel felt that the Council should raise design aspirations, particularly on the sites it owns.
- 6.3 Although the scale of growth of King's Lynn is now established as are the areas where much of that growth will be accommodated, nevertheless, the Panel considered that there was still much that could be done to ensure that the growth of the town is delivered in a manner which not only reinforces its town centre, but also sustains its impressive historic core.

6.4 **Recommendations**

6.4.1 For KL&WNC:-

- **The Council needs to set out a Vision for King's Lynn** – There is a need for a clear, strong and coherent long-term vision for King's Lynn which sets out:-
 - What is needed for the town to fulfil its role as a sub-regional centre
 - How it is envisaged more people might be encouraged to live in the town centre
 - Who it anticipates will live in the new housing areas that are being developed, what are their expectations and, indeed, prospects (in terms of quality of life, design, facilities, schools, employment) and how and where these will be met

- If it is envisaged that the town will provide homes for people working in Cambridge, what lifestyles are those people likely to want and how and where should they be provided
 - How the town centre offer can be raised in order to encourage greater footfall and more visitors
 - How the employment base of the town might be diversified and, in particular, how King's Lynn might encourage footloose IT companies to relocate here as opposed to Cambridge.
- **There is a need for a strategic parking review** – In order to help facilitate the redevelopment of the town centre car parks, there is a need for a study which evaluates:-
 - Where around the town centre are the most appropriate locations for the replacement car parks.
 - In the case of those car parks close to secondary retail areas, which of those area are fundamental to their economic well-being and
 - Which of the surface car parks might provide the best opportunities for redevelopment.
- **There is a need for a long-term transport strategy for King's Lynn** - Given the high car-dependency of the catchment area of the town and a development strategy which is going to create some 2,000 new dwellings on the edge of the settlement, there is a need for a transport strategy which sets out how these vehicle movements will be managed. This would include:-
 - How the new communities being developed at South Wooton, Knight's Hill and West Winch will be connected to the remainder of the town and the strategy and methods by which their residents might be encouraged to use public transport, or to cycle or walk to the town centre.
 - Identify any routes or land that needs to be safeguarded in order to deliver future transport links including a potential Parkway Station for the town
 - The potential for the provision of shuttle-busses or Park and Ride facilities from the car parks on the edge-of-town retail parks to the town centre

- **The design ambitions of the Council need to be raised** – The importance of King’s Lynn demands developments of the highest-quality. Consequently the Council should:-
 - On its own sites, engage designers who are capable of producing high-quality, well-detailed schemes. The Authority can then hold these up as exemplars of the quality of development expected in King’s Lynn.
 - Bring in external design advice (through, for example, establishing a local design review panel)
 - Put in Design Reviews as a key element of the development process.
 - In the next iteration of the Local Plan include strategic messages about the character of the town and set out an expectation that only the highest-quality of design will be acceptable in King’s Lynn.

- **The Council should produce a strategy for how West Winch connects with the remainder of the town** – The local communities of North Runcton and West Winch are in the advanced stages in the production of a Neighbourhood Plan which will set out a strategy for how this area should be developed. However, KL&WNC still has a key role in identifying:-
 - How this large new area of housing should connect to the remainder of the town, if necessary identifying and safeguard the routes and elements necessary to ensure that, in the long term, the key transport connections can be established.
 - The mechanism by which the realignment of the A10 will be secured

- **The Council should apply to Historic England for King’s Lynn to become a Heritage Action Zone²** – The Council should apply for King’s Lynn to become a Heritage Action Zone. This would draw together the different organisations currently operating in the town - KL&WNC, BID, LEP, King’s Lynn Preservation Trust. It would also enable the resources of Historic England to be used in providing a better understanding of the archaeology and non-designated heritage assets of King’s Lynn, the production of Masterplans and design Briefs and the delivery of specific projects in the historic town.

² Since the original Panel visit, KL&WNC were one of four Round 1 HAZ applicants for the East of England, and were successful in their bid.

6.4.2 For Historic England:-

- **Cathedral Cities in Peril should be made publically available** – Historic England should liaise with those responsible for the publication of *Cathedral Cities in Peril* to encourage this Report to be made publically available. This is a useful addition to the debate about how historic places might accommodate growth in a manner which sustains their character and contains some thought-provoking approaches that warrant further examination.

Historic England's Urban Panel provides expertise to help local authorities, development agencies and others to engage in major regeneration of historic towns and cities. The Members who attended the visit to King's Lynn on 25-26 May 2016 were:-

Mr Charles Wilson - Chair

Dr Nigel Baker

Mrs Joyce Bridges CBE

Mr Peter Buchan

Mr John Lord

Mr John Pringle

Professor Ziona Strelitz

Mr Peter Studdert

Mr Chris Twinn

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<https://historicengland.org.uk/about/who-we-are/committees-and-panels/urban-panel/review-papers/>

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