



1.1 INTRODUCTION

Terence O'Rourke have been commissioned by the Ilfracombe and District Community Alliance, led by North Devon District Council, to produce a strategy for Ilfracombe town centre as part of the Market and Coastal Towns Initiative (MCTi).

The Community Action Plan, prepared by the Community Alliance as part of the MCTi and published in September 2004, contains a variety of strategies and projects that are designed to encourage regeneration and enhance the quality of life for those living and working in the area. The document includes a vision for Ilfracombe that seeks to:

“Ensure a vibrant, prosperous and accessible area providing for the needs of all its residents whatever their status, and ensuring a quality destination for tourists; a sustainable community that respects its past whilst creating a better future; and a community that makes the most of the talents and skills of its people, and the opportunities created by its geography and climate”. Ilfracombe & District Market and Coastal

In order that the plan's objectives can be explored at greater depth, and tested for their feasibility, the Ilfracombe and District Community Alliance asked consultants to develop more detailed proposals for three areas of the town:

- the harbour/quayside;
- the Larkstone and Brimlands area; and
- the town centre.

This report represents the findings of the town centre study. The team includes Alan Baxter & Associates, who are specialists in transport and movement, and Roger Tym & Partners who are responsible for assessing socio-economic issues and advising on funding and delivery.

This study therefore provides a general appraisal of key opportunities and constraints within the study area. It identifies areas for development or enhancement within the town centre and assesses, in broad terms, the delivery of proposals. The study also considers traffic movement through the town, parking and public transport provision.

1.2 STUDY CONTEXT

Study area

Ilfracombe is the focal point to the north of the district, and is a major service centre for the area, located some 14 miles north of Barnstaple and 35 miles to the west of Minehead, the nearest town on the north coast.

However, because of the town's relative isolation, it needs to place an emphasis on its setting and unique characteristics, in order to encourage people to live, work, invest and visit.

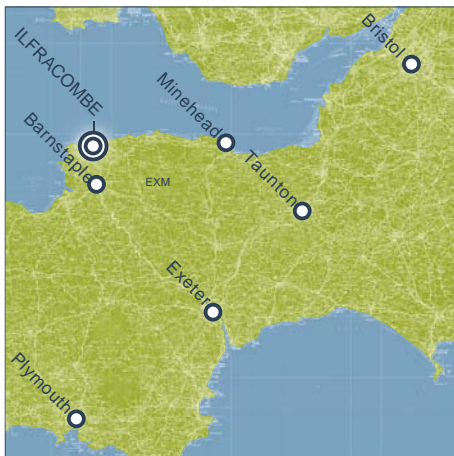
Physical context

The town is dramatically set at the base of a river valley, surrounded by cliffs and hills, much of it Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. It developed initially as a fishing port and then as a tourist resort, and has retained much of its Victorian architecture. However, the town suffers from acute economic problems associated with the relative decline in tourism in the area which, as a result, has threatened the quality of the built environment.

Town centre functions

Ilfracombe's town centre has a number of different but vital functions:

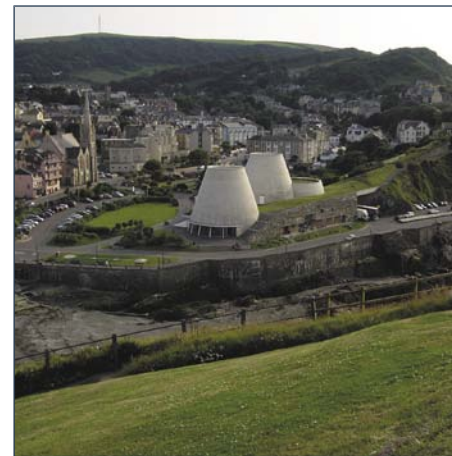
- It accommodates the majority of the town's retailing activity.
- It is a major tourist destination on the North Devon coast.
- It supports a mix of housing, business, community and leisure uses.
- It contains the key connections for travelling within and through the town.
- It sets the first impressions of Ilfracombe as a place and destination.



Regional context



Landscape setting



Landmark Theatre

1.3 STUDY APPROACH

The town centre is distinctive, and made up of three key elements; the harbour - the town's 'gem' and key focus for visitors; High Street, the heart of the town centre as the commercial and retail core; and the leisure attractions on Wilder Road which include the unusual and eye catching Landmark Theatre.

These are key destinations, but are not well-integrated, in part because of the local topography, which inhibits visual links and creates physical separation because of the steep slopes.

The town centre has many positive qualities, but these need to be made to work better:

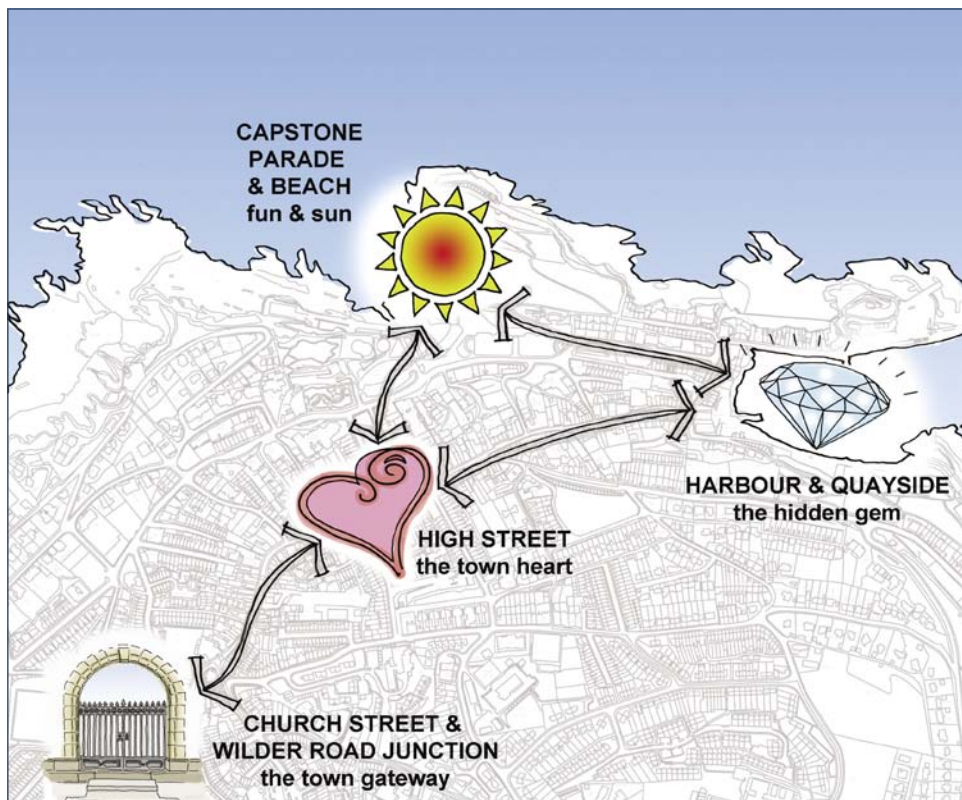
- An intact Victorian town centre with good quality buildings, but many of which are in poor repair.
- A fantastic landscape setting and topography, which results in steep inclines for pedestrians and cyclists.
- Large areas of green space and access to views, but very little open space within the core of the town centre.
- An inner and outer harbour, and the open sea, but views contained and limited to a few viewing platforms.
- Two key highway junctions at A361/ Church Street/Wilder Road/High Street and at Portland Street/Fore Street which could become key gateways/areas of focus in the town centre, but are currently poorly managed in terms of public realm.

Our overall approach is:

- Firstly to reinforce the existing attractions in the town centre – the harbour, the tourist and leisure character of the Wilder Road area, and the commercial and retail core along High Street / Church Street.
- Secondly, to improve the links between these key attractions.

This can be achieved by:

- Understanding the way in which the town works i.e. tourist focus and local focus.
- Focusing on key routes to improve links between areas.
- Ensuring a strategy is in place for key sites, and bringing sites forward for development.
- Looking a most efficient and appropriate way of traffic circulation and parking.
- Public realm improvements at key spaces.

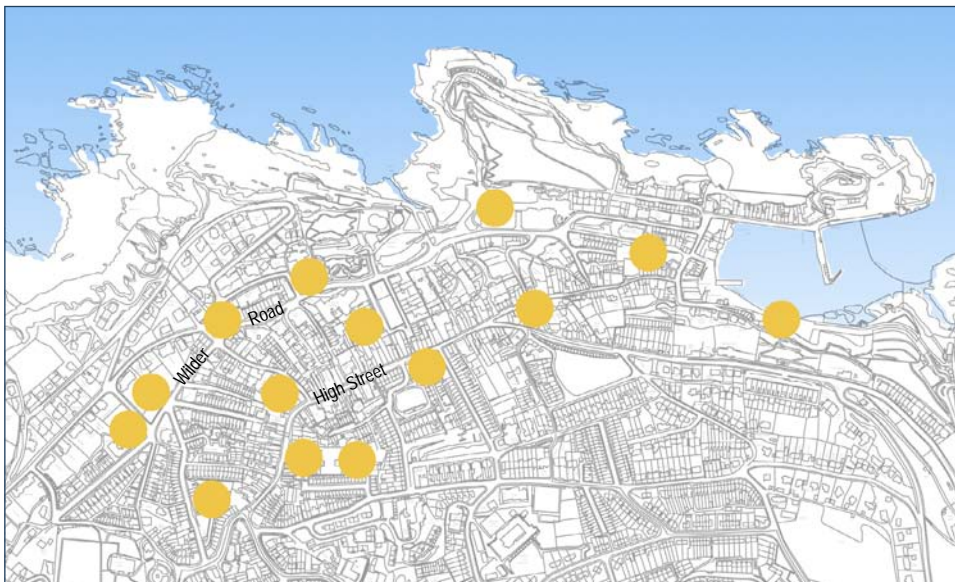


The key elements which make the town centre special

There are a number of development opportunities that can assist in reinforcing the key attractions in the town centre, and the key links. Some of these sites have proposals already in place.

This report provides a comprehensive framework for considering these opportunities and presents proposals for priority sites. This comprehensive approach recognises that:

- Ilfracombe is functioning relatively well as a visitor destination and as a local service centre.
- The existing unique qualities of the town centre - its architecture, views, landscape - are fragile and their future should be safeguarded.
- A sustainable strategy should not be reliant on major investment in new visitor attractions.



Development opportunities identified in the town centre

1.4 STUDY OBJECTIVES

Any future economic strategy needs to ensure that the town retains its essential character. The Victorian heritage that provides the town with a quiet and genteel character, should be preserved, and similarly the town needs to be able to connect with its dramatic surrounding landscape.

Key objectives therefore are:

- That Ilfracombe repositions/improves its key tourism function adapting to changes in the industry whilst retaining its key characteristics.
- That Ilfracombe prospers as a centre for North Devon coast, a place to live and work, serving local residents.
- That Ilfracombe retains its essential character - a peaceful Victorian resort with a unique local heritage set in a dramatic landscape.

This document provides a sustainable strategy for the town centre that will help the town to meet the above objectives. It sets out proposals for a number of contrasting development opportunities that, set within the wider policy framework, will help deliver the regeneration of the town.

The Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires local authorities to prepare Local Development Frameworks to replace the Local Plan system. The Revised Local Plan is due to be adopted end 2005 – early 2006, and this will guide development in the town until the Area Action Plan is produced as part of the new Local Development Framework.

This study will support the existing planning documents and help guide development within the town until such time as there is adopted planning guidance available.

The document is divided into the following sections:

- Economic & Social Context
- Physical Analysis of the Town Centre
- Transport & Movement
- Town Centre Strategy
- The Key Sites
- Conclusions & Next Steps