Foreword

Letter from the Mayor and Chairman of the Town Plan Co-Ordinating Committee

To the Residents of Ringwood May 2008

It is with great pleasure that I write this on the publication of Ringwood’s Town Plan for the future. Divided into short, medium and long term objectives, this plan is the result of over two years unstinting hard work by volunteers from the community with the Town Council, consulting as widely as possible to produce a realistic plan that clearly sets out the challenges facing Ringwood in the future. It comprehensively covers all the main issues that face the community in the prime areas of focus, namely:

- The Environment
- Community and Social
- The Economy
- Transport and Accessibility

In order to ensure that the plan would be professional in its approach and to attain a high level of consultation with the community, the Town Council took the commendable decision in 2005 to employ a dedicated Project Officer.

The role of the Plan has always had to be a strategic one that balances the needs of the population of the town whilst striving to improve the quality of life and opportunity for all. This is a complex operation which has to look at the bigger picture – how do we ensure that there are enough jobs and houses, high quality employment and education, excellent care for our health and the elderly, a safe environment for all, and training and opportunities
for our young people, who are, after all, the future, whilst not compromising the essence of the market town?

Inevitably there will be changes, and not everyone will like them, but the aim must be to retain the essential Market Town character of Ringwood whilst allowing some managed growth and putting the appropriate infrastructure in place. Only in this way can we ensure that Ringwood’s people can continue to enjoy a vibrant and economically viable town that offers a high quality of life into the future.

So where do we go from here? A list of projects has been drawn up to implement the recommendations in the Town Plan. The Town Plan Partnership Steering Group, comprised of Councillors and volunteer members of the public, will continue to meet and bring forward projects for implementation in partnership with volunteers, community groups and other local authorities.

I would like to thank my fellow Councillors, our staff, the community of Ringwood, all the members of the Focus Groups and the Town Plan Partnership Steering Group, and the schools who participated so willingly in the process and also particularly our Project Officer who brought everything together to enable this plan to be produced.

The Town Plan will give Ringwood Town Council a clear mandate to go forward and achieve a sustained and planned future for the Town of Ringwood.

Brian Terry

Chairman Town Plan
Co-ordinating Committee
Contents

Foreword 2
Contents 4
Executive Summary 5
Key Findings 7
Methodology 12
History 12
Map of Ringwood Parish 13
Ringwood Today 16
Economy 19
Housing 20
 Provision of Employment Land 22
 Old Wellworthy Site 23
 Improvement of the Streetscape 24
 Retail Sector 25
 Signage 26
 Training and Skills 27
 Internet 28
 Improvement of the Market 29
 Tourism 29
 Community Events 30

Environment
Built Environment 31
Access to the Riverside 33
Environmental Issues:
 Flooding 33
 Recycling 34
 Green Open Space 34
 Trees 35
 Litter, Dog Excrement and Vandalism 35
 Pollution 36
 Street Furniture 36
 Cycleways and Footpaths 36

Transport and Accessibility 38
Congestion in the town 38
A31 and strategic road network 40
Public Transport 42
Maintenance of Roads and Pavements 43
Parking 43

Accessibility 46
Community and Social 46
Housing 47
Amenities 48
Security 50
Health 51
Young People 52
Conclusion 55
Acknowledgements 56

Appendices
Appendix 1 Snapshot
Appendix 2 Love It, Hate It, I Wish analysis
Appendix 4 Housing/Highways Questionnaire March 2007.
Appendix 5 Questionnaire Summary Sheet, Ringwood School.
Appendix 8 Publicity
Appendix 9 Employment Land Options for Ringwood, Consultation November 2006.
Appendix 10 Worksheets Environment
Appendix 11 Worksheets Economy
Appendix 12 Worksheets Community & Social
Appendix 13 Worksheets Transport
Appendix 14 NFDC Business Needs Survey Report
Appendix 15 Town Centre Strategy Study R-10387-006 Ringwood
Appendix 16 PPG17 Assessment: Open Space, Sport and Recreation
Appendix 17 Accessibility Audit and Reports
Executive Summary

In 2000 the Government published a Rural White Paper that clearly identified the challenges facing our rural market towns in meeting the demands of modern life. For centuries they have been the trading centres and lifeblood of the country outside our cities. However, the 20th century has brought exceptional social mobility opening up the possibilities of commuting and second homes and this has pushed up the prices of housing in rural communities to unprecedented levels. In parallel there has been a decline in rural public transport services, which has also become very expensive as public funding has been withdrawn. Services have been centralised in the large city centres and out of town shopping developments are threatening the very existence and vitality of the traditional market town.

The Government initiated the Market Town ‘Healthcheck’ approach, which was a community based fact finding exercise aimed at small rural towns and villages of between 3,000 and 20,000 people. Through public consultations, the Healthcheck aimed to amass information on the state of the parish so that the strengths and weaknesses of, and opportunities and threats to the town could be identified. This would lead to a community vision and Town Plan. This Town Plan would feed into the wider strategic plans being formulated at District and County level and would give the town’s views and opinions far more weight and influence.

Whilst accepting all of the basic principles in the Healthcheck, including the full involvement of the community, the Town Council decided to adopt the role of the ‘honest broker’ that ensures that the views of all sections of the community are sought out, rather than allowing a situation to arise where
particular factions could hold sway. To this end, in 2005 the Town Council appointed a Project Officer, to prepare a Healthcheck and Town Plan for Ringwood.

The objectives of the process were to work with volunteers and consult in the community:

• to prepare a long-term strategy to secure the economic, social and environmental well-being of the town

• to identify projects and initiatives that would fulfil the aims and objectives contained in the Town Plan

It was decided that a full committee of the Town Council would be formed, the Town Plan Co-ordinating Committee, to oversee the project. Reporting to this committee would be the Town Plan Partnership Steering Group comprised of six Councillors and six members of the public, all volunteers. The work was then divided into four groups, Economy, Environment, Transport and Accessibility and Community and Social, each led by a Councillor with the groups made up of everyone who was interested and had volunteered. The plan of work was as follows:

• setting up a Town Plan Partnership Steering Group comprising six Councillors and six members of the community

• gaining community commitment

• completing a health check

• creating a vision

• preparing a Town Plan

• preparing a Strategic Implementation Programme with Action Plans to fulfil the objectives of the Town Plan.
Key Findings

1. Ringwood has a firm platform on which to build its strategic development. It has a prime location on the A31 and is bordered by the New Forest National Park, the Avon Valley and the Dorset and Wiltshire Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. It has easy access to Bournemouth and the cities of Southampton and Salisbury. Its enviable location, amenities and accessibility mean that it is a very desirable place to live and, consequently house prices are very high.

2. Ringwood has a buoyant town centre with low vacancies and a broad mix of shops for residents and visitors. The charming and historic town centre has been maintained and most of the services are based there. The retail offer has been enhanced by the Furlong Centre which, with Waitrose as its centrepiece, attracts shoppers from a wide area. The arrival of Sainsbury’s to the town has further strengthened the attractions of the town for shoppers.

3. Ringwood has nine thriving business parks, which house diverse businesses from all sectors. Its good transport connections make it a prime location for business. Some companies are operating in global markets. The unemployment rate is low.

4. Ringwood is served by five high quality schools and a number of pre-schools and playgroups which are at present sufficient for the town’s needs. Ringwood Infants’ School, Ringwood Junior School, Poulner Infants’ School and Poulner Junior School serve the needs of the under 11s, whilst Ringwood School provides education to A-level. Many students also go to Brockenhurst College post-GCSE.

5. Health services are generally described as ‘good’. There are three dental surgeries in Ringwood itself and two doctors’ surgeries with eighteen GPs, one in the town centre and one in Poulner, as well as three surgeries
within four miles of the town centre. Residents go to five centres for hospital treatment, namely Bournemouth, Poole, Salisbury, Southampton and Lymington. There are care homes to meet the needs of the elderly.

6. The police station is manned from Monday to Friday and is open between 9.00am and 5.00pm with a telephone service outside these hours. There are two Police Community Safety Officers.

7. Ringwood has a thriving programme of community events which are loved and appreciated by the local population and visitors alike. The Festival, Carnival and Christmas events attract visitors from other areas too and help to boost the town’s economy.

8. Ringwood has a strong social and community structure. It has two sports centres and a number of small halls in different locations around the town. Greyfriars Community Centre is a lynchpin of the town and provides facilities for amateur theatrical productions, which are well known and patronised over the whole of the New Forest, and is home to numerous voluntary organisations. The Town Council is developing sports facilities at Long Lane and improving the play facilities at Ash Grove. There are play facilities and a skate park at Carvers, and play facilities at Toad Corner in Poulner and at Ash Grove.

9. Ringwood has diverse attractions to offer all types of visitor, probably more than any other New Forest town. Its geography allows for water-
based activities such as sailing, water-skiing and ski-jumping, as well as activities based in the New Forest such as riding, walking and cycling. Fishing is particularly important and attracts visitors from all over the country. There are motor sports, go-karting and dry slope skiing nearby amongst many other opportunities and these make it an excellent base for family breaks. There are many cycle ways, footpaths and bridleways in Ringwood Parish and Ringwood is generally easily accessible by bicycle.

10. Despite this:

- the viability of many businesses that wish to expand is threatened by the fact that previously allocated employment land has not yet been developed. It should be emphasised that such areas are not in Council ownership. Businesses may be forced to leave the town because facilities are not available for their expansion until the present owners of the allocated land decide to develop.

- the future sustainability of the town is threatened by the lack of land designated for development, particularly for affordable housing within the town and its catchments. Young people are especially being forced to leave the town to find homes. Unless they are retained in the local labour market, future economic growth may be unsustainable and social coherency – Ringwood’s intangible sense of community – may be damaged irreparably.

- there are areas of the town which urgently need environmental improvements, including Southampton Road and the approach to the town from the Furlong car park. The links between the Furlong and the High Street and Market Place need to be improved and made more attractive. Pedestrianisation of the High Street and Market Place is an option very much favoured by the majority of residents.
Town Plan – Ringwood 2008

- a significant part of Ringwood’s hinterland is poorly served by public transport and there is no provision to and from the town itself in the evening or early in the morning for people to start work. There is no public transport cross-Forest and therefore Lymington Hospital is not accessible in this way. This not only impacts on individual quality of life and access to opportunity but also restricts young people in developing independence and enjoying the facilities and amenities that the larger neighbouring cities can offer.

- the town appears to be generally prosperous but pockets of real deprivation exist which are largely masked. There are areas where the quality of life of children and the elderly is negatively affected by poverty.

- there are areas of concern regarding health, such as the very high number of falls in comparison with other areas.

- there is only one NHS dentist, which is well below the national average.

- crime rates are lower than the national average but at present are higher than other areas of the New Forest and this needs to be addressed. There are increasing incidents of graffiti and vandalism, and litter and dog excrement are a problem.

- Ringwood’s future is threatened by the policies of New Forest District Council which presume exceptionally low levels of housing growth in the foreseeable future. Ringwood needs to retain a resident population to support services and facilities and introduce new enterprise and creativity – it should be a focus for sustainable housing growth in the District. Increasing housing land release through the planning system may also help to address problems of housing affordability.
• there is a lack of facilities for all ages but especially for the young, some of whom feel marginalised. The dense development of the town means there is a shortage of 47 acres of sports open space and this, combined with the shortage of play and sports facilities, has a negative impact upon the quality of life of children and young people. The riverside is not easily accessible and ways should be explored to overcome this. There is no cinema and the majority of residents have asked for either a cinema or arts facility incorporating theatre, cinema, concert hall etc. Young people complain that ‘there is nothing to do’ and it is true that there is a lack of places for them to meet and gather safely.

• some roads are difficult for cyclists because of the volume of traffic and the fact that they are generally not wide enough for two cycle lanes and two-way traffic. Cycle ways tend to peter out when they arrive at the town and this needs attention. The maintenance of footpaths and cycle ways is another area that needs attention.

• there is a shortage of hotel accommodation. Ringwood needs to be marketed as a destination in its own right rather than simply be a place bypassed on the A31. Signage needs to be improved to benefit visitors and attract more people into the town.

• noise from the A31, litter, graffiti and dog excrement in places are detrimental to the quality of life for all, but especially for children and this problem needs to be urgently addressed.

• there is no training provision after A-level and most young people have to seek qualifications after the age of 16 years outside the town because of the lack of provision locally. Statistics show that 50% of people in the workforce in Ringwood have no educational qualifications. However, the demand for more highly skilled personnel is already there and growing strongly. Action needs to be taken
to address this problem which will affect the local economy and levels of productivity in the future, maybe forcing businesses to relocate to regions where suitably skilled people are available. The provision of a Skills Centre, which provides training opportunities aimed at young people in the 14-19 age group, is called for.

Methodology

- After deciding the way forward, a Love it, Hate it, I Wish survey was delivered to every household in 2006 in postcode BH24 sectors 1, 2 and 3, which cover the whole parish as well as St. Leonards, St. Ives, Ashley Heath, Avon, Matchams, Blashford, South Gorley, Harbridge, Mockbeggar, Highwood, Ibsley, Linford, Linwood, Rockford, Sandford and Somerley, with a Freepost address for its return. This ensured that not only was the parish covered but also an extensive section of the rural and urban hinterland. Those who indicated that they were interested in being involved when they returned the survey were contacted – over a hundred people in all. No-one who wanted to take part was refused. This eventually settled down to a core of forty-three volunteers who gave up their time to work on the Town Plan. These volunteers formed a Committee for each group, and met at regular intervals over eighteen months to analyse the data, run the public consultations and decide upon the text and content, based on all the findings, for the Plan itself.

- A survey was distributed inside the Ringwood and Fordingbridge News to almost all households, this time focusing on the specific issues of housing, employment and transportation.

- A two-day consultation was held in the Meeting House in November 2006 on the issue of employment land.

- Once the results of all the surveys had been analysed, two public Open Days were held at the Trinity Centre in February 2007 when over 400 people came to give their views during two lively days. Attendees were asked to indicate their place of residence on a map and this clearly showed that people had come from all over the town and from the hinterland outside the town. This consultation was followed by two open evenings at Poulner Junior School and the Elm Tree public house.

- A business survey was carried out in the summer of 2007.

- All the information gathered from the public and from businesses was considered very carefully in the Committees along with the statistical information contained in the Worksheets. An analysis of the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) was carried out for each group and the Plan was written based on all the findings.

History

Since the beginning of its history, Ringwood has occupied an important strategic position on the crossroads between East and West, North and South with the River Avon providing its vital trading and transport links with the rest of the country. Throughout the centuries, the river has supplied water, food and employment in the form of the industries that it supported. Today the transport links are no longer dependent upon the river but are served by the A31 trunk road, B347 and the A338 and these ensure that Ringwood is easy to reach for both business and pleasure.

In 955AD the Saxon name Rimucwude, translated as edge of the wood, appeared in documents, but in the Domesday book it appears as Rincevede,
meaning a ford and a river. Whichever ancient name is preferred, both are appropriate as Ringwood stands between the western edge of the New Forest and the beautiful Avon Valley.

Over the next two centuries the town grew slowly and in 1226 King Henry III granted the Lord of the Manor the right to hold a market in Ringwood on Wednesdays. The market became renowned as the main centre for produce and New Forest pony sales in the Avon and Stour areas. In addition, there were two ‘fair days’ on St. Peter’s Day on 29th June and St. Andrew’s Day on 30th November. Later changed to 10th July and 11th December, these ‘fair days’ were highlights of Ringwood’s year up until World War II. In 1792 the Manor of Ringwood was sold to John Morant of Brockenhurst for £23,000. The Morant family subsequently sold most of the Manor in 1916 but they retained the Market Charter and, although the livestock and corn markets have now gone, the weekly market continues and draws throngs of people into the Market Place every Wednesday.

Ringwood has a charming and historic town centre and one of its most attractive aspects is its narrow High Street winding to the Market Place with its mix of imposing and more modest buildings. It has a rich legacy of historic building with thatched cottages nestling cheek by jowl with Georgian houses. The Meeting House in Meeting House Lane was built by Presbyterian non-conformists in 1727 and is the only pre-1800 Meeting House to survive in Hampshire.

Ringwood became nationally famous in 1685 when the Duke of Monmouth was imprisoned in a house (now called Monmouth House) in West Street after his capture following his defeat at the Battle of Sedgemoor. He was then taken to London where he was executed. Shortly afterwards Dame Alice Lisle was sentenced to death by the infamous Judge
Jeffreys in Winchester for allegedly harbouring fugitives from the Monmouth Rebellion. She was beheaded and her body was buried at the ancient Ellingham Church.

There is a long tradition of brewing in Ringwood with various breweries making use of the pure water from the River Avon for making good beer. The town became renowned for the quality of its ales from several breweries in the area and, although today just one brewery remains, Ringwood Brewery's ales are popular throughout the New Forest area and beyond.

The 19th Century saw great changes take place. In 1847 the railway between Southampton and Dorchester through the well established market towns of Brockenhurst, Ringwood, Wimborne and Wareham was opened, with a spur line to connect Ringwood to the fishing village of Bournemouth. This, coupled with the requirement for the line to stay away from the wooded areas of the New Forest, meant that the line twisted and turned. It was, therefore, nicknamed Castleman's Corkscrew after its foremost promoter, a Wimborne solicitor. Sadly falling victim to Beeching's cuts, the railway closed in 1964 but the track lives on as the Castleman Trail and is now used for walking and cycling.

The railway brought renewed prosperity to Ringwood as better transport links encouraged firms to set up business over time. Gravel extraction started in the 1930s and as a result Ringwood now has beautiful lakes to the north of the town which are not only a haven for wildlife and support a study centre, but also provide opportunities for all types of water sports. The lakes and the River Avon between them provide first class fishing to suit everyone and this accounts for a high percentage of tourist visitors.
Ringwood's position of strategic importance on the main highway continues to this day and the town's adaptability throughout the ages to current trading conditions ensures its vitality and prosperity. The challenge now is to maintain and build upon this success, providing opportunity and a place to live for our young families and quality of life for all of Ringwood's people.

Ringwood Today

Ringwood, the sixth largest town in the New Forest District, is situated on the western edge of the newly created (2006) New Forest National Park and on the eastern bank of a crossing point of the beautiful River Avon. This strategic position has been instrumental in shaping the development of the town. To the north are Blashford Lakes, created by sand and gravel works and to the south and east there is high quality agricultural land. Further afield to the west and north, but within easy reach by car, are the Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Part of the parish falls within the boundaries of the national park and it is only ten miles to the New Forest Heritage Coast. The town's position in relation to the New Forest, the coast, the surrounding countryside and the three cities and towns of Southampton, Salisbury and Bournemouth is the asset most highly prized by 55% of residents in the Love It, Hate It, I Wish Survey.

The town is comprised of three wards, Ringwood North, Ringwood South and Ringwood East and Sopley, and parts of Ringwood South are statistically more deprived. The three wards are distinctively different, Ringwood North being mainly residential, Ringwood South housing most of the industrial estates and Ringwood East and Sopley being more rural.
A large part of the town centre is a conservation area designated in 1983 by New Forest District Council and redesignated in 1999. There are 145 listed buildings. The High Street and the Market Place have been described as the ‘jewel in Ringwood’s crown’. There are many old and attractive buildings along the winding High Street, and the fine period buildings are a feature of the Market Place. There are important and beautiful views west from the Market Place towards the river.

A recent shopping development, The Furlong, with its high quality and exclusive High Street shops and Waitrose, has been developed in character with the market town image and the bronze statues of the New Forest mare and foal are much appreciated by residents and visitors alike. However, the A31 bypass cuts through the middle of the town creating noise and pollution problems for residents.

Ringwood faces similar problems with regard to housing as other market towns and villages. Lack of housing supply to meet demand pushes prices up so that many, especially the young, cannot afford to buy locally. Good schools at all levels make the town attractive to families, bringing in many from outside the area. For people who are waiting on the NFDC’s Homesearch Register for social housing in the New Forest, there is currently a wait of up to 11 years for a 2 bedroom house in the Ringwood area. Moreover, the fact that the New Forest is an attractive area for people to retire to from other parts of the country, adds to the acute housing problem.

Local surveys suggest that not only is there anxiety about young people being unable to afford property in Ringwood but also concern about inappropriate development and lack of infrastructure. It is essential that housing is not built without provision of additional surgeries, dentists and particularly schools where needed.
Expansion of the town is naturally limited by the fact that it is bordered by the New Forest National Park and the Avon Valley river system, both of which are Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and wetland sites of international importance designated under the Ramsar convention. The town’s natural environmental landmarks such as the Bickerley Millstream and Blashford Lakes are SSSIs and are well protected. There are a number of sites of importance for nature conservation such as Hightown Copse and Parsonage Wood amongst others. There is a plethora of SSSIs outside the parish but of importance to it, such as St. Leonards and St. Ives Heaths, Ferndown Common and Holt and West Moors Heaths.

Ringwood is sited superbly for road communications. It is a hub town at a north/south/east/west crossing point using the A 31, A338 and the B3347. The A31 trunk road provides fast and easy access to Southampton, Winchester, Bournemouth and the West Country; London via the M27 and M3; Portsmouth and the south east via the M27; the North through its link with the A34; northern Europe through the motorway network and the cross channel ferries from Poole. However, it also bisects the town. The A338 goes north to Salisbury and south west to Bournemouth, and the B3347 goes south to Christchurch, with important links to the trading and industrial estates. These road connections mean that Ringwood occupies a strategic position on the border between Dorset and Hampshire and is a sought-after location for both businesses and employees in the high-value business sector. At present there is an emphasis on climate change and the need to re-assess the way we live and work.

Ringwood’s strategic position provides opportunities for businesses that offer high value and professional employment to set up in the region and create more local employment opportunities.
Economy

Vision

To maintain and improve on Ringwood’s success as a bustling, vibrant market town, providing opportunities for business to thrive and creating employment at all levels.

Issues

• Cost and availability of housing
• Lack of land/premises available to allow the expansion of existing businesses
• Need to attract ‘high technology’ businesses
• Improvement of the streetscape
• Links between the High Street/Market Place/ Southampton Road and the Furlong
• Challenges facing the independent retailer
• Quality of the market
• Training and Skills
• Poor signage
• Making Ringwood attractive to visitors
• Coping with climate change
• Visitor Information Centre facilities
• Lack of hotel provision

The local business survey shows that confidence is high in Ringwood with 67% of businesses in the industrial sector planning to expand in the next two years. However, certain common themes have emerged as considerable challenges to the viability and future of these businesses, the three main ones being the difficulties encountered in recruiting suitably qualified staff, the lack of commercial premises and development of allocated employment
land for expansion, and the cost of housing. In Ringwood South there are fewer people employed in professional and managerial roles and more employed in semi-skilled and manual jobs than in the other wards. The rates of pay for these jobs are below the District, regional and national averages. Rates of pay for women and part time workers are also significantly lower than county and regional averages and in 2005 finally caught up with levels they were at in 2001.

Housing

Results from the local business survey show that lack of affordable housing and shortage in the housing supply is a threat to some businesses in the industrial sector. With the prices of semi-detached houses starting at £230,000 in 2007, first time buyers cannot afford to buy in Ringwood. As a result, the majority of employees live outside the town and travel to work by car, thereby adding to congestion and pollution. The cost of housing makes it difficult for companies to attract suitably qualified personnel to the area.

At present, Ringwood has a well-balanced demographic profile which must be retained for the future in order to maintain the vibrancy and vitality of the town. An increase in retirement housing will put undue pressure on health and social services. Furthermore, an imbalance in the town’s age structure may lead to resistance to change which could have a negative impact upon the younger population.

Second home ownership is low in Ringwood and it is important that this situation does not alter so that the imbalance in the housing supply does not deteriorate.

New Government guidelines with regard to climate change should ensure that all new housing
will be built to the most exacting standards for sustainability and environmental impact by 2016 and this is welcomed. We would recommend to NFDC that they adopt The Code for Sustainable Homes for public and private sector housing, which may well be made mandatory in 2008. The adoption of such a set of integrated measures will ensure high levels of energy efficiency, water consumption, environmental impact of materials usage, management of rain run off (Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems) and waste management. All new developments, both housing and commercial, should also be built with the latest communications infrastructure installed.

Lack of affordable housing is a threat to the future vibrancy and vitality of Ringwood. Controlled growth is necessary for the town to thrive. The Town needs to look at different schemes, such as that proposed at Moortown Farm, and at different ways of building affordable houses to try to help young people with house purchase. For example, attractive ‘kit houses’ that surpass the standards required for sustainability are available, are quick to erect and can even be built on stilts to enable cars to be parked beneath.

In common with other market towns, there is some fear of development amongst the population. The needs of the town must, however, be met in a sensible and sensitive fashion. Developing the former Wellworthy and Crow Arch Lane sites must be looked at as a priority. For such developments, the commissioning of design briefs is strongly supported to avoid the mistakes of the past. Preference should be given to exciting design of the highest quality. All new housing should be built at least to New Forest District Council’s design guide as outlined in the Local Development Framework. We would, however, go further than that and state that, to protect and enhance Ringwood’s position as a vibrant market town, innovative and sustainable designs that will enhance the local architecture and be in keeping with the 21st century should be encouraged and welcomed.
Provision of Employment Land

The local business survey shows that some businesses are experiencing difficulties because they wish to expand but there is no land available. Some are reluctantly contemplating moving to Southampton and Poole where there is space. The lack of commercial and industrial premises available for expansion has been identified in the local business survey as being the second largest threat to the viability of businesses in Ringwood.

There is also a lack of 'high tech' high value employment opportunities. The statistics show that almost 20% of the working population travels over 20 kilometres to work every day, by far the highest percentage in South West Hampshire. At the same time, the lowest percentage travel to work by active means, i.e. by bicycle or on foot.

There is a need to encourage high tech business into the area and provide opportunities for land use that allow existing businesses to expand and provide employment opportunities, rather than lose potential employment to other areas.

There is an acceptance by both the public and District Council of the need for development of reserve allocation land near Crow Lane and on the old Wellworthy site. The Wellworthy site, by nature of its location closer to the town centre, would be better allocated for mixed use or residential development. The proportion of commercial to residential development at the Crow Lane site can then be adjusted accordingly. It is strongly recommended that this allocated land be developed as soon as possible to supply the town’s needs, although this land is in private ownership and it is, therefore, outside the power of the Town Council to initiate development.
Old Wellworthy site

The response to New Forest District Council’s questionnaire on Employment Development Plan Options and Preferred Options (2007) showed substantial public objection to an employment land allocation at Lynes Farm. This was in accordance with previous findings (2004) by the Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State. However, there are conflicting views about the future of land at Lynes Farm and, with businesses crying out for expansion opportunities, it is suggested that the use of this area should be reviewed on an on-going basis. Options for this area will not be included in the short term while there are still opportunities at both the Wellworthy and Crow Arch Lane sites.

Local surveys have also identified a shortfall in hotel accommodation with businesses identifying a need for an upper tier 3 Star/4 Star hotel. Apart from valuable local employment and training opportunities, this could also provide many of the facilities desired by the local population for functions, conferences and leisure.

In summary, with proposed development in South East Dorset, Ringwood should not miss out on any opportunity to retain its position as an important market town and service centre for the surrounding area. The lack of housing and suitable employment issues will need to be addressed.
Improvement of the Streetscape

Whilst Ringwood is an attractive and historic market town, there are areas which are described by some as ‘run down and seedy’. These areas, such as the old cinema on the Market Place, Southampton Road and the approach to the town from the car park, need attention to improve the appeal of the town. However, many of the sensitive sites such as the old cinema are in private ownership and this makes it more difficult to influence their development. Some shop fronts are unattractive and out of keeping with the market town image and it is recommended that the appropriate planning authorities do everything within their power to ensure that NFDC’s guidelines on shop fronts are adhered to.

The proposed development linking the Furlong and the High Street is welcomed as it improves a key area of the town which is currently run down. Development of the South West corner of the Furlong would also improve the aspect of the town from the car park.

There are opportunities to increase the attractiveness of the other links through to the High Street to the benefit of both the shoppers and the retailers. This will help encourage people to explore the town through its charming lanes. Again, the highest standards of design should be met and powers invested in the local authorities to enforce them.
Retail Sector

Ringwood boasts a good variety of independent shops with some nationals such as Boots, Woolworths, Sainsbury’s and Waitrose. The recently built Furlong Centre has attracted more ‘up market’ shops such as Waitrose, Café Nero, Hobbs, Phase Eight and Fat Face and these shops attract customers from far and wide. However, the Furlong Centre has also made it more difficult for the independent retailer in the High Street and Market Place to operate successfully as rents have risen despite the fact that some old premises are not suitable for modern day trading. We wish to create an intelligent equilibrium between conservation and retail space to ensure that all traders can operate successfully in the modern day.

Results of the Love It, Hate It, I Wish survey showed that 41% of respondents wished for more shops, with the majority wanting small, interesting, independent shops, especially for women’s clothing with a wider variety of prices than are currently available, and more shops aimed at young people.

Many respondents have requested that Ringwood shops open on a Sunday. The shops in the Furlong make a large contribution towards a marketing and advertising budget and employ a manager to
promote their businesses. As a result, many events take place in the Furlong. Other traders in the town could do the same through the Chamber of Commerce so that a series of events in other parts of the town on weekends and at holiday times could improve the trading profile of the town, whilst adding vitality and improving community spirit.

The internet is changing shopping habits and people will come into shopping areas to browse and enjoy a high quality ambience with a choice of restaurants and cafés. Many will use these venues for business meetings. Local surveys have suggested that pedestrianisation of the High Street may greatly increase opportunities for the retail and restaurant sectors.

Both the retail sector and businesses on the industrial estates highlight lack of long term parking as a threat to their future prosperity.

**Signage**

Retailers have emphasised poor signage from the Furlong Car Park as an issue. The lack of internal directions and obvious walking links around the town are problems that need to be addressed. Many visitors arrive and do not find their way through to the High Street, Christchurch Road or Southampton Road and so the majority of business goes to the highly visible Furlong Centre. Ways must be found of encouraging visitors to explore the rest of the shopping area. Fridays Cross would appear to create a mental barrier to the shopper as they tend not
to continue up Christchurch Road to the shops on offer there. Signage in the town needs to have a co-ordinated appearance in keeping with the market town image.

Signage into the town from the A31, Burley and the A338 is inadequate and unattractive. There are many confusing signs at the entry to the town on the A31 and this needs addressing as a priority. There is a 'Welcome to Ringwood' sign on the A338 but it is not very noticeable and consideration should be given to this as the road carries between 15,000 and 20,000 cars a day.

A Signage Project group has been set up to address some of these problems.

Training and Skills

Ringwood has very good schools which attract families and teachers to the area. There is, however, no training provision after A-levels and many young people have to seek qualifications after the age of 16 years outside the town because of the lack of provision locally. Training is largely provided at Brockenhurst College, Southampton or Bournemouth. Some firms provide in-house training.

Statistics show that 50% of people in the workforce in Ringwood have no educational qualifications. However, the demand for more highly skilled personnel is already there and growing strongly. Action needs to be taken to address this problem which will affect the local economy and levels of productivity in the future, maybe forcing businesses to relocate to regions where suitably skilled people are available.

There is scope, therefore, for the provision of a Skills Centre. Many businesses find it difficult to attract qualified personnel, particularly in the engineering sector. Literacy has been identified as a problem by 28% of the businesses in the industrial sector. Difficulties in finding suitably qualified staff in the Ringwood area have been identified by companies as being the main threat to their businesses.
Internet

The majority of companies in the industrial sector use the internet, have a website, make purchases and sales through the internet and use it to access key resources and communicate with partner firms. There is some considerable interest in a portal website and this could be pursued as part of securing a brand image for the town. The current speed of broadband available in the town is supposed to be up to eight megabytes but in reality most people will achieve only three to six megabyte depending on where they live. This is already markedly out of date with some other countries which, through new technology, benefit from up to 100 megabytes. There will without doubt be a need and demand for this and any new development should ensure that the appropriate infrastructure is installed.

The use of the internet is much smaller in the retail sector with many traders seeing it as an unnecessary expense. However, increases of 50% are forecast for internet shopping for Christmas 2007 with this set to carry on into 2008. At the same time 40% of shoppers are looking to shop locally in order to find that ‘exclusive’ gift. Internet shopping is changing the behaviour of shoppers. The cumulative impact of online shopping may polarise the market into cheap and cheerful offerings on the one hand and niche and quality shops on the other. This may offer considerable opportunities for shop fitters and display specialists which could be very beneficial for Ringwood with its wealthy hinterland. It is clear that in order to survive in an increasingly competitive market place, the independent retailer will have to embrace new technology.
Improvement of the Market

The mediæval charter applies only to the Market Place and restricts market activity to one day a week. Many people still come to Ringwood for its Wednesday market but residents in local surveys have highlighted a perceived decline in quality and choice.

There is also a desire for the provision of different markets on other days, for example Farmers’ or European markets. There is great scope for the expansion and diversification of the market to promote local distinctiveness and business. This needs to be addressed, perhaps through the formation of a working group comprised of those who have an interest in improving and developing the market.

Tourism

Ringwood has many attractions to offer all types of visitor, probably more than any other New Forest town. There is, however, a shortage of hotel accommodation. The local Tourism Group has been revived and is concentrating on marketing the town in a fresh way in order to make Ringwood more of a destination rather than a place bypassed on the A31. A promotional film, which is backed up by a website and a brochure, has been made of Ringwood and this is now being shown in the Visitor Information Centres in Bournemouth and Lyndhurst. The town is also now featured on the Rural Ways website so considerable progress has been made in a short time towards raising the profile of the town for visitors.

Many respondents in local surveys highlighted restricted opening hours in the Visitor Information Centre as being a problem, particularly on Sundays. In the summer months, there are often visitors keen to access the centre when it is closed. Possible development of the South West corner of the
Furlong should lead to co-location of this service with Town and District Council services and this will mean longer opening hours. Co-operation between NFDC and the NPA should be encouraged so that the VIC can be open seven days a week and jointly run. In the meantime, however, the Ringwood Town and Country Experience has offered to host a Tourist Information ‘sub office’ on its premises.

Community Events

Respondents cited community spirit and events as being one of the main attractions of Ringwood. The importance of community spirit in terms of economic activity is significant and every effort should be made to continue to improve upon this aspect of life in the Town. Events in the street can also be used to attract shoppers to other parts of the town and this should be explored as a way of drawing people through from the Furlong.

Key events throughout the year include the Town Festival in July, the Carnival in September and the Christmas processions and Carol Service in December.

If pedestrianisation does become a reality in the future, then opportunities will arise for more events to take place in the Market Place, the traditional heart of the town.
Environment

In order to fulfil the overall vision for the Town, the Environment Group has had to consider the following:

- Built Environment – housing and industrial development
- Access to the Riverside
- Flooding
- Open Space
- Litter and Vandalism
- Pollution
- Street Furniture
- Signage
- Environmental Issues, such as Recycling
- Footpaths
- Cycle Ways
- Pavements and roads

The following are the issues identified through the worksheets and public consultations:

Built Environment

The challenge in Ringwood is to build in line with the town’s needs without compromising the charm and elevations of the historic centre. There has been considerable infilling in parts of the town and, whilst some consider this an acceptable way of providing housing, many others see it as destroying the essential character of the town. Already short of green open space within the town itself, Ringwood can ill afford to lose the gardens of existing houses. There is apprehension that the town will be spoilt by inappropriate or over development but at the same
time there is a fear that future generations will not be able to afford to buy houses in their home town. Whilst it is clear that great care must be taken to ensure that future building fits in with the historic market town image, it is also clear that the shortage of housing is an urgent problem that needs addressing. The question is whether it is better to meet the need by increasing the density of housing in existing streets, or by utilising some unused land for low cost affordable housing to buy or rent.

The High Street and the Market Place are referred to by some as ‘the jewel in Ringwood’s Crown’ and there are a number of buildings of historic interest in the town such as Monmouth House, Greyfriars, Church Hatch, the Bank House and the Meeting House. These areas define the character of the Town and are protected under the Conservation Area. However, residents and visitors have singled out specific areas as being detrimental to the special quality of the town. These are the old Cinema (currently derelict), the area at the back of Woolworths and the adjacent buildings as seen on entering Ringwood, the Western Service Road, and Southampton Road. These areas have been described as ‘seedy and dismal.’

The historic town centre could be greatly enhanced if the area were pedestrianised or at least subject to traffic restrictions.

The Town boasts a number of charming thatched cottages which are also listed as being of special architectural or historical importance. On the edge of the town centre, there are other houses of architectural interest such as the Manor House on Southampton Road, the Coach House on The Sweep and Rose House.
Access to the Riverside

During the various consultations and through the surveys, many residents expressed a strong desire for greater access to the riverside. Ringwood enjoys proximity to the beautiful and nationally important River Avon, and to the Bickerley Millstream, but access to these areas is limited. The Town Council is enhancing access to the Bickerley Millstream and improving Pocket Park. It is recommended that easier access to the mill stream be encouraged as there is scope for developing riverside walks in this area to provide a priceless asset for the Town.

Environmental Issues

Flooding

Ringwood’s low-lying position, inadequate surface water drainage and proximity to the River Avon make it vulnerable to flooding. Works have been carried out in recent years to alleviate the problems of the past and to provide protection for the future. However, infilling and lack of available parking space has led to gardens being built upon or covered with tarmac and thus rainfall run-off contributes to flooding problems. It appears likely that possible climate change may make the situation worse in future with its effects upon sea levels and quantities of rainfall.
Recycling

Whilst New Forest District Council has introduced a certain amount of recycling, many residents and businesses have said that they would like more initiatives regarding environmental issues, such as better recycling. Alternatives to conventional energy, such as wind or solar power, should be investigated for public buildings. Businesses have also indicated an interest in the opportunities that are available to them to respond positively to the threat of climate change and at the same time improve their bottom line.

Green Open Space

Appendix 15, PPG17 Assessment gives a thorough overview of the provision of open space, sport and recreation in the town. The town has one park, Jubilee Gardens, which resembles a traditional park but is badly affected by noise from the A31. There are very few areas of informal open space, the largest being Bickerley Common. Compared to the rest of the District, Ringwood has a low level of informal open space (0.77 ha. per thousand population compared with the District average of 1.72ha. per thousand); it noticeably lacks informal open space. Particular neighbourhoods, such as Broadshard Lane, Meadow Road and Cloughs Road, also suffer from poor access to open space because of the dense nature of residential development. Large numbers of people who live in Poulner and on land to the south and east of the A31, do not live near any informal open space, which tends to be located in the south west/west. With the intense density of development in the town and the considerable pressure to continue with the policy of infilling, it is clear that any further provision of open space will be on the edges of the town. Consequently such open space as exists is highly valued.
The Town Council has bought some land on the edge of the town to develop a centre of sporting excellence, and is currently negotiating to buy more in the same location, making a total area of approximately 50 acres. This may have the result of Carvers, which is popularly perceived and used as a local park, being freed from its current sporting commitments and enable it to be developed as a lovely park in the centre of the town catering for cross-generational needs.

Trees

There are some significant trees in the parish but most are not mapped and identified. They enhance their locality and can be landmarks of historic importance marking ancient highways and byways and providing the demarcation of land boundaries throughout the centuries.

The Furlong Car Park boasts a number of attractive trees which were mentioned often in the Love It, Hate It, I Wish survey. It is clear that these trees are regarded with great affection by many people and should be preserved wherever possible. They soften the aspect of the car park and the entry to the Town to the back of the town. They also provide welcome shade and create the illusion of a small ‘plaza’.

Litter, Dog Excrement and Vandalism

The approaches to the Town are disfigured by increasing amounts of litter along the A31. In the town itself, the pavements are disfigured by chewing gum. Litter and dog excrement are problematic on occasions on paths and in public open spaces. There are complaints of insufficient dog bins generally. It has also been noted that there are increasing incidents of graffiti and vandalism.
Pollution

Although the A31 trunk road is Ringwood’s lifeline, it also cuts through the middle of the town and contributes overwhelmingly to the problems of both air and noise pollution. Much has been written about the road in the Snapshot of Ringwood Today and in the Transport Section and it is Highways Department policy to resurface in a quieter material when required. With the strong likelihood of traffic increasing as a result of the planned development in South East Dorset and Bournemouth Airport, the problem of noise and pollution is likely to increase and the Highways Authority should be pressurised to bring forward its planned works.

Street Furniture

A lack of seating was generally identified throughout the town to enable people to rest and enjoy the environment. It is proposed that a seating audit is carried out and a suitable style of seat sourced to give an up-market and less cluttered look to the town. This information can then be incorporated into a map to particularly assist those who are disabled or have difficulty in walking far with planning their movements.

Cycleways and Footpaths

There are two byways open to all traffic, fifty four footpaths, five bridleways and two safeguarded cycle ways, with two proposed cycle ways. Ringwood is generally easily accessible by bicycle but some roads are difficult for cyclists because of the volume of traffic and the fact that they are generally not wide enough for two cycle lanes and two way traffic. However, cycle ways tend to peter out when they arrive at the town and this needs attention. The Castleman Trailway, which is a cycle path, bridleway and footpath from Dorset into the New
Forest from Hamworthy to Brockenhurst, largely follows the track of the old railway line but is incomplete in places as sections have been sold for housing and industrial development over the years. Improvements are therefore strongly sought to extend the path towards Burley and Brockenhurst. A Working Party dealing with safe walking and cycling routes into the town has been in existence for some time and many of its recommendations have been delivered. Some communities have joint pavements and cycle routes and this may be something to consider in the future. Extending cycle ways and footpaths linking open space and recreation facilities, for example down to Long Lane, should be prioritised particularly to improve access for those without a car and the young.

There are a number of designated walks around Ringwood but not all of them are accessible to disabled people. It would be useful to have the walks more clearly described. There are also many complaints regarding the condition and maintenance of footpaths and a mechanism should be sought to ensure that such paths are kept free from brambles, nettles and overhanging vegetation.
Transport & Accessibility

The Transport Focus Group has taken a strategic approach to the transport problems that exist in the town and tried to turn them into opportunities.

In order to attain the overall Vision for the future of the town, the Transport Group has had to consider the following:

• Congestion in the town centre
• A31 and strategic road network
• Public transport
• Maintenance of road, pavements and footpaths
• Parking
• Accessibility

Congestion in the Town

Congestion and illegal parking in the High Street was identified as the number one concern in the Love It, Hate It, I Wish survey. The High Street is frequently congested by illegally parked cars and at certain times of the day the town is gridlocked with queues of traffic extending up Christchurch Road. Although there are double yellow lines along the High Street, people park illegally in order to run quick errands, such as to the cash point. Blue badge holders also park there legally but there is anecdotal evidence of abuse of this privilege. The new regulations permitting authorised personnel (e.g. traffic wardens and police) to inspect Blue badges should reduce any misuse if enforced by the District Council.

Through traffic also causes congestion and this is exacerbated by the location of the bus depot in
West Street. Large, empty buses have to go up and down the High Street to use the depot. There is a particular problem on Market Day when the street remains open and traffic passes through the market, creating a safety hazard. The ambience of the town centre would be greatly enhanced if the bus depot were relocated.

Elsewhere in the town traffic is congested. Christchurch Road has a constant flow of traffic both day and night. It is difficult to cross at any time and particularly difficult to exit onto at rush hours. It is well used by heavy vehicles, including large lorries. This creates potential dangers for pedestrians on the narrow pavements, who run the risk of being hit by wing mirrors. Measures should be looked at to try to reduce the number of heavy vehicles using the town centre and other unsuitable roads in residential areas, such as Eastfield Lane and Hightown Road.

Reducing the speed and volume of the traffic using the town centre is seen as a priority by the public. Speeding is a problem in some areas, eg Southampton Road, Eastfield Lane and Speed Indicator Devices (SIDs), i.e. signs that flash the actual speed of the oncoming vehicle, can be effective when in position, but they are only temporary. It is recommended that permanent SIDs be installed in certain priority areas.
A31 and Strategic Road Network

Although vital for the economic well being of the town, the A31 also brings some problems in terms of noise and air pollution. It runs through the middle of the town, with the old town and shopping centre to the south and the large residential area of Poulner to the north. There are good foot and cycle path links from Poulner into the town. The noise pollution caused by speeding traffic on the A31 is a serious problem and 16% of respondents in the Love It, Hate It Survey put it as one of their three top ‘hates’.

The Route Management Strategy, as decided by the Highways Agency (2002/3) after public consultation, states that the ‘A31 from Wimborne to the M27 is of high strategic, regional and local importance.’ There is a planned series of improvement works aimed principally at improving safety, reducing congestion and improving accessibility whilst minimising environmental impacts but it is unclear how much will be in the Ringwood area.

Although the A31 is the vital lifeline for Ringwood’s continuing success and prosperity, it suffers from congestion at peak times of the day and at weekends and holiday periods. The A31 has been identified by Hampshire County Council as being particularly vulnerable to increased traffic with 40,000 – 67,000 new homes being planned close by over the border in Dorset under the South West Regional Spatial Strategy. Development and growth at Bournemouth Airport will mean increased passenger numbers and a new business park, and the impact of the 2012 Olympic Games will result in increased traffic going to Weymouth, which will also need to be taken into consideration.
Whilst highly significant, these issues will have few benefits for the Town itself other than passing trade. In practice it will make exiting from the town even more difficult and unless radical changes are made, especially to the westbound exit, which is complicated by the position of the filling station, there will be very severe congestion on the A31 and even more pollution and waste in terms of fuel, energy and time. The Local Plan highlights this concern and these issues need to be tackled by the Highways Agency.

There are already serious concerns regarding difficult and dangerous exit routes to the A31 and these are borne out by the road accident statistics, which alone merit improvements to aid traffic flow, especially at the West Street exit onto the A31. Much of the congestion in the town is caused by the fact that the western exits from the town are too short. This, plus problems caused by people using the petrol station and Fish Inn and the exits to Matchams and Verwood, demonstrates the need for a major review of the junctions on the A31 where it passes through the town.

Because it is sited on a major crossroads, Ringwood draws in north/south traffic to Christchurch but does not have the road infrastructure to support it. As a result, heavy vehicles are using inadequate roads such as Eastfield Lane and Christchurch Road into the town centre inappropriately. The Christchurch Road is now often congested with large vehicles serving the trading and industrial estates and it is submitted that a relief road from the A31 at Poulner through Hightown to the Christchurch Road should be investigated. It is appreciated that land is at a premium and there is conflict regarding housing and employment land use. Whatever the outcome, any development will need servicing and the present road system is increasingly inadequate.

There is often confusion at peak times on the Eastbound A31 at the A338 / A31 / Ringwood split. An illuminated gantry over this junction approach might assist at night.
Public Transport

Ringwood is very well served by National Express Coaches which are very well used and provide services all over the country as well as efficient services to the airports of Heathrow and Gatwick. However, there are no services to either Bournemouth or Southampton Airports. There is no designated parking available for those who use the coaches and no comfortable waiting facilities.

Local bus services are used mainly by the elderly with their free bus passes. The available public transport is described as expensive and unreliable and cuts to the services are being made as the result of withdrawal of public subsidies. The inadequate services disadvantage people who do not have their own transport. This affects access both to employment elsewhere and to amenities, such as places of entertainment, especially at night. The young are particularly disadvantaged in these respects.

Bus services are not integrated with train timetables. There is no cross-Forest bus service. It is recognised that the area cannot be viewed in the same way as London or other large conurbations. The scarcity and spread of habitation around Ringwood will not attract sufficient volumes to enable bus services to operate economically at intervals and times to make them attractive without crippling public subsidy. There could, however, be opportunities to allow private operators to run mini bus services at off-peak times and to smaller communities.
Maintenance of Roads and Pavements

The variable condition of roads and pavements has been highlighted by many respondents, with complaints about potholes and sharp road edges. Some of the pavements within the town centre are narrow and, in places, uneven. This makes them difficult for ‘wheelians’ (wheelchair, mobility scooter users and pushchair users) and the less able to negotiate. It may be that the condition of the pavements is a contributory factor to the very high incidence of falls in the parish.

Footpaths are also the subject of complaint by many respondents, mainly because of overgrown hedges and plants.

Parking

Ringwood generally has good short stay parking provision with car parks conveniently situated in the middle of the town. However, the layout of the main car park is the subject of much complaint as it only has one convoluted route round and no quick exit. This undoubtedly leads to a great deal of congestion and at times gridlock in the town, especially on Market Day. The layout should be looked at again and modified to avoid this unnecessary problem.

There are also considerable parking problems and consequent dangers around all the schools in Ringwood. Many residents find they are unable to enter and exit their roads/properties at school drop off and pick up times. More should be done to encourage children to walk and cycle to school.
There is a shortage of long stay places for those working in the town. Many of those that are available are taken early in the day by people working in Bournemouth who park and then take a minibus provided by their employer. Many people also park along the verges on the A338 to avoid the car parking charges. NFDC advocates “on street parking” in residential areas for long stay parking, which causes unnecessary congestion. This is disliked by residents. There is clearly a need for more ‘off street’ long stay parking and this may well provide a business opportunity. Ways of providing strategic parking provision within the town need to be explored.

Different groups of car park users have issues that must be addressed. Shoppers appear to be well provided for with many survey respondents remarking on the ‘excellent’ parking in Ringwood. However, it is anticipated that there will be increased demand for car parking spaces as more houses are built, better and more shops appear, the High Street/Market Place is potentially enhanced and ad hoc visits to the town increase as a result of more traffic on the A31 as already outlined above. There has been a reduction in the number of off-street car parking spaces in the town over the past ten to fifteen years, partly as a result of the provision of additional disabled parking bays. The increased traffic to the Olympic Games at Weymouth may offer particular opportunities to traders and the issue is that if people cannot park they are likely to go elsewhere.

However, those working in the town face considerable problems. More shops and businesses will lead to greater demand and those who do not need their car after arriving at work may be forced away from the car park. If those requiring their car for business cannot park, they may move elsewhere and some businesses have indicated that this is a problem.
There is currently no provision for those driving to Ringwood as a convenient place to park in order to connect with other transport, i.e. public network either for work or leisure including bus and coach services to airports/ports/railway stations and long distance services, and/or private such as car share or company transport. Demand is only set to increase. There is conflict with other parking requirements; insufficient time is allowed in present car parks; there are possible security and cost implications; unsatisfactory planning arrangements allow local authorities to make unilateral decisions to ban parking with no consideration of the effects elsewhere. Those in this group may have no connection with Ringwood but are doing the right thing in terms of traffic congestion and pollution and should be encouraged. In practice, none of the three County Councils, three Unitary Councils and five District Councils within a 20 mile radius has the duty, authority or budget to consider the strategic view. All would say there is no advantage to them individually.

It is submitted that the strategic view must be taken and if the location of a facility is within one administrative area but serves many, then it should be adopted. If funding cannot or will not be provided, then Central Government should step in.

The existing provision could be sufficient if those requiring long term parking could be accommodated elsewhere. As Ringwood is ideally situated on the crossing of two major highways, a park and ride relatively close to the town would have significant benefits. People would be encouraged to leave their vehicle at the site and use other transport to get to work allowing anyone to operate services to a multiplicity of destinations, car sharing facilities, long term parking and security. The car park should be incorporated into existing bus/coach service routes. The position is critical as it must be convenient but not cause disturbance to neighbours and not be obtrusive.
Accessibility

At present many of the shops and restaurants are not accessible to wheelians and, indeed, the uneven pavements constitute a hazard for those who are less mobile moving about the town. It is possible to access the whole town when using a wheelchair but steps need to be taken to ensure that this can be done safely and pleasurably. The old buildings make access to some shops and restaurants very difficult for wheelchair users but simple steps can be taken to overcome this problem. A sticker has been produced for shops that are accessible to display and in the future it is intended to publish information to highlight accessible premises.

The creation of walkways across the road raised to the level of the pavement where pedestrians would have right of way, would be desirable. These could be placed at regular intervals along the narrow stretch of the High Street and Southampton Road.

Community and Social Issues

- Lack of affordable housing
- Lack of facilities/opportunities for young people
- Lack of cinema/theatre and other amenities
- Crime and security
- Increase in anti-social behaviour, especially at night
- Public toilets
- Lack of NHS dentists
- Lack of play areas for children
Housing

Housing needs have already been covered extensively under the Economy section but the following problems contribute to the difficulties in providing sufficient housing. Lower cost housing is snapped up by buy-to-let landlords, taking stock out of the market for first time buyers, which include divorced people who are looking for lower cost housing within the area to enable them to be near children living with ex-partners. For people who are waiting on the NFDC’s Homesearch Register for social housing in the New Forest, there is currently a wait of up to eleven years for a two bedroom house or flat in the Ringwood area.

Ringwood currently does not attract young people to put down roots here because of the high cost of housing. Young people and families are vital to thriving communities. There is plenty of rented accommodation available for short term let but these do not meet the needs of those wishing to settle down. At the other end of the scale, lack of larger luxury flats for older or professional people means they settle in Bournemouth or Ferndown instead of staying in Ringwood as their housing needs change and so they are dislocated from their families and social networks.

There are low rates of second home ownership and vacant dwellings although, in Ringwood East and Sopley, 3.6% of the housing stock is either second homes or long term vacant. Around 20% of the housing stock in the parish fails to meet decent home standards. Grants administered by the District Council to deal with this have been cut by three quarters.

Nearly a quarter of all elderly people in Ringwood South live alone - well above District and national averages. There is also a lower life expectancy than in the rest of the parish, although it is still above
the national average. Over 7% of households in Ringwood South are classed as overcrowded. Poor housing conditions and other factors are adversely affecting the lives of children and the elderly, especially in Ringwood South, where there are lower rates of home ownership, with nearly a quarter of all households living in rented accommodation.

It is essential that, as housing is built, provision is made for additional surgeries, dentists and particularly schools where needed.

Amenities

There has been an overwhelming number of people (72%) expressing a desire for a cinema/theatre/concert hall/multi-purpose building. Such a building could fulfil many needs in the town, improving on and providing high quality amenities as well as improving youth provision with such facilities as a drop-in centre, youth pub and advice centre. Residents and businesses have asked for conference facilities and exhibition space and it is clear that such a facility would improve the quality of life in Ringwood.

There is a shortage of outdoor sporting provision, which is very low compared with the rest of the District. School pitches are already accommodating significant community use and there is currently no spare capacity. There is a great need for further improvement in provision of pitches for sport and for a multi use all weather sports area so that more sport can be offered within the town and healthier lifestyles encouraged. The Town Council is trying to address these problems with the provision of sporting facilities at Long Lane but it is essential that safe cycle ways and footpaths are provided to link open space and recreation facilities with residential areas as described above. It is also essential that the needs of disabled people are
taken into account in the design, accessibility and management of all open spaces and indoor and outdoor sport and recreation sites in the town.

Problems of access and pleasant facilities at Ringwood Recreation Centre have been highlighted and ways should be sought to improve the situation so that young people in particular are able to get there under their own steam. Apart from these problems, Ringwood is adequately served for indoor sports facilities at present.

There is undoubtedly a serious shortage of provision of amenities for young people to gather together in a safe and pleasant environment. The Word On The Street research project clearly identified that meeting friends was the favourite activity of the overwhelming majority of young people. There is a lack of information on what is available in many areas, for example training in basic learning skills such as reading and writing, help to move from education to employment and advice on housing and other issues. A forum of representatives of those involved with young people and of providers could ensure that information is exchanged and made readily available. It would also ensure that a strategic approach is adopted for the provision of facilities for young people.
Security

“It is generally a peaceful place where it feels safe to live with no ethnic/racial tensions and low crime”

This quote from the Love it, Hate it, I Wish survey is echoed by many but, equally, will not be true for those who have to suffer the effects of others’ anti-social and criminal behaviour. Ringwood South’s crime rate is the highest in the New Forest with the incidence of theft being almost twice as high as elsewhere in the District.

18% of rowdy and nuisance calls, 47.2% of public order offences and 27% of assaults (excluding domestic) are known to be alcohol related. (Crime and Disorder Partnership).

There are many “distraction burglaries” in East Poulner because of the elderly population. There is a very high rate of thefts from motor vehicles, and vehicle thefts, especially in the area of the Bickerley, and police report that these crimes are committed by a small number of people who have a negative impact on the community that is out of all proportion to their numbers.

The Police and many residents have identified areas where streets are either unlit or very poorly lit. These should be dealt with to not only decrease criminal activity and make people feel safer, but also to decrease accidents.

There is undoubtedly an enhanced fear of crime over and above the risk of being a victim in reality. Steps should be taken to reassure people, whilst at the same time educating them in staying safe.
Health

Residents in Ringwood go to five different centres for hospital treatment, Bournemouth, Poole, Salisbury, Lymington and Southampton. There are considerable difficulties for patients and visitors in reaching the hospitals because of lack of public transport – in fact it is impossible to get to Lymington this way. There are voluntary hospital transport schemes in the town.

Whilst residents express satisfaction with the doctors in Ringwood, statistics have highlighted a number of areas that need improvement. The Avon Valley has the worst rate in the South West Health District for seeing a doctor within one or two days. Rates have dropped by 8% to 89%, the only area in the District to have fallen. There are also concerns around the prescription of certain drugs that fall short of best practice.

The health statistics in the Avon Valley show other areas of considerable concern, such as hospital admission rates for falls and hypothermia which are more than twice as high as anywhere else in the South West District and are higher than they were five years ago. The figures for falls are in direct contrast with those of the South West Forest, which has a similar age profile and has one of the lowest hospital admissions rates. Falls are preventable and this is an area that needs looking at urgently.

It is very difficult to obtain information easily in the town on, for example, medical services and special clinics. Doctors’ surgeries in the town have proven to be an inadequate source of information on specific health problems. They do not seem to hold lists in reception that they can refer to and receptionists were unable to say if there were clinics available for drugs, alcohol or anything except the young people’s drop in on Wednesdays at the surgery. There is no drug drop-in and those seeking help have to go through the referral system. Some way of ensuring that this information is freely and easily available would be of great benefit to residents.
Although there are three dental surgeries and eight dentists in Ringwood town, there is only one NHS dentist whose list is full. There are lower than average levels of dental treatment generally which could indicate insufficient NHS cover. There is one NHS dentist for every 2,387 people in England. To be in line with that rate, there should be at least five NHS dentists in Ringwood.

It is recommended that a group be set up with representation from agencies and other concerned bodies, including members of the public, to examine these issues and lobby for improvements in the areas of concern.

Young People

The Love It, Hate It, I Wish survey produced an exceptionally high response from young people, with over 1,300 replies. Interestingly many of their replies correlated with those given by adults. There were, however, some distinct differences between the answers given by the younger children as opposed to the older ones.

The younger the children are, the more they value their immediate environment. They love Ringwood for its position in the New Forest, open spaces, play areas, the animals and wildlife, its ‘beautiful houses’. They do not, at that age, like to see change to their environment. It is disturbing and threatens their sense of security. They are also very aware of degradation of their environment and 60% specifically say that they hate litter, graffiti, vandalism and dog excrement. They hate noisy cars, traffic and pollution. With the level at which they walk and their sensitivity to visual and aural stimuli, children’s lives are negatively affected by dirt, mess and too much ‘busyness’. 35% of children say that they hate the public toilets and the smell around them.
The anti-social behaviour of some teenagers is a matter of concern for many children and, as a result, some say that they would like more police and security cameras.

Children and young people enjoy shopping but feel there are insufficient shops to cater for their interests and needs. Public transport is too expensive for them to take advantage of the choice available in the larger centres.

Children love Carvers, all the sports centres, swimming pools and local attractions such as the skate park and go-karting. However, many complain that there is not enough for children to do, for example insufficient space for 'boys to ride their bikes.' This would suggest a need for more play parks and greater access to open space. There are also good facilities at Toad Corner but in common with the rest of the District, the quantity of space for children and young people is not considered to be adequate and there are large residential areas which are not within easy reach of any formal provision. The development of facilities at Long Lane should help this situation but access is a problem because of the distance from the town. There are very few children who live within five or ten minutes walk of even informal open space, let alone to an equipped children's play area. The lack of open space in the town is having a negative impact upon children’s lives.

By the time they reach adolescence, young people’s priorities and perception have clearly and naturally changed. Their answers to the survey show that they still love many of the same characteristics of the town that they loved whilst children, although the Forest, animals and wildlife feature less strongly. However, they are much more aware of lack of facilities and amenities for their age group, with 45% of them complaining of having nothing to do. There is a youth club in the town and a drop-in has operated at Belinda’s, the bakery, for nearly ten years. This has
recently moved to the tennis pavilion on Carvers and provides an invaluable facility for all young people in town who wish to use it. Everyone is made welcome there and given help and support when needed. However, there is a need for more drop-in facilities, especially north of the A31 in Poulner, and for facilities incorporating a centre for confidential advice on health and personal problems.

Both children and young people want a cinema and other facilities and new shops. The older age group feels the lack of public transport more strongly. At an age when they should be developing their independence, they are prevented from doing so and denied opportunity, both for leisure activities and in the job market.

Lack of open space also has a negative impact on adolescents’ lives. They need to be able to let off steam physically and their favourite activity is meeting their friends, but where? Pubs are clearly not an option but their needs are natural and sociable and should be fulfilled. Like the children, few live within ten minutes of equipped young people’s space or of informal open space, but informal open space is not really what they are seeking. There is a need for the formation of a steering group to take a strategic view on children’s and young people’s play and activity areas.

It is suggested that a forum be set up for all those involved in the provision of services for children and young people to work together to ensure that there is no overlap and that their needs are catered for.
Conclusion

The findings from this plan have resulted in the Strategic Implementation Programme, the list of projects designed to produce the desired outcomes as outlined above. Divided into short, medium and long term, the projects should deliver a programme of improvements that will result in a better quality of life and greater opportunities for all. The SIP will be implemented by the Town Plan Partnership Steering Group which will comprise six Councillors and six members of the public and will report directly to Ringwood Town Council’s Policy and Finance Committee. It is intended that the SIP be reviewed annually to ensure that it remains relevant and that its targets are on track.
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(alphabetical order within the groups)

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