

To note: Loughton High Road

The attached report has been commissioned by EFDC Officer from a specialist external consultant.

Work on this report was carried out between December 2020 and April 2021 so some of the observations may refer to issues and conditions that existed at that time and may have been subsequently addressed.

The report is often linked with development proposals focused on the immediate actions required to improve the town centres. Further reports will be brought forward, often associated with more significant investment and development to cover the medium and long-term improvement of the town centres.

The immediate resources required to address priority town centre issues were identified in the EFDC 2021/22 Budget or will be supported by specific Covid 19 recovery grants made available by the Government.

It is intended as with the Waltham Abbey and Ongar town centre reports, that all approved recommendations will be project managed in detail, assigned to managers, given timelines, supported by identified resources and their delivery and impact monitored.

The reports have been produced after extensive consultation. This consultation with local members and other key partners will continue.

Although not specifically mentioned in this report, work on the ground will be linked with other initiatives such as sustainable transport with sub projects of demand responsive transport, cycling routes, electric car charging points and various greening and tree planting initiatives being taken forward as per our Green Infra-structure Policy and climate change action plan.

Comments only for Cabinet: Loughton High Road

The report is generally positive and has only been edited with regard to minor language changes.

The report mentions the Retail Park and EFDC as a significant landowner and infers both positive leverage and impacts on the Broadway.

The only other issue of note is how active the District wishes to be about frontage, preserving retail space at the core of the town and other associated actions. At one level there is an option of a "Schedule D" protection of the town centre, through an updated Planning Regs on frontages, signs, colour palette etc, through to informal guidance and encouragement. It should be noted that Government has become more permissive recently regarding change of use and similar but a balance between a market driven adaptive look and feel to the place, versus a Planning determined look, needs to be considered. There is also been some (opposition) noise around creating a formal conservation area and whilst this may be protective of what is there now, it could severely limit the ability of the area to develop and thrive for the future.

High Road, Loughton Regeneration Study and Proposals

“The most successful high streets and town centres will need to change to reflect the communities they serve by transforming themselves into community hub, playing to their strengths of offering human interaction and a unique sense of place and community”

HM Government response to an enquiry into High Streets and Town Centres in 2030 (presented to Parliament in 2019)



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AUTHORS NOTE:

The contents of this report and the recommendations made are based on Studio 3 Ltd's view of the town centre as a whole and the actions which should be taken to regenerate the towns and increase their general attractiveness to residents, visitors and businesses. Absolutely no consideration has been given as to whether the suggested actions and/or any related costs are the responsibility of the County, District, Town/Parish Councils or any other body.

What is crucial is that the different Councils, Town Partnerships, businesses and residents come together to agree priorities and for each organisation to put in place the necessary actions within their remit/responsibility to make the required improvements.

The regeneration of our town centres is the responsibility of all stakeholders. Key to these changes are the businesses, residents and Town/Parish Councils themselves. They are closest to the town and really know and understand the town and the needs and requirements of the local community. Their counsel and guidance should both therefore be provided and encouraged at all times.

The reinvention of our town centres will only be achieved by a joint and collaborative approach utilising the knowledge, expertise and skills of a range of people, bodies and organisations. No single person or organisation can achieve this on their own and everyone has their own specific part to play. It is essential that any plans have the buy in of all connected persons and that all parties support each other through the process.

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Foreword

Epping Forest District Council is reviewing a number of its town centres with the objective of regenerating them and making them a better and more attractive place to live, work, visit and play. There have been numerous projects over the years to generally improve the amenities, however the UK as a whole is now in the midst of a new era which will undoubtedly change high streets up and down the country. Covid 19 has unexpectedly changed the way we live and also as a result, our relationship with our local high street and/or town centre. More people are now shopping locally, and more people are working from home, which in turn is encouraging them to use their local amenities on a more regular basis. The Grimsey Review advises that high streets need to be re-invented as unique community hubs, designed around health, education, culture, housing, leisure and arts and crafts, along with retail shops. If towns can get it right, consumers should emerge from the pandemic with a stronger sense of community and a desire to support their local town centre. Strong high streets can build communities, keep crime at bay and foster civic pride and togetherness.

A YouGov poll revealed that only 9% of Britons want life to return to “normal” after the coronavirus outbreak is over. The positive from the above is that this is a great time to engage with our local communities and reinvent our town centres while the focus is on them and before things automatically revert to the “old” normal.

The Grimsey Review goes on to advise that for town centres and high streets to thrive and rediscover their community purpose we need to see:

Localism - A massive shift in power to local communities and a renewed focus on localism. Local people must be empowered to redesign their own high streets and have a say on the businesses, services and amenities that occupy it.

Leadership - Local leaders should be valued and recognised. Candidates for leadership roles should be selected for having a broad range of dynamic and collaborative skills in order to get the best out of communities. Local leaders who embrace change and are brave enough to imagine a new world have a better chance of succeeding.

Fewer cars, more green spaces - fewer streets and a huge expansion of green space, parks and town squares. Our towns must no longer be designed around the car as people learn to appreciate the benefit of open spaces.

Other important takeaways from the Grimsey Review that should be considered is the fact that there is a growing view among young adults that businesses need to be accountable to more than their bottom line and for the wellbeing of people and communities. It goes on to confirm that 72% of millennials (aged 24 to 38) would rather spend their money on an experience or an event than buying things and that this is reflected in the shift towards leisure, arts, culture and dining on the high streets. Deloitte’s 2019 Millennial Survey showed that millennials will patronise and support companies that align with their values and make a positive impact on society. Generation Z’s (aged 5 to 23) are also socially focussed with their opinions on companies formed by their ethics, practices and social impact.

The Grimsey Review confirms that town and high street plans should put sustainability and the environment at the heart of everything; should base their development on quality of life and experiences and not blind mass consumerism; should recognise and reward great local leadership; and allow local communities to develop their places to compete for people to live, work, visit and play.

Introduction

Loughton is the largest town within Epping Forest District Council's area with an estimated population of circa 33,000 people (Source: UK Office for National Statistics) and an average house price of £606,898 (Source: Zoopla). It is a lovely town set on the east side of Epping Forest. It provides a wide range of residential property across various neighbourhoods, is home to two main shopping areas, a retail park and an industrial estate. Loughton is close to the M11 with easy access to central London and has London Underground available from Debden and Loughton stations with access to Liverpool Street in 30 minutes. Although one town, Loughton is split into 2 main shopping areas – The Broadway (known locally as Debden Broadway) and the High Road. Each of these have their own characteristics, anomalies and requirements. As a result, I have chosen to split the study into two and report on each separately. This report concentrates on the High Road.

On the whole, Loughton is an affluent area, has a unique character and is a popular and vibrant place to live. It has a real community feel to it with a wide range of clubs, associations and community-based activity. In current Covid times Loughton is attractive as a town as it is pretty self-sufficient.

I am concerned that the current scale and mix of retail may be difficult to sustain in the longer term. The northern end of the High Road is home to over 160 mixed use shops. Although there is currently a vacancy rate of slightly lower than the national average, it can be seen that some of the national chains/brands have already withdrawn and I am concerned that this may be the beginning of a downward spiral. Unusually, the High Road has 6 banks. These I think will gradually close as, with the growth in digital banking, branch networks are no longer required. In addition to empty units, this will undoubtedly lead to a reduction in footfall. I do not see this town as a destination other than for locals yet the High Road houses 23 restaurants. I cannot see that these can all be viable. This will no doubt lead to further closures and more empty shops. Finally, I am aware that the quality of retailers now opening on the High Road does not meet the requirements of the area's more affluent consumers and that they will therefore shop elsewhere. I really think that the District and Town Councils, together with other local stakeholders and the Loughton High Road Town Centre Partnership, need to get together urgently to discuss this and put together a long-term plan for the town's future development and success.

Loughton is a great town to develop and adapt to the changing needs mentioned above. It already has a superb town centre, community space and activities and an abundance of green spaces. The town needs to ensure that it is modelled around the community, to make a more vibrant and relative space, and its residents and businesses encouraged and empowered to make the transformation into a town they can continue to be proud of. Success is about breathing life back into the High Road and The Broadway, about giving residents and visitors reasons to visit the town centre other than just the shops and making the experience enriching and the town centre a place to be seen in.

It is felt that the emphasis should be very much on developing a town, in the first instance, for residents and businesses. This regeneration and renewed enthusiasm in the town will result in a town centre that local people can be proud of with a brighter more buoyant market, new shops and a range of interesting activities and events. This in turn will provide for a more interesting place for visitors and make it somewhere they will be happy to dwell and as a result frequent more of the town's shops, businesses and attractions.

1 Quick Wins

There are a number of matters which could be addressed quickly and cheaply and could make considerable improvements to the High Road:

- ***Sweep/clean the High Road on an ongoing basis and ensure that litter bins are emptied and litter is cleared from the street/pavement.***
- ***Arrange for the cleaning/redecoration/repair of all street furniture – lamp posts, bollards, railings, planters, litter bins, benches etc.***
- ***Replace/re-lay broken and uneven pavement – particularly to the northern end of the High Road.***
- ***Tidy green spaces/ tree surrounds etc and weed kill as necessary.***
- ***Consideration should be given to the addition of further cycle racks/hoops.***
- ***Consideration should be given to the provision of further planters to soften/add character to the central retail section of the High Road.***

2 Town Management

2.1 Town Centre Leadership

Town centre regeneration is about localism and local leadership and the way to make this work is to provide local leadership with its finger on the pulse and with a connection to the local community. Therefore, and accepting that this project is being driven by Epping Forest District Council, it is suggested that buy in, action and leadership should be provided by Loughton Town Council with the support of a Town(s) Centre Manager appointed by the District Council.

All Town Councillors are local and as a result should be able to bring the local community and businesses together and develop a strong visionary plan to reinforce the distinctive heritage of the town, assist in making the town centre a real community hub and making Loughton a far more attractive town for locals and visitors alike. The role of an independent Town Centre Manager will be critical to providing professional expertise and an unbiased view on what is needed locally.

The great thing about Loughton is that it already has great community spirit and an extremely active residents' association. I am certain that all of these working together with the Town and District Councils will produce excellent results.

Recommendations:

- 1) Engage with Loughton Town Council (LTC).***
- 2) Obtain LTC commitment to the scheme and to providing leadership and support.***
- 3) Work with LTC and Loughton Residents' Association to establish and action a realistic plan.***

2.2 Town(s) Centre Manager

It is suggested that the Council commits to the appointment of a Town Centre Manager initially on a two-year fixed term basis. The manager would act as a single point of contact to receive ideas, thoughts and views from local stakeholders and as such, would be known and trusted by businesses, retailers and residents alike. They would work with the Town Council to ensure that standards are adhered to and that the town is as vibrant and attractive to local people and visitors as possible. A review of the post would be undertaken after 12 months to assess progress against the Town Centre action plan and the success of interventions and extended if necessary.

NB. As a part of its regeneration, Stockton-on-Tees council pulled together a multi-disciplinary team of market management, street licensing, civil enforcement and business support to manage the town centre. Stockton is a much larger town than Loughton, however the principles of hands-on organisation and management are much the same.

Recommendations:

- 4) Write Job profile and agree responsibilities for Town Centre Manager post.**
- 5) Post to be part of EFDC's Economic Development team within Strategic Planning Directorate.**
- 6) Town Team establishment to be priority.**

2.3 Establishment of a Town Team

To achieve the required changes, considerable two-way dialogue needs to be sought from the town's residents and businesses. Buy-in from the community is important to ensure there is a need or requirement for any proposed changes and that as a result these are carried out with the support of the town. Loughton already has an active residents' association and two Town Forums – one for The Broadway and one for the High Road and it is thought that these could be used as a catalyst for pulling together a formal Town Team.

It is important that the Town Team is made up of a cross section of the community including residents, businesses and retailers. A fair representation of age, sex and race should be included and input should be encouraged from organisations such as educational establishments, religious groups, social groups (e.g. Scouts etc) together with members of the town council and tourism and visitor groups.

Recommendations:

- 7) Decide with LTC the make-up of a Town Team and what it will be called.**
- 8) If utilising current Town Partnerships, engage with and obtain commitment and support from Chairmen and Town Forums as a whole.**
- 9) Arrange initial meeting to establish parameters and put in place a plan for town team development and action.**
- 10) EFDC to work with LTC and Loughton High Road Town Centre Partnership (LHRTCP) to establish vision and format for a new 21st century High Road.**

2.4 Attracting New Businesses and Brands

In conjunction with the Town Team, work could be done to identify key brands, businesses and/or other organisations to attract to the High Road and then steps taken to secure them. As the landlord for some sections of the High Road is Epping Forest District Council, there is a great opportunity for the Council to encourage a good mix of retailers ensuring that the needs and requirements of the community are met. In addition thought could also be given to holding an empty unit for short term rental for pop-up shops, start-up ventures, new/irregular non high street retailers to test the water for their market and for more experiential and art-based activities including exhibitions, shows, demonstrations etc.

As mentioned elsewhere in this report, EFDC has a plan for one of the parades of shops in the High Road. Details of the proposed tenant(s) should be sought and consideration given to their suitability to the town. (Note- At the time of writing there were vacancies that have since been let as of June 2021)

Recommendations:

- 11) Put in place a programme to encourage new businesses.***
- 12) Target prospective businesses.***
- 13) Communicate requirements to commercial agents.***
- 14) Consider use of an empty unit for non-conventional retailing i.e. pop ups, start-ups, experiential etc.***
- 15) Seek confirmation of proposed use of EFDC's parade of shops.***

3 Town Offer

3.1 High Road, Loughton

Loughton and the High Road could prove to be a perfect example of the "20 minute neighbourhood". There is everything at hand within a 20-minute public-transport trip, bike ride or walk from home – work, shopping, education, healthcare, community facilities, recreation and sport. There is also a fantastic community spirit supported by numerous community groups, church groups, clubs and associations.

The High Road is a mixed-use road ranging from mixed retail to churches, to community organisations, to offices and also residential use. There is a mixture of property ranging from Lopping Hall dating back to 1884, to 1960s parades of shops, the more recent development of the M&S Food Store in the 2000s and various developments in between.

The northern, retail end, of the High Road is quite busy and dynamic and has a great atmosphere. I visited the High Road on a warm September lunchtime last year and experienced a Mediterranean type atmosphere with people sitting outside restaurants, bars and coffee shops, eating, drinking and socialising.

Having said this, I have concerns about the High Road and its future. I would suggest that it could be on the verge of falling into decline and that as a result its retail footprint could reduce significantly as will its footfall and therefore its viability as a town centre. My reasons for these thoughts are as follows:

- Some of the larger brand names and national chains have vacated fairly spacious premises and these at the time of writing now remain empty. These brands are generally anchor stores to High Streets and serve to draw in footfall which other retailers, coffee shops and restaurants benefit from. Once

one or two of these anchor stores go, it puts pressure on other brands who will tend to follow, which then puts pressure on the remaining high street.

- Extremely unusually for a town of the size of Loughton, the High Road is home to six banks. With increased digital banking and the reduced need for in-person banking and therefore a branch network, we are seeing banks withdraw from high streets. Again, banks bring footfall, so any loss of banks from the High Road would further impact its viability. I understand that HSBC has already advised of its withdrawal from Loughton in August 2021.
- Loughton has 23 restaurants in the High Road. As it isn't particularly a tourist/visitor destination and I don't believe that any of these restaurants would be classed as destination type restaurants, they need therefore to rely on Loughton's local population to keep them in business. Even without Covid, I would suspect that there are insufficient potential customers to keep all but the very best restaurants going, so would expect to see further empty retail outlets as a result.
- A large percentage of the population in and around Loughton are high net worth individuals with substantial spending power. The type of shops however that this community would frequent in Loughton are reducing and being replaced with less attractive alternatives.
- Westfield Stratford, with its attractive range of retail outlets, is only a 20-minute train journey from Loughton.

In short, my view is that Loughton High Road needs immediate and urgent attention to maintain it as a popular, busy and attractive town centre. EFDC as the District Council and also a landlord of a large section of the High Road is in prime position to lead this work and in conjunction with Loughton Town Council, the Loughton Residents' Association and the Loughton High Road Town Centre Partnership together with residents and businesses, turn the High Road into a busy, vibrant and dynamic town centre and destination for the 21 Century.

3.2 Retail

Loughton High Road's retail offer is large and consists of over 160 shops. Its current vacancy rate (February 2021) is circa 10% which is slightly lower than the national average however some of the vacant units are owned by EFDC and are being kept purposefully vacant with a plan which at the current time EFDC is unable to disclose due to commercial sensitivity.

The High Road is very much mixed use with a fantastic selection and variety of shops. As could be expected, the largest uses in the High Road are restaurants at 14% of units and Hair and Beauty at 13%. There are 2 supermarkets – Sainsbury's and Morrisons and an M&S Food Store. Other larger users are estate agents at 7%, takeaways at 6%, opticians at 4% and unusually high, banks at 4%.

With fairly wide pavements at various points along the High Road, there is good opportunity for street trading and outdoor cafes, restaurants etc.

As previously explained, I am concerned that it will be difficult to maintain the High Road in its current form and feel that careful consideration needs to be given to its make-up and role in modern society. There are one or two shops which I feel would be attractive to Loughton's more affluent residents. These would include Gail's Bakers and The Ginger Pig butchers, together with one or two restaurants. My view is that work needs to be done to attract more of the same. Although I understand that McDonalds has pulled out of its proposed development, I would suggest that this is the type of retailer the High Road doesn't want.

Another varying element of high streets is the progression of the weekend and evening economies. We now live in a seven day a week world with extended working hours. Businesses need to adjust to the needs and requirements of their customers, and this may now include opening longer/different hours, opening on Sundays etc. The town centre manager could discuss these matters with retailers and see if there is any scope for taking these considerations further with a view to increasing footfall and also, subsequently, trade.

With EFDC being the landlord for large sections of the High Road and also some of the larger units, there is a great opportunity to shape and control the types of tenants, shops and uses moving forward. In partnership with the existing traders the High Road could be developed to offer an innovative and distinctive mixed use together with a range of pop up and temporary shops and also various experiential and community-based services.

At the current time people are tending to shop nearer to home and using their local town centres as opposed to going to the larger out of town shopping centres. Retailers should take advantage of this and go that extra mile to ensure a clean, safe and welcoming environment offering a comprehensive range of products and services. If customers can see the benefit of shopping local and enjoy it, they are less likely to change their habits when the pandemic is brought under control.

Recommendations:

16) EFDC to confirm details of their plans for the High Road and incorporate this within proposals.

17) Town Centre Manager to work with LHRTCP and retailers to increase the attractiveness and draw of the retail centre with a view to increasing the viability of the High Road and work towards aforementioned vision and redesign.

3.3 Epping Forest Retail Park

The Epping Forest Retail park situated near Debden Station will undoubtedly have some impact on the High Road and its retailers, however I feel that overall this effect would be minimal. This is due mainly to the make up of the retail park and its range of tenants, which I don't think will particularly pull trade away from the High Road.

If the High Road can be redeveloped as a unique and experiential shopping destination, then the retail park will provide an additional attraction to the area with the more every day type retailers.

Recommendations:

18) High Road should consider developing a place and offer which is complimentary to the retail park with a view to adding a further dimension to Loughton .

3.4 High Road Market

The Grimsey Review highlighted the importance of markets and their positive effect on residents. In a report by the Institute of Place Management (2015) it explained why markets are economically, socially and politically critical for town centres. The report also confirmed that markets can generate footfall increases of circa 25% and have been shown to increase retail sales with market visitors spending money in other shops. The report then goes on to explain that markets provide low barriers to entry and as result can encourage new businesses and nurture retail innovation.

Loughton has been holding a farmers' market every second Sunday of the month since 2002. This market is extremely popular with local people. It has become a community event and has also been pulling in people from outside the immediate area. Although currently cancelled due to Covid, it is a welcome addition to the town and moving forward should be encouraged, supported and if possible extended.

A busy and successful market will serve as an additional draw to the High Road and make it more of a destination, whilst at the same time providing additional footfall for High Roads retailers.

Recommendations:

- 19) EFDC to work with LTC and LRA to support and drive the market.**
- 20) Consideration to be given to expanding the market and/or introducing other feature markets i.e. Antiques, French, Italian etc. and doing this in conjunction with The Broadway.**

3.5 Signage

The biggest issues in respect of signage are the lack of signs from the station to the town centre and also to Epping Forest, which must be one of the town's biggest attractions. There is also a lack of signage from the High Road to Loughton Broadway.

Recommendations:

- 21) Generally review town signage and implement new signage as required.**
- 22) Increase signage from the station to the High Road and Epping Forest.**
- 23) Increase signage from the High Road to The Broadway.**

3.6 Tourism/Visitors

Loughton isn't a great tourist/visitor destination, although it does have easy and close access to Epping Forest. The one thing that could be done to attract more visitors is to remodel the town and make it a busy and bustling High Road with lots of interesting and experiential shops and venues, together with trendy boutiques and niche outlets and also destination restaurants, bars and cafes and the Mediterranean café culture which goes with it.

Recommendations:

- 24) EFDC/LTC to work with Loughton High Road Town Centre Partnership to put on key events to increase visitor interest in the Town.**
- 25) Loughton High Road Town Centre Partnership to encourage support and participation from local retailers and businesses for any High Road events.**

3.7 Loughton High Road Community hub

Within Loughton, it is suggested that 2 community hubs are set up – one centrally in the High Road and another on The Broadway. These could be used to establish a place where public opinions could be shared and discussed and a centre of community well-being for the area with exhibition space and also perhaps space for workshops, demonstrations, pop up shops etc. This community hub could also provide functions such as a Police help desk, mini job centre and other community based initiatives. Provision of these increased services will encourage more people into the town centre and will lead to them using other elements of the town centre at the same time.

I would normally recommend that the community hub is set up in the Library. This may be a consideration for the High Road, although it is slightly “off pitch” in Traps Hill. Having said this, if the Library was to be used then work should be done to ensure that the High Road is advised of and able to participate in any events and activities.

It is noted from my various conversations that outside of the specific clubs and associations based in Loughton, there is a lack of facilities for young people. This is something that could also be considered by the community hub.

Recommendations:

- 26) Set up community hub in line with the model being proposed for Waltham Abbey and Epping.**
- 27) Publicise community hub.**
- 28) Pull together program of events and activities for the year.**

3.8 Public Facilities

If the High Road is going to meet people’s needs, it should be reviewed to ensure that there are the required public facilities. These facilities would include adequate seating for all sections of the community in all areas, open, clean and functional public toilets, adequate lighting at all times across all areas of the town centre, bike racks/hoops in easily accessible places and strategically placed dog poo bins.

Recommendations:

- 29) Review benches and seating on the High Road and ensure they are adequate for the needs of the town.**
- 30) Review bike racks/hoops within the town centre and at other destinations and ensure they are adequate for the needs of the town.**
- 31) Review dog poo bins in High Road and other areas as appropriate and ensure they are adequate to the needs of the town.**
- 32) Ensure that all areas are adequately lit in and around the High Road, including car parks to the rear of the shops and footpaths etc.**

3.9 Wi-fi and Digital Presence

The digital age and the need for connectivity is increasingly important for numerous sections of the community and as a result I would suggest free wi-fi availability within the High Road.

It should be acknowledged that people are now shopping differently and that circa 30% of retail sales are being done online (Office of National Statistics, Aug 2020). This figure is up from 21.9% at the beginning of March 2020 and the beginning of the Covid 19 lock down. Regardless of the pandemic, online sales will continue to grow, and retail expert KPMG predicts the figure rising to 50% by 2025. As a result, retail businesses need to adjust their business models accordingly and develop their offer for both markets.

As a part of adding a wi-fi option to the High Road a social media presence should be developed enabling online and offline businesses. Mobile technologies and virtual shopping should be used to enhance the consumer town centre experience and in turn increase footfall.

Consideration should be given to bringing in a third-party contractor such as Maybe (www.maybetech.com) to develop social media/town centre/retailer collaboration.

Recommendations:

- 33) Put in place free WI-FI along the northern, “town centre” end of the High Road and publicise.**
- 34) Agree way forward in respect of social media strategy/presence and execute accordingly.**
- 35) Arrange for assistance and support for retailers in establishing an online presence.**

3.10 Epping Forest District Council

It was suggested by various parties that neither EFDC nor LTC were particularly receptive to working with the town centres on various initiatives. Moving forward, it is important that all parties work together to make the town as viable as possible for residents, visitors and the businesses.

It's not in my remit to comment on specific matters raised concerning EFDC/LTC but would hope that the appointment of a Town Centre Manager would build and maintain relationships with both the High Road and The Broadway and the town's businesses.

Recommendations:

- 36) EFDC Town Centre Manager to be actively involved in building and maintaining relationships with the High Road and The Broadway and their tenants.**

3.11 Pedestrianisation

I know that thought had been given to pedestrianising large chunks of the High Road. My thought on this is that it would be a lot of effort for little gain and that overall it may lead to a reduction in footfall. The High Road has plenty of space with wide pavement areas, various greens and service roads to some parades of shops that can be used, subject to permissions, for town centre events, activities and initiatives.

If the town centre becomes a busy hub and destination and shopping habits change then the idea of pedestrianisation may become viable. For the time being however it is something I would discount completely.

4 Appearance

The High Road has a long retail centre at the northern end, made up of various developments built over a long period of time. This has resulted in a mixture of designs and architecture and a selection of varying shopfronts and shop front design. Although adding interest to the High Road, it can also make it look untidy and disjointed and highlight retailers who aren't doing so well or have no consideration for the look of their business as a part of the general street scene.

My view is that the Councils should work with landlords and retailers to generally improve the street side view of the High Road and its aesthetics. The licensing/planning teams could also play a more active role by ensuring that new and replacement shop fronts are fairly uniform and in keeping with the requirements and feel of the town and that applications for street trading licenses are granted confirming strict terms and conditions in respect of space allowable, trading times, collection of litter, A-boards etc. Considerations should be given to some form of demarcation outside each store over which seating, A-boards and other retail paraphernalia, is allowed.

Recommendation:

37) EFDC to work with landlords and retailers to improve the appearance of the High Road.

38) EFDC planning/licensing teams to consider appropriateness of new/replacement shops/shop fronts to town design and police street trading licenses.

4.1 Street Scene

Work has been done to develop the High Road roughly between M&S and The Drive. The High Road north of The Drive however is in desperate need of attention with uneven and broken pavements, road surfaces in disrepair and old-fashioned lamp posts, which I understand are unable to supply power for that end of the High Road's Christmas lights.

Recommendation:

39) Refurbish road and pavement surfaces at northern end of High Road and replace street lights with modern alternatives.

4.2 Trees and Planters

Tree lined pedestrian routes and landscaped areas all contribute to civic pride and generally make a town more attractive. Although there are a number of trees along the High Road and some planters suspended from lamp posts, I am concerned that overall the area looks fairly bleak and quite hard. The addition of further planters would be a great improvement. In addition, I understand that a number of trees have been removed in the past. Consideration should be given to replacing these and also potentially adding some more.

Recommendations:

40) Review current "green" townscape and work to develop and improve.

5 Access

Town centres need to recognise that Co2 emissions have to be reduced and as a result there is much more emphasis on ensuring a reduced reliance on cars. To this end, town centres need to ensure their accessibility via other methods of transport and provide for these methods accordingly. In addition to reducing carbon emissions this will also encourage the use of the town centre by a wider range of the community via various methods of transport.

Simply stopping car access and reducing or taking away parking spaces, doesn't resolve this problem. Undoubtedly people will still want to access the High Road by car however there is a balance to be had between encouraging pedestrian, cycling and public transport access and then gradually reducing provision for motor vehicles as other methods of travel develop and gain traction.

For generations urban areas have been designed exclusively around the car. This now has to change and town centres developed to provide attractive, walkable and cyclable physical space.

5.1 Cycling

In a town the size of Loughton, all residents should be able to access the town centres, the retail park, the towns various green and public spaces, leisure centre and attractions via a network of secure, safe and clearly marked cycle paths and routes.

In addition, the town should also provide for cycle racks/hoops at the various easily accessible destinations to enable the bikes to be safely secured.

Recommendations:

41) Review cycling accessibility in Loughton particularly around main roads, shopping hubs, attractions and green spaces and make arrangements to provide a network of secure, safe and clearly marked cycle paths and routes.

5.2 Car Parks and Parking

I have not come across a lot of comments or complaints about parking in the High Road. My only observation here is that perhaps the pay-and-display parking on the High Road could provide 30 minutes free.

It was pointed out that there was very little parking for shop staff – perhaps parking permits could be issued by the Council in certain parking areas.

Recommendations:

42) Make parking on the High Road 30 minutes free of charge.

43) Consider parking permits for retailers in certain parking areas.

6 Consultation

6.1 Market Research

In addition to thoughts and expertise of the author, consultation for this report has been obtained from the following:

Epping Forest District Council
Loughton Town Council
Loughton Residents' Association
Loughton Broadway Town Centre Partnership
Debden Traders' Association
Loughton High Road Town Centre Partnership
Various councillors and other prominent/influential Loughton (Debden) residents
Various Broadway and High Road Retailers
Independent Landlords
Various Loughton residents

It is accepted that additional research will be required from residents, retailers and businesses to move the ideas in this report forward. It is felt however that if the initiative is going to be Community/Town Council driven then the research should be carried out more locally.

7. Sources of Additional Support

High Streets Task Force (www.highstreettaskforce.org.uk) – supporting communities and local government to transform their high streets.

Maybe (www.maybetech.com) – A smarter approach to social media

Action List	Priority
<i>EFDC/Highway Rangers to complete “quick wins”</i>	1
<i>Discuss with and establish Town Leadership Team</i>	1
<i>Form Town Team/refocus Town Centre Partnerships</i>	1
<i>Appoint Town Centre Manager</i>	1
EFDC, LTC, LRA and LHRTCP to discuss future of Loughton High Road and develop longer term plan	1
<i>Establish community hub</i>	1
<i>Provide for additional seating, bike racks/hoops, dog poo bins as appropriate</i>	2
<i>Talk to retailers re shop fronts, A-boards, pavement trading etc</i>	1
<i>Review Street Trading/Market licenses for the High Road and action accordingly</i>	1
<i>Review High Road market and put in place plans to re-establish and grow it</i>	1
<i>Put in place plans to review town cycle paths and implement findings</i>	2
<i>Review parking charges as per report and implement recommendations</i>	1
<i>Review town WI-FI proposal and put in place findings</i>	2
<i>Develop town centre social media presence</i>	2
<i>Complete research on thoughts and considerations of residents and businesses – incorporate and implement where appropriate</i>	1
<i>Review new businesses required on the High Road and take steps to attract</i>	3
<i>Review the “green” street scene on the High Road, consider the addition of planters etc and action accordingly</i>	1
<i>Carry out all general maintenance/refurbishment recommendations</i>	2