



Lymington Borough Seal 1686



LYMINGTON TOWN CENTRE

Seeking Consensus on

**Suggestions to Upgrade the Town Centre, Enhance the Economy,
and Improve the Environment**

24 October 2023

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PREAMBLE

This pamphlet is the result of work over the past year by a small group of Lymington residents who have professional experience in the fields of town planning, civil engineering, and urban regeneration. The ideas and suggestions herein are entirely their own and are aimed at keeping our historic town centre alive.

Historical note:

Throughout the 19th century pamphlets, usually paid for by their authors and/or contributors, were an important means of public debate and reasoned discourse covering the key environmental, political, social, and technical issues of the day.

The aim of this pamphlet is to describe possible solutions for the key challenges facing the town centre. The content of this pamphlet has been discussed with numerous residents, and with a few members of the Lymington Society, the Bottom of the Town Group, the Chamber of Commerce, and the Transitions Group.

This pamphlet is being submitted to the Lymington & Pennington Town Council, before their 31st October 2023 deadline, to be read as a response to the draft Neighbourhood Plan. Shortly thereafter it will be published for the benefit of residents, local interest groups, local businesses, and the press.

Readers are invited to send any comments to <editor@lymington-town.org>

This pamphlet may be downloaded in PDF from <www.lymington-town.org> where there is also a survey that may be completed anonymously.

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INTRODUCTION

The principle aims of the suggestions that follow are to:

- Support the town's retail sector (i.e., the shops, cafes, restaurants).
- Support other businesses in the town (e.g., professional services such as law firms, architects, travel agents, estate agents).
- Enhance residents' pride in and enjoyment of the town centre.
- Reduce air and noise pollution and improve safety in the High Street.

None of the suggestions herein are entirely novel; most of them have been previously put forward in some form or another, whether by councillors, residents, or businesses. But this pamphlet seeks to bring them together as an informal masterplan.

These suggestions in part overlap with the Neighbourhood Plan that is being prepared by the local authorities. But neighbourhood plans contain a lot of material relating to development and public services (e.g., house building, schools) whereas this pamphlet, by comparison, strictly limits itself to physical issues in the town centre.

Although Lymington's Georgian high street is the best in the local region, this does not mean that the town can afford to rest on its laurels. For example, Christchurch also aspires to make improvements, and it is believed that their ideas go back at least as far as 2015 (Fig. 1).



The High Street with reduced traffic flow and a more pedestrian and cycle friendly atmosphere

Fig. 1

To maintain the health of its business community, notably by enhancing its attraction to tourists and out-of-town shoppers, Lymington needs to make its town centre an unmissable "go-to destination".

Compared to most other town centres in the region, Lymington is well provided with parking. But this pamphlet unashamedly proposes an improvement in the parking provision because adequate capacity is crucial to support, in particular, the retail community which is under pressure from the growth of online shopping. Lymington is, after all, a market town and it is

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unrealistic to expect a diverse and high-quality retail sector to thrive in the absence of visiting shoppers, most of whom will arrive by car.

The question, therefore, is whether the ideas and suggestions herein will receive the majority support of the town's key stakeholders, namely its residents, its businesses, and the three councils. And whether that support can be mustered quickly enough to lead to meaningful change in, say, one to five years instead of the multi-decade timescale which is so often a depressively negative feature of getting things done in this country.

Here, then, are six suggestions.

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SUGGESTION 1 - Improvements to the High Street

A huge environmental improvement can be achieved by the hard and soft landscaping of the High Street between Captains Row and St. Thomas Anglican Church¹, with pedestrians and cyclists afforded greater convenience and safety than now².

Improvement measures should comprise:

- Wider pavements with spaces available for use by cafes, pop-up stalls, displays, and the performing arts;
- Seating, some of it covered;
- Extensive tree planting and some flowerbeds;
- Car-parking bays to be changed to herringbone³ whilst retaining parallel spaces for delivery vehicles serving the retailers;
- One-way traffic flow⁴;
- Bicycle parking stands.

The kerb-less concept which is increasingly popular in urban design should be seriously considered. On the Continent this is often referred to as the "shared space" concept. It makes a street *accessible* to vehicles without making it *designed* or *prioritised* for vehicles. The removal of kerbs also means fewer tripping hazards for the elderly.

Car parking charges have been recently imposed in the High Street which is, on the face of it, logical (although not necessarily popular!) given that one must pay to use the other car parks in town. One option for the future would be to restrict High Street parking spaces to cars displaying a NFDC Parking Clock or a Blue Badge, and to increase the permissible duration of stay. This would certainly give drivers with a Blue Badge a much-improved chance of finding a vacant space. It would also reduce the expense of maintaining the ticket machines and policing the parked cars.

The next couple of pages contain a selection of 'mood' images to give an idea of what such improvements might look like (Figs. 2).

¹ The section from the church up to and around the Priestlands Place one-way triangle should be considered at a future date.

² It is a prerequisite of all Government funded road projects that there must be an improvement in cycling and walking infrastructure.

³ See Annex A.

⁴ See Suggestion 3 below.

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Fig. 2a



Fig. 2b

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Fig. 2c



Fig. 2d

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Fig. 2e



Fig. 2f

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Fig. 2g



Fig. 2h

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Fig. 2i



Fig. 2j

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Fig. 2k

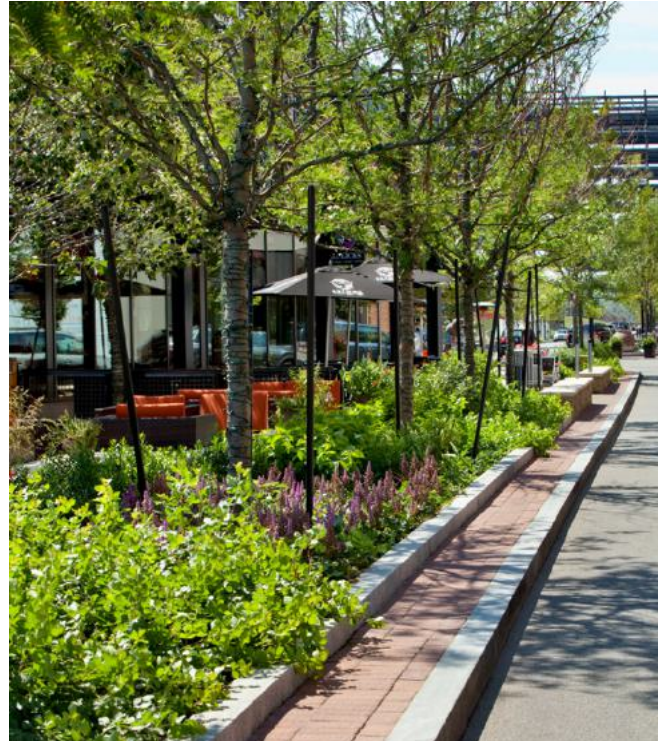


Fig. 2l

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SUGGESTION 2 - Wayfinding⁵

It is suggested that a more extensive and visible system of distinctive signage be displayed, supported by a resurfacing of the courtyards and lanes to draw in customers to their businesses. Such upgrades would be applied to:

- Cannon Court
- Henderson Court
- Earley Court
- Angel Courtyard
- Rashley Mews.
- Ashely Lane

Signage should also be installed to clarify the routes between the High Street and the car parks.

In designing the signage, we should not overlook that fact that there are many retailers located in the upper part of the town centre, between the church and Waitrose.

Wayfinding should also be applied along the four core pedestrian routes:

- Between the High Street, Quay Hill, and the Town Quay.
- Between the railway station and the High Street.
- Along the Solent Coastal Path, from Lymington Yacht Haven to Bridge Road (previously known as the toll bridge).

⁵ The term "wayfinding" encompasses all the means such as signposts and other displays to help people orientate themselves and navigate around an area.

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SUGGESTION 3 - One-Way Traffic along the High Street & Captains Row

Many of the landscaping and parking improvements described in Suggestion 1 could not be executed if two-way traffic were to continue along the High Street. It is suggested, therefore, that the High Street be limited to one-way traffic. One-way flow will improve safety and result in less noise and air pollution⁶.

A one-way High Street is also essential to enable herringbone parking (the more convenient, space-efficient, and safer arrangement described in Annex A).

It is considered preferable that the one-way traffic flows East to West (i.e., uphill) because:

- The steep hill at the east end of the High Street is such that properties and people will always be at risk from fast-moving downhill traffic, especially when the road surface is slippery.
- The junction of Captains Row with the High Street and Quay Hill is hazardous and congested for both pedestrians and vehicles⁷. And traffic coming down the High Street is already prohibited from turning right into Captains Row (Fig. 3).



Fig. 3

⁶ This will reflect the aims of the NFDC's "Air Quality in New Development - Draft supplementary planning document February 2022".

⁷ The Bottom of Town Group has long been urging improvements to this junction. Some ideas date back to 2014, which reflects the point made earlier about long timescales for project implementation.

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Another option would be to make the High Street traffic-free except for Blue Badge holders, buses, taxis, and retailer delivery vehicles. (It is relevant to remind ourselves that the Saturday market is widely favoured by our community, and this relies on the High Street being, to all intents and purposes, closed to traffic.)

Making the High Street traffic-free would, however, result in the on-street parking bays being inaccessible (except those provided for Blue Badge holders) and so this might not be appropriate unless additional carparking spaces are provided elsewhere.

Captains Row might also become one-way with its traffic flowing North to South. This would reduce traffic volumes along that street and consequently noise and exhaust emissions, and it would remove the hazardous bottleneck adjacent the top of Quay Hill (see Fig. 3). A carefully designed and landscaped pedestrian crossing at this point would also double as a traffic calming measure to ensure that the vehicles entering Captains Row would be slow-moving⁸.

If Captains Row were made one-way then the traffic coming up Nelson Place would have to continue via Grove Road. This traffic volume is very modest⁹, and it is to be hoped that residents along Grove Road would not find this change objectionable. Indeed, Grove Road too might be made one way; then there would be no net change in traffic volume, and width would be freed-up to allow a pavement to be built around the dangerous S-bend near the intersection with Church Lane.

These proposed changes would, of course, have to be studied by traffic engineers. In the first instance a simple traffic flow survey over consecutive weekends will indicate the viability of these suggestions.

This survey might proceed as follows:

First survey (Saturday #1)

- One traffic spotter to be stationed on Captains Row and one on Grove Road.
- The number of vehicles moving in each direction on each road to be recorded for each hour between 0900 and 1500.

Second survey (Saturday #2)

- Temporary signs placed at the south end of Captains Row showing that the road is closed and all traffic coming up Nelson Place must proceed along Grove Road.

⁸ Until a few years ago, this junction was painted with a Yellow Box, but this disappeared under a re-surfacing.

⁹ And traffic flow would be reduced if the number of parking spaces on the Town Quay were reduced (see Suggestion 5 below).

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- Temporary signs placed at the west end of Grove Road showing that the road is closed.
 - One traffic spotter to be stationed on Captains Row and one on Grove Road.
 - The number of vehicles moving in the single direction on each road to be recorded for each hour between 0900 and 1500.
-

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SUGGESTION 4 - Car Parking

If the town centre is to attract the increased footfall that will benefit businesses, then car-parking capacity will have to be increased and/or the functioning of the existing car-parks made more efficient. Whilst carrying out these works, numerous electric car charging points should be installed.

It is not known if there is any data on car-park usage available, but it seems to be widely held that the main car parks have inadequate capacity during peak periods. If so, this is bound to be disincentivising shoppers and tourists to visit, thus negatively impacting the business community. Furthermore, if the Town Quay were to be re-modelled with fewer parking spaces (see later), and/or if it were decided that the number of parking spaces in the High Street itself should be reduced to allow for extra landscaping, then an increase in car-park capacity would become yet more important.

The present carpark inventory may be summarised as follows¹⁰:

St. Thomas Street Carpark

The 270-car capacity of the St. Thomas Street carpark (behind M&S Food) could not be increased other than by hugely disruptive and expensive construction works, whether above ground or underground. Such works would be extremely unlikely ever to receive planning consent or funding.

Emsworth Road Carpark

The 100-car capacity Emsworth Road carpark (behind the St Barbe Museum & Gallery) is fully constrained and has no potential for enlargement.

Barfields & Town Hall Carparks

The Barfields carpark (outlined in blue on Fig. 4) and the Town Hall carpark (outlined in green on Fig. 4) have capacities of about 137 and 166 spaces respectively.

During the working week, the Town Hall carpark has barriers making it unavailable to the general public. These barriers are usually open at weekends so that the whole Town Hall and Barfields carparks function as one.

The combined facility nevertheless tends to be under-utilised at weekends¹¹ because it is the farthest carpark from the High Street and is probably perceived to be the least

¹⁰ Capacities are quoted in round figures and are inclusive of disabled and car-charging spaces.

¹¹ A simple survey during the summer will confirm this.

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convenient, and because it is not well signposted. Improved wayfinding and competitive pricing will make this a more attractive parking location.

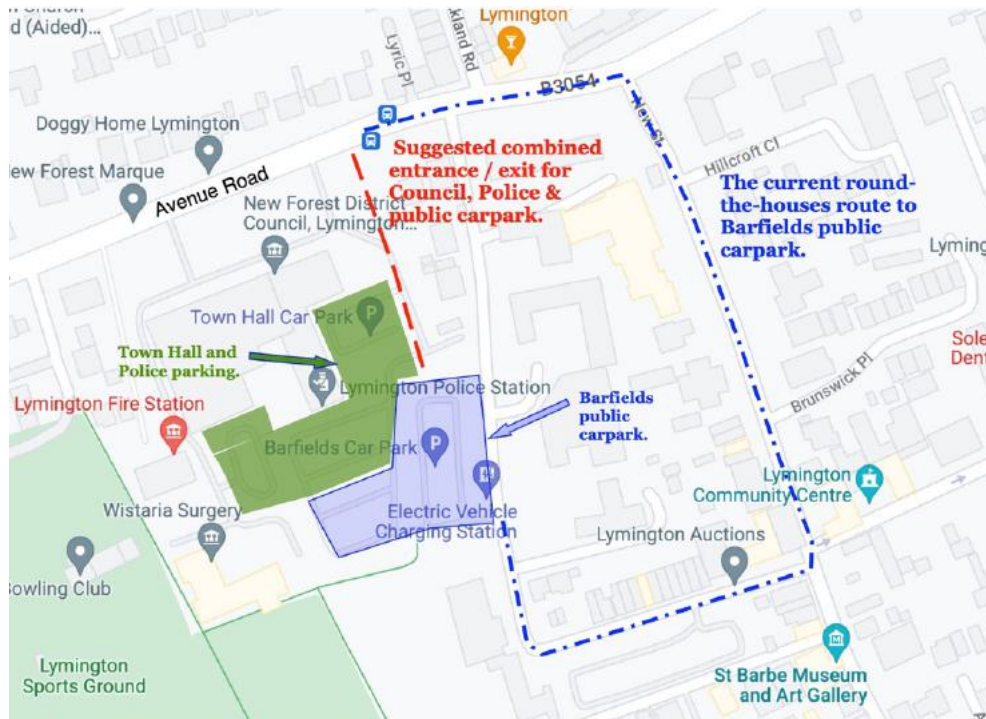


Fig. 4

The whole carpark, including the 'green' areas presently reserved for the Town Hall staff and the Police, would benefit from redesign and a re-landscaping. This might include a switch to herringbone parking (see Annex A) resulting in a capacity increase of 20% or even more. A special area must nonetheless be reserved for the Police.

An increase in utilisation would surely be achieved by the simple expedient of improving the existing entrance / exit on Avenue Road (as shown in Fig. 4 in red). This would be a far more convenient and direct route than the current one which involves driving along New Street, Emsworth Road, and Barfields Road (shown in blue in Fig. 4), and it would decrease noise and pollution in those residential areas. A clear and prominent entrance on Avenue Road would surely make this car park easier to find, for tourists in particular.

Capacity of the redesigned carpark could be almost doubled by installing a lightweight upper deck (see Annex B) over some of the area. The suggested extent of this is shown below in magenta colour (Fig. 5) and would provide about 200 spaces.

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Fig. 5

Cannon Street car parks

The Cannon Street East and West car parks total about 260 spaces. The change in level as one moves across the site on the east-west axis (Figs. 6) presents a number of options for increasing capacity. The simplest, least disruptive, and most cost-effective option is found at the East Carpark.

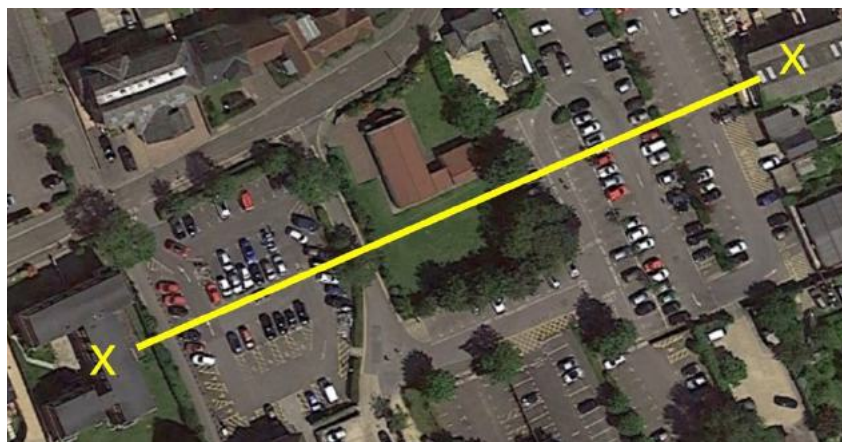


Fig. 6a

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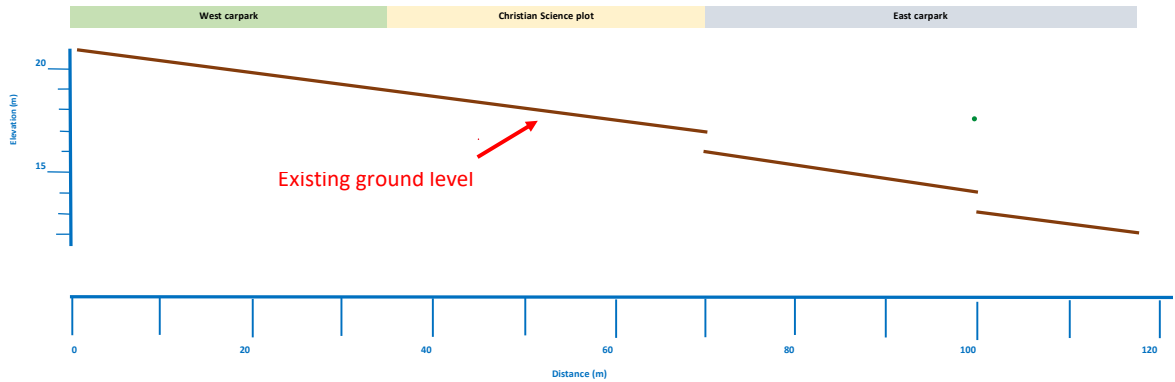


Fig. 6b

Levels are approximate, having been sourced from Google Earth.

The East Carpark, which currently has a crossfall of about 3m (from +16m to +13m), would be levelled down, and a lightweight steel deck (Annex B) added to create about 100 additional spaces (Figs. 7).



Fig. 7a

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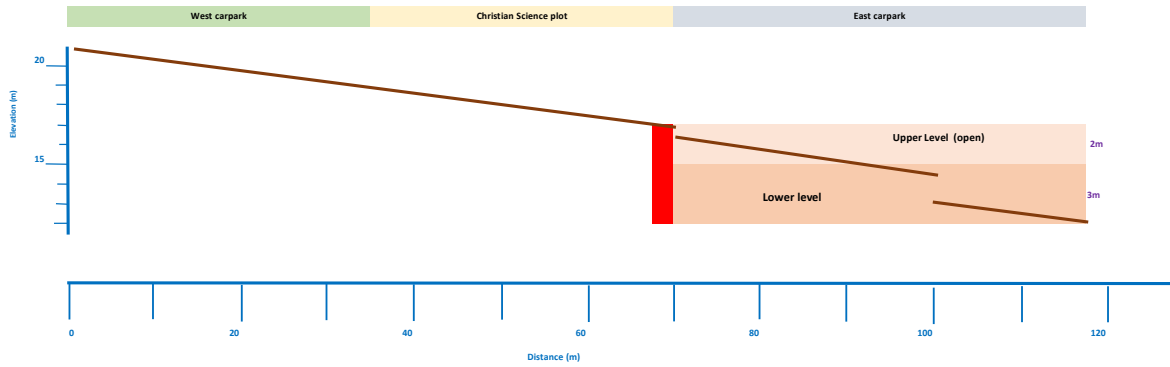


Fig. 7b

It is suggested that "live" signposting to all the town's carparks be considered. Such signs customarily have 4G data links showing real-time available capacities (Fig. 8).



Fig. 8

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SUGGESTION 5 - The Town Quay

The Town Quay currently provides a total of 54 parking spaces¹². Additionally, there are another 10 spaces in front of the Ship Inn. The majority of the Town Quay area is thus a carpark; it is certainly not the restful and photogenic harbour-front that tourists hope to find, or residents would like to enjoy (Fig. 9).



Fig. 9

A greater proportion of the Town Quay should be landscaped, with some covered seating provided to allow enjoyment even during wet weather.

Issues for debate during consultations would include:

- Parking for the owners of the adjoining residential properties.
- The number of short-term spaces needed to support the retailers, and how these spaces could be managed.
- The provision of disabled parking spaces.
- The provision of, say, two open-air serviced areas¹³ that could be used for food & beverage pop-up cafes in high season, a more financially viable solution (and certainly less costly) than the permanent cafe building recently proposed.

¹² Capacities are quoted in round figures and are inclusive of disabled and car-charging bays.

¹³ A serviced area means one with power, water, and drainage connections.

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The design of any new amenity block (i.e., the toilets & showers) is not covered here since it could stand on the present footprint and thus need not affect this parking and landscaping suggestion.

There are ways to achieve a significant improvement to the Town Quay at minimal cost and with minimal disruption.

Plan A (Fig. 10) Remove the 10 parking spaces near the Ship Inn and hard and soft landscape the area. Vehicular access to the fishermen's wharf and to a delivery bay for the Ship Inn would be maintained.

Plan B (Fig. 10) Remove one line of parking on the Town Quay and replace with hard and soft landscaping. This would result in a net loss of 12 parking spaces on the Quay.



Fig. 10

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Plan C (Fig. 11)

Remove and re-order two lines of parking on the Town Quay and replace with landscaping. This would result in a net loss of about 13 parking spaces on the Quay.



Fig. 11

The recommended solution is Plan A plus Plan C, as shown on Fig. 11.

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SUGGESTION 6 - Securing the Best Designs

Urban landscaping is a specialist field. Rather than just select one firm in the hope they come up with a good design, the Town Centre project could be made the subject of a competition. Indeed, the varying nature of this project is such that two competitions might be appropriate: one for the High Street and another for the Town Quay.

This is a high-profile project of the sort that many firms would find appealing, so putting it out to a competition would almost certainly lead to the receipt of wide-ranging ideas at minimal cost¹⁴. The RIBA are well known for helping to run such competitions.

FUNDING

Undoubtedly, the main challenge is how to fund these works. The subject of funding is not considered in detail in this pamphlet for the simple reason that all concerned parties must first agree on a masterplan. Nevertheless, some preliminary remarks can be made.

If Lymington is to have any hope of attracting funds from Central Government (e.g., under the "Levelling-Up" legislation), our community must reach substantial agreement. The key parties are:

- The Hampshire County Council.
- The New Forest District Council.
- The Lymington & Pennington Town Council.
- The business community (e.g., the Chamber of Commerce).
- The residents (based on their views from surveys and meetings).
- The local heritage groups (e.g., The Lymington Society, The Pennington & Lymington Lanes Society).

Additionally, the support of the local MP will be very helpful when applying for Government funding.

The presentation of the designs and budgets needs to be of an exceptionally high standard.

¹⁴ It is customary in such competitions only to pay an honorarium to the short-listed finalists.

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Note

Under the Levelling-Up agenda, Lyminster is a Category 3 place, meaning that it is not seen as being a deprived location in desperate need of improvement. The Government prospectus nevertheless says:

- "Bids from categories 2 and 3 will still be considered for funding on their merits of deliverability, value for money and strategic fit, and could still be successful if they are of exceptionally high quality."
- "Investment suggestions should focus on supporting high priority projects that will make a visible impact in local areas".

The Government's prospectus places a lot of weight on transport issues and so bus and rail operations must also be considered.

Finance from the Heritage High Street Fund should also be investigated, most probably with a view to applying funds to restore shop fronts and facades. For the 'corporate' owned shops, a direct approach to their HQs might elicit improvements.

It may also be noted that revisions to the Section 106 rules are expected soon, and these will help secure more community infrastructure level ("CIL") funds. However, given the relatively low value of upcoming developments in Lyminster, the CIL amounts will be very modest and spread over a long period.

How to secure funding for Lyminster Town Centre project is expected to be a challenge and will require early input from specialists in this field. But in the context of applying for money, the old adage applies: "If you don't ask, you won't get". But equally, Lyminster must be seen to be helping itself if it is to attract funding (which might include match funding).

The application of lateral thinking to this conundrum leads to an idea that might, given the very clear aims and objectives described herein, be achievable. The Lyminster & Pennington Town Council would request New Forest District Council to apply a "Town Centre Improvement Levy" to the Council Tax demands. This would be a percentage addition and so the cost increase to each ratepayer would be a proportional one. This levy would not go into the general exchequer; it would be held in a fund that would be used only for the defined Town Centre works and it would be the subject of oversight by independent accountants and quantity surveyors.

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PHASING

Some of the suggestions described herein could be implemented relatively easily and at modest expense. Hence:

PHASE ONE

- Designating the High Street and Captains Row (and possibly Grove Road) as one-way.
- Herringbone parking in the High Street.
- The wayfinding signage.
- A new combined entrance on Avenue Road to the Town Hall and Barfields carpark, with the Town Hall's carpark to be open to the public every weekend.
- Hard and soft landscaping the area between the Ship Inn and the Town Quay slipway.

The more costly works could follow at a later date:

PHASE TWO

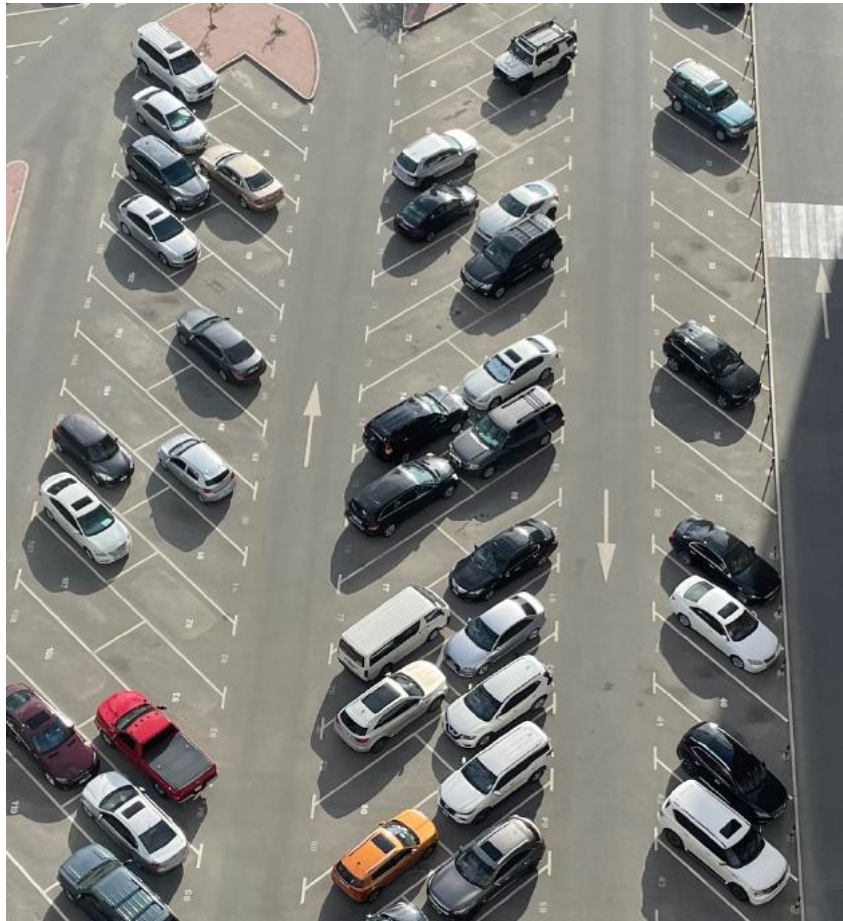
- Resurfacing and landscaping the High Street and the courtyards.
- Increasing the capacity of the Town Hall / Barfields carparks.
- Improving the Town Quay.
- Increasing the capacity of the Cannon Street East carpark.

----- END -----



ANNEX A

Herringbone Parking



A recent walking survey between the church and the bottom of the High Street counted approximately 104 parallel car parking spaces.

The standard UK/European length for a parallel space is 6.0m (6.5m for disabled bays) but for today's larger cars, 6.0m is very much on the small side¹⁵ and this invariably results in linear parking areas being utilised inefficiently.

If the High Street were to become one-way, then herringbone parking could be adopted. Backwards-and-forwards manoeuvring is not required when using a herringbone bay and so 6.0m is adequate, even for the largest SUVs. Herringbone parking is known to much easier to

¹⁵ Example lengths: Audi Q7 5.1m, Range Rover Sport 4.9m.

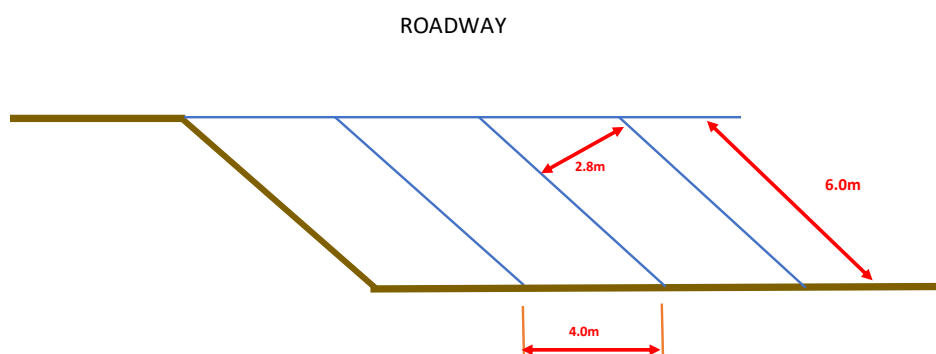
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use, especially for elderly drivers. And reversing out of a herringbone space into one-way traffic flow is much safer than out of a right-angled space into a two-way traffic flow¹⁶.



As regards bay width, the UK standard is 2.4m but this is on the tight side with today's larger cars¹⁷ so 2.6m should be the new minimum. It might even be increased to 2.8m for Lymington given the large percentage of elderly people who find getting in and out of their cars (even compact cars) difficult unless the door is wide open.



As shown above, the result is that a 2.8m wide herringbone bay will occupy about 4.0m measured along the edge of the pavement, compared to the 'standard' 6.0m for a parallel bay.

¹⁶ In cars having a reversing camera, the driver is actually able to see approaching traffic.

¹⁷ Example widths: Audi Q7 2.0m, Range Rover Sport 2.2m.

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This indicates that even allowing for the 'dead' space at the end of each herringbone row (which would anyway become part of the proposed landscaping), 104 generously-dimensioned herringbone spaces will occupy about one third less of the High Street than do the current 104 parallel spaces.

One example of herringbone parking may be seen in Bridgenorth, Shropshire, a historic market town not dissimilar to Lymington.



Bridgenorth



ANNEX B

Lightweight Deck Parking



Single deck carpark structures are of lightweight steel, and they rarely need other than simple pad footings. Screening to minimise the visual impact can be provided by cladding the sides of the structure and/or by soft landscaping.

It should be noted that such a lightweight deck can be easily modified, removed, re-deployed to another site, or sold if circumstances change.

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