



HODDESDON TOMORROW

THE PEOPLE'S PLAN

9th October 2009

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This plan for the future of Hoddesdon has been produced by Action4Hoddesdon – an independent community group set up by residents and business people who are concerned about the current and future state of our historic market town and its communities.

BACKGROUND

In January 2009 the co-owners of Hoddesdon's independent bookshop wrote an open letter to Broxbourne Council and the local press highlighting the serious decline of Hoddesdon town centre and demanding that something be done to address the issue.

At a Borough Consultative Panel meeting on 9th February to discuss the Broxbourne Borough's Core Strategy, Ken Ayling, the Leader of the Council, forbade any discussion of Hoddesdon on the grounds the Council are preparing a draft plan for the town.

On 26th March a public meeting was held in Hoddesdon Parish Church chaired by Broxbourne's MP Charles Walker at which 350 people were presented with a damning catalogue of neglect and negligence by Broxbourne Council which had led to a serious and worsening decline in the state of Hoddesdon Town Centre. The audience unanimously voted to back The Hoddesdon Charter (please see below) calling for a number of key short term initiatives to help reverse the situation in the town.

As a result of the level of support and concern shared by local residents and traders the organisers of the meeting announced they would be setting up a campaign group to lobby for the Hoddesdon Charter to be implemented by Broxbourne Council and to fight for the future improvement of the town.

THE HODDESDON CHARTER

Like many market towns Hoddesdon has suffered serious decline over the last few years. To stop any further deterioration in the Town Centre and start a process of renewal we believe we must improve the town's **VISIBILITY** and **ACCESSIBILITY**, provide a focal point for **COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION** and have a **CO-ORDINATED PLANNING POLICY**. We are therefore calling on Broxbourne District Council to implement the following:

- a) **Initiate an urgent meeting with the owners of The Tower Centre and Fawkon Walk plus other major landlords with property holdings in the town to discuss tactics which can be adopted to attract new chain and independent retailers to move into the large number of empty retail units.**
- b) **Create a co-ordinated Parking policy for Hoddesdon Town Centre - the first priority being to open up the northern end of the High Street to create as many free short term parking spaces as possible. Long-term parking facilities must be introduced for town centre workers in an existing Council Car Park.**
- c) **Fund the immediate launch of a Shop Local Campaign.**
- d) **Provide proper funding for an annual programme of four major Town Centre events each year, which includes money to help expand the Christmas Carnival of Light.**
- e) **Install new signage at all main approaches to the town which welcomes people to Hoddesdon and directs them into the High Street.**
- f) **Give grant funding for the maintenance and expansion of the existing Hoddesdononline website to promote the town to visitors and businesses, and provide a resource for the local community.**
- g) **Introduce free parking in all the Borough's car parks on each Saturday in December to counteract the same policies which have been adopted by both Epping Forest and East Herts Councils in the nearby towns of Waltham Abbey, Hertford and Ware.**
- h) **Adopt a policy to actively encourage leisure facilities back into the Town Centre and specifically to provide financial support to fund the expansion of existing leisure activity programmes at Mayhem Theatre Arts aimed at children and young adults.**
- i) **Produce a Master Plan for Hoddesdon's long term development in close consultation with local residents and businesses which includes a strategy to replace the Tower Centre.**

ACTION4HODDESDON VISION & AIMS

On 25th April the first campaign meeting for Action4Hoddesdon attracted over 70 people and the group agreed the following vision for the town's future and the campaign's key objectives:

Our Vision For The Future

- Hoddesdon will be a safe, attractive and well designed town, enhanced by the quality of its built and natural environments, acting as the focal point for the whole community.
- The heritage of the town will be respected with all future developments sympathetic to its character and setting.
- The town will need to be economically viable – improving the profitability and allowing for the growth of its businesses, as well as increasing local employment opportunities.
- Sustainable and environmentally friendly solutions will be developed and encouraged alongside new measures to save energy and reduce carbon emissions.
- The whole community will be encouraged to contribute to the town's future through debate, discussion and consultation on development policies and proposals.

Objectives

Over the last 40 years our rural market town has seen an explosion of new housing development and rapid population growth. That expansion is likely to continue and we therefore want to ensure a sustainable and economically viable future for town, whilst improving the quality of life for newcomers and long-established residents. At the same time we need to protect the town's unique heritage, attractive rural character and local distinctiveness for both its citizens and casual visitors.

We do not want Hoddesdon to become just another **CLONE TOWN** indistinguishable from thousands of others around the country which consist of exactly the same depressing line-up of national brand names, multiple chain stores, banks and building societies.

We want to see Hoddesdon developed into a **HOME TOWN** which is distinctive and recognisable as a unique place. We therefore need a clear strategy to encourage local producers and "niche" or boutique shop owners to set up businesses in the town alongside the existing supermarkets and national chains to provide a diversity of high quality products and services making the town a distinctive and interesting place to live in and visit.

PREPARING THE HODDESDON TOMORROW EXHIBITION

When Broxbourne Council issued its first consultation document In May 2009 proposing the opening of the north end of the High Street and the introduction of free short term parking Action4Hoddesdon orchestrated a public and media campaign to support that plan and collected nearly 700 signatures from local residents who agreed with it which were delivered to the Council.

Having seen Broxbourne Council's first draft of their proposed Town Plan in May, Action4Hoddesdon were so concerned that the document lacked any real concrete policies that they decided to undertake various public consultations with a view to producing their own series of recommendations for a "People's Plan" for Hoddesdon.

Between May and July 2009 Action4Hoddesdon conducted a questionnaire for local residents which was featured in The Mercury newspaper and could be completed online at www.action4hoddesdon.co.uk. Another public meeting was held to canvass the views of the local community, and the group also carried out a questionnaire of local market traders.

All the ideas and proposals which arose from these initiatives and surveys, along with research carried out by members of the group were then put on display in a public exhibition entitled HODDESDON TOMORROW which was run from 16th – 26th September to co-incide with the public consultation period for Broxbourne Council's Draft Town Centre Strategy. The exhibition was also available to view online.

Over 300 local people visited the HODDESDON TOMORROW exhibition over six days and were asked to give their views and suggestions on feedback forms.(see Appendix 1) Almost 300 people signed a petition supporting the proposals in the exhibition including Broxbourne MP, Charles Walker, and 50 more signed the online version of the petition.

The same proposals were presented at a well attended Public Meeting at Hoddesdon Parish Church on 1st October where they were debated alongside Broxbourne Council's suggestions, and received an overwhelmingly positive backing from the local community.

Having received such significant endorsement from the local community, we believe those policies which are outlined in this document – the People's Plan - should be adopted in the final draft of Broxbourne Council's Hoddesdon Town Plan.

ACTION4HODDESODON'S RESPONSE TO BROXBOURNE COUNCIL'S DRAFT HODDESODON TOWN PLAN

After waiting six years for this plan to be produced, we believe it to be a very disappointing document which contains only one concrete scheme relating to the town – to re-open the north end of the high street and allow free short term parking – but has no real future strategy or vision for Hoddesdon.

It is full of imprecise phrases such as “the council will investigate.” “efforts will be made...” “the council will explore...” instead of concrete proposals which a strategy document should contain. We want to see a clear set of proposals with targets, timeframes and costings.

Particularly worrying is the absence of data and findings from three major reports which Broxbourne Council have commissioned from external consultants – *Towards an Urban Strategy for Hoddesdon Town Centre*, *Market Town Future Retail Study* and the *Hoddesdon Town Centre Traffic Impact Assessment*. All of these are reported to be in draft stage (p26) are not therefore available for inclusion in the Draft Town Centre Plan.

We cannot see how a proper consultation can be attempted if crucial evidence on which any debate and considerations by local residents should be based is still not available.

A *Market Town Future Retail Study* has been commissioned from an external consultancy called Javelin “*to advise how the town centre might be improved as a shopping destination.*” We do not understand why Broxbourne Council are bringing in outside people for this, when we have Paul Wallace, a long established commercial property agency, right on our doorstep in Hoddesdon.

This local company have an excellent and proven track record of bringing major new retailers into Hoddesdon over the last 10 years, including national chain retailers such as Clinton cards, Specsavers, Café Nero and, most recently, Wilkinsons who wish to move into the former co-op department store. In addition, they have attracted a whole range of excellent independent outlets including The Eye, books @ Hoddesdon, Nicky Cornell furniture, Swagga menswear, Life is Beautiful mobility shop, etc, etc

We believe that Paul Wallace Commercial are far better placed to advise on what policies are needed to develop a retail strategy for the town than any outside so-called experts.

Action4Hoddesdon is extremely concerned that the only detailed policy in the Draft Hoddesdon Plan relates to the expansion of Brookfield Farm out of town shopping centre (p12). We believe it is a complete disgrace and an insult to the people of this town that this unpopular and deeply flawed proposal has been included in this plan at all.

Broxbourne Council's proposal to build a massive £600,000 development to include a new shopping complex will fatally undermine the vitality and viability of Hoddesdon. All existing evidence proves that the expansion of out of town shopping centres leads to nearby High Streets suffering major decline, which is why such development has been specifically forbidden for more than a decade under national Planning Laws.

Broxbourne Council's flimsy justification for expanding Brookfield Farm is contained in a report produced in 2006 by external consultants GVA Grimley and updated in 2008 at a total cost of more than £215,000. By undertaking our own surveys we have shown that the Grimley data on the town centre retail capacity is completely inaccurate. (see p19) Their argument that Hoddesdon does not have capacity for retail expansion is complete nonsense, with the current retail vacancy rate of 30% and the recent re-development of The Tower Centre and Fawkon Walk taken together with several other current and planned developments in the town means that hundreds of thousands of square feet of retail capacity are available in the town.

Without any proper rationale GVA Grimley further recommends that Hoddesdon Town Centre should only be expanded as a "convenience" shopping destination – a proposal we totally reject. Their argument that an expansion of Brookfield Farm would help stem "leakage" of shoppers out of the Borough is equally flawed. The development of Hoddesdon as a "Home Town" with a good range and variety of specialist and individual independent retailers and boutique outlets will actually draw people into the Borough from "Clone Towns" like Harlow, Stevenage and Hatfield if Hoddesdon's unique retail, restaurant and leisure offerings are properly marketed and promoted in the surrounding areas by Broxbourne Council.

We therefore demand that this whole section on Brookfield Farm be completely removed from this Plan.

Instead we call upon Broxbourne Council to commit the same level of resources, funding, officer time and promotional activity over the next five years to planning and implementing the replacement of The Tower Centre with a brand new shopping centre and housing development as they have spent over the last five years on their plans to expand Brookfield Farm.

We also call upon Broxbourne Council to adopt the recommendations in the five categories outlined below, which were contained in the Hoddesdon Tomorrow exhibition and have been viewed, debated and approved by 380 local residents.

HODDES DON MARKET

A Brief History

For over 800 years a market, in one form or another, has played a central role in contributing to the prosperity of the town.

In 1253 Richard de Boxe obtained a Royal Grant from Henry III giving him the right to hold a market "in his manor of Hoddesdon". The charter of 1253 reads "*We have granted to the same Richard that he and his heirs forever may hold a market at his aforesaid manor of Hoddesdon on Thursday in each week, and that forever they may hold a fair once a year lasting for three days.*"

The market is not mentioned again until 1469 when Sir John Say, the then owner of Baas Manor, obtained a confirmation of the grant from Edward IV.

In 1569 the manor was granted by Elizabeth I to Sir William Cecil and then inherited by his son, the Earl of Salisbury, thence to the Geddings family who held manors in and around Hoddesdon from the 13th Century. They acquired rights to hold the market thus benefiting financially, and in an extract from their rental accounts of 1585 listed the stalls in the market at a total of 35

From the 17th Century to the 19th there was a slow process of decline, until in 1886 a Mr Bridgman (who held a yearly tenancy of the rights) started a cattle market. At that time the market day was changed to Wednesday. It continued until about 1930, by which time it sold mainly poultry.

Finally in 1922 the town council purchased the market rights from the Marquess of Salisbury so that nowadays the rents from the stalls are paid to the Borough Council

With acknowledgements to '*A History of Hoddesdon in the County of Hertfordshire*' by J A Tregelles, & '*The Chronicles of Hoddesdon*' by H F Hayllar

Current State Of The Market

Broxbourne Council's own recent figures show an alarming decline in the size and profitability of Hoddesdon market - takings have dropped by 10% over the last year, and between April and June 2009 the number of stallholders on the Wednesday Market has dropped by 9%, and on the Friday market by 25%.

On 14th August The Hoddesdon Mercury reported that a stallholder of 30 years had left Hoddesdon market because market managers at the Borough of Broxbourne have allowed the market to decline as long-standing stallholders have abandoned the market for other towns.

Trader John Kessler was quoted as saying *“Hoddesdon market can be vastly improved if the management listened to traders or requested an information share with the teams who run other thriving markets in the area.”* When, due to a drop in takings, he asked to reduce his rent by halving the size of his pitch he was told he couldn't reduce the size of his existing stall but had to move elsewhere in the town. When he refused to move and threatened to leave, pointing out that his regular customers wouldn't be able to find him, he was allegedly told by the Market Inspector *“No problem, we have a very long waiting list for pitches*

Worried by what was happening to the market, Action4Hoddesdon carried out a survey of Hoddesdon's market traders on Wednesday 29th July and Friday 31st July 2009. Questionnaires were handed to every stallholder and there was a 50% response rate, with the following results:

The father and son who run the greengrocery stall near the War Memorial have traded in the town for 65 years while, in comparison, the confectionary stall has only been there for five months

The council charge for renting a pitch ranges between £15 and £56

Just over 50% of respondents rated the rental charge here higher than other markets. Hitchin is most the competitive comparison at £10.

The lack of on-hand electricity and the poor condition of the public toilets was raised. It is worth noting that new public toilets were promised in the original 2008 plan for the refurbishment of the Tower Centre, but disappeared after a secret meeting took place between the management and Broxbourne Council's Planning Officers.

80% of traders are in favour of reintroducing traffic to the High Street.

Without being asked a specific question in the survey, 100% favoured free parking in the town, and deemed this essential to the town's survival.

Proposals to Improve Hoddesdon Market

- Free parking in the town – this was deemed to be the most important issue by all market traders who responded to the survey.
- A rent review and reductions introduced to bring Hoddesdon in line with other markets.
- Better facilities for traders & customers - in particular public toilets.
- Improvements made to the appearance to the market in general.
- Incentives and publicity to attract more, and a greater variety of stalls/traders into the town.
- Designated special days for different types of markets e.g. farmer's market, antiques market, French and Italian markets, etc.

TOWN CENTRE PARKING

Once Free, Now Fee

Through the previous consultations carried out by Broxbourne Council, and the studies undertaken by Action4Hoddesdon with the general public and market traders, one of the perceived causes of the steady decline of the centre is the lack of free parking serving it.

Back in March 2000, planning permission was granted for the construction of a new Sainsbury's supermarket at Charlton Mead Lane. At that time, apart from the short stay kerbside parking, the following car parking facilities were available in the town centre:

123 paid for parking spaces in council-owned car parks
492 FREE parking spaces elsewhere

In January 2003, following a decision by Broxbourne Council, parking charges were introduced at the newly completed Sainsbury's supermarket. As a result of this, in order to avoid the new fees Sainsbury's shoppers began parking at the Co-op site next door forcing that store (now replaced by Netto) to introduce its own pay and display system. Iceland subsequently brought in its own restrictions and when the new Aldi opened nearby it introduced 72 customer parking spaces, initially free for a period of two hours subsequently reduced to 90 minutes. Earlier this year the Tower Centre introduced pay and display parking for the first time.

Therefore, as a direct result of Broxbourne Council's decision to charge for parking at Sainsbury's instead of having 492 FREE parking spaces, now all off-street parking is only available for between 60 minutes and two hours, the latter being charged for. In this period there has been a small increase in the number of kerb-side free short term parking spaces, but several private car parks for employees at the rear of the High Street have been lost due to residential developments being built on them.

Free Out Of Town Vs Paid For In Town

At the Brookfield Farm Centre signage suggests that car parking is free for the first three hours but, unlike the Sainsbury's site in Hoddesdon, there are no payment machines in the car park, nor is there any evidence of wardens or enforcement meaning customers can park or as long as they wish for free.

Last year the Federation of Small Businesses commented: *"Free parking at out of town shopping has already seen a decline in town centre shoppers and, unless the parking fee problem is addressed in the near future, we will witness a further decline in town centre shopping."* Income from town centre parking raised a staggering £1.6 billion for local authorities in 2005, rising from just £628 million in 1997. The FSB has urged local government to rethink the parking problem, claiming that *"excessive fees are a short term fix and that customers are ultimately being turned away from High Street shopping."*

In July 2008 the Conservative Party's **Commission on Small Shops in the High Street** proposed local councils should *“give stronger consideration to the impact of parking provision and charging on high street and town centre vitality... bad parking facilities coupled with poor transportation into town centres severely restrict the footfall that High Street retailers need.”*

Numerous local councils are trying to help bring back trade to their High Streets by reducing car parking fees:

- ❖ Kensington and Chelsea are making thousands of parking spaces free at weekends in order to fight the recession and fierce competition from the newly opened Westfield Centre at White City.
- ❖ Guildford and Mansfield have introduced schemes offering 3 hours of free parking
- ❖ Oldham Council is slashing the cost of on-street parking.
- ❖ Abingdon is seeking parity with nearby Didcot and Whitney where parking is free.
- ❖ Daventry proposes free parking within certain time limits.
- ❖ Swansea has reduced car parking charges.

Proposal to Introduce a 3 Hour Free Parking Regime

The circumstances in Hoddesdon are comparable with many market towns throughout the UK, and our research shows how trade in High Streets is adversely affected by car parking charges.

It should be noted that no other Sainsbury's superstores in Hertfordshire, Essex or Enfield charge for their car parking provision.

We do not believe shoppers in Hoddesdon should be subjected to car parking charges at all, but to be realistic in the current climate we propose that parking in the town should at least be equivalent to the terms applicable at The Brookfield Centre i.e. the first 3 hours parking free. In this way the town would be given the opportunity of once again competing against other nearby towns and shopping centres which have less expensive parking facilities.

If Broxbourne Council will not bring in a comparable 3 hour free parking regime in Hoddesdon, then they should introduce charged car parking at The Brookfield Centre.

The Local Government Association are strongly recommending that local Councils impose a “shopping tax” on out of town car parking to encourage people to use their cars less and walk or use public transport instead. Lewes and Exeter Councils are planning to introduce such charges. (See Daily Telegraph report 26/09/09)

LEISURE AND EVENTS

Past and Present

For a variety of reasons, a number of facilities in Hoddesdon and special events which were held here have been lost over the years, among them an Athletics Club, Bowling Alley and Snooker and Squash Clubs and, most recently, the Spinning Wheel open air pool and Broxbourne Lido.

Until 1972 Hoddesdon had a Cinema. Lowewood Arts Centre was lost in 2004 and the long established Summer Festival in 2006. Few people know that Hoddesdon once had two Town Bands and an Annual Flower Show. It is important to prevent further losses of this kind.

Although Hoddesdon still has a Civic Hall for a variety of events and performances, a Museum and a substantial number of local voluntary groups who pursue creative and sporting activities, the atmosphere in the Town Centre itself does not suggest a thriving community.

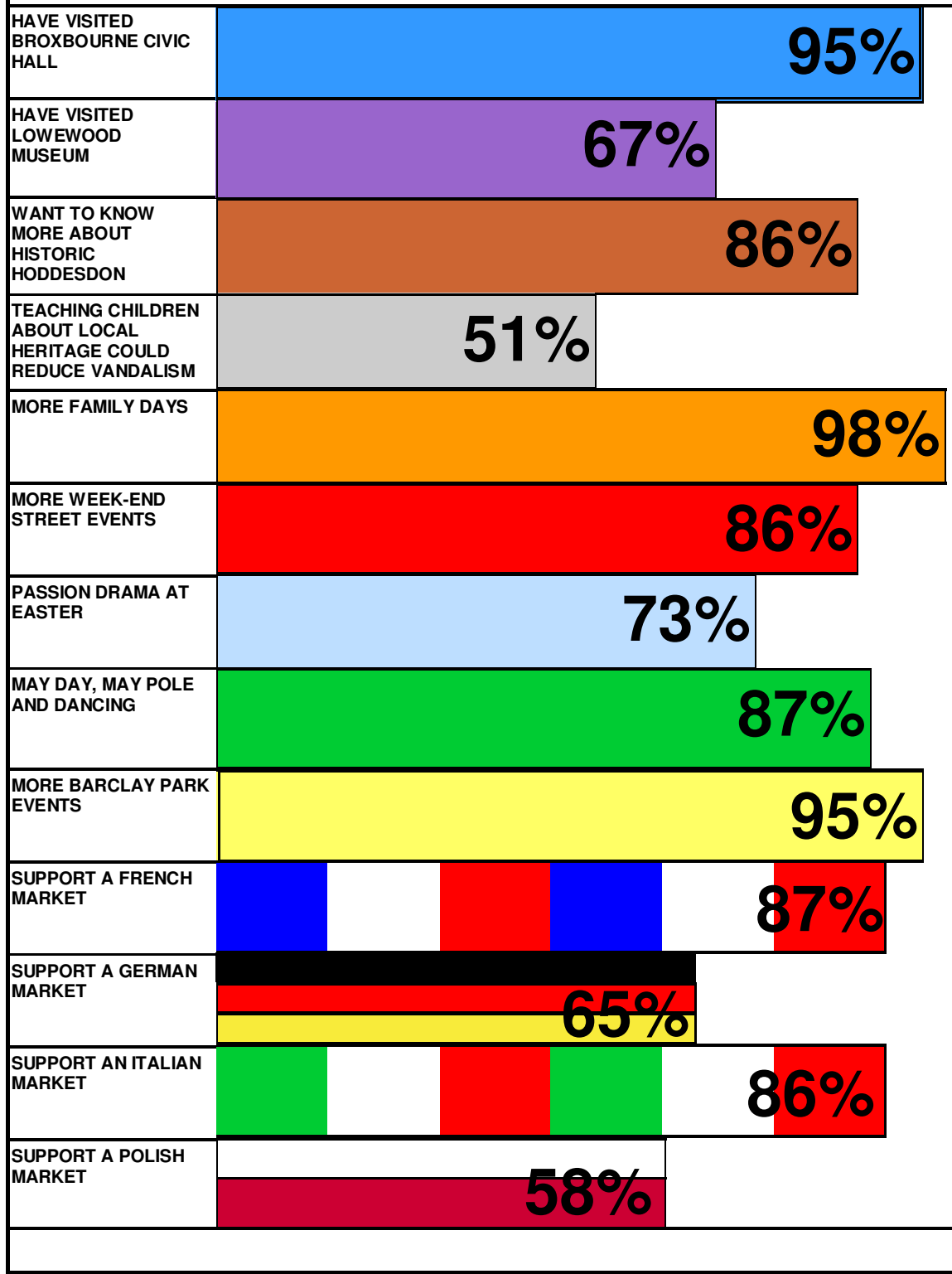
Empty shops and limited, free short-term parking have encouraged local people to go elsewhere for their shopping and the few low-key, routinely repeated Borough organised events during the year have done little to attract visitors. The town is almost deserted on Saturday afternoons.

Canvassing Community Opinion

The Action4Hoddesdon Leisure and Events Working Group ran a survey (See Appendix 2) to canvas people's opinions on Hoddesdon and collected ideas and suggestions for improvements and new ways of attracting people into the Town Centre. We also asked people their preferences from a range of specific types of event. Full results of the survey can be seen in the graph on the next page

- 98% supported more 'family- oriented' days with 95% particularly interested in events in Barclay Park and 86% in weekend street events.
- 86% were also interested in knowing more about Historic Hoddesdon.
- Just over half the people thought that teaching children more about local heritage *could* help to reduce vandalism.
- The idea of reviving the traditional Maypole and country dancing by local schools had strong support with 87% in favour.
- A substantial number of people were interested in different kinds of markets, especially those with a continental flavour. French and Italian were the most popular, but German and Polish also featured.
- We were interested to learn that 95% of the people surveyed had visited the Civic Hall, but only 67% had been to Lowewood Museum.

**SURVEY ON HODDESDON TOWN CENTRE STRATEGY,
CONDUCTED VIA THE MERCURY, ON-LINE AND ON A 1:1 BASIS IN THE STREET**



Proposals to Improve Leisure and Events in Hoddesdon

Before Hoddesdon became part of the Borough of Broxbourne in 1974, there was a Hoddesdon Town Guide. We would like to see this revived and updated to give people a sense of pride in their town and their community.

People liked the idea of local eating places offering special meal deals for families at weekends and more opportunities for leisurely morning coffee or afternoon tea *outdoors*. With this in mind, there were pleas for more outdoor tables and parasols, a small green space in the town and a play area for children.

It was felt that the Town Centre could benefit from Pavement Board Games, such as Draughts and Chess, and an Art Gallery and a Tourist Centre. Community Notice Boards, to advertise purely *local* events, could help to make people more aware of leisure opportunities.

Maps with 'You are Here' and the location of shops and facilities were thought to be a good idea and better signage to key places such as the Library, Civic Hall and Barclay Park. Incentives and rewards for shopping locally could help town centre traders.

Specific events focused on Hoddesdon's history and heritage, local artists' work, books, music and fashion would be welcomed and could include:

Art Attack - themed art for children/adults, maybe with a competitive element

Paint the Town Local Artists sketch or paint an aspect of the town for a local exhibition

Fashion Show - featuring local shops/college students' designs

Book Fair

Love Your Library - open day with tour and talks

Hoddesdon Festival Weekend

That's Entertainment - Local performing arts displays/activities in the Tower Centre with programmes & ticket booth

Open House at the Civic Hall and at Mayhem Theatre Arts

My Kind of Music - music of all kinds in pedestrian area/Tower Centre/Fawkon Walk depending on weather

Open On Sunday - Where you can go & what you can do locally on a Sunday

Hoddesdon Heritage Weekend - Open house at Museum; launch of a revised Heritage Trail; talks and an exhibition on family history; special screening of The Hoddesdon Newsreels.

Walking with History Regular tours of area with Historic Houses & Pubs (all-in price with lunch). A Ghost Walk

Stand and Deliver - The Dick Turpin Experience Tour, pub meal and performance

Parks on Parade - programme of events in Barclay Park, & Rye Park

Garden 'Party' – event focusing on Gardens and Gardening

Many of the suggestions listed above are not necessarily costly to implement. Some just need imagination and the will to make improvements which will contribute to the regeneration of Hoddesdon and make it once again an attractive place in which to live.

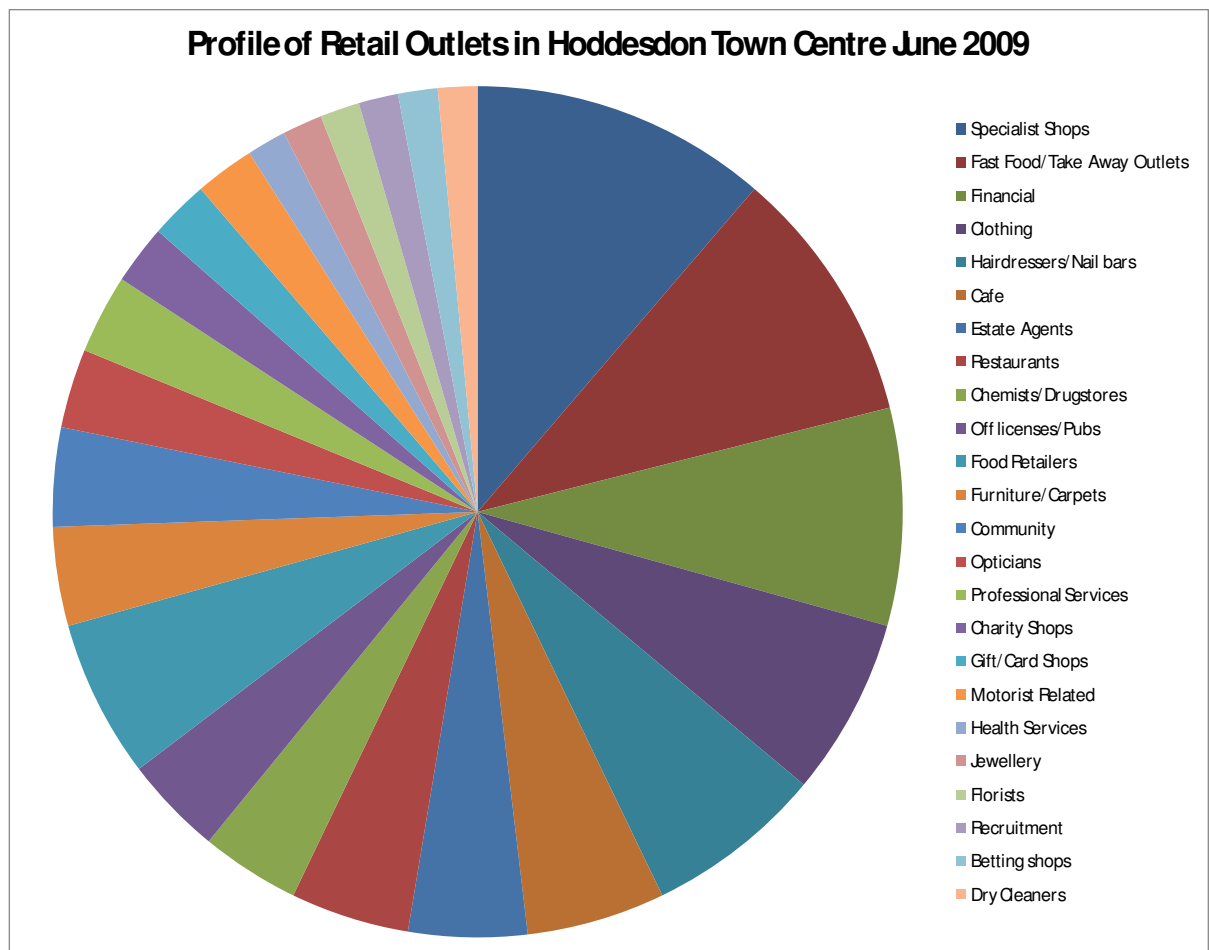
SHOPPING IN HODDESDON TOWN CENTRE

Home Town not Clone Town

A review was carried out during June 2009, which assessed the number of vacant retail units in Hoddesdon Town Centre whilst analysing the range of retailers and the offer. The research concluded that there are 189 retail outlets available, comprising the following:

Vacant units	56
Independently owned	90
Chain Stores	43

The most significant categories of retailers were Specialist Shops (11.5%), Fast Food Outlets (9.8%) and Financial Services (8.3%). Clothes shops and Hair and Beauty outlets were the next largest categories at 6.8%. The diagram below outlines the complete range of shops and services available.



Using this data, a survey for the New Economics Foundation (nef), was completed to determine whether Hoddesdon is a Clone Town, Border Town or Home Town. The nef definitions for these categories are:

A **Clone Town** is 'indistinguishable from dozens of others around the country'.

A **Border Town** is 'neither highly homogenised, nor strongly independent and diverse.'

A **Home Town** is 'distinctive and recognisable as a unique place'.

The Clone Town Britain Index measures the identity and diversity of retail outlets on the high street. The nef scoring is weighted towards identity because they believe that 'ownership is critical to the health of the local economy and community.' The scoring mechanism is as follows:

Clone Town: Towns scoring below 50, where over half of the stores counted are chains and there is little diversity.

Border Town: Towns scoring between 51 and 65 are indistinct.

Home Town: Towns scoring over 65, where almost two thirds or more of the stores are independent and there is a wide range of outlets.

The survey was carried out in the High Street and was limited to 60 shops. This did not extend to the Tower Centre or the shops immediately in the vicinity.

Hoddesdon achieved a score of 64.5 therefore just outside of the Home Town Category. The importance of this information is that should a significant number of the vacant retail outlets be rented by chain stores, Hoddesdon may move from Border Town into the Clone Town category.

We need to ensure that only a third of the retail outlets are chain stores to move away from the Border Town category and sit within the more desirable Home Town banding. The current vacant shops need to be a mixture of chain and independent to make our Town diverse and unique. How does this information differ from that presented by the Council in the reports dated August 2006 and October 2009?

An Alternative to Expanding Brookfield Farm

There are two significant factors that have affected the retail business in Hoddesdon over the last twelve months: the recession and the refurbishment of the Tower Centre. Several retailers have not been able to continue trading in the difficult economic climate and the new retail shops in the Tower Centre remain empty creating an impression of a town in decline.

The conclusions of the Broxbourne Retail Study in October 2008 made a strong case for the development of the Brookfield Centre, based on the desire to keep the resident's money within the Borough. A comparison of the research carried out for this report with the Action4Hoddesdon research is highlighted below.

Summary	No of Units	Broxbourne Retail Report 2008	Variance	% Variance
Comparison	33	47	-14	-30%
Convenience	8	11	-3	-27%
Service	91	87	4	5%
Miscellaneous	1	2	-1	-50%
Vacant	56	26	30	115%
Total	189	173	16	9%

An explanation of each retail category is provided below with the list on the left being the existing retail offer whilst the list on the right identifies the retail offers currently not available.

Comparison Shops

Ladies wear and accessories
 Gift and Greetings Card Shops
 Charity Shops
 Chemists/ Drugstores
 Children's wear

Mens wear
 DIY and Home Improvements
 Music and Video Recordings
 Telephone and Accessories

Convenience Goods

Supermarkets
 Convenience Store
 Bakers
 Delicatessens

Grocers
 Fishmongers
 Health foods

Service

Health and Beauty
 Fast Food and Takeaway Outlets
 Restaurants and Cafes
 Property Services Operators
 High Street Banks

The results show that there has been reductions in the number of Comparison and Convenience Goods, with a small increase in the Service sector. However the most worrying statistic is the increase in vacant shops. Using the national averages from the report of October 2008 the revised retail analysis compares as follows.

Summary	No of Units	% of Total	UK Average % (2008)	Variance
Comparison	33	17.46	35.47	-18.01
Convenience	8	4.23	8.71	-4.48
Service	91	48.15	45.72	2.43
Miscellaneous	1	0.53	0.17	0.36
Vacant	56	29.63	9.92	19.71
Total	189	100	100	100

This information is highlighting that Hoddesdon Town centre compared with other Towns does not have the correct balance of retail outlets and that the level of vacant units is three times higher than the national average. Even if the 37 units in the Tower Centre are excluded from the analysis there are still 2.5% more empty units than the norm.

An Alternative Retail Strategy for Hoddesdon

The two key issues to address are:

- ❖ How to encourage retailers to the Town Centre
- ❖ What do the local residents of Hoddesdon want to buy?

Encouraging retailers to the Town

Broxbourne Borough Council has advised that they do not have any jurisdiction to fill empty retail outlets, although they are clearly prepared and able to work with the retailers at Brookfield. In order for new retailers to be encouraged we would like to see:

1. Low entry rent and rates for a fixed term
2. Support with advertising and marketing
3. Grants for new businesses

Creative schemes are required to firstly use the empty space even on a short term basis and then work with the retailers to build and grow their business. If the space cannot be used for retail then allow community groups the opportunity to use it to bring people into the Town.

What do local residents want to buy?

A recent survey asked this question and there was an overwhelming majority who would like to see more Comparison and Convenience Goods.

There is a clear demand for:

- Mens casual and formal wear
- Shoe shops
- More upmarket Women's clothes shops

- Local food produce
- DIY and home improvement stores
- Mobile phone stores
- CD/Music shops
- Children's toy shops

What is recognised is that independent retailers will be welcome within the Town, providing niche or specialist products. Further fast food, catering outlets or Supermarkets are not wanted or needed.

There is a requirement for quotas to be put in place to control the mix of shops within the Town to encourage as many residents as possible to visit. In this way the Town will become vibrant and vital, achieving the requirement of Planning Policy SS5. This policy outlines the requirements for a Town Centre Strategy:

Include a strategy for each town centre to promote successful mixed use economies, manage change, refocus where necessary and support cultural heritage;

Protect and enhance existing neighbourhood centres and, where a need is established, promote new provision of an appropriate scale and function to meet local day to day needs; and ensure land is allocated to meet the full range of identified needs.

The format of the retail offer for Hoddesdon we recommend should be as follows.

	Number of Shops	% of Total Retail Outlets
Comparison Goods	70	37%
Convenience	24	13%
Service	86	46%
Miscellaneous	1	1%
Vacant	8	4%
Total	189	100%

There should be no more than 60 chain stores within this proposed retail strategy to encourage the local producers and niche shop holders to the area. Diversity is the most important element to ensure Home Town status is achieved, making it a distinctive and interesting place to visit.

A LONG TERM REGENERATION STRATEGY

Urban Development

Over the last forty years there have been five major developments which have contributed to the complete transformation of Hoddesdon.

1967 The Tower Centre is completed, consisting of a shopping precinct, basement car park for 100 cars, a bowling alley, offices and a high rise block of 54 flats. A significant number of historic buildings, including one of the oldest buildings in the town: the Maidenhead Inn, are demolished to make way for the development.

1968 On the west side of the High Street the Fawkon Walk shopping mall is opened, consisting of a number of small shops units leading to a larger Sainsburys Supermarket with an adjacent free car park.

1970 The town bypass opens to take traffic to the north and east of the High Street via the Dinant Link Road and Charlton Way.

1991 - 1997 In the teeth of massive opposition from residents and traders, Broxbourne Council imposes the pedestrianisation of the north end of the High Street and its subsequent closure to through traffic in three phases. This involves the building of service roads to the east and west of the High Street and the introduction of a complicated and confusing one way traffic system.

2002 After a public enquiry Sainsburys build a new supermarket with over 400 parking spaces and a petrol station off Brewery Road. In 2005 they added a large extension to the store and built an upper storey to part of the car park.

A Town Fit for the 21st Century

We believe there are three main priorities which will need addressing over the next two decades to improve and revitalise Hoddesdon:

1) The north end of the High Street needs to be re-opened to traffic and short term free parking spaces introduced. The current road has a bend in it forcing pedestrians to have to cross it at some point when walking from north to south. The road needs to be re-located back to the west where it was sited previously. This will create a safe wide pedestrian area to the east allowing the market stalls to be sited all together rather than split up into three areas as at present. The war memorial and clock tower would then be linked together along with the newly re-sited Samaritan Woman statue to create a new public square in heart of the town.

2) Changes need to be made to the ring road to attract traffic and visitors back in to the High Street rather than diverting them around and away from the town as at present.

This would require new signage on all approach roads featuring attractive colour photographs or specially commissioned artwork so drivers are made aware of what the town centre actually looks like, since they will not be able to see even a glimpse of it as they drive past round the ring road. Eye-catching “gateway” features at the north and south ends of the town would also be a help. The road junctions at the north and south end of the High Street need to be completely re-designed and existing underpasses replaced by re-located pedestrian crossings.

A new multi-storey car park could be built on the unused land adjacent to the Essex Road/ Charlton Way roundabout junction and a walkway link provided over the road towards the town centre. This has recently been done in Bury St Edmunds as part of a major new retail and housing development in the centre of that very historic town. This car park would need to have provision for reasonably priced season ticket rates for drivers who work in the town, but who currently have virtually no long term parking options.

3) Whilst in the short term we want Broxbourne Council to work closely with The Tower Centre management to attract new tenants to the precinct for the overall benefit of the town, in the longer term we believe that the Tower Centre needs knocking down and re-developing. Such a major re-development, if carried out with proper public consultation and the backing of the local community and businesses, would serve as the primary engine of regeneration for the whole town.

The majority of 1960s shopping centres of this age and design around the country have already been demolished to make way for more appropriate new schemes tailored to the very different requirements of contemporary retailing, and we believe this must happen with The Tower Centre too.

The fact that, despite several multi million pound re-vamps over the last decade - the last costing £6m, the number of commercial units operating there has declined consistently and inexorably to the point that over 70% of them are empty. This proves that the centre cannot attract either independent traders or national chain stores and is therefore no longer fit for purpose as a modern shopping complex.

Re-Shaping Hoddesdon for the 21st Century

We believe the concept drawings produced by The Saunders Partnership for Broxbourne Council which were published earlier this year offer some excellent ideas for the type of new mixed development that should replace the Tower Centre.

We propose that the following criteria should be adopted in the Hoddesdon Town Plan to define the type of scheme which should replace the Tower Centre.

- **A low rise, high density, mixed use development (similar to Fawkon Walk) which is in proportion to the current scale of the rest of the buildings in the town centre, and sympathetically and imaginatively designed.**
- **Provide a mix of dwelling sizes and types with the majority of tenures being affordable housing to replace those lost by the demolition of the existing flats in the centre. Replacement housing for those displaced by the development must obviously be provided.**
- **Contain a variety of medium and small retail units designed to attract independent and niche comparison retailers as well as national chains.**
- **Incorporate leisure facilities such as a hotel, a gym, children's soft play centre, plus community facilities such as an Information Advice and Guidance Centre for Herts Regional College.**
- **Make specific provision for open spaces for plants, trees and other greenery to grow naturally.**
- **The scale and nature of any development will be sustainable and not have adverse impacts on the local transport infrastructure and environment and make use of the latest recycling techniques, as well as using environmentally friendly building materials and renewable energy sources.**

Action4Hoddesdon believe that such a major re-development would attract national and specialist retailers and new leisure facilities to Hoddesdon, and thereby help to bring about the revival and revitalisation of the town.

Appendix One

PUBLIC RESPONSES TO THE 'HODDESDON TOMORROW' EXHIBITION

The following are a selection of written comments made by some of the 300 visitors to the Hoddesdon Tomorrow Exhibition between 16th and 26th September 2009.

SECTION 1. VISION FOR THE FUTURE AND OBJECTIVES

Vision for the future is a good one, but too far into the future to be of much use e.g. Promote Tower Centre in 2015

Hoddesdon Charter addresses the issues well

The present pedestrianised area is a killer for local shops. It should be opened up for traffic and free parking.

The future vision forgets the needs of young people to have somewhere safe to meet and socialise. A forum with the schools could start ideas. Maybe a coffee shop run by young people, not for profit.

The Tower Centre has outlived its life... it remains a white elephant and monstrosity on the Hertfordshire horizon. The area could be re-developed to cater for the needs of young and old alike.

Unless you can fill the Tower Centre, we don't see much future for the town

More cheaper housing, better lighting for safety, covered walkways for shoppers, liven plain walls with art work (especially in Dinant Link Area) Get Banksy to do it!

Except on market days, the atmosphere of the town is quite depressing—an area in decline and not much hope of revival. People are disillusioned and cynical, because of the number of schemes that have failed to materialise and the Borough Council's reluctance to address the issues that concern the public.

Wholeheartedly support Action4 Hoddesdon views. Would like Broxbourne Borough Council to incorporate them into their document.

Completely redeveloped Tower Centre essential if Hoddesdon is to be revived.

Some excellent, well thought-out ideas. However, do not believe any significant progress can be made until Tower Centre is demolished and replaced with something less intimidating.

Give us back the Hoddesdon we had in the 1950s with an assortment of shops... menswear, hardware, shoe shops, butchers, wet fish and greengrocers.

Have lived in Hoddesdon for 45 years and watched the gradual degradation of the centre through 'modernisation'. Perhaps this is a chance for past Council errors to be admitted and rectified.

For too long, the local residents have been ignored and Hoddesdon Town Centre has had changes with a significant negative impact. I fully endorse the plans proposed by Action 4 Hoddesdon.

Should canvass the views of young people

SECTION 2. PARKING ISSUES

Parking is a key issue.

The current parking rules are keeping shoppers away.

Short term parking should be extended.

Increase 20 minute parking to 1 hour.

Free parking on market days and special event days.

Free parking in December

Free parking for 3 hours.

Free parking for 3 hours in the larger car parks.

Provide additional free parking by demolishing pedestrian area.

Underground parking. Free Sunday parking. Free parking after 6 pm.

Parking comparable with Brookfield would be good and parking along the High St.

Park and Ride scheme

More railings for parking bicycles. Tower Centre lift doesn't accommodate bicycles.

Standardise the parking charges for employees in Hoddesdon....costs £150 per quarter for some and only 50p per day (approx £40 per quarter) for workers in the precinct

I know of no other place where supermarkets charge for all parking - a few do if you do not use the store.

SECTION 3. LEISURE AND EVENTS

Loss of The Spinning Wheel pool is disgusting.

What events? No leisure facilities other than John Warner. Broxbourne Council doesn't listen to the rate payers.

Re-open the open-air pool. Make it an ice-rink in winter.

Public ownership of outdoor pool.... A co-operative.... Extra rates to make it viable

Cinema and Bowling Alley needed.

More children's play areas.

Tesco or M& S to sponsor better playing fields

Athletics track.

More special seasonal events.

Better Christmas lights, local stores sponsoring.

Develop venues for young people. A Dance Hall for discos and concerts.

A new bowling alley

Youth centres with contemporary emphasis. Teenage activities in town.

Supervised indoor play centres for young children

There should be provision for sports/exercise facilities to meet national need for better fitness

Open-air church service on special days.

Puppet show, mini Marathon, Cycling Days, events at a re-instated outdoor pool

SECTION 4 THE MARKET

Rent should be similar to other markets

French market appreciated. It should come more often.

More foreign markets

Wednesday market very good. Difficult to attract custom again on Friday.

The market is not as busy as it used to be. Even traders have given up and left.

A redeeming feature of a mainly dead town. Better parking would encourage support for market.

Very good market. The only day that Hoddesdon comes to life, but support reduced since 'Pay and Display' installed in Tower Centre.

Bring back a Farmers' Market, but on a Saturday, different from Hertford.

The rent for market pitches should be a lot lower, in line with other areas.

Market should be focused in one area e.g. The Tower Centre, preferably under cover, or in the square with covered walkways. Norwich has a permanent market area and does a good trade. New toilets needed... Tower Centre toilets are disgusting.

More diversity needed.

We enjoy 2 days of thriving market. Long may it continue.

SECTION 5 SHOPPING

Very poor. Any new, even short term shops would be appreciated.

Please don't get the same shops as everywhere else into the Tower Centre.

Don't make us a Clone town.

Need a greengrocer... supermarkets the only place to buy otherwise and freshness doubtful.

Very sad to see so many empty shops, but the ones we do have are quite a good mixture. Why is development of the Tower Centre to be left out of the equation until 2015?

Dire, except for a fantastic bookshop.

Bring back the old, brilliant market town we once had

Shops are having to pay too high a rent. Could be subsidised, or tax concessions given to encourage property owner to charge lower rents and promote full occupancy.

Rent and rates should be lowered to encourage more shops... even Bon Marché, Matalan, Pound shops etc would be good. Should be a free leaflet with map showing shopping in Hoddesdon and opening times.

More diversity needed. Council should discourage any more fast food outlets and encourage greengrocer, wet fish and fruiterer.

Turn former Co-Op store into a supermarket, so OAPs don't have to traipse to Netto / Sainsbury. Many of us don't own cars.

Need clothing shop for 'older' women.

As a visitor living in a similar size town, very surprised to see Hoddesdon like a graveyard on Sundays.

Would like to be able to do more shopping in Hoddesdon with the return of more small shops.

I live in a town where the new shopping centre has revitalised the whole town. Visitors now come from far afield to visit - on every day of the week. It CAN be done. Go for it!

There are no shops selling sports goods

Crèche for children

Shopping incentives. BOGOF

SECTION 6 LONG-TERM RE-DEVELOPMENT

Any EEC funding for improvements?

Tower Centre demolition.

Consider the future.

Indoor shopping hall like Stratford or Harlow

Small shops under the Clock Tower

Modernise War Memorial to include new serving men who perished. No gateways to Hoddesdon just the crest and good signs saying 'welcome' either end of town.

Stop wasting money on investigating and reporting and get on with doing something.

A competition for Architects for a market place 'focal point', to be a meeting place... a significant larger structure embodying the themes of the local coaching and market town history.

The Broxbourne Lido should be re-developed as a multi-function youth activity centre with workshops, consultation youth workers, coffee bars etc... a safe place to meet.

About time the residents of Hoddesdon took some positive action. Is there any strategy that could be used to get the Broxbourne Council to listen?

Message to Councillors... Don't tell residents what you think we want. LISTEN and take on board OUR comments - other market towns have been improved by councils listening and acting on comments