



**ECONOMICS
& TOWN
CENTRE**



Retaining and enhancing the vitality of Ware Town Centre

At the heart of the draft Plan, there's a recognition that it must help position Ware as a thriving 21st century market town centre by supporting a sustainable mix of uses, which will encourage footfall throughout the day and into the evening.

The town centre falls fully within a Conservation Area and contains many fine buildings of historic importance, a good number linked to the town's malting heritage. Many of the buildings are nationally listed, with others identified as non-designated heritage assets, reflecting their local importance. The waterside setting provides an attractive backdrop.

The East Herts District Plan categorises Ware as a Minor Town Centre, catering for a mixture of shopping and other service needs, both for its own residents and those of surrounding settlements. Predominantly, Ware features high quality, smaller independent stores, as opposed to larger units; and is also known for its higher-than-average food and drink offer.

Like many town centres, over the last few decades Ware has been impacted by a variety of issues including competition from neighbouring towns, out-of-town stores and online shopping. This has been exacerbated by the recent Covid-19 pandemic. Despite this, however, the number of vacant units remains fairly low: just 15 units were recorded as available in March 2021.

While the ongoing provision of retail is clearly important, the opportunity exists to host other services and facilities to enhance the overall "product" on offer. This could include identifying cultural and arts uses, providing shared spaces playing host to different activities depending on the time of day, and temporary "pop-up" uses, supported by promotional activities to encourage footfall, such as events and markets.

The conversion of units to residential – particularly those on the upper floors – could provide a useful source of footfall, while meeting housing needs.

Our draft plan proposes that town-centre mixed-use development proposals – including employment, office, retail, community, cultural, tourism and residential uses – will normally be supported, subject to other policies.

It would also support proposals to provide sufficient public and private car parking for the town centre and will seek to ensure that this provision caters for forecast future needs. The temporary change of use of vacant premises to enable pop-up shops and activities will be supported.

It is the aim of these policies to ensure that development contributes to a safe, accessible and attractive public realm within the town centre.

The plan recognises the need to improve wayfinding and signage for the town centre, provided that this can be satisfactorily integrated and is sympathetic to surroundings.

And it proposes that waste bins are integrated into the design of buildings and allow for the separate storage and collection of recyclable materials. In order to protect visual amenity, such facilities should be suitably screened. Odour should also be mitigated.

The plan will seek to support the ongoing provision of smaller business property units to attract independent retailers. It also backs the idea of shared uses for properties, where this can enable both the ongoing viability of the unit.

The re-use of buildings, including historic buildings, within Ware Town Centre for activities that will enhance the vitality and viability of the town will be particularly supported. This could include community uses, retail or business. Any associated physical alterations should be sympathetic to the historic and architectural significance and character of the building concerned.

In addition, the Neighbourhood Plan engagement has identified some additional sites that are considered to contribute significantly to the commercial offering of the town:

- Watton Road Auto-Care
- Star Street Garage and various units
- Simon Light Mercedes Benz on corner of Clement Street
- Ware Bathroom Centre
- Deans old building
- New Road Southern Maltings Industrial Estate

- Potential land at rear of Kingshill Shops by garages for small business
- Medlocks Electrical
- Various units next to Tesco car park
- Waggoners Yard

Our plan recognises the growing contribution of home-based and small-to-medium sized businesses and seeks to encourage opportunities for them.

And it will support, where appropriate, initiatives to promote the development and expansion of tourism facilities, accommodation, entertainment, visitor attractions and activities connected with day-trippers and staying visitors, and extending the night-time economy.