



# TUNBRIDGE WELLS

CIVIC DEVELOPMENT  
PLANNING FRAMEWORK

July 2017







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## 1.1 INTRODUCTION

This document has been prepared to supplement existing planning policies and guidance in relation to specific key sites within the centre of Royal Tunbridge Wells. The intention is that the additional guidance helps shape the form and quality of future development proposals including the Councils own development projects.

The document sets out a planning framework for the following key sites in Tunbridge Wells town centre (please refer to the plan at figure 1):

- Crescent Road/Church Road
- Mount Pleasant Car Park
- Great Hall Car Park

It provides up to date site-specific planning guidance on the implementation of relevant policies set out in the suite of documents that comprise the Tunbridge Wells Development Plan. The guidance has been informed by a comprehensive evidence base specific to the sites which encompasses heritage, urban design, transport/access, and environmental/technical matters.

The preparation of the framework aims to optimise the planning and other potential benefits associated with the redevelopment of the sites, with the following specific planning objectives:

- Provide up-to-date site specific planning guidance for each of the three sites;
- Provide the local community with the opportunity to influence development;
- Ensure that a comprehensive approach is taken to the preparation of redevelopment proposals for the sites (which are inter-related); and
- Assist in the determination of planning applications.

This document has the status of non-statutory planning guidance and will be a material consideration in the determination of future planning applications.

It has been prepared on behalf of Tunbridge Wells Borough Council with significant stakeholder consultation undertaken to inform its content. This has included meetings and workshops with local interest groups including the Town Forum, The Friends of Calverley Grounds and The Civic Society with two major stakeholder meetings held on 26 April 2016 and 16 June 2016. The Council has also sought the advice and support of Historic England in the preparation of this document.

This document was subject to a detailed six-week programme of public consultation from 20 April to 1 June 2017, to ensure that it has weight to inform decision-making on subsequent planning applications. It was subsequently updated to reflect the inputs of the consultation process.

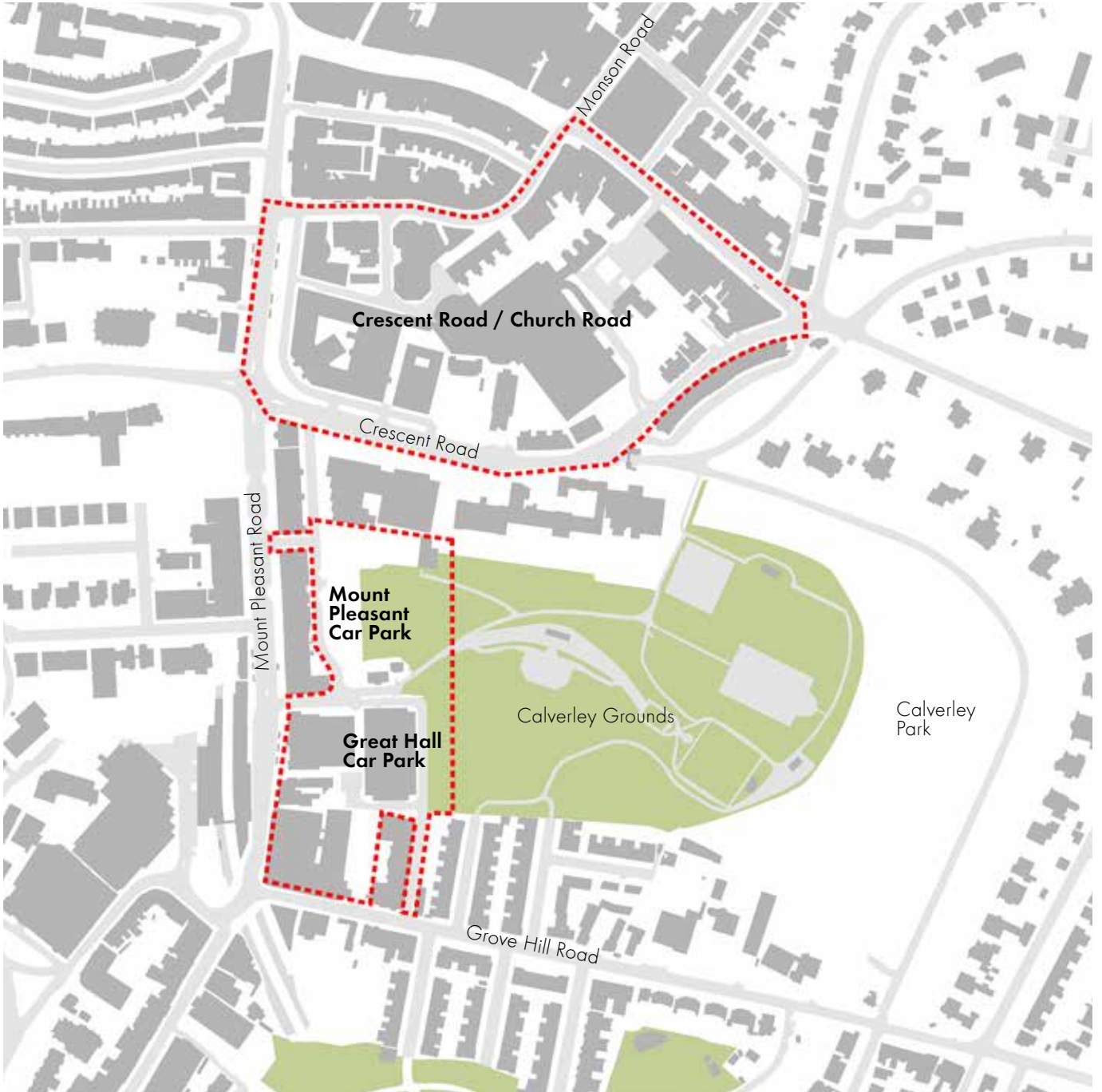
The Council may wish to adopt the framework as a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) in due course, and would undertake further statutory consultation as part of this process.

## 1.2 STUDY AREA

The area of study for this framework includes the whole urban block bounded by Mount Pleasant Road, Monson Road, Calverley Road and Crescent Road, along with the block stretching down the hill between Mount Pleasant Road and Calverley Grounds as far as Grove Hill Road. The study area is shown in Figure 1.

This boundary reflects existing policy allocations in the Tunbridge Wells Development Plan, and responds to scheme developments being proposed to inform a suitable planning context.

A brief guide to the key buildings and spaces is presented on the following pages.



Key



Study area

**Fig 1** Study area



### The existing Town Hall and Assembly Hall

contains offices, meeting rooms and Council Chamber. The adjoining Assembly Hall is a 1,000 seat theatre with a flat floor and retractable seating. The external range of the buildings and particularly the strong corner tower are important features in the townscape.



**The Library** is part of the listed group of civic buildings. It is adjacent to the **Adult Education Centre** which faces onto Monson Road and is also listed, but with a distinctive Edwardian character. Proposals are being developed to bring the two buildings together as the Cultural and Learning Hub

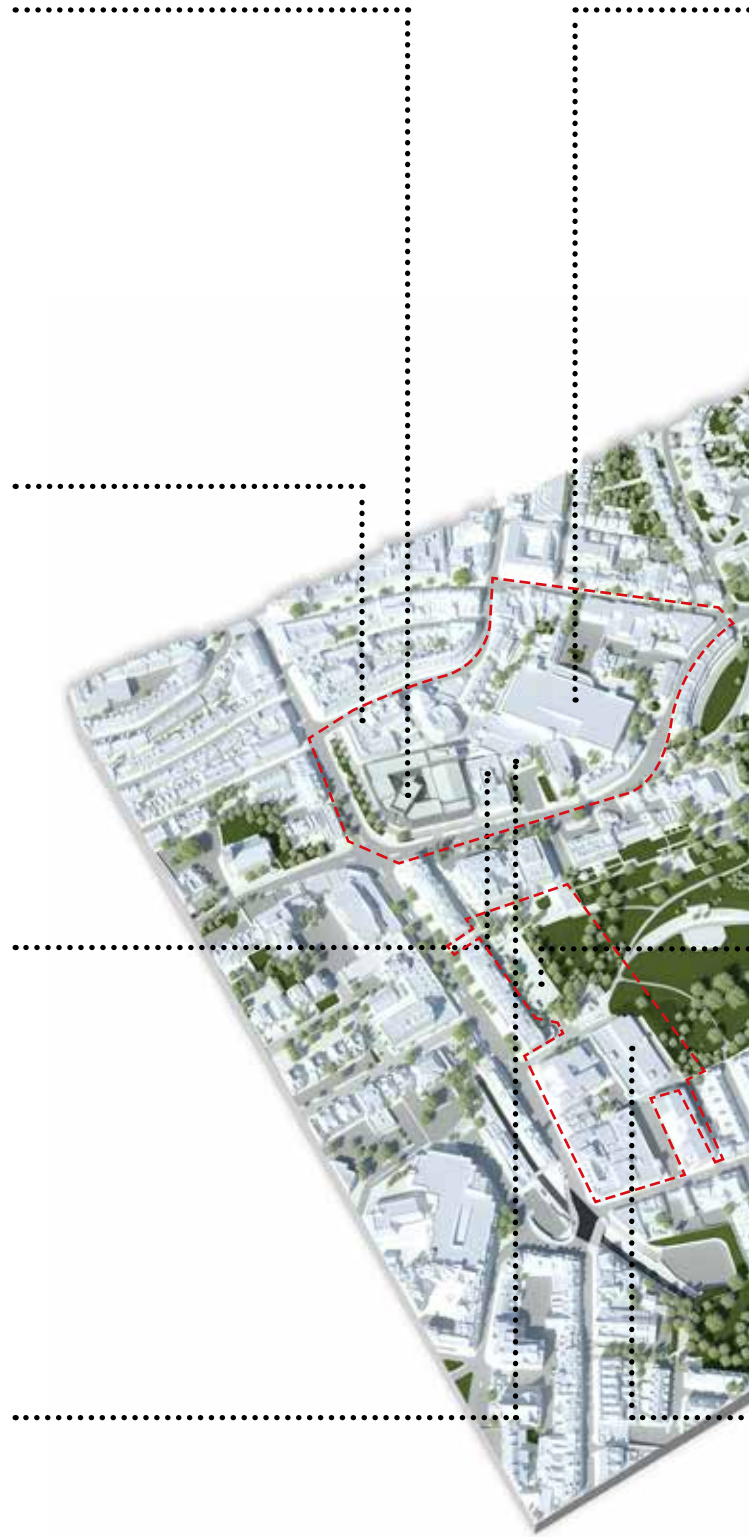


**The Police and Magistrates Court** also forms part of the civic cluster designed by Thomas and Prestwich in the 1930s. The building is no longer used as a magistrates court and may be surplus to police requirements in the future.



### 9-10 Calverley Terrace

are the remaining pair of original Decimus Burton buildings on the site. The setting of the building is dominated by parking, with the decked car park to the rear and the large parking forecourt.







..... **The Crescent Road car park** is a major multi-storey car park serving the town centre. Access is from Crescent Road, with a further pedestrian connection out to Monson Road to the north



..... **Calverley Grounds** is an historic park in the centre of Tunbridge Wells. The landscape forms an attractive natural bowl and there are a number of mature trees and features. Facilities within Calverley Grounds include the bowling green and tennis courts. Calverley Grounds forms part of the wider historic landscape with Calverley Park to the east



..... **The Mount Pleasant Avenue car park** is located alongside Calverley Grounds. It provides public parking at the weekends and is largely screened from the road and from the park by shrubs and trees



..... **The Great Hall car park** is a low-rise decked car park adjacent to Calverley Grounds. It provides public parking throughout the week. It is accessed from Mount Pleasant Road with an exit onto Grove Hill Road



## 1.3 PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT

### Policy Framework

The planning policy basis that underpins the framework comprises the following:

- National planning policy as set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (2012) (and associated National Planning Policy Guidance (NPPG) (2014)); and
- The Tunbridge Wells Development Plan which comprises:
  - Local Plan (2006) (saved policies)
  - Core Strategy (2010)
  - Site Allocations Local Plan (2016)

The 2006 Local Plan and 2010 Core Strategy were prepared prior to the publication of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and the operational period of the 2006 Plan has now expired. Accordingly, parts of the adopted Development Plan are no longer considered up to date.

Furthermore, the Council is at the early stages of preparing a new Local Plan which will replace the existing adopted Development Plan documents. The sites are not located within a defined Neighbourhood Plan Area.

### Site/area specific policies

The Civic Centre site is allocated for development in the Site Allocations DPD (Policy AL/RTW2A) (see Figure 2). The allocation site covers the whole block defined by Crescent Road to the south, Calverley Road to the east, Monson Road to the north, and Mount Pleasant Road to the west.

The Mount Pleasant Car Park site is allocated for development in the Site Allocations DPD (Policy AL/RTW21)

The Great Hall car park site is not subject to any site specific policies in the Local Plan.

### Policy designations

Local Plan (2006) policy designations that are relevant to the framework area are as follows: Conservation Area – Local Plan Policies EN4 and EN5

Historic Parks and Gardens – Local Plan Policy EN11

Arcadian Area – Local Plan Policy EN24

Areas of Important Open Space – Local Plan Policy EN21

Central Parking Zone – Local Plan Policy TP7

Economic Development Area – Local Plan Policies ED1 and ED3

Primary Shopping Area – Local Plan Policy CR5

### Other Relevant Planning Policies

The following strategic Core Strategy (2010) policies are of particular relevance:

Core Policy 1: Delivery of Development

Core Policy 3: Transport Infrastructure

Core Policy 4: Environment

Core Policy 5: Sustainable Design and Construction

Core Policy 6: Housing Provision

Core Policy 7: Employment Provision








Core Policy 8: Retail, Leisure, and Community Facilities Provision

Core Policy 9: Development in Royal Tunbridge Wells

Fig 2 shows the policy designations relevant to the study area. It should be noted that due to the extensive nature of the town centre conservation area the boundary is wider than the extents of this plan.



Key

-  Study area boundary
-  Listed buildings
-  Primary shopping area
-  Retail/mixed use development sites allocated in the Local Plan
-  **1** AL/RTW2A: Civic complex/Crescent Road area of change
-  **2** AL/RTW2I: Mount Pleasant car park
-  Calverley Park and Grounds grade II listed landscape

**Fig 2** Study area planning context

### **Policy AL/RTW 2A: Crescent Road/Church Road Area of Change (extract from site allocations DPD 2016)**

The area shown on the Royal Tunbridge Wells & Southborough Proposals Map is designated as an Area of Change.

A masterplan shall be prepared by the developer(s) with the involvement of the Borough Council, stakeholders and the local community. The masterplan shall indicate the distribution, scale and quantum of proposed uses together with areas of open space/public realm, vehicular access, parking provision and pedestrian routes into and within the site. Proposals will be expected to deliver:

- civic, educational, cultural and leisure uses: these shall include library, museum, adult education and theatre facilities, including the facilities to be provided by the Cultural and Learning Hub. There shall be no loss of existing educational, cultural and leisure facilities, or public or ceremonial civic functions from the Area of Change unless suitable alternative provision has been secured elsewhere in the town centre
- retail development: incorporating approximately 15,000sqm (net) additional comparison retail floorspace (A1) which may include a new department store and other units of varying sizes. Retail uses should be provided on the ground floor to ensure active retail frontages

Other uses may also be delivered as part of the redevelopment and refurbishment of sites within the area. Appropriate uses could include:

- restaurants and cafés: development could provide restaurant and café facilities
- market facilities: development could provide

enhanced market facilities, which may include the provision of permanent facilities

- hotel and conference facilities
- office (B1): high quality (B1) office space
- residential use: supplementary to the other uses
- parking: any development should reinstate at least the same amount of public car parking spaces within the Area of Change, with the provision to include additional or fewer spaces as considered necessary, subject to the latest available evidence

Development shall contribute to transport improvements, to include the Royal Oak junction Bayhall Road, Church Road/Mount Pleasant junction, Church Road/A26 (London Road) junction and Garden Road/Victoria Road/Camden Road junction.

Proposals for redevelopment and refurbishment within the Civic Complex/Crescent Road Area of Change shall accord with the following principles:

- a Conservation Statement must be produced to inform the masterplan and guide the redevelopment and refurbishment of sites, buildings and spaces within the Area of Change. This will focus on the heritage assets within the area (including listed buildings such as the Assembly Hall Theatre, Police Station, Magistrates' Court, Town Hall, War Memorial and Nos 9-10 Calverley Crescent) and also address any potential Local Heritage Assets
- proposals must be of a high quality design and shall demonstrate how they conserve and enhance the Conservation Area
- proposals must be accompanied by an Air Quality Assessment and appropriate mitigation measures
- any proposals affecting the Town Hall will be expected to retain significant features, such

as the main entrance, staircase and Council Chamber in situ and allow their continued use for civic functions and other compatible uses

- key views into, and within, the Area shall be protected. These are likely to include views of the main Town Hall entrance and views down Mount Pleasant Road
- opportunities should be explored to create a series of new public spaces and interlinking routes to promote better access for cycling and walking
- development will be expected to provide or enhance green infrastructure links within the area and to provide public art, which may include water features
- proposals shall promote the use of high quality, locally distinctive materials and features
- proposals should explore the potential to enhance the lighting of the area to promote public safety and improve the night-time setting of historic buildings and the associated public realm

Proposals for developing part of the Area of Change shall not compromise the wider aims and comprehensive redevelopment of Policy AL/RTW2A and wider Core Strategy objectives.

## **Policy AL/RTW 21 Mount Pleasant Avenue Car Park**

This site, as shown on the Royal Tunbridge Wells & Southborough Proposals Map, is allocated for office employment uses providing approximately 3,200sqm (gross) floorspace. The preferred use is office (B1(a)) or financial and professional services (A2). Opportunities to re-provide a similar amount of public car parking provision on site shall be explored.



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SECTION 2

# VISION AND OBJECTIVES



## 2.1 VISION

Tunbridge Wells is a vibrant historic town with an excellent retail and leisure offer and a strong cultural and civic presence. The planning framework in seeking to guide and influence the form and quality of future development proposals, including proposals for a new Theatre and new Council offices and civic suite, has the objective of safeguarding and enhancing the townscape, cultural vitality and civic life of Royal Tunbridge Wells.

Redevelopment of the existing Town Hall and Assembly Hall will work sensitively with the wider group of historic buildings, respecting their listed status and their group value. A viable long term future for the listed buildings will be sought to ensure their continued contribution to the historic character of the town centre.

The ambitious Civic development project presents an exciting opportunity to create a new focal point for civic functions and public life in Tunbridge Wells and will play a major role in strengthening Tunbridge Wells' identity as a cultural destination for the south-east.

The development will deliver a more efficient and modern office building and civic suite with open and flexible spaces and a new 1,200 seat theatre capable of hosting first-class touring shows. The buildings will be complemented by an attractive public space for congregation and celebration, creating an improved entrance to Calverley Grounds. The new buildings will create an attractive civic and cultural presence at the edge of Calverley Grounds, promoting their use and enjoyment.



## 2.2 OBJECTIVES

The planning framework objectives draw on the findings of baseline research and through discussions that took place at the stakeholder workshops.

Development of the area should:

**Establish a strong new civic focus for the town – a fulcrum which links together the upper and lower parts of Tunbridge Wells.**

The new civic buildings will play an essential role in the every-day civil and community activities of the town. This echoes the strong concept of the existing 1930s suite of civic buildings. Their location between Calverley Grounds and the railway station strengthens the link between the upper and lower parts of the town, creating a new civic heart for the town.

**Create a forum for public life – a destination for the wider area and a place of congregation and celebration.**

The theatre will strengthen Tunbridge Wells popularity as a cultural beacon for the region, encouraging people to visit and spend time in the town. There will be new spaces for the community, which will offer an opportunity for people to gather together and to celebrate life's special moments.

**Protect and enhance the historic townscape – a sustainable future for the existing historic buildings, parks and spaces.**

The historic buildings and spaces in the town centre are a vital part of the continuing appeal of Tunbridge Wells. Proposals should protect and enhance this character, particularly establishing a viable and sustainable use of the existing historic buildings to give them a long term future which protects their continued contribution.

**Deliver architecture and public realm of the highest quality – flexible and sustainable development which responds to its context.**

The objective for the study area is to preserve and enhance the best aspects of the townscape of the area and to seek enhancements where possible to elevate all areas of public realm and all buildings to a good standard. The new buildings, and particularly the new office building and civic suite will deliver flexible space which can accommodate a range of activities and which can be adaptable over time.

## 2.3 KEY PRINCIPLES

A series of urban design principles have been identified for the study area:

### **Retention and enhancement of locally listed buildings and conservation area**

The existing buildings are part of an important listed group within the heart of the town centre conservation area and should be conserved and enriched. Calverley Grounds and Park is located within a conservation area requiring new buildings to be sensitive to their surrounding context.

### **A strong unified civic identity**

The existing buildings should maintain a united civic appearance, and any new buildings should share a cohesive identity with clear purpose and activity which establishes a new civic heart for the town.

### **A well-connected environment**

Any development scheme should improve connections and ease of movement for pedestrians, cyclists and vehicles, contributing positively to the legibility of the town. This will include the potential for a new connection into Calverley Grounds.

### **Integration of development within its local context**

The buildings should be integrated well within the surrounding area. Any new buildings should embrace and enhance Calverley Grounds, by creating views over the park and encouraging indoor uses to spill out into the outside spaces. Re-modelling and re-use of the existing buildings should reflect their listed status and contribution to the wider townscape.

### **A high quality public realm**

The setting of the existing and new buildings should be enhanced by improvements to the public realm, to create an attractive network of streets and spaces for people to enjoy. Creating a new gateway into Calverley Grounds and improving the street-scape around the existing Civic buildings are two major components of this.

### **Flexible and adaptable space for multi-use and long term resilience**

The preferred approach will prioritise the flexibility and adaptability of spaces. New buildings will be adaptable over time to accommodate a range of uses. Proposals for a new office building and civic suite will have public rooms designed to accommodate a range of functions and lettings as well as their core civic activities.

### **A sustainable future**

Any proposed development should contribute towards a shift to sustainability and reduced carbon footprint. In the case of any buildings developed for Tunbridge Wells Borough Council this should enhance the Council's self-sufficiency, increasing its capacity to respond to the needs of the local population without compromising the ability to meet the needs of future generations.





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SECTION 3

# FRAMEWORK FOR DEVELOPMENT



### 3.1 OVERALL FRAMEWORK

This framework has been drafted to help guide and coordinate a number of potential development projects and to set these within the context of wider townscape considerations and public realm improvements.

The overall framework for the area has emerged in response to the Council's decision to relocate the theatre and council offices, currently situated at the junction of Mount Pleasant Avenue and Crescent Road. The existing Town Hall is not fit for purpose as modern office space but has significant potential for re-use through remodelling. The Assembly Hall lacks the space and back-of-house facilities to attract the variety of theatre shows needed to achieve the Council's broader vision to strengthen the identity of Royal Tunbridge Wells as a cultural beacon for the region.

An initial options study was undertaken in October 2015, on behalf of Tunbridge Wells Borough Council, to explore the possibilities for the relocation of the Civic complex and the redevelopment of the existing buildings. These options were tested and developed, and a preferred option emerged which sees the development of a new theatre on the edge of Calverley Grounds, together with a new office building and civic suite which allows for flexible and efficient multi-use spaces. It also proposes the partial remodelling of the existing buildings to make them suitable for a wide range of alternative uses and thereby give them a sustainable future.

The preferred option is outlined in this masterplan framework, accompanied by a set of guiding principles to inform development of the highest quality. The main components of the preferred approach are outlined in the following section.

Delivery of the **Culture and Learning Hub** project in the Library and Adult Education buildings .....

**Town Hall and Assembly Hall** refurbished and remodelled .....

**Police and Magistrates Court** refurbished and remodelled .....





Setting of **9-10 Calverley Terrace** enhanced with improved landscaping .....

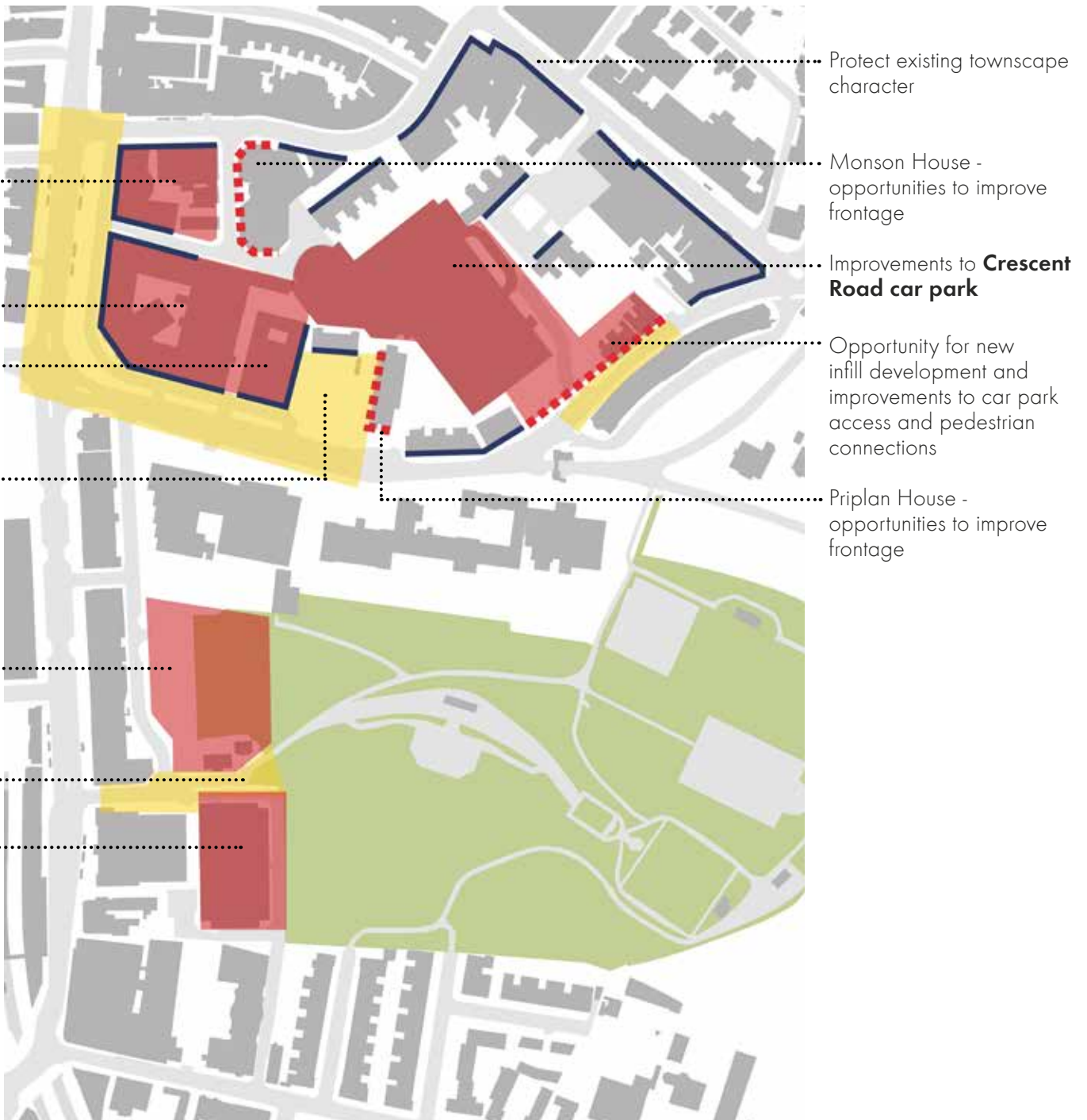
New **office building and civic suite** with underground car parking .....

Improved **park entrance** .....

**New theatre** .....

Key

-  Key opportunity sites
-  Frontage to protect
-  Frontage to enhance
-  Public realm enhancements



**Fig 3** Proposed civic framework

## 3.2 PUBLIC REALM

### Context

The Council's wider planning policy provides the following context for the Framework:

- To improve linkages between different areas of the town centre and to improve the street scene and public realm, including with the provision of street furniture and green infrastructure, to promote wellbeing and a sense of place;
- To promote the town centre as an attractive and thriving place for retail and leisure (including the night-time economy);
- To promote and improve access to the town's cultural, tourism and amenity attractions; and
- To reduce traffic congestion in the town centre and beyond and to encourage alternative modes of transport.

Streetscape improvements for Mount Pleasant Road, set out in the Public Realm Framework include:

- Create a more attractive link between top and bottom of town;
- Upgrade and reinforce existing character;
- Replace all trees with consistent species in properly constructed tree pits;
- Replace all lamp columns to same design as elsewhere in town centre and properly spaced;
- Upgrade pedestrian courtesy crossing improve sense of priority and calm traffic; and
- Surface parking bays in paving to reduce visual impact of highway.

A detailed set of public realm enhancements are being developed by Tunbridge Wells Borough Council. These include:

- Maintaining a good east-west traffic flow across town;
- Potential for landmark space;
- A clearer definition of road hierarchy through paving and signal phasing;
- Wider footways provide greater pedestrian potential;
- Shorter pedestrian crossings;
- Restricted access and speeds in north-south directions; and
- Adjusted signals phasing would retain east-west traffic priority.



### **Civic Way**

There is potential for cars to be removed from Civic Way and the space to be re-landscaped to provide a high quality pedestrian environment.

The area in front of the Library may be more extensively re-modelled to create a more cohesive space in front of the building. This would reflect its enhanced significance as a public building in the area.

In the event that a non-public use is considered for the existing Town Hall site an element of landscape buffer between the building and the publicly accessible space may be appropriate to manage access and privacy. A more public re-use of the building could be reflected in the inclusion of new seating and landscaping which encourages access.

### **9 and 10 Calverley terrace**

The forecourt to these buildings has been dominated by parking in recent years, particularly associated with the Police Station. If this use were to cease there may be the opportunity to reconsider the design of the space to enhance the setting of the buildings. Ideally this would feature a predominantly green space, reflecting the original setting of the buildings.

### **Monson Way**

Monson Way will remain important to provide service and parking access within the block. However, there is also potential for improvements in the space and the addition of a new pedestrian link through the opening up of the Police Station site.

### **Crescent Road**

An element of potential infill development has been identified along Crescent Road. This

would help to screen the existing multi-storey car park, improving the wider townscape. This element of development coincides with a pinch-point along the road itself, and development in this location could usefully deliver a carriageway widening to improve safety and access.

The existing pedestrian connection past the Crescent Road car park is noted as being relatively unattractive. This could be enhanced as part of the wider improvements to the area, creating better access to the car park and a more useable link from Monson Road to Crescent Road. The design of the infill development on Crescent Road should particularly consider how passive surveillance might be achieved to provide greater overlooking of this route. The Carrs Corner junction at the eastern end of Crescent Road is complex and would benefit from changes to improve cycle and pedestrian facilities.

### **Calverley Grounds**

Calverley Grounds has a key role in the centre of Tunbridge Wells as an historic open space. The natural bowl of the landscape, overlooked by historic buildings, makes it an attractive location for occasional events and festivals, but at all times of the year it provides a welcome open space close to a number of town centre amenities.

Development of the office building and civic suite and Theatre presents an opportunity to reassess the way in which Calverley Grounds is used and managed, with potential for a wider range of events linking into the new civic buildings, reflecting its historic role. The new development would also be a helpful trigger to initiate a wider study of the park and review whether any existing amenities can be consolidated or improved to the betterment of the historic character.

## **Mount Pleasant Road**

The improvements to the public realm approaching Calverley Grounds has the potential to connect in with wider public realm enhancements along Mount Pleasant Road, particularly in the area around the station.

The station building, Hoopers Department Store and the Great Hall building all provide strong frontage onto the street, and there are opportunities to rationalise bus stops, taxi rank and pedestrian realm to enhance the quality of arrival in the town centre.

## **Pedestrians**

The Core Strategy notes that it is important to increase the current low levels of walking to facilitate a shift away from private car use. There is currently poor pedestrian access into Calverley Grounds, limited by the relatively small number of entrances. The lack of connecting routes on desire lines means it is not a natural short-cut for daily use.

A new gateway to Calverley Grounds via Mount Pleasant Avenue, framed by the proposed new office building and civic suite and theatre buildings, would improve the setting and approach to the park for pedestrians by creating a high quality and attractive shared surface with active frontage leading up to the park. This route should be designed as a pedestrian priority public space, taking into account the necessity for service and delivery access for the theatre and office building and civic suite, and vehicular access along the stretch of Mount Pleasant Avenue which runs parallel to Mount Pleasant Road. The space in front of the proposed theatre and office building and civic suite should be designed for pedestrians only.

Public realm improvements along existing stretches of Mount Pleasant Avenue to the west of the proposed office building and civic suite, including better quality paving and planting, would make the area safer and more pleasant for pedestrians.

Access to Calverley Grounds from the south is currently from Mountfield Road and Mountfield Gardens, and from the north from the northern end of Calverley Park. A new pedestrian entrance to Calverley Grounds should also be considered from the north of Calverley Grounds, linking Crescent Road to the park, to create another route through Calverley Grounds that follows a natural desire line. This could be from 9-10 Calverley Terrace with a new pedestrian crossing over Crescent Road.

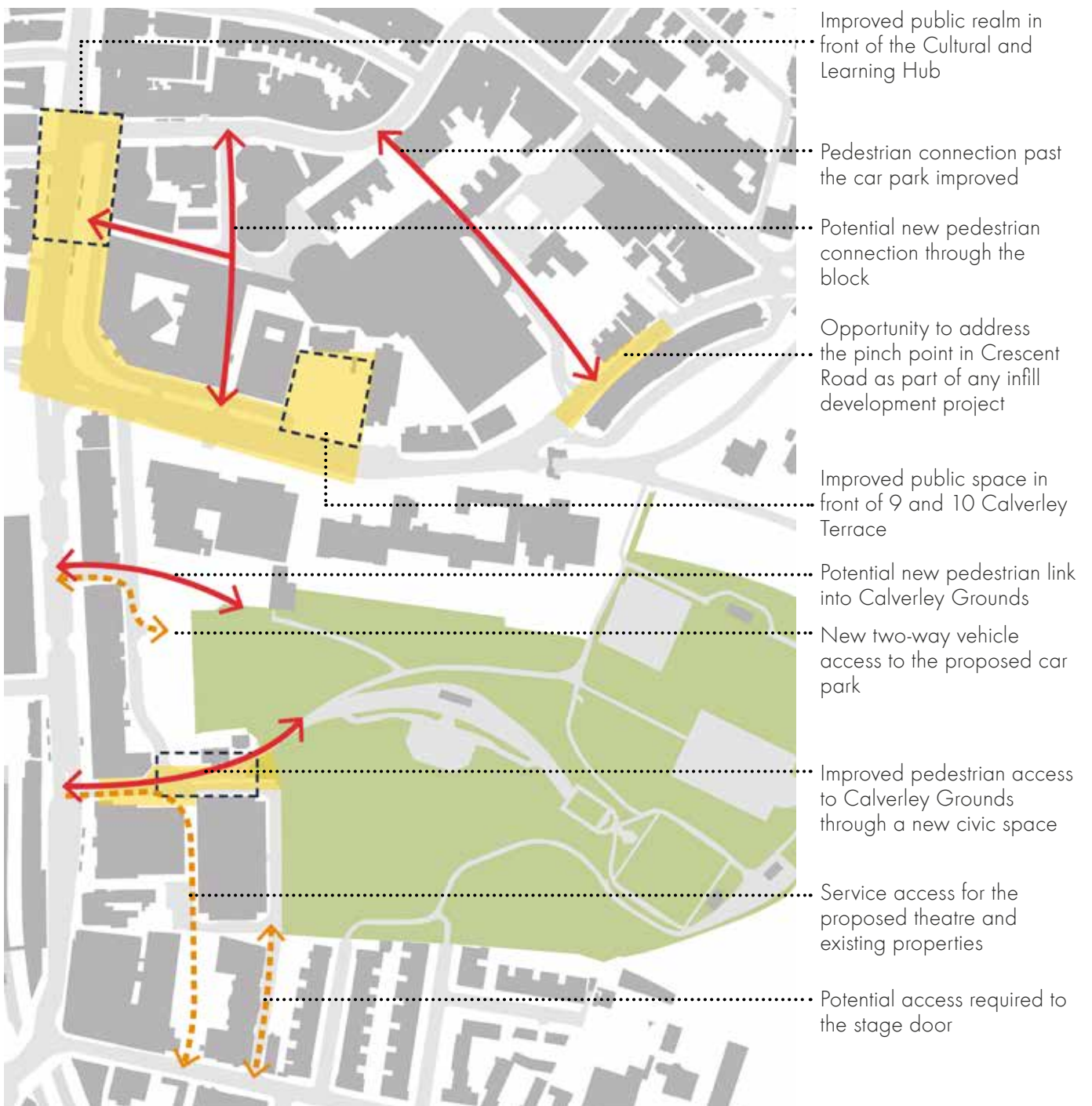
Development should take advantage of Mount Pleasant Road as a key link between the top and bottom of town and a transport node; there are a number of bus stops and it is in close proximity to the train station.

## **Cycling**

Cycling to and from the site will be encouraged. Safe and secure cycle parking should be provided for employees and for public use. The number of cycle parking spaces should be in keeping with Tunbridge Wells Borough Council policy requirements, and should be in an obvious and accessible location. A possible location for bike storage could be along the southern edge of Mount Pleasant Avenue.

## **Vehicular movement**

Mount Pleasant Avenue will need to remain in use as a service route to maintain access to a number of existing buildings. Similarly, the servicing for the new theatre will require access from the bottom of Mount Pleasant Avenue around the back of the Great Hall and connecting with the service area of Hoopers Department Store.



**Fig4** Public realm

Both of these access movements will necessitate an element of shared space, but will leave the connecting link between the new office building and civic suite and theatre free of traffic. Large vehicles will require access to the theatre service yard at the beginning and end of any show run, and for delivery and refuse collection. However, this is not expected to result in a high number of vehicle movements during the middle of the day or during the run of a show.

Computer analysis of these routes has been undertaken to ensure that vehicles will be able to safely undertake the movements required, and the planning of the routes eliminates the need for large vehicles to reverse in public spaces.

The shared surface space is also important as an access for emergency vehicles, including into Calverley Grounds.

### **Car parking**

To support the development of the theatre and office building and civic suite, new car parking should be delivered to replace the two existing car parks.

Options studies have been undertaken to test different locations and access arrangements. This work has considered how the impact in terms of construction process and access for vehicles can be minimised. It has been identified that basement parking would best be provided below the site identified for office development. It may be possible for the basement parking to extend below part of Calverley Grounds provided that the landscape is properly reinstated.

Access to a car park in this location would be established by allowing two way movement on a short stretch of Mount Pleasant Avenue, as shown in figure 4, to ensure that cars are not required to pass through the new public space between the office and theatre buildings.

### **Taxis**

The proposed changes to the park entrance will require an alternative solution to the current taxi waiting area on the eastern side of Mount Pleasant Road. This will be developed as part of the public realm improvements being undertaken by the Borough Council, in discussion with taxi operators.

### **Set-down and pick-up**

The development of a new theatre on the Great Hall car park site will attract a significant number of vehicles, including coach parties, as happens with the existing Assembly Hall Theatre. The short stay parking on the eastern side of Mount Pleasant Road will be reviewed with the aim of providing set-down and pick-up areas for the theatre.

### 3.3 LAND USE

Site Allocations Local Plan Policy AL/RTW2A (Civic Complex/Crescent Road Area of Change) establishes policy principles in terms of the protection and retention of existing uses and sets out acceptable alternative uses in the Crescent Road/Church Road Area of Change.

The policy requires the educational, cultural, and leisure facilities and civic/ceremonial functions that currently exist within the site to be retained or re-provided on the site or elsewhere within the town centre. The policy therefore allows some of these uses to be 'decanted' to the sites identified in the lower area of the Development Framework.

The use of part of the town hall buildings should be reserved for publicly accessible civic-type functions but the policy also recognises an opportunity to incorporate other uses on site as part of its comprehensive redevelopment and refurbishment. These uses could include restaurants and cafés, market facilities, hotel and conference facilities, offices, and residential use.

Policy AL/RTW21 in the Site Allocations Local Plan (2016) allocates the Mount Pleasant car park site for office use. As the site is also within the town centre boundary, strategic planning policy supports a range of town centre uses (with the exception of retail, which would need to satisfy sequential and impact assessment tests). This includes potential to accommodate 'decanted' uses from the sites identified in the upper area of the Development Framework.

Although the Great Hall car park site does not benefit from a site specific policy in the Site Allocations Local Plan (2016), it is located within the town centre boundary. As explained above, strategic planning policy therefore supports a range of town centre uses within the site (including 'decanted' uses from the sites

identified in the upper area of the Development Framework.

Paragraphs 3.28-3.29 of the Site Allocations Local Plan require that each development in the town centre re-provides at least the same amount of public parking spaces (this is 205 spaces for the Great Hall car park and 60 spaces for the Mount Pleasant car park) unless justified by evidence of a lack of need. Furthermore, policy would allow additional car parking to meet operational needs.

The existing use of the land to the east of the Great Hall car park is a public park. The site is subject to designations in the adopted Local Plan as an Area of Important Open Space, a Historic Park or Garden, and an Arcadian Area. Whilst none of the existing trees on site are subject to Tree Preservation Orders, the site is within a Conservation Area.

### 3.4 FORM, SCALE AND MASSING

Building heights in the centre of Tunbridge Wells are predominantly two to four stories. However, perceptions of scale are also impacted by the dynamic topography which creates a varied and interesting roofscape.

There are a number of set-piece elements within the town centre, including the Calverley Park Crescent, designed by Decimus Burton, which create a strong consistent form rather than stepping with the terrain.

The existing group of civic buildings takes a similar form, establishing a strong consistent parapet wall height which unifies the group despite the changes in ground level around the area. The entrance to the Town Hall on the prominent corner of Mount Pleasant Road and Crescent Road is then distinguished by the presence of a squat, muscular tower. To the rear of the block the Assembly Hall has

an existing fly-tower structure which rises to a similar height but is far less visible from the surrounding streets.

Other taller features of the area include the strong roofline of the Adult Education building, and the domes of the former opera house to the north of Monson Road.

Future development within the area, including re-modelling of the existing buildings should respect rather than challenge this overall character, particularly the strong tower of the Town Hall as part of a broadly symmetrical composition.

The opportunity for infill development along Crescent Road to screen the existing car park should also take its reference point as the surrounding buildings to repair the existing townscape.



**Fig 5** Existing stepping terrace on Mount Pleasant Road

In the particular vicinity of the proposed theatre and office building and civic suite development the existing buildings tend to follow the sloping terrain, creating stepping terraces, which some buildings in the wider town centre create a stronger presence in the townscape.

This dynamic townscape creates a strong backdrop to new development. It strongly suggests that development of the office building and civic suite on the existing Mount Pleasant Avenue car park should step gradually down the hillside, reflecting the overall massing and the stepped terrace of Mount Pleasant Road.

The proposed location for a new theatre is at the lowest point in the landscape. This is helpful in terms of accommodating what will inevitably be a relatively large building. Any fly tower and the wider roovescape will be particularly significant in the townscape given the location of the building in the bottom of the valley, making them even more prominent.





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SECTION 4

# KEY SITES



## 4.1 EXISTING TOWN HALL AND ASSEMBLY HALL

### Context

The existing Town Hall is the centrepiece of the civic cluster, occupying the dominant corner site at the junction of Mount Pleasant Road and Crescent Road. It is currently the main site for the council offices, council chamber and members robing rooms. The building has two generous storeys, along with a basement level and a limited element of rooftop development, with a courtyard in the centre.

The Assembly Hall forms the eastern section of the block. Its current use as a theatre is limited by poor back-of-house facilities and its lack of space, which, together with the capacity and layout of seating, makes it less attractive to touring shows. The building is comprised of an elegant art-deco style lobby with stairs leading to the main theatre space; a simple rectangular box with single large rake of seating above a flat floor.

The 1930s neo-Georgian style buildings are Grade II Listed, thus requiring the preservation and enhancement of the buildings. It is also located with the town centre conservation area and within the Site Allocations Local Plan (Policy AL/RTW2A).

### Objectives

- To protect the Grade II Listed buildings and the historic fabric of the surrounding townscape;
- To provide suitable alternative uses for the building which work well in the town centre context; and
- To improve the setting of the civic buildings by ensuring a high quality public realm.

### Development parameters

The existing Town Hall building is characterised by a strong corner tower presence and side wings which are superficially symmetrical. This tower and the rest of the outer range of buildings form an important part of the historic townscape and are important features to retain and enhance.

To the rear of the site, the large box of the Assembly Hall theatre has less of an impact on the townscape as despite its bulk it is screened on all sides by other buildings. Similarly, the fly tower is relatively obscured from view.



The Council Chamber is located in a projecting element in the centre of the courtyard, on the same orientation as the corner tower. It has no visible impact on the street, but it does significantly constrain the potential for successful re-use of the rest of the building around the courtyard.

It is important for the long term future of the listed buildings that a viable and sustainable future use is established. This should balance the desire to retain and protect the character of the existing buildings with the need to adapt them to ensure their ongoing usability.

There is a significant level change between the floor level in the building and the external ground level which varies substantially around the edge of the building. Coupled with the existing listed status of the buildings this limits the opportunities to create new entrances into the building.

Potential uses such as office space, academic use, hotel or residential use could all be considered as potentially suitable for the building, subject to commercial viability.

In order to render the structure more usable it may be possible to undertake significant modifications whilst retaining and protecting the essential character and contribution to the townscape. Any additions to the silhouette of the Assembly Hall and new development to the roof of the existing building should respect the form and symmetry of the building and the prominence of the corner tower.

The public realm around the site should be improved. In particular, enhancements will be sought to improve the setting of the War Memorial.

Public use of the buildings would imply retained public access to the space with opportunities for revised treatment such as seating and market stalls. A more private use such as residential-led development would benefit from reduced access to the edge of the building and private landscaped garden space replacing Civic Way.

Consideration should be given to the potential development of the Police Station and Magistrates Court to the east of the site. Flexibility should be built into the design of the redevelopment to ensure that a range of options can be explored for the adjacent site. Delivery of this development and re-use of the existing building is contingent on the completion of the proposed new theatre and office building and civic suite which will allow for the buildings to be vacated.

## 4.2 CULTURAL AND LEARNING HUB

### Context

The Cultural and Learning Hub will integrate the existing Library and Museum & Art Gallery with the adjacent Adult Education Centre, to create a modernised space that is a vibrant hub for culture and heritage. It is being coordinated by Kent County Council and Tunbridge Wells Borough Council. The building is located within the area covered by the Site Allocations Local Plan (Policy AL/RTW2A).

### Objectives

- To establish a new Cultural and Learning Hub in the existing Library, Museum and Adult Education Centre
- To support an integrated approach to development of the Town Centre;
- To create a suitable public realm context for the Cultural and Learning Hub as a significant public building.

### Design parameters

The current Library entrance should remain as the main entrance to the Hub, with potential for a secondary service entrance on Monson Way.

The two existing listed buildings should be retained, with new connecting development established to the rear on Monson Way. Given the location of this (away from the main street frontage) there is scope for this to be an attractive modern addition which mediates between the varied style of the two buildings.

The existing Adult Education building is one of the taller structures in the area and has a distinctive and dynamic roofline. New development should be clearly subordinate to this. However, there may be opportunities for sensitive additions to the roof of the existing Library within the wider context of the whole listed group.

In the event that public uses such as education are established for the existing Town Hall building there may be opportunities to deliver further integration between the two functions.



## 4.3 POLICE STATION AND MAGISTRATES COURT

### Context

The existing police and magistrates building was designed specifically for that function in the 1930s. It forms part of the listed group and includes a number of very particular elements such as cells and courtrooms which render the building difficult to re-use. Accessibility is also very limited. It is therefore considered that significant remodelling could be possible in order to ensure that the key elements of the building are retained in order to maintain the listed group. The building is located within the area covered by the Site Allocations Local Plan (Policy AL/RTW2A).

### Objectives

- To support an integrated approach to development of the Town Centre;
- To ensure the heritage value of the building is protected; and
- To potentially integrate the development with the adjacent Assembly Hall development.

### Design parameters

As with the Town Hall and Assembly Hall the front range of the building to the street has particular importance. It is one of the key entrances, and continues the group elevation. This range of the building should be retained and incorporated as part of the remodelling and reuse of the building.

The area of building to the rear could be sensitively remodelled, including partial demolition to create more useable space which establishes a viable future for the building. The east elevation of the building faces onto the open space in front of 9-10 Calverley Terrace and active frontage and new entrances could be established which face this way.

There may be some scope to accommodate additional building volume towards the rear of the plot, replacing the existing garaging.

Any design options for the building will be required to facilitate a north-south pedestrian link through the block. This is to be in the form of a lane or a mews, with active frontages and overlooking.



## 4.4 NO. 9-10 CALVERLEY TERRACE

### Context

The pair of buildings are Grade II Listed and the last to remain out of the group of Decimus Burton villas that were demolished to make way for the existing civic buildings. They are located to the east of the Police Station and Magistrates Court and set back considerably from the road.

Their context has been significantly affected by subsequent development, including the 1930s civic development which changed the building line to the street, limiting views to and from the buildings.

The large forecourt in front of 9-10 Calverley Terrace is currently for car parking, principally associated with the Police Station. They are currently in use as office accommodation and are located within the area covered by the Site Allocations Local Plan (Policy AL/RTW2A)

### Objectives

- To establish a viable long-term future for the building; and
- To improve the setting of the building to enhance its Grade II Listed character.

### Design parameters

This is a significant building by Decimus Burton, and therefore limited external alterations are expected beyond the restoration of period features and measures to improve accessibility.

The potential to re-model the landscaping in front of the building once car parking is not required for the police station could significantly enhance the setting of the building, potentially complemented by more active frontages on the police station site and the adjoining Priplan House site.

The Town Yard decked car park to the rear of the building is a separate element of parking, and is an independent structure from the main Crescent Road car park. Removal of this car park would improve the setting of the building, and would create the possibility for appropriate buildings to be developed to the rear which could complement the listed building.



1897 - 99 map extract showing the original buildings

## 4.5 CRESCENT ROAD

### Context

The existing Crescent Road car park is acknowledged as an unattractive but important structure in the town centre. Its impact is in part due to the large area of open space on Crescent Road which means that it has a direct impact on the listed Calverley Park Terrace.

A further constraint on the area is the pinch point in Crescent Road. This impacts on both vehicles in the area, but also limits the opportunities to provide a suitable footway on both sides of the road. The building is located within the area covered by the Site Allocations Local Plan (Policy AL/RTW2A)

### Objectives

- To screen the car park from the street through sensitive infill development;
- To provide additional parking capacity within the site;
- To improve the north-south pedestrian connection through the block; and
- To facilitate the widening of Crescent Road to remove the existing pinch point through setting the buildings back from the existing building line.



### Design parameters

The space to the south and east of the car park offers the potential for additional parking capacity to be delivered. This should be accompanied by new frontage development to Crescent Road which screens the car park structure. These buildings should establish a consistent building line, re-establishing active frontage.

These properties are expected to be residential development most likely to be in the form of apartments. This is not considered to be a strong commercial location and therefore active ground floor uses would be encouraged but not required.

The entrance and exit arrangement to the car park should be rationalised to reduce its land take and impact on the street scene. At the same time, the project also provides the opportunity to remove the pinch point in the road to improve safety for vehicles and pedestrians.

The quality of the north-south pedestrian route past the car park should be improved, including consideration given to the directness and clarity of the route and the potential to include any active overlooking to enhance passive surveillance.

Consideration should be given to improving the appearance of existing elevations of the structure to reduce its impact on the wider townscape.

## 4.6 NEW OFFICE BUILDING AND CIVIC SUITE AND CAR PARK

### Context

The proposed location for a new office building and civic suite is at the site of the existing Mount Pleasant car park and, together with the new theatre, will frame the improved entrance into Calverley Grounds.

The existing Town Hall building is currently insufficient for its use and function, and a new building will provide opportunity for the council to make efficiency savings and to reduce operational and running costs.

The Mount Pleasant Car Park site is allocated for development in the Site Allocations Local Plan (Policy AL/RTW21)

### Objectives

- To provide a modern and sustainable building for Tunbridge Wells Borough Council, presenting an open and welcoming character and significantly reducing the life costs of the building compared to the existing town hall.
- To deliver spaces that are flexible and adaptable and which ensure long term resilience;
- To provide opportunities for lettable space that offers a commercial return;
- To establish active frontage onto the public space;
- To deliver new parking provision to maintain town centre capacity; and
- To have multi-use public facing spaces which encourage people to gather together and to celebrate important events.

### Design parameters

The creation of a new civic building is a significant opportunity for the Council to create an environment which will suit modern working practices and democratic processes as well as engaging with the public in an accessible

manner. The southern part of the building should provide flexible civic and public spaces whilst the rear of the site should provide flexible and sub-dividable office accommodation.

Whilst the Council could choose to occupy the whole building, any space it doesn't wish to use for Council functions could be subdivided and let as independent office space. Separate access can be created into the different parts of the building, allowing it to be let either as a stand-alone office suitable for a significant employer, or as a series of smaller units suitable for start-up companies.

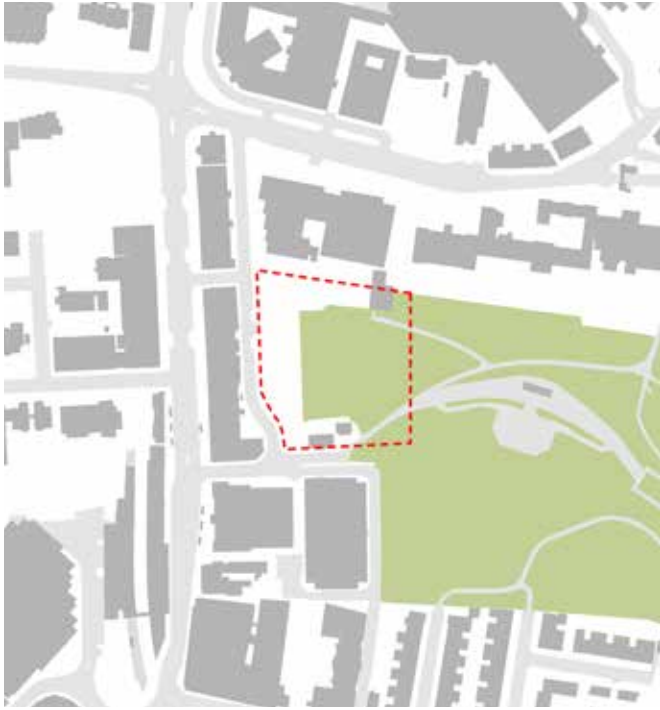
The southern edge of the block should be the main entrance to the building and help to improve the setting of the route into Calverley Grounds. The concept proposed for the building is to establish a new civic presence onto Mount Pleasant Avenue, facing south towards a new theatre, with two buildings together framing the entrance into the park.

The design of the building should be shaped by the challenging terrain of the site, which slopes steeply upwards from the south to the north.

The building should address the parkland setting in a positive manner, capitalising on the setting to create high quality civic buildings.

New parking provision is expected to be provided as underground parking below the office. Parking may extend below the open space provided this is reinstated. The entrance and exit to the car park is expected to be via Mount Pleasant Road at the northern end of the site and that traffic arrangements on Mount Pleasant Avenue may be altered to allow two way flows on the upper part to avoid traffic having to use the new public space at the bottom of the hill.





## 4.7 NEW THEATRE

### Context

A new 1,200 seat theatre is proposed on the site of the existing Great Hall car park. This will replace the existing Assembly Hall Theatre and will be large enough to attract an excellent artistic programme and expand the cultural and leisure offer of Tunbridge Wells.

The Great Hall car park site and the land to the east are not subject to any site specific policies in the Local Plan. The car parking spaces will be reprovided within the scheme. The theatre, along with the office building and civic suite, will frame a new attractive gateway into Calverley Grounds.

### Objectives

- To deliver a 1,200 seat venue that attracts a variety of high quality touring shows and encourages people from across the region to visit;
- To form a strong unified civic identity with the new Office building and civic suite;
- To embrace its setting close to Calverley Grounds by creating terraces and new views, and coordinating cultural events which make use of the park;
- To enhance the restaurant and bar offer that supports the functioning of the Theatre; and
- To ensure ease of movement around the site for service and emergency vehicles.

### Design parameters

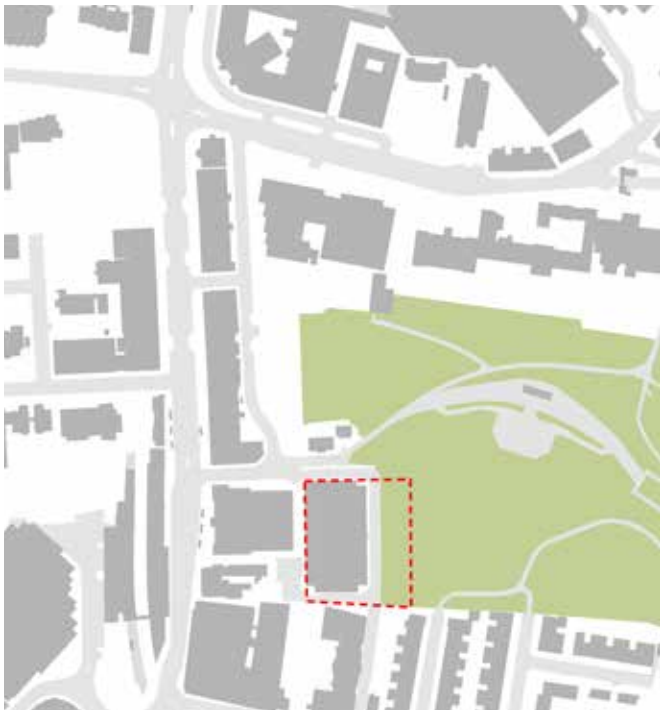
A new building on the site should frame a new entrance for Calverley Grounds. The principle facade and entrance will be on the north side, facing onto the new pedestrian space.

The second significant elevation will be the frontage to the park, where there is the opportunity to create open views and establish

a terrace which extends opportunities for outside seating and activities.

It is acknowledged that the theatre will be a building of significant size. Care should be taken in the design to modulate and manage this, particularly in views from around Calverley Grounds. The elevated vantage points which the terrain provides means that an attractive approach is required for the fly tower and for the roofscape more generally given their prominence in many views.

Servicing should be established on the yard to the south of the building, with access from the north via the shared space and exiting to the south onto Grove Hill Road.





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SECTION 5

# DELIVERY



## 5.1 DELIVERY

### Delivering the vision and objectives

The Council is seeking to deliver its vision and objectives for Tunbridge Wells town centre. This section provides guidance on the delivery approach for comprehensive development and applies to all development within the study area regardless of ownership.

### Continuing to work with stakeholders

Significant stakeholder consultation has already been undertaken to inform the preparation of this planning framework and proposals for the sites. The Council will continue to work and engage with stakeholders including the local community, businesses, landowners, residents and statutory consultees to progress the delivery of each site including through the planning application process.

### Delivery approach

In line with the Core Strategy, Local Plan and Site Allocations DPD, the Council promotes town centre uses within Tunbridge Wells town. Tunbridge Wells town is the borough's main town and largest shopping area. The town incorporates a number of distinct character areas, with much of the town designated as a Conservation Area, reflecting its rich architectural heritage. There are many listed buildings and the open spaces and parks are highly valued. New development must ensure that it considers and is appropriate for the surrounding built and natural environment whilst also enhancing Tunbridge Well's role as the borough's main town centre. The guidance in this document seeks to ensure this.

The Council is committed to redeveloping parts of Tunbridge Wells town centre including the Civic development project, which will provide new council offices and civic suite, and a new theatre. Project feasibility and viability are key considerations for the Council and at every stage

of decision making the Council seeks to ensure a deliverable solution to development.

The Council requires a comprehensive and coordinated approach to development of the Civic development project. This is in order to deliver the aspirations of this planning framework and the wider policy framework including the Site Allocations DPD designations, and policies within the Core Strategy and Local Plan.

Where possible the Council is bringing forward its own land for development. Where required, the Council will use its statutory powers including compulsory purchase powers to facilitate comprehensive development and delivery of the sites in order to deliver the policy framework for Tunbridge Wells.

### Managing the developments

A coordinated management of development is required in order to minimise impact on businesses, residents and visitors during and post construction. The following will be considered to manage the construction process and the impact of the development:

- Construction Management Plans.
- Encouraging contractors to achieve excellence in construction management, as certified by the national Considerate Contractors Scheme.
- Minimising impact on public realm and open space during construction.
- Requiring travel plans.
- Requiring delivery and servicing plans to address the delivery and servicing arrangement for new developments.

This may include the use of planning conditions and/or section 106 planning obligations to minimise and mitigate the impact of development.



