



Stevenage Station Gateway Area Action Plan Preferred Options Report



Executive Summary

What is an AAP?

An Area Action Plan (AAP) is an optional development plan document which provides specific planning policy and guidance for a particular location or area of significant change. AAPs must be in general conformity with the Local Plan and the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). The key stages of an AAP are summarised below:

- Publication of Issues and Options, which seek the views of stakeholders on Issues and Options for the future development of the area. (*Stevenage Connection Area Action Plan: Issues and Options Report, produced for Stevenage Borough Council by David Lock Associates*¹. Consultation: July to September 2021)
- **Publication of Preferred Options, to set out the Council's preferred way forward for the area.** (*Stevenage Station Gateway Area Action Plan: Preferred Options Report. This Consultation document*)
- Following consideration of responses to this consultation, the Submission Document will be prepared. This will be submitted to the Secretary of State.
- The fourth stage is the independent Examination of the submitted document. The purpose of this is to consider the soundness of the AAP and representations. A Planning Inspector will be appointed by the Secretary of State to conduct the examination.
- The Planning Inspector will produce a binding report that sets out the final version of the AAP. This will then be adopted by the Council and incorporated into the wider development plan.

Stages 1 to 3 will each be subject to a minimum 6-week public consultation (in compliance with SBC's Statement of Community Involvement (SCI; 2018) which sets out statutory consultation requirements).

Why create an Area Action Plan (AAP)?

After reviewing Stevenage's Local Plan during the Hold Direction, the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) asked Stevenage Borough Council (SBC) to prepare an Area Action Plan (AAP) for Stevenage Station Gateway Area to support Policy TC4: Station Gateway Major Opportunity Area. This is a limited area within the wider Stevenage Central area.

The AAP can create new policy over and above the Local Plan and will require its own Sustainable Environmental Assessment at the Preferred Options Stage. Other mechanisms are available to provide appropriate planning and design guidance.

It is important to understand that this version of the Area Action Plan is not prescribing specific solutions to the issues and challenges raised. This Preferred Options Report is discussing key concepts and high level, strategic options and scenarios around Stevenage Railway Station, in order to enable potential future development that could take place. It does not, at this stage, suggest specific proposals for Stevenage Railway Station or relating to Lytton Way which would ultimately be subject to the planning application process.

Stevenage Borough Council is a co-operative Council and will undergo several rounds of consultation, work and co-operation with residents, businesses and key stakeholders to shape the Area Action Plan through these key stages. As a co-operative Council, Stevenage Borough Council will take into account all views and representations before discussing and developing any final options.

¹ A series of images and diagrams have been reproduced within this Preferred Options Report, from the Issues and Options Report. Credit: David Lock Associates, 2021

Fitting within the Local Plan

Stevenage Borough Local Plan policy TC4 (“Station Gateway Major Opportunity Area”) states:

Within the Station Gateway Major Opportunity Area, as defined on the Policies Map, planning permission will be granted for:

- a. An extended and regenerated train station;*
- b. New bus station;*
- c. High-density Use Class C3 residential units;*
- d. New multi-storey or basement car parking;*
- e. New Use Class B1 office premises;*
- f. A new Use Class C1 hotel; and*
- g. New Use Class A1 and Use Class A3 restaurant and cafe uses.*

Applications should address the following design and land use principles:

- i. Major reconfiguration of Lytton Way between Fairlands Way and Six Hills Way;*
- ii. Demolition of the Arts & Leisure Centre to facilitate better east-west integration and create new development sites in the environs of the train station*
- iii. The provision of replacement sports and theatre facilities elsewhere within Stevenage Central*
- iv. A significantly regenerated and enlarged dual-frontage train station of high quality, with associated facilities*
- v. New public squares on the eastern and western frontages of the train station*
- vi. High quality office buildings within a short walking distance of the train station*
- vii. At least one multi-storey car park and cycle parking plus drop-off space*
- viii. Establishment of an attractive east - west pedestrian route across the East Coast Main Line*
- ix. High quality landmark gateway environment to create a positive image of Stevenage for all rail visitors*

Within this policy context, there are a range of high-level policy objectives which align with the Local Plan and national policy direction for the AAP to respond to. These include:

- Sustainable travel considered throughout
- Green infrastructure in the public realm
- Climate change consideration in all development decisions
- Design of the highest architectural standards

The options proposed for the area included within the AAP will be strongly influenced by the masterplan for the SG1 development which lies to the east and within the town centre. Connections to this development and connections through into the town square and central area will form the emerging physical context within which the AAP sits.

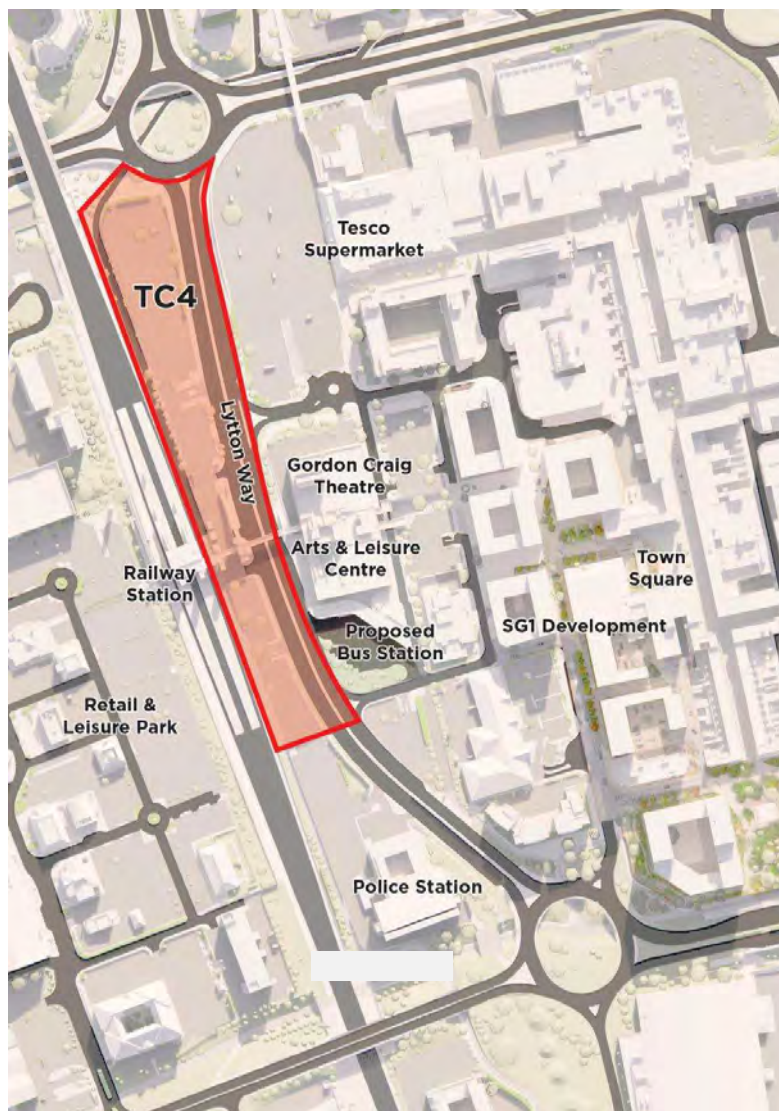
The Site

The selected Stevenage Station Gateway AAP area is tightly defined. It abuts the railway land / tracks and includes the dual carriageway of Lytton Way. The ambitious regeneration plans for Stevenage Central anticipated that Lytton Way would largely be redeveloped as part of a major reorganisation of the town's distributor road network.

Most of the site is currently occupied by surface level car parks which largely serve commuters using Stevenage Station. The constrained nature of the site limits both the volume of building which can be accommodated, the range of uses and how the buildings are organised on site.

The site, designated as TC4 in the Local Plan, is approximately 440m from north to south, and varies between 100m wide at the northern end, to 55m at the station entrance. The total site area is about 3ha. The site is oriented roughly north-south and is situated to the west of the main part of Stevenage town centre.

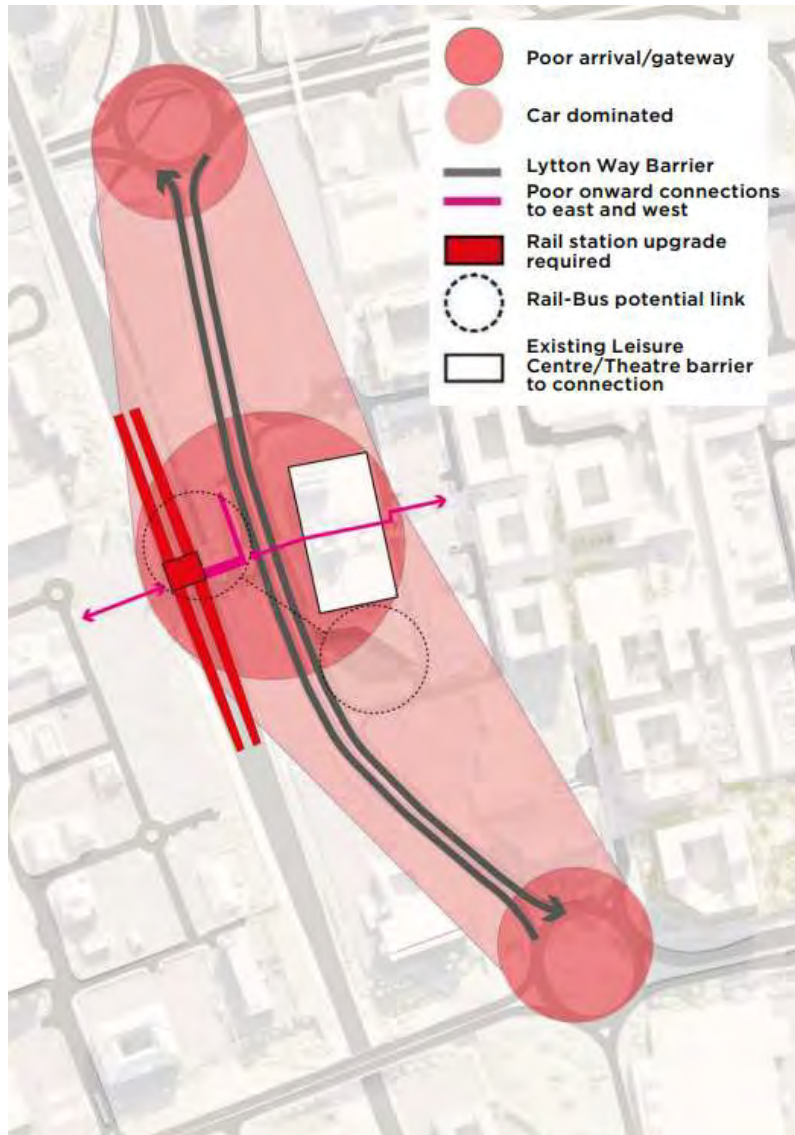
The boundary of Local Plan Policy TC4 includes the two sites that form the Gordon Craig Theatre / Stevenage Arts & Leisure Centre and proposed new Bus Station development. These sites, current developments and future proposals regarding them are considered in the context of this Area Action Plan but not included for the purposes of the Area Action Plan boundary.



Site plan showing TC4 area and selected nearby locations

Issues and Challenges

Our analysis has divided the issues within the TC4 station area boundary into three categories: experiential issues, functional issues and development issues. Although there is overlap between them, this forms a useful framework for understanding the main challenges to be addressed.



Issues and challenges in the station area

The area around Stevenage station is compromised by:

- Poor access and linkages for pedestrians and over-dominant car infrastructure
- Few uses and activities beyond the station and associated car parking
- Unattractive public realm and landscaping, giving little comfort and a poor image
- No opportunity for street life, connections between people or other sociability

Emerging Framework

Objectives

The baseline analysis presented in previous chapters point towards a series of complementary objectives to address the issues facing the station area. Interventions in the AAP area should deliver:

- **A new gateway and arrival experience:** *the station area should create a sense of arrival in a distinctive and vibrant place. It should be welcoming, safe, legible and accessible to all and capitalise on helpful wayfinding and positive signposting. The station has a presence in the urban landscape as it is highly visible to people in the town.*
- **Enhanced movement & access for all modes:** *rationalisation of space currently given over to vehicles will increase space for walking and cycling, making movement and access better and easier for all, with good segregation to ensure safety. Effective transport interchange between sustainable modes should be facilitated by grouping of activities and modes.*
- **Green infrastructure integrated throughout:** *'greening the grey', by converting surfaces to permeable green infrastructure and habitats provides relief from dense urban environments, enhances biodiversity, creates more pleasant microclimates, improves air quality and urban drainage, and contributes to attractive public realm and placemaking.*
- **New mixed use development to unlock the economic opportunity:** *Stevenage's location and connectivity create the perfect conditions for strong economic growth. The station area is the ideal place to locate new development to support this, with sustainable transport connections and under-used land. The AAP will support this with a new mix of uses designed to create a vibrant and successful place.*
- **Creating a low-carbon urban village:** *mixing new homes, employment, retail and other uses with strong placemaking and exceptional mobility has the potential to deliver on Stevenage's ambitious climate change targets, creating an exemplar development in the heart of the town. It must be flexible to accommodate changing lifestyles, encourage low car ownership rates, and including buildings that are adaptable.*
- **Sustainability in mobility, built form and landscaping:** *the station area has a significant part to play in creating supporting active travel and other low-carbon travel modes, as well as creating sustainable development opportunities. Development must be future-proofed for new technologies, with resilience and adaptability to new forms of micro-mobility such as e-scooters.*
- **Celebrating the heritage of the town:** *as one of the original New Towns, with a unique heritage and design, Stevenage's station area must reflect what makes the town special and use it to create a sense of place on arrival and departure.*
- **Making the most of digital connectivity and high speed broadband:** *many firms and some industries already located in Stevenage operate at a global level and have a tradition of research and development, innovation and high-tech solutions. In order to maintain these industries and attract further economic growth, the town must continue to offer the best possible digital connectivity to businesses, residents and visitors, in particular high speed broadband on arrival to Stevenage Station.*

Key Principles

To deliver on these objectives, a set of design principles has been adopted that will be carried through the process of creating the AAP. These are:

- ***Enhance the station arrival experience, wayfinding and signposting to create a people-friendly space***
- ***Ensuring permeable east-west links between the station, town centre and Leisure Park area***
- ***Improve step-free, disabled and accessible pedestrian links with town centre***
- ***Improve links between rail and bus stations***
- ***Turn Lytton Way into a 'town street'***
- ***Create good access for all travel modes with high quality, attractive cycling facilities, and prioritising sustainable and active modes***
- ***Provide new options for people to move at ground level.***
- ***Consolidate surface car parking to make better use of land and enable development opportunities***
- ***High quality public realm, green infrastructure and creating space and opportunities for landscaping through rationalisation of vehicle space***
- ***Future proof for possible station upgrade, replacement of the Leisure Centre and improved links and development west of the rail station***
- ***Design in flexibility to accommodate changing behaviours and the most up to date and attractive technology and high speed digital connection***
- ***Celebrate the heritage of the town in the fabric, layout and design of the station gateway***
- ***Creating a lasting legacy of high quality placemaking***
- ***Putting people first, at the heart of the decision-making process***

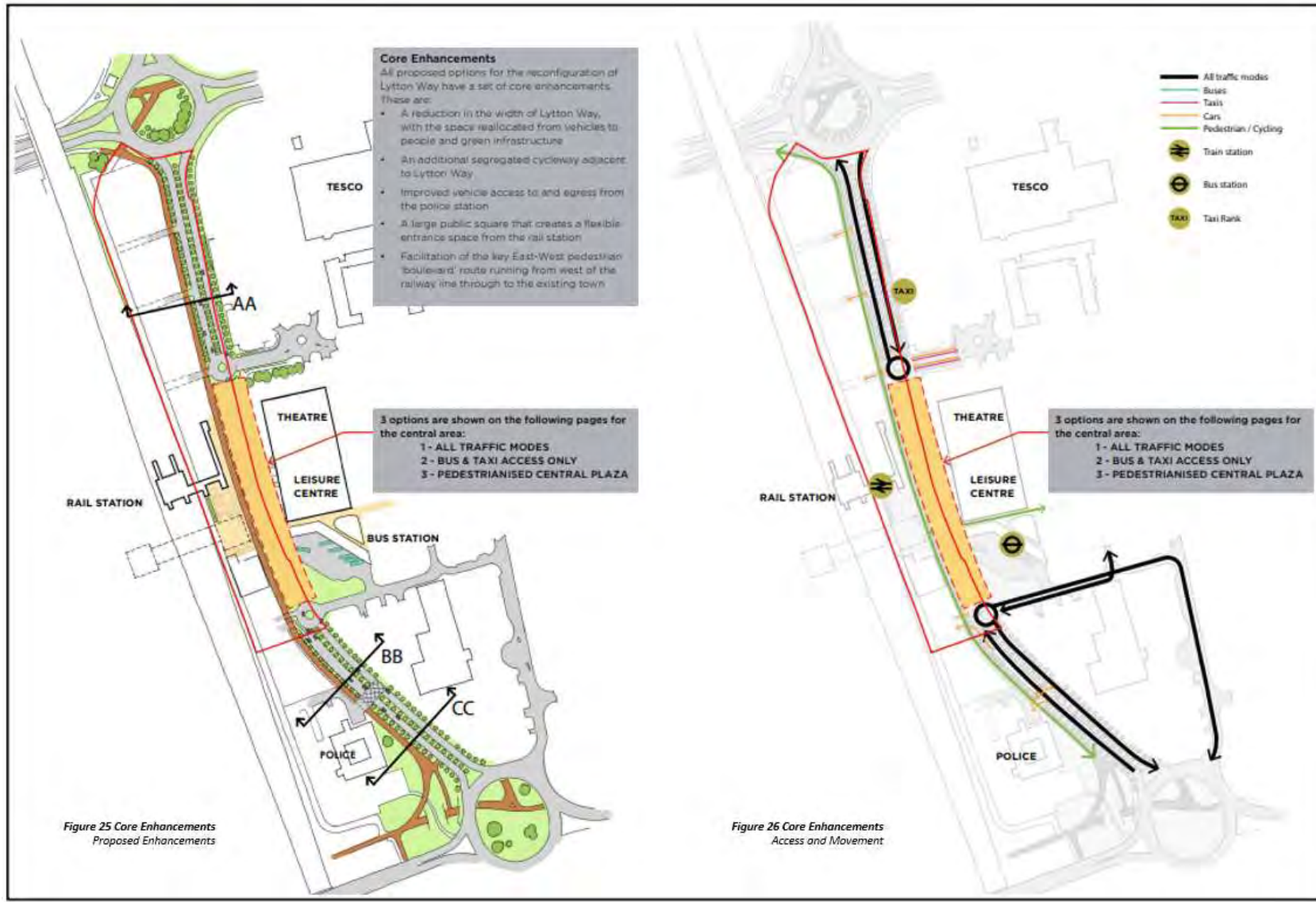
Preferred Option for Lytton Way

At the heart of the issues affecting Stevenage's station area is the design and function of Lytton Way. It severs the station from the town centre, provides a barrier and unpleasant environment for active travel modes and the public realm, uses land inefficiently so as to create unusable development parcels between it and the railway line, and undermines SBC and HCC's commitment to sustainable transportation.

To unlock the potential of the AAP area, it is essential first to determine the preferred option for a redesign of Lytton Way. This chapter of the report presents the core enhancements proposed, the preferred option(s) for the key central area between Swingate and Danesgate, and then a series of themes that the reconfiguration of Lytton Way will enable.

***It is important to recognise that the objectives and key design principles of the Area Action Plan, as listed above, will be brought through any final option the Area Action Plan recommends. All potential changes to this area and scenarios proposed will promote movement and improve access to and from the Railway Station to the Town Centre and enhance the sense of arrival to Stevenage, providing the gateway to improved opportunities for the area.**

Core Enhancements



All proposed options for the reconfiguration of Lytton Way have a set of core enhancements, primarily in the northern and southern zones of the AAP area, north of Swingate and south of Danesgate. These are:

- A reduction in the width of Lytton Way, with the space reallocated to pedestrian or cycling movement, street trees and other landscaped green infrastructure. In these northern and southern areas Lytton Way will remain open to all modes, providing continued access for other parts of the town centre.
- An additional segregated cycleway adjacent to Lytton Way, away from the railway tracks. Making use of the improved street environment along Lytton Way, cycling along this route will become more attractive. Along with built form development along this route, this offers the advantages of creating an overlooked cycling route that will feel considerably safer to users than the current path adjacent to the tracks. It will add movement and vibrancy to the street and create visibility for all modes. An additional cycleway should connect to the existing cycle network at Six Hills Way and Fairlands Way to provide safe onward links to destinations including Gunnels Wood and Stevenage Old Town.
- Improved vehicle access to and egress from the police station, making use of the reduction in speeds and change in character of Lytton Way to offer a limited use right-turn access box.
- Vehicle drop off and pick up facilities will need to be provided in the Multi-Storey Car Park and southern car park with good pedestrian links to the station.
- A large public square that creates a flexible entrance space from the existing station building, future-proofed for a new station or enhanced station entrance further to the south.
- Facilitation of the key East-West pedestrian 'boulevard' route running from west of the railway line through to the existing town centre, crossing at the railway station and the proposed public square in front. The enhancements proposed enable this connection to be made and provide the key spaces through which it will pass through within the AAP area.
- A 'cycle hub', compatible with existing and potential new station buildings, that contains secure cycle parking, cycle hire schemes, cycle maintenance facilities and the potential for a local transport information point to aid multi-modal interchange. Above the cycle hub on the ground floor would be development opportunities.
- Any final option would ensure that the existing footbridge is retained, until any redevelopment of the station and wider area takes place. This would maintain a traffic free route for pedestrians.
- Development plots made available by the consolidation of surface car parking into a multi-storey car park.

The real improvement required is the delivery of the Railway Station Vision as set out by Arup. In advance of this, some improvements could include:

- Creating an enclosed, but transparent, footbridge across Lytton Way to provide weather protection
- A new set of steps to the footbridge on the leisure centre side of the road to create a more direct route to the new bus station
- Re-instatement of the travellator
- Improved staircases / ramps from the retail park
- Additional high quality cycle parking

Summary of Issues and Options Consultation Responses

Consultation on the Stevenage Connection Area Action Plan: Issues and Options Report was held between 12th July 2021 and 5th September 2021.

The representations made to the Issues and Options AAP, and representations to this Preferred Options AAP, will be fully considered when preparing the final version of the AAP, the Submission version. More detailed information on the Issues and Options AAP consultation is detailed within a *Consultation Statement*.

The public consultation exercise returned a wide range of responses from members of the public, interest groups and key stakeholders. The AAP covers many planning and policy issues and challenges.

The varied response the Council received, not just on the Options for the central section of Lytton Way, proves that when developing the Preferred Options AAP and taking the AAP through to its final stages, the ambitions and aspirations in the vision section of this AAP are of prime importance. This is to ensure that the Station Gateway area of opportunity is brought to life and delivered in the appropriate manner, in accordance with other related measures.

Taking everything into consideration, the indications were that there was a lower level of support for a “do nothing” approach as advocated by Option 0. Transport and accessibility attracted a great deal of interest, for which officers have considered closely for this Preferred Options AAP.

Option 2 has emerged as a Preferred Option. However, Option 3 was also very popular across many consultation respondents and key stakeholders. Some elements of Option 3 will be reflected or future proofed as much as possible, in order to match the aspirations of active travel and the regeneration plans for the Town Centre (SG1).

While Option 1 is less supportive of active travel aspirations, it was also popular among respondents. This demonstrated a clear overall desire for some form of positive change involving Lytton Way. Option 0 received significantly less support than Options 1, 2 or 3.

Preferred Option(s) for Lytton Way

The following preferred option(s) proposed illustrate the core options available within the central area, defined as that south of Swingate but north of Danesgate.

***It is important to recognise that the options for Lytton Way form just a part of the overall aims and objectives of the Station Gateway area, as presented throughout this document. While Option 2 has emerged as the Preferred Option, the final solution for this AAP will be flexible in land use terms to move from Option 2 to Option 3 or even Option 1, in accordance with active travel aspirations and the overall opportunity the area presents, to bring about the best possible sense of arrival and gateway to the regenerated town centre. This will be in accordance with the objectives and key design principles of this Area Action Plan and Local Plan Policy TC4: Station Gateway.**

Central Area Option 2 – Bus and Taxi access only



Option 2 reduces the central area of Lytton Way between Swingate and Danesgate to a single carriageway and restricts movement to buses and taxis only. A change of surface material reinforces this restriction. As it approaches the area outside the station it transitions to becoming a shared space carriageway with flush kerbs and bollards to reduce vehicle speeds.

The movement diagram demonstrates how different modes are able to move within the new environment.

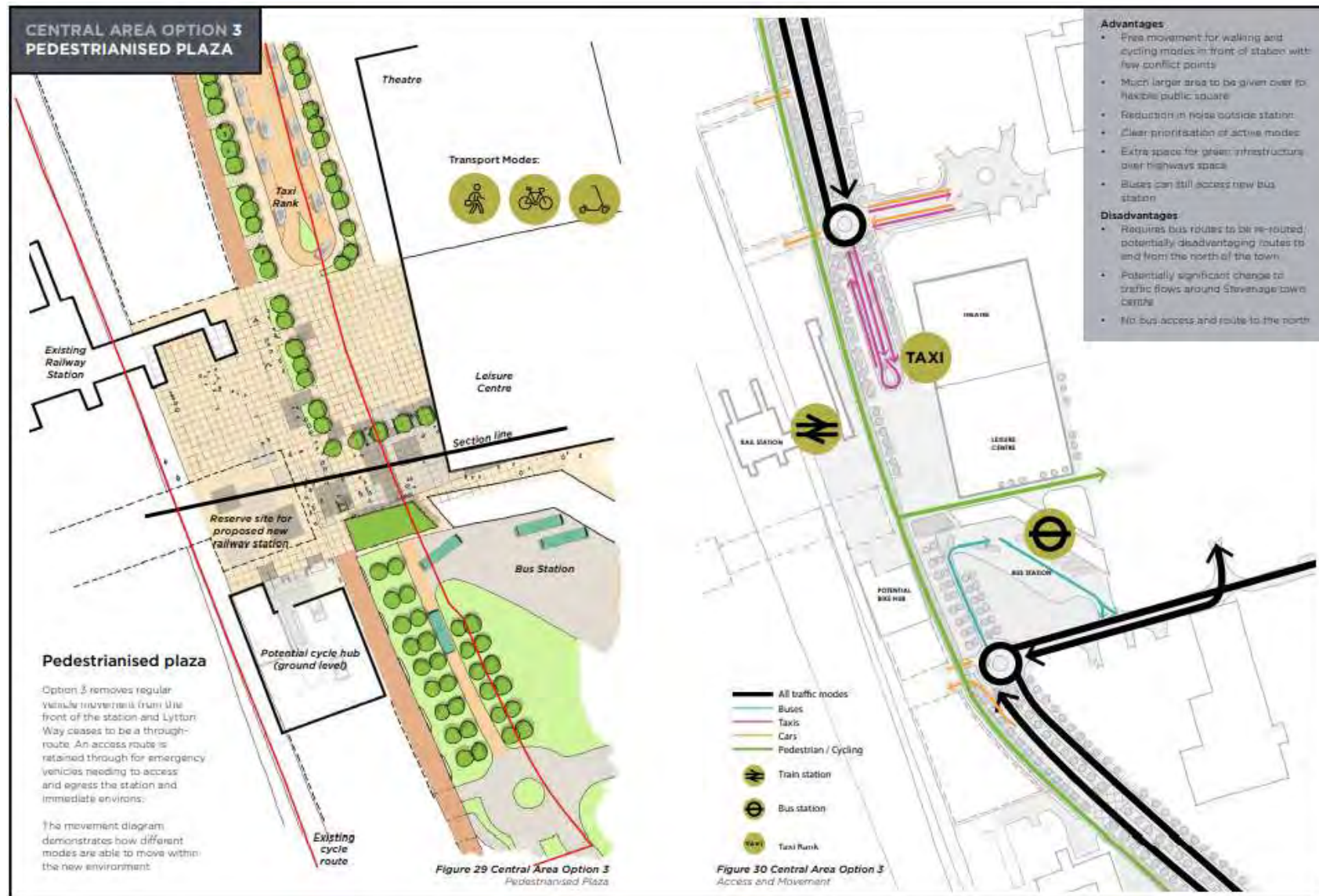
Advantages

- Reduction in vehicle traffic makes pedestrian and cycling movement easier
- Reduction in noise outside station
- No re-routing of bus routes required
- Clear prioritisation of sustainable modes

Disadvantages

- Potential conflicts between buses, taxis and pedestrians, although risk much lower than Option 1
- Potentially significant change to traffic flows around Stevenage town centre
- Drop off and pick up solutions at the Station require further design consideration

Central Area Option 3 – Pedestrianised Plaza



Option 3 removes regular vehicle movement from the front of the station and Lytton Way ceases to be a through-route. An access route is retained through for emergency vehicles needing to access and egress the station and immediate environs.

The movement diagram demonstrates how different modes are able to move within the new environment.

Advantages

- Free movement for walking and cycling modes in front of station with few conflict points
- Much larger area that can be given over to flexible public square
- Reduction in noise outside station
- Clear prioritisation of active modes
- Extra space for green infrastructure over highways space

Disadvantages

- Requires bus routes to be re-routed, potentially disadvantaging routes to and from the north of the town
- Potentially significant change to traffic flows around Stevenage town centre
- May need innovative solutions regarding rail replacement buses, when required

Cycle Path Options

The existing cycle path along the edge of the railway tracks has been identified earlier in this document as suffering from a lack of passive surveillance and perceived lack of safety and security. Its position constrains the width of potential development parcels that could otherwise back straight onto the railway tracks. Due to its location pushed to the edge, it appears as a back-of-house or service access and feels secondary to vehicles.

However, the cycle path does provide a direct, uninterrupted and segregated cycle route through the area, although it also functions as the only north-south pedestrian route.

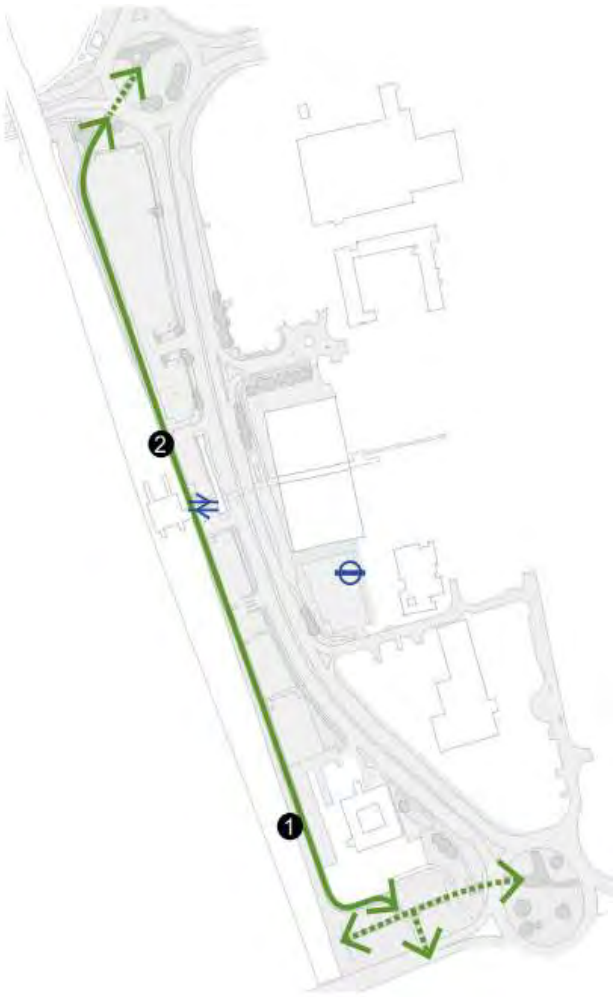
The Issues and Options AAP proposed two potential options for improving cycle access within the station area, building on its strengths while addressing weaknesses.

At this stage of the Area Action Plan, Stevenage Borough Council is determined in seeking the very best solutions for sustainable travel. The importance of the cycle link is paramount in any scenario presented. The Council remains committed to providing cycling routes in the town in accordance with the Future Town Future Transport Strategy.

CURRENT ALIGNMENT

POTENTIAL LAYOUT 1

POTENTIAL LAYOUT 2



Summary of Issues and Options Consultation Responses

There was a clear preference for “Potential Layout 1” relating to the cycle path options.

Potential Layout 2 proposed to remove the existing cycle path and was not thought as feasible in achieving positive modal shift in accordance with active travel ambitions. Potential Layout 1 retains this cycle path and offers the opportunity to connect the AAP area to the Town Centre (with any Lytton Way Option(s) taken forward) and a new north–south route.

Potential Layout 1 also offers the opportunity to enhance the existing National Cycle Route and create additional cultural features, for example, to celebrate the town and relate to the new identity being created by regeneration of the Town Centre and a sense of arrival into Stevenage, in accordance with other regeneration measures.

Preferred Option for Cycle Path

Preferred Option – Two Cycle Paths

This option retains the existing bicycle path and creates a new segregated path within the revised Lytton Way street profile. It is compatible with all three Central Area Options for Lytton Way. The provision of a new cycle hub facility can be accessed conveniently from both routes.

Provision of the new path within the enhanced streetscape of Lytton Way contributes to an activated public realm and the increased safety and security this provides. It elevates cycling to the street and makes it more visible as a mobility option.

The new path would be segregated from cyclists by use of a different surface colour and small kerb upstands, as recommended in LTN 1/20 (Cycle Infrastructure Design). The routing along the street would create some potential conflict points with pedestrians, and cars at the multi-storey car park entrance. These would need to be mitigated with clear markings and signage.

Cycling provision in the preferred option will need to be developed in accordance with LTN 1/20 guidance. Further consideration will be given to the connections of the proposed cycle path with the existing cycle network on Six Hills Way and at Fairlands Way. Level differences at Six Hills Way will also need to be addressed. Consideration will also be given to crossing of side road accesses and provision for cyclists wanting to access Swinggate and Danesgate via any proposed new roundabouts.

Consideration will need to be given to crossing of side road accesses and provision for cyclists wanting to access Swinggate and Danesgate via any proposed new roundabouts.

Any final option for cycle paths will need to consider the following challenges:

- Significant differences in levels between Six Hills Way and Lytton Way
- Accounting for cycle commuters who perform cycle – train – cycle journeys as well as those who ride through the station area to commute to other destinations
- Relationship at the south end of Lytton Way with the emergency exit from the Police Station
- Management of the crossing of the proposed new cycle path with the Railway Station entrance – this would need to be designed in accordance with the final option for Lytton Way and the Railway Station entrance
- Integration of the proposed new cycle path with the access and egress from the new Multi-Storey Car Park
- Signage, lighting should be encouraged as well as an opportunity to showcase cultural and heritage aspects relating to Stevenage
- Potential to improve cycle infrastructure at the north end of the AAP site, in order to connect to the existing cycle route safely and practically
- Maintenance of the cycleways in order for people to be encouraged to use them and to keep them attractive and well-used

Phasing and Temporary Uses

To transform the station area towards one of these options requires a phasing strategy that considers:

- Timing of highway works
- Provision of active travel infrastructure
- Timing of relocation of key mobility uses such as taxi ranks and drop-off
- Relocation and consolidation of station surface car parking
- Integration with the new Bus Interchange and new at-grade crossing of Lytton Way

A potential phasing strategy that is robust and flexible enough to accommodate all three options is presented overleaf. Phase 1 provides the temporary groundwork for Phase 2, which fully implements the options as presented in this report. Phase 3 considers potential future developments and how they would interact with the options presented.

To enable this phased approach, a strategy employing temporary uses should be put in place. The phasing strategy clearly identifies locations suitable for such temporary uses, which can enliven the space around the station and establish the groundwork and footfall for permanent development in the future. This can provide reassurance to potential developers that a location is viable and visited, as well as creating a safer and more vibrant place during the process of transformation.

Phasing needs to recognise the changes already planned as part of the new bus interchange and the new at-grade crossing. The existing footbridge should be retained until there is a wider redevelopment that enables suitable alternatives to be provided.

Responding to Stevenage's Arts & Culture Strategy, it would also be possible to include early space in developments for artists' studios or workshops to activate the ground floor and provide a placemaking catalyst as a temporary use. The use of such temporary arts provision could also be used to 'kick-start' a local arts trail, as recommended in the strategy document.

Using Development to Make a Place

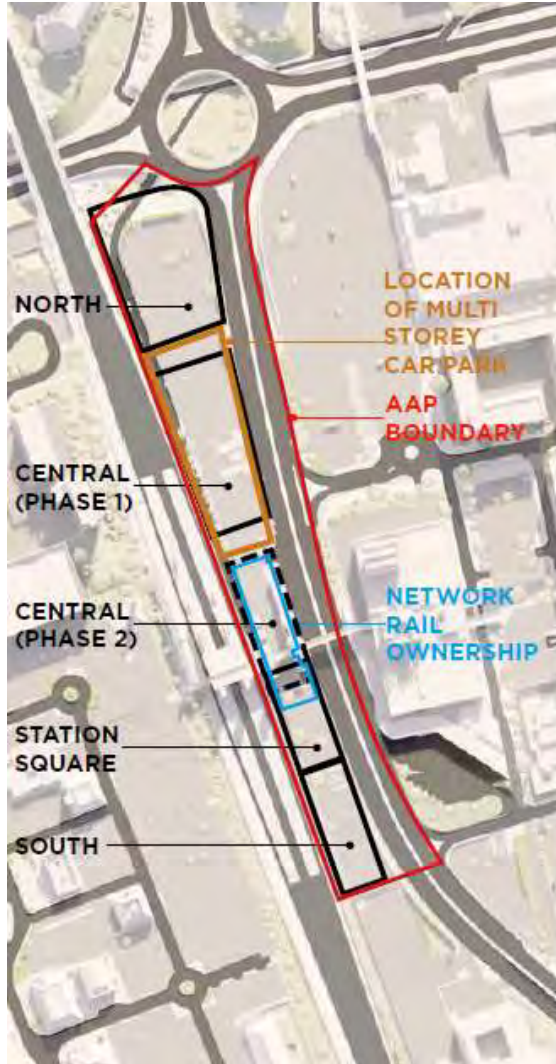
The reconfiguration of mobility along Lytton Way enables a range of development opportunities to come forward on land previously used for car parking or transport infrastructure.

Opportunities for investment and development are important to identify within this key location. Beyond this, the design of developments should support the creation of the station area as a functional, vibrant, interesting and useful place for the town – a destination as well as a transit point towards other places. There is a potential in this area to showcase exemplary design of buildings to secure a strong sense of arrival to the town.

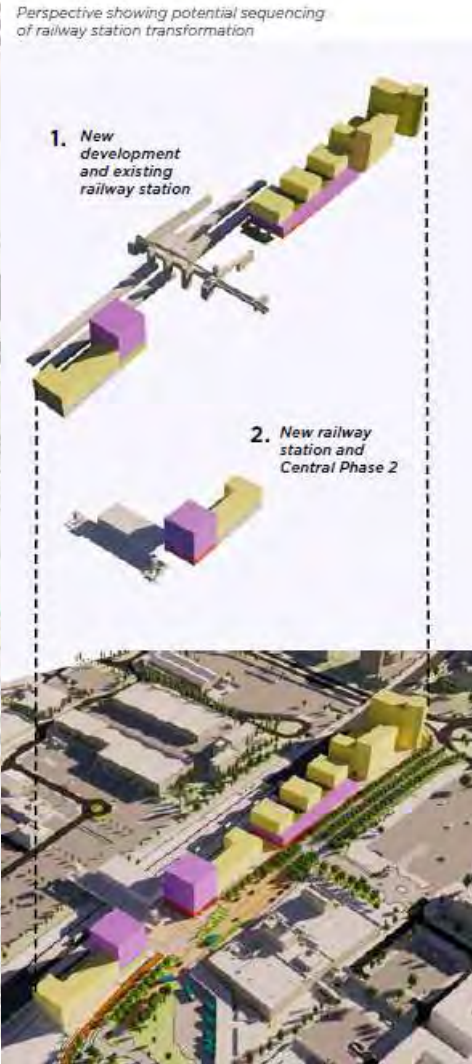
Development Parcels

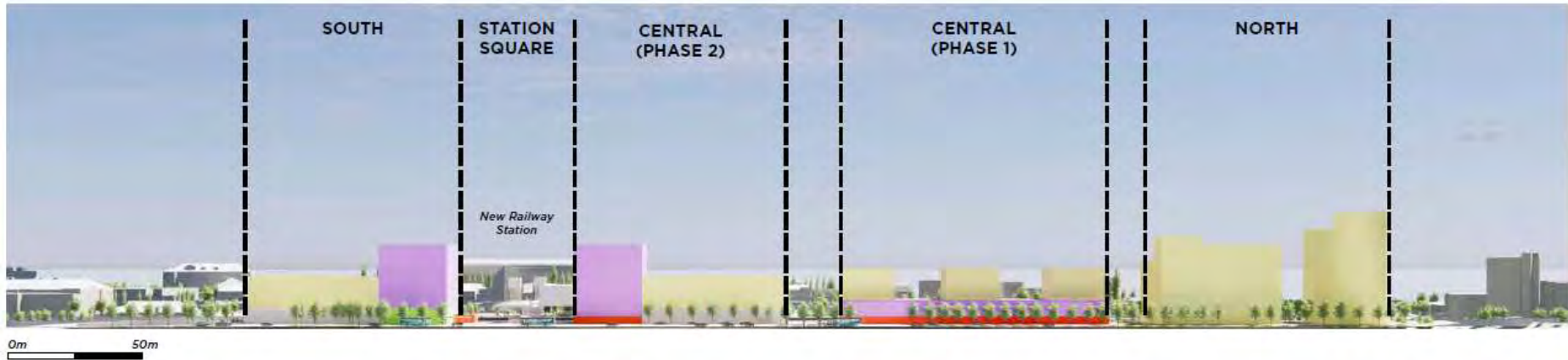
Five main development parcels have been identified.

It is important to note at this stage that the opportunities offered within each development parcel reflect the stage this Area Action Plan is at and are intended to be strategic, high-level details. There will be scope to build on and progress the opportunities identified within each development parcel through the process of developing this Area Action Plan. The Issues and Options version of this AAP detailed some hypothetical diagrams for each of the development parcels, showing the potential of the area to deliver significant growth and opportunities to complement the regeneration of Stevenage Town Centre.



Plan of station area showing new railway station in place





Perspective view of station area 1



Perspective view of station area 2

Conclusions and Feedback

This report outlines the core issues that are present within the station area as well as the background policy and wider context that affects its development. This is the second stage of the preparation of an AAP, and preferred options that focus on mobility, and promotion of active travel in Stevenage, are presented for feedback from the public and targeted stakeholders.

Stakeholder Feedback

This report will be circulated to key stakeholders who operate within and around the area covered by the AAP. It seeks targeted feedback from these stakeholders on the following topics:

- Chapters 1–5: Overall Vision, Aims, Objectives, Key Design Principles of the Stevenage Station Gateway AAP
- Chapter 6: The Enhancements for Preferred Options
- Chapter 6: Preferred Option(s) for Central Section of Lytton Way, with a particular focus on issues and opportunities raised by the different mobility options
- Chapter 6: Preferred Cycle Path Option
- Chapter 6: Phasing approaches

In addition to these, this stage of the process seeks informal thoughts and feedback on opportunities for and the form of Temporary Uses, Green Infrastructure and potential Development Options.

Following consultation on this document, the Preferred Options AAP, the next stage of the process of preparation of the AAP will be a formal public consultation on the final version of the AAP, which will have been influenced by feedback from this report. The final version of the AAP is submitted to the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) before undergoing the process of Examination in Public.