

A Portrait of Shepton Mallet

A background paper to help support public consultation on the preparation of the Mendip Sustainable Community Strategy and Local Development Framework Core Strategy



Time to Plan
December 2008



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Introduction

This document provides an overview of Shepton Mallet as a place. It is by no means comprehensive or definitive but draws upon a range of published material and background studies to outline Shepton Mallet's key characteristics and important issues facing the town. It also draws upon the views of local people, gathered through consultation as part of the 'Time to Plan' campaign supported by Mendip District Council and the Mendip Strategic Partnership during March, April and May 2008.

This Portrait of Shepton Mallet should be read in conjunction with the Portrait of Mendip. Its principal purpose is to provide a broad overview of facts and information which underpin the development of two key strategies for the Mendip area, to help support public participation in their preparation:

- **The Mendip Sustainable Community Strategy** - Drawing on your opinions and other information, this plan will seek to agree how the resources of public organisations and other partners should be best used to meet our local needs and expectations. The direction of this strategy is informed by the Mendip Strategic Partnership whose membership comprises public organisations including the police, Somerset Primary Care Trust and local councils, business interests as well as local and voluntary groups.
- **The Mendip Local Development Framework (LDF)** - This will be the new planning strategy for the area and is being coordinated with the Sustainable Community Strategy. Whilst it performs a critical role in identifying where new development should be located, its central policy document, the Core Strategy, is also charged with putting in place a framework to help shape and improve the places where we live, work and visit within the district.

Over the next year or so, this portrait will be refined in light of any new information that becomes available, whether that be from further study work, consultation or other sources, to enable emerging proposals to be as soundly based as they possibly can. Therefore, in reading this document, and the accompanying Consultation Paper, we will be glad to hear your views or receive any further information that might justify a different approach.

The role of Shepton 21

Shepton 21 is a community led group of business people, community groups and organisations. Its purpose is to help engage local people in thinking about the future of Shepton Mallet and the surrounding area. This means that it is well placed to contribute to the two statutory plans described above.

Shepton 21 has prepared a community strategic plan called "At a Crossroads" which is being used to help inform the preparation of these plans. At the same time, Shepton 21 is refreshing the community strategic plan. This enabled joint consultation to take place in the spring of this year and the sharing of a wealth of information. In taking forward proposals in the Sustainable Community Strategy and the LDF Core Strategy it is hoped that the positive relationships with Shepton 21 will remain strong and productive, giving local people confidence that their views are shaping the way we plan for the town's future.

Introduction to Shepton Mallet

With a population of approximately 9,700¹, the historic market town of Shepton Mallet is the second smallest of the five towns in Mendip and is located at the geographical heart of the district. It is known by many as the birthplace of the popular Perry drink 'Babycham' in the Fifties.

Shepton Mallet had a relatively small retail centre until recently with its offer largely restricted to meeting local needs². As a result, most people also travelled to nearby towns and cities such as Bath, Bristol and Yeovil to shop³. However, the recently completed Townsend Retail Park to the south of the town centre has resulted in significantly less people leaving the town for food shopping.

Consultation undertaken in the town in 2007 revealed a local perception of Shepton Mallet as being a town in decline and much in need of regeneration. However, recent events such as the arrival of the Bristol Academy of Performing Arts in the town and some private sector investment are already showing signs positive change for the town and encouraging the renewal of the town centre.

Physical setting, geology and topography

Shepton Mallet is situated on a shelf of Jurassic limestone 30m thick, known locally as Downside Stone, which was deposited when the sea slowly encroached upon the eroded Triassic landscape about 200 million years ago⁴. The Downside Stone, named after the nearby village where the stone was quarried for building stone, is part of the Lias Group. The rocks here are typically white, coarsely crystalline, shelly and sandy limestone with thin beds of conglomerate and contrast with the characteristic interbedded thin limestones and mudstones seen elsewhere. These rocks were deposited near an ancient shoreline at a time when the Mendip region formed an archipelago of small islands in a shallow sea, with deeper water to the south where more typical Lias Group sediments were deposited. The Downside Stone rests on Triassic rocks south of the town, but oversteps this to the north, resting directly on the underlying Carboniferous Limestone between Doultong and Downside.

Brief history and origins of Shepton Mallet

The name 'Shepton' derives from the Anglo Saxon for 'sheep fold' and points to the original base of the town's wealth as a market place. The second part of the town's name is explained by it having been part of lands given to the Malet family by Henry I during the 12th century⁵.

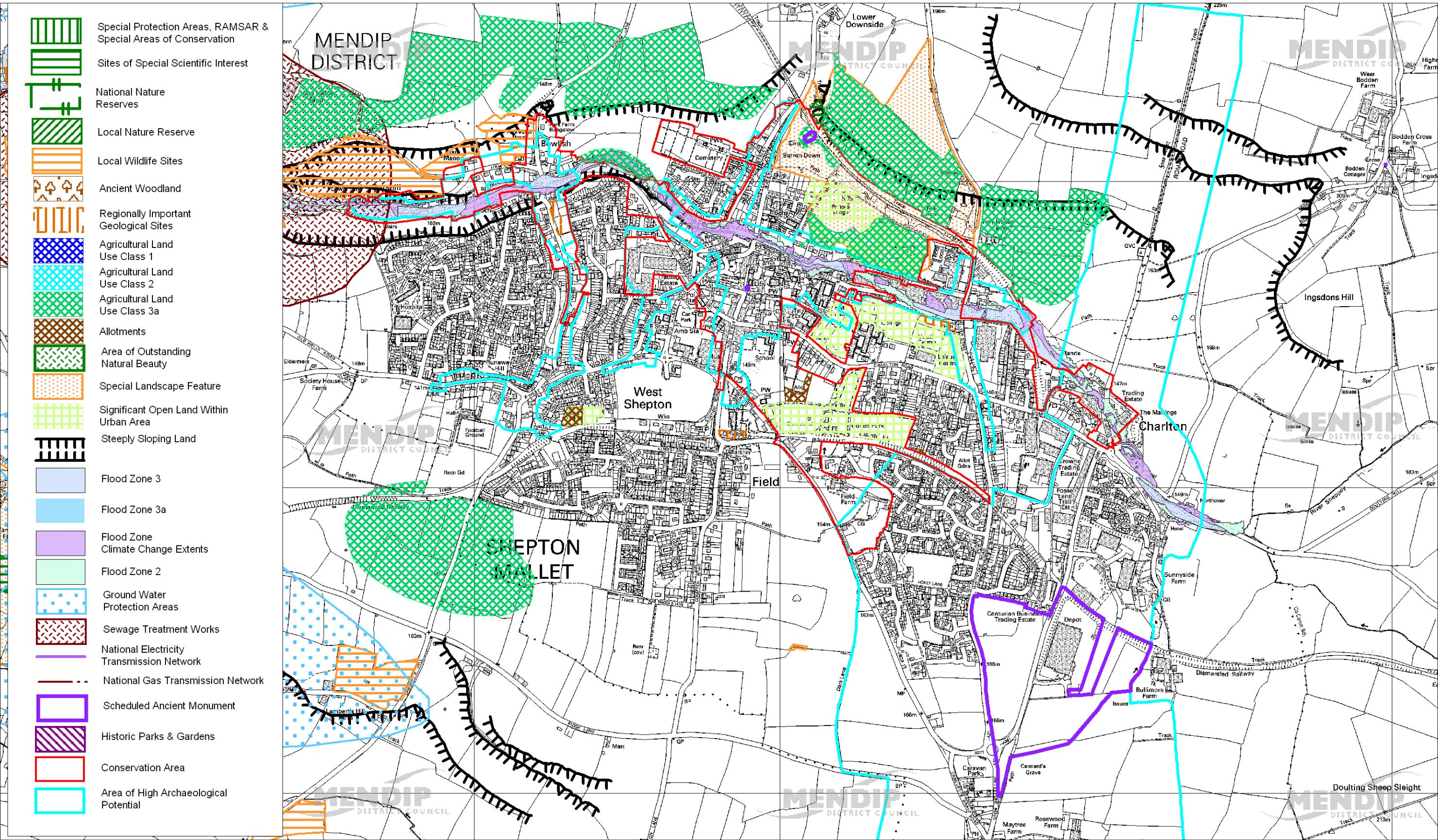
The history of the settlement dates back to at least Roman times. Archaeologists discovered a number of Roman artefacts near Fosse Way including a cemetery, several Roman villas and a well. A key find was the Chi Rho Amulet which was

Figure 1 - Physical and Environmental Factors

Shepton Mallet

Scale 1:12000

MENDIP
DISTRICT COUNCIL
Cannards Grave Rd
Shepton Mallet
Somerset BA4 5BT
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Compiled on 10 September 2008

hailed until recently as being one of the earliest pieces of evidence of Christianity in England.

Until the 19th century, industry in the town was focused around wool and silk, for which the River Sheppey was a vital tool. The arrival of the Anglo Bavarian Brewery in Shepton Mallet, which was reputedly the first in England to brew lager, changed the industrial make up of the town. Shepton is still an important centre for brewing and is home to Gaymers Cider Co, part of the huge company Constellation Europe, who run the second largest cider factory in the world in Shepton Mallet.

Water

Shepton Mallet lies within the catchment area of the River Axe and the River Sheppey runs slightly to the north of the town.

Surface flooding is a particular problem in Shepton Mallet as dramatically illustrated by recent events. On 30 May 2008 Shepton Mallet suffered from flash flooding when the River Sheppey burst its banks due to torrential rain, leaving people with three feet of water inside their homes, causing businesses to close and leaving others stranded in their cars. The Fire and Rescue Team have recorded at least 14 call outs for flooding over the past three years.

It is expected that due to the effects of climate change there will be an increase in the risk of flooding in the town. A Strategic Flood Risk Assessment⁶ has identified a need to increase the flood zone around the town to reflect this (see Figure 1). This increase has produced new areas of risk and the greatest increase occurs at Draycott Road. There is ongoing discussion about the exact causes and the likely required remedies, but Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems will now need to be incorporated into all new development in the town.

Biodiversity

There are three nationally designated Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) in the vicinity of Shepton Mallet. However these are designated for geological reasons rather than for their flora and fauna species.

There are also three Local Wildlife Sites very close to the town. 'Ham Fields' to the north-west of Shepton Mallet is an area of unimproved calcareous grassland, while 'Titwell Wood' also in the north-west is an area of semi-natural broadleaved woodland. To the south of the town is a pond of local importance. Great Crested Newts are known to be active very close to the town.

Strategic Nature Areas (SNAs) are areas of potential biodiversity enhancement - land where habitat networks could be improved to sustain wildlife as well as enabling it to move more freely across our countryside. To the north of Shepton Mallet lie SNAs of lowland heath, to the south and east lie SNAs of woodland. All provide potential for habitat improvement.

Public consultation feedback revealed that some residents of the town would like to see the River Sheppey enhanced as a wildlife corridor.

Land

Shepton Mallet lies within the Sheppey Valley with land rising to the Cranmore Slopes to the north and Cannard's Grave Shelf to the south (Figure 2). The town has grown from several centres developed during the prosperity of the cloth trade. Due to this there are quite large areas of open space and some rather indeterminate edges.

The old core of the town is characterised by:

- Attractive local stone buildings
- Steep, narrow valley sides
- Ruined mills and evidence of the cloth industry
- Good hedgerow and hedgerow tree cover
- Irregular field pattern
- Frequent woodland

In terms of landscape quality the Cranmore Slopes fall outside the Mendip Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty designation but do share many of the landscape qualities of the AONB. In particular they share a strong sense of place and an unspoilt character that extends right down to the edge of the town making them an important part of the rural backdrop of the town. The Sheppey Valley is of a similar quality of landscape to the Cranmore Slopes.

As most of the town lies within the valley it is concealed from middle and long distance views. There are also very limited views of the urban edge from public viewpoints.

Shepton Mallet is the least constrained town in landscape terms and, with care, there is the potential to accommodate future growth without significant harm to the landscape and setting of the town.

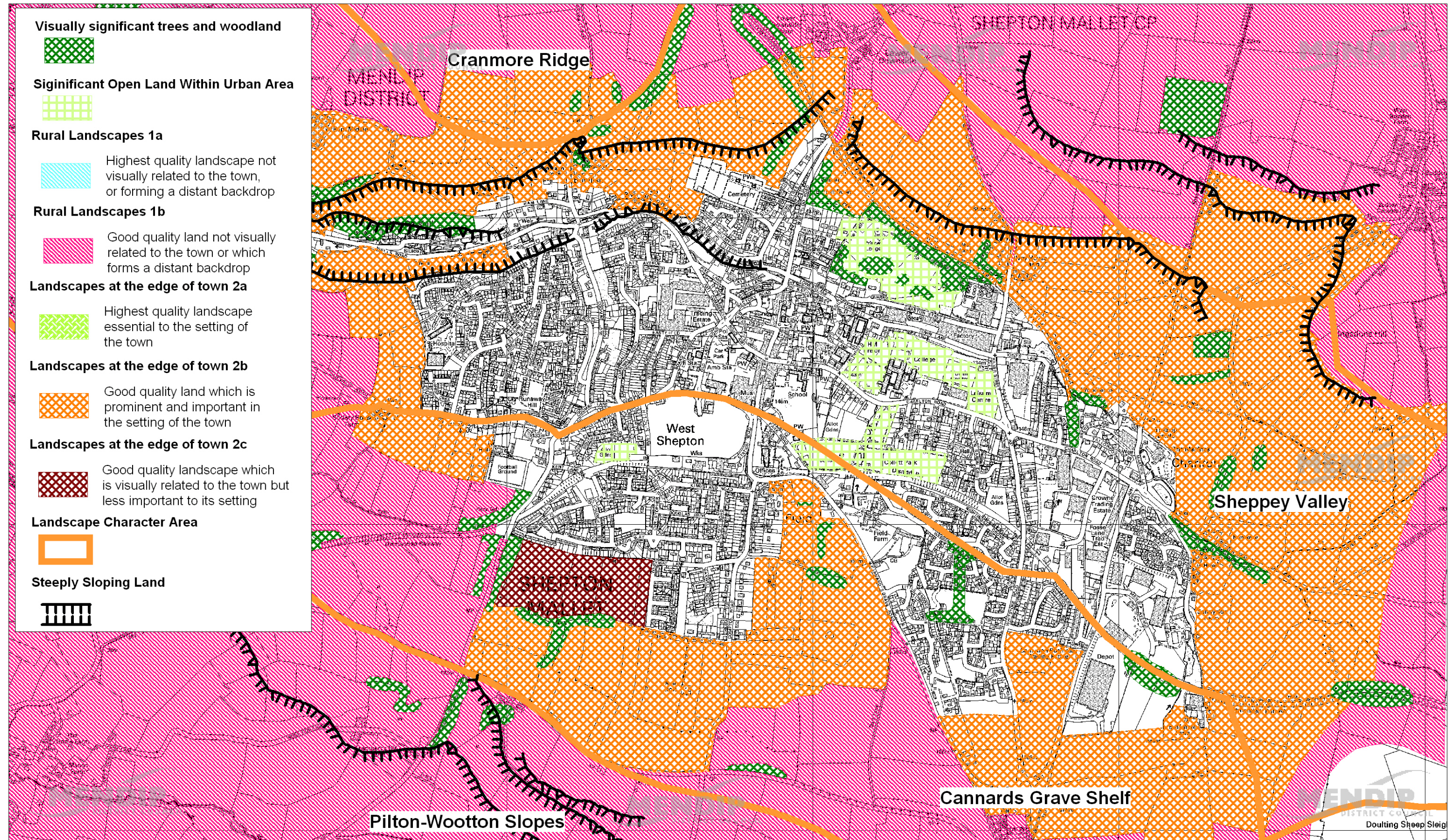
The land quality as designated by the Agricultural Land Classification around the town falls under Grade 3 which is good to moderate quality agricultural land.

Figure 2 - Landscape Setting

Shepton Mallet

Scale 1:12000

Notes: Based upon "A Landscape Assessment of the Fringes of the Towns of Mendip District", Chris Blandford Associates, 1996.



Built Environment

The historic core of the town lies around the market place containing the Market Cross and The Shambles with St Peter and St Paul's Parish Church just to the east. Slightly further east Shepton Mallet prison, which is the oldest working prison in England, dominates the Leg Square area with its towering stone walls. High Street & Great Ostry contain some fine 17th to 19th century buildings. There are 18th and 19th century cottages and mills and other buildings associated with the cloth industry on the streets from Draycott to Garston parallel to the river. There is also a group of older buildings at West Shepton, including the recently converted Norah Fry hospital, originally the workhouse, and a substantial country house at Charlton, now a hotel, and surrounded by parkland. To the south of the old centre, the former Anglo Bavarian Brewery occupies a prominent site.

At the western edge of the town, Bowlish is enclosed within a very narrow section of the Sheppey valley. It was originally a separate settlement, and has some attractive Georgian merchant's houses. To the north-west of the town there are prominent railway viaducts at Charlton and Gold Hill⁷.

There are 210 records of Grade II Listed Buildings, nine records of Grade II* Listed Buildings and the Church of St Peter & St Paul is a Grade I Listed Building⁸. An area of the Romano-British linear village at Fosse Lane is designated as a Scheduled Ancient Monument as is the Market Cross.

A substantial part of the town lies within the Conservation Area where stone is the most prominent walling material, mostly locally quarried Forest Marble and Doultong stone, although some buildings such as the banks are built of Bath stone. Ashlar is used on the facades of grand buildings, for example Bowlish House. There is the occasional use of brick, often from the post-railway era. Roofing material is mostly terracotta and brown or red clay tiles, with some blue-grey Welsh slates and one thatched building.

The distinctive local identity of the Shepton Mallet Conservation Area is enhanced by areas of historic paving (e.g. around the church), stone walls, stonework embellished with date stones and ammonites, iron railings and other features such as foot scrapers and street name signs. Bridges are also significant elements in the townscape notably bridges over the Sheppey, the two railway viaducts and the bridge over Cowl Street⁹.

Mendip District Council has invested heavily in the historic built environment of Shepton Mallet in recent years. A Heritage Economic Regeneration Scheme (HERS) in partnership with English Heritage, Shepton Mallet Town and Somerset County Councils has offered almost half a million pounds of grant aid since 2004. The HERS is being followed up by a Heritage Lottery Fund-backed Townscape Heritage Initiative which will invest a similar amount over the next four years.

Air

There are no Air Quality Management Areas within the town. There are two nitrogen dioxide monitoring sites in Shepton Mallet which are currently both meeting their objective targets¹⁰.

Renewable energy

Please refer to the Portrait of Mendip for renewable energy production information.

Population

In 2001 Shepton Mallet was officially the smallest of the five towns with a population of 8,077. However, in recent years significant levels of residential development have increased the population, making it marginally larger than Glastonbury¹¹. The population of Shepton Mallet is now estimated to have risen to 9,700¹². Growth has largely been in the Shepton East ward through new housing development (most notably the award winning Tadley Acres). There are approximately 3,714 households in the town. The average household size in Shepton is 2.42 persons per household which is in line with the regional and national average.

The median age of the population in the Shepton East ward is 34. This is three years less than the England population and six years less than the Mendip district median. Analysis by age band shows that the ward had at Census 2001 a greater proportion of children in the 0-4 age band, and also a greater proportion in the 25-29 and 30-44 age bands. The above average proportion in the 25-29 band goes against the overall profile for Mendip, and the South West. Shepton East ward has markedly fewer people in the 65-74 and 75-84 age bands.

By contrast, the age profile in the Shepton West ward shows some differences in age bands. The 0-4 age band is one percentage point above the national profile, but the age 20-24 and 25-29 bands are more in line with the Mendip age band profile. The contrast between the two wards is most marked in the age ranges 65-74 and 75-84. It should be remembered that the total numbers are relatively small so percentages will indicate a shift greater than the numbers suggest. The median age for Shepton West is 37 which is the same as for the England wide population, though again three years below the median for Mendip.

The ethnicity profile of both wards confirms that most residents are of White British origin. In the Shepton East ward 96% are White British, and in Shepton West this is 97.7%. These figures compare with a percentage for England of 87% White British, but are closer to the regional figure for the South West of 95.4%. It should be noted however that this data predates the A8 accession countries of Eastern Europe joining the EU so the true picture may be significantly different. It is clear for example that there are strong Portuguese and Polish communities in Shepton Mallet.

Housing

Please refer to the Portrait of Mendip for information about the housing sub-markets in the Shepton Mallet area and the wider housing market area.

Health

Health of the Population

The general health of the population in both Shepton East and Shepton West wards is fair, with 92% of residents classifying themselves as in good or fairly good health. Around 16.3% of the population of Shepton Mallet have a limiting long term illness which is not dissimilar to the national and South West profiles. Approximately 20% of people in Shepton Mallet provide 20 or more hours care per week¹³.

2007 data shows 385 incapacity or severe disablement claimants in Shepton Mallet, broadly in line with district and regional figures¹⁴.

Shepton East continues to come within top priority wards for both children and all ages. Shepton Mallet was identified in previous ward data on teenage conceptions as an area that needed to be targeted (2002-4). However, this will need to be revisited when new ward data becomes available later this year. Shepton Mallet has been identified as a possible target area for the second wave of health trainers, to work with individuals on health related behaviour change.

Health Care Provision

There are two hospitals in Shepton Mallet; the Shepton Mallet Community Hospital and the Shepton Mallet NHS Treatment Centre. These facilities adjoin one another on a site on the Old Wells Road. The Shepton Mallet Community Hospital provides clinics on audiological medicine, cardiology, dermatology, trauma and orthopaedics and urology. The Shepton Mallet NHS Treatment Centre provides clinics on dermatology, gastroenterology, ophthalmology, trauma and orthopaedics. In order to access accident and emergency treatment however, patients need to travel 24 kilometres to the Royal United Hospital in Bath or 27 kilometres to Yeovil District Hospital.

There are two doctors' surgeries in Shepton Mallet. The Park Medical Practice on the Cannards Grave Road provides diabetes, ante natal care and an asthma clinic and is currently accepting new patients. Grove House Surgery in West Shepton is also accepting new patients and in addition to the clinics provided by the Park Medical Centre, it also offers Well Woman and Well Man clinics.

Confidential sexual health advice services are offered by the English Churches Housing Street on Town Street, the Young People's Centre on Paul Street and the Young People's Clinic at the Shepton Mallet Leisure Centre on Charlton Road. The Shepton Mallet Community Hospital also offers Chlamydia screening.

There are two dental practices operating from Shepton Mallet; Redd and ADP in Town Street. Shepton also has two pharmacies, Boots on the Cannards Grave Road and Boots at the Townsend Business Park. There are two opticians; Dolland & Aitchison on Town Street and the Young Clinic located on the High Street.

Education

Education attainment

In terms of qualifications gained, the picture in Shepton compares unfavourably with the national and regional figures. The percentage of adults with the highest level of

qualifications is significantly lower in the two Shepton wards than the national average of 19.9% and the regional average of 18.8%.

The percentage of adults with no qualifications in Shepton East is 27.8% which is marginally better than the national average of 28.9%. However, the percentage of 16-74 year olds in Shepton West with no qualifications is significantly higher than the Somerset or national average, at 34.4%.

Education provision

Education in and around Shepton Mallet is organised on a two-tier system. There are four primary schools in Shepton Mallet. Bowlsh Infant School accepts pupils from age 4-7 and has 101 pupils on the school roll. Shepton Mallet Community Infants School takes children aged 4-7 and has a nursery and Children's Centre on the same site and has 125 pupils. St Paul's Church of England VC Junior School accepts pupils aged 7-11 and has 307 pupils.¹

Whitstone Community School is the secondary school serving Shepton Mallet and surrounding area. This school provides education for 11-16 year olds and has 722 pupils on the register. There is no provision for post-16 education in Shepton Mallet so most students seeking further learning go to Strode College in Street or other post-16 education facilities. (All roll figures as of May 2008)

Future need and provision

The possibility of a site move for Whitstone School has been raised in the past through the community plan 'At a Crossroads' and by Somerset County Council as the Local Authority for education on the grounds that the current site is constrained and many of the buildings are unsuitable for current and future use. The relocation of Whitstone may also enable the consolidation of existing infant and junior schools on that site. However, due to the excellent location of Whitstone School in the centre of town means, there is currently no desire to move on the part of the school. At the present time therefore, there is no requirement to identify a new site for Whitstone School through the forward planning process.

Given this position, and based on the advice of the Local Authority, it will be necessary to identify a site for a new primary school in the town. This site will need to be large enough to accommodate a 14 class primary school and will need to be about 2 hectares in size. This will only accommodate existing pupils with a slight addition and means that Bowlsh will continue to operate.

Community Facilities

Shepton Mallet has most of the core community facilities necessary to enable it to function as a self-contained place. There is a post office, three banks, a library and a tourist information and heritage centre all centrally located in the town. The Shepton Mallet Fire Station is located on Board Cross and the police station on Commercial Road. In addition to basic services, there are a number of accountancy /financial advice practices, estate agents, legal firms, a veterinary practice and several play groups in the town. Tourist accommodation includes two caravan sites, one campsite and four hotels with nearby attractions including the East Somerset Railway in Cranmore. However, there is no town hall or community meeting place (see below).

One of the most important facilities for the town is the Academy building at the Market Place formerly known as the Amulet. The theatre was erected in the 1970s as a gift to the people of Shepton from the Showering family and used the best technology available. The theatre has what was then the only suspended seating system in the UK. The building was never fully used for its intended purpose and its future had become uncertain. However, new occupiers (the Bristol Academy of Performing Arts) have revived this facility through an extensive refurbishment programme. The building now incorporates an auditorium with sprung dance floor, a conference room and two multi-purpose mirrored teaching rooms, each with an electric piano. There is also a foyer/ bar area. Rooms in the Academy are available for hire for uses such as concerts and theatre performances, weddings, corporate functions and conferences.

The Royal Bath and West Showground is another highly important asset for Shepton Mallet. The site which is approximately 97.1 hectares includes 6 indoor venues and is used for exhibitions, meetings, trade shows, concerts and project launches. The facility is a major tourism draw as it hosts a number of major national events such as the annual Bath and West Agricultural Show which attracted approximately 151,000 visitors in 2008.¹⁵

Currently, however, there is no town hall or community meeting facility. Shepton Mallet Town Council leases office space on the Mendip District Council site on Cannards Grave Road with Town Council meetings held at the Mendip District Council offices. The need for a community building for Shepton, which would be the base for the Town Council, has long been recognised. 'At a Crossroads', the strategic plan for Shepton Mallet published by community planning group Shepton 21 recognises this. One element of its action plan, to provide a sustainable future for the community, is 'Building a new Town Hall and Community Meeting Space for Shepton Mallet'. The vision for this building is that it would be a 'flagship' building which would be used for a range of community facilities. In addition to being the home for the Town Council, it would also be used as a Community Advice, Training and Employment Centre. These plans have now progressed to the point that a feasibility study is being carried out (funded by the Regional Development Agency) which will assess whether such a centre is necessary and viable in the town.

The consultation process also identified the possible need for a crematorium in Shepton Mallet. A private company has expressed interest in taking this forward in the town.

Community

The Shepton 21 Regeneration Partnership is a strong community planning group in Shepton Mallet. The group has been active in Shepton Mallet since evolving from the Shepton Mallet task force in 2002 in order to meet the requirements of the Market and Coastal Towns Initiative and secure funding. In 2006, the group used this funding to produce a community strategic plan called 'At a Crossroads' which sets out a vision for the town, a set of goals and actions to help implement these. The steering group for the Shepton 21 Regeneration Partnership includes representatives from local businesses in the town, the district council, the town council, the chamber of commerce and voluntary groups.

The Shepton Mallet Football Club is another beacon of community life. It has been active in the town for 50 years and has 12 teams in total. These include the first team in the Toolstation League which currently has semi professional status, an A team in the Mid Somerset League, a reserve side in the Somerset County League, an under 18s, under 16s and under 8 team and two girls sides at under 12 and 16.

The youth section has achieved FA Charter Standard status and the Club has also been awarded the Western League Hospitality Award. A difficult issue facing Shepton Mallet AFC is that for the first team to retain its semi professional status or be eligible to apply for professional status it is necessary for the club to upgrade existing facilities to the required levels by the beginning of the 2009/10 season or face relegation. Facilities are extremely run down and do not meet FA requirements. This is detailed further under “Sports and leisure facilities” below.

Other clubs include the Shepton Mallet Bowls Club, The Shepton Mallet Cricket Club, Shepton Mallet youth club, judo club, men’s and women’s hockey teams, a cricket club, a yoga group and a belly dancing group.

Community safety

Please refer to the Portrait of Mendip for information about Community Safety.

Entertainment/leisure/sport/recreation/culture

Sports and leisure facilities

Shepton Mallet is less well provided for in terms of sports and leisure facilities than the other Mendip towns. Although there is a leisure centre in the town (located on the Charlton Road) which includes four squash courts, an outdoor all weather pitch and a fitness room, it occupies a shared site with Whitstone Community School and does not include an indoor swimming pool.

The Shepton Mallet Lido, located on Shaftgate Avenue (off Commercial Road) is an outdoor swimming pool which was refurbished in 2006 and is open from June to September unless maintenance work dictates otherwise. Consultation responses have indicated that although the pool is valued by the local community, its seasonal opening and weather dependency limits its usefulness. There were some suggestions that if the pool was covered it would be a more useful resource for the town.

The West Shepton Playing Fields on the Old Wells Road are the home ground for Shepton Mallet AFC which leases the ground from Mendip District Council. There are currently 11 years to run on this lease. Facilities include two pitches, changing rooms and a club house. Improvements to these facilities are necessary for two reasons; firstly, the facilities are inadequate in terms of both space and quality. The two available pitches do not meet the needs of the club and it is necessary for the children’s teams to go outside of Shepton Mallet to be able to play. Floodlights are thirty years old, changing rooms are extremely run down and there is no perimeter fence meaning that it is difficult for the club to charge for matches. The Mendip Play Strategy identifies the ground as being of poor quality, a view reinforced by meetings

with Shepton Mallet Town Council. Secondly, if the club does not upgrade facilities to the FA's required levels by the beginning of the 2009/10 season the first team which has worked hard for its semi professional status will face relegation. Improvements are likely to cost in the region of £60,000. There is commitment in principle by Mendip District Council to extend the lease (currently with 11 years left to run) but there are ancillary issues that also need to be agreed in order to make upgrading the facilities viable.

Other facilities in the town include the 'Train Station' health and fitness centre on Town Street and Monty's Spa, at the Charlton House Hotel, both of which are privately owned. The skate park in Shepton Mallet serves young people in the town and is identified in the Mendip Play Strategy as being of high quality. There is also the intention to build a BMX track next to it.

Consultation undertaken in 2008 in Shepton Mallet revealed that there is a strong feeling that there is a need for the provision of leisure facilities in the town, such as an indoor swimming pool, bowling alley or cinema. Shepton Mallet's location at the centre of a network of places in central Mendip which have poor access to leisure facilities suggests that it may be well placed to serve as a 'leisure hub' for this part of the district. Leisure facilities are currently being reviewed through an audit, assessment and forward plan (expected completion spring 2009) which will inform whether a leisure complex in Shepton Mallet would be feasible.

Open space and play space

Of all the towns in the Mendip district, Shepton Mallet has the highest level of strategic provision of open space. This is a direct result of the town having the largest park in the district (Collett Park). By contrast, however, it also has the lowest percentage of neighbourhood provision of open space in Mendip and one of the two wards in Shepton Mallet has a level below the minimum standard.

Open space and play space at a strategic level for the town is well provided for by Collett Park. This recreation ground is recognised in the audit of open space, play space and playing pitches as being a high quality and well located for the town as a whole. The town park and the skate park are the most well-used of the public open space in the town. Age range suitability of sites is relatively evenly distributed with slightly fewer facilities for 6-11 year olds. In terms of accessibility, the town park is accessible for almost all of the town with a small gap at the north-western extremity. The skate park however, is accessible only for the western part of the town.

At neighbourhood level, there are three main gaps in provision; an isolated area on the eastern edge of the town, the central and northern residential areas, and the north-western extremity which is also lacking at strategic level. At local level, coverage is well distributed and provides accessibility for a large proportion of the population.

The Mendip Play Strategy summarises the main issues and challenges that the strategy needs to address in Shepton Mallet as being:

- strategic provision – whilst the town park is well located and of high quality, the skate park is less well sited at the south-western extremity of the town. There is therefore a gap in provision east of the town centre;
- neighbourhood provision is poorer, with gaps to the north of the town centre and at the eastern end of the town in the Charlton area. There is only one

playing field – at the south-west extremity of the town which provides only limited coverage and is in need of improvement. However, playing fields at the town park help to remedy this;

- local provision - although the quality of provision appears to be higher than in other towns, there is still a need to improve this. As the opportunities to create new space are limited, the challenge will be to improve the quality of provision from existing sites.

Allotments

Shepton Mallet Town Council provides 81 allotment plots in total over four sites. These are located on Hitchen Lane, Whitstone Road and two areas on the Allyn Saxon Estate. The charges are some of the lowest in Mendip. There is currently a waiting list of 18 prospective tenants with vacant allotments being offered on a first come first served basis.

There are aspirations to expand the Hitchen Lane site onto the derelict land adjacent to the east of the existing site.

Entertainment and Culture

The occupation of the Bristol Academy of Performing Arts at the Academy building on the market place has infused Shepton Mallet with new life in terms of music, entertainment and culture. Two programmes are currently offered at the Academy; a three year degree course in musical theatre, and a one year postgraduate diploma. Musical theatre students are already living in the town and have put on a number of performances at the Academy which have been well attended by local people. The intake of full time students is expected to increase significantly over the next two to three years, with additions to the courses offered and expansion into production and stage management. The increase in full time students at the Academy is likely to have a significant impact on the town itself, with knock on effects in terms of trade and demand for entertainment facilities.

Shepton Mallet is part of the West Country Carnival Circuit which is an annual celebration of parades of illuminated floats, which takes place every winter and raises money for charity while providing entertainment for local people.

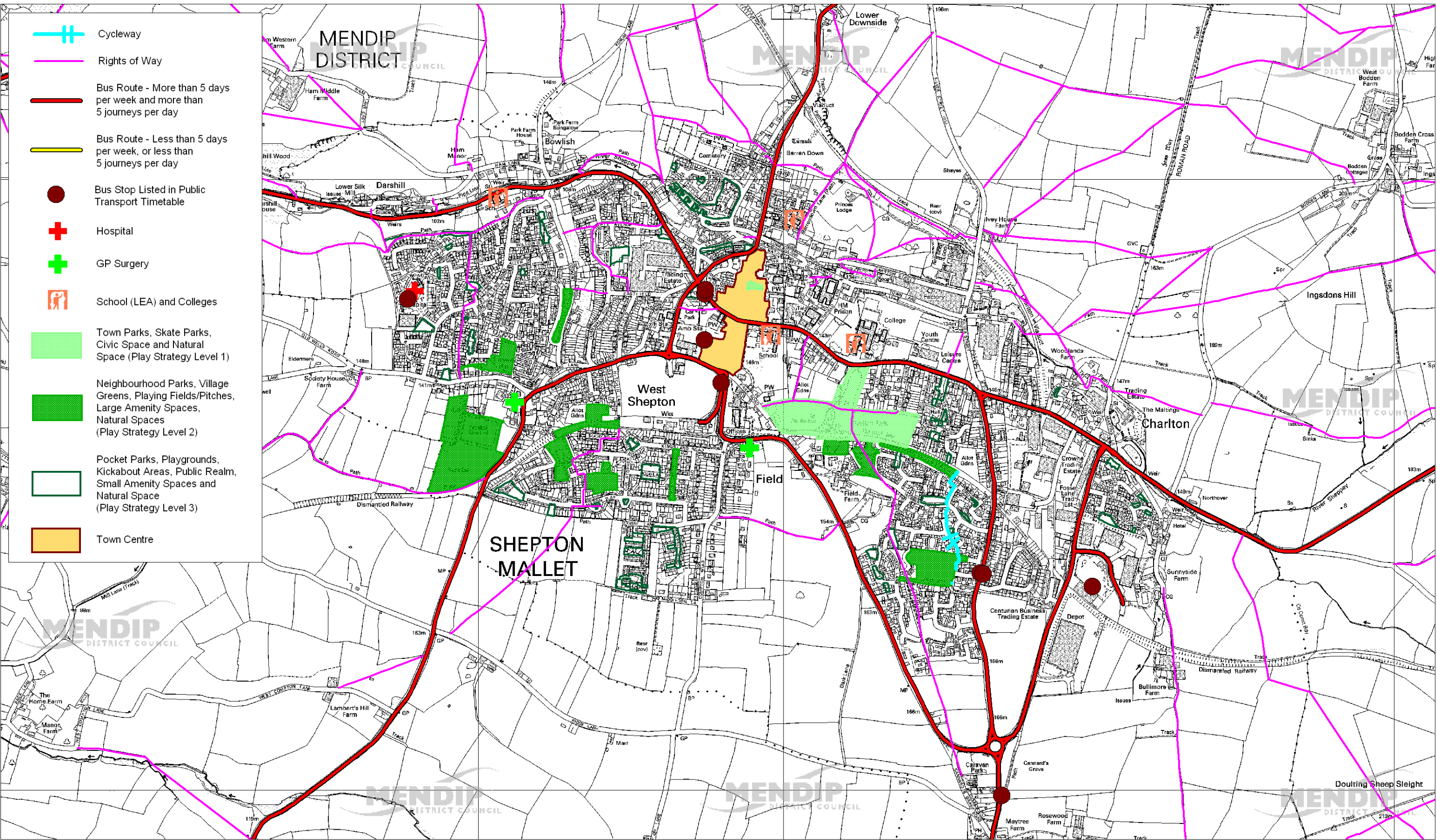
Accessibility and transport

A County Council study has found that a number of business find it difficult to retain employees due to transport problems. It has been confirmed by Jobcentre Plus that a number of long-term unemployed residents of Shepton Mallet have difficulties accessing employment. Access to a job centre is also difficult for people living in Shepton Mallet and the surrounding rural areas. Shepton Mallet saw a big increase in car ownership in the twenty year period 1981-2001 of around 12%¹⁶. 18% of the resident population of the town do not have access to a private car, the highest proportion being in Shepton East ward¹⁷.

It has also been identified that students from villages surrounding Shepton Mallet have difficulties accessing higher education in colleges.

Figure 3 - Shepton Mallet Accessibility

Scale 1:12000



Shepton Mallet is poorly served by buses with only seven services. There are no services to Bristol, Bath or Taunton but there is an hourly service to Yeovil¹⁸. The public consultation highlighted that residents of Shepton Mallet would like to see direct bus services to main centres such as Bristol and that frequency of services should be increased along with improved timetable co-ordination of buses in order to encourage people to come to Shepton, and reduce car traffic on the roads.

There is no railway station in Shepton Mallet, however it is possible to use public transport to connect to nearby stations. There is a direct bus to Castle Cary train station which takes 25 minutes. There is also a bus to Frome station which is just under 50 minutes with one change¹⁹. Although currently there is no station in Shepton Mallet there are aspirations to extend the East Somerset railway line from Frome to the former Tesco site at Fosse Way in Shepton Mallet. The line currently ends at Mendip Vale, several kilometres from Shepton Mallet, however there are track beds for most of the proposed extension to the route.

Although not currently very well served by cycle paths, as part of the Strawberry Line project there are plans to link the town to Wells and perhaps Cranmore with a multi-user path. The Strawberry Line project is a proposal to create a multi user path from Yatton to Cheddar. A local group LEGS is promoting the extension of this path from Cheddar to Wells with local regeneration officers supporting an extension of this from Wells to Shepton Mallet. A feasibility study has already been carried out for the Wells to Shepton part of this route.

Public consultation exercises carried out in spring 2008 revealed that parking is perceived as being a real issue in Shepton Mallet. There are a total of 268 parking spaces provided in five Mendip District Council owned car parks. This is the lowest number of council owned spaces in the five towns. There was also a strong feeling that parking problems are exacerbated by employees of Mendip District Council parking in one of the car parks and therefore utilising a large number of spaces. Complaints in relation to parking included an 'insufficient number of parking spaces and that the cost of parking was 'prohibitive' to trade in the town centre. One suggestion made was that parking should be free in order to boost economy through increased use of the town.

Economy

A core observation of the town economy is that it is low skilled with a predominance of manual and elementary occupations. This situation does leave the workforce vulnerable to the effect of sudden closures or new working practices. Shepton Mallet contains the second largest concentration of employment land and premises in the district with 54 hectares. The land available is of varying quality. However this has provided a good basis to encourage new business in the town.

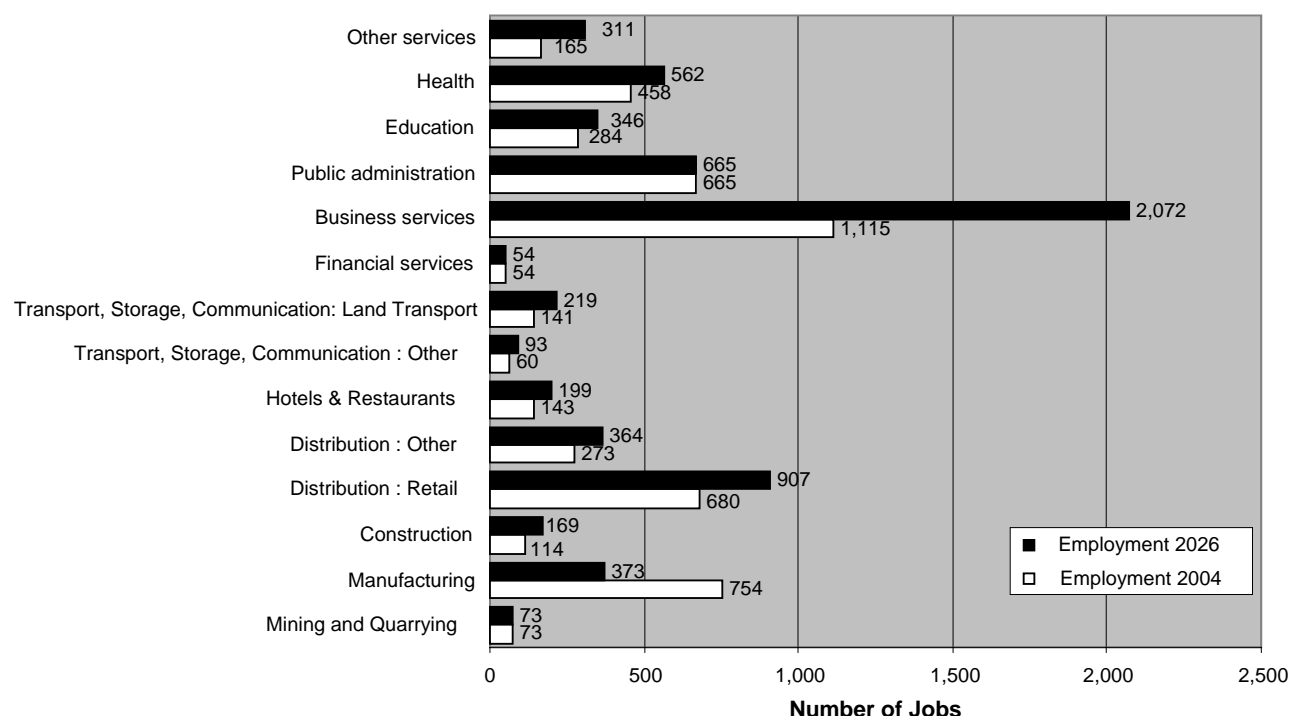
Table 1: Key Statistics

Number of jobs (inc. self employed) (2001)	4954
Size of the economically active population (2001) (i.e. those in full or part time work, self employed or actively seeking work)	4530
Unemployed (2006)	90
Commuting Patterns	
Workers travelling into Shepton Mallet and surrounding villages	4034
Workers travelling out of Shepton Mallet and surrounding villages	4263
Workers living in Shepton Mallet or its immediate rural surroundings	4582
Workers resident in Shepton Mallet travelling to other Mendip towns	1601
Workers resident in Shepton Mallet travelling to Bristol/Bath	900
Conurbation	576
Workers resident in Shepton Mallet travelling to Midsomer Norton/Radstock	
Recent employment growth – growth in jobs (1998-2004)	650
Estimated potential for further job growth (2004-2026)	1430

Employment Growth and Change

Figure 4 indicates the projected changes in the economy over the next 20 years. There is potential for around 1,430 additional jobs to be created over this period.

Figure 4: Projected Employment Change by Sector: Shepton Mallet 2004-2026



In terms of specific sectors, manufacturing is expected to see continued decline and by 2026 will account for just 5% of jobs compared with the 25% it provided in 1998. In terms of emerging jobs expected to replace these losses, business services are

expected to flourish adding almost 1000 jobs. Job growth in other sectors will be fairly uniform, although whilst retailing and health will make larger contributions.

Skills

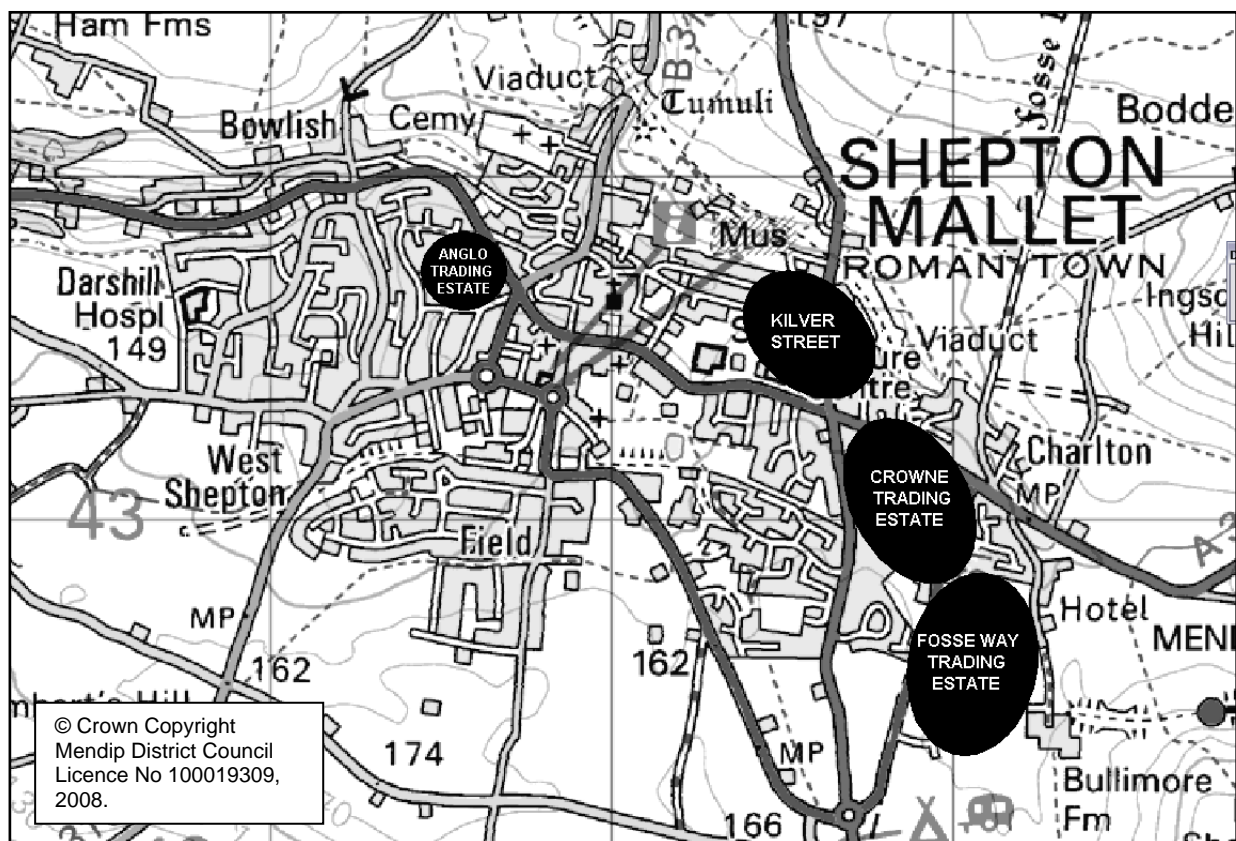
Workforce skills in Shepton are amongst the lowest in the district which is reflected in the nature of the work available. Over 30% of the workforce has no formal qualifications (academic or vocational) and 28% of jobs are of a manual or elementary nature which is the highest across the district as a whole and is in excess of the national and regional averages. These figures emphasise that Shepton is a low skill, low wage economy and although it fulfils a role in the wider sub-regional economy, wage levels - particularly when compared to the upward spiral in house prices – need to be encouraged upwards.

In terms of addressing the skills deficit, as mentioned earlier, work has been ongoing to bring forward a Community Advice, Training and Employment Centre (CATEC). Plans for this facility have now progressed to the point that consultants have been appointed to carry out a feasibility study (funded by the Regional Development Agency) which will assess whether CATEC is necessary and viable in the town.

Employment Land

Employment land and premises in Shepton Mallet is in good supply, although its quality in a number of cases is poor and in need of regeneration. Nevertheless, views expressed suggest that local business values the availability of cheaper low quality premises to meet their needs and ensure that costs are kept down.

Figure 5: Concentrations of Business and Industrial Land in Shepton Mallet



Employment land around the town is mainly concentrated to the east of the town based around the junctions of the A37 and A361. The drinks plant at Kilver Street is a major employment site which has faced closure on a number of occasions in the past, however with ongoing investment it remains an important local employer. Further south, employment land is found at the Fosseway and Crowne Trading Estates accommodating significant transport and warehousing firms. Interspersed, the Charlton and Centurion estates offer smaller premises encouraging business start-up. A key part of the business appeal in Shepton Mallet is the variety of space available which is reflected in rents. At the lower end of the market, the Anglo Trading Estate and Station Road offer basic premises, although both have redevelopment potential associated with improving the attraction of the town centre. The other principal employment area in the town is the council offices site at Cannards Grave Road which not only houses Mendip District Council but a number of contractors and support service providers.

In terms of available land supply in the town, there is little new greenfield land aside from areas within existing estates such as that at Fosseway Trading Estate. In the last Local Plan, land adjacent to the town centre was allocated to encourage regeneration. In addition to this part of the housing development at Field Farm was set aside to provide for live/work homes, however the success of this approach remains to be evaluated once it is completed.

Future Land Supply

Based on job growth predictions and the emerging land supply picture since 2004, Shepton Mallet will require around 9.2 hectares of employment land to meet needs to 2026. In terms of land supply to meet this level of provision, the planning process will need to provide for a site of this scale. Options for the location of such a site are set out in the accompanying consultation paper.

As far as existing employment sites goes, there are opportunities to improve the quality and in certain cases contribute to the ongoing efforts to regenerate the town centre area. The most obvious examples here are the Commercial Road/Little Ostry area and the Anglo Trading Estate, both of which represent underutilised land resources which, with investment, could provide an economic kick start to the town centre by bringing more workers into the heart of the town. The Anglo complex in particular provides opportunities to provide new and refurbished space for knowledge based business (IT, Research & Development, etc.) as well as creative activities linked to the emerging BAPA proposals.

The Town Centre

Overview

Shepton Mallet is the smallest retail centre in Mendip. Surrounded by centres such as Bath, Wells, Frome and Street which all offer a wider range of goods and services, its retail offer is very much restricted to meeting local needs. There are a growing number of specialist shops with a broader catchment, (for example, Christoforides bridal shop) as well as the long established Haskins, an extensive and independently run furniture store which has a sub-regional reputation and attracts custom from a considerable distance.

In response to the declining fortunes of the town centre, the council pursued an opportunity offered by the redundant Huntsman and Griggs site (to the south of the town centre) to add a substantial extension to the retailing core. Anchored by a substantial new Tesco store (replacing the out of town store on Mendip Avenue) the Townsend Retail Park also includes five adaptable retail warehouse units which are now occupied by the likes of Boots, Argos, Woolworths and New Look. The principal aim of the development was to stem the flow of retail trade from the town to nearby centres, which at one time amounted to 85% of all comparison purchases. The development has seen some relocation of business from the town centre (Boots, New Look) however this has allowed those operators to offer a wider product range which, in turn, improves the attraction to shoppers. Modernisation works and the substitution of Somerfield for Aldi within the Haskins premises is also set to offer further improvements to the retail offer of the town during 2008. The aim is to continue further town centre enhancements improving the physical appearance and image of the town centre to improve confidence amongst retailers which in turn will draw trade from visitors to the new stores on the southern fringes into the High Street.

One aspect which remains an issue is the availability of car parking (see “Accessibility and transport”). The centre is served by two larger car parks at Commercial Road and Great Ostry, although the former does meet some needs of the local government workforce. Since 2007, the Townsend Retail Park has substantially supplemented available parking for shoppers; however consultation issues raised suggest that the free parking there is doing nothing to assist confidence amongst the high street businesses.

In 2006, consultants²⁰ looking at issues affecting the town centre came to a number of conclusions about its potential in coming years. These points, updated in light of recent new development, are set out below:

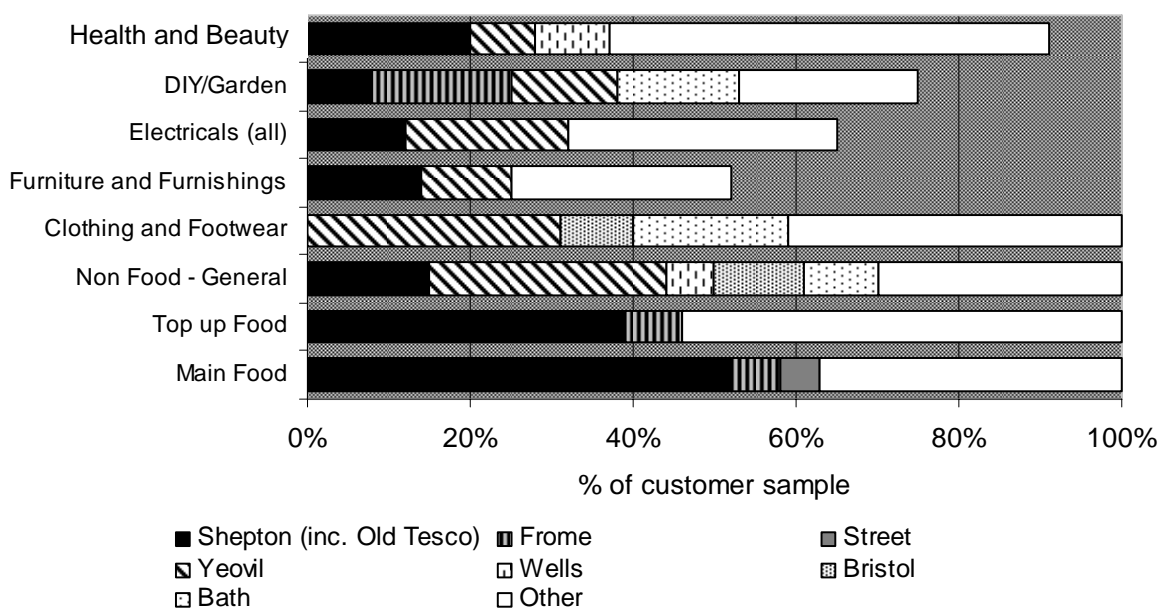
Table 2: Shepton Mallet Town Centre SWOT Analysis

Strengths Weekly Outdoor Market Haskins Store Good road access from many directions Large Tesco Food store with wide product range	Weaknesses High vacancy rates Limited, although improved, representation by national retailers
Opportunities Large locally based workforce Access to grants and regeneration funding	Threats Delays to town centre investment will compound difficulties for High Street traders

Retail Trends

The diagram below, drawn from data compiled from the council’s consultant study²¹ shows where residents of Shepton Mallet and its surrounding area broadly go to meet a range of consumer needs. The data was based on a household survey undertaken in 2005 and therefore does not reflect the changes to shopping patterns expected from the opening of the Townsend Retail Park in 2007. New data, to be commissioned shortly, will allow the effect of this development to be understood.

Figure 6: Shopping Destinations of Shepton Mallet Area Residents



The diagram indicates that only 50% of households shopped locally for their main food purchases, a level well below that seen in other towns (taking into account town centres and superstores). Just 15% of households indicated that Shepton met their comparison goods needs. In all categories of higher order goods, Yeovil was a favoured destination although Bath featured strongly as an alternative. These figures underline the fact that Shepton's retailing was of very poor quality and barely adequate to meet even local needs.

Future Needs

Requirements for new retail floorspace are derived from the increasing population and growth in disposable incomes. Whilst expenditure will vary annually given the underlying state of the economy, future projections 10-15 years ahead have been broadly reliable. The longer term figures to 2026 should only be viewed as a guide and will be subject to review prior to that time. The table below represents the base position at 2006 but does build in the contributions from the Townsend Retail Park and the new Focus DIY store.

Table 3: Retail expenditure growth and floorspace requirements in Shepton Mallet (2005-2026)²²

		2011	2016	2021	2026
Convenience Goods (Food and everyday purchases)	Expenditure Growth (£m)	3.09	6.09	8.91	12.21
	New Sales Floorspace Large Format Stores (m ²)	0	0	0	0
	New Sales Floorspace Small Format Stores (m ²)	116	228	334	458
Comparison Goods (Clothes, electricals and other higher value goods)	Expenditure Growth (£m)	21.3	28.9	37.3	50.2
	New Sales Floorspace (m ²)	0	817	2289	4516
Figures in this table build in contributions made from Focus and the Townsend Retail Park					

The projections point towards the fact that retail capacity has been catered for in the short term. The new Tesco store, along with existing and refurbished provision in the town (i.e. Co-op and Aldi) will provide for all large format food need, whilst with significant new comparison retailing will not be required before 2016. The key focus

for Shepton town centre is to harness the increase in shopper numbers drawn in by the Townsend Retail Park in order that they also purchase goods from the High Street. Part of this will rely upon the image of the town centre being further enhanced through further public realm improvements and investment by shopkeepers (supported currently through some modest grants) whilst the land use planning regime must seek to reinforce the town centre in considering further retail and leisure proposals.

Leisure and Entertainment

Consultation exercises in the town have identified a perception amongst the community that there is a dearth of leisure and entertainment facilities in the town. A view that came through strongly was that an indoor swimming pool, cinema or bowling alley has long been needed in the town. Currently residents have to travel to Wells, Frome and Street for swimming (outside the period when the open air pool is operating in the summer).

In terms of potential, Shepton Mallet's central location between the larger centres of Bristol/Bath, Yeovil, Taunton and Bridgwater gives it an advantage in terms of an economically viable catchment that includes the other Mendip towns and many rural communities. Consultants looking at leisure potential considered that the extent of local demand from this central area would appear to be sufficient to support a multi faceted leisure complex of a moderate scale. However the key challenge is to provide for this type of development in a location which contributes to the town as a whole rather than being a peripheral attraction which does not contribute to wider economic objectives.

In terms of more general leisure and social opportunities, Shepton Mallet has a good array of eating and drinking establishments for a town of its size. There are seven cafes and restaurants in the town, nineteen bar and pub licenses. It is notable that the town has only one venue which is licensed for entertainment such as live music²³.

Office Space

Alongside traditional employment land, office space is an increasingly important type of workspace. As a supplement to the work carried out to inform the preceding section on employment, Table 4 summarises the likely office space demands arising from the creation of new jobs in relevant sectors. The levels below exclude ancillary office uses that might form part of a business park development and thus give an indication of the provision expected in a town centre location. A town centre location for offices is considered beneficial in that the presence of office workers can reinforce other town centre uses, notably in terms of hospitality and retailing. Furthermore, the higher frequency public transport to the town centres offers the workforce a real alternative to car use.

Table 4: Office space demands in Shepton Mallet

	Area in sqm
Projected job growth in office based employment sectors to 2026	430
Floorspace required (m^2)	5,363
less office space gained between 2004/05 and 2006/07	715
Residual Office Supply requirement (<i>rounded to nearest 50m²</i>)	4,650

In Shepton Mallet, the job growth figures point towards the need for around 5,700sqm of office space during the period to 2026 to meet demands in the services sector. Since 2004, around 700sqm has been provided although much of this has been in the form of small scale conversions of upper floor accommodation rather than any modern standalone office premises.

As indicated in the preceding section on employment, there are opportunities at the Anglo Trading Estate and Commercial Road/Little Ostry to provide for new and refurbished employment space in the form of offices and creative workshops. This would bring more people into the central area, in turn offering potential to improve shopper through-flow on the High Street.

Tourism

Shepton Mallet has immense potential which as yet remains unrealised. Firstly, its location at the foot of the Mendip Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty makes the town a well placed base for walkers and naturalists. Furthermore, the rich archaeological history of the town, in particular, its Roman origins has the potential to attract visitors with an interest in history and archaeology as well as nature and walking. There have been suggestions that this potential could be promoted through a well placed information centre or archaeological trail with signposted walks.

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