



Harpenden Town Council
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Design Brief: Thompsons Close

1. Philosophy of the Design Brief

In order to enhance Thompsons Close and make shopping a pleasant experience, the Town Council wish to receive innovative and creative ideas of ways in which to promote economic and social stability in the Thompsons Close area of Harpenden

2. Location

Thompsons Close is situated on the East side of Harpenden High Street. Development in the immediate vicinity is both primary and secondary shopping frontages, including A3 use and office development. The High Street as it intersects with Thompsons Close hosts a variety of domestic scale buildings setback from the main carriageway behind trees and landscaped greens. This particular feature dates from the eighteenth century ropewalk.

Many of the shops on the East side of the High Street have ground floor shops with a variety of pitched, slated or tiled roofs and detailed brick elevations dating mostly from the early 20th Century.

The buildings at this entrance of Thompsons Close are circa 18th century and still form part of the medieval skirt of the village. Unfortunately the historical interest wears out within 20m of leaving the High Street as the nature of the Cul de Sac reveals a mix of restaurants, the rear of a very bland red brick wall of a retail car park, a couple of B1 units also in red brick and then the streetscape merges into an assortment of facades dating from most decades since the 1950s.

The entrance to the east of Thompsons Close where it joins Bowers Way North, slopes down towards the High Street. Development here is predominantly inter-war suburban housing and includes features such as half-timbering and chequered brickwork.

2. Constraints

At a preliminary meeting held with interested parties the following constraints were highlighted:

- The current entrance from the High Street does not induce shoppers to deviate from the main shopping frontages;
- Poor signage from the High Street
- Poor lighting
- Lack of retail outlets
- Unattractive setting - prone to antisocial behaviour and isolated in nature. Natural surveillance of the site is challenging due to orientation of buildings.
- Depot site owned by the District Council used for street cleaning and adds to the dereliction of the area.
- Vehicular movement is restricted within the Cul de Sac.
- Unattractive wall abutting site with municipal Car Park
- The windows on the side elevations of the shops on the High Street have been boarded up adding to the neglected atmosphere on entering Thompsons Close.

- Cable cabinet at High Street entrance changed for one that cannot be sat on.
- Overgrown vegetation which promotes negative aspect and obscures street lighting.

3. Opportunities

The following opportunities have been identified:

- Close to the High Street
- Adjacent to a municipal car park
- Close to transport links ie Station and bus service
- Some element of pedestrianisation towards the south of the Close
- Area of land adjacent to the car park which could be regenerated
- Introduction of hanging baskets and Christmas catenaries
- Opportunity to introduce an occasional crafts market

4. Planning Policy

All proposals should comply with national, regional, district and local planning policy:

Planning Policy Statement 1 – Creating Sustainable Communities
 Planning Policy Statement 6 – Town Centres
 St Albans District Local Plan Review 1994, Policy Area 2 High Street (North).
 Policies 53, 57, 74 and 85

5. Background

Meetings have been held with both leaseholders, freeholders (including Sainsburys) and Members of Harpenden Town and St Albans District Councils, officers of Hertfordshire Highways, St Albans District Council, Harpenden Community Police Unit and Harpenden Town Council who have formed a partnership in order to investigate ways of re-developing the Thompsons Close area to enhance and encourage residents and visitors to visit the area and enjoy the experience.

6. Scope of Design Brief

6.1 Creating a Sense of Place

A sense of place encompasses local distinctiveness with visual quality and encouragement of social activity. The proposal would therefore need to integrate a feature or focal point which would enhance and preserve the Harpenden Conservation Area but would also be unique to the Thompsons Close area as well as being realistic to install and maintain.

Proposals will need to explain the ways in which a Concept could be introduced into the area to promote the area's sustainability without compromising the ability of existing commercial outlets to continue trading competitively.

The essential principles of urban design would need to be incorporated into the proposal. To include:

- Character
- Continuity and enclosure (a place where public and private spaces are clearly distinguished)
- Quality of the Public Realm (safe and attractive outdoor areas)
- Ease of movement (easy to get to and move through)
- Legibility (a place that has a clear image and easy to understand)
- Adaptability (a place that can change quickly)
- Diversity (variety and choice)

6.2 Movement

Legibility: Thompsons Close requires a clear image and one which is easy to understand. Therefore good clear signage is essential in guiding visitors to the area. The use of clear but creative signage at the entrance to the Close from the High Street possibly incorporated into a carefully crafted “Gateway” feature is a distinct possibility.

Recognising the importance of integrating the community function with the commercial element to produce a space of social interaction.

By raising the road to the same height as the pavement at the end of Thompsons Close where it joins with the High Street as far as the pedestrian entrance to the Car Park would create a shared space to enhance the street scene but would also allow access for deliveries.

6.3 Access

Access from the High Street to Thompsons Close is obtained via a pedestrian link only. This entrance is narrow typifying the period when roads were constructed for horse drawn vehicles only. However this route is the main convenient route from the railway bridge – it is a direct route down from East Harpenden (which is bisected by the railwayline), to the Town Centre and is a popular short cut for many residents wishing to avoid the busy main roads.

The entrance from Bowers Way to the East of the site is both pedestrian and vehicular.

To the South of the site there is a municipal car park which connects street to parking.

Certain shops fronting the High Street have vehicular access to the rear of their shops from Thompsons Close.

Thompsons Close already benefits from a flexible street layout which combines both place and movement functions. On site permeability, which encourages the connectivity to main destinations and routes, is already in existence.

6.4 Parking

There is a mix of free and controlled on-street parking in this area. There is also an adjacent municipal car park to the South of the site.

6.5 Public Realm

Street furniture, fixtures and fittings are controlled by St Albans District Council and follow the Conservation Area theme of black with gold bands.

Any maintenance or public liability for new features and fittings would be the responsibility of the Thompsons Close Working Group.

6.6 Designing out Crime

The proposal would seek to encourage a safe and secure environment by designing out crime, to ensure that those visiting, working, living or just passing through feel safe from crime.

7. **Cost**

A break-down of all costs should be included in any proposal submitted.

8. **Date**

Date for submission of proposals to be 31st January 2008.

9. **Submissions**

All submissions to be sent to:

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View from the High Street



View from Bowers Way