



Royal Tunbridge Wells Town Centre Study

Baseline Evidence Report

February 2023



LDĀ DESIGN



LDĀDESIGN



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This document has been prepared and checked in accordance with ISO 9001:2015

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Appendix A. Town Centre Character Physical Characteristics

This document is to be read in conjunction with the following separate reports:

1. Royal Tunbridge Wells Town Centre Study - Stakeholder & Community Engagement Report (LDA Design)
2. Royal Tunbridge Wells Town Centre Study - A Reimagined Royal Spa Town of the Future (LDA Design)
3. Town Centre Study: Transport & Carbon Baseline Report (City Science)
4. Royal Tunbridge Wells Town Centre Retail Study and Healthcheck (Knight Frank)

1.0 Introduction

The Town Centre Study sets out a vision for Royal Tunbridge Wells up to the year 2040. It is a product of extensive technical studies and comprehensive engagement and is best described as a call for action to shape an ambitious plan for change, bringing key decision makers together in a strategic manner to capitalise on the town centre's unique qualities and characteristics. It proposes a number of key projects and interventions, which will be developed further as part of the future Town Centre Plan, which will form part of the adopted Borough-wide Local Plan. The conclusions of the Town Centre Study align with the ambitions set out in the Tunbridge Wells Submission Local Plan 2021, including Policy STR/RTW 2- Strategy for Royal Tunbridge Wells Town Centre and Policy STR 6 - Transport and Parking.

This document provides a summary of the key technical findings from the baseline review, which has informed the Town Centre Study document. This study was undertaken to provide comprehensive analysis of cross-cutting themes of relevance to Royal Tunbridge Wells. It has been designed as a high-level summary but also references planning policy and a themed analysis of the built environment, including economics and viability as well as movement and decarbonisation. It summarises the findings of the following technical studies:

1. Town Centre Study: Transport & Carbon Baseline Report (City Science)

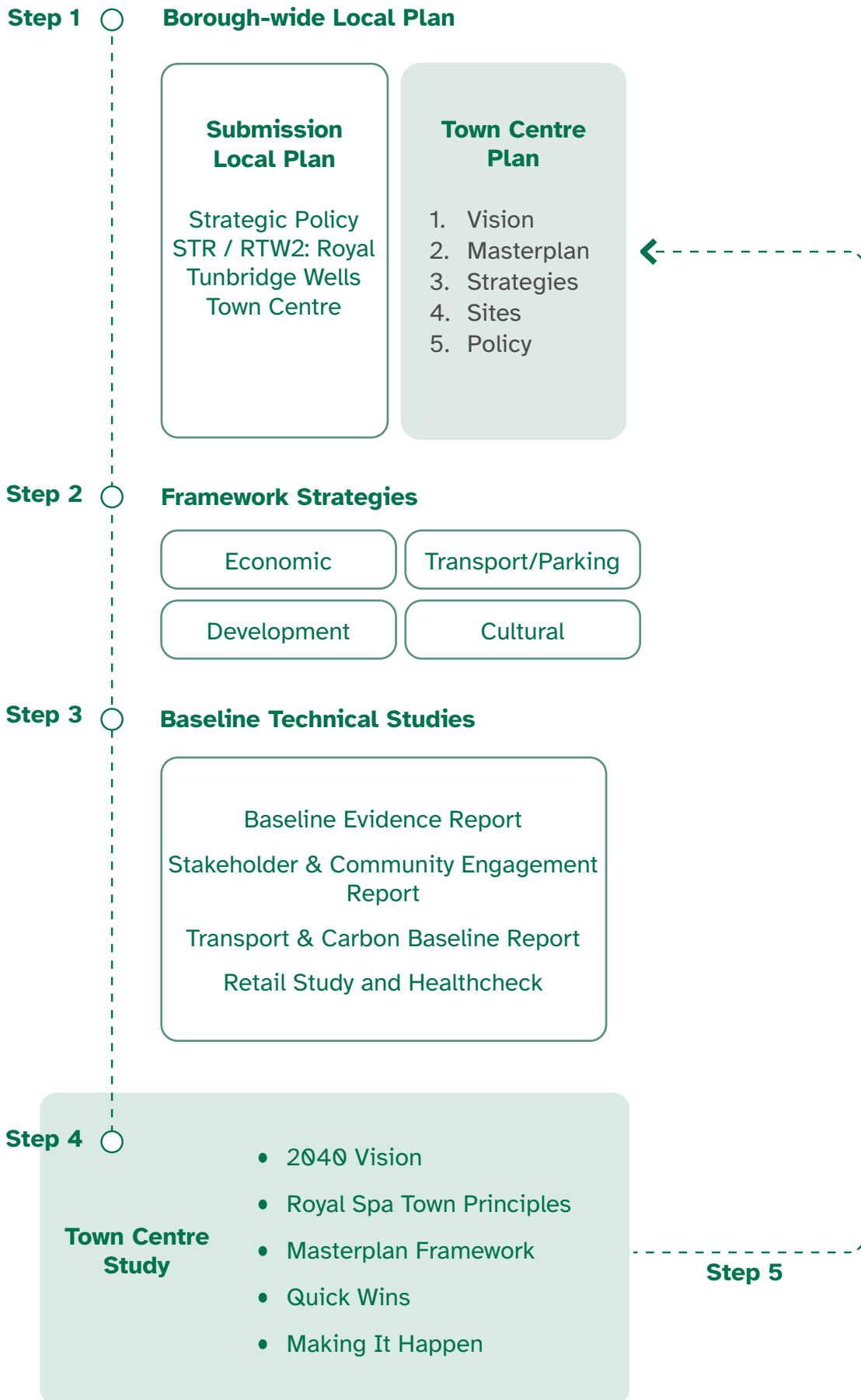
This document consolidates the initial evidence base across policy and data to provide an overview of the current transport provisions and carbon emissions relevant to the study area (see Town Centre Study Area Plan in chapter 2.1). It also considers the wider strategic context and structures the findings in the form of a SWOT analysis.

2. Royal Tunbridge Wells Town Centre Retail Study and Healthcheck (Knight Frank)

This document provides an overview of the current status of retail in Royal Tunbridge Wells Town Centre and includes information on the performance of retail stores and businesses in the study area (see Town Centre Study Area Plan in chapter 2.1) and local context. In addition, the report provides strategic recommendations for improving the overall health and vitality of the town centre's retail environment moving forward.

3. Royal Tunbridge Wells Town Centre Study - Stakeholder & Community Engagement Report (LDA Design)

In October and November 2022, engagement events discussed the future of the Royal Tunbridge Wells Town Centre. These events involved local people and businesses to share knowledge and develop ideas for the Town Centre Plan. In-person workshops, a community pop-up event, and an online questionnaire on Talking Point were used for engagement.



Organogram showing how this document relates to the wider Town Centre Study and Local Plan



Royal Tunbridge Wells Calverley Grounds Gateway

2.0

Project Overview

Chapter 2.0 provides a summary of the town centre and its defining characteristics. It also summarises the physical study area, and explains the project methodology and key project stages undertaken.

2.1 Area of Focus

Royal Tunbridge Wells is the primary retail and leisure destination in the borough providing a unique range of retail and business services to the surrounding catchment. It is also an attractive tourist destination, bringing domestic (UK) visitors from across Kent, East Sussex and London as well as international visitors arriving via Gatwick and the Channel Ports. The vibrant town centre benefits from a rich cultural heritage of both the natural and built environment including a large Conservation Area that encompasses much of the town centre, as well as numerous listed buildings, and distinct areas such as The Pantiles and Calverley Grounds, which is a designated historic park and garden. This distinctive environment is part of what attracts shoppers and visitors to the town centre.

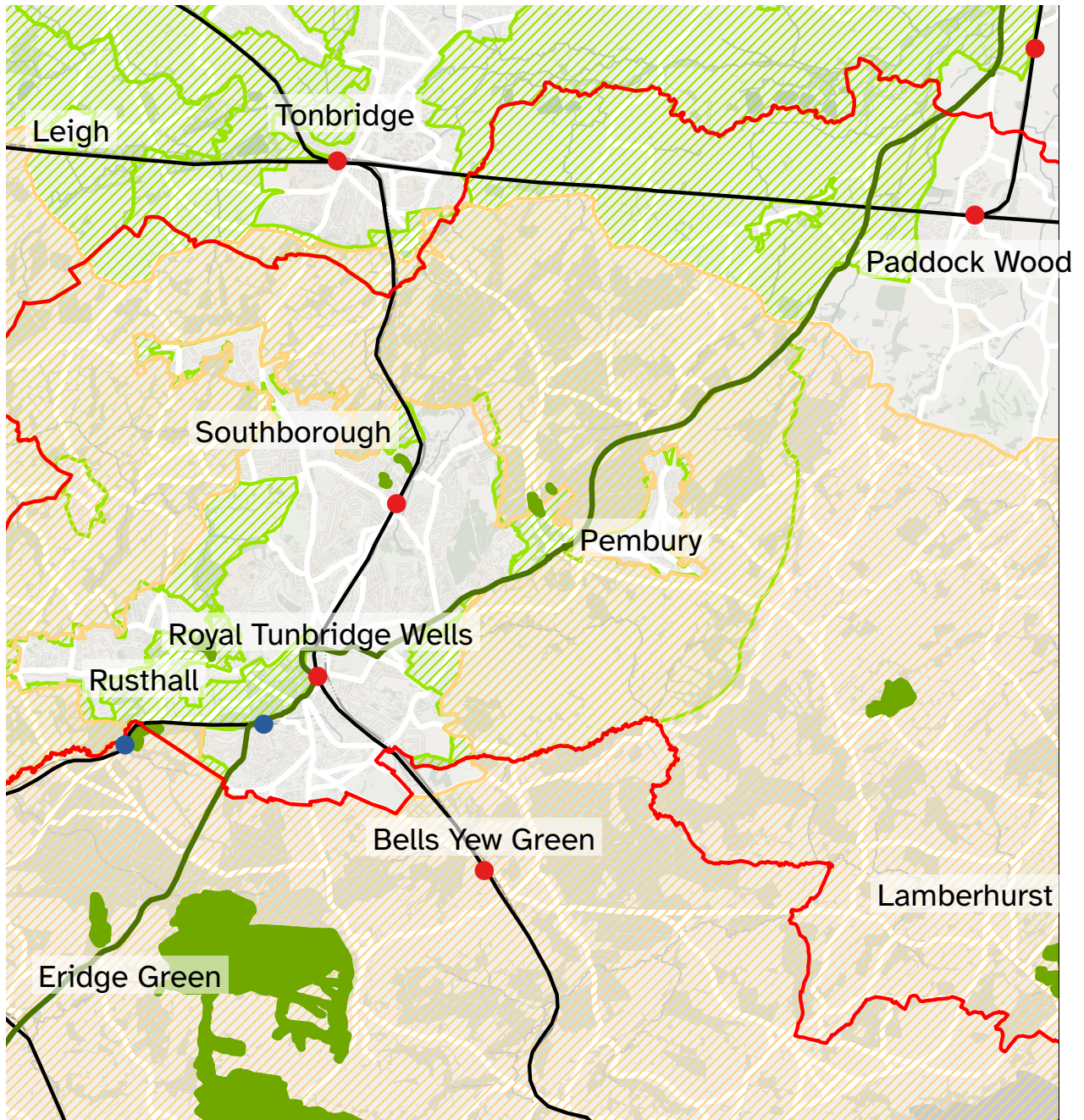
The town centres' character is derived from its undulating topography, an abundance of well kept historic buildings, and its origins as a spa town. The town centre already has many of the attributes to make it a socially and economically sustainable place including generous green infrastructure, retail, cultural and leisure uses, education provision and walkable neighbourhoods. As with many town centres however, complex land ownerships, fragmented development, transport infrastructure and outside economic threats at times dominate and diminish the quality of the built and natural environment.

The plan below shows the Royal Tunbridge Wells Town Centre study boundary as defined within the Submission Local Plan. It also shows overlapping quarters of different character used to determine the outputs of the Town Centre Study. It should be noted that the town centre does of course extend beyond this area and as such the baseline demographic, retail, transport and carbon technical evidence makes reference to wider adjacencies.











Town Centre Study area and quarters.

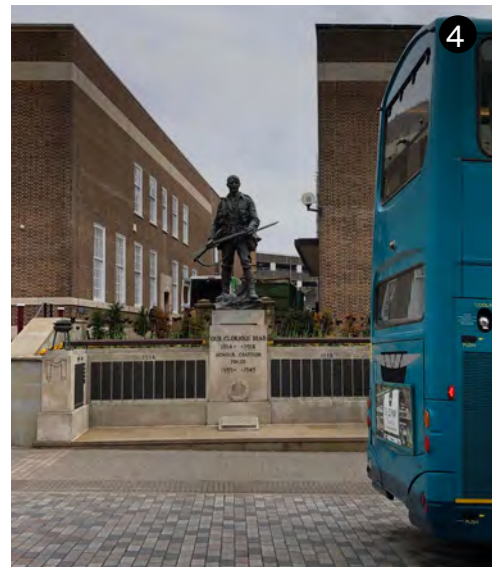
--- Town Centre Study Boundary



Royal Tunbridge Wells Town Centre location within the wider context.

- | | |
|--|---|
|  Tunbridge Wells Borough Boundary |  Green Belt |
|  Train Stations |  Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) |
|  Steam Train Station (Leisure) |  Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) |
|  Railway | |
|  Major Road Network | |

Royal Tunbridge Wells - Photographs of the existing context



1. St John's Road - The dominance of highways infrastructure
2. Grosvenor Road - Poor pedestrian environment
3. Mount Pleasant Road - Opportunity for improved architecture
4. Mount Pleasant Road Millennium Square - Buses dominate the pedestrian environment
5. Monson Road - Impact of highways

Royal Tunbridge Wells - Photographs of the existing context (continued)



1. Dudley Road - Historic residential streets
2. Inner London Road - Recently refurbished historic terraces
3. The Pantiles - Historically significant and independent retail
4. Inner London Road - Green and accessible landscape

2.3 Methodology

The process of producing the Town Centre Study followed three project stages which are summarised here:

Baseline Evidence Review

Prior to undertaking any consultation or design work, a thorough analysis of Royal Tunbridge Wells was undertaken. This document summarises this work. This focussed on a cross-section of issues to understand what has shaped Royal Tunbridge Wells and what issues and opportunities exist that will allow it to remain a successful town centre to the year 2040 and beyond. This included the following analysis, the results of which are concluded in separate reports and summarised within chapters 3.0 and 4.0 of this document:

- Planning Policy Context (chapter 3.1)
- Built Environment (chapter 3.2)
- Economics and Viability (chapter 3.3)
- Transport & Carbon (chapter 3.4)

Stakeholder and Community Engagement Report

To inform the emerging proposals and vision for the town centre, engagement was undertaken with the Town Centre Plan Working Group, local stakeholders and the community to understand their concerns and aspirations for the town centre. Three key workshops were undertaken with a cross section of local stakeholders covering topics as follows:

- Movement and Decarbonisation
- Public Realm Improvements
- Opportunities for Development

These events were complemented by other forms of public consultation including a pop-up event in the town centre on Wednesday 12th October 2022 at the Fiveways Precinct and an online survey via Talking Point on Tunbridge Wells Borough Council's website (four week consultation period 26th October to 22nd November 2022). These events were concluded in a separate 'Stakeholder & Community Engagement Report' and the findings are summarised in chapter 5.0 of this report.

Vision and project interventions

In coordination with the Town Centre Plan Working Group and Tunbridge Wells Borough Council, a 2040 vision statement, future project areas and development opportunities were agreed across the town centre in response to the baseline technical analysis and stakeholder engagement events.

Masterplan Framework

Future proposed interventions across the town centre were agreed at two scales. The first established a set of Royal Spa Town Principles that represent a series of town centre cross-cutting ambitions with the purpose of delivering the outcomes of the vision. These were complemented by the preparation of a Masterplan Framework that was structured into four town centre quarters in response to the towns differing character and uses. The Masterplan Framework provides a diagrammatic representation and written summary of development opportunities and associated projects that include public realm, landscape, highways, and development interventions.



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OF ROYAL TUNBRIDGE WELLS
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FISH MARKET

Inner walk of The Pantiles



Redcliffe Place →
Station
P Main car parks
Kent & Sussex Crematorium
117 The Nevill Ground →
Spectrum ↑

A26 looking northwards towards King Charles the Martyr