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1. INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

Introduction

This study has been compiled by Allies and Morrison Urban Practitioners on behalf of Maldon District Council. It is intended to support the development of policies for the Central Area within the Council’s emerging Local Development Plan.

The Central Area Contextual Study provides an urban analysis of the area and outlines opportunities for improvement. The study uses the DETR and CABE publication “By Design, Urban Design in the Planning System: Towards Better Practice” as a reference point throughout the contextual analysis.
Maldon and its geographic context

Maldon is an historic town, and is recorded in the Domesday Book of 1086 A.D. It has a strong built heritage, containing a high number of listed buildings with a significant part of the town centre in the Maldon Conservation Area. The town is positioned at the most inland point of the Blackwater Estuary and has a population of approximately 15,000 people. To the north of the Blackwater, Maldon is joined to Heybridge, with Maldon town centre serving both communities. Maldon and Heybridge have a distinct landscape setting separated from other urban areas on the Essex coast. Chelmsford is the nearest large settlement located approximately eight miles west of Maldon. Maldon used to be served by two train stations but services to the town ceased in 1964. The nearest train station is now Hatfield Peverel or North Fambridge. Maldon has a rich maritime history and Hythe Quay still operates as a working dock. Historically, Thames Barges would leave the Hythe carrying foodstuffs to London returning with horse manure for local farms. Fishing vessels would be moored along the Blackwater and larger vessels would bring timber and other materials to Sadd’s Wharf and grain to the flour mills at Fullbridge. Today most maritime activity focuses on leisure pursuits with tour bookings on renovated Thames Barges departing from Hythe Quay. The Blackwater Estuary is a Special Protection Area and an important habitat for migrating birds.
Maldon Central Area Policy Boundary

The Central Area comprises of three distinct character areas as shown on the adjacent plan. These areas are:

1. Causeway Regeneration Area
This is a predominantly industrial and large format retail area, including a 24 hour Tesco Extra supermarket, Carr’s Flour Mills and Bentalls shopping centre.

2. Maldon Central Area
This is the historic centre of the town and is the principle focus for commercial activity along a traditional, linear high street with 86 listed buildings.

3. Leisure Quarter
The Leisure Quarter provides high quality, open space within the town centre beside the Blackwater Estuary. It is a regional tourist attraction with walks along the estuary and the popular Promenade Park.
Central Area policy boundary and zones
By Design; Urban design in the planning system: towards better practice

By Design has been used widely in the promotion of good quality urban design. It has been the cornerstone of design guidance for over a decade, and the objectives of urban design that it sets out are timeless. The publication outlines the ‘objectives of urban design’ and the ‘aspects of development form’. Effective policy and design guidance is viewed as that which focuses on how, in a particular context, development form can achieve urban design objectives.

This report analyses the existing urban character and form of the Central Area based on the ‘aspects of development form’ outlined in the ‘By Design’ publication.

Report structure

The Central Area Contextual Study is structured as follows:

1. Introduction and context
2. Urban analysis
3. SWOT summary
4. Conclusion and recommendations
2. URBAN ANALYSIS

The first part of this section is ordered following the guidance provided in By Design, this includes a short sentence from the publication under each heading. The last four headings – ‘Treatment of the public realm’, ‘Appearance: The High Street’, ‘Historic development and built heritage’ and ‘Enacting change: development process’ – are not included within By Design, but are considered to be important for setting any contextual understanding of a traditional market town.
2.1 LAYOUT: URBAN STRUCTURE

The framework of routes and spaces that connect locally and more widely, and the way developments, routes and open spaces relate to one other.

Central Area composition

The Central Area is composed of a number of distinct elements. As noted previously, there are three distinct character areas to the Central Area, these are the Causeway Regeneration Area, Maldon Central Area and the Leisure Quarter.

The plan on the facing page shows the location and relationship between the three areas. The Causeway Regeneration Area is to the north of the Blackwater, Maldon Central Area is to the south and comprises the town centre, and the Leisure Quarter is to the south east, nearer to the mouth of the estuary.

The Blackwater plays a significant role in explaining the composition of the Central Area, with the High Street having grown along the road linking the original settlement at the hill-top towards the river at Hythe Quay. The historic high street, with its many attractive historic buildings, forms the core of the Maldon Central Area and is its main defining feature.

The Hythe Quay has its own distinct character and forms a link between the Maldon Central Area and the Leisure Quarter. It also provides a public connection to the edge of the Blackwater, which is also one of the Leisure Quarter’s defining features. The Leisure Quarter is predominantly comprised of Promenade Park, Maldon’s most significant open space and a regional visitor destination.
Composition of the Central Area

- **Causeway Regeneration Area**
- **Maldon Central Area**
- **Leisure Quarter**

- **Causeway industrial area**
- **Surviving historic core of industrial activity**
- **Secondary High Street**
- **Core High Street**
- **Leisure**
- **River frontage and access**
- **Area boundaries**
The plan on the facing page illustrates the primary road network in Maldon and Heybridge. The movement structure of the town is a result of its historic development, with the High Street forming a spine that the other historic routes connect to.

Fullbridge forms the only historic connection across the river between Maldon and Heybridge. The expansion of Heybridge as an employment and housing area means that the north-south connection across Fullbridge is a key movement corridor, which is heavily trafficked. It also means that the junction of Market Hill and High Street is a key junction into the town centre.

The Maldon Bypass has eased the pressure on Maldon town centre’s road network, importantly providing an alternative route around the historic centre for HGVs associated with the industrial uses within the Causeway Regeneration Area. Within the historic centre, vehicle movements are constrained due to the relatively narrow High Street. Whilst this has the result of increasing vehicular journey times, it also creates a safer, more pedestrian friendly centre.

Maldon’s central car parks are well connected to the High Street, supporting town centre businesses. White Horse Lane and Butt Lane car parks are the two largest in the centre, with White Horse Lane to the south of High Street and Butt Lane to the north. Both are connected to the High Street via alleyways fronted with commercial uses. The alleyways linking to the north and south of the High Street contribute to its success as a pleasant and attractive shopping location.

The Blackwater Estuary and the Chelmer and Blackwater Navigation were historically important for the distribution of goods. Both are still in use today, but at much reduced levels, primarily linked to tourism.

Rail connections to Maldon were lost as a result of the 1960s Beeching closures. Historically the town was served by two stations, with Maldon East Station now converted to offices located on Station Road in the Causeway area.
Movement - key routes and parking

- Maldon bypass
- Main connections
- Alleyway links
- Car parks
Legibility

The character of the three areas within the Central Area contributes significantly to how the town is understood, with the distinct differences between the industrial Causeway area, the historic Maldon Central Area and open Leisure Quarter allowing for clear transitions from one part of the town to another.

The road network creates clear gateways at the edge of the town and Maldon's core High Street. Ensuring that these areas have high quality environments should be a priority as they will form a first impression for many visitors.

Due to their prominent location and scale, a number of key landmarks help orientate visitors to the town. These include All Saints Church, Plume Library, St Mary's Church and the taller parts of Carr's Flour Mills.

The Blackwater is also visible from a significant proportion of the town, providing a reference point aiding legibility. In addition, the hill top location of the town centre means that central landmarks are more prominent and its location easy to determine.

Connections between the three areas of the town are relatively direct by vehicle, but are not that strong for those on foot, with few signs of encouragement present on the connecting routes to support walkers’ orientation.

The Market Hill/Causeway route through the town provides an interesting cross section of Maldon's activities from the historic core, through the river crossing and into industrial activity and emerging out of town retail.

The Causeway area has relatively poor legibility due to the way it has evolved and changed uses - the main spine has a confused character with rows of terraced housing giving way to glimpses of the industrial activities that dominate behind them.
Causeway industrial area
Surviving historic core of industrial activity
Local Heybridge centres
Secondary High Street
Core High Street
Leisure quarter
Hythe Quay
Landmarks
Key destinations / activity generators
Important node / intersection
Secondary node / intersection
Relationship with river
Carparks
Key vehicular routes

Legibility
2.2 LAYOUT: URBAN GRAIN

The pattern of the arrangement of street blocks, plots and their buildings in a settlement.

Morphology

The distinction between the three areas is most clearly illustrated when looking at the urban grain of the town, as can be seen on the plan on the facing page.

The historic fine grain of the High Street and Maldon Central Area forms strong edges and enclosure to the streets, whilst enabling a relatively permeable network of routes between blocks.

The Leisure Quarter is primarily open space with buildings either set within parkland or focused around the riverside and play area.

The Causeway Regeneration Area is dominated by large single or linked buildings which now dwarf the historic industrial buildings which remain. Incidences of finer grain occur along the Causeway itself where residential terraces survive and provide a more domestic scale frontage to the street.

The topography underlying the town has a clear impact on the grain of development - creating lines of development along contours, and limiting the size of buildings in the central area.
Fronts and backs

How buildings face each other and the spaces between them contributes significantly to the quality of places. Active frontages, those containing windows and doors, provide overlooking of spaces and help to make streets and spaces feel safer and generally better cared for. Unattractive buildings and inactive frontages, those with large blank walls and often the backs of buildings, can impact spaces negatively, making them feel unsafe and poorly cared for.

The three areas within the Central Area exhibit very different characteristics with respect to front and back relationships.

The High Street provides a strong spine of active frontage, with buildings built upon relatively narrow plots along the historic route. However, the car parks to the rear of the high street are generally faced by the backs of buildings, which contribute towards creating less pleasant urban spaces. Sensitive infill development at the edges of the major car parks may provide opportunities to increase the level of active frontage whilst retaining essential town centre parking.

Along The Causeway, houses shield some of the industrial uses, providing active frontage which helps humanise the street. However, the poor quality frontages of a significant number of industrial uses are still visible from the road, contributing towards its rather inhospitable character. This is amplified due to the large quantity of vehicle movements. The area around and between the two roundabouts on The Causeway to the north of Fullbridge is particularly lacking in active or attractive frontage, and this is unfortunate as this is also a key gateway to Maldon.
2.3 DENSITY AND MIX

The amount of development on a given piece of land and the range of uses. Density influences the intensity of development, and in combination with the mix of uses can affect a place’s vitality and viability.

Density of activity

The plan on the facing page indicates where levels of activity in the town are greatest. The core of the town centre is generally busy during the day, with the area from All Saints Church to Wenlock Way (the alleyway linking to Butt Lane car park) the main focus for activity. However, footfall does drop significantly as one moves eastwards, with far fewer people visiting this, more secondary, section of the High Street.

To the south of the High Street, St Peters Hospital, Plume School and Maldon District Council offices are also important generators of activity during the day.

Whilst visitor activity at Hythe Quay and in Promenade Park is seasonal and impacted by weather conditions, on sunny days and in the summer holidays, very high numbers of people can be present. The major draw for this leisure destination is its waterside setting, and it is beside the Blackwater where there is significant visitor activity.

To the north of the Blackwater, the 24 hour Tesco is also a major shopping focus, as is the Morrisons on the south western edge of the town. At the north-eastern tip of the Central Area, the Heybridge Bentalls shopping centre, including a small Asda store, is well used.
Density of activity
Land use

The distinct difference in the role that the three character areas perform within Maldon and Heybridge is clearly evident in the land use plan on the facing page.

Historically, the town evolved with very clear land use zones. The Causeway area was almost entirely industrial, with a few residential streets to house local workers. The high street was the focus for all retail activity, with only incidental corner stores and specialist wholesalers located outside this area. The Leisure Quarter was almost non-existent, with most of the area more recently reclaimed from the river floodplain.

Today, the Causeway Regeneration Area is primarily industrial, with out of town centre shopping at Tesco and fragmented other uses along The Causeway. Residential uses have extended and are predicted to expand further as industrial sites come up for redevelopment. A key issue for this area is managing land use change to ensure positive growth of the local economy and positive evolution of the town’s character.

The Maldon Central Area is still dominated by retail use along the High Street, with the introduction of a wider range of restaurants and cafés. Key community uses, including the Plume School and St Peters Hospital, are located close to the High Street within the town centre. These key organisations bring activity to the centre, with the opportunity to capture trade from visitors and linked trips. Residential uses encircle and are located in the High Street in an organic way.

The Leisure Quarter is today home to a series of permanent structures set around public parkland. These all support leisure activity, both formal sports (leisure centre and Yacht Club) and informal recreation and enjoyment (Museum, parkland, restaurants and cafés).
2.4 LANDSCAPE

The character and appearance of land, including its shape, form, ecology, natural features, colours and elements, and the way these components combine.

Topography

Maldon’s character is heavily influenced by its special topography. As a rare example of a hilltop coastal town in Essex it is set apart from other local settlements.

The relationship between the high ground of the central part of town and the low lying land associated with the River Blackwater is a very attractive one. Views across the estuary to the town are particularly pleasing, as are the glimpses across the estuary from the central high ground.

The low lying ground has been left largely undeveloped immediately around the watercourses, enabling a strong relationship between the land and water.

A series of winding streets link the high and low ground which are edged by bands of development following the contour lines.
Topography

- 0m AOD
- 5m
- 10m
- 15m
- 20m
- 25m
- 30m
- Skyline landmark
- Key skyline viewing point
Public / open spaces

The river and its floodplain represent the town’s primary open space assets. Promenade Park is the town’s main public park and is a significant recreational resource - both for local people and regional visitors. In addition, smaller parks are dotted along the south side of the river and provide amenity for local residents.

The riverside is a very attractive environment and a series of footpaths provide access to this asset. However, there is no continuous riverside walking route which is a major gap in the town’s offer.

To the south of the High Street is the town’s largest enclosed urban green space, Longfields. Adjacent to this public space are the playing fields of the Plume School.

Along the High Street itself, the grounds of the church and the Plume Library provide green space respite to the largely hard public realm.
Water and flood risk

Water has been central to Maldon’s development, both from a physical evolution perspective as well as its economic growth. Water remains an important element in the town’s character today and will continue to shape growth and activities in the future.

A significant proportion of the town is low lying and categorised as flood zone 2 or 3a, meaning it is subject to a flood risk of medium or high probability. In zone 2 areas (medium probability - between 1 in 100 and 1 in 1,000 annual probability of river flooding) opportunities to reduce the overall level of flood risk in the area through the layout and form of the development, and the appropriate application of sustainable drainage techniques, should be sought. In zone 3a area (high probability - 1 in 100 or greater annual probability of river flooding) water compatible and less vulnerable land uses are appropriate.

The implication for Maldon’s development is that future new development should avoid these areas, and any opportunities to reduce flood risk and remove vulnerable uses should be explored. Future climate change puts an increased emphasis on achieving these objectives.
2.5 SCALE: HEIGHT AND MASSING

Scale is the size of a building in relation to its surroundings. Height determines the impact of development on views, vistas and skylines. Massing is the combined effect of the arrangement, volume and shape of a building or group of buildings in relation to other buildings and spaces.

Building heights

The pattern of building heights is strongly influenced by Maldon’s topography. A general pattern of taller and landmark buildings at the heart of the centre, at Maldon’s highest point, can be seen. Generally lower rise buildings occupy the low lying land. This gives the attractive impression of accentuating the impact of the topography.

Maldon is not a location for tall buildings. In the core of the town centre, four storeys is the limit for buildings along the High Street, although the spires of the churches stand above this level. Beyond this area, the only other tall buildings are associated with historic industrial activities on the Causeway.

A key issue for Maldon is ensuring future development respects both the character of building heights in the town and street level amenity. This is particularly an issue for sites around the High Street where care is needed to ensure new buildings do not reduce the daylighting and amenity of the main street. Thus, new buildings which directly front the High Street should not be higher than two or three storeys.
Skyline

The special physical qualities of Maldon give rise to a very attractive and distinctive skyline.

The Maldon Historic Skyline Survey 2009 concluded that the town’s skyline is composed of significant historic buildings, representing the traditional religious and civic hierarchies of the town’s past, and that the skyline is sensitive to taller developments.

The illustrations here show how the churches and civic buildings contribute to the skyline, but also the importance of Maldon’s riverside activity to the complete view. The masts of the tall ships at Hythe Quay punctuate the skyline and the foreground of views from the river.
2.6 LAYERED, ENCLODED AND FRAMED VIEWS

Topography, road curvature and building heights can often combine to reveal and frame key views, enriching the sequential experience of a place.

Views

When approaching the town centre, the physical qualities of the street combine to support a series of attractive framed views.

The High Street is a particularly good example. When moving westwards up the High Street a changing view unfolds, with the church spire and the Moot Hall frontage prominent. These views provide a high degree of legibility due to the key landmarks.

Importantly, however, this strong legibility is not true in reverse. Moving eastwards along the High Street there is little indication of the presence of Hythe Quay or Promenade Park.

Location of photographs demonstrating key framed views
2.7 APPEARANCE: DETAILS AND MATERIALS

Details focus on the quality of the craftsmanship, building techniques, decoration, styles and lighting of a building or structure. The materiality of a place is the texture, colour, pattern and durability of materials, and how they are used.

Materials and detail

Maldon’s built heritage supports an eclectic mix of materials. The majority of the central building stock is predominantly influenced by the Georgian and Victorian expansions of the town, however older elements remain reflecting the town’s long history.

The High Street buildings are particularly rich in detailing, all supporting an attractive rhythm to the upper section of the street.

The riverside frontage has a simpler character, with a good density of one and two storey black barn constructions.

The rich detailing and classical properties of the historic buildings provide a fine rhythm and texture.
2.8 APPEARANCE: THE HIGH STREET

The traditional high street is an important feature of most market towns. The quality, maintenance and scale of buildings on the high street contribute greatly to the attractiveness of a town centre as a place to visit and shop in. Shop front design is often a key feature in contributing positively or negatively to the aesthetic quality of the high street.

A visual overview of the High Street’s building frontages is set out in this section. The frontages are characterised by the eclectic mix of styles which are predominantly Georgian and Victorian. Despite the variation in architectural styles, there is a consistency of scale and rhythm, with all buildings retaining the original plot widths.

A reduction in the quality of buildings towards the eastern end of the High Street can be detected. Opportunities to improve these frontages should be sought.
Plan showing length of high street included within photo-survey

Section of high street facing north

Section of high street facing south
Plan showing length of high street included within photo-survey

Section of high street facing north

Section of high street facing south
Plan showing length of high street included within photo-survey

Section of high street facing north

Section of high street facing south
2.9 CHARACTER: LEISURE QUARTER / PROMENADE PARK

The Leisure Quarter is a uniquely large recreation asset in the town. As the primary public park in the local area it is a fantastic resource for residents and regional visitors alike. Its waterside setting supports a very attractive character.

The key features of this quarter are the wide open spaces, the strong connection to the estuarine environment and Edwardian design. A range of buildings are found in the quarter. The Edwardian museum building supports the original entrance to Promenade Park. The café and toilet blocks reflect the traditional Black Barn constructions which characterise the waterfront. The modern Leisure Centre and adjacent buildings illustrate a very different style with much less relationship to the surrounding parkland.

Opportunities exist to enhance the quality of buildings and strengthen the relationship between built form and the waterfront. In particular re-organising the collection of café, toilet block and concessions buildings in Promenade Park could provide a set of structures which front both the river and Park’s waterbody and fully support the visitor demand in terms of offer.
2.10 CHARACTER: CAUSEWAY REGENERATION AREA

The Causeway has a strong industrial legacy and is currently experiencing significant change. Its future role as a focus for new economic activities and employment, alongside the redevelopment of some sites as new residential areas, will need careful management to support the evolution of character.

The character of the Causeway Regeneration Area has been carved out by waves of economic-led development. In Maldon's industrial heyday the area was characterised by activity including saw milling, iron-founding, agricultural equipment manufacture and timber supplying.

The strong connections - by river, canal and rail - supported significant economic activity and physical development. Much of this legacy is still present in the area’s built fabric. Old buildings are finding new uses such as the old Maldon East station building which is now a small business hub. Much of this surviving architecture is Victorian and has been attractively refurbished.

Today, by far the most dominant building form is the large format warehouse or industrial shed. These functional structures occupy over half of the land area. Whilst generally shielded by strips of Victorian terraced housing, these areas have few positive features in terms of character. Generally inward looking, with little active frontage on to streets, the built form is anonymous.
2.11 HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT AND BUILT HERITAGE

Understanding how a settlement has grown is key to appreciating its character and thinking about its future. Buildings with heritage value should be preserved and enhanced, with their setting carefully considered.

Historic development

Maldon's strategic position in the county attracted early settlement. The town therefore has a long and significant history. The river has been central to the town's growth and it has shaped the activities which have happened here since its first settlement.

Maldon is famously the location of England's oldest battlefield, dating from 991. Since then, the town has continued a legacy of military activity which is now played out in the Combined Forces Military Services Museum on Station Road.

Industrial activities have also been central to the town's historic development, and again are strongly linked to the town's position on the River Blackwater estuary. Major growth in the Victorian period supported the development of two rail stations, both of which are now decommissioned.

The river has also supported a rich heritage of food production in Maldon. Fishing activities have long taken place around Hythe Quay and continue on a small scale today. However, the most famous product is Maldon Sea Salt. Salt extraction via evaporation began commercially in the 18th century in and around the River Blackwater. The 'Maldon Crystal Salt Company' was established in 1882 and still operates today, producing the famous Maldon Sea Salt. This part of Maldon's history is relatively underplayed and there is scope to make much more of the town's food heritage.

The town itself has seen waves of residential growth, which has in turn supported a thriving retail and commercial centre. Maldon's slightly isolated position, appears to have worked in the town's favour, ensuring its local catchment has stayed loyal to the town centre.
Built heritage

Maldon is very lucky to have so much of its historic built fabric still intact and very much in use. The High Street is home to over 80 listed buildings, which is testament to this.

Almost the whole of Maldon Central Area is included in the Maldon Conservation Area, as well as Fullbridge, Hythe Quay and the northern sections of Promenade Park. In addition, a further Conservation Area covers key sections of the Chelmer and Blackwater Navigation (see following section).

Article 4 Directions also cover a number of street sections in the eastern half of Maldon Central Area.
2.12 ENACTING CHANGE: DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

Town planning seeks to control and shape economic forces through the development process. Important factors to consider include land ownership, planning policy and proposed major developments.

Planning designations

In addition to the built heritage planning designations discussed earlier, the Central Area is subject to a number of other spatial policies which control the area's future development and change.

Principal among these is the Flood Zone designations which limit development types across the Causeway area and beyond along the estuary. In addition, much of the Causeway area is designated as employment areas.

Primary and secondary retail areas are designated emphasising the extent of Maldon town centre and the local importance of the Heybridge centres.
Opportunity sites

The Contextual Study has allowed the identification of a number of opportunity sites where intervention could support an enhancement to the quality of the urban environment and a better visitor experience.

These potential opportunity sites are:

1. Brooks Bros sites - currently industrial use, with potential for full or partial redevelopment for mixed use
2. Sadd's Wharf site - currently being considered for redevelopment as residential-led mixed use
3. Butt Lane car park - a well used car park, but with potential for partial redevelopment should a wider parking solution be possible
4. White Horse Lane and Friary Fields car parks - potential scope to (maintain and) consolidate parking provision on to one area and free up space for frontage development along this secondary street
5. Lower High Street - opportunity for further frontage enhancement and/or selective re-use or redevelopment of poorer quality units
6. Hythe Quay - scope for re-organisation and new development to support a stronger visitor offer at this important destination
7. Promenade Park - existing structures represent opportunity for consolidation and development of a high quality new building which houses a complete range of activities to satisfy visitor demand
8. Leisure Centre - renewal of contract in 2014 presents an opportunity for minor changes and improvements at this site
3. URBAN SWOT ANALYSIS

This section outlines the main strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats with respect to the whole Central Area. Central to this appraisal is the town's character and qualities and the scope to protect and enhance.
3.1 STRENGTHS

The main urban character strengths of the town are:

- A unique setting - the estuarine location and topography of the town combine to create a very special quality to the town.

- A strong and distinctive character which should be used to control and shape future change.

- Extensive built heritage which is well protected and in sustainable use.

- Extensive opportunity sites to accommodate future growth and secure a sustainable local economy.

- Promenade Park and Hythe Quay together form an important asset and visitor destination.

- The A414 bypass route spares the town centre from HGV movements, reducing the adverse impact that such vehicles can cause in an old market town, and provides easy access from the Causeway industrial areas to the region’s strategic road network.

- The Chelmer and Blackwater Conservation Area provides protection for the character of the Causeway Regeneration area and greater control over the design of new development.

- A set of well connected car parks located in appropriate positions behind the High Street with strong links to the shops along the High Street.
Active and attractive town centre
Established employment areas
Leisure Quarter / Promenade Park
Town centre car parks
Links between car parks and the high street
The Hythe
Key community use
Maldon bypass
Skyline landmark
Maldon Town Conservation Area
Estuary walk
3.2 WEAKNESSES

The weaknesses which affect the town and need to be addressed are:

• Separation between three areas - whilst Hythe Quay, Promenade Park and Fullbridge are within walking distance from the main shopping area, they are far enough away to be perceptually removed, a feature that is accentuated by the town’s topography.

• Lack of waterside walking route - whilst some sections exist, there is no continuous route linking different parts of the town along the waterfront.

• Poor quality buildings and shop fronts - the Lower High Street has seen some recent improvements and should remain a focus for enhancement.

• Traffic on the High Street - the High Street accommodates a significant number of vehicular movements with traffic often congested at the western end.

• Pedestrian and vehicular conflict - the main junctions along the High Street are subject to conflict between vehicles and pedestrians with narrow pavements and railings in some locations.

• HGVs turning onto Butt Lane - this is a difficult turning for large vehicles due to the narrowness of the road.

• Low quality gateways to the centre - some key entry points into the town are dominated by vehicles and poor quality building frontages. They include the roundabouts on the Causeway and the Mill Road / High Street junction.

• The local centre of Heybridge suffers from significant traffic movements, with commercial activities fragmented along the B1022.
Pedestrian vehicle conflict
Low quality high street buildings
Secondary retail area
Poor gateway
Distance between distinct areas
Lack of quality food offer
Unclear connection
Lack of pedestrian priority to walking route
Heybridge retail areas
Vehicular domination within the centre of Heybridge
3.3 OPPORTUNITIES

There are a series of opportunities to improve how the town operates and to address key weaknesses:

- **Improved gateways** - there is a significant opportunity to create new built frontage where The Causeway meets Fullbridge and to improve this gateway and arrival point. There is also the opportunity for improved signage and public realm in this area.

- **Heritage / food trail** - establishment of a core route which links key visitor destinations and becomes the focus for public realm and wayfinding enhancements.

- **Improved footpaths** - a continuous and more prominent waterside pedestrian (and cycling) route would support stronger connections between the three areas and extend the visitor offer.

- **Relocation of the market** - moving the market to outside the library would allow a pilot period to establish whether this route, parallel to the High Street, could accommodate a future larger market alongside urban environment improvements.

- **Completed retail loops** - through sensitive infill development to the rear of the high street, there is potential to create stronger retail loops linking to the town’s principle car parks.

- **Selective high street redevelopment** - targeted redevelopment of the lower quality buildings on the High Street could give opportunities for sensitive retail expansion whilst retaining the unique character of this area.

- **Shop front improvements** - continued use of the shop front improvement scheme will continue the improvements to the visual appeal of the High Street and to enhance the tourism potential of the area.

- **Riverside / Causeway employment growth** - there is an opportunity to expand the existing employment uses to create more jobs, whilst improving connections between The Causeway and the town centre. Fullbridge could grow into a hub for small businesses and start-ups.

- **Maldon Salt visitor attraction** - Maldon is famous for its salt, however the factory contains no visitor attraction. This presents a major opportunity to improve the town’s tourist offer and enhance the profile of the town.

- **Improved frontage to the Causeway** - Existing, relatively poor quality industrial buildings could be shielded through new buildings or improved public realm treatment.

- **Park and ride** - a park and ride facility (such as a small shuttle bus) within Promenade Park would improve public transport connections and promote linked trips between the town centre and the park.

- **Heybridge town centre improvements** - scope to strengthen Heybridge as a local centre by supporting linkages between commercial sections and improving the pedestrian environment.
Large site with planning permission
Southern car park opportunity site
Enhancements to secondary retail area
Heybridge improvement area
Gateway enhancements
Heritage trail
Destination on heritage trail
Car parks
Improved riverside walking connection
Potential new walking route
Potential for new footbridge
Existing footpath network
Park and ride area of search
Maldon Salt visitor attraction
Promenade Park visitor attraction
Blackwater Leisure Centre
Skyline viewing point
3.4 THREATS

The following issues need to be considered when exploring opportunities in the town:

- **Flooding** - A significant part of Maldon, primarily to the north of the Blackwater, is liable to flooding.

- **Out of centre retail** - this could negatively impact the vitality of the town centre.

- **Distance between the centre and Promenade Park** - this distance and topography may prove difficult to promote linked trips between the two, which is the key tourist offer of the town.

- **Fullbridge pinch point** - whilst the A414 bypasses the town centre, Fullbridge provides the only crossing of the Blackwater, constraining potential movements.

- **Maintaining employment land** - employment land is likely to come under pressure for new retail and housing uses.

- **A constrained High Street** - the historic tight nature of the high street makes it a challenge to expand the town’s offer whilst retaining and enhancing the historic character and skyline.

- **Lower High Street** - it may be difficult to deliver change in this area in the short-medium term due to market conditions, particularly considering the current state of the retail market and high streets up and down the country. However, relatively short term public realm and shop front improvements may attract both increased footfall and investment in the medium to longer term.
4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The analysis of the town has identified those qualities which are central to the character. This section outlines what makes Maldon and Heybridge so special and provides some recommendations on how change could managed over the next decade.

Maldon and Heybridge are identified areas for housing growth within the District Council’s emerging Local Development Plan. This provides an opportunity to evaluate the role of the towns and to build upon their successes.

A number of recommendations for how the Central Area could be improved are made in section 4.2. These recommendations are intended as thoughts for consideration for planning policies which maximise the potential of the Central Area.

This Contextual Study has shown the important role that the Central Area has within Maldon and Heybridge as the core employment, retail and leisure destination for the town. The area already functions well, benefitting from an attractive historic centre and waterside environment and is a tourist destination. The recommendations are intended to help further this success and realise the Central Area’s potential.

Central Area emerging key diagram from the Local Plan, with the Contextual Study opportunities plan above.
4.1 MALDON'S SPECIAL FEATURES

Historic town centre

The town centre is highly attractive with the historic grain contributing to a rich urban experience.

Blackwater Estuary

The Blackwater provides the town with a beautiful and varied waterside setting. The working docks at Hythe Quay are a key attraction.

Promenade Park

Promenade Park celebrates the town’s waterside setting, providing public access to the Blackwater. It also provides high quality open space and is a regional visitor attraction.
Topography

Maldon’s hill-top setting is unique within Essex and contributes significantly to the character of the town.

Skyline

The topography and waterside setting make for a distinctive skyline, within which St Mary’s Church is a key landmark.

Materials and details

There is a rich variety of materials and building details within the town, with the core High Street having a particularly distinct character.
4.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

In concluding the Contextual Study, the following recommendations are made for the Central Area with regard to future development and public sector investment:

1. Causeway Regeneration area - interventions should seek to ensure a more attractive environment whilst supporting employment uses. Any retail expansion in this area should be viewed in relation to its potential impact on the vitality of the existing core town centre.

2. Maldon Central Area - interventions should seek to retain the high street as the focal point for commercial activity with the public realm improved where possible and heritage assets protected and enhanced.

3. Leisure Quarter - interventions should seek to increase the attractiveness of the Leisure Quarter for visitors with a wider tourist offer.

4. Wayfinding strategy - clear signage should guide visitors around the Central Area. This could take the form of a heritage / food trail linking the key destinations shown on the plan on the facing page. This would connect to the town's existing public footpaths and through them the town's rural hinterland. Ensuring high quality footpaths at the edge of water should be a key priority, including from Hythe Quay to Fullbridge. The implementation of a heritage trail would be best achieved in tandem with a town wide branding strategy, including improvements to street furniture and lighting and the establishment of replicable designs that celebrate Maldon's heritage and character.

5. Improved Promenade Park facilities - there is opportunity to improve the visitor facilities around the attractive ornamental lake. This is a key opportunity to provide a higher quality food offer within the town.

6. High quality gateways - all gateways to the town should be attractive to help form strong first impressions. A gateway enhancement strategy should be developed, with the roundabout where the Maldon Bypass meets the Causeway a key priority for improvement.

7. Lower High Street - the lower high street should be a focal point for shop front and building enhancements in recognition of the important linking it role it has between the core town centre and the Hythe and Promenade Park. Measures to increase commercial activity should also be encouraged where possible.

8. Hythe Quay opportunity zone - Hythe Quay has a unique character and is already a key visitor destination and the starting point for boat trips. There is potential to widen the offer at Hythe Quay and improve the public realm whilst, importantly, retaining its function as a working dock.

9. Southern central car park opportunity area - this is the largest car parking and servicing area in the core town centre and as such is an important entry point for users of the town centre. Scope exists to consolidate the parking function and free up space for development along the main linking road, which could in turn operate as a market street. It is recommended that as a first step the market is
Recommendations for the Central Area
moved to the front of the library as a test pilot. Alongside this a feasibility study could explore the options for this area. Maintaining adequate servicing will be a key consideration, however the proposal could dramatically improve frontage to the car parks and establish White Horse Lane as a more traditional street. The vacant buildings at the south-west corner of main car park could also present a further development opportunity.

10. Skyline landmarks and view impact assessments - in recognition of the role that Maldon’s skyline plays in the identity of the town, skyline landmarks could be established which would need to be considered by new development. This could include formal skyline assessments from key viewing points depending on the scope and location of development.

11. Maintain heritage protections - this is particularly important within the core historic high street. New development should consider its immediate context and Maldon’s unique character, whilst avoiding pastiche designs. Specific local considerations should be a source of inspiration rather than Essex wide design guidance. A contextual design guide outlining clear parameters should be produced for each site within the Maldon Conservation Area and used as a basis for any proposals.

12. Park and ride - a park and ride facility could improve linkages between the Leisure Quarter and the Maldon Central Area. It could be introduced at first on a temporary basis when visitor numbers are higher during the summer months.

13. Maldon Sea Salt - Maldon is famous for its salt, salt which is used in some of the best kitchens in the country. Any visitor attraction associated with Maldon Sea Salt Company would be a natural destination for food lovers, and an opportunity to enhance the town’s restaurant offer.

14. Heybridge improvements - there is considerable opportunity to improve the environmental quality of the centre of Heybridge and mitigate against the impact of the high traffic levels. Proposals could be drawn up to establish a prioritised list of projects to enhance this important but relatively fragmented centre.

15. Maldon’s new market - the existing market suffers from a relatively low profile and has the potential for an improved offer and improved branding and stalls. One option would be to relocate the market to be adjacent to the library, where it could benefit from more linked trips and form part of a stronger retail loop with the High Street. This should be considered as part of the previously identified southern central car park opportunity area.

16. Blackwater Leisure Centre - there will be an opportunity to review leisure provision in 2014, which could be an opportunity to improve facilities.

17. Pedestrian bridge - a bridge at this location could improve pedestrian and cycling connections between the Causeway Regeneration area and Maldon Central Area. However, the requirement to continue boat access to Fullbridge could present a significant technical challenge to achieving this.