



**IPSWICH  
VISION**

# DELIVERING THE CONNECTED TOWN

**CONSUMER AND BUSINESS PERSPECTIVES**

Produced by Ipswich Central and All About Ipswich  
on behalf of the Ipswich Vision

**2021**



**Suffolk**  
County Council

**NEWANGLIA**  
Local Enterprise Partnership  
for Norfolk and Suffolk



Suffolk  
Chamber of  
Commerce



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of Suffolk**

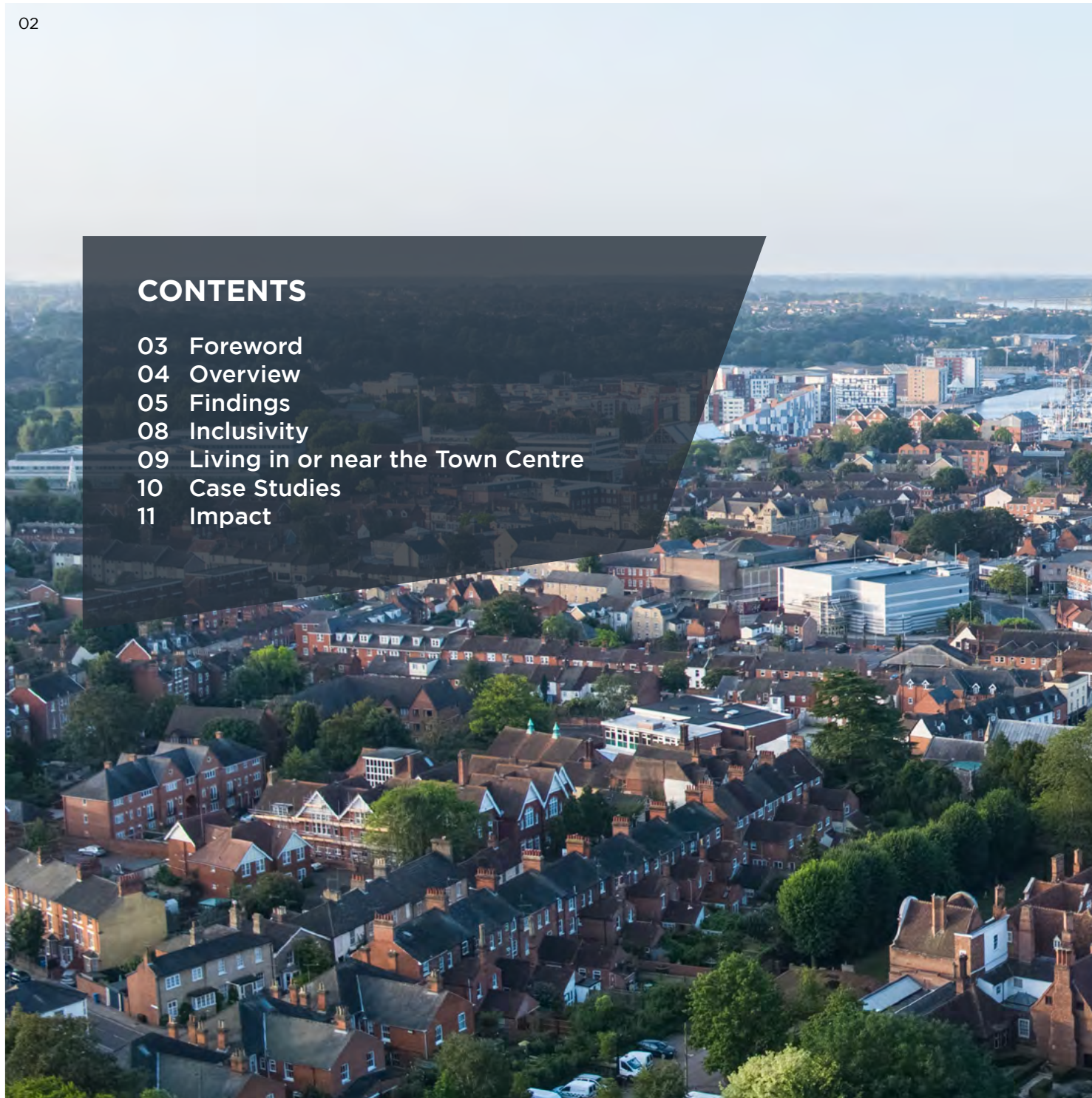
**TOM  
HUNT**  
for Ipswich





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## 1.0 FOREWORD

The Connected Town concept was approved by the Vision partners early in 2021 as their future strategy for the development and revival of the wider town centre area, partly in response to COVID and to changes in consumer habits. This ambitious plan aims to capitalise on the compact nature of Ipswich which, for example, positions the railway station, parks, shops, theatres, business premises and the waterfront all within an easy 15-minute walk (or 5-minute cycle ride) of each other. However, to maximise the benefits of this proximity, the partners recognised the need for significant change including more people living in the centre of the town and them having around them all that they might need to live their lives there to the full.

In the Spring of 2021, the partners published a series of explanatory documents and committed to a large-scale consultation process to encourage other ideas as to how the Connected Town concept should be delivered.

My role was to organise the research process, agree the methodology and to analyse the data. This document summarises some of the key research findings.



## 2.0 OVERVIEW

This brief overview brings together the findings for the three main surveys undertaken during the middle of 2021.

These are

- Online and Street Survey with 1,394 participants
- Telephone Survey with 500 participants
- Business Survey with 183 participants

along with five Focus Groups including business and culture. Although quantitative, the on-line, street and business surveys included significant qualitative responses which have been collated and analysed.



## 3.0 FINDINGS

As a general comment, there was strong support for the Connected Town strategy, particularly aspects such as more people living centrally by the supply of more, diversified residential provision, particularly of town housing alongside apartments. More and different things to do and places to do things, including green spaces, were seen as important. Ease of movement across all areas was viewed as critical, including better cycling provision, more pedestrianisation and less traffic. Consideration may be given, for example, to the area between the southern town centre and the waterfront.

Brief comments are presented on the eight main themes which emerged recognising in some cases these overlap. As the data was not weighted, these are presented in alphabetical order. Greater detail is presented in the main reports.

### 3.1 DIGITAL CONNECTIVITY

This theme was seen to be crucial by many in helping promote the Connected Town digitally. In particular, the need to ease access to entertainment, arts and culture, along with the hospitality sector was seen by many to be of major importance. Linked to this, the use of virtual reality to bring heritage alive was highlighted. Particularly attractive was the notion of free wi-fi.

### 3.2 ENTERTAINMENT, ARTS AND CULTURE

This theme was seen to be important in all three surveys and reinforced by the focus groups. The telephone survey particularly highlighted cinemas and festivals as part of the offering and the qualitative data pointed to the need for more music venues. Cultural attractions were seen as important including the possibility of outside art installations. More opportunities to celebrate Ipswich's ethnic diversity was noted along with the need for spaces for community engagement.





### 3.3 GREEN AMENITIES

This seems to be a crucial theme post COVID and overlaps with well-being and hospitality. The need for green outdoor spaces including pocket parks and play areas was seen as of major importance. Pedestrianisation was noted by many from the qualitative responses in line with providing walking routes within the town. Planting flowers, trees and shrubs was seen as a priority by many.

### 3.4 HEALTH FACILITIES

This theme was very straight-forward with the need for GP surgeries and health centres, dental surgeries and pharmacies being the priority. There was also a demand for more opticians and hearing centres as well as veterinary surgeries. The issue here will be meeting demand within a growing and more inhabited town centre.

### 3.5 HOSPITALITY

The main theme to emerge was a desire for more 'al fresco' style dining which links to green amenities. Hospitality was seen as important for those living in or near the town centre and a major attraction for those visiting. The links with digital connectivity should be noted along with the opportunities to increase dwell time.

### 3.6 RETAIL

Particularly during the peak of the pandemic, there has been a growth in on-line shopping both for retail products and food and drink. With most respondents having no concerns using the town centre post COVID, and with 27% now willing to use it more, opportunities remain. In particular, the qualitative responses reinforced the niche role of independents. There were a number of comments on empty units and there is a clear need for their repurposing to other non-retail uses.

### 3.7 TRANSPORT

This is likely to overlap or compete with the desire for pedestrianisation. More and better cycle routes were seen as vital to offering an improved way forward to reduce car usage. The cost of car parking was commented on by many. Participants noted buses as an alternative, but with a need to understand better how to increase their use. There is clearly a need to better manage the flow of cars. A good example might be resolving linkages between the town and the waterfront along Star Lane and College Street.

### 3.8 WELL-BEING

This theme overlapped with green amenities and emphasised the importance of cycle and walking routes. Gyms remained of importance as did the use of outdoor spaces for activities and recreation, including those of a sporting nature.







## 4.0 INCLUSIVITY

In addition to the above, four further issues were raised.

- A** The broad theme of those most disadvantaged arose from the qualitative data. The 'disadvantaged' included hard to reach young adults and those in need of affordable housing and employment often through training schemes. Therefore, it is particularly important to avoid the development of new housing stock in Ipswich town centre leading to any degree of gentrification by appealing to and being affordable by only the most affluent residents.
- B** The new, extended Connected Town population must include all aspects of the town's cultural and ethnic diversity.
- C** Crime and anti-social behaviour emerged entirely from the qualitative data reflecting the concerns of both consumers and businesses. A key issue is safety, both perceived and real, and it might affect demand for town centre living. Action is required if the town centre is planned to be busier throughout the week.
- D** A suggestion for further consultation would be to widen discussions amongst young adults as the project progresses.

## 5.0 LIVING IN OR NEAR TO THE TOWN CENTRE

The answer to this question is indicative of the need for additional housing within the Connected Town. By way of an example, out of the 590 responses to the on-line and street survey from those currently living outside the town centre, 79 (or 14%) would like to live in or very near to the centre if the improvements suggested were made. This type of demand should be used in conjunction with typical numbers of people living in town centres the size of Ipswich and the availability of sites and buildings suitable for development. This will provide a range as to the potential for urban living in the town.





## 6.0 CASE STUDIES

The Connected Town strategy is a progression of the 15-minute city concept which has become of particular interest since COVID. In many global cities (e.g., Paris, Barcelona, Melbourne, Ottawa, New York and Copenhagen) policymakers are embracing the idea and there are many lessons that Ipswich can learn in developing a unique version of the model.

A report entitled 'No Place Left Behind' is very timely. Produced by the Create Streets Foundation, it was launched in September 2021. The organisation is chaired by Toby Lloyd, former Head of Policy at Shelter and Housing Advisor to the Prime Minister. The report focuses upon a 'bottom up' approach to improvements in local places. For example, it points to the importance of 'treelined boulevards' and 'green spaces'. The report is now with the new Ministry for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities for consideration.

## 7.0 IMPACT

Given the high response rate to the consultation, there is real interest in the concept of the 'Connected Town'. The Vision partners have the critical role of building on this to enable the project. These findings will now be used by the Ipswich Vision Board when developing its Delivery Plan for the Connected Town.







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