

Borough Council of
**King’s Lynn &
 West Norfolk**



Project Brief – Baxter’s Plain Public Realm

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Project Definition

Baxters Plain area is a significant area of public open space, identified as having potential to enhance as an outdoor venue for civic, public and temporary events in the King's Lynn Town Centre Public Realm Action Plan (2021). The space is situated at a key point on the 'Rail to River' priority route, a route that has been prioritised for focus as part of the Town Investment Plan. A package of projects has been agreed under the King's Lynn Towns Fund which will have significant impact on the area immediately surrounding Baxter's Plain. These include the redevelopment of the former Argos building as a Multi User Community Hub, walking and cycling improvements to the Gyrotory and animation and greening of the Rail to River route.

The purpose of this project is to prepare a RIBA Stage 1 concept design for public realm enhancements to the Baxters Plain area. We want to establish a vision for the area, taking into account its status as a key nodal point and opportunities to enhance the public realm. The vision needs to consider the appropriate materials and infrastructure required for vehicle/pedestrian/cycle access to the area and connectivity with the town centre and reflect the ambitions of the Town Investment Plan.

The RIBA Stage 1 design will guide and inform future development and investment in the area in line with the Public Realm Action Plan Guidelines to;

- Reinforce the network of spaces and their character
- Improve walking routes and the pedestrian environment
- Improve Green Infrastructure
- Provide opportunities for temporary events including performances and static installations
- Aid legibility through consistent wayfinding

This will contribute to the wider vision set out in the Town Investment Plan.

Background

The area identified for the RIBA Stage 1 study extends to circa 0.72 Ha (appendix 1) and is primarily existing public space and highways. There is a mixture of built form surrounding the space. This comprises the prominent former c17th Post Office, former 1970's Argos Building, c20th Majestic Cinema, later development of the Vancouver Quarter in early 2000's, plus the recent addition of the H&M unit. Alongside this are c15th -19th buildings leading to Tower Street. The central area of Baxters Plain intersects with key routes in the town including Blackfriars Street, Paradise Lane, Broad Street, Tower Street and New Conduit Street. The Purfleet watercourse was previously an open watercourse that ran through the project area through to New Conduit Street. This was covered for health reasons during the 19th Century.

The land within the study area has mixed ownership comprising Borough Council freehold, Norfolk County Council Highways and Vancouver Quarter (private). Appendix 2 sets out the current land ownership status.

The site offers the potential to create a high quality nodal point in the heart of the town centre. It is an important junction for people arriving close to the area either walking, cycling or by vehicle. The proposed regeneration and redevelopment of the former Argos building has the potential to be transformative, and the wider redevelopment of Baxters Plain would open up opportunities for cultural programmes alongside the MUCH and other event organisers, beyond what is feasible in other public spaces in the Town.

Strategic Context

A King's Lynn Town Investment Plan (TIP) was prepared and submitted to government in 2020 and sets out the vision, strategy and investment priorities for King's Lynn over the next ten years. During 2020, residents, businesses and a range of local institutions worked together, through Vision King's Lynn and the King's Lynn Town Deal Board, to set clear priorities and a vision for King's Lynn that delivers:

- New opportunities for skills and jobs for our young people and all those affected by Covid-19
- Growing innovative businesses
- A repurposed town centre with new experiences and enterprise
- A high-quality residential and leisure offer in the historic town core and riverfront
- A sustainably connected town

The outcome of this work has resulted in an agreed set of priorities with the Town Deal Board;

- Creating a town where people want to come to live and stay
- Developing a local skills pipeline for local opportunities responding to Covid-19
- Improving digital and sustainable connectivity
- Repurposing the town centre and historic assets for visitors and residents

Local Plan Site Allocations & Development Management Policies (SADMP) 2016, updates the Core Strategy 2011 planning guidance, and identifies King's Lynn as a primary sub regional centre, and key focus for investment. Its policy for the town centre is to promote this area as the prime focus in the Borough for retail, community and professional services, leisure, culture and entertainment (Policy E1.1).

New Anglia Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) works with businesses, local authorities and education institutions to drive growth and enterprise in Norfolk and Suffolk. King's Lynn and the A10 and rail corridor to Cambridge have been identified by the LEP as a Priority Place where investment will be focused for maximum impact. The LEP also sees culture as a key driver of growth. The proposed enhancement of this public space therefore aligns well with this strategy.

Norfolk County Council similarly designates King's Lynn as a priority for growth in the Norfolk and Suffolk Economic Strategy (2017). NCC will be a key partner in respect of the delivery of a final scheme as the highway authority, through the West Norfolk Transport & Infrastructure Steering Group.

The [King's Lynn Local Cycling & Walking Infrastructure Plan \(LCWIP\)](#), adopted 2022, contains the detail of the priority cycling and walking network improvements schemes identified by the planning process, all of which have been subject to stakeholder engagement, appraisal and prioritisation using Department for Transport's (DfT) assessment tools. The 'neighbourhood' active travel route runs through the project area. No particular interventions to improve walking and cycling in the project area specifically have been identified in the LCWIP but should be considered inherently in any new design given its pivotal location.

Previous & Parallel Studies

A number of interrelated strategies and initiatives focusing on this area has progressed over recent years that will contribute to the development of new concept designs for the area, to define the vision and establish the principles to bring the strands of existing activity together.

Initiatives and work to date includes (but not limited to);

- [The King's Lynn Transport Strategy & Gyratory](#) identifies the gyratory and London Road as a priority area to improve vehicle flow, reduce congestion and improve the Air Quality Management Area. Norfolk County Council secured funding to complete a feasibility study to consider options to improve this area from a transport perspective. Following a feasibility study completed by WSP in 2022, the scheme (which included the Southgates) was approved under the Levelling Up Fund transportation strand in January 2023 is being developed to Outline Business Case includes bus priority, cycle lane improvements and public realm enhancements which will interface with the study area or extend into the study area in part (along Blackfriars Street).
- As part of the [King's Lynn Town Deal](#) led by the Borough Council, funding has been secured for the redevelopment and repurposing of the former Argos building for a new Multi User Community Hub (MUCH). The project is being delivered by NCC and is moving towards RIBA Stage 2 in Spring 2023 and project completion in 2025. The building footprint of the redevelopment is envisaged to be reduced in order to reveal the view of the Majestic Cinema, therefore creating an opportunity for enlarged public realm area at Baxters Plain. The activities and services which will run from the MUCH also have the potential to utilise outside space for activities/small events. Therefore the public realm should be seen as an 'extension' of the inside space to the MUCH (appendix 3 MUCH RIBA Stage 1 & ground floor spatial requirements).
- A further, smaller project under the Towns Fund is the [Rail to River Public Realm](#) which aims to animate and enliven the route from the rail station westwards through the project area and to the riverfront via Purfleet Street. The project is due to be completed in 2023 and includes interventions;
 - New finger post directional signage (town wide)
 - Artwork Trail
 - New outdoor seating and planting at the Rail Station
 - Digital signage at the Rail Station
 - Pop up food/retail units and street furniture at Purfleet Street
 - Pilot Cycle scheme at Baker lane (relocating Purfleet St cycle stands)

While the 'rail to river' route runs through the project area, no interventions are planned here in this section due to the need to create more detailed comprehensive plan for the Baxter's Plan area, beyond what is available to be delivered in the Rail to River project budget.

Project Scope

The scope of this project comprises preparation of a RIBA Stage 1 Concept design with QS cost estimates for the enhancement of the public realm within the red line area identified in appendix 1. The preparation of the RIBA Stage 1 design will inform the final design of the MUCH and enable the scheme to be developed to a stage in readiness for funding opportunities as they arise.

The outcomes of this stage of work will be the establishment of a scheme jointly endorsed by BCKLWN & Norfolk County Council as a key project partner, and determine the preferred route to delivery.

Lead Professional's Brief:

The overall aim of the project is to create a distinctive sense of place and focal point at this key nodal junction in the town centre. The nature of the built environment in this area is less 'sensitive' to the conservation and heritage setting of other places in the town centre, therefore this is an opportunity to be bolder in the design of the public realm compared to other locations. The concept design must complement the setting of existing and future development of the area and serve the daily needs of the people who live work and visit the town.

The initial scope of the commission is limited to RIBA Work Plan Stages 0-1 and includes;

Developing a vision, design principles, concept design and assessing the feasibility and cost for public realm enhancements to the Baxters Plain area within the red line boundary (appendix 1), broken down into three key areas to consider;

1. The highway layout and appropriate vehicular, pedestrian and cycle access
2. Open space and public realm identifying opportunities to broaden use and activity
3. Complement the planned building and infrastructure development in and adjoining the project area

The scope of the commission will specifically;

- Review existing known site information, constraints, previous work and existing complementary projects, to develop design principles, concept layout and design for the area.
- Commission topographical survey to ascertain the feasibility of creating a level surface /shared space throughout the project area to provide a space for informal socialising, gathering, street entertainment and activities (not street trading/pop ups)
- To develop the above, considerations should be given to the following priorities identified by the [Public Realm Working Group](#) including highways, infrastructure requirements to support small scale events, public realm improvements to surfacing, seating, encourage active travel in the area, street furniture, signage, public art and lighting.
- Review of Highways layout should consider appropriate level of access required by property owners for servicing which is not to the detriment of maximising the use of the space for public realm activities; opportunities for further pedestrianisation of the area; infrastructure for cyclists in line with the LCWIP and opportunities for existing businesses to expand a 'café culture' environment in the area.
- Opportunity for 'features' in the space to facilitate regular activity, spark intrigue, interest and excitement in the space to complement the activities of the existing buildings around the space (retail, hospitality, cinema, MUCH); including artwork and opportunity for a covered (temporary or permanent) for small flexible events.
- Opportunities for additional greenery to the area, alongside retention of the existing, mature trees already well established in the area.
- Identify the reduction in street 'clutter' in particular alternatives to the utilities infrastructure currently 'above ground', and existing bollards.
- Consider the operational requirements of the space for emergencies, maintenance, deliveries, taxis, disabled access, requirement for an appropriate level of on-street parking.
- Prepare outline specification and preliminary cost information for the project
- Stakeholder engagement on the options and preferred concept plan; including allowance for 2 meetings with the Public Realm Working Group, presentation(s) to the Town Deal Board, West Norfolk Transport & Infrastructure Steering Group and Regeneration & Development

Panel. Engagement with property owners and occupiers in the red line area and adjacent Tower Street.

- Consider how the scheme could be phased as funding becomes available.

A number of other strategies and studies are being progressed alongside the proposed concept design. The design should be cognisant of these and consider these carefully in the development of the RIBA Stage 1 proposals;

1. [King's Lynn Transport Strategy, WSP, 2019](#)
2. [Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan, NCC](#)
3. [Air Quality Management Area Action Plan](#)
4. [Local Plan \(2016-2036\)](#)
5. [Town Investment Plan, 2021](#)
6. [King's Lynn Public Realm Action Plan](#)
7. [STARS Project – LUF Submission](#)

The following documents specific to the study area should be considered as part of the exercise

- Red Line Boundary (see appendix 1)
- Land Ownership Plan (see appendix 2)
- Utilities and Highways Plans (appendix 3)
- History relating to Baxters Plain, King's Lynn Civic Society (appendix 4)
- MUCH RIBA Stage 1 report (appendix 5)