

Kingswood Town Centre
Health Check
December 2012

INTRODUCTION

The Kingswood Town Centre Health Check, led by Kingswood Business Association (with support from local partners), aims to identify the work currently taking place in Kingswood to *improve the vibrancy and vitality of the town centre* and highlight actions that will help it continue to improve.

BACKGROUND

In May 1997 the Steering Group for the Kingswood Regeneration Partnership published a draft strategy, which aimed to improve Kingswood Town Centre as well as the surrounding residential and employment area. This group consisted of representatives from South Gloucestershire Council, Kingswood and District Business Partnership, Warmley Clocktower Association, local police, Kingswood Environment Forum and local residents.

In spring 1998, an *update* was produced summarising the 300 comments received after circulating the draft strategy. Some of these comments were also used to amend the draft strategy, which clearly showed wide ranging support for the following key aims of the project:

- ✎ Creating a better, safer more user-friendly town centre
- ✎ Ease parking congestion and parking problems
- ✎ Increase trade and services in the town centre
- ✎ Increase leisure and community facilities
- ✎ Provide for environmental improvements
- ✎ Bring back life to the town centre

The spring 1998 *update* also included a number of key proposals addressing the above aims and formulated a vision for the town centre with three main aspects:

- 1] Kingswood as a major district centre
- 2] Kingswood as an urban village
- 3] Kingswood as a centre of opportunity

Once the final strategy for Kingswood Town Centre was produced in November 2000, the majority of the actions highlighted were successfully achieved by partner groups. Further to the dissolution of the Kingswood and District Business Partnership, local businesses felt the need to re-establish a chamber of trade and in summer 2009, the Kingswood Business Association was formed. With the help of local delivery partners, this new chamber of trade aims to build on previous work and make Kingswood a better place to shop, visit and do business.

ECONOMIC CLIMATE

Following the 2008 recession, the UK has only shown signs of a modest recovery with a global economic downturn continuing. In 2009 Government bodies published reports and guides that highlighted the need for town centre partners to work together to counteract the decline of high streets and town centres. These included: *21st Century High Streets*, British Retail Consortium (2009), *Driving Economic Prosperity: a practical guide for lead members*, I&DeA (2009) and *High Noon for the High Street*, New Local Government Network (2009).

THE PORTAS REVIEW

In spring 2011, Mary Portas was hired by Government to investigate innovative ways in which the high street could fight back against low consumer spending, inflation and increased overheads. The Portas Review was published in December 2011, detailing a 28-point plan that can help the high street become the vibrant hub of the community it once used to be in so many communities across the UK. Mary Portas' Vision is set out on the following page.

WHY A HEALTH CHECK?

Monitoring the health of a town centre was a common theme in the documents mentioned above and important to determine areas for improvement. As a result, these documents were used as the basis for designing this health check (the introductions highlighted in blue at the start of each section reflects this). The 'Key Messages' from these documents are also summarised on the next page.

In spring 2011, Kingswood Business Association (KBA) took the initiative and with support from South Gloucestershire Council, started the health check process. A draft version was circulated to local partners for comment (including South Gloucestershire Council, Kingswood Safer Stronger Community Group and Avon & Somerset Police) and made available online for the public to view before publishing.

FRAMEWORK

The health check has two primary areas of focus, which are both seen as crucial in helping to create a vibrant town centre. The first area of focus is ***developing the town centre*** and the second area of focus is ***chamber of trade activities***. For the purpose of this health check and to be in keeping with previous studies, 'town centre' refers to Regent Street, High Street and the adjoining economy.

This health check will help inform South Gloucestershire Council's future plans for Kingswood Town Centre and will also act as guide for local partners engaged in developing the vitality and vibrancy of Kingswood Town Centre.

KEY MESSAGES

↳ Out of town centres have decreased town centre footfall and spend. The average group spend for out of town centres, across the UK, is £55 compared to £34 within in-town centres. Moreover, money spent in a chain is more likely to leave the local economy.

↳ Research shows that money spent with local suppliers is worth more to the local economy and tends to be re-spent locally. Locally owned businesses can generate up to a 70 per cent local premium in enhanced economic impact.

↳ In contrast, only a small amount of the wealth that supermarkets generate actually stays in the communities in which they operate. For example, retail profits of large chain stores or multinationals typically flow direct from stores to the head office and ultimately to shareholders around the world.

↳ It is important however to emphasise that chain stores can drive regeneration, contribute to the community and improve local economic prosperity. While the growth of the 'cloned' British High Street may have harmed local entrepreneurship, it has also often provided much needed inward investment to a community.

↳ Town centres are central to local environmental policy and street scene improvements. The aesthetic character of high streets and their design can play a crucial role in addressing crime and vandalism.

↳ Town centres can be the catalyst for regeneration; can impact on local employment; can be central to driving footfall increases; and provide important opportunities for entrepreneurship and enterprise.

↳ Town centres are a focal point of encouraging local spending, social inclusion and empowerment. Added to this, regions with higher economic performance, often driven by the performance of the town centre, are recognised to have higher levels of social trust and capital.

↳ Promoting the town centre can encourage less travel and reduce carbon footprints. Other benefits could be accrued on the basis that local shops tend to rely on local produce and suppliers more, with possible benefits across food miles, also leading to a lower carbon footprint.

↳ Town centre partnerships are forums bringing together key local stakeholders to promote the health and wellbeing of the area. The partnership's board of key local actors provides the direction. These partnerships have proved particularly valuable during the recession. Research shows that areas where town centre/high street partnerships exist seem to have reacted more quickly to recent economic pressures.

THE PORTAS REVIEW

My vision: I want to breathe economic and community life back into our high streets. Let me spell out my vision of the future...

I don't want to live in a Britain that doesn't care about community. And I believe that our high streets are a really important part of building communities and pulling people together in a way that a supermarket or shopping mall, however convenient, however entertaining and however slick, just never can.

With town centre vacancy rates doubling over the last two years and total consumer spend away from our high streets now over 50%, the need to take action has never been clearer. Although some high streets are thriving, most have a fight on their hands. Many are sickly, others are on the critical list and some are now dead. We cannot and should not attempt to save every high street but my findings have led me to believe that unless urgent action is taken, the casualties will only continue to multiply.

Fundamentally I believe that our high streets are uniquely placed to deliver something new. I believe that our high streets can be lively, dynamic, exciting and social places that give a sense of belonging and trust to a community. A sense of belonging which, as the recent riots clearly demonstrated, has been eroded and in some instances eradicated. I also fundamentally believe that once we invest in and create social capital in the heart of our communities, the economic capital will follow.

High streets must be ready to experiment, try new things, take risks and become destinations again. They need to be spaces and places that people want to be in. High streets of the future must be a hub of the community that local people are proud of and want to protect.

*Mary Portas (December 2011)
The Portas Review*

High streets and town centres that are fit for the 21st century need to be multifunctional social centres, not simply competitors for stretched consumers. They must offer irresistible opportunities and experiences that do not exist elsewhere, are rooted in the interests and needs of local people, and will meet the demands of a rapidly changing world.

*Action for Market Towns (2011)
Twenty-First Century Town Centres*

KINGSWOOD HERITAGE

Kingswood is located to the east of Bristol. It comprises three wards: Kings Chase and Rodway, north of the A420, and Woodstock to the south. The Kingswood name came from the King's Wood or Forest, used by royalty as hunting grounds dating back to Saxon times. By the 17th century the king had lost the forest to wealthy landowners who let the land for coal mining. Lots of small pits existed where coal came to the surface. As these were worked out, mining went deeper until there were fewer collieries e.g. Hanham Pit, Speedwell Pit, Deep Pit - these continued into the early 20th century.

The miners of the area, during the 18th century, were known as a "lawless people" ripe for conversion by such preachers as Whitfield and Wesley whose preaching made such an impact on the people as is shown by the numerous chapels, some of which are still standing. Methodism is said to have been born here, in 1739.

As the coal pits closed, the ex-miners went into boot making, which had previously been a sideline job. Messrs Daniel Flook and Abraham Fussell led early mass production of boots and, later, shoes, using specialised machinery, from the mid 1850's. Around 1900 there were over 80 small boot/shoe workshops. Some of these buildings still exist with their zigzag roofs. As the trade declined from the 1930s there were fewer factories. G. B. Britton did continue, now using new production methods e.g. moulded soles – as "Tuf" shoes of the 1950s. Eventually they were bought out in the 1990s.

There have been a few notable people, like Samuel Budgett, who lived on Kingswood Hill, becoming trade grocers – buying in bulk and reselling, as early as the 1820s. H. H. & S. Budgett eventually moved their business into the city of Bristol. It continued into the 1960s when they were bought out.

Today there are a few retailing businesses that have been trading over 100 years e.g. Zahringers (clocks, jewellery, etc), Lloyds Bank and Aldridge (undertakers). There are a few others that have a long track record. Some shop facades show something of earlier Victorian glory – two are dated 1892.

In 1975 the Kings Chase shopping precinct was created bringing into the area some larger businesses such as Sainsbury's, Iceland, Wilkinson's and a number of smaller shops, modernising the former run down retail area.

Information courtesy of John Oldham, Local Historian & volunteer with Kingswood Heritage Museum

KINGSWOOD TODAY

The town centre provides convenience and low order comparison shopping, together with local service facilities. In total there are 90 units with an A1 use class providing 10,652 square metres of retail floor space. The centre accommodates a Sainsbury's supermarket and an Iceland food store, as well as some multiple stores (Boots, WH Smiths, and Wilkinson). In addition a Co-Op food store and Poundstretcher Extra store adjoin the centre. Comparison shopping forms the majority of retailing activity in the town centre with 46% of units or 6,147 square metres, in comparison use. Convenience functions account for 18% of all A1 units and total 3,138 square metres, while service functions account for 17% of all A1 units or 7% of the available A1 floor space. At the time of the survey there were 18 vacant or empty A1 units. This represents 20% of all A1 retail units in the town centre.

The out-of-centre Retail Park a few miles away at Longwell Green, together with the adjacent Asda superstore, have increasingly taken footfall away from Kingswood Town Centre as they have grown and expanded their retail offer. Despite the national trend for out-of-centre retail development in recent decades, the high street and shopping precinct in Kingswood Town Centre offer a diverse retail experience to attract different types of shoppers. As a result, demand for units in the shopping precinct is high with no vacant units at the time of writing (summer 2012).

Three large national anchor stores (Sainsbury's, Wilkinson and Co-Op) attract shoppers to the town centre and though money generated by these stores may leave the local economy, their presence encourages people to visit the town centre, thus providing an opportunity for local shoppers to use other, smaller and independent retailers. The town centre now has a new focal point in the form of a stand-alone café, built in front of the shopping precinct. This should facilitate a longer visit to the town centre, help attract new types of footfall (i.e. business people) and create a social focus for Kingswood Town Centre.

*Information from Local Economic Assessment
South Gloucestershire Council (September 2011)*

*and Town Centres & Retailing in South Gloucestershire
(August 2011 Update)*

1. DEVELOPING THE TOWN CENTRE

A] UNIQUE SENSE OF PLACE

Town centres are vital to the local community. Local people and groups should work together to maximise the advantages of a town centre's local heritage and natural surroundings whilst providing facilities for modern retailing. A town centre's local identity should be complemented by an appropriate retail mix that is marketed effectively. This will encourage shoppers to appreciate the true retail experience.

CURRENT STATUS

- KBA is working to build stronger relationships with South Gloucestershire Council (SGC) and statutory bodies to maintain the town centre's economic heritage and identity. KBA actively encourages new retailers to move to the town centre.
- The town centre has historically been the hub of economic activity in the area. Remnants of its historic affluence are still visible in the high street through architecture and monuments.
- KBA has produced marketing material to promote local shops and businesses. This has raised awareness of the variety of retail and other service businesses in the area to local residents and visitors from further afield.

FUTURE ACTIONS

- Continue to build stronger links with landlords of premises, particularly vacant units, with a view to further the regeneration of the town centre's physical landscape.
Lead Partner – Kingswood Business Association
- Work with local history groups to develop and promote the town centre's historic identity.
Lead Partner – Kingswood Heritage Museum
- Continue to explore the idea of producing a Kingswood Town Centre brochure for advertising purposes as well as a town centre display board.
Lead Partner – Kingswood Business Association

B] ATTRACTIVE PUBLIC REALM

A town centre should have an attractive trading environment with consistent styling, pedestrian signage and public spaces maintained to high standards. This should include effective deterrents against pollution. The local authority, public bodies and private interest groups need to work together to achieve such improvements.

CURRENT STATUS

- The town centre has scope to be more attractive than it currently is. Styling varies somewhat between old and new buildings.
- Current cleaning regimes are adequate in most places in the town centre. In some areas however, street cleansing does not provide acceptable results. There are no visual deterrents against pollution in the town centre (except litter bins).
- Work has taken place between KBA and SGC to identify 'trouble spots' of unacceptably high levels of rubbish in and around the town centre.

FUTURE ACTIONS

- Consider ideas that can brighten the aesthetic appearance of the streetscape, in particular pavements. Ensure all future highway signage does not create a sense of clutter but complements existing ones.
Lead Partner – Kingswood Business Association
- Review cleaning regimes with a view to improving them and consider quarterly, intensive spring cleans of streetscape.
Lead Partner – Kingswood Business Association
- Encourage and create a greater awareness of pride by educating the local community to maintain a higher degree of cleanliness in the town centre. Consider installing 'enforcement signage' to deter people from littering.
Lead Partner – Kingswood Business Association

1. DEVELOPING THE TOWN CENTRE cont.

C] PLANNING FOR SUCCESS

Monitoring the health of the town centre should underpin any effective town centre system. A clear strategy should be established to address the increasing rates of vacancy and the accompanying decline in fortunes of town centres.

CURRENT STATUS

- KBA has worked with Kings Chase Shopping Precinct and regularly has contact with SGC on relevant matters. There is no town or parish council in Kingswood. KBA have a close working relationship with the local police.
- KBA is leading on the Town Centre Health Check initiative to identify areas for improvement.
- KBA has investigated empty premises in the town centre to find out who the landlords are and has offered to publicise their units but there has been little interest from agents to collaborate on this project.

FUTURE ACTIONS

- Increase the working relationship between KBA and larger commercial organisations such as national chain stores and Kings Chase Shopping Precinct.
Lead Partner – Kings Chase Shopping Precinct
- Highlight actions to improve the vitality and vibrancy of the town centre, to make it a more attractive shopping destination, place to visit do business.
Lead Partner – Kingswood Business Association
- Continue to lobby agents and landlords of empty premises in the town centre and create a detailed and accessible 'vacant property register' for interested parties to view.
Lead Partner – Kingswood Business Association

D] ACCESSIBILITY

Parking and transport policy should reduce town centre congestion and parking demands without affecting footfall. Car parking and cycle locking facilities need to attract customers to the town centre and adequate public transport links should connect local communities to the town centre. Retail premises should be easily accessible to encourage visits from wheelchair users and buggy users.

CURRENT STATUS

- Kingswood town centre has a number of car parks within walking distance of the high street and Kings Chase Shopping Precinct. Free car parking times vary between 90 minutes and two hours. The Kings Chase Shopping Precinct car park (which is not free) is currently under-used.
- There are various, well-used bus services routed through the town centre connecting local and wider communities.
- Given the age of the buildings in the town centre, there is variable access to retail premises.

FUTURE ACTIONS

- Work towards ensuring all current and future car parks serving Kingswood Town Centre are free for at least two hours, to encourage greater footfall into the area.
Lead Partner – Kingswood Business Association
- Review the spread of bus stop locations with a view to alleviate town centre congestion, particularly outside Kings Chase Shopping Precinct.
Lead Partner – Kingswood Business Association
- Signpost town centre businesses to relevant websites for guidance on commercial property accessibility issues.
Lead Partner – Kingswood Business Association

1. DEVELOPING THE TOWN CENTRE cont.

E] SAFETY & SECURITY

Retail crime and anti-social behaviour should be deterred, with damaged property and streetscape restored as quickly as possible. Meaningful deterrence can be achieved through a co-ordinated response by local retailers and businesses. Neighbourhood policing should meet the needs of the local community to ensure the town centre is a safe, inclusive and accessible place.

CURRENT STATUS

- Kings Chase Shopping Precinct has its own security. There is an established Pub Watch scheme. Street Pastors are also being deployed. KBA actively encourages all local businesses and residents to report relevant damage to SGC, who give prompt attention.
- Discussions have taken place between the local police and KBA with regard to the possibility of a 'shop watch scheme'. Many businesses in the town centre already have their own security.
- There has been a recent review by local police resulting in the allocation of additional police resources into the area. Kingswood Safer Stronger Community Group holds regular dialogue with KBA and the police, to highlight relevant and current issues.

FUTURE ACTIONS

- Continue to develop identified retail crime deterrents and further promote the reporting of criminal activity and damage to the appropriate bodies.

Lead Partner – Safer & Stronger Community Group

- Implement the proposed shop watch scheme. Invite other agencies to future KBA meetings to discuss how retail crime can be further addressed.

Lead Partner – Avon & Somerset Police

- Strengthen the links between all parties involved with Kingswood Safer Stronger Community Group.

Lead Partner – Safer & Stronger Community Group

F] CORE STRATEGY

The Core Strategy sets the strategic planning policy framework to guide future development across South Gloucestershire. In the Core Strategy, Kingswood is defined as a town centre which functions as a high street and shopping service centre. This Health Check therefore, complements the Core Strategy.

Under Policy CS14 (Town Centres and Retail), South Gloucestershire Council will work with partners and the local community to protect and enhance the vitality and viability of existing centres in South Gloucestershire, in recognition of their retail, service and social functions.

As a result of community engagement, the Core Strategy's vision for the future of the East Fringe of Bristol (which includes Kingswood) aims to:

- Preserve and enhance the distinctive identity and heritage of the physical community
- Strengthen the vibrancy and vitality of the town centres
- Improve employment opportunities (by being in close proximity to the Bristol & Bath Science Park)
- Develop reliable, punctual and frequent public transport services with the North Fringe of Bristol
- Integrate well designed housing developments (which do not isolate the town centre)

Policy CS29 in the Core Strategy aims to deliver this draft vision through managing development and partnership working.

The viability and vibrancy of Kingswood will be improved to enhance its role as a service centre for the urban and surrounding rural area including making provision for additional comparison floor space as appropriate.

2. CHAMBER OF TRADE ACTIVITIES

Kingswood Business Association has been established since 2009. The group encourages businesses in the Kingswood area to meet regularly, gain access to business support, trade with each other and promote the local economy. The 'Key Messages' section of this health check identifies the need for a strong and active chamber of trade to be in place, to work with local partners and undertake activities that can improve the vibrancy and vitality of the town centre. Kingswood Business Association, has highlighted a set of ambitions and goals they believe will help contribute towards a vibrant and prosperous town centre.

CURRENT STATUS

FUTURE ACTIONS

A] Development of a business environment in which entrepreneurship can flourish.

The recent growth of KBA has led to a closer working relationship between local businesses. KBA Retail Group meetings facilitate closer understanding of one and another's businesses and enable the sharing of good practice and initiatives.

Continue to promote close working relationships between all businesses. Encourage businesses to attend KBA's newly established, Business Breakfast Club.

B] Create and foster a spirit of goodwill, friendship and unity amongst local businesses.

General KBA meetings allow for an open exchange of views. Input from all businesses is actively encouraged.

Encourage businesses to communicate and interact outside of ordinary KBA meetings using existing channels (such as social media) and social functions and events.

C] Provide facilities for the exchange of views and interaction between businesses.

KBA provides opportunities for businesses to meet and discuss issues affecting their business at the main and Retail Group meetings.

Promote the new Breakfast Club as another facility for businesses to interact with each other.

D] Develop informative website for the Chamber.

KBA has an on-line presence generously provided by www.MyKingswood.co.uk/KBA. KBA's page on My Kingswood lists all current members and activities taking place.

Develop a dedicated KBA website with a secure log-in section for KBA members to access with useful resources available to download. Incorporate a members' benefits section as well.

E] Improve communications between the Chamber and Parish, Town and District Councils through meetings and circulars.

There is no Town or Parish Council in Kingswood however, KBA regularly communicates with SGC on various issues.

Ensure KBA maintains a close working relationship with SGC by attending meetings as appropriate and responding to and acting on consultations as relevant.

F] Establish a rapport with the whole community and be recognised as representing the view of local businesses to the wider community.

There have been limited opportunities for KBA to represent the views of businesses to the community.

Raise the profile of KBA so that relevant bodies are aware of its capacity to effectively address issues affecting the local economy.

2. CHAMBER OF TRADE ACTIVITIES cont.

	CURRENT STATUS	FUTURE ACTIONS
G] Keep members informed on important matters affecting trade, businesses and industry, retail and tourism.	KBA circulates information to local businesses about issues of relevance and information that can prove beneficial to them.	Increase the regularity of circulating relevant business support material and information to members and utilise the new KBA website as a medium to do this.
H] Establish and maintain relations with bodies having similar objects to promote the vibrancy of the local town centre.	KBA is aware of and has met other local business groups in South Gloucestershire. KBA has a good working relationship with Kings Chase Shopping Precinct.	Continue to be involved in activities of the South Gloucestershire Business Forum and attend its events to represent Kingswood businesses.
I] Support and have presence at local events for promotional purpose as appropriate.	KBA has been involved with various national, local and seasonal events to promote both its members and Kingswood Town Centre.	Identify other events at which KBA can have a presence to effectively promote the local economy.

SUMMARY & CONTACTS

➤ This health check provides a guide that will be used by local partners currently engaged in developing the vitality and vibrancy of Kingswood Town Centre.

➤ Coordinated by Kingswood Business Association, these partners will enlist the help of relevant delivery partners and review the health check regularly to ensure the future actions identified are being achieved.

➤ For information about the progress being made with each of the future actions or to offer your support to any of the lead partners, please contact:

Kingswood Business Association	enquiries@silverbridals.com
Avon & Somerset Police	Dominic.Graham@avonandsomerset.police.uk
Kingswood Safer Stronger Community Group	marian.jones@southglos.gov.uk
South Gloucestershire Council	business@southglos.gov.uk
Kingswood Heritage Museum	kingswoodstudy@hotmail.co.uk
Kings Chase Shopping Precinct	karl.taylor@htccentres.uk.com

For a paper version of this health check, please email: business@southglos.gov.uk