

Staple Hill Town Centre
Health Check
December 2012

INTRODUCTION

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

BACKGROUND

The Staple Hill Regeneration Partnership was founded and has evolved in answer to the identified needs of the Staple Hill area. The group started working on local projects in 1998 long before it was formally constituted. Towards the end of 1998 concerns were raised by residents, community group leaders and traders about the general deterioration of the town centre and Page Park, an increase in anti social behaviour and a lack of community spirit. Councillors representing the ward raised these concerns at council meetings and at meetings of the Policy & Resources Committee. Members were sympathetic but the then recently formed South Gloucestershire Council (1996) had limited resources to invest in the area.

With the help of council facilitators the needs of Staple Hill were identified through surveys and action plans were set up. In 2001, part of a Government grant was dedicated to improving the town centre. A group of traders and community activists were consulted about the project and were given the responsibility of overseeing the work. This resulted in the formal founding of the Staple Hill Regeneration Partnership, which is an umbrella organisation. It includes local residents, representatives of a wide range of voluntary and community organisations, traders and local businesses and representatives of the council and other agencies.

The purpose of the partnership is to identify and address some of the area's problems and thus improve the quality of life for people living and trading in Staple Hill. The Regeneration Partnership is working together with the Staple Hill Chamber of Trade to implement the town centre health check.

ECONOMIC CLIMATE

Following the 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 highlighting the need for local partners to work together to counteract the decline of their high street or town centre. These documents 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 reflect this). The 'Key Messages' from these documents are also summarised on the following page.

In summer 2011, Staple Hill Chamber of Trade took the initiative and with support from South Gloucestershire Council, started the health check process. The draft document was circulated to local partners for comment (including Staple Hill Regeneration Partnership and Staple Hill Safer & Stronger Community Group) and made available online for the public to view before publishing.

FRAMEWORK

This health check has two primary areas of focus, which as already established, 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, 'town centre' refers to the area between Page Park and the junction of High Street and Pendennis Road/Acacia Road.

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

STAPLE HILL HERITAGE

The name Staple derives from an old English word Steap or Steep. Staple Hill means 'on the steep hill'. Staple Hill was once part of Kingswood Forest, which covered an area of eighteen square miles and extended six miles north east from Bristol to Pucklechurch. Partly within this forest was the Manor of Barton Regis, which included the ancient Parishes of Clifton, St George, Stapleton and Mangotsfield.

The earliest known map of the area, which is from 1610, gives the name Staple Hill but no houses are shown, only an oak tree (The Staple Hill Oak) and the road leading from Bristol across Staple Hill (Mangotsfield Way).

Staple Hill was never a village in the accepted sense, unlike Mangotsfield (which grew up around the church) and Downend (which expanded from a hamlet). Staple Hill evolved as a local community alongside a very ancient track way running from Bristol to the Saxon Royal Hunting Lodge at Pucklechurch. But it was not until the nineteenth century that Staple Hill began to develop into the built-up area that it is now.

The earliest copy of Matthews Trade Directory (dated 1801) held by the Central Library in Bristol, only covered Bristol. The 1853 edition covered Bristol and surrounding villages. Downend is first mentioned in 1859 and entries include traders located in Staple Hill.

It is well known that coal was mined in Staple Hill for several centuries. There was also quarrying for the local pennant stone, which was used for building houses and walls. With the development of machines driven by steam, the old system of cottage industries gradually died as factories were built to house the machines. This, with the enclosure of common and open fields, helped the migration of country people from the rural districts to the towns.

In the Gloucestershire Record Office there is a very large book containing plans of buildings submitted by various local builders who wished to build in the Staple Hill area between 1896 and 1898. In those two years there were applications for the building of over 240 houses in Cassell Road, North Street, High Street, Berkeley Road, Parnalls Lane, Soundwell Road and Hermitage Estate.

In 1895, Lloyds Bank acquired premises in the High Street. Though shops had existed in the high street prior to this, the bank drew more traders to the area and as a result, the town centre of Staple Hill was formed. It remains a vibrant high street today with remnants of its historic past still visible through primarily Victorian architecture.

*Information from Staple Hill, A History
By Reg. Howlett (1991)*

STAPLE HILL TODAY

Staple Hill is an urban area located to the east of Bristol Fringe, approximately 0.5 kilometres from the Bristol – South Gloucestershire boundary. It is mainly a residential area with retail shops and businesses. The primary retail area is along Staple Hill High Street and is classed as a town centre. An Air Quality Management Assessment is in operation at Staple Hill, located at the Broad Street, High Street, Victoria Street and Soundwell Road crossroads. This busy intersection suffers from traffic congestion at peak times. In addition, where Soundwell Road joins the crossroads, it is narrow and more enclosed by buildings. This creates a 'street canyon' effect where any build-up of pollutants may not so easily disperse.

There are 11,143 registered businesses in South Gloucestershire and 668 (6%) are registered to the Staple Hill Ward. Staple Hill Town Centre has a total of 84 units with an A1 use class providing 6,992 square metres of retail floor space. The centre currently accommodates two food stores, a Tesco Metro Store and Iceland. Although Staple Hill lacks the range of multiples found in other major town/district centres, it has a large number of independent traders, offering a range of comparison and convenience shopping, serving the local community. Comparison shopping forms the majority of A1 retailing activity in the town centre with 46% of units and 3,322 square metres in comparison use. Convenience functions account for 21% of all A1 units and totals 2,208 square metres, while service functions account for 26% of all A1 units or 13% of the available A1 floor space. At the time of the survey there were 6 vacant or empty A1 units in the town centre, representing 5% of all A1 retail units in the town centre.

*Information from Local Economic Assessment
South Gloucestershire Council (September 2011)
and Town Centres & Retailing in South Gloucestershire
(August 2011)*

The new retail centre at Emersons Green has no doubt drawn shoppers from Staple Hill Town Centre over the last decade but the high street has done well to compete by offering an independent selection of retailers. The post office at one end of the high street and Tesco store at the other have created anchors at either end of the town centre which also help attract and retain foot fall in the high street.

The success of Staple Hill Town Centre can be attributed to the commitment the local chamber of trade has for supporting the high street and its independent retailers. Participation in regular community events reinforces the collective spirit of the area and this could be something that attracts loyal, seasonal shoppers to the high street.

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 retail experience.

CURRENT STATUS

- The Chamber of Trade is a member of and works closely with Staple Hill Regeneration Partnership and Staple Hill Safer & Stronger Community Group (and partners).
- The high street has a high proportion of independent retailers that offer quality products with a personalised and expert service.
- Businesses in Staple Hill are marketed through the Chamber of Trade's Facebook page, the local press, local media and the Chamber website (www.staplehill.co.uk).

FUTURE ACTIONS

- Ensure close working continues between all local community groups including the Chamber of Trade, Friends of Page Park, Royal British Legion, Our Place and local library, on events and activities that can increase footfall to the high street.
Lead Partner – Chamber of Trade
- Encourage more specialised retailers to move to the high street, to complement the existing retail mix and work closely with South Gloucestershire Council to ensure future planning contributes to this existing retail mix.
Lead Partner – Chamber of Trade
- Promote virtues of the internet and create better integration between the Chamber of Trade website and local business websites. Further promote the Staple Hill brand through coordinated signs, flyers, leaflets etc.
Lead Partner – Chamber of Trade

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 high street creates a pleasant shopping experience due to its wide pavements and attractive street furniture.
- High street cleanliness is maintained to a high standard. Open spaces and greenery are also maintained on a seasonal basis as required, by the local authority.
- The Chamber of Trade has a close working relationship with the Street Care department at South Gloucestershire Council to address prevailing issues.
- Page Park is maintained to high standard by the local authority and the Friends of Page Park. Other open spaces and greenery are also maintained, on a sporadic basis, by the local authority.

FUTURE ACTIONS

- Work with Staple Hill Regeneration Partnership to secure any available grant funding for shop front renovation.
Lead Partner – Chamber of Trade
- Encourage all local retailers (through appropriate communications) to maintain their shop frontage, to be in keeping with Staple Hill's high standards of cleanliness and aesthetic, visual appeal.
Lead Partner – Chamber of Trade
- Continue to work with South Gloucestershire Council to improve waste collection facilities in the town centre, as required and maintain open and green spaces, especially in Page Park.
Lead Partner – Chamber of Trade

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

- For over 20 years, the Regeneration Partnership (as well as its partners) has been working towards achieving physical improvements in the town centre.
- Various local groups (such as the Regeneration Partnership) frequently work to monitor the health of the high street, to understand where improvements can be made (such as to Fountain Square).
- The Chamber of Trade, through its marketing of Staple Hill to outside businesses, works towards promoting the area as a place where independent retailers can flourish.

FUTURE ACTIONS

- Ensure a close working relationship continues to be maintained with the Regeneration Partnership, to promote the work of the Chamber of Trade and help achieve local ambitions.
Lead Partner – Regeneration Partnership
- Circulate this Town Centre Health Check document to relevant partners in Staple Hill including the Friends of Page Park, Safer & Stronger Community Group, Police and Regeneration Partnership.
Lead Partner – Chamber of Trade
- Produce a marketing pack for prospective businesses and new start-ups to highlight the benefits of moving to and trading in Staple Hill.
Lead Partner – Chamber of Trade

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

- The Chamber of Trade has been working closely with South Gloucestershire Council for a number of years to ensure there are adequate parking facilities in and around the high street. The number of free car parks currently serving the high street reflects this. The council has also committed to maintain free car parking in Staple Hill.
- Despite a number of bus routes serving Staple Hill, there are still some gaps in public transport links. For example, there is no direct bus route that connects Hanham to Staple Hill.
- The Chamber has worked with South Gloucestershire Council to educate and advise high street businesses about accessibility issues.

FUTURE ACTIONS

- Continue to work with South Gloucestershire Council to provide as many free car parking spaces as possible in and around the high street as well as to retain existing ones.
Lead Partner – Chamber of Trade
- Lobby local transport providers and work with the Regeneration Partnership to look at increased bus service provision to connect Staple Hill to neighbouring suburbs.
Lead Partner – Regeneration Partnership
- Ensure new town centre projects consider accessibility issues as appropriate (such as the regeneration of Fountain Square).
Lead Partner – Regeneration Partnership

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. The town centre should be a safe, inclusive and accessible place for people to live, work, shop and visit.

CURRENT STATUS

- The police work closely with local partnerships and attend various forums in order to share information. Shoplifting in the high street was recently prioritised and the Neighbourhood Police Team works proactively to reduce the impact of anti-social behaviour on local trade.
- The Chamber of Trade has, for over a decade, operated the *ShopWatch* scheme successfully. Information is also shared between high street traders, creating a total link between them.
- Overall, policing does meet the needs of high street businesses. This is primarily due to the Chamber of Trade communicating regularly with the local police to maintain a strong working relationship.

FUTURE ACTIONS

- Continue to support the Safer & Stronger Community Group which is the most suitable forum for prioritising any relevant issues.

Lead Partner – Avon & Somerset Police

- Support the Safer & Stronger Community Group to organise the Neighbourhood Watch scheme.

Lead Partner – Avon & Somerset Police

- Monitor crime levels and update relevant partners as appropriate. Discuss business crime at Chamber of Trade meetings as required and action as appropriate.

Lead Partner – Chamber of Trade

F] CORE STRATEGY

The Core Strategy sets the strategic planning policy framework to guide future development across South Gloucestershire. In the Core Strategy, Staple Hill is defined as a town centre and 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 Staple Hill) 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 Staple Hill 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

Staple Hill Chamber of Trade has been established for over 40 years. The group encourages businesses in the Staple Hill 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. Staple Hill Chamber of Trade has highlighted a set of ambitions and goals they believe will help contribute towards a vibrant and prosperous town centre.

CURRENT STATUS

A] Create and foster a spirit of goodwill, friendship and unity amongst local businesses and the local community.

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

C] Develop an informative website for the Chamber of Trade.

D] Improve communications between the Chamber of Trade and all sectors of the local community.

E] Be recognised as representing and promoting the view of businesses to the rest of the community.

F] Keep local businesses informed on important matters affecting trade, businesses and tourism.

The Chamber of Trade is regularly involved with community events that take place in and around the high street. One example is the Page Park Centenary Celebrations (2011).

Monthly meetings always allow for this. The Chamber of Trade intranet is another example of how local businesses communicate with each other and discuss issues affecting the high street.

The Chamber of Trade website (www.staplehill.co.uk) has recently been improved and contains up-to-date information about facilities in the high street, including a comprehensive list of shops.

Email circulars and newsletters are sent out to businesses regularly. The Chamber intranet provides a good tool for communication between local businesses. This health check is an ideal way for the local community to see the work of the Chamber of Trade.

The Chamber of Trade is regularly consulted on a variety of matters (eg parking by South Gloucestershire Council).

This regularly takes place at Chamber of Trade meetings and through circulation of newsletters and emails as well as posts on the intranet site.

FUTURE ACTIONS

Communicate with more people to get them involved in supporting future local events, to spread work-load and increase relationships between groups and individuals in the community.

Continue to hold regular meetings and invite external speakers to serve local business demands.

Promote the Chamber of Trade website when and where appropriate and link it with all other Staple Hill community websites.

Publish a Staple Hill Business Directory containing a list of all shops in the high street and place in each shop. Circulate to local community groups as well.

Increase the Chamber of Trade's current level of public relations so it is recognised by local groups as well as the media.

Attend future South Gloucestershire Business Forum events to learn about new developments that can help the high street maintain its vibrancy and vitality and competitiveness.

2. CHAMBER OF TRADE ACTIVITIES cont.

CURRENT STATUS

G] Establish and maintain relations with bodies having similar objectives to promote the vibrancy of the high street.

The Chamber of Trade is a member of the Regeneration Partnership. The Chamber is represented at Regeneration Partnership meetings where relevant issues affecting the high street are addressed.

H] Promote the high street as a vibrant and unified shopping district.

The Chamber of Trade has worked towards celebrating 150 years of trading in the high street. There was a creative programme of activities held during 2012.

I] Support and have presence at local events for promotional purposes, as appropriate.

The Chamber of Trade has been participating in events such as Christmas on the Hill, Page Park Centenary Celebrations and Armed Forces Day.

FUTURE ACTIONS

Continue to work with the Royal British Legion, the Regeneration Partnership, the Friends of Page Park and the local library to communicate and address issues affecting the vibrancy and vitality of the high street.

Collaborate with the Bristol and Bath Science Park and arrange meet and greet event where high street businesses can introduce themselves to Science Park tenants and visitors.

Participate and have active involvement in the Easter Egg Hunt and events at Page Park similar to the Diamond Jubilee Celebrations, to promote and encourage more foot fall to the high street. Generate ideas for future events.

SUMMARY & CONTACTS

This health check provides a guide that will be used by local partners currently engaged in developing the vitality and vibrancy of Staple Hill Town Centre. Coordinated by Staple Hill Chamber of Trade, these partners will 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:

Staple Hill Chamber of Trade	staplehillchamberoftrade@hotmail.co.uk
Staple Hill Regeneration Partnership	our.place@hotmail.co.uk
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Safer & Stronger Community Group	Terry.Johnson@southglos.gov.uk
South Gloucestershire Council	business@southglos.gov.uk

For a paper version of this health check please email:
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