

4.0 Urban Design Issues

URBAN DESIGN ISSUES

Introduction

- 4.1 The study team was fortunate to work closely with the client group in order to understand the Town Centre's strengths and weaknesses. A series of detailed site visits were jointly carried out which enabled a dialogue to evolve that has helped to shape the urban design aspects of the Strategy.
- 4.2 Furthermore, the parallel Borough-wide Character Assessment has carried out a series of urban neighbourhood studies, one of which covers the town centre. Appendix 3 incorporates the character study for the town centre which breaks the area down into 11 character areas. Each of these is then described in detail with guidance on sensitivity to change in regard to heritage and conservation policy.
- 4.3 The urban design 'audit' has explored a range of issues in the form of identifying opportunities and constraints. These issues have been simplified to six key areas of concern and are identified as:
- Townscape;
 - access and parking;
 - "friendly faces and hostile places" – community safety;
 - activities;
 - places, spaces and links; and
 - development sites.
- 4.4 The analysis of these issues has helped inform the town centre strategy and the framework for development, by taking account of the local distinctiveness and characteristics of the area. The audit and conceptual work have been the subject of workshops with both the Council and other key stakeholders.

Townscape Issues

- 4.5 In analysing the Town Centre and its performance, it has been important to understand the physical aspects of the Centre that contribute both positively and negatively to its success. The study team looked at a range of different criteria such as urban edges, the quality of townscape, landmarks and gateways and the way the Town Centre is

'celebrated' (see Fig 4.1).

- 4.6 The urban edges are defined by both changes in the patterns of development, their intensity and uses. Five areas have been identified where urban edges are helping to define different "neighbourhoods" within the Town Centre. These are:
- along the Creedy, separating the suburban development of Twynham from the more Saxon street pattern of the core of the Town Centre;
 - Bargates, largely 19th century development, was once part of a longer High Street and has been cut from the core of the Town Centre by Fountain Way;
 - the Town Centre is defined by the A35 to the north, includes the Priory to the south, and is bounded on the west by Druitt Gardens and to the east by the Mill Stream;
 - the core of the Town Centre is separated from Rossiters Quay by the Avon River. This area sits on an island between the Town Centre and development to the east in Purewell. Rossiter Quay comprises early development along Bridge Street to which has recently been added two new marina developments; and
 - the second branch of the Avon separates Rossiter Quay from the more industrial part of Purewell, that incorporates the Civic Offices, leisure facilities and gas works.

These five areas have distinct identities.

- 4.7 However there are areas between the edges of these 'neighbourhoods' that are undeveloped or reflect no distinct urban form. These 'transition areas' offer the opportunity to redefine the urban edges through new development. They are:
- the Magistrates Court site;
 - Land abutting Druitt Gardens and parking areas in Sopers Lane and Wick Lane; and
 - the parking and service yards of the Co-op and Somerfield supermarkets.
- 4.8 Whereas the core of the Town Centre offers a comfortable sense of enclosure that makes Christchurch High Street and some of its adjacent lanes popular locations, the transition areas are essentially unfriendly and potentially hostile

environments.

- 4.9 Part of this comfort comes from the good quality townscape of the High Street and its environs. The sense of enclosure is enhanced by views to landmarks such as the Priory, Millhams Street Church, the Castle and the bandstand in the Quomps. These landmarks help people understand where they are. The Priory tower in particular provides a major landmark visible from the A35 and glimpsed views from the river frontages to the south along Stanpit and Mudeford.
- 4.10 The town also suffers from poor quality landmarks such as the gasometers. Over time the opportunities to remove structures that detract from the positive quality of environment of the town should be taken. Other opportunities include the Council offices and a number of buildings fronting the High Street including the arcade at the junction of Wick Lane.
- 4.11 It will be important to identify 'gateways' to the Town Centre. The A35 whisks the visitor through the Town Centre with no acknowledgement of the historic core. There are opportunities to create new 'gateways'.

Outer gateways:

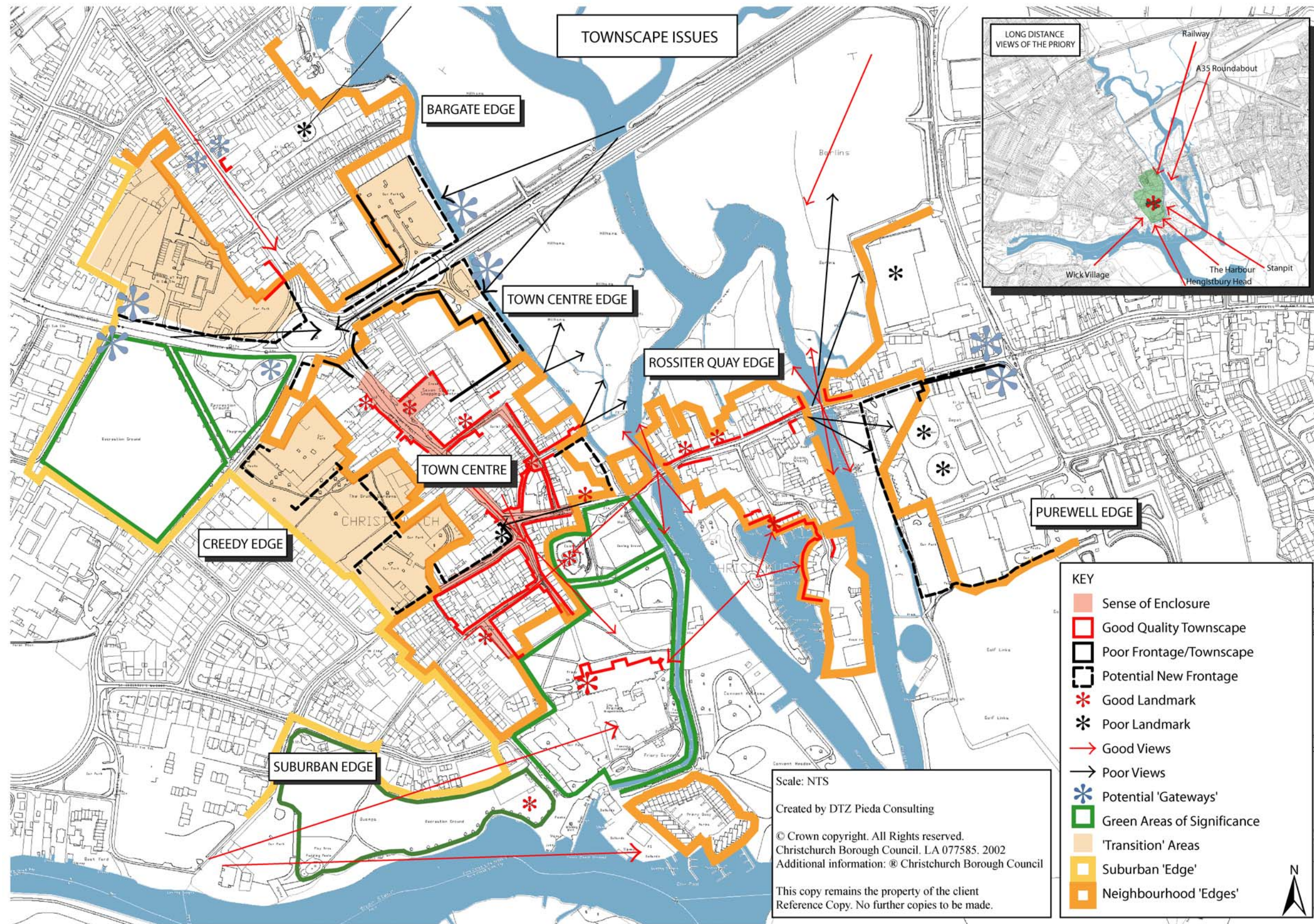
- at the A35 roundabout at Stony Lane, with views to the Priory over carefully managed land across the water meadows;
- at the train station junction with Bargates where the first glimpses of the Priory tower are gained; and
- at Tuckton Bridge.

And inner gateways:

- A35 at the Mill Stream, where the backs and service yards of two supermarkets currently greet residents and visitors;
- at the western edge of the recreation ground on Barrack Road;
- at the junction of Bridge Street and Stony Lane; and
- at New Zealand Gardens – a key entry space.

Although the entry points to the Town Centre from the west are more diffuse, there are opportunities to introduce minor gateways at the Quomps.







A friendly face



A hostile place

4.12 All these areas need enhancing to inform people that they are entering an historic place. This could take the form of:

- carefully designed signage;
- architectural features;
- changes in public realm treatment;
- changes in traffic behaviour; and
- lighting.

Friendly Faces and Hostile Places – Community Safety Issues

4.13 Large areas of the Town Centre are inaccessible to the public creating a 'dysfunctional' movement network as indicated in Fig.4.2. Visitors have only limited access to the waterfront and to key green areas.

4.14 The accessible waterfront is limited to:

- The Quomps;
- Priory Quay
- parts of the Mill Stream around the Priory and the Castle;
- parts of Rossiter Quay;
- the edge of Stanpit Marsh; and
- the Brewhouse Hole (adjacent to the Royalty Fisheries, Avon Buildings).

4.15 There is potential to increase the amount of waterfront available by opening up the Mill Stream, the Avon around Rossiter Quay and the fenced off open space adjacent to the Council Offices. Convent Meadows offers a long term opportunity to improve accessibility to the waterfront parts of Priory Quay.

4.16 In addition, the opportunity to open up the two 'green rooms':

- the area between the causeway across the Avon and Bridge Street; and
- the area between the railway and the causeway (which contains a number of electricity pylons)

should be considered as part of an overall programme of management. The current lack of effective management has left these areas rough, underused, unconnected, of no

great environmental significance and relatively hostile.

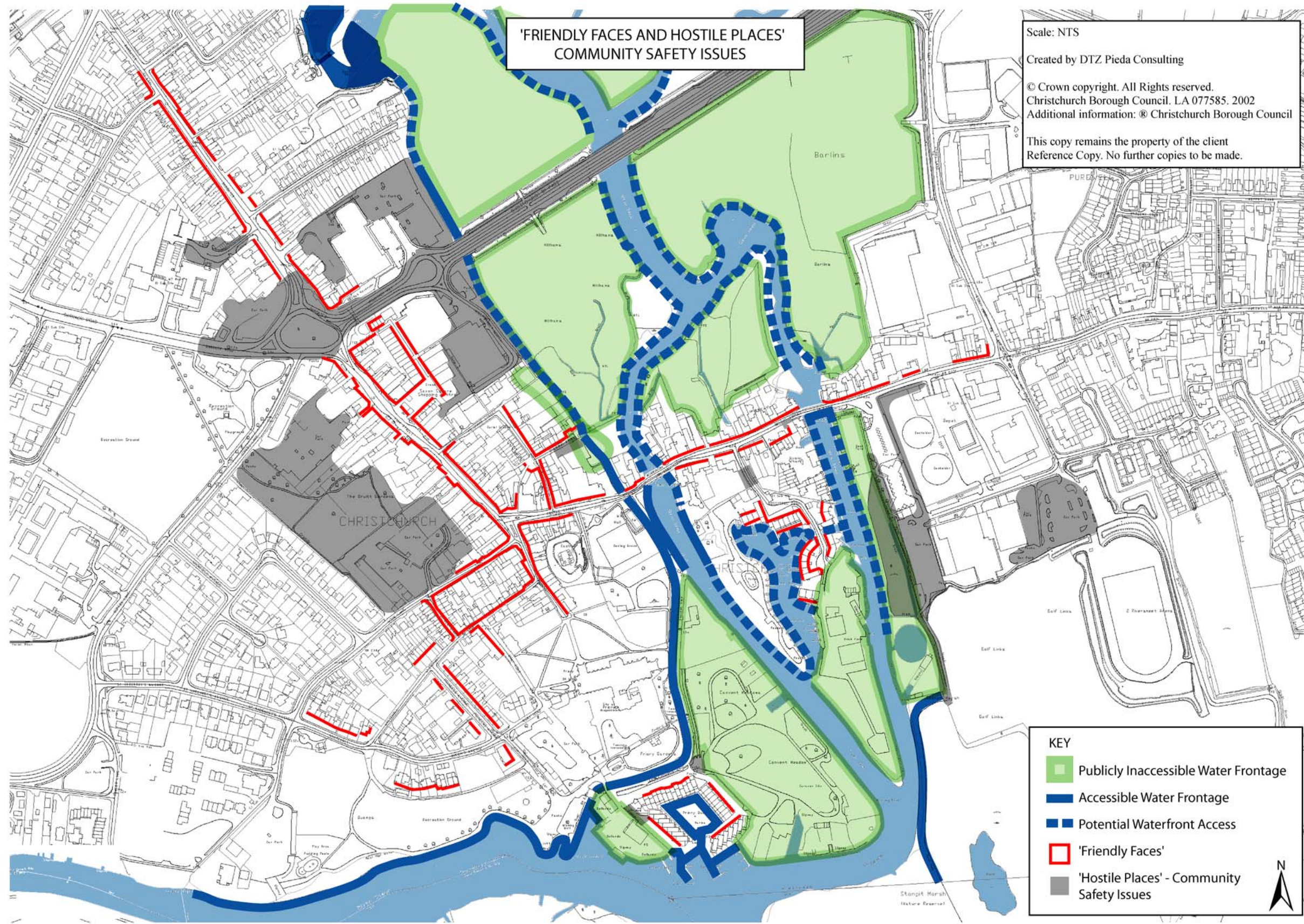
4.17 Most 'friendly faces' are along the main streets where buildings face onto and overlook the public realm. Currently these streets are also transport routes. The introduction of a 20mph speed limit in the High Street, developed in association with pedestrian 'friendly' public realm improvements will reinforce the attractiveness of the retail core. However, care will need to be taken with design and siting of speed limit signage.

4.18 There are a number of 'hostile' areas with safety, crime, noise and pollution issues that need to be addressed. These are:

- along the 'causeway' of the A35 where the traffic speed and pollution from vehicles make the pedestrian or cyclist extremely uncomfortable. More space for pedestrians and cyclists, better lighting and greater traffic management could help reduce this unpleasantness;
- this hostile environment is extended to the service/parking areas of the two supermarkets. These are characterised by poor environmental and waste management quality and little surveillance or sense of enclosure;
- similar traffic and service related issues, where little surveillance takes place, occur around the Council Offices and Two Riversmeet Leisure Centre;
- this traffic related hostile environment continues to Fountain Way where the speed of traffic, compounded by the poor facilities for pedestrians to cross helps to sever Bargates from the High Street; and
- DrUITT Gardens is poorly managed and maintained. The result is an environment with many 'lurking' spaces. It is becoming a no-go area at night and an area that is increasingly avoided at certain times of the day. A major upgrading is required. This would involve some thinning out of trees, shrubbery and undergrowth, increasing sight lines, introducing lighting and appropriate landscape treatment. The community safety issues are exacerbated by the proximity of Sopers Lane and Wick Lane car parks and associated service yards.

4.19 Young people hang around Saxon Square creating unease among







Water frontage of the Civic Office car park



The Boathouse Café and Restaurant



The Old Mill Café on the Town Quay

older residents. Addressing the needs of the young people of Christchurch will be important in generating a sense of ‘well-being’ in the town. Appropriate facilities need to be considered and located in and around the centre.

- 4.20 The Strategy will aim to address these challenges by tackling the road issues on the A35 where it crosses through the Town Centre. The development opportunities proposed around the Sopers Lane and Wick Lane car parks present opportunities to give a community frontage to Druiitt Gardens.

Activities

- 4.21 A town is judged by its activities. Christchurch offers a range of activities but some of them are limited by physical constraints. Fig. 4.3 shows the main day time activities that take place along the High Street and adjacent streets. Most cafes and restaurants are located close to the Priory and on Castle Street. The potential to encourage more of these activities through policy and licensing changes could help create focal points of activity in the evening.

- 4.22 There is only limited ‘spill-out’ space – spaces where internal activities can spill out onto the pavement in the town centre. Such spaces are important for cafés and restaurants, but are also beneficial to other uses such as shops. Two ‘spill-out’ areas exist in the Town Centre:

- at Pound Lane; and
- at Boathouse Café and Old Mill Café.

- 4.23 Potential exists to increase such spaces at:

- Saxon Square;
- the junction of Castle Street and High Street – perhaps with the creation of a new ‘place’ or square;
- at the Boathouse Café, where additional space could be appropriate for sitting out and seasonal entertainment, although this will have to be treated with design sensitivity;
- at the King’s Arms Hotel, where the asset of the Castle and Mill Stream is underused, perhaps the creation of a pedestrian ‘friendly’ space to the front of the hotel; and
- along the River Avon, currently devoid of any non-boat related activity. The area fronting the Civic Offices car park would be an early opportunity to develop

accessible water frontage.

These spaces would add vitality to the centre.

- 4.24 This could be associated with improvements in the evening economy, and the encouragement of activity within the centre. Opportunities exist to capitalise on the success of the Regent Centre as an arts and cultural focus. Around this – and with a refurbished Druiitt Gardens, with its potential to include outdoor performance space – an evening economy of cafes and restaurants could be encouraged. It would be necessary to review the operation of local plan policies in order to achieve this aim.

Places Spaces and Links

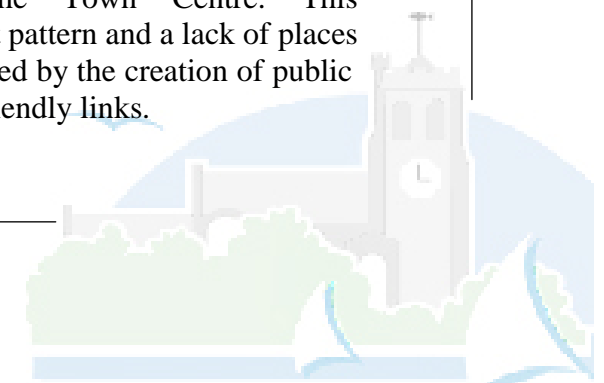
- 4.25 Figure 4.4 illustrates the existing and potential places, spaces and links. Two main spaces exist in the Town Centre; the Quomps and the Priory/Castle grounds. The audit indicates a number of other existing spaces. These are:

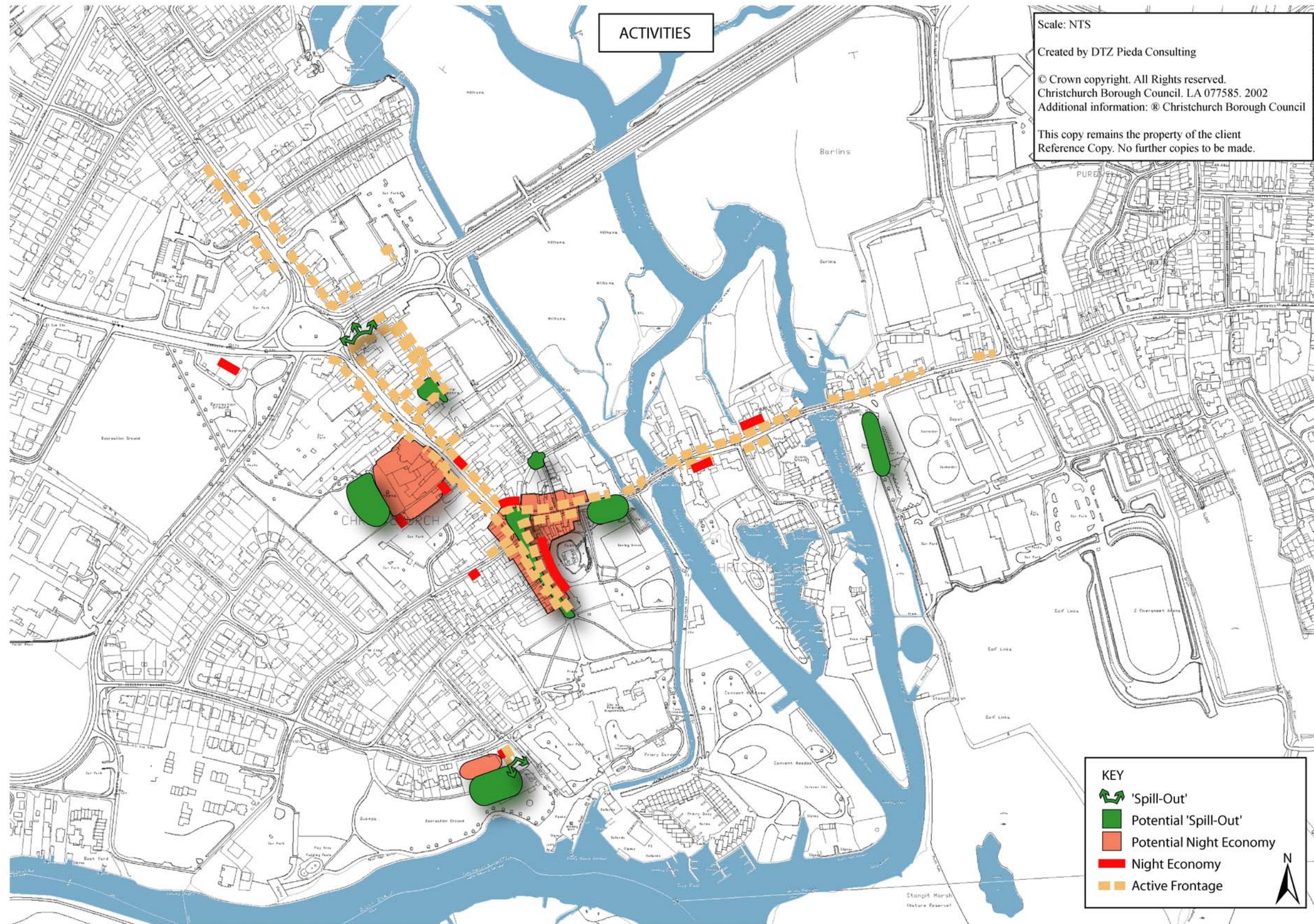
- at the Brewhouse Hole;
- Saxon Square;
- the Burial Ground;
- adjacent to Ducking Stool Lane;
- Druiitt Gardens; and
- at Avon Wharf, a small private space, part of Rossiter Quay Marina development.

- 4.26 In addition a number of “water spaces” exist:

- again, at the Brewhouse Hole;
- at the division of the River Avon as it goes around Rossiter Island;
- adjacent to Town Bridge;
- Priory Quay;
- Rossiter Quay Marina; and
- the boatyard south of the Council Offices.

- 4.27 The audit has clearly shown the lack of connection between different parts of the Town Centre. This dysfunctional movement pattern and a lack of places to sit out could be relieved by the creation of public spaces and pedestrian-friendly links.







Priory Quay



Saxon Square



New Zealand Gardens

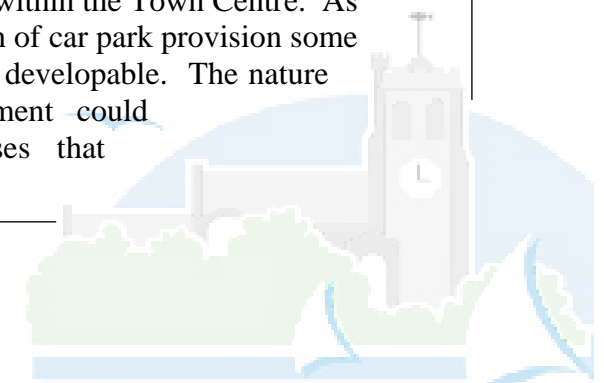
- 4.28 Such spaces and links are indicated in Fig 4.4 and could be located:
- along the Mill Stream linking the Brewhouse Hole to the north with Priory Quay to the south;
 - as part of a cross river connection between the Priory, Rossiter Quay and the gaswork/Leisure Centre site in the long term;
 - along the Creedy through the avenue of trees at New Zealand Gardens and the former Magistrates Court site linking the Brewhouse Hole with the Priory through a western route;
 - in the case of the Former Magistrates Court site it will be important to encourage pedestrian routes through the redeveloped site; and
 - through Druitt Gardens connecting the High Street to the fork in the River Avon.
- 4.29 These potential spaces could be augmented by a ‘water space’ at the gasworks—although an appropriate location has yet to be identified.
- 4.30 Key to the success of attracting and encouraging visitors to stay will be the idea of exploring the town. This requires the opening up of areas that have until now been inaccessible to the public. In this way a movement network emerges that allows people through a variety of pedestrian-friendly routes to uncover the town, discover its secrets and present an attractive and comfortable environment for residents and visitors.
- 4.31 Such a movement network would connect:
- Woodland Gardens at Druitt Gardens, suitable for ‘spilling-out’, outdoor performances and other civic events – especially if linked to the Library, Community Centre, and Regents Centre;
 - New Zealand Gardens – the focal point of arrival along the ‘causeway’. This is an opportunity for a major piece of contemporary civic landscape that would bring people to the town;
 - an improved Saxon Square with increased vitality provided by ground floor activities as well as new housing;
 - an environmentally enhanced Burial Ground and “Ducking Stool Square” at the junction of Ducking

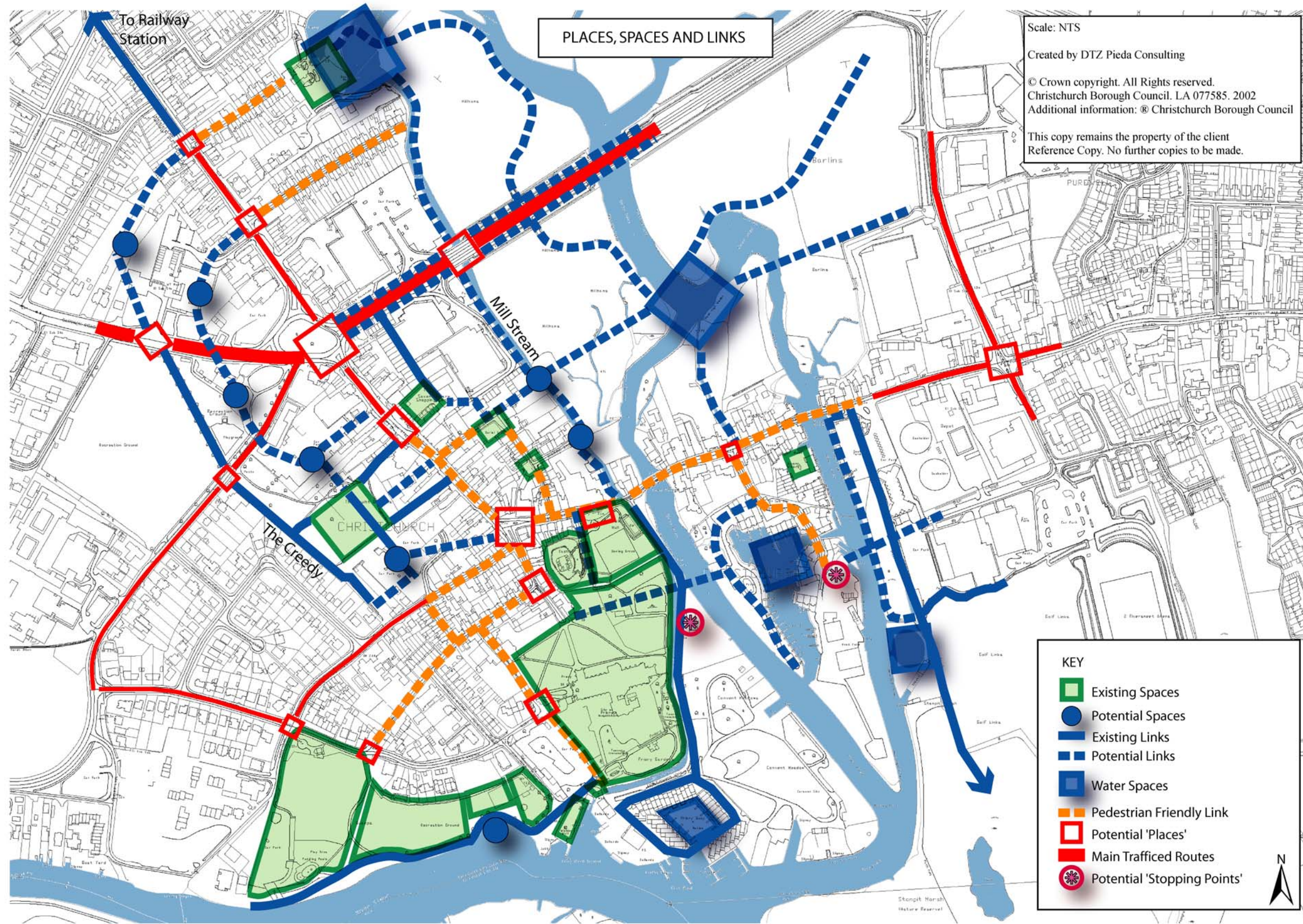
Stool Lane and Millham Street;

- the Castle and Constables House, with improved visual and physical linkages to the Priory, which form the town’s historic core; and
- an improved space at Brewhouse Hole.

Development Sites

- 4.32 The audit suggests a number of potential development opportunities. These are summarised below.
- 4.33 **The Magistrates Court site.** This is a major site with the potential for a range of uses. However, it has a southern boundary that could be affected by any reconfiguration of Fountain Way. Should the traffic and transport analysis indicate the opportunity to change the nature and form of the existing convoluted roundabout then this could release additional development land. The amount of developable land will depend on the agreed solution for improvements to Fountain roundabout. This site will need to be seen as part of Bargates and connected to both Bargates and New Zealand Gardens by at-grade pedestrian links. It may also be appropriate to create new vehicular links. These could involve acquiring shop frontage on Bargates. The junction offers a very important opportunity to create a bold new architectural gateway statement at the apex of the site.
- 4.34 **Supermarket sites.** The corollary of this is the creation of new gateway statements at the eastern entrance to the Town Centre. There are opportunities both at Co-op/Pioneer and Saxon Square/Somerfield for the reconfiguration of access points to enable new development to face onto Mill Stream and hide the service yards and parking areas from view. The potential to rationalise parking provision and locate additional car parking at the entry points to the Town Centre should be considered as part of a future access and car-parking study/strategy.
- 4.35 **Sopers Lane and Wick Lane car parks.** The whole of the western transition area between the rear of High Street properties and the early suburban development to the west needs improvement. Opportunities exist to create a new ‘heart’ for the town but also to develop underused land to enhance this area’s role within the Town Centre. As part of the rationalisation of car park provision some of the car parks may be developable. The nature and form of development could include a mix of uses that







Magistrates Court Site



Pound Lane



Sopers Lane and Druitts Gardens

together with the Library, Druitt Hall and Regents Centre, could become the cultural core of the town.

- 4.36 **Druitt Gardens.** The potential centrepiece of the Town Centre, this space could become an attractive woodland garden, a place for meeting people, having coffee, watching open-air performances and a link space between the various possible cultural and community activities that take place around the Gardens already. Associated with this would be the redevelopment of The Lanes. It could also become the second public promenade space with links to the Quomps which currently performs some of the cultural roles that a more central open space has to play.
- 4.37 **Bridge Street/Stony Lane South including Riversmeet Arena.** This site offers a major long-term opportunity for leisure-based development in association with residential and civic uses.
- 4.38 **Other sites.** Other development opportunities include:
- additional accommodation/tourism development at the King's Arms Hotel as part of the development of a new pedestrian 'friendly' place on Castle Street;
 - a series of small sites that could act as 'stopping points' along new pedestrian/tourist routes including the crazy golf site adjacent to the Boathouse Café, the triangular site adjacent to Convent Meadows and the northern part of Rossiter's Boat Yard; and
 - the Post Office, Arcade and Wick Lane car park areas could also support redevelopment proposals focussed around A1/A3 and residential uses.

