

Expert Solution Based Report



Table of Contents

About this report	2
Introduction.....	3
Information Gathering & Engagement	5
Findings & Analysis	6
Potential Solutions.....	7
Additional Support.....	39
Conclusion	39

About this report

The High Streets Task Force engaged with Cornwall Council as part of its support to St Austell, to consider how the town could benefit from expert support. As such, Cristina Refolo was prescribed as one of our Experts to provide help and guidance in the areas of place making and urban design.

As part of this process, we have undertaken a deeper exploration of the issues, providing a series of recommendations for improvement. These recommendations emerged following an analysis of existing place-plans, a number of conversations with key stakeholders and a site visit to the town that took place in September 2023.

This report provides a summary of the practical recommendations and technical guidance that, if applied, will help to unlock some of the barriers to transformation in your town.

On behalf of the High Streets Task Force, may I take this opportunity to thank all those who gave up their time to help inform this report and for the frank and positive manner throughout our engagement with your town.

It is clear that there are great opportunities in St Austell, with many strengths both in the town and in your people. As such, I hope that this report will help you to build on those strengths as you seek to transform your town.



Matt Colledge

High Streets Task Force Project Director

Introduction

St Austell is one of the largest towns in Cornwall and boasts excellent transportation connections to London and Newquay Airport. It is renowned for being the location of the well-known St Austell Brewery, as well as its proximity to popular attractions such as the Eden Project and The Lost Gardens of Heligan.

The impressive clay quarries surrounding St Austell stand as a testament to its history in China clay mining. The lucrative clay mining industry during the mid-19th and early 20th centuries drew a significant number of people to St Austell. Consequently, this influx of residents attracted additional local enterprises and commerce, generating employment opportunities that propelled St Austell to prominence as one of the primary commercial hubs in the region.

St Austell's High Street (Fore Street) and the Town Centre used to be a vibrant commercial hub but has witnessed a decline in recent years. Whilst there are multiple reasons behind a widespread national High Street decline, recent research has shown that the High Street is changing and is now becoming as much a social destination as a shopping area. This means that the urban landscape needs to be welcoming, as well as green and sustainable from a biodiversity point of view.

To help realise the aspiration to revitalise Fore Street, Cristina Refolo, acting as a HSTF Expert in green infrastructure, has identified the issues, challenges and opportunities facing the High Street and its surroundings, before proposing potential solutions that could lead to further development.

Cristina Refolo's expertise and suitability for the role are outlined below:

Cristina is a passionate Chartered Landscape Architect with a background in the social-economic sector. She has a degree in Political Science and an MSc in Local Economic Development - with a focus on socio-economic statistical modelling (London School of Economics). Further to this she has an MSc in Landscape Architecture. Her diverse experience includes working as a landscape architect for The Canal & River Trust and in private practice before setting up her own landscape architecture studio in 2013.

She is an assessor for Building with Nature (BwN), the first UK Green Infrastructure accreditation, and a visiting lecturer at Greenwich University. In 2020 she was presented with the Landscape Institute award for Excellence in Horticulture and Planting Design and the 2020 and 2022 Susdrain/Ciria SuDS awards, the latter for leading the co-design of a landscape-led masterplan that crucially integrates SuDS early on in the design process. Cristina has also acted as an advisor for the Islington Design Review Panel and champions the development of greener and more sustainable places where wildlife and human habitat can coexist harmoniously for the wellbeing of all.

Cristina is an Expert for the High Street Task Force in SuDS and biodiversity improvements with a broader remit relating to placemaking and urban design.

Cristina's strategy was to interact with Cornwall Council, St Austell Council and other stakeholders, and to do detailed research into the existing literature and press. This allowed her to identify various areas of intervention in the public realm. These involved promoting sustainability and green infrastructure and improving the overall aesthetic outlook of the High Street and Town Centre thus making it a more desirable place for residents and visitors.

Cristina's investigative process started with an overview of existing documentation and an initial online meeting with Cornwall Council to discuss and query specific issues. Inhouse GIS data mapping was further explored to understand the setting and conduct an analysis of the Town Centre from various green infrastructure, as well as socio-economic, perspectives. This process involved

consideration of 3D contour mapping, flooding events data, and index of deprivation data. This was followed by an online meeting and a town visit.

To understand the dynamics of the study area and capture its sense of place, Cristina walked around the Town Centre on her own for an afternoon. The next day, a well-organized Town Centre visit with the Council and other stakeholders allowed for specific zones to be further considered and explored. The lunch and afternoon meeting at the Council offices allowed for identification of areas of improvements, providing further testament of the great efforts that are being implemented to bring St Austell back to its former glory.

Before leaving St Austell, Cristina undertook a further visit to the town centre, quietly sitting in different areas and informally chatting with local shop keepers and residents. This allowed a better understanding of St Austell's Town Centre essence, its people, the overall vibe and Geni Loci to enable her to propose potential solutions that may benefit local people and the High Street.

Cornwall Council and St Austell Council were very open about the challenges of the Town Centre. Several positives as well as challenges were recognised. There is clearly an ongoing effort to identify areas for investment strategies where immediate intervention is needed.

Information Gathering & Engagement

The key point of contact with Cornwall Council was:

- David Rodda MBE – Economic Growth Policy and Intelligence Lead for Cornwall Council

David was responsible for organising an exceptional day of site visits and meetings. The morning was dedicated to walking around the Town Centre with a number of stakeholders, while the afternoon was organised with a brief lunch and then a seated meeting at the council's Offices with further patrons.

In addition to David Rodda, attendees to the site visit and meeting included (here arranged in first name alphabetical order):

- Anne Double – St Austell Central and Gover Councillor
- Annette Miller - St Austell BID Manager
- David Pooley – Town Clerk to St Austell
- Emily Kent - Head of Inclusive Growth and Skills at Cornwall Council
- Gavin Smith - Senior Planning Officer at Cornwall County Council
- Graham Potter - Estate Transformation Business Lead at Cornwall County Council
- Helen Toms - Community Safety Officer Cornwall County Council
- Mark Ellis - Strategic Planning Manager Cornwall County Council
- Matthew Vowels - Director of Capital Projects & Funding at Cornwall County Council
- Michael Hawes - Director of MeiLoc
- Rebecca Lyle - Cornwall County Council
- Richard Clemo - St Austell Central and Gover Councillor
- Steve Double - MP for St Austell and Newquay
- Tom French - Cornwall Councillor and St Austell Town Councillor

Several documents were shared, including presentations and strategy reports. Key documents included:

- *Vision Masterplan – St Austell Town Centre Revitalisation. Revitalisation Partnership - Summary Masterplan Document and Investment Plan, Autumn 2022*
- *Heritage Trails and Activities (St Austell Council November 2021)*
- *St Austell Townscape Heritage Scheme Application Pack (St Austell Council July 2018)*
- *St Austell Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan, 2017*
- *Discover St Austell App*
- *Discover St Austell website - <https://www.staustell.co.uk>*
- *St Austell Market House Options Appraisal and Viability Study, Purcell 2016*
- *Several more websites covering events in St Austell were assessed as well as recent local press articles.*



Findings & Analysis

To conduct a thorough analysis of challenges and opportunities for the High Street, I have separated St Austell town centre into 7 distinctive Zones/Topics. This is due to a need to simplify the current complexity and vastness of the issue at hand.

The Zones/Topics are as follows:

1. Market House
2. Fore Street Public Realm
3. SuDS and Downstream Impact
4. Lighting Improvements
5. Old Fire Station Premises
6. Performance Corner
7. Improvements Required for Access to Fore Street

Potential Solutions

Consideration & Background	Potential Solutions
<p>1. Market House.</p>  <p>Market House with adjoining outdoor public (Google Earth Pro)</p>	
<p>1.1 Historic Background</p>	<p>Market House was designed by Cope and Eales of London and constructed by Oliver Stone and Sons of Falmouth in 1844. It has a versatile layout that has accommodated various uses throughout its history. The granite used for the building was sourced from local quarries and transported by horse and cart. The front façade, probably made of Carn Grey granite from Trethurgy, is finely tooled and decorated, with the front steps also crafted from the same stone.</p> <div data-bbox="435 1444 1425 1809">  </div> <p>Images of Market House (Source: https://staustellmarkethouse.co.uk/about/#history/)</p> <p>Inside, underneath a vast vaulted ceiling, a section of the market was allocated for farm produce and with the butchers' market situated on the ground floor. The</p>

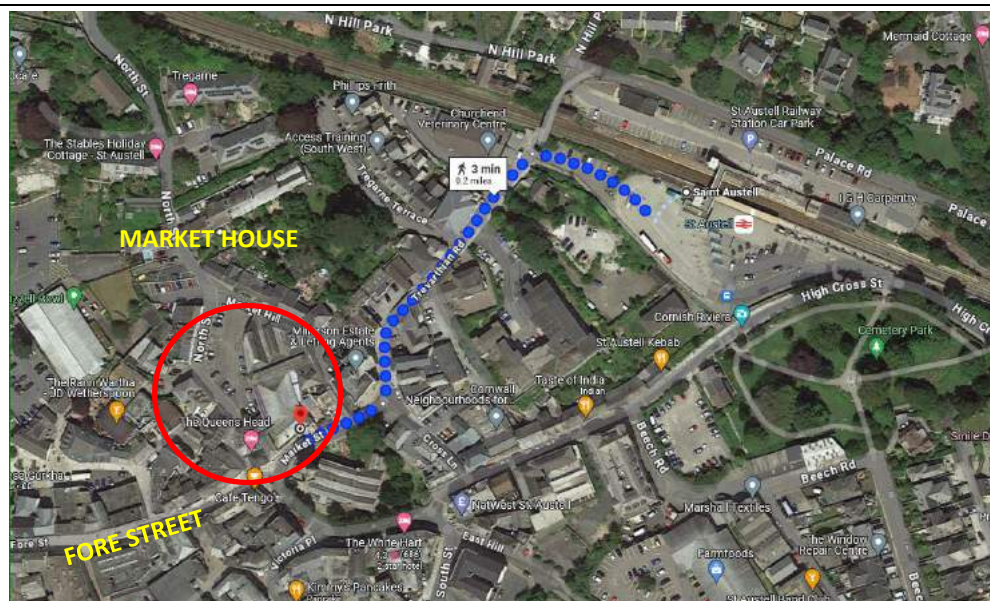
market boasted the largest freestanding timber roof space in the northern hemisphere at the time of construction. It was supported not by walls but by cast-iron poles. Using yellow pine beams over 50 feet long, it highlights the exceptional skills and craftsmanship of the local community. Stone stairways on either side of the butchers' market lead up to the first floor, where stalls for fruit, vegetables, poultry, butter, and general dealers were once positioned. A vintage display board of fees can still be seen above the stairwell, enhancing the historical charm of Market House.



Market House indoors showing the timber roof and cast-iron poles. The arched doorway that has been blocked up is visible at the rear – marked on the photo with a red circle. (Photo from site visit).

1.2 Ease of Access

Upon exploring St Austell Town Centre (both online and in person), it quickly became apparent that the Grade II* Listed Market House significantly contributes to shaping the identity of the town. Positioned close to the Grade I Listed Holy Trinity Church and only a short 3-minute stroll from the Central Station, it offers a unique opportunity to serve as a year-round focal point for locals and tourists alike. It creates a connection hub linking the various tourist attractions around St Austell. Its proximity to Fore Street could make it an important footfall generator for the High Street.



A Google Maps image above displays the walking distance between Market House and St Austell Station, which takes approximately 3 minutes. It is important to note that the route is not wheelchair accessible, as is the case with many roads in St Austell, due to its topographical location. However, the 1:11 gradient is easily manageable for pedestrians. To ensure the safety of visitors, a clear directional movement can be indicated on the ground or by use of bollards, guiding visitors from the station to Market House along a secure path.

1.3 Potential Usage

A multi-community asset since 1844, Market House has been valuable to multiple communities. It has been overseen by dedicated local volunteers (St Austell Market House CIC) and a committed group of tenants, creatives and participants.

Various events and initiatives are consistently being organised to bring life to the vast interior space. These include a range of ticketed musical performances, generously sponsored by Keltek Brewery. Additionally, the space is frequently utilised for community gatherings centred around crafts, pottery workshops and Mad for Miniatures events.

(Source: (<https://staustellmarkethouse.co.uk/about/>))

Unfortunately, the building has deteriorated significantly over the years and requires immediate attention. To facilitate the refurbishment and transformation of Market House, an extensive market analysis was carried out in 2016 (*St Austell Market House Options Appraisal and Viability Study, Purcell 2016*). A wide range of potential uses were examined, including a mix of viable options such as residential units, flexible office spaces, a venue for events and a food hall.

Revitalising a High Street requires encouraging a sense of pride and belonging within the local community. One solution that could achieve this is the introduction of a food hall, featuring local artisan food stalls. This concept not only offers a variety of family-friendly dining options at affordable prices, but also serves as a convenient stop for families travelling to popular attractions such as the Eden Project or The Lost Gardens of Heligan. By providing affordable choices, the

food hall can become a central meeting point and the use of playful design can attract families with children.



Above: Borough Market in London. Image below: example of outdoor seating attracting lunchtime visitors.

Creating a child-friendly attraction is a foolproof method of boosting visitor numbers. Moreover, this space could also advertise nearby attractions like Pentewan Beach (easily accessible by bus or train), Pinetum Gardens, The Clay Pits, Trebah Gardens, The National Maritime Museum, Wheal Martin, and The St Austell's Brewery. Many of these attractions offer joint memberships with discounts or free visits during specific months. This could be promoted at Market House, serving as a central hub for these different destinations. In return, a mutual agreement could be established with these centres to promote St Austell's Town Centre and Market House, providing exclusive deals, exciting treasure hunts, and desirable prizes. By engaging both adults and children, treasure hunts have proven to be highly effective in influencing movement and creating a lively atmosphere.

The Food and Artisan market would be expected to enhance the local community's sense of pride. Moreover, the venue has the potential to host private events and weddings, increasing revenue. According to the market research conducted in

**1.4 Historic
Hidden SuDS
Reservoir**

2016, a food hall was identified as a popular and flexible choice. (*St Austell Market House Options Appraisal and Viability Study, Purcell 2016*).

The building's rich history, boasting the largest freestanding timber roof space in the northern hemisphere at the time of construction, makes it a must-see destination. To further enhance its appeal, a dynamic directional lighting scheme could be commissioned to highlight the beauty of the roof.

Another fascinating feature of the building is the cast-iron poles, which not only support the roof but also function as an historic and sustainable urban drainage system (SuDS).



View of Upper Hall taken during site visit demonstrating the seamless integration of the hidden rainwater downpipe system with the structural elements of the building.

At the back of the gallery, aligned with Market Hill to the north, there was a section that served as a fire station. Rainwater from the roof was channelled through concealed downpipes within the supporting cast iron poles and stored in an underground chamber. This rainwater was utilised in the 1840s in a mobile fire cart with a hand pump, drawn by a horse named Margaret. The intriguing tale of the fire brigade and Margaret the horse has the potential to be a captivating story for children. It is worth noting that this SuDS feature of the 1800s is historically significant and deserves attention, particularly in the current climate crisis.

The rise in flooding risk has led to the widespread adoption of SuDS and rainwater harvesting in UK property developments. Water companies are actively supporting and funding rainwater systems. Uncovering a hidden 1800s rainwater harvesting system within Market House's architectural pillars is a significant find for St Austell, deserving of both local and national recognition.

To show this feature off, a small glass panel on the floor of the hall could be installed to view the water feature below. Ensuring the preservation of its history and the structural integrity of the ground would be essential to such a project. The addition of LED lights could help accentuate its unique characteristics. There is an opportunity to approach South West Water to sponsor this project to promote sustainable urban drainage systems (SuDS) and rainwater harvesting initiatives. This historic system could be restored to working order and provoke national architectural and industrial interest.

1.5 The Outdoor Space

The outdoor area measures around 138sqm and is located to the west of the building. It holds significant opportunity in the redevelopment of Market House. This south and west facing space, which currently functions as a Council car park, offers a splendid view of the Holy Trinity Church Tower. This space could be made accessible from Market House by opening up the grand arched entrance that is presently closed off. The existing façade showcases a striking wall of rugged stones, enhancing the area's appeal and potential.



View of the exterior of Market House - existing large outdoor space currently used as a car park.



View of Market House from the car park showing the currently blocked up arched doorway. A detail of the variety of stones and blocked up openings which hold a deep connection to the area's rich history can be seen to the right.

The natural texture, patterns, and colours of the façade can be accentuated by environmentally friendly LED uplighters (Image 4), highlighting the textures of the stones and creating a visually appealing ambience.



(Image 4)

During the site visit, it was brought to my attention that a significant challenge for the Market House exterior space is the steep slope at the rear and the issue of providing level access to the currently blocked up arched doorway. The GIS Contour Lidar assessment image displayed below showcases the contours in the vicinity, indicating a direct path to the arched doorway along a contour, enabling level access from point D to point E (Image 6). Therefore, with regards to Part M accessibility regulations, the rear entry would meet the requirements if an individual was to be dropped off by a vehicle, or if there is a designated disabled parking spot close to point E on the map.

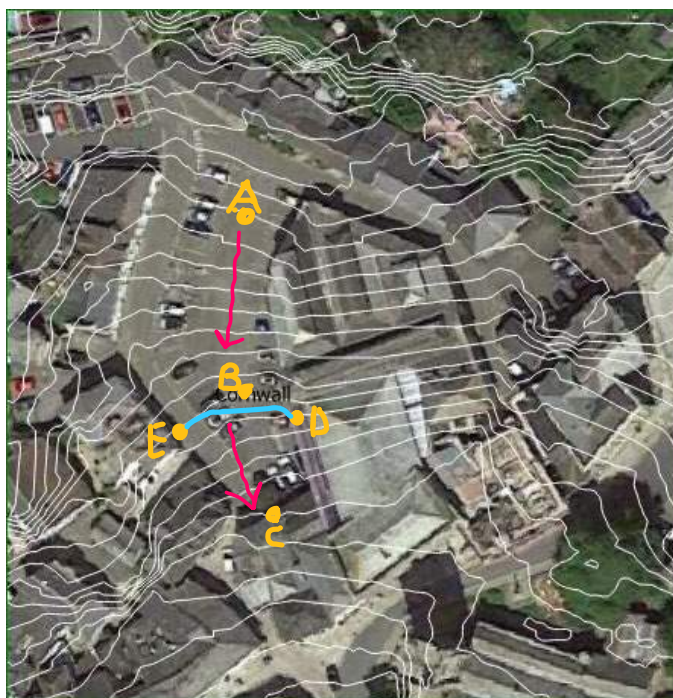


Image 6. View of the contours and access points in the existing car park

There is a 4.5m level difference between Point A and Point B in the outdoor area, creating a unique opportunity for a south-facing terraced seating and dining space. Planting on these terraces could be inspired by the Lost Gardens of Heligan or the Mediterranean area at the Eden Project. The introduction of artistic planting in this terraced area would massively enhance the overall design and atmosphere of the space. The sloping nature of the ground lends itself to a water feature which could tie in with the SUDS feature within the building.



Examples of terraced public realm spaces with social dining areas.

High Streets across the UK are increasingly offering outdoor spaces for people to enjoy eating and socialising. St Austell stands out as an ideal location for this trend due to its mild climate. More outdoor cafés, dining areas, and social activity spaces would be hugely beneficial in St Austell.

However, considering the monthly rainfall, it would be wise to have a flexible canopy system (with potential heating to encourage all year use) in place to partially cover these spaces. This way, people can still enjoy the outdoors even on rainy days.



These graphs compare the average monthly temperature and rainfall of St Austell (Purple), London (Green), and Leicester (Red) (Source: WeatherSpark).

Additionally, a rain garden in the area at the bottom of the slope could effectively capture stormwater, aligning with SUDS principles and establishing a connection with the 1800s SUDS system. This would contribute to sustainable water management and enhance the overall appeal of the outdoor spaces.



Map showing the areas at risk of surface water flooding overlaid on Google Maps. The rain garden location (Green Circle) at the lower south end of Market House public realm would capture stormwater at its source and prevent flooding further downhill.

The lower southern section could be used as a temporary outdoor stage area, designed to host events during festivals. The proposed terraced seating system would create an amphitheatre-like atmosphere.

These events could feature literary discussions or theatrical productions, drawing in a sophisticated audience from St Austell and surrounding areas. The uplit textured stone and arched entranceway would further enhance the dramatic impact of the historic wall against the new stage setup. When not hosting events, the stage could serve as a space for food or artisan stalls.



A stage set against the backdrop of historic buildings and stones creates a unique atmosphere for a literary festival, adding to the charm and warmth of the setting as shown above, in Largo Porta Alfonsina, Otranto, Italy.

**1.6 Further Access
from Priory Car
Park**

The construction of a pedestrian pathway linking Priory Car Park with Market House would enhance access. This proposal was previously reviewed by the Council and was a topic of conversation during the on-site inspection. The pathway could traverse a section of the existing grassy area, as depicted in the accompanying images. The ownership status of the vacant plot is unknown to me.



View towards 'A' in Image above

**Consideration
& Background**

Potential Solutions

2. Fore Street Public Realm



Image: Fore Street and Surrounding Area (Google Earth Pro)

**2.1 Historic
Background**

The population of the town has grown from around 12,000 in 1921 to around 21,000 in 2021. St Austell now stands as the largest town in Cornwall.



An historic image of a busy Fore Street

**2.2 Local
Opportunities**

St Austell was once a bustling market town. Farmers would gather here with their families on Tuesdays for the cattle market in the morning, have lunch in town and then maybe spend the afternoon shopping. Fridays were market days, with local farmers bringing their produce to Market House for sale. Local shops extended their hours to 8am to 7pm to take advantage of the increased foot traffic. This demonstrates how one event can have a huge beneficial impact on the town's economy.

Fore Street is conveniently situated a short walk from both the train station in one direction and the council-owned Priory Car park in the other. The area boasts numerous listed buildings, adding to the charm of the High Street and the town centre. Recently, the Council initiated a comprehensive survey of these listed buildings, and they have also developed the 'Discover St Austell Heritage Trail' app, which can be easily accessed on mobile phones.



Impressive views along Fore Street looking towards The Grade I Listed Holy Trinity church.



GIS map showing the many Listed buildings in the Town Centre

Another heritage application could integrate augmented reality technology or a mobile phone slider function to show before and after images. Using QR codes within an app, the history of the High Street and Market House could be revealed.



Example of a sliding tool showing before and after images.

2.3 Footfall issues

Recently, the Town Centre including Fore Street have experienced a decrease in foot traffic and shopping activity. A notable revival of enthusiasm and commerce was observed in 2018 after the renovation of Market House's facade and the opening of new shops. Unfortunately, a mix of Covid-19 and a rise in antisocial behaviour (ASB) has once more led to a decline in foot traffic, resulting in the closure of a significant number of shops.

Several measures, such as the BID and enhanced support, have been implemented to address the ASB problem, which are showing signs of being effective. Additionally, there has been a focus on policing the main shopping streets. However, Cornwall Council is currently facing a major challenge in finding suitable housing for homeless families. As a result, various town centres, like St Austell, have been identified as suitable relocation areas.

While Cornwall Council's commendable efforts to provide housing for the homeless should be recognised, it can have negative consequences for the main shopping areas, especially if these relocation areas are near the centre. This placement has resulted in the Town Centre becoming less appealing due to issues such as disruptive behaviour and substance abuse. These issues have a negative effect during daylight but can have an even greater impact at night. Shops and restaurants are reluctant to open after dark, or later in the evening, and this significantly impacts the local night-time economy. Hopefully, with an increase in foot traffic, more effective policing and better integration and job opportunities for the recently relocated community, the problem will continue to be addressed.

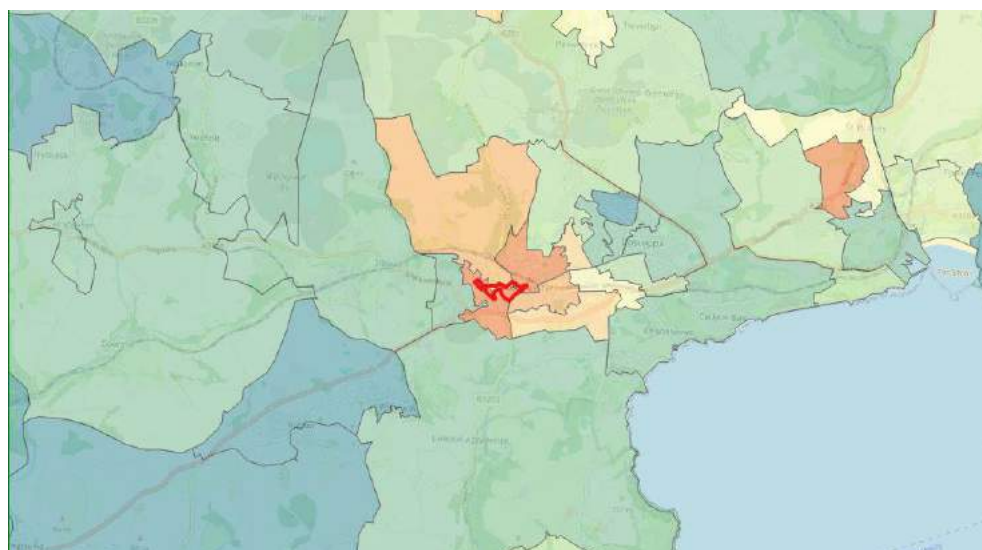
2.4 A mini survey

During my stroll in St Austell, I engaged in conversations with local shop owners and residents to gather their thoughts on the Town Centre and potential improvements. There is clearly a strong sense of pride in St Austell and a shared aspiration to restore the centre of St Austell into a vibrant town centre. Challenges such as anti-social behaviour make it tough for independent establishments to

operate beyond 4pm, resulting in several closed shops. Larger National Chains seem to be the only ones who can operate safely at these times. The cafe at Market House and independent shops on Fore Street are commendable, yet drawing consistent foot traffic and enhancing the evening economy remains a challenge, especially with nearby tourist attractions like Charlestown.

The 'Safer Austell' Community Safety Officers are making significant contributions through a variety of interventions. However, a potential approach to foster a renewed sense of pride for St Austell among the local newcomers could involve offering incentives for small-scale entrepreneurial ventures. These ventures could initially begin in market stalls and, if successful, transition to subsidised shop premises. Such an initiative could facilitate integration within the new community, generate employment opportunities, encourage self-regulation, and encourage a sense of empowerment.

The latest figures from the IMD (Index of Multiple Deprivation) in 2019 indicate that the most deprived segment of the population is clustered around the old town area, which is typical of small towns. The key is to engage the surrounding community and turn St Austell Town Centre into an attraction for various community groups. Fore Street could be designated as solely for independent shops, while chain stores could be allowed in other areas of the town. This strategy has been very effectively applied by Islington Council on Upper Street in North London. This might help to attract more affluent visitors to the Town Centre.



Index of Multiple Deprivation (2019). The red boundary is St Austell's town centre. Darker orange indicates most deprived decile. Darker blue indicates least deprived decile.

An alternative approach to utilising the vacant shops in St Austell Town Centre might be to transform it into a thriving artistic hub, showcasing both emerging talents and renowned artists. Currently, there are various initiatives in place to temporarily repurpose these empty spaces for art exhibitions and workshops. One notable company that facilitates this service is Hypha Studios, which collaborates with landlords, councils, and creatives to unlock these spaces and attract visitors.

	<p>This not only revitalises and rejuvenates the High Street but also provides artists and artisans with a platform to display their work and offer skill-based workshops. This could attract visitors from the higher socio-economic brackets, thereby generating positive spillover effects for neighbouring shops. This concept is reminiscent of the historical influence the cattle market used to have on Fore Street, when shops stayed open longer on Market Days to capitalise on the increase in footfall.</p> <p>To learn more about Hypha Studios, you can watch their video on YouTube.</p> <p>https://youtu.be/W8xKB8SfPkA <u>On the Panel - Hypha Studios</u></p> <p>As stated by Hypha Studios: <i>‘With 40 locations across the country offering free space to local creatives, Hypha Studios is on a mission to regenerate High Streets through art and culture-themed community events. In addition to supporting artists, Hypha’s model has proven popular with commercial property owners looking for ways to keep their assets in use, attract footfall, and connect with communities’.</i></p>
2.5 Alternative Use of the High Street	<p>It should be emphasized that Hypha Studio carefully selects artists and artisans who align with the interests of the wider community, thereby attracting the appropriate audience and specific demographics. Their work should not be confused with reintegrating those with complex lifestyles back into the economy.</p> <p>They also possess the ability to effectively communicate and understand the language of artists. These initiatives can contribute to a cultural revitalisation of town centres. For instance, if 30 artists exhibit their work, drawing in 500 individuals who also enjoy a drink at the opening night, they may subsequently choose to visit a local restaurant, resulting in additional benefits for the night-time economy. Moreover, the recent improvement of the train connectivity can further enhance this connection and increase foot traffic.</p> <p>This approach can be likened to kickstarting and activating the economy, similar to post-war Keynesian theories, where demand is created and the subsequent ripple effects multiply naturally over time.</p>
2.6 Homes in the High Street	<p>The main street has also transformed into a potential housing option on the upper levels, also leading to the much-desired increased foot traffic. It is essential to cater the housing towards professionals to maintain a lively atmosphere and make it an attractive residential area, ultimately fostering self-regulation and potentially decreasing anti-social behaviour. The appeal of living in downtown St Austell could rise with the enhancements to the railway network.</p>
2.7 A Coordinated Street Design	<p>The charming narrow street features attractive Listed buildings and offers a captivating view of the Grade I Trinity Church tower at the end of Fore Street, creating a warm and inviting public space. To enhance the street's appeal, a cohesive design language for the street furniture could be developed, drawing inspiration from old street images and the area's ceramic heritage. By</p>

incorporating this design language into signage, lighting, and planters, a unified aesthetic can be achieved. Building upon the analysis already provided in The Cornwall Shopfront Design Guide 2017, further street enhancements can be implemented. Additionally, integrating seating areas with planters outside cafes could provide an opportunity for attractive dining areas, fostering a pleasant and sociable atmosphere while introducing artistic planting to the street.



An historic image of a busy Fore Street. Right: detail of the lighting design and signage.

Historical pictures can serve as a source of inspiration for the design, as seen in other shopping streets across the country. For example, in Belgravia, London, the coordinated planters overflowing with lush vegetation create a luxurious and inviting atmosphere. Similarly, the coordinated design of vintage shop fronts with reintroduced lighting in Dalston, London, has made a noticeable impact on the street scene, attracting a different group of shoppers and new customers for the new restaurants.



Planters and outdoor seating in Belgravia, London



56 Dalston Lane, before (2010) and after (2023) showing a coordinated design theme and approach, featuring an elegant antique style. The pedestrian paving has been widened to encourage footfall and outdoor dining.

2.8 Browsability of the High Street

'Browsability' is an adjective defined in the Collins Dictionary as : *'able to be browsed. The long sloping high street was lined with browsable stalls buzzing with activity. Designed for browsing'*.

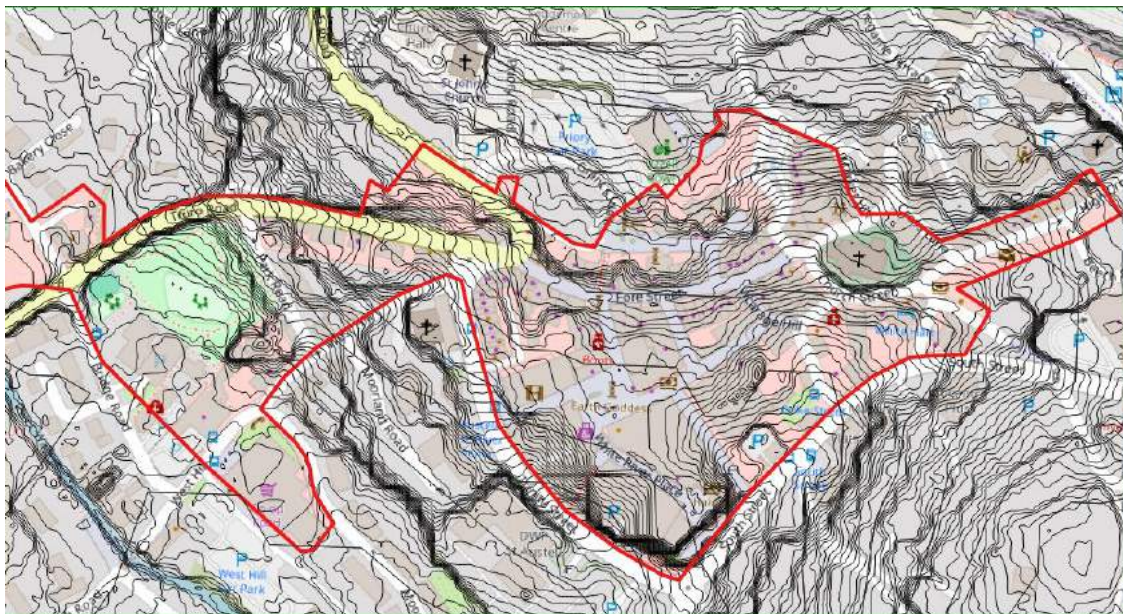
This is the adjective that we should aspire for all our High Streets.

High streets should be planned with the intention of encouraging browsing. They should serve as a gathering place for socialising and meeting others, while also offering the enjoyable experience of exploring various shops that regularly update their merchandise. Additionally, incorporating captivating window displays, possibly featuring the work of local artists, can further engage customers. By enticing individuals to enter shops solely for the purpose of browsing, there is an immediate opportunity for a potential sale.

Browsability encourages an extended interaction with the High Street, increasing the likelihood of shoppers wanting to revisit soon.



Window displays from website: <https://www.lightspeedhq.co.uk/blog/retail-window-displays/>

Consideration & Background	Potential Solutions
<h3>3. SuDS and Downstream Impact</h3> <div></div> <p>Contours mapped over the Town Centre – GIS Lidar Data</p>	
<h4>3.1 SuDS from the uphill town</h4>	<p>St Austell's historic Town Centre is situated atop a hill, making it fairly safe from surface water flooding. Nevertheless, the rainwater that cascades from this elevated position has a significant influence on the valley below, flowing through St Austell's River and eventually reaching Pentewan beach and the charming fishing village of Mevagissey. Renowned for its scenic beauty, Pentewan beach is a popular destination for water sports enthusiasts and swimmers alike.</p> <p>The topography of St Austell, as depicted in Image 3.1, showcases the St Austell River and its connection to Pentewan beach. The areas highlighted in magenta on the map indicate a heightened risk of flooding, as determined by the Environment Agency Fluvial Model Flood Zone 3. This flooding occurs due to the impact of surface water from rainfall on the surrounding land and river, particularly the delta at the base of the river. Such flooding can have adverse effects on the water quality in Pentewan.</p> <p>To tackle this issue, it is crucial to address all urban runoff, including water from roofs and downpipes. This will help eliminate contamination by surface pollution of the water that flows into watercourses and the sea. This mixture may contain high concentrations of nutrients and organic matter, which can accumulate during rapid runoff across the land. This results in excessive growth of microbes in watercourses, which, in turn, reduces oxygen levels and harms invertebrates and fish, disrupting the entire ecosystem. St Austell has a particular problem here due to the prevalence of impermeable hard surfaces on a significant slope, which encourages rapid runoff.</p>

Therefore, it is recommended to capture rainwater at its source, particularly in densely populated urban areas like St Austell town centre. This can be accomplished by the implementation of nature-based SUDS solutions such as attenuation ponds, rain gardens, green roofs and bioretention planters connected to roof downpipes.



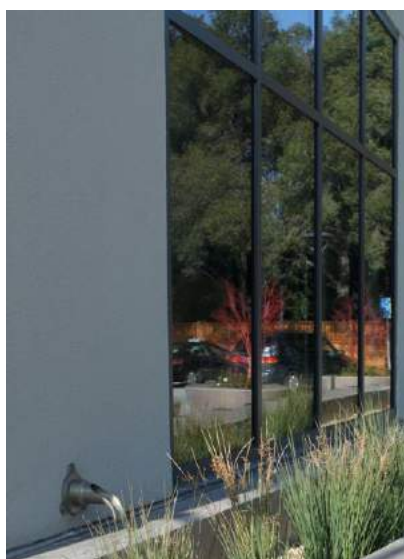
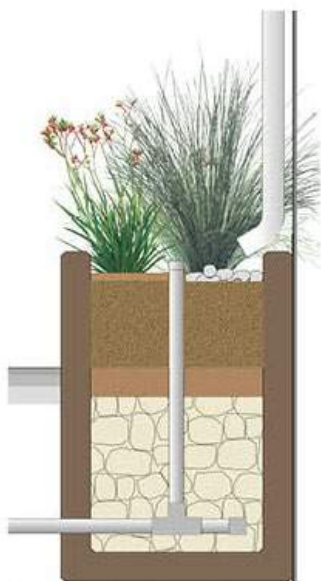
Image 3.1. The Environment Agency fluvial model overlay, with Site Contours overlaid by the author, depicts the probability of flooding in St Austell's River using historical data (High (Magenta), Medium (Dark Blue), Low Risk (Light Blue))




The St Austell River delta can be observed on the right side of Pentewan beach.

**3.2 St Austell SuDS
planters**

The entire town centre could be equipped with SuDS bioretention planters that are connected to roof downpipes. These planters can be designed with a specific theme for each street, such as an antique feel for Fore Street. Additionally, various artists could contribute to the design by incorporating the clay heritage of the area. The planters would not only add variety and artistic quality to the town, but also complement the historic SuDS system of Market House. This unique feature could attract more visitors to the town centre, transforming it into a destination beyond just a shopping area. To further enhance interest and footfall, activities such as a treasure hunt with prizes for children could be organized.

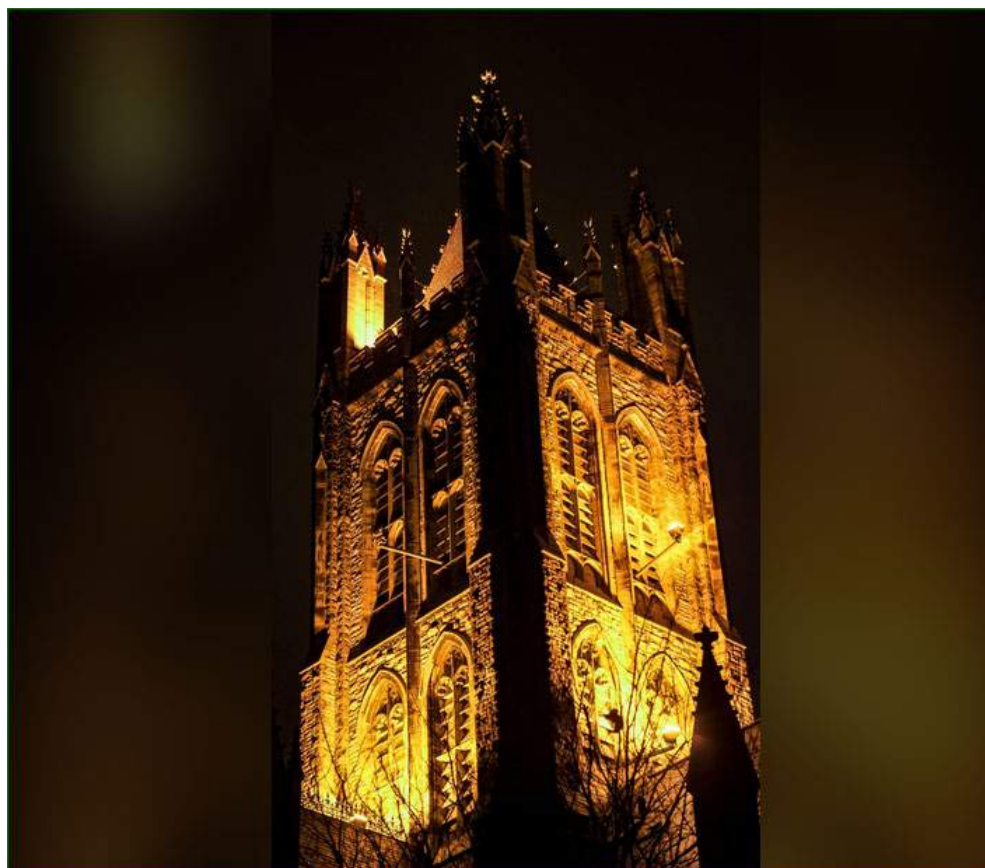


On the left side, R-LA's graphic depicts a standard bioretention planter that can only be installed above ground. On the right side, there is a physical example of the planter.

Considerations & Background	Potential Solutions
<p>4. Lighting Improvements</p>  <p>Image Courtesy of Tony Howell</p>	
<p>4.1 Lighting in Fore Street</p>	<p>Enhancing the lighting in the Town Centre and other important areas can contribute to boosting the nighttime economy and enhancing the feeling of security.</p> <p>The lighting arrangements in Fore Street could be carefully crafted to harmonize with the street's overall agreed aesthetic. It would be fitting to incorporate elements reminiscent of the antique style from the street's vibrant past when Market House and the clay industry flourished. However, it is essential for the designs also to consider modern methods of safeguarding the light fixtures against potential acts of vandalism.</p> <div data-bbox="459 1469 805 1935" data-label="Image"> </div> <div data-bbox="879 1469 1385 1935" data-label="Image"> </div> <p>A historic images of lighting features in Fore Street</p>

4.2 Lighting the Church Tower

Installing soft ambience and environmentally sensitive lighting would enhance the visibility of the Grade I Listed Holy Trinity Church tower at the end of various streets, such as Fore Street, transforming it into a historical and stunning focal point. The thoughtfully designed lighting would emphasize the detailed stonework of the 15th Century Tower, featuring intricate sculptures of figures, animals, and gargoyles crafted from the local honey-coloured Pentewan Stone and granite. This transformation would result in striking view-points from multiple streets.



Example of a lit-up church tower with dramatic effect, highlighting the historic features.

4.3 St Austell Viaduct – historic opportunity

When considering the overall Town Centre experience, it is important to look beyond the immediate High Street. The entrance to any Town Centre plays a crucial role in establishing a sense of place and arrival. In the case of St Austell, the viaduct on Bodmin Road is a significant part of the journey by car to the town centre. Originally designed by Isambard Kingdom Brunel, the St Austell viaduct spans the Trenance valley, located half a mile west of St Austell railway station. Standing at 115 feet high and 720 feet long with 10 piers, it showcases an impressive engineering feat. Although a new stone viaduct replaced Brunel's design in 1899, his original piers still stand as a testament to his ingenuity. By utilising before and after images through a slider and incorporating augmented reality, there is an opportunity to attract engineering students to the Town Centre and as a positive consequence increase footfall. This approach also serves to celebrate the rich history of St Austell and the various features that foster a sense of pride in its residents.



How the St Austell viaduct might have originally looked with the stone piers and timber supports (the historic photo represents Truro's old viaduct).



How the St Austell Viaduct looks today. The original Brunel piers are still visible.

**4.4 St Austell Viaduct
– Lighting and
Sense of Arrival**

The viaduct in St Austell serves as a welcoming gateway from Bodmin Road, providing access to the main car park, Priory Park. As it is the first impression visitors have when entering the town centre, it is crucial that the viaduct receives proper maintenance, especially in the vicinity of the road. To further enhance its aesthetic appeal, the addition of night lighting would transform it into a prominent landmark. By utilizing environmentally friendly LED lighting, various colour options could be implemented to commemorate special events in St Austell Town Centre, similar to the Glenfinnan Viaduct in Scotland.



How the Viaduct looks today. The old Brunel piers still visible.



Glenfinnan Viaduct lit up in support of NHS during lockdown.

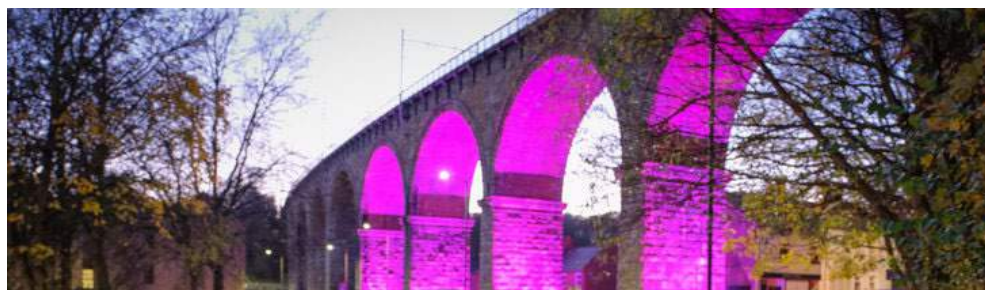


Alternative lighting for Glenfinnan Viaduct.

4.5 Artistic Lighting Installation

The lighting scheme for St Austell's viaduct has the potential to become a captivating element of a public art installation. An example of a very successful similar endeavour is the Lumiere festival. The festival in Durham City featured artist Vicky Hay's Arclight, a mesmerising colour-changing installation, which adorned the railway arches. This remarkable artwork was just one of many that enticed a staggering 240,000 visitors to the city during the four-day festival. With

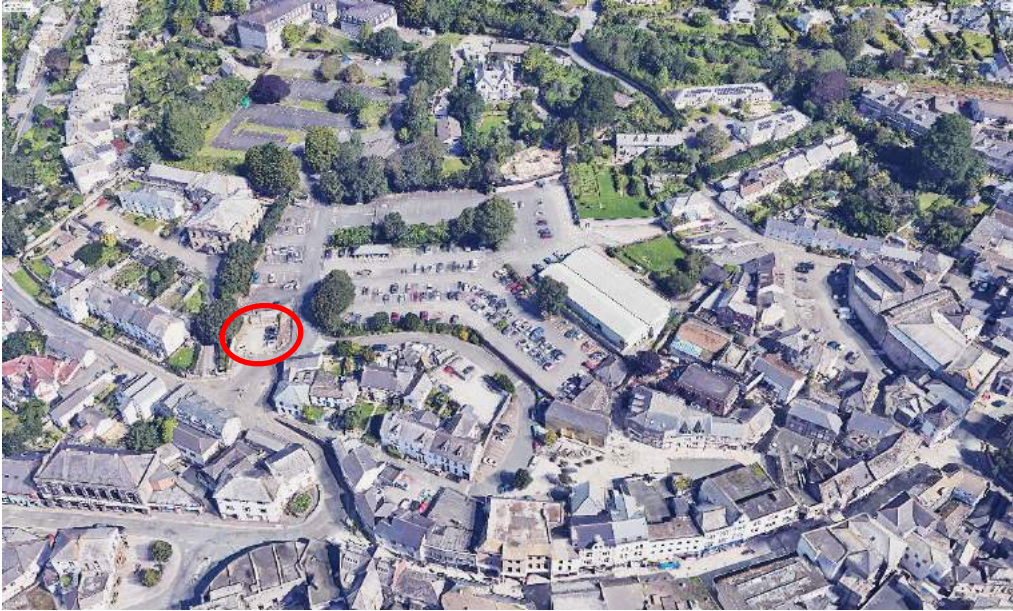

its picturesque views of the valley and numerous historic landmarks, St Austell has a fantastic opportunity to host a similar festival of light that would undoubtedly attract visitors and encourage them to visit the town centre and explore the surrounding area providing a much-needed boost for retail, leisure and hospitality.



Railway arches art installation in Durham

**4.6 Environmentally
Friendly Lighting**

It is important for all lighting to be environmentally friendly LEDs to ensure there is no disruption to wildlife. An example of this is the eco-friendly LED lighting installed on the Samuel De Champlain Bridge in Canada, which not only transformed the structure into an iconic emblem, but also effectively minimized light pollution and glare. The project team focussed on keeping the light confined to the bridge itself, rather than allowing it to spill over into the surrounding environment. Through collaboration with the manufacturer and rigorous light pollution studies, a perfect balance was achieved, minimising the project's environmental impact. Furthermore, careful consideration was given to disruptions to wildlife, particularly during seasonal bird migrations. Selecting appropriate hues and ensuring the luminaires met specific durability and performance standards was crucial to the success of this project.

Considerations & Background	Potential Solutions
<p>5. The Old Fire Station Premises</p> 	
<p>5.1 The Old Fire Station</p>	<p>The former location of the old fire station now stands vacant. This is in a prime location on a key access route to the town centre. Priory Car Park is adjacent for vehicular access to this site, and it is just a short distance from Fore Street. The sloping topography and strategic location presents a unique opportunity to develop a double storey theatre / workshop on the site. This would be a major cultural boon to St Austell and would significantly increase footfall in the town centre.</p>  <p><i>Original location of the old Fire Station.</i></p> <p>The theatre complex could include a community artistic centre with circus performances and workshops. An excellent illustration of this concept is Jackson Lane (The Home of Contemporary Circus) in North London, known for being a cultural hub and a major proponent of contemporary circus arts in the UK (https://www.jacksonslane.org.uk/about-us/).</p> <p>Jackson Lane provides accessible performance spaces for artists, as well as various educational programs and classes. Performers can utilise the public</p>

performance areas for ticketed events and make use of the free of charge training rooms for practice sessions. The centre also offers a diverse range of educational and training opportunities to further enrich the community.





Images 2. Jackson Lane Circus (from Jackson Lane website)

5.2 Wall of Kindness

The café also features a Wall of Kindness where visitors can participate by either purchasing or taking a voucher. To contribute, buy a voucher and pin it to the wall, where someone less fortunate can use it. These vouchers range from a cup of coffee to a slice of cake or a sandwich. Guests in need and with low means are then encouraged to choose a voucher from the Wall of Kindness and redeem it at the counter, no questions asked. Additionally, the venue is available for private events or weddings to increase the revenue.





Considerations & Background	Potential Solutions
<p>6. Performance Corner</p> 	
<p>6.1 A public performance corner</p>	<p>Biddicks Court underwent a significant transformation in recent years, boasting an impressive ceramic mosaic, artistic seating, upgraded railings, and engraved public art across the area. A popular local café and bar can be found in one corner, open daily until midnight. Biddicks Court serves as a crucial connecting route between Fore Street and Priory Car Park.</p> <p>Situated in a corner of the Court is an elevated platform equipped with stairs and railings, previously utilised for reaching an ATM machine.</p>  <p><i>Biddicks Court peculiar, stepped corner</i></p> <p>The area could be transformed into a public art corner and a small outdoor stage, possibly in partnership with St Austell's Arts Centre, known for its various youth</p>

programs. Involving young locals in performing arts could draw in families and tourists, and as a positive consequence increase the footfall for local cafes, restaurants, and stores nearby.



Image from St Austell's Arts Theatre - <http://www.staustellartstheatre.org.uk/whatson/>

Considerations & Background	Potential Solutions
<p>7. Improvements Required for Access to Fore Street</p> 	
<p>7.1 Bodmin Road</p>	<p>The western access to Fore Street via Bodmin Road features a very narrow pavement. This pedestrian path would benefit from highway improvements for health and safety purposes, encouraging a safer access to the High Street.</p>  <p><i>Existing pedestrian access route to Fore Street from Bodmin Road.</i></p> <p>This could be achieved in a number of ways and each needs to be explored in terms of feasibility and viability for highways. The Vision Document has started to address this area. However, the immediate action I would recommend is to install a tall guard rail in keeping with the decided style of the street furniture. This should be done to avoid any potential accidents and provide a safer access to Fore Street.</p>



Example of a narrow pedestrian paving with decorative guardrails.

There is a North-South stepped route from Bodmin Road to Truro Road which could be developed to provide a safer route into town from this area. This would be an excellent approach to the front of the new theatre.

General Note

Any advice given in this report is made without the adequate in-depth assessments and surveys required for further design development. The images used in this report may be subject to copyright.

Additional Support

As the design strategies for the High Street evolve and the level of design detail progresses, the proposals could be assessed by design review panels and other specialist professionals to ensure that all aspects have been adequately considered.

Conclusion

The initiatives outlined in this document are taken as a holistic approach to the Town Centre. Additional footfall to the High Street and the rejuvenation of its retail appeal will flow naturally from the development of the Town Centre as a whole. Advice and concept designs provided in this report are preliminary and made without the adequate in-depth assessments and surveys required for a detailed design and are here provided as an inspiration for further development.

It has been a pleasure to interact and work with Cornwall County Council and the St Austell Council teams, hearing their success stories and witnessing the huge effort that is being made to make St Austell the desirable place it deserves to be. The proposals are ambitious and with suitable design progress and correct decision making they stand a good chance of success.

The High Street Task Force and Cristina wish to thank Cornwall County Council and St Austell Council for allowing us to engage in this exciting process and we wish them every success in their future plans.