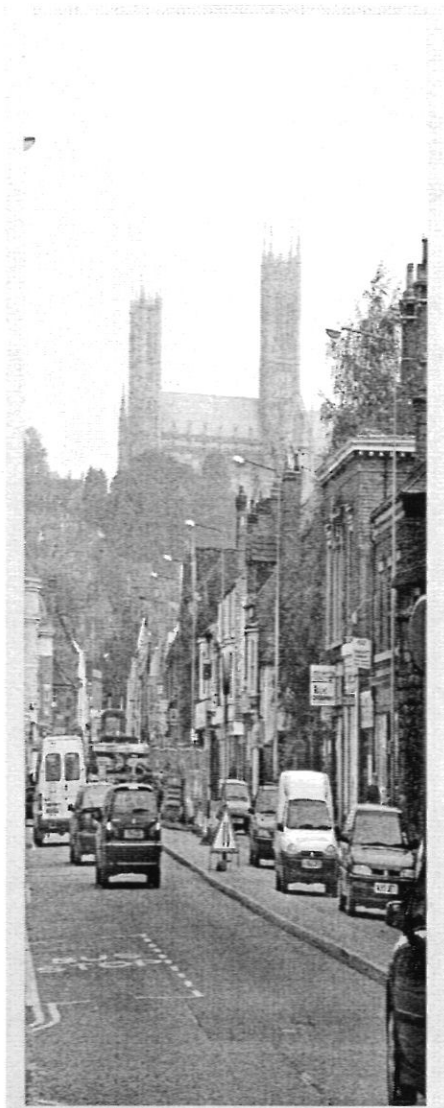


South High Street Area Placecheck



prepared by
Lichfield Planning
for
South High Street Area/
Lincoln Community Development Project
September 2001

First Action Plan



*Placecheck:
"A method of assessing the
qualities of a place, showing
what improvements are
needed, and focusing people
on working together to
achieve them."*

*From the Placecheck Users'
Guide published by UDAL, 2001*

Introduction

The South High Street Area Placecheck project is being led and developed by the local community. The initial aim has been to develop a shared vision and an effective action plan to improve the South High Street Area. The work is being carried out by people who live, work and go to school in the area. Elected councillors (City and County) and council officers are being involved and kept informed, and have been helping with some aspects of the work, but this is not a Council project: it is a project being carried out by the local community, for the local community.

The Project area includes the High Street, from South Park roundabout to St Mary's Street / Wigford Way and all the adjoining streets east and west. At this stage, it focuses primarily on the High Street itself but does not exclude other parts of the area. Streets beyond the High Street that are particularly in need of early action include Portland Street, Dixon Street and Altham Terrace.

Placecheck

The Urban Design Alliance (UDAL) has devised Placecheck and stresses that it is something that communities can do for themselves, involving residents (of all ages), businesses, voluntary organizations, churches, the police, development agencies, schools, universities, professional practices, local authorities and others.

The Placecheck focuses on:

People - How people whose influence and actions shape a place can work together more effectively;

The Urban Design Alliance is a national organisation that brings together several professional institutes – town planners, architects, landscape architects, engineers, urban designers, surveyors and the Civic Trust – to promote better urban environments.

Places - How the physical form of buildings and spaces can help to make a place work better;

Movement - How the network of streets, routes and public transport can bring a place to life.

Lincoln's South High Street Placecheck Project was chosen as one of only ten national pilot projects for testing "Placecheck". The work carried out over the past year in the South High Street area has helped to develop Placecheck as a tool that other communities can use. More importantly for people living and working in the South High Street area, it has generated a vision for the future and a package of actions that can be taken and promoted to start solving problems and releasing opportunities in this part of Lincoln.

Time to Placecheck the South High Street Area

The Placecheck was started in the summer of 2000 in response to a variety of problems and opportunities in this part of Lincoln, including:

- Increasing traffic problems on and around High Street;
- Declining quality of the local environment;
- Concerns about the effects of more freight trains coming across High Street level crossing prompting new proposals to deal with traffic problems;
- Social and economic problems affecting the lives of many people in the South High Street Area community;
- A need for economic, social and environmental issues in the area to be tackled in a joined-up way;

The "Placecheck" project is backed by the Government, English Partnerships, the Commission for Architecture & the Built Environment (CABE) and the Local Government Association



- The appointment of a Community Development Worker for Park Ward providing opportunities to drive community-led projects forward;
- A danger that competition for limited resources could mean that the designation of South High Street as a "Revival Area" in the City of Lincoln Local Plan stays as no more than just another good idea on paper;
- big investments in environmental improvements at St Peter's-at-Gowts primary school showing what can be done!;
- A lot of money having been spent on the Riverside Walk and Cycleway, but links with the South High Street Area remaining poor;
- the Riverside Walk itself already being neglected and damaged;
- problems being experienced by many of the small businesses to which South High Street is home to many small businesses - especially some of the pubs and small shops that are struggling against competition from big national chains.

Placecheck provides an opportunity for people, businesses and communities in the South High Street to understand each other's problems, needs and hopes and work together, as a community, to:

- identify things that need doing;
- get on with the changes they can make themselves;

- press for action by the local authorities and other agencies to tackle problems that local people can't tackle on their own.

What has happened so far?

In its first year, the South High Street Area Placecheck has involved:

- ❑ a Placecheck Walkabout by children from St Peter's-at-Gowts Primary School;
- ❑ an introductory Community Meeting and Workshop, attended by over 40 local people;
- ❑ 2 open Placecheck Walkabouts;
- ❑ several information-exchange meetings with the national Placecheck Project;
- ❑ 2 presentations to the national Urban Design Conference in Manchester and London;
- ❑ preparation of an initial First Stage Report and, now, this Action Plan;
- ❑ identifying some jobs that Placecheck can tackle immediately.

That completes the first year of the South High Street Area Placecheck Project, but it's only the beginning: Placecheck has really only just got off the ground. The aims for the next stage include:



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- publicising and distributing this Action Plan as widely as possible within the South High Street Area to let more people know what is going on, to get feed-back and to encourage more people to get involved in the Project;
- meeting representatives of the local authorities, police, other public bodies and "utilities" companies to discuss the initial ideas, proposals and action points, find out what is preventing things from being done and work out how to overcome problems and make real improvements;
- carrying out more Placecheck Walkabouts and Workshops;
- making a special effort to involve more young people (particularly teenagers / young adults) and young families (working with Youth Matters and other organisations to achieve this);
- developing the Action Plan further;
- making the Action Plan work and carrying out regular Placechecks to make sure that improvements are really happening. This should be a continuous process:

Who's already involved in Placecheck?

Lincoln Community Development Project is driving the South High Street Area Placecheck Project forward through Rosemary Robinson, the Community Development Worker for Park Ward. As well as contributing Rosemary's time, Lincoln Community Development Project is able to help by providing access to funding for particular projects.

South High Street Placecheck – First Action Plan – September 2001

Prepared by Lichfield Planning for Lincoln Community Development Project & South High Street Placecheck

The Project was kicked off initially by local town planner, Steve Kemp, whose firm, **Lichfield Planning**, is continuing to support the Project, as part of its Community Support Programme.

Lincoln Civic Trust has its offices and meeting rooms in the South High Street, at St Mary's Guildhall, and is actively involved in the Project. Chairman, Ted Wilkinson, has been taking part in Placecheck Walkabouts and Workshops and organised a walk through the area, looking at "Lincoln's Hidden Treasures".

Teachers and children at **St Peter's-at-Gowts Primary School** have been closely and enthusiastically involved with the Project.

The Project is receiving active support from churches in the South High Street Area and **St Peter's-at-Gowts Church** has made its Church Hall available for many of the meetings.

Lincolnshire Police are supporting Placecheck through the involvement of the local Community Police Officer.

South High Street is home to some of Lincoln's best pubs and the Project is being supported by landlords, both individually and through the **Pubwatch Committee**. Ken Fraser-Rowe of the **George and Dragon** has been particularly supportive in getting the Placecheck Project off the ground.

City and County Councillors representing the wards that include the South High Street Area have been taking an interest in the Project and supporting it by attending meetings and contributing to discussions. Officers of the City Council's

Early Achievements

Most of the things proposed in this Action Plan have not yet been done, but some important first actions have already been taken. Here are two examples:

➤ **Completion of the new wall at St Peter's-at-Gowts Primary School**

The first phase of replacing the old wall with a combination of lower wall and railings was very popular, both in the school and with the Placecheckers. As part of its promotion of Placecheck, Lincoln Community Development Project helped to find the money to enable the rest of the old wall to be demolished and replaced.

➤ **Revival of St Botolph's Church Hall**

The hall had remained closed for several years, due to problems with the building and lack of funds to repair and improve it. With the assistance of Lincoln Community Development Project, a local community arts group, ImpArt, that was in need of accommodation has now been placed in the building. This is helping to release grant aid and other funding to continue the repair of the building and its restoration for wider use by the Parish and the community.

Planning Department have also been attending and have helped with equipment and materials for some of the events.

So far, about 60 **local people** have involved themselves in the Project by attending events, carrying out Placechecks, and making comments and suggestions. This is a good start, but it will be even better if more people now get involved. Teenagers, young adults and young families will be particularly welcome as these groups have not been well represented up to now.

Time for Action!

The following sections identify and describe an initial package of improvements that could be made to improve the South High Street Area. Some are things that could be done almost immediately, others will take more time because of the need to consider their implications, plan, consult and find money to carry them out.

The action suggestions that follow have all come from people taking part in the South High Street Placecheck.

❑ **There needs to be a comprehensive and integrated scheme to reduce traffic and the pollution, noise and disruption associated with it**

The single greatest source of concern to people who have been taking part in the Placecheck has been traffic and its harmful effects on the local environment and quality of life. Many of the detailed action points are therefore related to a desire to civilize traffic in the area.

❑ **CCTV coverage should be extended further south**
to deter crime and vandalism and make people feel safer using this part of the City.

- **The pedestrian underpass linking South High Street to the pedestrian precinct needs improvement**

The lighting is poor and the walls could use some public artwork. This needs tying in with improvements to the whole area around the St Mary's Street junction. This should be a welcoming "gateway" to South High St. - not a hostile barrier!

- **More on street parking spaces are needed**

These should be provided as part of a comprehensive improvement scheme, together with more street planting, traffic calming and better facilities for cyclists (so they don't feel they have to use the pavement).

- **There's a need for better bus shelters and better timetable information - and the bus lane does not do its job properly at present - these should also be dealt with as part of a comprehensive scheme.**

- **Options for reducing traffic on Dixon Street and Portland Street need to be explored**

People are having their home environments (and their lives) ruined by traffic - a proper study of alternatives needs to be done now and urgent action is needed.

- **Better community facilities are needed - St Mary's Guildhall and St Botolph's Church Hall are still under-used resources for the community and facilities for teenagers are very poor. Young people need to be involved in deciding how to improve the situation.**

- **A South High Street Heritage Trail should be established, marked-out and publicised**

People are not aware of all the historic and interesting buildings in the South High Street. The Council's map for

visitors misses out St Mary-le-Wigford Church and most of South High Street. Why not devise a proper heritage trail?

- ❑ **Interesting buildings along South High Street should be picked out at night by "flood-lighting".**

- ❑ **Christmas lights should be extended along the South High Street.**

- ❑ **Great Gowts Drain and Sincil Dyke should be maintained as important amenity and ecology features**

At present they are disgracefully neglected - they are full of litter and debris. Couldn't the water level be kept higher?

- ❑ **the bridges over the High Street should be renovated**
At present they are poorly maintained and largely hidden by untended trees and shrubs.

- ❑ **Altham Terrace must be improved**
The residents' needs are neglected and it should be a good link between South Common, High Street, the Riverside Walk and Boultham Park, but it's in an appalling condition. This is a problem for the community, not just the residents!

- ❑ **Better, safer pedestrian and cycle routes are needed for people wanting to use the South Common and the Common itself needs to be policed properly**

There is a shortage of usable public open space within the South High Street Area itself, so the Common is a particularly valuable asset for the local community.

TAKING ACTION

Some of the Action Points are now explored in a little more detail in the following pages.

ACTION POINTS:

- *The Police and Local Authority are asked to consider local perceptions of criminal and anti-social behaviour.*
- *The matter should be discussed with members of the local community to ascertain the facts and to consider appropriate responses.*
- *Serious consideration should be given to the extension of **CCTV** coverage in the South High Street area to deter problem behaviour.*
- *The Local Authority is asked to review the way it deals with **street cleansing and litter collection** in the South High Street area in the light of its use as a main route to and from the City Centre and the nature of many of the businesses trading in the area itself from evening into early morning.*

- **Action should be taken to deter crime, vandalism and other forms of 'anti-social' behaviour to make people feel safer living in and using this part of the City.**

Many who have taken part in Placecheck feel that the quality of life available to people living in this part of Lincoln is diminished by incidents of crime, vandalism and behaviour that might generally be termed "anti-social". People have spoken of a wide range of problems, including: strewn litter; drunkenness and other types of substance abuse; fighting; threatening and intimidating behaviour; people urinating and vomiting in the street and in doorways; vandalism of property; burglary and prostitution. The perception of many of the people who have contributed to Placecheck is that these problems are particularly bad in this part of the City, although it has not yet been possible to discover whether this is actually the case. Even the perception is a problem, however, as feeling threatened, intimidated and afraid of crime can itself diminish the quality of people's lives.

There is a feeling that some of this behaviour may be displaced to streets in the South High Street area from parts of the City Centre, further north, that are covered by CCTV surveillance. Some of those who run pubs in the area feel that the absence of CCTV coverage in this area places them at a disadvantage to pubs in the main part of the City Centre in terms of monitoring and responding to problems as they arise, and deterring them in the first place. Again, it has not been possible to check whether this is actually the case.

ACTION POINTS:

- *The Local Authority is asked to consider whether South High Street's position and the role it plays in the City's "evening economy" warrant provision of suitable **public toilet facilities** to replace the inadequate facilities that have been removed in recent years.*

ACTION POINTS:

- *Proposals for a **radical, long-term solution** to problems associated with the level crossing and the volume of traffic using the St Mary's Street / High Street / Wigford Way are supported in principle.*
- *The authorities, agencies, companies and departments involved in discussions are urged to come to an in-principle decision as soon as possible.*
- *An **interim package of integrated environmental and access improvements** should be prepared and implemented as a short to medium-term measure.*

It is felt that some of the behavioural problems experienced in the area may result from a combination of the pubs, clubs, hot-food take-aways and taxi offices, which line this part of the High Street itself, and the fact that the Street is a main route between the City Centre and large concentrations of housing. It has been suggested that this combination of factors may indeed make the area particularly prone to problem behaviour and that this should be recognised and remedied by a comprehensive package of policing, surveillance and urban management measures.

Links between South High Street and the parts of the City Centre north of the railway and St Mary-le-Wigford need radical improvement.

There is a feeling that South High Street is too often regarded as being "the wrong side of the track". This impression is reinforced by the poor quality of links between South High Street and the core of the City Centre. Whilst the redevelopment of St Marks as a major shopping centre has regenerated that site and brought some limited regeneration benefits in the immediately adjacent area, the potential regeneration benefits of investments like this will not be realised fully unless linkage between South High Street and the core of the City Centre is greatly improved.

☐ From comments made by people who have been contributing to the Placecheck, it seems likely that there would be considerable support for a **radical solution**, such as tunnelling the railway and extending pedestrian priority, to achieve much better integration of South High Street and the main City Centre, whilst also paving the way for more widespread regeneration south of the railway. However, the magnitude of the engineering and funding challenges that have to be met before such a scheme can proceed make this

ACTION POINTS:

- *Subject to whatever decision may be made on a more radical solution, a scheme for major environmental improvements should be prepared, one effect of which should be to make this **an attractive and welcoming "gateway"** between South High Street and the main part of the City Centre*
- *The pedestrian underpass should be improved. A suitable scheme should combine improved lighting, re-decoration, preferably including elements of public art relevant to the area and the community, improved drainage and improvements to the steps and ramps and the handrails and barriers associated with them. The County and City Councils are asked to address this matter jointly.*
- *The phasing of the traffic lights should be reviewed with the objective of giving pedestrians more frequent opportunities to cross.*
- *The time allowed for crossing at each "green man" phase should also be reviewed.*
- *Replacement of street furniture (barriers, signs, poles etc.) with items of better design and quality should be considered.*

too precarious a basket in which to place all our eggs at this stage. A major scheme of that sort may prove feasible and fundable, but even so a start cannot be expected for some years yet. The problems, however, are there now, are very real and are not likely to diminish without positive intervention and investment.

☐ Placecheck has highlighted the inadequacy of the existing **facilities for pedestrians**. It seems that people's needs as pedestrians are currently considered a low priority by comparison with the priority given to traffic. The underpass is generally considered horrible – it is too narrow for the volume of people who need to use it and at the very least, the lighting needs improving and the walls would benefit from some public artwork. Its tendency to flood when it rains heavily is seen as a further indication that maintaining good pedestrian facilities is not regarded as a high priority.



☐ Much has been said and written recently about disruption resulting from the operation of the level crossing. However, the more continuous **disruption of pedestrian movement across St Mary's Street** seems to cause much less comment and concern. The phasing of the traffic lights at this junction leaves masses of people standing, waiting for the "green man" for long periods – often exposed to cold, wind, rain and noise, pollution and spray from passing vehicles.



ACTION POINTS:

- *A scheme should be promoted for comprehensive remodeling of the whole St Mary's Street junction area as a well designed and managed urban space.*
- *the Local Authorities are asked to consider a comprehensive and integrated programme of environmental improvements and traffic management measures to improve environmental quality (including air quality) throughout the whole South High Street area. This is detailed in the next part of this report in the context of the proposed Community Travel Zone Scheme.*
- *The County and City Councils are asked to address these matters jointly.*

When the pedestrian phase eventually arrives, it is so short that people have to rush across the road before traffic takes over again. For anyone with reduced mobility this is a particularly intimidating and stressful situation.

☐ The whole **area around the St Mary's Street junction** is in need of extensive environmental improvements. It is not a pleasant place to spend time. Pollution and noise dominate. The environment around St Mary-le Wigford church is not suitable for such an important piece of the City's cultural, social and spiritual heritage. This should be a welcoming "gateway" between South High Street and the main part of the City Centre, but at present it is all too often a hostile barrier! A comprehensive and integrated approach needs to be taken, prioritising the needs of pedestrians, cyclists and buses, rather than treating these as an after thought as seems to be the case at present.

☐ Observation suggests that the fundamental traffic problem on the South High Street is simply the **volume of traffic**. This greatly disrupts movement within the area and ever-growing queues expose everyone on the pavements and in the adjacent buildings to levels of noise and other pollution that many consider unacceptable. Many of those taking part in the Placecheck have expressed concern about air quality in South High Street.

There needs to be a comprehensive and integrated scheme to reduce traffic and the pollution, noise and disruption associated with it

The County Council is currently consulting the community about proposals for a Park Ward Community Travel Zone. This will be one of several schemes in Lincoln and Lincolnshire intended to make changes that will encourage and help people to make more of their local journeys by foot, bike or public transport and, therefore, to be less reliant on cars.

Concern about the impact of traffic on the local environment has featured very prominently in views expressed so far during the Placecheck. It is clear that a lot of people in this area do walk and, to a lesser extent, cycle locally and use buses. What is very obvious, however, is that the volume and nature of the traffic moving through the area makes this less easy, less pleasant and less safe than it should be. The local environment and the quality of local people's lives are impoverished by the effects of traffic.

The response from members of the community who have been involved in Placecheck so far suggests that many people would be pleased to make more of their journeys by foot and bike - and encourage their children to do so - if the local conditions were safer, cleaner and more pleasant.

This being the case, it does not seem unreasonable for the local community to expect the wider community to co-operate. This is likely to mean accepting some significant changes in the ways that traffic is allowed to use High Street and other streets that are currently suffering extreme environmental stress from traffic, such as Dixon Street and Portland Street.

Key proposals for consideration in relation to the Community Travel Zone

Gateways

The entrances to the South High Street from north and south should be marked by effective "gateway" features.

We suggest a narrowed carriageway incorporating a form of "speed table", using attractive, high quality surfacing materials and bollards with well-designed signs announcing the area, accompanied by suitable planting or / and sculpture.



Village Squares

Placecheck has identified the areas in the vicinity of St Botolph's Church and St Peter's at Gowts Church as visual, social and commercial focal points.

We suggest that this should be expressed physically in the layout and surfacing of the street and through the use of appropriate street furniture.



What is envisaged is an extended "speed table" area at each point. The whole street width should be resurfaced at these points, using attractive materials that promote a greater sense of pedestrian priority. In effect the pavements will carry right across the street and vehicles will drive at reduced speed across a pedestrian-friendly square.

This will:

- ☐ Reinforce the focal nature of these two areas;
- ☐ Visually punctuate the long, straight High Street
- ☐ Reduce traffic speeds, whilst still allowing traffic to pass through;
- ☐ Promote greater awareness of the needs of pedestrians;
- ☐ help pedestrians to move conveniently and safely from one side of the street to another.



Where possible, these improvements should be complemented by street tree planting and other street-environment improvements.

Opportunities should be found to increase / extend short-stay, on-street parking in these areas to support local businesses.



Removal of Central Reservation

In most if not all places where it currently exists the central reservation should be removed. It forms a severe barrier for people trying to cross the street using wheelchairs, pushchairs / buggies / prams and it is very inconvenient for others who have impaired mobility. It is considered that it also has the effect of promoting higher vehicle speeds, because drivers view it as protective separation strip between the two halves of a dual carriageway - a feature normally associated with faster roads.

The reservation also wastes usable street-space and produces a greater than necessary distance between footways.

Re-prioritise all minor junctions in favour of pedestrians



At most minor junctions on the High Street the footway is broken by the carriageway and vehicles take precedence over pedestrians. The Highway Code clearly states that drivers should give way to pedestrians crossing at such junctions, but this rarely happens and, in practice, pedestrians are frequently intimidated by approaching vehicles.

There is one exception to this - at Firth Road. Here the footway carries across the junction at a slightly raised level, and drivers generally give way to pedestrians.

It is recommended that this pattern should now be repeated as the norm for all minor junctions with South High Street, the only exceptions being Tentercroft Street, Portland Street (initially) and Dixon Street. At all of those junctions the needs of pedestrians also need to be given much greater recognition and priority than at present.

Review and Re-prioritise Street-user Allocations



In conjunction with the changes recommended above, there should be a comprehensive review of the way that this generally wide street is used to accommodate different modes of transport. This should be in the context of the objective of promoting a modal shift away from dependence on cars towards increased use of alternative modes - bus, bike and foot.

In some place the Street is the equivalent of six lanes in width. In most places and at most times (including peak times) only one lane of traffic flows in each direction. This should be recognized and the "spare" space should be used to facilitate:

- ☐ The efficient running of buses;
- ☐ Safer facilities for cyclists;
- ☐ Better footways;
- ☐ More short-stay on-street parking to support local businesses;
- ☐ Appropriate planting of street trees;
- ☐ A programme of street-environment improvements.



A thorough audit is recommended so that effective redistribution of street-space may be planned and implemented.



Recognise Portland Street and Dixon Street as Home Environments

Both these streets carry heavy flows of through-traffic. Both are lined by houses at or only just beyond the back edge of the footways. Both streets are the home environment for large numbers of people. Neither is suitable for the level of traffic it is currently carrying.

It is strongly urged that the role of these streets should be reviewed with the objective of finding ways to reduce through-traffic and effect significant quality of life improvements for the benefit of local residents.

To create safe home environments, most of the residential areas east and west of the High Street should be made 20 mph zones. Designation as Home Zones should also be considered.



A South High Street Heritage Trail should be established, marked-out and publicised

People are not aware of all the historic and interesting buildings in the South High Street - so why not produce a proper "heritage trail"? Some have asked why the Council's map for visitors misses out St Mary-le-Wigford Church and most of South High Street?

It is suggested that the Civic Trust and local community (including the schools) should be supported by the local authorities in creating and publicizing a South High Street Heritage Trail. This should involve identification of key buildings and their history, both on site and in a booklet.

The night time scene is very important on the South High Street and it is recommended that a lighting strategy should be devised, so as to highlight heritage buildings and features and create an attractive atmosphere for people using and passing through the area after dark.



Many people also feel that the South High Street should have its own Christmas lighting scheme. This is something that the local business community and the Council are recommended to consider.

Next Steps

This First Action Plan still needs further work to "put flesh on the bones".

There is a need for support from the community and the local authorities to develop this work further.

Discussions regarding the proposed Community Travel Zone are seen as a particular priority at this stage, but other aspects also need to be worked up further.

More people need to be involved.

A local steering group could play a very helpful role.

The community needs help to help itself - what is referred to as "capacity building".



- 1 + 10 Create attractive Gateways
- 2 Make more of space between St. Mark's and magistrates Court
- 3 Improve conditions for Portland Street residents
- 4 + 8 'Village Squares'
- 5 Remove central reservation and re-allocate road space throughout High Street
- 6 + 9 Renovate bridges and clean drains
- 7 Improve conditions for residents of Dixon Street
- 10 Altham Terrace needs major improvement scheme

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