

### **3.0 Problems and Objectives**

#### **3.1 Overview of Problems and Objectives**

- 3.1.1 Hucknall, formally Hucknall Torkard, was once a thriving mining community. Since the closure of the last pit in 1986, the decline of the mining industry in Hucknall has left a legacy of gradual economic deterioration. Over the last two decades notable social exclusion, poor housing, environmental damage and ill health have become endemic in Hucknall with two Lower Super Output Areas defined as being in the top 10% nationally based on the 2004 Indices of Deprivation. Hucknall Town Centre lies in the top 30% nationally most deprived Lower Super Output Areas.
- 3.1.2 Visible signs of deprivation and poverty are clearly apparent in Hucknall town centre with high numbers of charity shops, takeaways and lower grade retailers. The High Street experiences significant levels of traffic congestion creating an unpleasant and unsafe environment for shoppers. Several properties close to the High Street have remained derelict for many years and there is a frequent turnover of business premises for lease in the town with a number that have been vacant over a long term.
- 3.1.3 The local objectives are threefold and designed to provide a solution to the problems being encountered:-
- ❖ Economic Regeneration
  - ❖ Quality of life
  - ❖ Making best use of existing assets

#### **3.2 Local Objective 1 - Economic regeneration**

- 3.2.1 *To support regeneration and neighbourhood renewal by improving the transport infrastructure in Hucknall and enhancing the visual appearance of the town to attract inward investment.* With a population of almost 30,000 inhabitants, Hucknall town centre is in urgent need of revitalisation to halt the economic decline.
- 3.2.2 The sub-regional centre of Hucknall is set to undergo significant change with 3,000 new houses and 7 hectares of industrial development proposed for build by 2011 (see para. 2.7 and figure 5). The addition of these new developments will increase travel demand within this already busy town and exacerbate current congestion and road safety problems. The run-down nature of the town centre is of limited appeal to new inhabitants to the area with the majority choosing to shop at Nottingham or at neighbouring areas such as Bulwell, both easily accessed by tram.
- 3.2.3 The town centre at Hucknall has a typically traditional layout with a market place at one end of the High Street. This is used twice weekly for a market (one full day and one evening) and is used as a pay and display car park for the remainder of the time. The market itself has undergone a decline in numbers over recent years and Ashfield District Council recently responded with an environmental improvement scheme in Spring 2007.
- 3.2.4 This scheme has enhanced the appearance of the Market Place by using high quality paving materials and alterations to the layout of the car parking spaces.



Photograph 7: Hucknall Market Place

3.2.5 Hucknall as a retail centre features several bookmakers, public houses and off-licences and existing named retailers include Birds Confectioners, Bon Marché, Boots the Chemist, Holland and Barrett, Jonathan James, Peacocks, Specsavers, Thorntons and Wilkinsons.



Photograph 8: Vacant retail unit



Photograph 9: Vacant retail unit



Photograph 10: Vacant former Safeway building



Photograph 11: Vandalism to the rear of the former Safeway building

- 3.2.6 The former anchor store, Safeway, has remained empty for three years and the Kwiksave that was located at the western end of the High Street was replaced last year with a discount/bargain operator named B & M. This, combined with other visibly vacant retail properties is adding to the unattractive visual appearance of the High Street which has the effect of inhibiting new business take-up in the area.
- 3.2.7 Hucknall town centre is divided into four distinct areas comprising: the Market Place, the High Street, the NET/Rail station and the Tesco supermarket. The flow of pedestrians/shoppers between each area is limited due to a lack of cohesion between the areas which has evolved as a result of: busy traffic, particularly on the High Street; a restrictive footpath environment; poor quality of retail provision; a genuine lack of alternative transport choice within the town; poor accessibility between each area and a lack of uniformity of design. Uniting these four areas aims to bring back a sense of community by providing a common identity for the town.
- 3.2.8 The Local Futures Group undertook an analysis of Ashfield's economy on behalf of the North Derbyshire and North Nottinghamshire Alliance Strategic Sub-Regional Partnership in January 2005. It showed that Ashfield has a relatively small economy by national standards ranked 233<sup>rd</sup> out of 408 Districts in Great Britain. In addition the District is ranked 279<sup>th</sup> out of 408 Districts nationally in terms of economic productivity.
- 3.2.9 Between 1998-2002 the number of people in employment in Ashfield fell by 4.4% whereas during the same period there was an increase of 5.1% for Great Britain; this was the 368<sup>th</sup> worst performance of 408 Districts in the Country. The labour market in Ashfield, as shown by the 2002/03 employment rate stands at 73.9%, which is only marginally below that for Great Britain as a whole at 74.2% during the same time period.
- 3.2.10 In terms of education, 8.5% of working age people in Ashfield are qualified to NVQ level 4 (degree level), which is the 406<sup>th</sup> lowest proportion out of 408 districts in the Country. At the other end of the scale, almost half (49.7%) of the working age population were qualified below NVQ level 2 compared with 35.3% for Great Britain. Ashfield ranked as the 11th worst district in the country for education. Hucknall is

ranked the 21st highest ward (out of 176 wards) in the County for the number of unemployed as a percentage of the working age population (Nottinghamshire County Council Employment Bulletin April 2007).

- 3.2.11 With regards to transport and accessibility, 30.1% of households in Hucknall Central Ward do not have access to a car or van, consequently there is a reliance on public transport for trip making purposes (source 2001 Census).
- 3.2.12 During the late nineties Nottinghamshire County Council put together a submission to the National Coalfields Task Force (CTF) which was published in June 1998 under the title "Making the Difference – a New Start for England's Coalfield Communities". The report recommended that English Partnerships should assume responsibility for 11 important former colliery sites. The report also listed a further 18 sites with potential for redevelopment for the benefit of the coalfield communities, in which Hucknall was identified. There was a recommendation that English Partnerships should work to facilitate the reclamation and redevelopment of these 18 sites. The interim evaluation of the coalfield regeneration programme by the Department of Communities and Local Government in March 2007 revealed that Hucknall was 'complete'. ('Complete' refers to sites where the full investment from the programme has been made, enabling the site to be regenerated. It does not necessarily mean that activity on site by other parties, including the private sector, is finished).
- 3.2.13 Ashfield District Council's report "Hucknall: Design for the Future", published in 2003 also identified various key issues that are contributing to the decline of Hucknall as a retail centre (see section 2.7.7). These issues included: limited variety of retail provision; lack of attractive amenities; concerns about long stay parking; perception of high levels of crime (particularly at weekends) and the effect of the arrival of Tesco. Earlier this year the Greater Nottingham Partnership (GNP) commissioned a study to assess the economic health and well being of Hucknall. It was intended that the new study would provide evidence and support for Ashfield District Council's policies for shaping its centres of economic activity to reflect the needs of the local population. The outcome of the study is a new report "Reviving the Heart of Hucknall" which is due to be published in Autumn 2007.

### **3.3 Local Objective 2 – Quality of Life**

- 3.3.1 *To improve the quality of life for people in Hucknall who are adversely affected by traffic congestion, poor safety and poor air quality.* The analysis carried out by the Local Futures Group also revealed that Ashfield recorded a low life expectancy – 76.8 years – placing it 348<sup>th</sup> out of the 408 districts in the country, with a standardised mortality ratio score of 112 (ie. 12 per cent higher than in the country as a whole. Crime levels were also high with 52.4 offences per 1000 population which ranked Hucknall as 76<sup>th</sup> highest out of all 376 districts in England and Wales.

The following section details the existing conditions and problems that will be addressed by the proposal.

- 3.3.2 The existing High Street in Hucknall is the focus of the main shopping centre for the town and carries over 9200 vehicles per day (Annual Average Daily Traffic (AADT) 2006) at the western end and 12200 vehicles per day (AADT 2006) at the eastern

end, including 6% heavy goods vehicles (HGV's) in both cases. The existing carriageway ranges from between 7.0m and 8.0m in width and the road is subject to a 48 kph (30 mph) speed limit.

- 3.3.3 There are footways on either side of the carriageway which narrow in places to 1.5m in width. Parking is prohibited on both sides of the carriageway over the entire length of High Street, although parking violations are a regular occurrence due to a lack of enforcement in the town. Civil Parking Enforcement (CPE) is planned to commence in May 2008 to remedy this situation.
- 3.3.4 High levels of congestion are a daily occurrence on Hucknall's High Street caused by the high volumes of traffic, illegally parked vehicles, the impact of the bus services using the route, traffic signal phasing and constrained physical nature of the surroundings. This has led to poor environmental and road safety conditions.
- 3.3.5 The road is bordered by a mix of modern and period terraced properties, most with minimal or no frontage and buildings are grimy from the effects of pollution. The topography shows that the High Street experiences a gradual incline, rising by 4m over its entire length when travelling from east to west and a horizontal alignment that curves gently to the south.
- 3.3.6 Short stay pay and display parking is available close to the shops on the High Street at a fee of 20p per hour. The Piggins Croft car park located towards the western end of High Street has capacity for 350 vehicles and the newly revamped Market Place car park nearby has capacity for 72 vehicles. As Tesco offer free car parking for over 400 cars at their store this has fuelled strong resistance to fee paying for parking in the town centre and consequently these car parks remain largely empty.
- 3.3.7 Long stay car parks are provided at Ogle Street (44 spaces) and Yorke Street (18 spaces), similarly at 20p per hour and with a daily charge of £1. The Station Road car park located close to the eastern end of High Street presently has capacity for 110 vehicles, however under the proposals for the new inner relief road it will be necessary for approximately two thirds of the square area of this car park to be removed.
- 3.3.8 In addition to the pay and display car parks there are a number of privately owned plots of land which are used for free car parking in preference to the official car parks provided.
- 3.3.9 Formal crossing facilities are provided for pedestrians at either end of High Street and at the junction of High Street and Watnall Road. The roundabout junction at the Station Road/Linby Road junction has no designated crossing points for pedestrians and a circulatory width of between 9 and 10 metres which makes crossing particularly difficult for mobility impaired pedestrians or pedestrians with buggies and pushchairs.
- 3.3.10 Over the length of High Street there have been 23 injury accidents since 2002, of which 10 involved pedestrians, 2 involved cyclists and 2 involved motor cyclists, highlighting the plight of vulnerable road users in this location. Of the total number of accidents, 4 were serious and 19 were slight. The congested nature of the town centre is increasing the likelihood of accidents occurring due to pedestrian/car conflict

in the future. This, combined with the lack of crossing facilities at the Station Road/Linby Road roundabout junction emphasises the need for urgently upgrading pedestrian facilities to reflect their travel demands.

- 3.3.11 There are no specific facilities in existence for cyclists within the centre of the town and as discussed in para. 3.2.7 the town has fragmented into four distinct areas with poor accessibility between each. The ease of pedestrian circulation is restricted largely due to the narrow footpaths and is confounded by street furniture and signage which contributes to a cluttered environment. Several street trees have outgrown the spaces available for them making localised areas along the High Street slightly dark. These factors, combined with traffic congestion, poor safety, pollution, poor crossing facilities, inconsistency of design and unappealing surroundings make the street environment less attractive to shoppers and visitors alike. Therefore pedestrians are not able to optimise what the town has to offer and are deterred from traversing on foot from one part of the town centre to another.

### 3.4 **Local Objective 3 – Making best use of existing highways assets**

- 3.4.1 The creation of better highway infrastructure within Hucknall will enable non-essential local access and through-traffic to be diverted away from the shopping core of the town centre. Pedestrianisation of the existing High Street and consequent removal of traffic relies on the introduction of a new inner relief road to accommodate the displaced traffic from the town centre. Improvements to accessibility within the town are sought through integrated proposals that enhance footpaths, cycleways and provide better links and improved public transport facilities. These integrated transport proposals will assist in promoting a modal shift away from the private car.
- 3.4.2 These proposals are reliant on the removal of traffic from the town centre and will improve highway infrastructure for the town as a whole. The proposed scheme will provide improved access to proposed housing and industrial development land in the area, some of which is brownfield land on the former Hucknall Colliery site.
- 3.4.3 Management of the existing road network through efficient maintenance strategy and effective coordination of roadworks and incident management will also minimise congestion and disruption, reducing traffic delays overall.