THE TOWCESTER PARTNERSHIP

MARKET TOWN HEALTHCHECK REPORT JULY 2003

.....constructing the future.....
.....enhancing the present.....
.....honouring the past.....
The Healthcheck Story

The Countryside Agency checklist, known as the Healthcheck, contains 202 questions, covering most aspects of the life of a market town. They range from subjects we discovered we are good at, like producing well-qualified school-leavers, to things we discovered we are not so good at, such as having NHS Dentists.

Team approach
With a deadline of the end of February we started answering the questions in mid-December with the help of three researchers – Peter Cook, Peter Mains and Catherine Earnshaw, the first time this method had been tried. We planned our campaign and made a start before the Christmas break but it was in the new year that much burning of midnight oil took place as we took a hard look at the town. The Vicar can testify to seeing the light on in our office many evenings, and sometimes nearly through the night, especially as our deadline approached.

No-one had asked before…
We contacted many organisations and authorities but quickly discovered that while they might know about their own part of the town, no-one had an overall picture of the many different aspects. Information was surprisingly difficult to come by at times – not because of a lack of willingness to answer the question, but because no-one had asked that particular question before.

Visit the website yourself
Our burning of midnight oil paid off – we made the deadline. If you want to see the results for yourselves, the answers are on the Internet at http://markettowns.jigsaw-it.co.uk

Who Are The Partners?

The Board includes elected representatives of the following organisations:

Northamptonshire County Council
Rosemary Bromwich, County Councillor for the Towcester area

South Northants Council
Councillors Mary Clarke (Mill Ward), Andrew Grant. (Brook Ward)

Towcester Town Council
Councillors Jacqueline Hart, Martin Johns

Towcester Family of Churches
The Vicar of Towcester, Canon Michael Baker

Towcester Education Community
The Head of Sponne School, Ian Brown.

Towcester Health Centre Partnerships
Dr Robin Kelso

Towcester Business Club
Tony Gray and Jonathan Carpenter
What Is The Partnership?

Last year a number of organisations interested in the future of Towcester and its hinterland together with the local authorities formed The Towcester Partnership. The Partnership qualified itself for the Government’s “Action for Market Towns” initiative and completed a comprehensive survey called The Healthcheck.

“national standards”

The Healthcheck provides a current analysis of the “state of health” of practically every aspect of life in the area from affordable housing, schools, health, business vitality and employment opportunities, shopping, public transport and youth facilities to open spaces and sports and arts provision. It enables us to benchmark our own town against national standards and other market towns and identify what can be done to ensure that we in Towcester share in our nation’s future prosperity.

“the whole is greater than the sum of the parts”.

From the Healthcheck a priority list of development projects has been identified and The Partnership’s role is now to develop, facilitate and, where necessary, manage these projects to fruition. Part of this task is to obtain the necessary funding from a variety of sources including lottery funds, government grants, charities, local investors etc. There is an old adage that applies to such a coming together of the various parts of the community in a common endeavour, that “the whole is greater than the sum of the parts”.

Welcome!

These are exciting times for Towcester and the surrounding villages! We live in a very prosperous area of the country and are close enough to large towns and cities to benefit from them…. yet far enough away to have our own identity and culture.

The Government has recognised that this situation presents market towns like Towcester with a dilemma – do we allow ourselves to get sucked into the large towns nearby, becoming merely dormitories and losing our independent identity, or do we continue to grow and invest in ourselves and become the prosperous backbone of rural England once again?

We in the Towcester area have already made that decision. Towcester is part of a Government initiative run by The Countryside Agency and has joined an organisation known as “Action for Market Towns”. This puts us in a special league with some 70 or so other market towns. It provides us with some very special benefits, opening the way to inward investment that will enable us to commission projects to re-vitalise our town, the surrounding villages and the lives of our people.

The Towcester Partnership

- The Towcester Partnership Ltd is a registered company limited by guarantee.
- The Partnership Trust will shortly become a registered charity.
- The Partnership is a member of “Action for Market Towns”.
- We are funded by The Countryside Agency, South Northants Council and Towcester Town Council.
- We are supported by the East Midlands Development Agency and its sub-regional organisation, The Northamptonshire Partnership which is responsible for local economic development.
- The Towcester Partnership is part of a government directed “Local Strategic Partnership” in South Northants District that is to plan for the future strategic direction of the district.
Who’s Who?

Andrew Wilby
Andrew was elected to be the independent Chairman of the Board last September. With a background in planning and starting new businesses and also the management of partnerships, he is well able to guide this Partnership through the initial stages of getting up and running.

Geoffrey Iley
Geoffrey is the elected Vice-Chairman of the Partnership, and is currently the Mayor of Towcester. He has had a long and distinguished Board level career in the international automotive industry and brings much valuable wisdom to the Partnership.

Mary Taylor
Mary, as the Clerk to the Partnership, is responsible for all the administrative work and acts as Company Secretary. She has lived in Towcester for 12 years and can be found in the Partnership’s office three mornings a week.

Alan Rowe
Alan is an important piece of the Jigsaw and was appointed Project Manager in April. Alan lives in Oxfordshire and has spent much of his working life leading projects in the telecommunications industry. When he’s not out and about Alan can be found in the Partnership Office.

Dianne Isaacs
Dianne Isaacs, the Clerk to Towcester Town Council, is an advisor and Treasurer to the Board of the Partnership

Working Groups

There are currently four working groups:
- Culture and Education led by Director Ian Brown - Education Community
- Business led by Director Tony Gray - Towcester Business Club
- Social and Community led by Director Cllr Rosemary Bromwich - County Council
- Transport lead currently vacant – due for election in July
The Healthcheck Upsides

- Attractive place to live
  - Historic Town Centre
  - Many good buildings and villages
  - Low crime levels
  - Good free car parking
  - Extensive club and social life

- Well connected to national road system
  - Major route intersection
  - Centrally located on the Government’s Oxford – Cambridge Hi-tech Development Arc

- Low unemployment
  - Skilled workforce

- Schools producing good results

- Wide range of local businesses
  - Great potential for local shopping development

The Healthcheck Downsides

- Health
  - Not enough Doctors
  - No NHS Dentist
  - Poor access to hospitals

- Education
  - Not enough pre-school nursery or play group places

- Transport
  - Not enough buses, particularly in the evenings
  - Too much traffic and too many accidents in Watling Street
  - Not enough town signs and visitor information
  - Too many potholes and overgrown or unlit footpaths

- Housing
  - Not enough affordable houses

- Social
  - Little for teenagers to do
  - Fear of crime – police force too thinly spread
  - Not enough open spaces
  - Not enough sports facilities
  - Not enough arts and cultural facilities
  - Not enough shopping variety
  - Cemetery nearly full
The Opportunities

Now that we know what’s right with Towcester and the surrounding areas as well as what’s wrong with it, we can start to build a plan and begin putting more things right!

Data that came out of the Healthcheck is enabling The Partnership to develop a range of projects that will enhance our lifestyle and future together.

Doing the Jig-saw

These projects are now looking like a big Jig-saw puzzle and it’s the next job of the Partnership, with the whole community, to fit the pieces together. Some of the projects are small while a few will take some years to complete. However, we know from the experience of other market towns that once we have all the individual pieces of the puzzle in place, the resulting plan will have a huge positive impact on everyone in the area. This is not going to be just one little group or another putting forward its aspirations, this is a Partnership of the whole community and we want everyone in and around Towcester to be involved.....and this is where you come in.....

On the next few pages you will see the Jig-saw puzzle of projects that have emerged so far. While these initial projects tend to focus on the market town itself, a subsequent step will be to discuss with the surrounding village communities what may be achieved in the future with them.

All the projects, no matter whether large or small, will have impact on the vitality of the town centre and movement about the town. As they roll out over the next few years, the larger projects will have a major influence on the whole community.

What do you want to see......?

For each piece of the Jig-saw we have briefly described the project and the benefits it can bring. Now we want to hear from you – what is your opinion of these projects and what do you want to see coming from them?

Centre page pull out

On the back of the centre pages we’ve given you space to make your comments. Add more pages of your own if the space is not enough! Tell us what you want for your town or village and remember, if we do nothing, change will still happen to us whether we like it or not. If however we take our future into our own hands we can influence that future and benefit from the considerable financial support available to communities that do so.

Investment funding

Local Government, Regional Government, National and European Government are all willing to invest in local communities that know what they want and can demonstrate the ability to manage their future wisely.

When we have all your suggestions and comments we will use them in putting the Jig-saw together and this will drive the future work of The Partnership

Our commitment to you

Our mission is to work with you and for you to make Towcester and the surrounding villages into a group of vibrant, thriving and prosperous communities. We will keep you informed of our progress and consult you further as plans develop.

The aim

We aim to make Towcester once again into a successful market town and focal point. We want good public transport links, plenty for everyone to do, great shopping, good business opportunities, continued excellence in education and great living opportunities for our children.

IT’S YOUR TOWCESTER....... 
......tell us what you want and we will help to deliver!
The Towcester Partnership –
Special Pull out Section

Healthcheck Response Form

On the back page of this special pull-out section we have left space for you to tell us what you think. For the Projects we have so far identified, we would like to know what you feel about them. Also are there any other serious issues that you believe The Towcester Partnership should be considering? If so, let us know about those as well. We can only take into consideration your concerns and views if you tell us.

Please give us your name, and contact details because this validates your response as coming from a local resident. When you’ve filled in the back page, please return the form before the end of July to:

The Clerk to The Towcester Partnership
Chantry House
Market Square
Towcester NN12 6BT

Feel free to add any additional comments on further sheets. We really DO want to know what you are thinking!

May we also invite you to become an Associate member of The Partnership Trust
As an Associate member you will enjoy the following benefits:

- Regular bulletins about actions being taken by The Partnership Board, about plans and projects under development and about relevant matters that affect the town and surrounding area.
- Invitations to Public Meetings and to participate in other forms of consultation.
- Invitations to join Project Working Teams and Consultative Groups.

Associate Membership is for individual members of the community for which the annual fee of £5 will be paid by SNC for 2003-4. In joining, you agree to information about yourself and your personal interests and expertise being held in The Partnership’s Members Register on the understanding that it will be used solely in support of The Partnership’s commitment to community involvement and consultation.

Name .................................
Address .................................
Postcode .................................
Phone .................................
E-mail .................................
Signature .................................

Special interests or expertise – please circle as appropriate:
- Sports, Leisure, Culture, Education
- Youth, Town Centre Viability
- Business Development, Finance
- Fund Raising, Tourism, Health
- Social Inclusion, Housing, Environment
- Security, Transport

I would / would not like to be invited to join a Working Group.
21st Century Towcester

..... constructing the future....
RESPONSE SHEET

Use this sheet to tell us your views. Add extra sheets if you wish.

Name: ........................................................................................................ Phone: ......................
Address: ........................................................................................................
Post Code: .......... E-mail: ..........................................................
THE A5 SOUTHERN BY-PASS PROPOSAL

- An A5 By-pass is listed in the Government’s Milton Keynes – South Midlands Development Strategy, a development which will seriously impact on traffic levels in our area.
- This is a key piece of the Towcester Jig-saw puzzle. With a by-pass we can develop one plan for the future, but without it we will need another. Many of the Healthcheck solutions are dependent on this decision.
- It would provide relief from heavy lorry traffic in Watling Street which has now been declared a “Red Route” by the County because of the number of accidents.
- It would set an effective southern boundary to the town encouraging but also limiting growth and development.
- It can provide an effective development envelope if we so choose, containing affordable housing, schools, open space, sports and recreational facilities, health centre, business park, etc. Towcester is a “Strategic Development Area” under the existing plan and is expected to take an increase in population. Such an increase, without careful thought into the provision of essential additional social infrastructure, could be a disaster for the town.

Plan: The Partnership will work alongside the County and District Council to ensure that as the town grows the infrastructure will be put in place at an early stage of development. We will encourage consultation among the community so that well informed judgements may be made to ensure the best for the future of the town.

PUBLIC TRANSPORT

- Everyone knows there’s no effective public transport serving the area. Parts of the district are even described as “deprived” in Government statistics.
- The Government’s Milton Keynes and East Midlands Development proposals will seriously stretch our current access to national rail, bus and air networks.

Plans: The County plans to improve services between the district’s major towns, and a new railway station near M1 Junction 15 has been mooted.
The Partnership will commission a study and plan to provide effective local bus services in Towcester, between the villages and Towcester, and between Towcester and Northampton and Milton Keynes. These will link with national networks. By running small, economic buses at times that people want them, including into the late evening, Towcester will become more attractive not only for shopping but also for business and leisure activities. Transport is a key element in the future prosperity and quality of life of the market town and area.
…..constructing the future…..

SCHOOLS
- Sponne School is unable to expand on its present site and is currently admitting its maximum annual intake of pupils. The further population growth expected in the town and hinterland cause this to be a Healthcheck priority.
- The maintenance costs of the present old school buildings in Towcester are high and growing
- Similarly any population growth will require the expansion of primary school facilities.
- The Healthcheck highlighted the limited opportunities for extra-curricular activities for Towcester’s young people

Plan: Consideration should be given to developing new school facilities, fully equipped to 21st century standards and acknowledging the requirements of modern transport, possibly on a new greenfield site. A new facility might enable links to be established with any new sporting and recreational facilities to mutual communal benefit. It must ensure the young of Towcester have access to the best that education can offer in the new century.

HEALTH CENTRE
- The Healthcheck identified the under provision of health facilities in Towcester. Any further increase in the population must certainly be accompanied by further provision.
- The current Health Centre cannot be expanded on its present site.
- Present day standards call for the provision of a small number of overnight beds to facilitate minor surgery and bringing together several of the related services on one site.

Plan: The Partnership is currently working with the NHS Primary Care Trust to identify a site for a new Health Centre as a priority, to be used by GPs and Primary Care staff as well as Social Services.

YOUTH PROJECTS
- The Healthcheck indicated that there were over 500 young people in Towcester between the ages of 14 and 21 and generally acknowledged that there is little for them to do in the evenings. To make matters worse there is no public transport to take them to Northampton or Milton Keynes where considerable entertainment possibilities exist.

Plan: Bringing about an improvement in public transport is a must for the old as well as the young. Improved sports and recreational facilities will be an asset. The re-development of the Community Centre will also provide a base from which to offer a variety of programmes for our younger citizens.
…..constructing the future…..

BUSINESS PARK
- The Healthcheck identified a lack of growth in local employment as an economic priority to be addressed. Towcester is on the “Oxford-Cambridge hi-tech development arc” where the government expects to see the development of many of the high tech businesses of the future. Without the facilities to attract such enterprises to our town our people will miss out.

Plan: The Partnership intends to evaluate the benefits of the provision of a new Business Park in the town as part of any future development. The knock-on effect can help our shops and business vitality in the town centre, as well as creating job opportunities.

CULTURE AND THE ARTS
- The Healthcheck identified the lack of a quality venue for concerts and other cultural events.
- The town has the marvellous heritage of the Studio Band, the Choral Society and other arts groups who deserve good facilities and who would benefit from such provision.

Plan: The Partnership will support the initiative to provide a 350 seat auditorium in the proposed Tove Centre on the Northampton Road. We will facilitate the coming together of all the cultural groups in the town to develop the cultural life of the community and seek the provision of first class facilities and management to go with it.

SPORTS
- The Healthcheck identified that Towcester has a lack of sporting facilities per head of population.
- Notably the town lacks adequate provision for football and hockey while most existing facilities are stretched and not of the highest quality.

Plan: The Partnership will seek to co-ordinate activity among all sporting groups in the town to attract funding towards comprehensive good quality provision in the future. New sports and recreational facilities could be developed within the area encompassed by an A5 by-pass. Sharing sports and recreational facilities between clubs and schools can attract funding against the promise of comprehensive usage.

OPEN SPACES
- The Healthcheck has identified that Towcester is deficient in open space and attractive walking and cycling areas against national standards.

Plan: The provision of public open space should be a key consideration in any future development. The continuation of the excellent achievements by SNC and the Town Council in opening up the Silverstone Brook corridor and the Tove Valley at Belle Baulk must remain a priority.
.....enhancing the present.....

CAR PARKING

- Everyone thinks there’s a parking problem in Towcester.
- Ever tried parking in London or MK or Northampton? Towcester is a paradise in comparison— and it’s free too!!
- Never-the-less the Healthcheck demonstrates that we could do better in several ways, in its general management, with parking control and signposting to the car parks.

Plans: The Richmond Road Car Park is to be landscaped, environmentally enhanced and better signed. Signage to the other parking sites is to be improved. More parking will be sought in any future developments. Consideration is to be given to more active parking control.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

- The Healthcheck identified the need for more affordable housing in Towcester. There is inadequate provision for first time buyers, for young professionals or for senior members wishing to downsize their accommodation.
- Government has also identified the provision of affordable housing to be a planning priority
- The County plan and the East Midlands Development Area plan both identify Towcester as a growth area.

Plan: New affordable housing is a priority and will be included in all developmental considerations by The Partnership.

COMMUNITY CENTRE

- The Community Centre is managed by a voluntary management committee, with the Town Council as Trustees of the property. It is becoming too expensive to maintain and needs re-building.
- Surveys have been carried out to find out what people REALLY want from their Community Centre and the results will be used to develop a new specification.

Plan: The Partnership will work with local councils to seek the funding to commission a design for a new Centre. The Centre will serve a large range of social and educational needs in the community particularly in relation to the younger members.

NHS DENTIST

- The Healthcheck identified the requirement for an NHS dental practice in Towcester as none now exists. The concern is that this will lead to a dental health problem in the town in the future.

Plan: The Partnership will help to identify and procure suitable premises in the town, and is working with Daventry Primary Care Trust who will equip and manage the practice and ensure it is maintained as an NHS practice.
 enhancing the present

TOWN INFORMATION CENTRE
- How do you find out what goes on in and around Towcester?
- Where is the advice for local businesses?
- How is local Tourism promoted?
- How do visitors book B+B and find out what’s on offer?
- How do you buy tickets for local events?
- Comparison with other Market Towns shows we are missing out on such a facility.

Plan: The Partnership proposes to open an “information centre” in the Town Centre as soon as possible. It will be a facility for the whole community and hopefully provide an HQ for The Partnership.

TOWN SIGNAGE
- The Healthcheck indicated that the signage in the town could be improved and expanded in a number of ways.
- To encourage people to stop and spend money in the town - not just pass through.
- To direct local people and first time visitors to the town’s amenities and attractions

Plans: Three types – gateway – driving - walking signs are envisaged
- Driving
  - “Gateway” signs (including “Brown” attraction signs)
  - Entry and exit routes, car parking, local attractions
- Walking
  - Local attractions / amenities that can be reached on foot
- Information Boards to identify
  - Attractions, antiquities, amenities, footpaths, etc

TOWN SERVICES
- The Healthcheck showed that we might not be managing the maintenance of the town as well as we could due to divided responsibilities
- Broken street lamps and furniture
- Roads, pavements, bushes, weeds needing repair or clearing
- Do you know who to call to get things done?

Plan: The Towcester Partnership will work in collaboration with the authorities and utilities to develop a speedy and effective maintenance regime.
…..honouring the past…..

HERITAGE CENTRE

- The former White Horse coaching inn has been developed to include a Heritage Centre as well as retail and residential units
- The Museum Trust is seeking Lottery Heritage funding to establish a permanent exhibition but this will not come to fruition for several years

Plans: The Partnership is supporting the Museum Trust in working towards opening the Centre building as soon as possible for temporary uses. This will be achieved by assisting in identifying external funding and helping project manage the building conversion work.

BURY MOUNT

- One of Towcester’s most valuable historic treasures. A Scheduled Ancient Monument, it is now almost invisible and classified by English Heritage as a monument “at risk”!
- It is overgrown, vandalised and unused but was at one time the central focus of the town.

Plan: The mount can be cleared and developed to provide a valuable and historic attribute to attract visitors to the town. The surrounding Moat Lane area can be attractively developed as well to meet a range of community aspirations and uses including open markets, a commercial area, affordable housing, car parking, etc. A SNC Development Brief for the area has been open for public consultation and is agreed and a developer is expected to make a planning application for the area during 2003. Part of any proposal will include transferring Bury Mount into public ownership, enabling the monument to be protected for future generations.

CEMETERY

- The present Cemetery in Brackley Road is nearly full and burials are now taking over allotment space with which the town is also under provided according to The Healthcheck.
- The Town Council has the statutory responsibility to provide and maintain a public cemetery for the town.

Plan: To assist the Town Council by seeking to include a new cemetery in any new development plans for the town.

Partnership Office
The Partnership Office is on the first floor of The Chantry House in the Market Square.

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