

PART 2: DETAILED CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

3. TOWN CENTRE

Located at the geographic centre of Crawley and encompassing the core of commercial and retail uses. The town centre strategic character area includes the Civic functions of the town, Town Hall, Library and the major public transport hubs around the railway and bus stations, plus areas around the inner ring road that have commercial and retail functions.

The town centre is distinctive as a zone almost purely focused on retail, commercial and community premises. It has both a pedestrianised shopping core and a highly car dominated inner ring road creating a barrier between the outer areas and adjacent neighbourhoods. Proposals for major redevelopment and expansion in the northern part of the town centre will have a significant impact on the scale and character of the centre as a whole and the way in which traffic functions.

The town centre is classified into three sub-areas:

- Historic High Street
- New Town centre and extension
- Town centre edge

3.1 Historic High Street

Location:

Split between the wards of Northgate and West Green, the sub-area boundary is defined by the Conservation Area designation namely the medieval High Street of Crawley, running north south with historic townscape on east and west sides.

This area is covered in detail in the adopted High Street Conservation Area Statement, 1998.

Character:

Very distinctive, high quality medieval/mixed age townscape with a central linear market space. The area contains 12 listed buildings, and 16 locally listed buildings detailed in the Conservation Area Statement.

Land uses include ground floor small scale retail, mixed use upper floors, offices towards the south, and a cluster of restaurants, cafes and bars bringing evening activity.

A medieval pattern of organic growth characterised by a mix of building styles and typologies, fine urban grain, narrow burgage plots running from the high street, a continuous frontage to the street, and variety of building heights (generally of 2-3 storeys). Buildings exhibit vernacular detailing and use of materials including clay tile hanging to the front elevation and white render and are generally of red brick, stone or timber. Tall brick chimneys,

pitched roofs and some gable ends onto the street create a mixed and interesting roofscape.

Continuity and enclosure:

Frontage to the High Street is active, constant and back of pavement. Although there is limited opportunity for development on the High Street itself, the rear plot areas are poorly used and could offer opportunities for infill development to complement High Street uses, and create better connections to the adjacent New Town areas.

Public realm and landscape:

Street furniture appears oversized and the public realm could be improved to provide a less intrusive and more complementary setting for the historic townscape.

The High Street is a flexible public space with potential for private uses to spill out onto the wide pavements. A fenced area of grass with landmark mature Jubilee Oak provides a green feature at the northern end of the High Street.

Ease of movement:

Connectivity is good north-south, with the High Street providing an attractive pedestrian route; however integration into the wider town centre via the Broadwalk is poor. To the south, the main road creates a barrier to pedestrian movements due to a lack of pedestrian priority at junctions. Traffic on the High Street is one way and does not dominate and the market square itself is pedestrianised.

Originally the railway station was located at the southern end of the High Street. As part of the New Town plan it was moved eastwards, but train and bus stations are still only a short walk away. Car parking is to the rear of individual high street plots and in on street bays.

Legibility:

Landmarks include the distinctive High Street frontage in its entirety, the Gallows structure (part of the George Hotel) and mature trees/greens. St John the Baptist Church is a key landmark however its location adjacent to the ring road, makes it peripheral to the town centre core and limits its visibility.

Recent redevelopments at the southern end of the high street fronting Peglar Way have endeavoured to create a 'gateway' feature through the use of corner towers.

Views north-south along the High Street are good, with land rising to the south. Visual connections to the New Town centre are limited to the Broadwalk and have been reduced in recent years by the construction of a new retail block at the western end of Queens Square. Views from the town centre terminate in the Jubilee Oak and Coral betting shop.

Adaptability and diversity:

Over time the historic townscape has been adapted to new uses and needs resulting in a diversity of uses.

Opportunities and threats:

The relocation of the railway station away from its location at the southern end of the High Street, completion of the New Town shopping malls and recent retail development including ASDA has moved the commercial and retail focus firmly away from the historic high street and is evident in vacant shop units in the area.

Although the area already receives protection through the Conservation Area designation, due to its distinctive historic townscape, it is important that vitality in the area is encouraged through a flexible approach to building reuse to suit changing circumstances. Connections could be improved between the High Street and Queen's Square / station to

encourage passing trade.

The public realm is tired, and could be enhanced to provide a higher quality setting for the conservation area.

3.2 New Town Centre and Extension

Location:

Within Northgate and Three Bridges wards, this sub-area includes land to the north of Crawley railway station / Station Way / Haslett Avenue West, and south of Kilnmead and Northgate Road. It sits to the east of the Historic High Street. The northern part of this area is to be subject to major redevelopment in line with the Town Centre North masterplan which will significantly alter the character and function of The Boulevard.

Character:

The major retail centre in Crawley containing offices and civic functions and a limited amount of residential above shops. Retail building heights are generally 3-5 storeys in and around Queen's Square, reducing in scale on The Broadwalk which links into the historic High Street. The Boulevard contains a number of office towers of up to 8 storeys. Community uses, including the College of Further Education (10 storeys) and new library, are located to the east of College Road / Southgate Road.

The Queen's Square opened in 1958 with The Boulevard following later. County Shopping Mall formed an extension to the original new town centre in the late 1970s and most recently a new retail block was introduced on the western end of Queen's Square. A new library has recently been opened, and the Central Sussex College is redeveloping its campus east of College Road.

Materials are generally concrete and render, with large strip windows and clad panels below windows. Roofs are generally flat. The recent college and library are steel, concrete and glass with white render.

The layout is formal and grid-like with Queen's Square forming the focal point for retail. The Boulevard is a wide linear street of large civic and office premises with buildings facing southwards towards the rear servicing and car parking for the retail units. The overall quality is good and generally well maintained in the central areas, due to the presence of good quality shop frontages, but deteriorates on The Broadwalk and towards the station. The upper storeys of the 1950s/60s buildings appear tired.

Continuity and enclosure:

Active frontages to all sides of Queen's Square and The Broadway provide a strong sense of continuity and the recent block on the west of the square has increased the enclosure of what was an oversized public plaza. However, the County Shopping Mall is completely internalised and forms a particularly poor and low quality blank facade on all sides, including the station arrival area and Memorial Gardens. The rear servicing of The Martletts presents a poor frontage to the Gardens on their western side, and to the east the Gardens are bordered by College Road dual carriageway.

The rear of retail units onto the eastern end of The Boulevard create a partially non-active frontage.

Buildings on The Boulevard are generally standalone but provide a regular continuity to the street scene.

Public realm and landscape:

The Memorial Gardens which were a pre-cursor to the New Town Centre are poorly integrated and within the core retail area there are limited street trees and large areas of paving, resulting in a hard environment. Queen's Square contains a bandstand, tree planters and block paving patterns and would benefit from an updated design. The square has been colonised by a pavement cafe in the western corner which provides additional activity.

Ease of movement:

The area is very well connected with key public transport hubs serving rail

and bus. The retail core is pedestrianised and movement is easy, however pedestrian access from the town centre to adjacent areas including civic uses on The Boulevard and the FE college and town library are poor due to the dominance of the dualled inner ring road formed by Peglar Way, College Road and Station Way. The lack of pedestrian priority is particularly apparent on the key route from the station to the town centre. Streets are cluttered by over engineered highways infrastructure, pedestrian barriers and traffic light systems and pedestrians are herded between fenced refuge areas.

Car parking is in multi storey or surface car parks accessed off the inner ring road.

Legibility:

Queen's Square and the bandstand are key landmarks for orientation and the core retail area is legible. County Mall due to its internalised layout is poorly legible in relation to the outside street network, and links north to the The Boulevard are less clear due to the offset nature of the pedestrian routes (this is being addressed through the new masterplan).

The legibility of links between the historic and new town centre are poor due to the lack of visual connections – this has been further reduced by the recent new retail block at the western end of Queen's Square.

Adaptability and diversity:

The town centre is not a diverse mix having an almost exclusively retail core area with office / civic and community uses pushed to the edge. There are few residential properties and a lack of evening activity in the New Town Centre.

Opportunities and threats:

Queen's Square, The Broadway and The Boulevard are a distinctive set piece of relatively intact town planning of the 1950/60s and as such could benefit

from some form of protection or recognition. However the proposals for Town Centre North are well advanced and set out a programme for wide scale change which will alter this character dramatically. The proposals seek to tackle the poor integration between Queen's Square and The Boulevard and introduce an increased mix of uses including residential. In taking forward these proposals it is important to ensure that the best of the New Town Centre is retained and enhanced, and that the lack of pedestrian priority on the inner ring road is tackled comprehensively and problems are not pushed further out.

The approach to the town centre from the railway station should be improved as a priority in combination with improved crossings to the station. Opportunities to develop active frontage around County Mall could be explored to create an active link from the rail / bus stations into the town centre core and an active frontage to the Memorial Gardens.

3.3 Town Centre Edge

Location:

Straddling West Green, Northgate, Southgate and Three Bridges wards taking in land ringing the town centre to the east and north of the historic High Street on Peglar Way and London Road and to the south of the New Town Centre on Haslett Avenue and Station Way. The sub-area includes commercial uses immediately adjacent to the station on the southern side of the rail line.

Character:

The area contains a mix of light industrial, office, hotel/leisure and out-of-town superstores including ASDA and Sainsbury's accessed off the inner ring road. The area also contains the late 1950s St Francis & St Anthony's church and church yard (listed). Buildings are stand alone large boxes with limited active frontage, and generally of 1-4 storeys (or equivalent) with the office block over the rail station around 6 storeys. The layout is piecemeal, arranged along the ring roads, and development varies in quality and age.

Materials are mixed and include brick, concrete, steel, glass and render. Recent hotels/ offices have duo pitched roofs including some rotunda towers at corners, and older blocks and superstores have flat or shallow pitched roofs.

The urban grain is coarse due to the large block and plot sizes and densities low due to the high proportion of land utilised for surface car parking which is a dominant characteristic.

Recent large scale 7 storey office development off Southgate Avenue has extended the commercial area of the town centre to the south of the rail line.

The area includes the former leisure centre site now being developed for 829 houses which sits to the south of Haslett Avenue.

Continuity and enclosure:

Particularly poor throughout this sub-area, with a dominance of non-active blank facades and large swathes of surface car parking fronting the street. Boundary definition is weak and poorly related to the street and pedestrian access points.

Public realm and landscape:

Public realm is generally of a poor quality and is dominated by highways infrastructure and over engineered access arrangements which prioritise vehicles above pedestrians. Trees surrounding West Green Park, St John's and St Francis and St Anthony's churches, plus trees planted on roundabouts and verges add an element of greenery to an otherwise tar macadam dominated area.

Public realm is particularly poor quality outside the railway station, presenting a poor first impression of the town to visitors.

Ease of movement:

The area contains Crawley Rail Station and is adjacent to the bus station. As previously discussed, pedestrian access is poor throughout this area due to the dominance of the highways and traffic of the ring roads, and the lack of single stage pedestrian crossing points.

Access to the majority of these sites is designed for the car, with a multitude of surface car parks available.

Legibility:

Although the area contains a number of large landmark buildings including the Crawley station tower block and adjacent nightclub, these do not positively contribute to the townscape, but are notable for their scale and prominence on the main routes through the town centre. Views to the historic High Street and St John's Church are available from the main roads creating points of interest on the ringroad.

Adaptability and diversity:

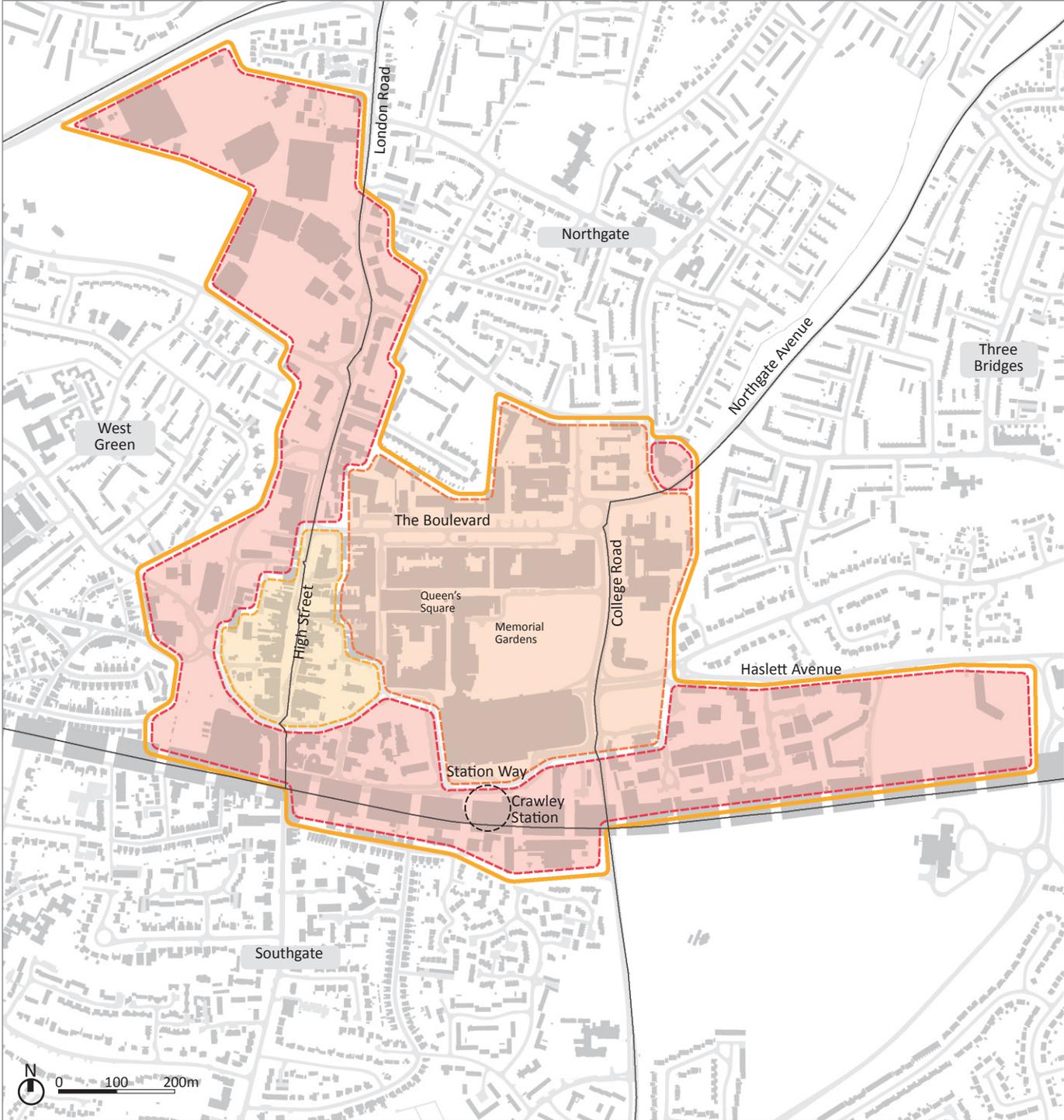
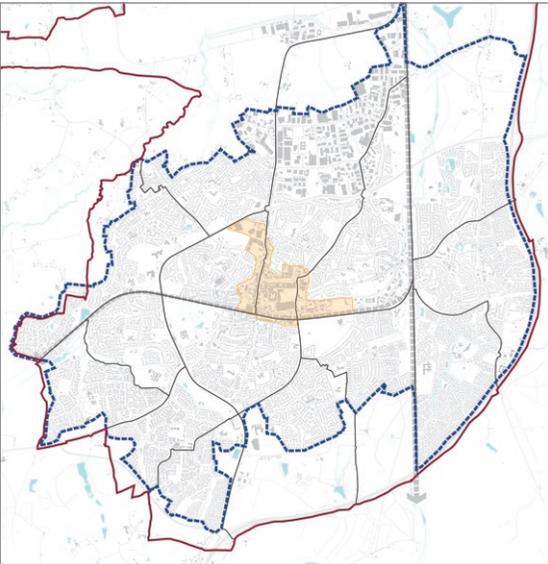
The area offers some potential for redevelopment on a site by site basis. The low building to plot ratios and inefficient layouts present opportunities for infill and densification. This area could be prioritised for a regeneration strategy to better integrate inner and outer town centre and adjacent neighbourhoods, and increase the quality and mix of development.

Opportunities and threats:

Typical of many town centre ring roads with large out-of-town retail sheds, dominated by traffic and highways infrastructure. The character of the area is likely to remain car dominated while the dual carriageway continues to separate the sub-area from the town centre core. Increasing pedestrian priority would be the first step towards integrating these sites into the town centre.

The station area should be prioritised for public realm improvements as a key arrival point for visitors to the town centre.

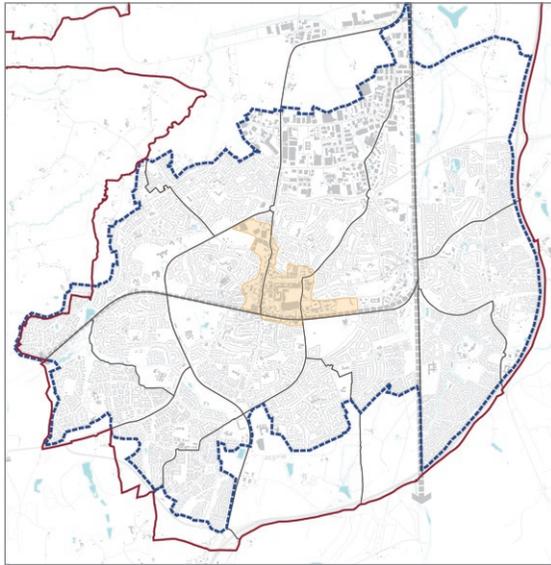
Fig 17: Character Area details: Town Centre
01: Sub areas



- Town Centre Character Area
- Historic High Street
- New Town Centre & Extension
- Town Centre Edge

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Fig 17: Character Area details: Town Centre
 02: Relevant Policy designations



- Town Centre Character Area
- Listed Buildings
- Conservation Areas
- Main Shopping area
- Main Employment Area
- Strategic Housing development opportunity
- Mixed Use development opportunities
- Town Centre North Boundary
- Existing Town Centre Boundary

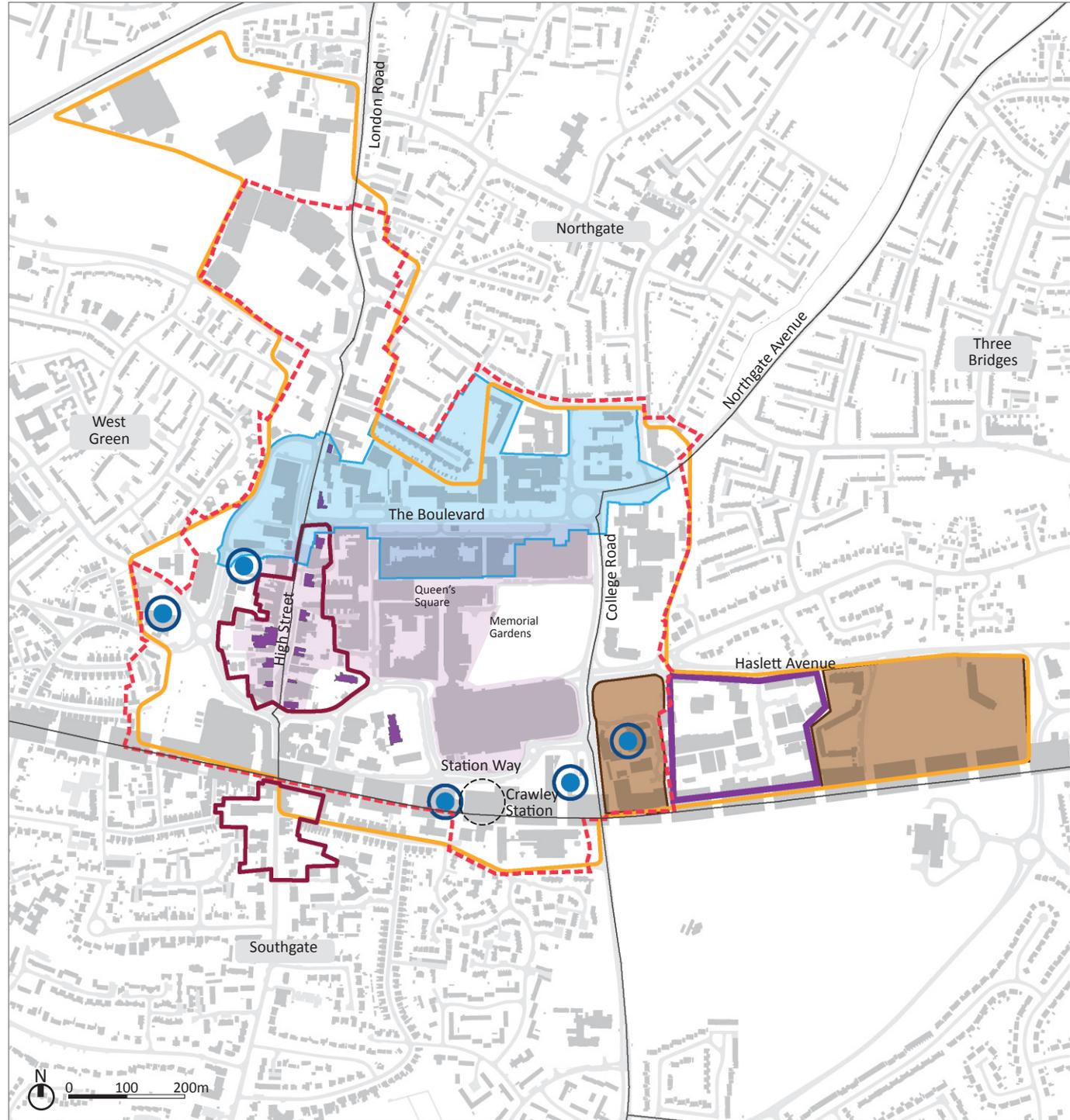
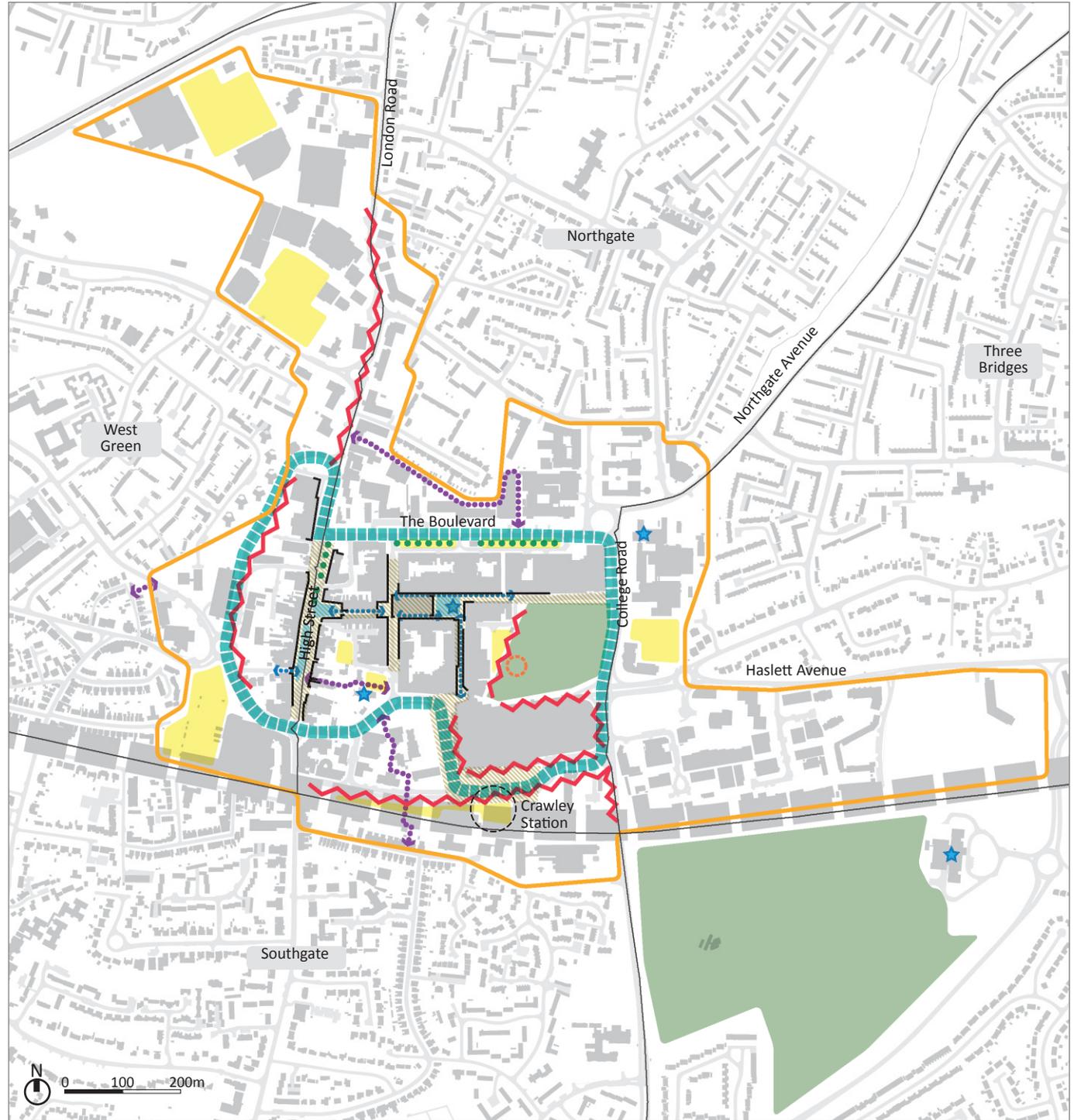


Fig 17: Character Area details: Town Centre
03: Analysis

- Town Centre Character Area
- Potential for designation as a Conservation Area / recognition of importance within New Town plan.
- Opportunity for public realm improvements
- Potential for increased pedestrian priority & crossings
- Key frontages
- Negative edges
- Designated Footpaths
- Pedestrian spaces
- Pedestrian only connections
- Surface car parking
- Green space
- Childrens Play
- Tree lined routes
- Landmarks



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Fig 18: Character Area details: Town Centre
Photos - Historic High Street



IMG_0211
George Hotel, High Street



IMG_0214
Church Walk, High Street



IMG_0215
St John the Baptist, High Street



IMG_0208
Jubilee Oak, High Street



IMG_0210
High Street

Photos - New Town Centre and Expansion



IMG_0197
Queen's Square



IMG_0195
Town Centre



IMG_0201
The Broadway



IMG_0205
The Broadwalk

Fig 18: Character Area details: Town Centre
Photos - New Town Centre and Expansion



IMG_0192
Inside County Mall



IMG_0193
View to St John the Baptist Church, Haslett Avenue
West



IMG_0238
Memorial Gardens



IMG_0231
Town Hall, The Boulevard



IMG_0227
View east along The Boulevard



IMG_0243
Central Sussex College, College Road



IMG_0247
Library, Haslett Avenue East



IMG_0246
Rear of County Mall



IMG_0248
Rear of County Mall

Fig 18: Character Area details: Town Centre
Photos - New Town Centre Edge



IMG_0189
Crawley Station, Station Way



IMG_0187
Outside station, looking towards town centre, Station Way



IMG_0190
Southgate Avenue