



# Cranbrook Town Centre Masterplan: A Development Narrative



Cover image: Cranbrook Town Centre, June 2024 (© Still Imaging 2024)

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# Introduction

## Background

Construction of the new town of Cranbrook began in June 2011, with the first new residents moving in just over a year later in August 2012. Today, with more than 3,200 homes and around 8,500 people living in it, Cranbrook continues to grow and will eventually have around 8,000 houses and 22,000 people calling the town home.

Alongside these homes numerous facilities and services have been provided at Cranbrook to support the people living in the town and enable them to form a functioning community, while also supporting the surrounding rural communities.

The town centre lies at the physical heart of Cranbrook and has always been envisaged as the future social and economic heart of the town, providing spaces for the community to thrive and grow. Although the Cranberry Farm pub opened within it in early summer 2017 further development has been sporadic, reflecting both the difficult economic conditions during this period, and the reality of the constraints

faced by commercial development. It was five years later, in late summer 2022, that construction started of a supermarket, children's nursery, high street shops with homes above and a town square. At the time of writing (autumn 2024) these are nearing completion with the supermarket and one of the high street shops currently being fitted out, and the apartments above the shops having been let. Although these buildings marking another milestone for Cranbrook and its residents, they are surrounded by a significant amount of land that remains empty and undeveloped, yet to find its role as part of a thriving town centre.

The UK high street has been the subject of much discussion in recent years as the impact of online shopping and changing habits have affected how we use town centres. To survive, town centres have had to adapt and evolve so that they remain relevant to the lives of the people they serve. The assumption that activity will be retail led is no longer the case. What is not yet clear is the mix of uses required to meet Cranbrook's needs,

both commercially and for the community.

We must also be mindful that the town is close to Exeter whose established city centre and out of centre retail areas provide significant shopping opportunities. Cranbrook cannot compete with these far larger offerings, but the town has the advantage of a blank canvas on which to define for itself what it means and needs to create to become a successful 21st century town centre. This document sets out how that will be achieved.

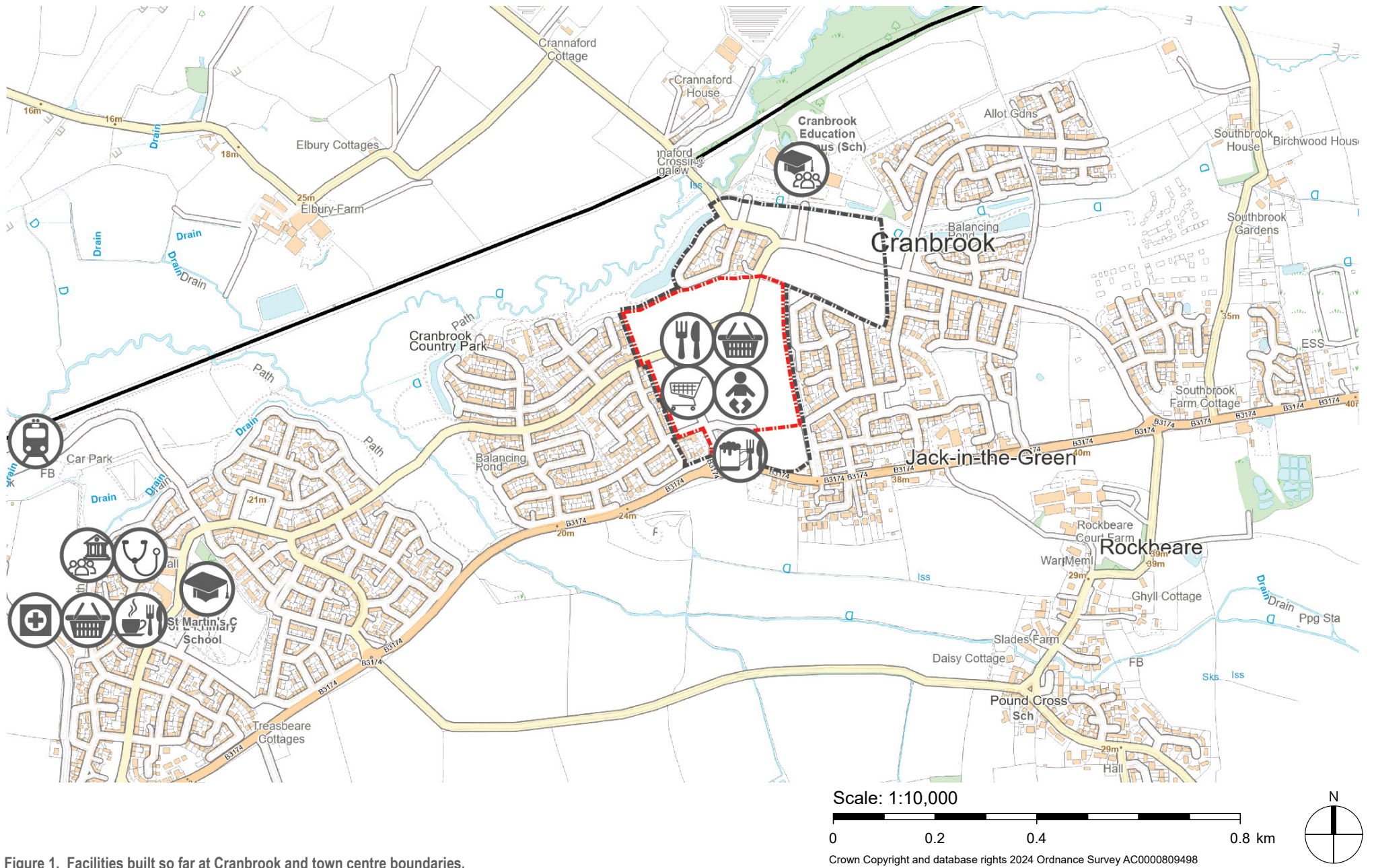


Figure 1. Facilities built so far at Cranbrook and town centre boundaries.

## Cranbrook Plan Policy

The [Cranbrook Plan](#) includes policy CB21 specifically addressing the development of the town centre and sets out a holistic vision for it:

“An enterprising, vibrant, innovative, exciting, and sustainable town centre that develops a strong economic and cultural identity that comes from, brings together and supports the community of Cranbrook.”

(EDDC Cranbrook Plan, 2022)

The key priorities for Cranbrook town centre are:

- Resilience and flexibility – user needs and customer demands change as time passes and it is imperative that spaces and buildings are designed flexibly so that they have alternative futures without rebuilding.
- Community identity and cohesion – designing a town centre that encourages social interaction and builds strong social networks, it must be equally attractive and accessible to the whole community.
- Local enterprise – opportunities for businesses to establish, thrive and grow. We know that there is lots of enterprise in Cranbrook already and the town centre will be a core location for the local economy.

This document will steer the town centre toward this vision and priorities through:

- Helping to direct design going forward in order to give the town centre a high quality architectural distinctiveness;
- Stimulating and directing development;
- Providing clear direction on what should be achieved and what should be avoided so that the town centre is fit for purpose;
- Recognising the necessity for flexibility so that spaces have alternative futures as needs and demands change;
- Addressing the wider determinants of health – fulfilling employment needs, places and spaces where social bonds and good relationships can be fostered;

This document is a dynamic plan, it can provide an overview of the current conditions and recommendations, advice and guidance for how the next stages of the town might be designed and achieved and but it cannot predict the future or design for the unknown. It is for this reason that where the locations of buildings or uses is not yet known, the plan does not attempt to dictate exactly what happens, instead it suggests the types of development that will be appropriate.

## The Opportunity

By the time negotiations were taking place between East Devon District Council and developers over the proposals for the supermarket and shops a number of areas within the town centre had been turned over to housing, making the town centre smaller than originally planned. The change in the extent of the town centre can be seen in Figure 1 overleaf. As a result, negotiations also took place over the future ownership and plans for the remaining land in the town centre to safeguard it for uses needed by the community in the years to come. These negotiations ultimately led, in November 2022, to East Devon District Council purchasing 1.5 hectares (3.8 acres) of town centre land.

Cranbrook Town Centre is one of the four commercial areas comprising the Exeter and East Devon Enterprise Zone, the purpose of which is to provide world-class, low-carbon environments that support business success. Over £100m has been allocated for infrastructure investment supporting activity within the zone. The purchase of land at the town centre represents a significant public sector investment in the Enterprise Zone. In addition to this commercial purchase of land the East Devon New Community partners are also required to transfer a further 2.6 hectares (6.5 acres) in the town centre to Devon County Council, East Devon District Council and Cranbrook Town Council for £1 as part of existing legal agreements. This means that when all the land is transferred, the total public sector landholding in

the town centre will be 4.1 hectares (10.3 acres).

The substantial public sector land-holding within the town centre provides the opportunity to take proactive steps to address the sense of uncertainty within the community over what the future holds for their town centre. With the supermarket, shops, children's nursery and apartments nearing completion the time is right to set out a dynamic plan for how Cranbrook's town centre will continue to develop in a way that is fit for the future of this young and growing town.

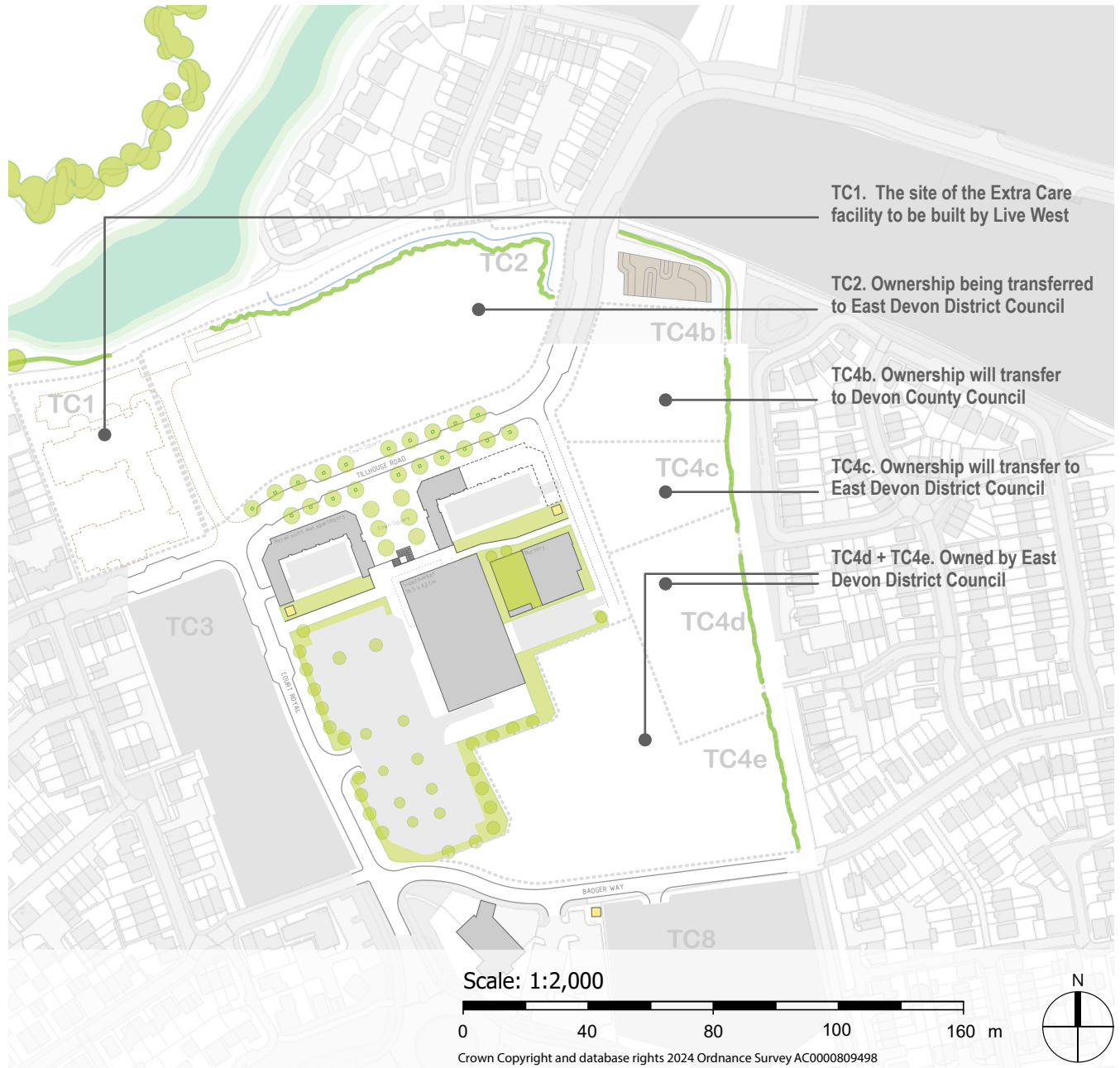


Figure 2. The parcels of land within the Town Centre and their ownership.

# Evidence & research

The proposals and strategy in this document have been developed from existing policy, evidence and research commissioned for Cranbrook including the [Cranbrook Plan Development Plan Document](#), [Cranbrook Economic Development Strategy](#), [Cranbrook Our Place Operational Plan](#) and [Cranbrook in Common – A cultural development strategy](#). The document also uses the evidence and experience gained from being part of the NHS England Healthy New Town Pilot programme from 2015 to 2018. Some of what was learnt was captured in the series of [guidance documents produced as a result of the programme by NHS England](#) and the collaborative research carried out with the Devon Public Health Data Analytics team and Space Syntax, some of which was captured in [Cranbrook HNT: From Learning to Action](#), produced by the District Council and the Devon Director of Public Health setting out options available to address the evidence and recommendations that resulted.

In addition to these existing documents, over the course of 2024, there has been engagement with stakeholders including Cranbrook Town Council, NHS Devon, Devon County Council, East Devon leisure team, Devon and Cornwall Police, Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service and EX5 Alive to understand what the service requirements of each organisation are, how they envisage their services operating alongside one another and the spatial needs that may result. Although this could never result in anything definitive without being far more in depth and time consuming it has provided far greater clarity and the broad understanding necessary for this stage of design.

Some of the most important recent work was the engagement carried out by Ash Futures on behalf of EDDC in late 2023 that asked the Cranbrook community for their opinion about the future of the town centre. It is this work that provides an insight

into what the people of Cranbrook want for their town centre. With this insight the other evidence and research gains meaning and purpose.

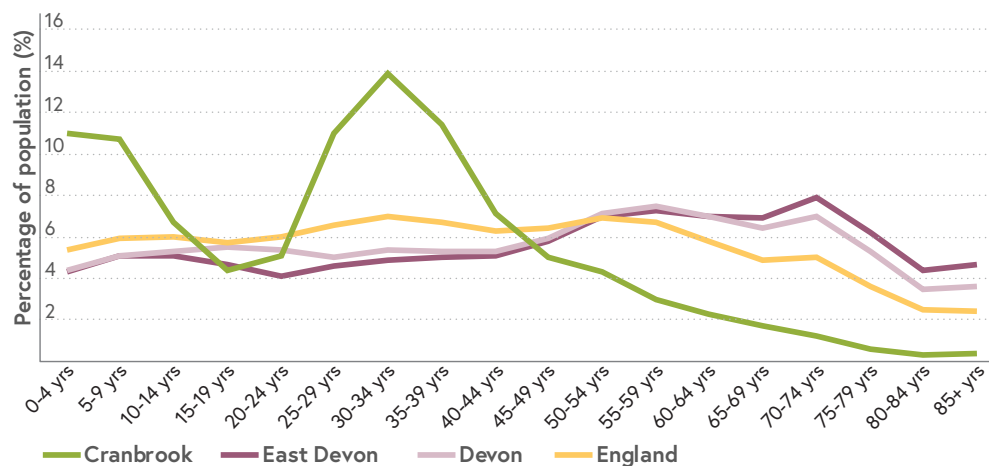


## The People

The age profile of Cranbrook is incredibly young, with data from the 2021 Census showing that the town has more than double the England and East Devon average for children between the ages of 0-9 and adults between 29-39 years of age. However, past the age of 45, the town has fewer people than the East Devon and England averages. East Devon as a whole has higher proportions of older people than the national average and so Cranbrook is an outlier not only in the district but also in Devon where it has by far the youngest age profile of any town or city. Population forecasting undertaken by Devon County Council's Public Health Intelligence team indicates that although the average age of the town's population will increase it will remain younger than other Devon towns in the long term. This is a pattern that has also been seen consistently across the previous, 20th century, generation of New Towns.

Cranbrook's young age profile means that the needs of the community are very different to those of more established towns in East Devon, particularly those with significantly higher proportions of older people, such as Sidmouth and Budleigh Salterton. This means that the town centre will also need to reflect those differences

Figure 3. Graph of Cranbrook age profile compared to East Devon, Devon and England. Data from Office for National Statistics (Census 2021) .



in the types of shops and services on offer. To start with, there are far more economically active people in Cranbrook, making the provision of employment opportunities taking a much higher priority than in other East Devon communities. There is also a far greater need for children's and family services.

## The Economy

From the outset, Cranbrook has been thought of as part of a broader pattern of development at the eastern edge of East Devon and around Exeter. This set Cranbrook as the residential heart of an ambitious programme of long-term economic growth, building on the area's reputation in the knowledge economy and high-end engineering. The SkyPark, Exeter Logistics Park, Exeter Science Park, Airport Business Park and the planned Power Park are all within 4km of Cranbrook and linked by direct bus and cycle routes both to the town and surrounding areas, including Exeter.

However, despite its predominantly residential role within this, Cranbrook will be an important economic entity in its own right, the Treasbeare expansion area of Cranbrook, granted outline planning permission

in Spring 2024, includes a site of up to 10 hectares for employment development. But it is as the home of businesses serving its community, those supporting activity on the business parks and start-up or smaller businesses that sit more naturally within towns that the importance of Cranbrook in this broad picture of development will stand out. Although its economic role could be seen as complimentary to the business parks, it is vital to their success as it creates a broader spectrum of activity and a more vibrant, attractive place for people living and working in the area.

The three expansion areas of Treasbeare, Codens and Grange include new neighbour centres that will have broad similarities to the existing neighbourhood centre at Younghayes though they will all develop their

Figure 4. The levels of economically active people in Cranbrook is significantly higher than that seen in the rest of Devon or England as a whole, reflecting the relative youth of its population.

(Source, Office for National Statistics 2021)

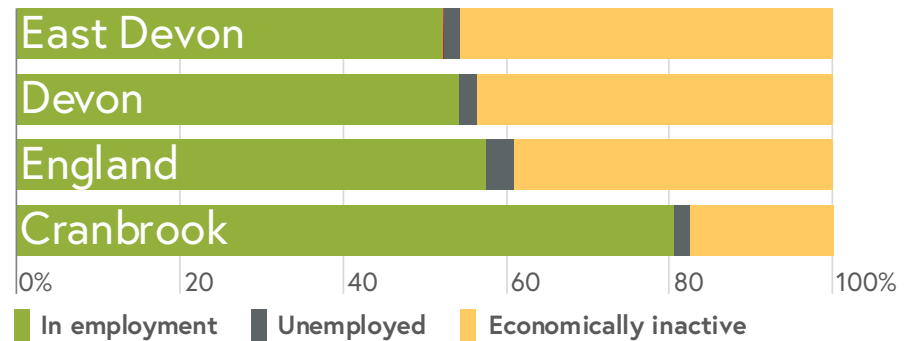




Figure 5. Cranbrook Town Centre sits as part of a wider area of economic activity as part of the Exeter and East Devon Enterprise Zone together with Exeter Science Park, Skypark and Power Park. It will play an important complimentary role to encourage business start-ups and provide a broader spread of employment opportunities than the business parks can provide on their own.

own identity and mix of employment, social and community activity. The Bluehayes expansion area will also include a mixed use area though on a slightly smaller scale and likely to develop in a different way given its proximity to the neighbourhood centres at Younghayes and Treasbeare.

centres will provide for the local needs of people living across Cranbrook. The town centre has a different scale and purpose and can play host to a wider range of retail, employment, cultural and social activity that can showcase the activity and creativity within the town's community.

Together, these neighbourhood and mixed use

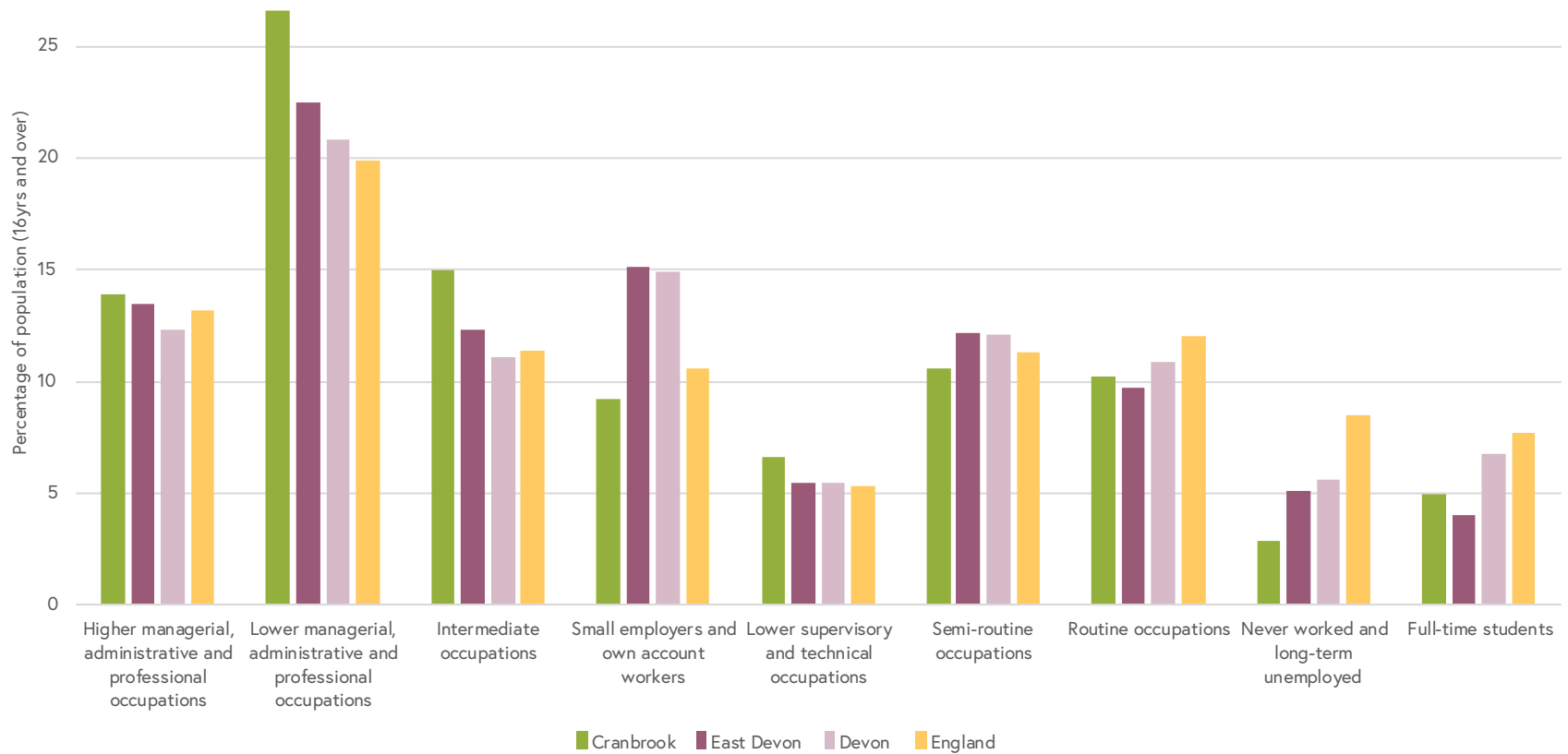


Figure 6. The economically active part of the Cranbrook community have a greater proportion of higher socio-economic jobs than the local or national average.

(Data from ONS Census 2021)

## Economic Development Strategy

The 2015 [Cranbrook Economic Development Strategy](#) articulates an economic vision for Cranbrook as:

“... a lively, enterprising town with a strong entrepreneurial identity, which builds its own business base and creates strong links with surrounding employment developments.”

(2015, Ash Futures Ltd)

The strategy has three themes of:

1. Supporting enterprise with the Cranbrook Business Ladder
2. Creating employment and providing services in Cranbrook and
3. Building strong links with the Growth Point.

A high proportion of economically active people means there is greater chance of start-ups and small businesses being generated and needing suitable spaces within the town. There is a higher proportion of people in managerial and intermediate occupations than the UK or local averages, and under-representation of small employers. This could suggest a relatively high performing community without the spaces necessary for small businesses and start-ups to be represented.

The diversity of backgrounds and expertise in a large, highly skilled community makes the nature of any potential businesses unpredictable so there needs to be a range of spaces that are

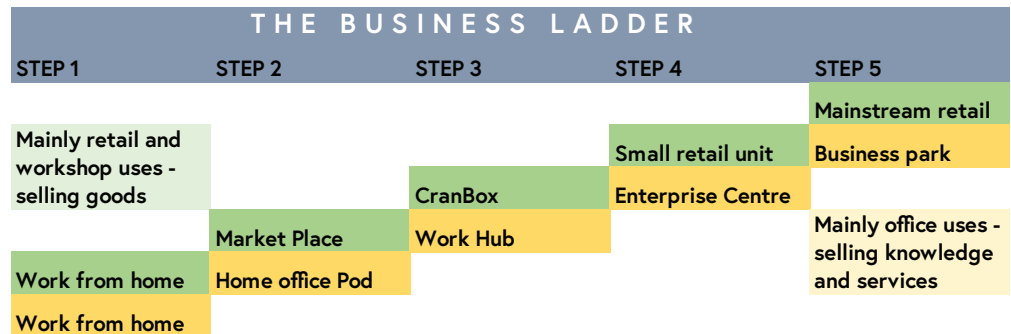
adaptable in the short and long-term to remain relevant as business needs grow and evolve.

The Business Ladder concept provides this range of spaces to allow the unexpected to happen, support growth and adapt as the town, its community and businesses find their feet and evolve. With space for businesses at all stages, from start-up onwards the concept was developed for Cranbrook, where a community and economy are being built from scratch and, with no history of economic activity, the business needs are unknown.

Central to this is “CranBox” which will deliver adaptable space that will provide accommodation for small businesses. These units will enable individuals and businesses to deliver a range of services to the community with easy in/easy out terms and conditions. This will reduce the financial risk to individuals or companies who are seeking to set up a new business, or expand an existing business, in Cranbrook.

Although this has a primarily economic purpose it is also integral to how Cranbrook discovers its purpose as a town, giving it a bold and ever evolving visual identity within the town centre and a strong community identity in the hearts and minds of its citizens.

Figure 7. The Cranbrook Business Ladder  
(2015, Ash Futures Ltd.)



## Cultural and Community Development

The 2016 [Cranbrook in Common Cultural Development Strategy](#) outlines a 10 year plan focusing on integrating culture into the town's development. The strategy emphasizes the importance of culture in enhancing community identity, health, and economic growth. It is structured around four core themes: People, Learning and Skills, Activity, and Infrastructure.

The EX5 Alive hub has been established in the Cranbrook Education Campus using space that isn't yet needed for education purposes. It provides spaces for community groups to operate from as well as support services such as the food bank, public health nursing, warm hub, support services for families with

special educational needs. It also hosts the Cranbrook Community Builder and Community Connector whose roles have been financially supported by the Exeter and Cranbrook Live and Move programme (Sport England Local Delivery Pilot and East Devon District Council). The Community Builder has supported 54 different groups within the town. The establishment of EX5 Alive and the community connecting and building programme has gone some way to addressing the needs of the community identified in the Cultural Development Strategy.



Figure 8. Pump-track opening, 2024. The community at Cranbrook is positive, vibrant and pro-active, reflected in the successful annual Cranbrook Day and the constant efforts of the Town Council working with community organisations to provide activities and outlets for the town.

(© Matt Round 2024.)

### Cultural Development Strategy Key Points:

**Vision:** The strategy aims to create a unique and desirable place that celebrates local identity while embracing global opportunities. It also focuses on supporting cultural innovation and ensuring sustainability.

**Community Engagement:** The strategy underscores the importance of engaging residents in cultural activities and decisions, proposing the establishment of roles like a Cultural Development Officer to drive initiatives.

**Cultural Integration:** It emphasizes culture's role in planning and development, aligning with national policies that recognize the importance of cultural well-being in sustainable communities.

**Recommendations:** These include fostering local talent, ensuring accessibility to cultural activities, and encouraging co-design processes where residents participate in planning cultural spaces.

## Health and Wellbeing

Cranbrook was one of 10 developments chosen to be part of the 2015 NHS England Healthy New Town Pilot Programme. This marked the first time any part of the NHS had taken an active role in shaping the built environment to explore how the development of new places could create healthier and connected communities with integrated and high-quality services.

The legacy of being part of this programme was together with Exeter, in 2018 Cranbrook became one of Sport England's Local Delivery Pilot places. This is a programme aimed at increasing activity levels and for Cranbrook the focus has been on families.

For the Cranbrook Plan, the vision for the town to promote good health and wellbeing outcomes is set out in policy CB1.

The built environment significantly influences the health and wellbeing of communities by shaping their physical, mental, social, and environmental conditions. Well-designed, inclusive, and sustainable environments promote active living, social cohesion, mental well-being, and resilience, leading to healthier and more vibrant communities.

## Built environment factors influencing health and wellbeing:

- **Design**  
walkable places, pedestrian and cycle routes, accessible parks and spaces have a positive impact
- **Design of public spaces**  
environments that promote social connectivity enhance social cohesion, reduce feelings of loneliness and provide a sense of belonging
- **Air quality**  
the need to travel by car affects traffic levels, 'dirty' land uses can worsen air quality
- **Green spaces**  
access to parks, gardens and the natural environment reduces stress, improves mood and overall mental health
- **Access to healthy food**  
through spaces for growing food, grocery shops in easy access and spaces for farmers markets obesity levels can be reduced
- **Noise and light pollution**  
reductions in noise and light pollution can significantly improve mental health
- **Safety and security**  
safe, well-lit and maintained public spaces can reduce crime and the fear of crime, contributing to a community's overall sense of security and wellbeing
- **Sustainable design**  
energy efficient buildings that may use renewable energy sources and incorporate sustainable waste management protects the environment but also means that having warm spaces is more affordable and reduces exposure to pollutants
- **Climate resilience**  
resilient infrastructure protects communities from the adverse health effects of climate change, such as heatwaves, floods and storms

## Town Centre Community Engagement 2023

The purpose of this engagement exercise was to gather community input to inform the master planning of the town centre. A series of workshops and other events enabled members of the community to explore the issues with the consultant team and officers involved in the development of the town centre.

The survey that grew out of the engagement process had a very high response rate with almost 1,400 responses to the main survey and 50 responses to the business survey indicating a high level of interest and willingness to participate in the process of delivering the town centre.

The findings of the consultation are the most up-to-date evidence that we have of the needs and desires of the community and so are key to shaping this plan. They highlight community priorities in terms of the sorts of facilities they would like to see, but also the results go some way towards revealing what people want it to be like. This has been instrumental in shaping the approach to design for the town centre and will have the longest lasting impact of all the results.

Figure 9. Young people had a greater bias towards social spaces than other adults for what they wanted in the town centre but the results were otherwise broadly similar.  
(Data from Ash Futures Ltd.)

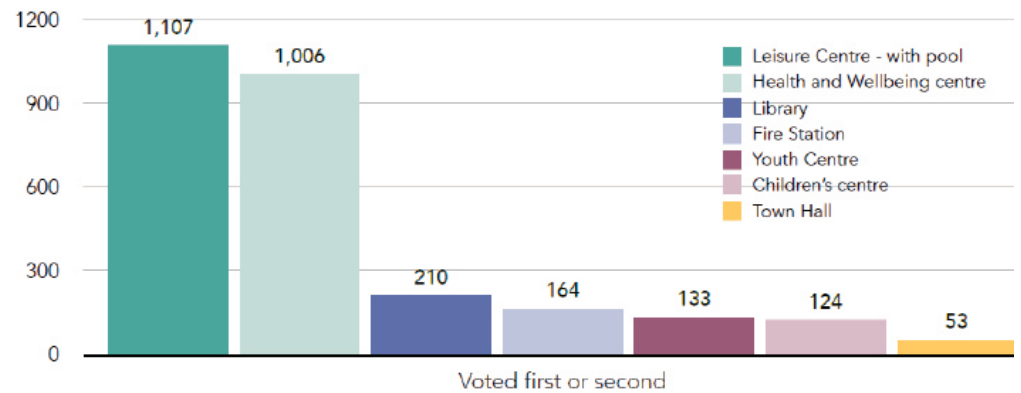
### Young people

- Places to eat
- Wide range of shops
- Town square
- Bars and pubs
- Cinema
- Housing for elderly / vulnerable
- Temporary / adaptable space (CranBox)
- Live / work units
- Workhub hot-desking
- Small workshops

### Adults

- Wide range of shops
- Places to eat
- Town square
- Bars and pubs
- Temporary / adaptable space (CranBox)
- Housing for elderly / vulnerable
- Small workshops
- Cinemas
- Live / work units
- Workhub hot-desking

Figure 10. The survey results for what people wanted to see in the town centre showed that the priorities for adults and young people differed in places, but were largely the same.  
(2023, Ash Futures Ltd.)





# 1397

responded to the survey



# 1107

want a leisure centre most

# 784

want a busy town square



# 50%

want outside places to sit, chat and eat

# 93%

will visit town centre at least weekly



## Key points from Community Engagement:

- 1. Community Priorities:** The top priorities identified by residents include the development of a leisure centre with a swimming pool and a health and wellbeing centre with a GP surgery. The community also expressed a desire for a diverse range of shops, eateries, a vibrant town square, public and green spaces, cultural venues, and family and youth facilities.
- 2. Town Centre Design:** Residents favoured a design that incorporates greenery, integrates with the surrounding environment and country park, includes outdoor social spaces, and provides for local businesses. Accessibility, safety, and modern, versatile designs were also emphasized.
- 3. Market and Business Spaces:** There is strong support (95%) for a regular market in the town centre, with preferences for farmers' markets, street food markets, and specialist markets, and strong support (82%) for CranBox, offering affordable, flexible spaces for small businesses.
- 4. Sustainability and Accessibility:** Suggestions included excellent public transport links, renewable energy, green construction, recycling points, and active travel options. Residents also called for improved pavements, cycling infrastructure, wheelchair accessibility, and ample public seating.
- 5. Youth and Micro-Business Needs:** Given the town's young demographic, there is a need for spaces that cater to youth, offering both organized and unstructured activities. Micro-businesses expressed a need for low-cost, flexible working spaces within the town centre.

# Masterplan Delivery

An important factor noted by the Economic and Cultural Development Strategies is that we can't predict the future and it is important to be flexible and provide the means for a community to evolve and find for itself what it needs. These strategies were written on the basis that clear underlying principles can lead to far stronger end results as they can be specifically tailored and designed to enable the community to generate results from within rather than relying on external help.

This masterplan also acknowledges the future is unknown and unpredictable and works with that uncertainty to provide the community the means to find what it needs instead of dictating fixed solutions. Its delivery aims to change the perception of a Local Planning Authority's role in development from dictating and controlling to advising and enabling. It puts community and stakeholder engagement at the heart of this process and document as it provides

the information and direction needed to progress.

This document uses a Development Narrative to propose a plausible way to achieve the ambitions held for the town centre over time. It does not rely on a fixed picture of how the town centre will be but paints an outline of how it could be, along with a structure and guidance for development so those ambitions can be delivered as they become clear. It is termed a narrative because it needs to tell a compelling story of the direction the town centre will take and how it will undertake its journey. It must be compelling to bring the community with it and attract the investment needed to make it happen.

The narrative is structured around what we know so far; the broad preferences expressed by the community; buildings to be delivered by developers and public sector and the likely order this will happen. It uses

this to surmise what is likely to happen from one stage to the next, with feedback on earlier stages from the community and business suggesting what buildings and spaces are wanted next. At any stage, the narrative can put little detail into what will happen beyond the very next steps but can suggest a direction based on the priorities outlined by the community.

A development narrative is about maintaining patience, gathering adequate information to fully understand what is wanted, having a clear vision and not rushing into decisions or actions to be seen to be doing something. It is above all about maintaining good communication and engagement between stakeholders throughout the long-term process of building a town.

# Infrastructure

## Green Infrastructure (GI)

The scheme will incorporate appropriate green and blue infrastructure (planting, habitat creation, public and nature connectivity and surface water management) in line with Natural England's Green Infrastructure Planning and Design Guide to meet their five GI principles of:

- Nature rich beautiful places;
- Active and Healthy Places;
- Thriving and Prosperous Communities;
- Improved Water Management
- Resilient and Climate Positive Places.

The GI scheme will reflect the change in character from urban to rural in moving from the town centre to the country park, with more formal interventions around the town centre becoming softer, less formal and with more native species approaching the country park.

Trees will be large canopy to maximise eco-system service benefits which include shade and temperature regulation, health and wellbeing, wildlife habitat, carbon sequestration and improved air quality. Smaller/ fastigate trees will be limited to locations in very close proximity to buildings. Understorey

Figure 11. The Country Park runs through the middle of Cranbrook and is one of the most frequently mentioned features when residents describe the reasons they love living in their new town. (2022, Cranbrook Town Council)



planting will be selected to support insects such as bees and butterflies. Nest boxes will be provided on buildings and reptile and invertebrate log piles will be created in appropriate locations, including in the public realm close to the country park.

Developing a strategy for effectively dealing with surface water run-off is also an important consideration in the early master-planning stage with appropriate treatments developed as the scheme progresses through detail design.

There is very limited capacity for additional surface water storage within the country park. The slope of the site, with an average gradient of 1:20 (5%), together with the underlying clay soils severely limits the potential for infiltration of surface water into the ground below. While buried storage crates are an effective means of storing excess surface water run-off, they do little to improve water quality and fail to provide amenity or biodiversity value. A Sustainable Drainage System (SuDS) scheme is therefore proposed. The principal aims of a SuDS scheme are:

- To control the quantity of runoff to reduce flood risk and maintain and protect the natural water cycle
- To improve the quality of run-off to prevent pollution
- To create and sustain better places

for people and nature

The masterplan proposes the use of an integrated SuDS treatment train which captures and attenuates surface water as close to source as possible through a variety of measures including green roofs, permeable paving, bioretention areas/ raingardens, tree pits and hardscape storage (open water channels/ rills). The site conditions will require many of these features to be under-drained and some buried storage capacity may also be required as a last resort measure. It is expected that some 25-30% of the external surface area will comprise soft landscape and permeable paving will be used for parking areas.

Such a well-designed scheme will enhance visual amenity, provide a range of wildlife habitats and opportunities for incidental play, while controlling run-off and removing pollutants prior to entry into watercourses beyond the site.

The SuDS scheme will be a core part of green infrastructure provision within the scheme.

## Transport

Cranbrook has excellent bus links, with buses running through the town every 15 minutes and going directly to Exeter city centre. The train station is around 1.5km to the west of the town centre and buses are expected to serve the station once a new road through the Bluehayes expansion area extends to Burrough Fields, the existing road to the station. This will significantly improve station access to other parts of the town, including the town centre where new bus stops will be installed along Tillhouse Road.

The expanded Cranbrook will be more than 4km long from east to west. With the town centre at the physical centre it is beyond reasonable walking distance for the expansion areas but easily accessible cycling or scooting from across the town. Most of the town (existing and planned expansion) is also relatively level, which makes travel by these means more attractive. The 2023 consultation survey indicated that 50% of people value easier access to the town centre on foot, with only just under a third of respondents wanting more car parking.

The town has wide pavements along its main roads for shared use by people walking and cycling and those on Tillhouse Road in the town centre are due to be further widened to make pedestrian use more attractive. For the expansion of Cranbrook the strategy has changed and in line with guidance published by the Department for Transport segregated cycle paths will be provided on the main routes. It is not feasible or viable to retrofit

segregated cycle paths throughout the first phases of Cranbrook so this design will not be used in the town centre as you would have very short sections of these before going back to shared routes. In designing new shared paths and spaces, better consideration of how they integrate surfaces that are suitable for wheelchair users and people using pushchairs and prams will be given so that the town centre is accessible for all.

Cycle racks have been provided at Morrisons and in the town square and further covered cycle stands will be designed and provided in public spaces that are well overlooked, including outside key buildings including the Tillhouse, Leisure Centre and Health and Wellbeing centre. These cycle stands will also be suitable for parking cargo bikes and other non-standard cycles in order to encourage travel by these means. Futureproofing for the provision for e-bike stands will also be included.

Cranbrook's movement strategy is to encourage town centre visits by bus, walking or cycling and embed sustainable movement habits. The town centre will remain open for access by private car and there is an undeniable need for car parking provision. Morrisons are due to open their supermarket in late 2024/early 2025 and are going to make their 160 space car park available for all visitors to the town centre and this is expected to meet most parking needs in the medium term. The Cranberry Farm pub has 65 car parking spaces and at

the time of writing there is no restriction on the use of these, but it reasonable to assume that restrictions may be introduced as the town centre becomes more well used. Any changes to the current policy will be for the pub operator to decide and implement.

Regardless of the strategy for encouraging sustainable travel, there is not enough land available for the town centre for additional large ground-level public car parking without significant hinderance to the ability to provide the buildings and facilities the community will need. Multi-storey or below ground parking is unlikely to be viable at Cranbrook due to high capital costs and lower land value.

Modest amounts of parking for specific uses will be supported where it is well related to nearby buildings and complements the public realm but this document does not seek to prescribe the amount of parking per use. Sharing of parking provision by multiple uses will be actively pursued as this will lower the overall amount required as buildings and uses will have varying peak times.

Most additional parking will be part of the public realm such as along the Tillhouse Road, which is due to have additional on-street parking bays when the existing grass island is removed.

Public realm car parking will be located both for ease of use and natural surveillance. Where appropriate,

for example where parking is provided between the street and a building frontage, parking will be designed as part of a multi-functional space so that it can be used for other purposes if needed.

# Specific developments

There are a number of public buildings slated for the town centre that range in certainty depending on how clear the service need, intended building programme and funding are for each one. In many or most cases the way services are delivered and funded have changed significantly in the time since these buildings were first proposed for the town centre so, although a huge amount of work has been carried out to understand the needs driving each one, it can appear that little progress has been made.

However, it is important that buildings are designed built in a way that is flexible and meets current and future needs. Building in this flexibility ensures that buildings continue to be fit for purpose in the long term.

Some of these projects are integral to the built strategy for the town centre. The Tillhouse (Town Hall) and CranBox, for instance, both help to define spaces early on, such as the extended town square, and also play an active role helping the town develop its economic, social and cultural feet.

## CranBox

CranBox was developed by in 2014 by East Devon District Council, in partnership with the Cranbrook community, based on the Business Ladder concept that formed the basis of a successful bid for government funding to help develop local enterprise. However, of all the ideas held within the Business Ladder, it was CranBox that captured people's imagination, gaining the interest and support of local businesses, funding bodies and community.

The idea behind CranBox is the rapid delivery of adaptable low-cost spaces for businesses and other organisations in Cranbrook. Originally it was thought of as using shipping containers both for the spaces within them and how they can be used as building blocks to define space for seating or performance between them.

CranBox is a key component for the town centre and could house a range of uses from retail, food and beverage outlets, to space for cultural and community activities.

CranBox aims to fill a gap in the market and provide spaces that small businesses would normally occupy in the mix of older buildings of established town centres.

This market sector is diverse, vibrant and important for town centre resilience and local economic and social needs. The trade-off to the risk is that there is more potential demand from these smaller businesses than those able to afford the larger spaces.

A location around the TC2 square will help to frame it and with the early delivery of Cranbox this will provide a purpose to the square, which may be established in a temporary or smaller form to start off with. CranBox should also form a high-street edge as the activity and businesses within it can be used to provide a lively and ever-changing frontage to Cranbrook's "shop window".



Figures 12 & 13. The Shed in the new community at Whitehill and Borden is an adapted agricultural portal-frame shed with small business units within it. It is home to a number of local, indigenous businesses, is a popular meeting place for residents and an easily recognisable part of the community's identity. (Images EDDC 2021)



## Purposes fulfilled by CranBox

1. Rapid delivery of space for the fulfilment of local needs
2. Low-cost space and shared management of facilities reduce overheads and therefore the risks to potential entrepreneurs which allows more business ideas to be tested making it quicker to find what businesses and services are needed and wanted in this new town
3. A higher number of small spaces is more likely to create a vibrant and diverse town centre making it more attractive to visitors
4. A greater diversity of businesses and organisations makes a more resilient town centre and local economy
5. CranBox, by being diverse and able to change to meet evolving business needs, can provide visual change and interest to help Cranbrook's town centre stand out and compete on a more equal footing with established towns
6. By being adaptable CranBox can test what spaces are wanted and needed by businesses and the community at Cranbrook without the need to make them permanent before knowing what works and what does not
7. It should allow the creation of spaces that would otherwise not be available to a young, relatively small community such as a covered market, or informal performance space
8. Allowing a diversity of business ideas to be tested and developed within an adaptable structure makes it possible for Cranbrook to develop its economic and community identity and provide a unique physical identity within the town centre

## The Tillhouse (Cranbrook Town Hall)

Cranbrook Town Council are of critical importance to the success of the town centre. They already have responsibility for the Younghayes centre and the town's parks and open spaces and will be taking on ownership of the town square that is under construction. Going forward, it is intended that the Town Council will have an increasingly large role in the stewardship of assets and so it is imperative that in doing so, they have the ability to generate income to help cover the costs associated with owning and managing buildings and facilities.

The Town Council's vision for The Tillhouse is that it will be at the heart of the community of Cranbrook as the hub for community and social activities, and will benefit residents, tradespeople and visitors alike. To achieve this, the ambition is for the building to incorporate the Town Council offices and a multi-use open space for entertainment, events, exhibitions, indoor markets and for Council meetings alongside a café-bar. Above ground floor level the building will generate income by including hot-desking space for small and micro businesses and flexible meetings spaces. The spaces and uses at The Tillhouse will be designed to complement the offer at Cranbox.

With a central location in the town centre, The Tillhouse can act as community hub, offering a home for a wide range of services beyond those that the Town Council are responsible for, for example family and youth services and activities that currently take place at EX5



Alive. The Cranbrook Ranger has an important role in the town, educating people about the nearby Country Park and facilitating organised activities within it. A base at The Tillhouse for the ranger presents an excellent opportunity for including a green infrastructure link between the building and the country park.

As well as linking with the country park, the Tillhouse can be used to frame the wider public realm and in particular a second or enlarged public square. Sitting at the back of this square, The Tillhouse will be a building that has gravitas and a high status in the town.

This second public square will be on the sunnier side of the street and is more suitable for seating to relax and socialise and informal play. Having a second public square in the town centre will also enable larger events and celebrations to take place, straddling Tillhouse Road.

Figure 14. The new leisure centre and swimming pool in Chard, by AHR Architects, is an example of well-designed modern architecture that responds successfully to its brief and sensitive local context. The parking is fairly limited as it is just outside the town centre, and has a high quality surface that helps lift the appearance of the building and make the parking area an attractive space where events can take place.

(Image EDDC 2021)



## Leisure Centre and Swimming Pool

A leisure centre is the facility that the residents of the town have expressed the strongest desire to see built. A town centre location will mean that it is easily accessible by everyone and people can link visits to other town centre facilities and services e.g. the supermarket or dropping/picking up children at school or nursery.

Having a town centre location makes the design of the leisure centre of paramount importance so that it has a frontage that is interesting and positively contributes to the quality and appearance of the town centre. However, it is not a use that needs to be at the very heart of the town on parcel TC2 and putting it on one of the TC4 land parcels will enable it to have a central location in the town but away from the main high street.

The chosen location for the leisure centre is at the southern end of the town centre, adjacent to Badger Way and opposite the Cranberry Farm public house. This site will give it prominence as people enter the town centre from London Road.

## Health and Wellbeing Centre

The need for a bespoke building for the provision of health and wellbeing services is of paramount importance to the residents of Cranbrook and this was clear from the 2023 community consultation, where its provision came a narrow second in

priority to the delivery of a leisure centre.

A building of around 3,000 sq. m. in total floor area is needed to deliver the health services intended for the town (excluding dentistry). There is a direct link between good health outcomes and activity levels and in order to maximise the benefits of social prescribing, where professionals signpost people

## Devon County Council Building

Devon County Council run public services in Exeter and many towns across Devon and need space to do the same at Cranbrook - space for children's services such as the running of health visitors clinics, a library and space for youth clubs and other activities for families, children and young people. In deciding how best to accommodate this in the town centre, there is a need to be mindful of the ongoing costs of running these services and of the changing ways that these are operated. As a result, at the time of writing, it is undecided if Devon County Council will have a standalone building to run their services or if they will be sharing space in another public building. The plans included in this document for the town centre allow for both eventualities. What is critical though is that these important services for the community are housed in a prominent location and support the activity in the town centre, increasing footfall and widening the public offer.

## Work space

Cranbrook's population is significantly younger than the East Devon average and this is reflected in the economic activity levels, with more than 80% of residents over 16yrs being economically active (compared with less than 55% of East Devon residents as a whole). This means that providing work spaces and job opportunities within Cranbrook is vitally important and is an area that has to date not been well catered for.

Cranbox, The Tillhouse and the high street shops will provide space for business to establish and grow but these will not cater for all business needs. As more people visit the town centre footfall will increase and it will become an attractive location for a wider range of businesses. The 2023 business survey shows that there is latent demand for commercial space in the town centre, including includes workshop units and small retail spaces.

Not all business activity will happen on the high street itself and to accommodate wider needs other types of business workshop/spaces will help to promote and encourage a wide range of activity and jobs in other parts in the town centre. As well as developments with street frontages this could include mews typologies.

Mews typologies will be of a smaller scale than the employment uses at Treasbeare, and the wider enterprise zone areas, and offer a development type that is adaptable to changing needs and economic conditions. This type of development also has the

potential to include homes or further workspaces above the ground floor and will positively add to the vibrancy and vitality of the town centre.

## Residential Development

Housing in the town centre will increase activity and surveillance and support the creation of a vibrant, busy place.

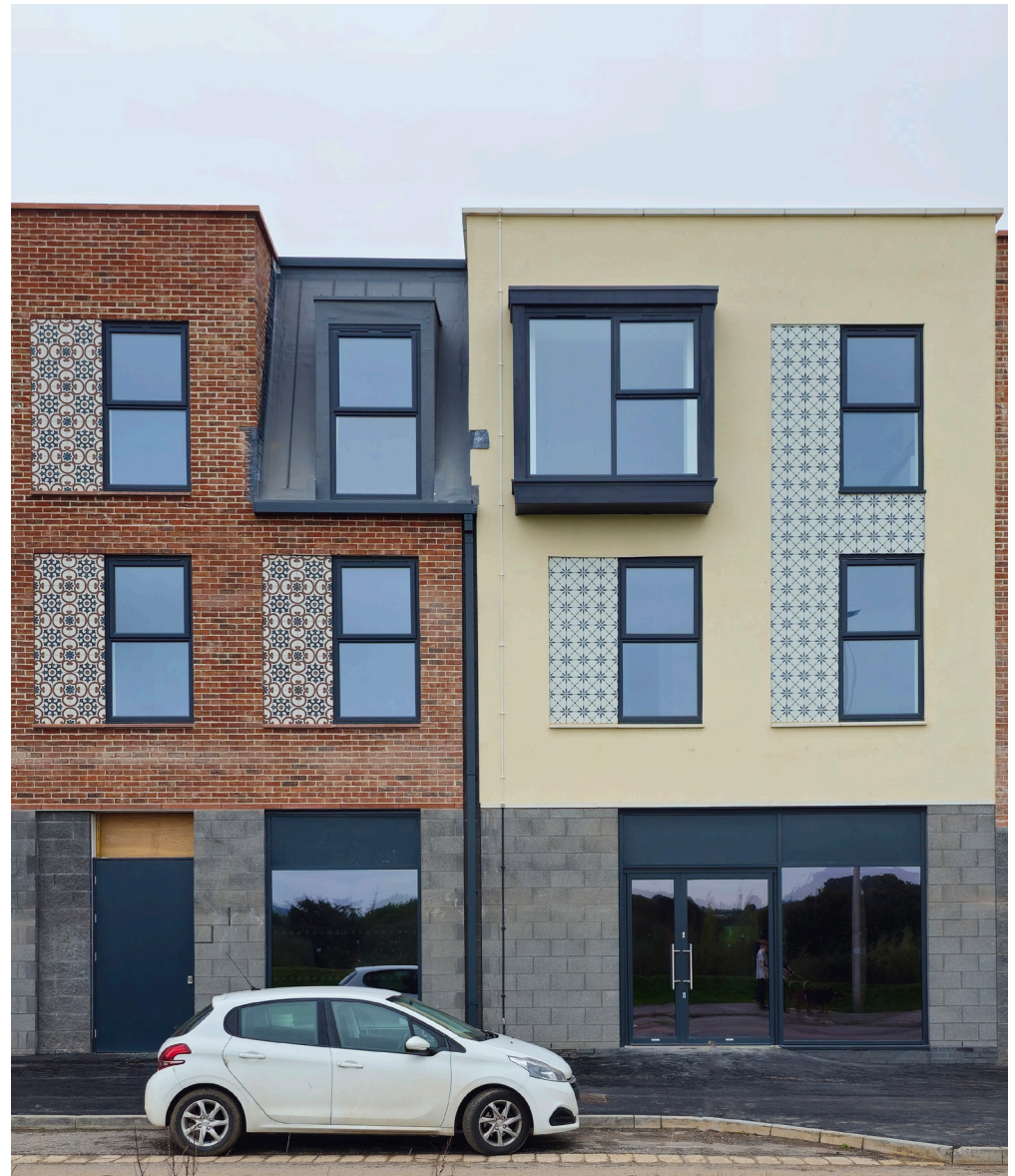
The houses that have been built at Cranbrook so far are mostly family homes with private gardens and parking and these aren't the types of homes that are usually found in a town centre.

It is important that we bring in more people to live in the town centre where it is suitable for homes in apartments and other higher density housing types such as terraces or mews houses.

This will allow a mix of housing above other ground floor uses like that already developed in the town centre, and housing from ground floor up on the northern side of TC2, fronting the watercourse that runs through the site. Housing in this area will help to transition from the suburban density housing on the opposite side of the hedge. Housing fronting Tillhouse Road will need to be mindful of noise from ground floor uses, passing traffic and the nearby skatepark.

Figure 15. The new retail units and apartments in the town centre, designed by HDA Architects, introduce some levity to the street frontage in Cranbrook using patterned tiles to distinguish between each of the apartment frontages.

(Image EDDC 2024)



# Design

## Background

The Cranbrook Plan puts health and wellbeing at the core of the Council's policy for the new town and is taken as the main guiding principle for the town centre masterplan.

It can be difficult to see how health and wellbeing relate to the design of a town centre beyond issues of safety but our health and mental well-being is affected by every part of our lives and what we do. The design of the built environment can help or hinder our ability to make healthier choices, breathe cleaner air, meet friends or simply walk to work. Some of the main factors that affect our health and how happy we feel are how easy it is to walk to the places we want to visit, our ability to form strong social bonds, the availability of a range of attractive open spaces and how safe we feel in the places we live.

The character of the town centre is important. The

way a place feels affects how often we want to visit it and has direct and indirect effects on us, our behaviour, our emotions, and even our relationships.

The results of the community engagement have told us what is important to the community - prioritising what facilities should be built, how the town centre should perform and what it should feel like to be there.

This person-centred approach to design can also help explain choices, or the way design impacts the way we live. Cranbrook is a young town, in terms of both buildings and residents but it will age and ensuring it is suited to people of all ages, from children through to the elderly, it is important that the town centre is legible. Legibility enables people to find their way around, with landmark buildings and areas with distinctive character being two aspects of design that are particularly helpful for children and adults. Clear,

simple routes and visually distinctive features also play a major role in making a town dementia friendly.

Using desire-lines, the direct routes people tend to take where they are able, between entry points to the town centre as the basic structure around which future development is built helps to create legibility. It embeds the way people want to move and the way they want to live into the physical structure of the town centre rather than trying to direct their movement or force their behaviour to conform to a structure based on design convenience. This is how traditional towns and cities are structured, why people like them and therefore why they have endured. The aim of this design exercise is to help Cranbrook endure in the same way.

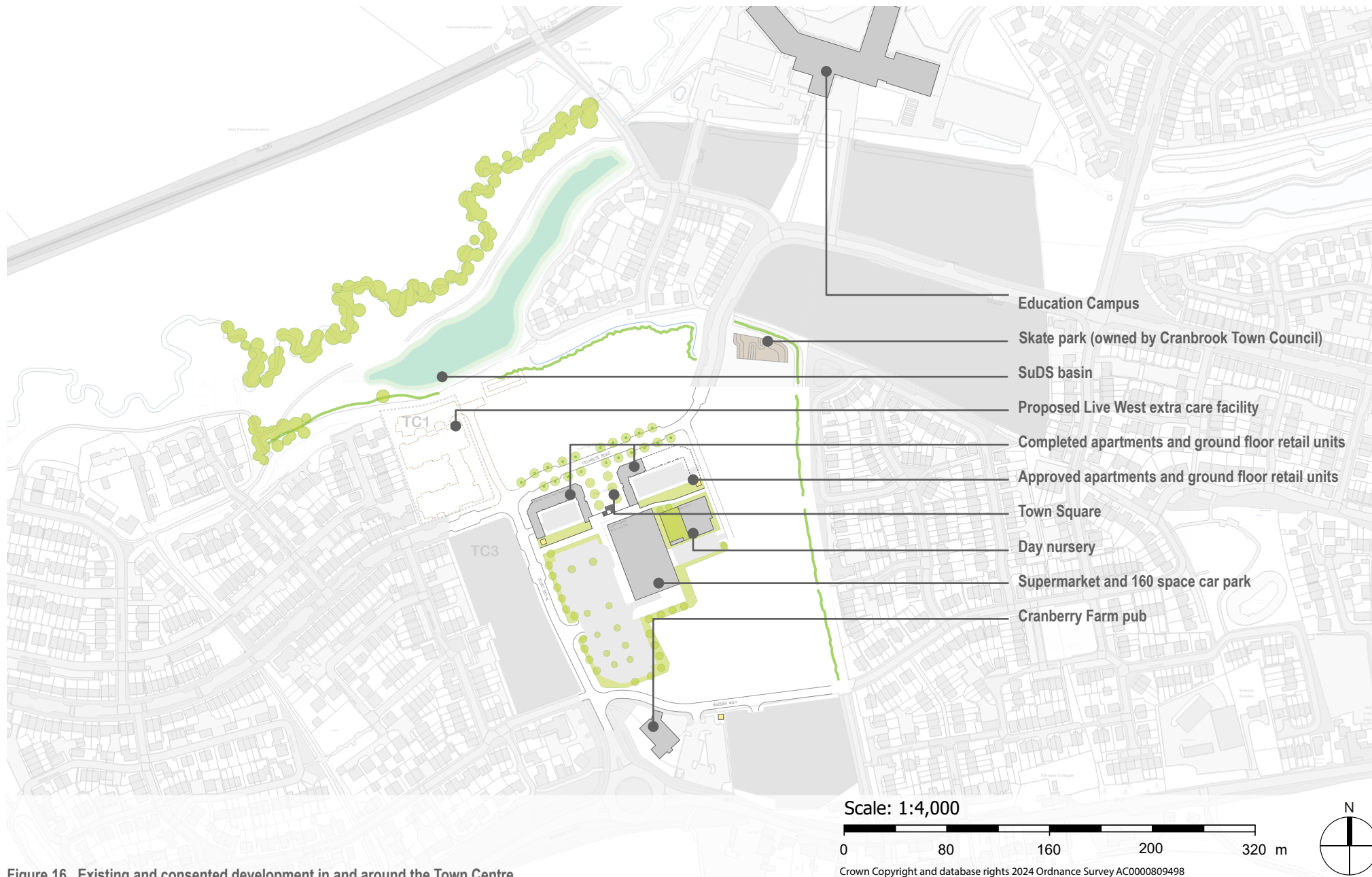


Figure 16. Existing and consented development in and around the Town Centre

# The Site

There has been major activity in Cranbrook town centre since 2022, with significant construction work to build a supermarket, seven retail units a children's nursery and apartments. These are scheduled for completion by the end of 2024. A skate park has already been completed and opened in summer 2024 and is already well used by Cranbrook residents.

Other developments in the town centre have gained planning consent but not yet started construction. These include a further five retail units and apartments to complete the south side of the Tillhouse Road high street; a revised layout of Tillhouse Road; an expansion of the drainage basin that sits immediately north of the town centre. It is the new layout of Tillhouse Road and new design of the basin used in images throughout this document unless indicated otherwise.

The changes to Tillhouse Road will remove the central island, narrow the carriageway and widen the pavements either side to make them more suitable for a town centre and provide enough space for trees. Three new crossings will be put in at the same time, one in front of the town square, another across the Crannaforde Lane and a third just east of the entrance

up to the school. The crossing in front of the square will have traffic lights, the other two will not.

The town centre is on a north facing slope that rises nearly 13 metres from where it meets the Country Park up to its highest point next to the pub. The gradient is steepest on areas TC1 and TC2 with a fall of around 4 metres between the Tillhouse Road and the park.

An informal path runs east – west across the site with an exit into the country park. On the northern part of TC2 there is a 2 metre high bank next to a ditch taking surface water from developments east of the town centre.

The town centre land falls away from the Cranberry Farm pub down toward the country park and heightens the importance of views to and from the country park. Beyond the country park are views of Ashclyst Forest to the north. Making the most of these views will be important to creating a distinctive identity for the town centre and correspond with locations where key buildings or frontages should be provided.

The gradient will potentially complicate what development takes place on land parcel TC2,

where it is steeper than the other land parcels. Buildings and the public realm on this parcel will need to be carefully designed to have accessible gradients and no large blank retaining structures.

The areas surrounding the town centre have all been completed so points of access are limited to those that already exist. In designing the surrounding areas, the developers and council had thought about what links might be required and in addition to the road accesses from Tillhouse Road, Badger Way and Shareford Way, walking and cycling links from Whiteways to the west and the old Crannaforde Lane and Westland Way to the east are in place. An informal access into the country park will be formalised when works to extend the closest drainage basin are undertaken.

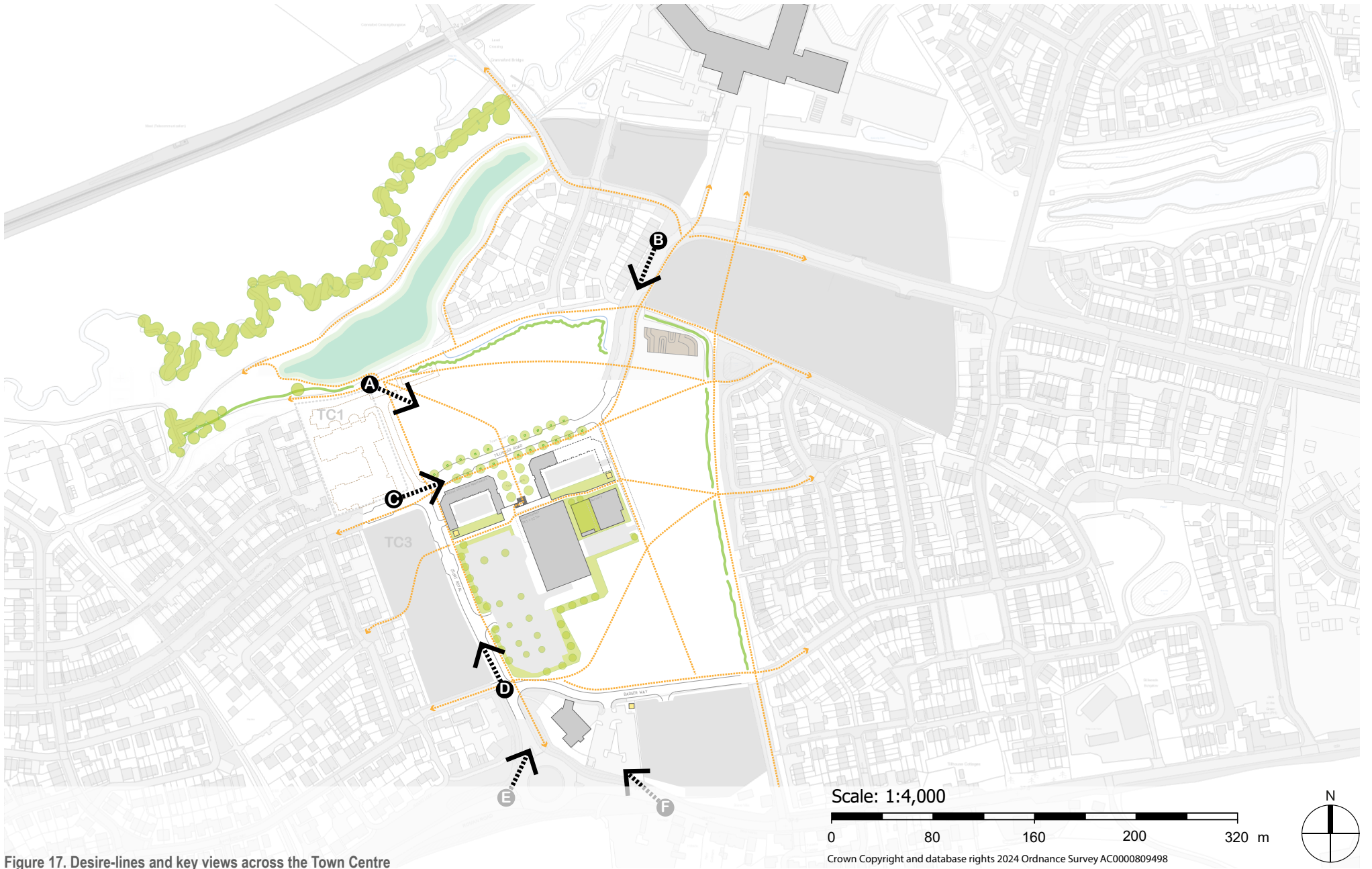


Figure 17. Desire-lines and key views across the Town Centre

**A**

The view into the town centre from the Country Park should help people easily navigate to where they want to be. It's structure should be designed to allow people to take the most direct routes to the places they are most likely to visit, where there is most activity or where they may want to gather or meet friends.

From this location this is likely to mean the Town Square, which will lead people on to the Town Hall, CranBox and the supermarket, or up Court Royal to the Cranberry Farm pub.



Figure 17.A

**B**

The view from the east of the Town Centre as seen from the direction of Crannafor Lane. As an entry point to the Town Centre and Cranbrook itself, the view from this junction needs to provide a visual indication of the activity within the town centre, and present attractive, well-designed and distinctive elevations to buildings visible from this point to showcase Cranbrook and promote the positivity and pride within the community.



Figure 17.B



C

The view from the west, along Tillhouse Road, is the only long view down the main highstreet that terminates within the town centre. This makes it an important view to get right, with vibrant, active frontages along its length.

A future building on TC4b will terminate this view and, taking such an iconic position, must be well designed and should be publicly accessible, potentially a cultural building to both showcase the cultural identity of the community and become an important part of the town's architectural identity.

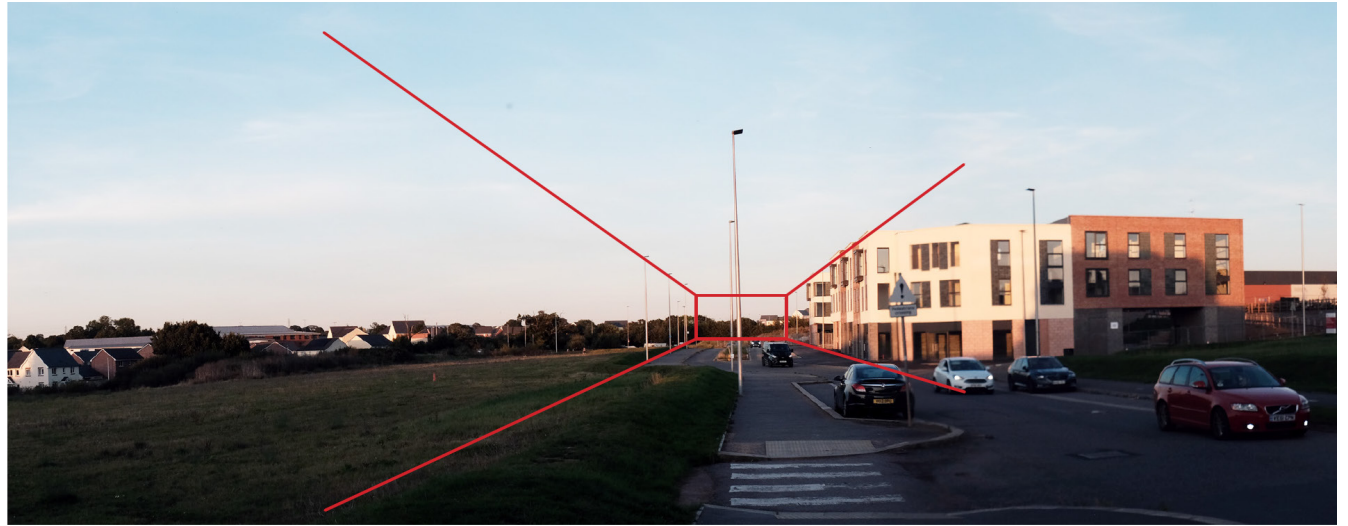


Figure 17.C

D

The view down to Tillhouse Road from the highest point in the town centre, next to the Cranberry Farm pub. This view will link the town centre to the Country Park beyond. The successful visual transition between these two very different but equally important parts of Cranbrook is the design challenge set for any future frontage across parcel TC2 between the activity of the high street and the calm of the park beyond.



Figure 17.D

**E**

Approaching the town centre from the Exeter direction the first thing people see is the Cranberry Farm pub. The red lines on the photo indicate heights of 13m or 9m (equivalent to a 3 or 2 storey commercial building respectively) set back 2m from the boundary edge of TC4d taking ground level as the highest point of TC4d next to Badger Way. This shows that there is very limited visibility of the town centre from London Road making it important that the buildings and activity within it have a clear identity and Unique Selling Point or “USP” to draw people to it.



Figure 17.E

**F**

Approaching from the east along the London Road, from the direction of Honiton and Ottery Saint Mary, housing (height indicated as an approximation by the dotted line) will take up the road frontage apart from the area of the pub car-park. This will effectively hide any town centre buildings from view from this direction.



Figure 17.F

# Design approach



Figure 18. Hawick High Street, Scotland. A typical late 19th century street scene with people occupying its whole width as a place to play, talk as well as walk.

(Photochrome postcard.  
U.S. Library of Congress)

## Design for People

In the face of public anger at the number of deaths and injuries caused by motor-vehicles that nearly saw cars banned from towns and cities, the American car industry in 1923 and 24 ran a sustained campaign to demonise pedestrians and label them as backward and idiotic<sup>1</sup>. The campaign was incredibly successful and its effects have spread around the world, changing 10,000 years of human interaction with our built environment. It is why, for the last 100 years, we have assumed that streets are primarily for cars and traffic with other uses being secondary and relegated to the edges, particularly pedestrians.

Apart from perhaps one exception<sup>2</sup>, from the time that human settlements grew beyond a simple collection of huts they have featured streets. Throughout the history of human settlements these spaces running

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1 Peter D. Norton. *Fighting Traffic: The Dawn of the Motor Age in the American City*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008.

2 Çatalhöyük in Anatolia, Turkey, is one of the earliest known permanent settlements in the world with the site being occupied for around 2000 years from 7400BC. The settlement is notable for having no streets, with buildings sharing walls and inhabitants walking across the roofs and accessing their homes through a hole in the roof.

between buildings have functioned as markets, social spaces, places of celebration and relaxation as well as being the routes along which people and goods have travelled. Images of streets from before the 1920's show adults and children using the whole width of a street to walk, talk, buy and sell and go about their business or simply stand aimlessly watching the world go by.

This ages-old idea of a multi-functional street is one that we, as a society, are slowly starting to rediscover. We forget that cars not only introduce danger to streets, they also bring a level of noise that makes relaxed conversation difficult. Social interaction on streets with constant traffic tends to be limited or to not to happen at all as vehicle noise drowns out speech at conversational volumes forcing people to either raise their voices, wait for traffic to pass, or give up entirely. Designing around people, reducing vehicle speeds and numbers not only improves safety and air quality, it also makes streets social spaces where conversation can once again be heard. It is this idea of streets designed around life and people that leads the approach taken to the town centre.

People tend to take the most direct available route

## Shaped by the way people move

to the places they want to go. They do not like sharp changes of direction or routes that are not easy to follow or understand. Where people cut across grass or cut across corners on a footpath it indicates that the path is not along the route people want to take. For active travel is it especially important that routes are direct, easy to follow and safe as otherwise people will simply go somewhere else, most likely by car.

Where these direct routes, or desire lines, already exist or are likely to exist in the remaining areas of non-residential land in the town centre, they are used as the basis for streets and spaces with buildings and infrastructure arranged around them. This arranges these remaining areas of town centre around people rather than delivery lorries or bins.

The desire lines connect entry-points to the town centre as well as destinations beyond it to make it as easy as possible for people to walk or cycle to or through the town centre helping reduce car use and make everywhere safer and more attractive.

The desire lines are also where open spaces within the town centre are located. This can either be as larger, more formal open spaces like the town square, or less formal spaces either opening off paths and streets, or formed where streets widen a little to allow more to happen between buildings.

Pedestrian links and open spaces link the town

## Multi-functional spaces

centre to the country park where there are drainage basins that take surface-water run-off. Using the right tree species and designing planting and other features within these open spaces can allow them to be part of a wider strategy to direct, store and slow water before it gets to the park while also creating a healthy and attractive environment. The trees and planting also provide shade in summer and help cool the open spaces and buildings around them.

To maximise the level of bio-diversity and minimise storm-water run-off the design of streets and spaces reverses convention to only put hard-landscaping where it is necessary, leaving the remainder to be green space. This allows them to function better as part of a Sustainable Urban Drainage System (SuDS) if planted areas are designed as rain-gardens and tree-pits are linked into the overall system to allow the soil to absorb and slow the water. Alongside shade and shelter this helps to increase biodiversity in what could otherwise be a relatively intense urban environment.

There will be a statutory obligation for any development within the town centre to provide a minimum 10% Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) over what exists on site at the moment. The linked spaces within the town centre will form part of the strategy to achieve this, helped by the rain-gardens and trees within the SuDS network.

Linking the town square and country park with a series of spaces (figure 17, note A) allows a more meandering



Figure 19 Paseo de la Plaza Mayor, Sabadell, Spain. The landscaping and planting in the square manage surface-water run-off while providing an attractive, cooling environment.

(Image, Green Blue Urban Ltd)

route that makes negotiating the gradient here easier. This cascade of spaces can also change the formality of their design as they draw people between the greenery and countryside of the park and more formal and structured town square. These are seen almost as “incidental spaces” that result from the arrangement of buildings and structures either side of this route, much like the sort of spaces that occur throughout medieval towns and cities that developed around pedestrians not vehicles. This also starts to suggest the sort of uses that might be hosted around these spaces, such as cafes and restaurants, shops or galleries that can open into them.

The Town Council employs a Park Ranger who not only looks after the park, but also organises events and educational sessions for the community about the park and wildlife within it which these spaces could also be used for. The linked spaces between the Tillhouse and the Country Park physically connects the two and maximises the benefit that the Ranger can provide the community.

The link running diagonally from the pub across to the Green Lane east of the town centre (figure 17, H) is not expected to be as busy as the route between the Town Square and Country Park as it links residential areas rather than destinations. However, it does provide a direct route for these areas to destinations in or beyond the town centre so remains one that is important to maintain. The route runs past the corners

in the boundary to the supermarket and its car park. This boundary is very visible from the whole length of Court Royal so needs to present an attractive backdrop. These present another opportunity to locate open spaces where people will be passing and more likely to use them. Using them as green spaces allows them to provide a SuDS function in the same way that the link between the square and park does.

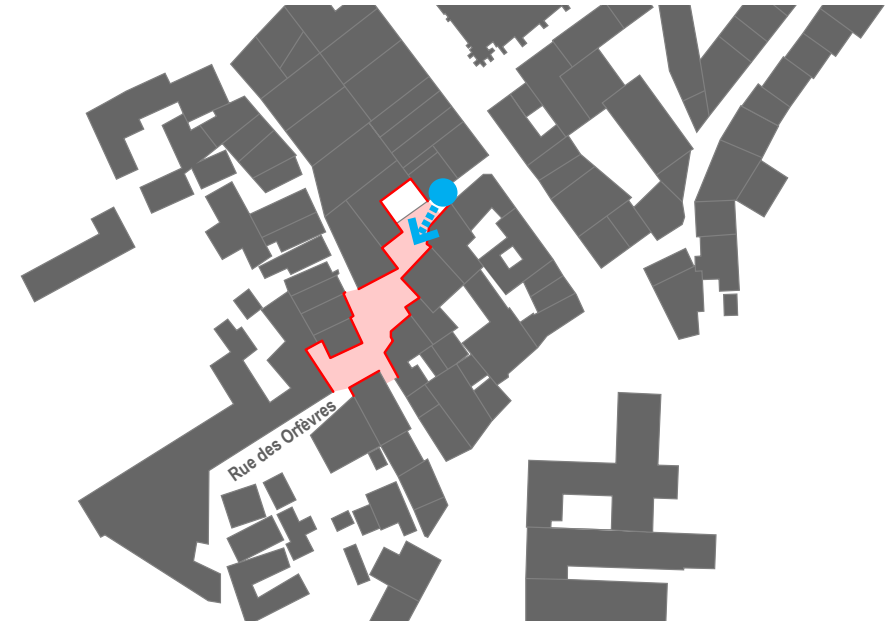


Figure 20. Place Valencia, Vannes, France. The figure-ground map shows the linked spaces along the Rue des Orfèvres that form Place Valencia as the road winds downhill towards the harbour.



Figure 21. Place Valencia, Vannes, France, taken from the location indicated on the figure-ground plan.

**A** A cascade of informal spaces can form a link between the Town Square and the Country Park. These spaces can be formed by varying the alignment of buildings either side of what could otherwise be a simple lane or footpath.

Creating spaces will create interest, encouraging more people to use the route while also allowing them to slow down and interact with what is around them. These spaces can also play an important part within a SuDS system to help store and slow the flow of surface water.

This form of open space where streets widen as building lines shift and open up is typical of traditional towns where such spaces can host outdoor seating for restaurants and cafes, be where people can sit in the shade of trees or small events take place.

**B** The Tillhouse (Cranbrook Town Hall) will sit at the head of the Town Square that will extend across the Tillhouse Road.

As one of the buildings more likely to be built early on, this will help to define a space that might otherwise be open and undefined, while at the same time placing the Council figuratively and literally at the heart of the town.

The ambitions for the building are that it has more than an administrative function as it will also host the Country Park Ranger office and park related education space, hot-desking, meeting spaces, exhibition space and cafe being considered as part of its brief. This mix of functions will be important in bringing more people and activity into the square and will compliment the more retail led services around the southern half of the square.

**C** The pink dotted line shows the area that CranBox could occupy. This priority structure should be designed to delivered rapidly to fulfil a pioneering role in the Town Centre.

As it will be one of the first structures to be built on TC2 it, along with The Tillhouse, has an important role in defining the extents of the Town Square. It also will

complete the high street frontage opposite the existing retail units and apartments on the south side of the road.

CranBox needs to be designed to enable easy, rapid and low cost adaptation of the space it contains so it can be partitioned or opened up according to need or demand. This enables the town to trail different configurations of space, both open and enclosed, as businesses and the community grow and evolve to have different needs.

**D** This site will terminate the view from Badger Way along the route down to Tillhouse Road. The frontage needs to turn the corner of Tillhouse Road and have high architectural quality, though it does not have to stand out.

This corner is also likely to be next to a vehicular entrance to parcel TC2 and pedestrian and cycle entry as well, which will go on to lead people either through the parcel or around the boundary with the existing housing, to emerge at the entrance to the Country Park at the bottom of Court Royal.

**E** This site terminates the view down the Cranbrook high street. Being such a prominent site this could perform an important function showcasing the activity within the community of Cranbrook and, as such should be occupied by a building with community and cultural function. Being so visible the architecture of any building occupying this site needs to be of the highest quality.

Having an open space at the front of this site, especially with a building of cultural and community use, allows people to congregate before or after events.

**F** Following the design strategy of using desire-lines to structure where development goes this location, where two desire-lines head in different direction can become an informal open space where people can stop and meet others. It also provides a public space for people in the buildings around it and a visual reference point within the town centre.

**G** The link between Badger Way and Tillhouse Road is seen as a linear open space for pedestrians and cyclists with limited vehicle access for disabled access, deliveries and servicing alongside limited parking for people living and working in the buildings around it. This maintains the town centre as an area that prioritises pedestrians and cyclists so there is a feeling of safety and security throughout.

The link should be designed to allow traffic through should Court Royal be closed for any reason.

**H** The desire line across the Town Centre from the south west to north east runs past awkward corners along the boundary with the supermarket and its car park. Although these could be occupied by the backs of buildings this may not present an attractive backdrop along the back of the supermarket car park which is very visible along Court Royal.

Instead, these corners are used as open spaces along the desire line, which can form part of a SuDS chain with trees, ponds and rain gardens within them. Buildings alongside this desire-line and these spaces can open onto them and should have live frontages to provide overlooking and passive surveillance so these spaces feel safe for those using them.



Figure 22. Proposed approach to design of the town centre



# Applying the design approach

## Designing with uncertainty

Much of the development of the town centre is still at a stage where building proposals are not certain due to any number of factors, including lack of funding or clear requirements and even uncertainty of the need for a service to have a building at all. In this context information that offers any clarity or direction becomes invaluable to the design process as there is otherwise nothing to go on. The evidence builds a picture of what should be built or how any development should respond but it cannot do anything without development to be applied to.

This scenario is not unusual and, at this stage, thinking that we know what development is appropriate across the whole of the town centre would be a mistake. We are instead at the very start of a long process of finding out, but the answer is always shifting as times and communities change.

However, what can be done is to work forward through the evidence while playing out a development scenario around the structure put forward earlier in the document.

Figure 22 overleaf shows an example layout that uses

standard building footprints for facilities that we can expect to be built in the town centre. In reality these buildings are unlikely to conform to these footprints but it allows a layout to be generated for this example.

The location of some of these buildings can be narrowed down because of their physical requirements and likely minimum dimensions. This is the case for the leisure centre and swimming pool which is easiest to locate on TC4e where there is enough space, it is reasonably flat and next to a district heating valve.

Other buildings are located for operational reasons. The Health and Wellbeing centre is located next to the leisure centre to increase the effectiveness and take-up of social prescribing, while the Fire Service is located close to the London Road and away from areas likely to see the most pedestrian movement to reduce risks when there is a call-out.

The Tillhouse is located at the head of the Town Square because it has symbolic importance and can help to form this additional part of the square. The remainder are located where it would be sensible given the likely characteristics of the building or user,

but otherwise their locations are entirely indicative and should not be seen as in any way definitive.

CranBox has been located so it can maximise the benefits it potentially brings. As a project that should be delivered early it can kick-start the more active phase of the town centre, introducing a greater diversity of business types and, potentially, covered open spaces. In it's indicated location opposite the newly completed shops and apartments completes the high street frontage while also helping to frame the extended Town Square.

Building footprints that are not identified form an indicative pattern of development that delivers the priorities expressed by the community. These have been arranged around the structure or routes and spaces described in the Design Approach and are drawn with building widths of between 10 and 15m to reflect standard construction modules that allow relatively efficient building performance with cross-ventilation and natural daylight.



Figure 23. Indicative layout with the swimming and leisure building at the southern end of the town centre

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## Architectural design

The architecture of established towns reflects the diversity of people and changes to building technology and fashions over the years they have existed. This is a valuable part of their appeal and something that isn't available to new towns as they are planned, then built over a couple of decades rather than being unplanned and built over centuries. This often results in new towns and developments being labelled bland as everything is too similar and simply too neat.

To offset the lack of design diversity this document is not prescriptive about design, but does expect design excellence in town centre buildings.

The shops and apartments completed along the high street have started to introduce design elements and interest previously not seen in Cranbrook with patterned ceramic tiles that change from one flat to the other so that there is a greater sense of identity for those living in the flats and visual interest for people who visit the shops. It also introduces something that does not get mentioned much in planning documents - fun. Equally, rather than sticking to "tasteful" muted colours the nursery building has bright green colour panels to reflect the playfulness within.

In contrast to the explicitly modern architecture of the shops and apartments, the Cranberry Farm pub has a much more traditional appearance that, in many ways, reflects the expectations people have of a pub and the need for something

relatively familiar in an entirely new town.

There still has to be a sense of coherence to what happens in the town centre, but much of this will be down to the way buildings are arranged relative to each other and to the street edge.

## Design challenges

Future buildings within the town centre will need to address design challenges that result from climate change as well as the need to allow genuinely sustainable lifestyles.

Alongside being energy efficient there is a very real need to address surface water run-off in the town centre as the existing basins within the Country Park that take existing run-off are at capacity with very limited scope for further expansion. This means that hard-surfacing should be used only where it is needed, with planting and soft landscaping being the default. For buildings there are a number of ways that run-off can be reduced through their design. Green roofs; rain-water harvesting for use within buildings; rain-water storage for external use during dry summers can all be designed into buildings to reduce the need for off-site attenuation. Green roofs, although more expensive at construction, can reduce running costs of buildings by increasing thermal mass or reducing the need for air conditioning by evaporative cooling.

Buildings should also be designed using a "whole life-cycle" methodology so that materials used in their construction do not cause disproportionate environmental harm through their embodied energy in production and transport or through persistent chemical harms during production, construction, use and disposal.

## Building Heights

Cranbrook is restricted to a maximum building height of around four storeys because of the neighbouring airport and the need to avoid interference with airport systems. However, in reality it does not make much difference as similar sized town centres across the UK and Europe are generally low rise and seldom exceed four storeys.

Across the town centre the existing buildings reach a maximum of three storeys along the high street. This has been taken as a reasonable maximum height across the town centre to reduce the amount of overshadowing, given the north facing slope, and to prevent buildings from being overbearing and appearing out of place. This latter point is more of an issue at Cranbrook as the town centre will always appear very open due to the supermarket and car-park at its core.

The storey heights shown in figure 23 reduce along the edge of the Country Park, where buildings approach existing housing, or towards the edges of the town centre so there is not sudden step up in building scale.

Figure 24. The Cranberry Farm pub has a traditional external design that is also reflected internally, though the building itself uses modern building techniques with traditional materials.

(Image, EDDC)



Figure 25. The new hotel currently under construction at the Science Park is highly ambitious in its use of sustainable technology, with a solar facade and solar roof expected to produce more energy than the building uses over the course of a year, and sustainable construction meeting RIBA 2030 embodied energy targets.

(Image, EDDC)



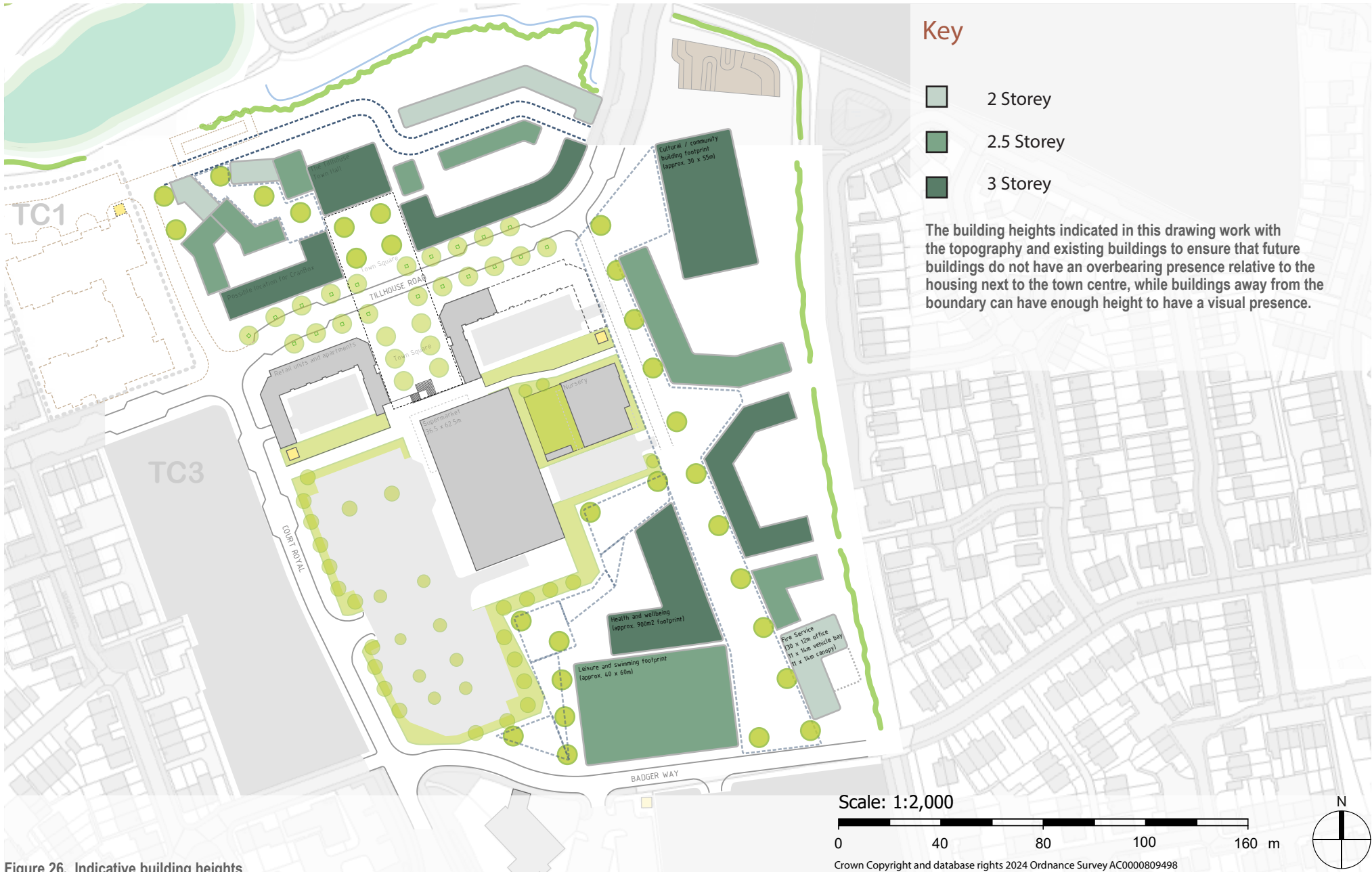


Figure 26. Indicative building heights

# Starting a story

A narrative has a start, but it does not necessarily have an end. This is the case with any town and town centre, where there is a constant state of renewal and progression as culture, technology and people change. As mentioned before, this makes it difficult to foresee what will be built when as timescales can be long and costs and risks high.

Cranbrook Town Council, East Devon District Council and Devon County Council all have an ongoing role to play in the development of the town centre. All have ambitions to maintain a presence within it for years to come. However, the councils will not dictate every next step or attempt to second guess what the community needs. Instead, the councils' role is to help provide the means for communities to take their own next steps and determine their own needs. This is especially the case at Cranbrook where a young, well educated and highly motivated community led by a very active Town Council want the chance to make their mark and say who they are. We expect the unexpected, and that is the point.

This next step in the narrative is the delivery of CranBox which will be designed to demonstrate the ambition, diversity and capability of the community. Successful businesses that start in CranBox can form part of a body of demand for permanent business space in the town centre, reducing the speculation and risk inherent in commercial development not only by demonstrating demand but, perhaps more importantly, the sort of space that demand is for. This helps ensure that the right buildings are developed at the right time and in the right place.

The same goes for cultural and social spaces, those that do not have commercially led demand but without which life is grey and dull. CranBox needs to be adaptable enough to form larger open spaces in which the community can celebrate, perform, socialise so they have the chance to find and define their cultural and social needs and understand the spaces and buildings needed to host them. This iterative process learns from what came before and allows greater diversity of design and purpose than would otherwise be the case.

The Tillhouse, although not a priority in the 2023 consultation, is a high priority for the opportunities it brings for community and cultural benefit, where communal ambitions can be realised and different business needs met within the symbolic heart of Cranbrook. The Town Council will lead on the planning and delivery of The Tillhouse and are keen to progress it in the short term.

At the other end of the town centre there are functional priorities driving the health and wellbeing centre and leisure centre and swimming pool. The need for these facilities gives them a short to medium term priority.

The narrative therefore tells the story of a town centre emerging from two distinct community priorities in different locations. In time, the spaces between these two areas of the town centre will themselves become occupied, following the principles set out in this document.

Masterplans should always be understood more as a process, not a drawing. Terming this one a narrative

does not set it apart, it only makes this clear. It also makes clear that this process involves an ongoing, close conversation with the community who have consistently demonstrated their wish to be involved and their positivity in doing so. It is a process that is about asking the right questions and listening, openly and without prejudice, to ensure the right answers result.

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