Quality community facilities - the secret to successful high streets

Urban Design Group

28 February 2019

Tibbalds
planning and urban design

Location and Context

Key:

- Study area
- Major roads
- Railway
- Train stations
- Proximity areas
- Leisure hubs
- Protection of open space
- Other green areas
- River Medway
- Other major local activities
- Core retail areas
- Retail allocations
- Educational and leisure facilities

Located within north Kent, Gillingham is the eastern most of the Medway towns of Strood, Rochester and Chatham. Gillingham's town centre – the focus of this project – is at the heart of the town, close to the railway station and surrounded by residential development, but within a short distance of the bigger town centre at Chatham. It serves a local function, predominantly attracting people from close by on foot.

Located on the northern side of Gillingham, at the riverside, are two out-of-centre retail and leisure hubs, which are likely to attract people from distance due to their size, proximity to the river, accessibility and the range of activities.

To the southwest, Chatham town centre is the main centre in the area, offering a higher order of shops and services. Combined with this, Chatham has a good food and beverage offer and an established evening economy based around a range of activities, including a theatre and bingo hall. The area between Chatham town centre and Gillingham town centre is occupied by the Great Lines Heritage Park, a significant open space protected as a conservation area and wrapped up in the maritime history of the area.

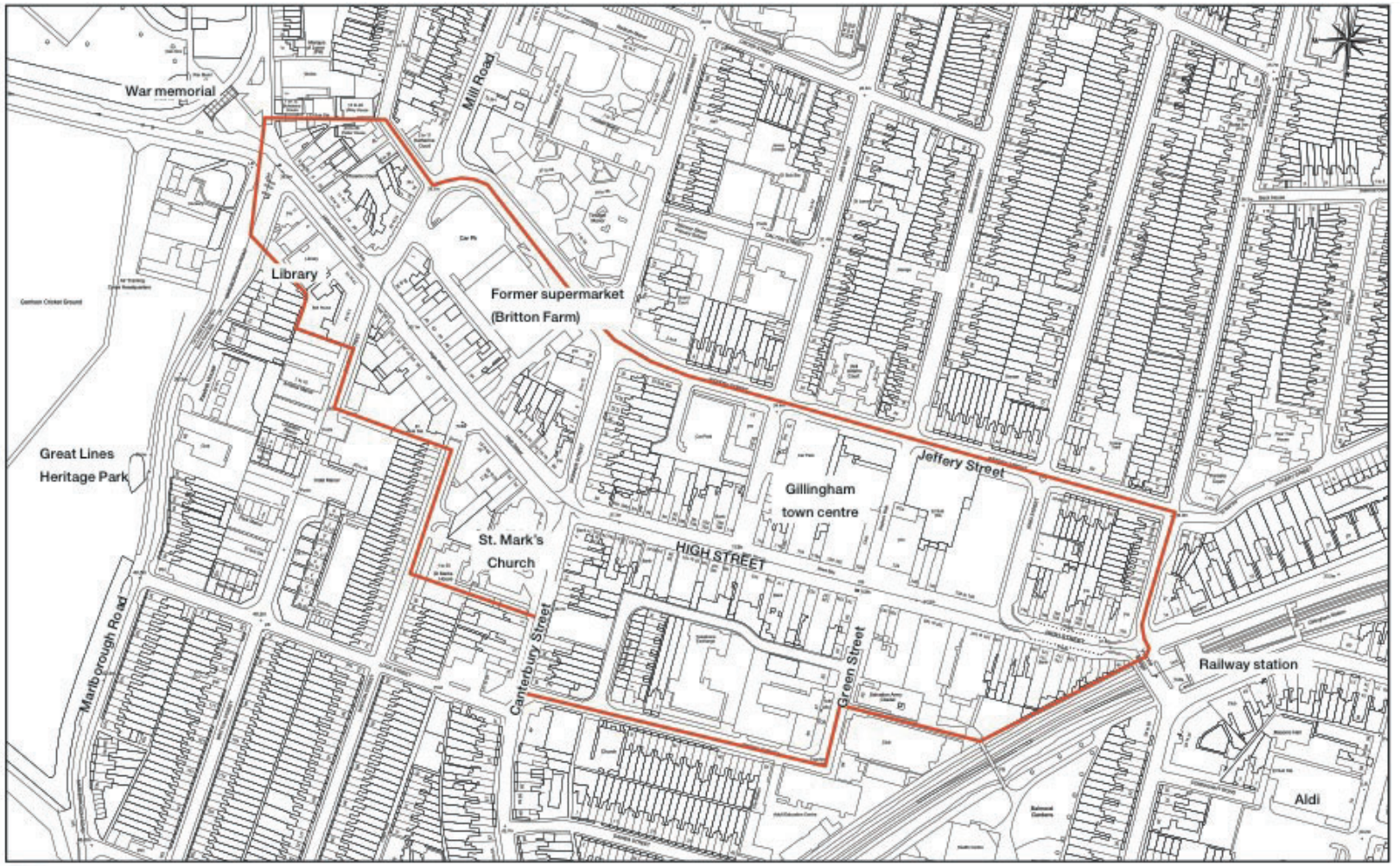
Gillingham town centre has a railway station, which offers access directly into the high street, the town centre is well connected with surrounding streets, particularly on the northern side; connections to the south are more constrained due to the railway. It is therefore accessible by a range of means to residents and visitors to the town. In addition, the town centre has the potential to attract students from the nearby educational institutions to the north and may also benefit from being close to significant neighbouring land uses including Medway Maritime Hospital, Gillingham FC stadium.

In terms of its proximity to other centres, Gillingham's core retail area is around 15 mins away from one of the northern leisure hubs. The connection with Chatham town centre is encouraged by Great Lines Heritage Park which facilitates pedestrian links between the two local hearts.

Gillingham Town Centre
Local context

drawing no.	-
client	Medway Council
scale	1:10000 @ A3
date	19-06-2018

Purpose of the work
and Study Area



- Production of a masterplan for the defined centre in Gillingham (red line on the adjacent map)
- 'to determine key development opportunities and demonstrate the deliverability of proposals'
- Evidence base for the Local Plan
- Similar work for Strood and Chatham

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Railway station, High Street (far east)

Smaller units, High Street (east)

Street trees to the western end

Larger retail units, central High Street

Market / smaller units, High Street (west)

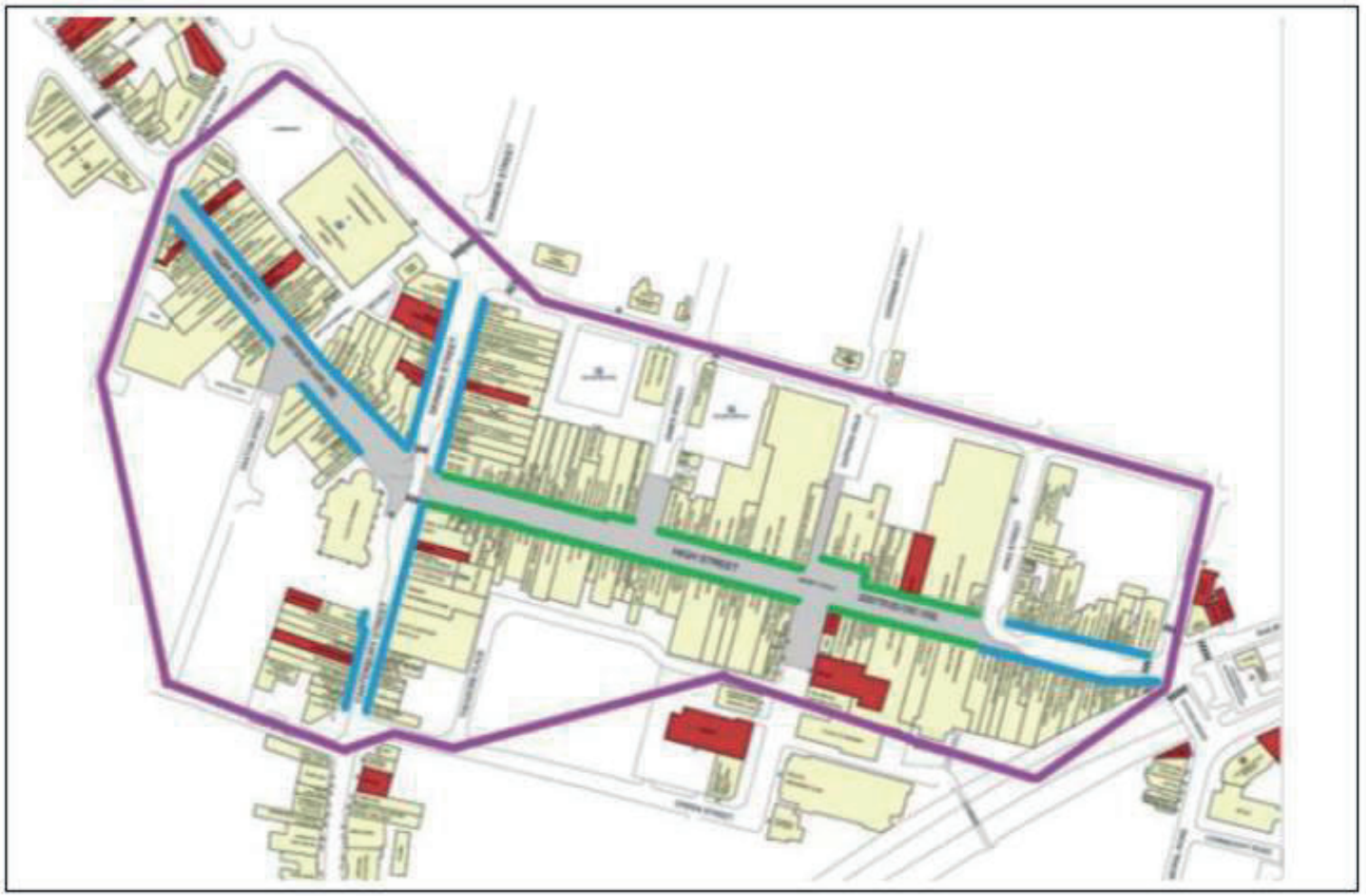
Britton Farm mall

Food and drink, High Street (far west)

Some heritage buildings exist

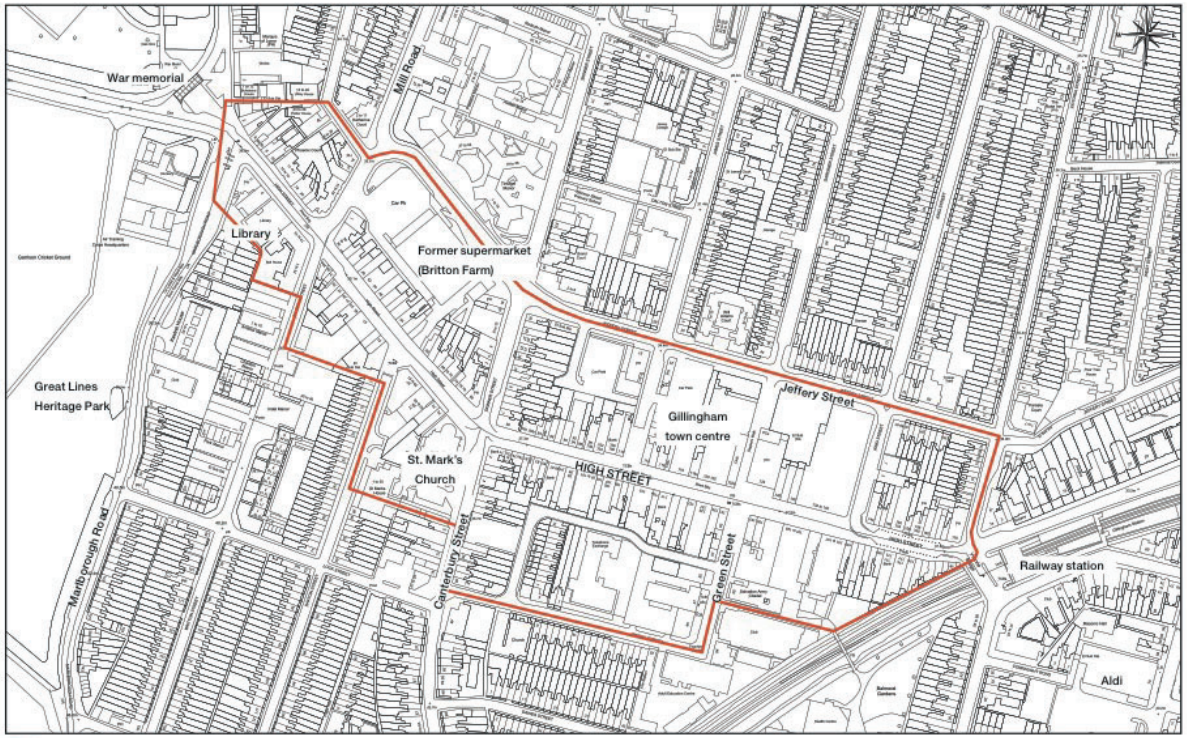
Gillingham's town centre
Planning Policy

Retail Designation 5c: Gillingham District Centre



- Town centre tightly defined around the retail functions
- Defines primary and secondary areas
- Acknowledged the need for town centres to have other services and functions within it – but not reflected in the boundary

Gillingham's High Street
and looking more widely



- Length of High Street a possible constraint
- **Eastern end**
  - station gateway
  - Aldi and health centre considered outside the town centre
- **Central areas**
  - retail core
  - clear focal points
- **Western end**
  - independent shops
  - but library and sports centre considered outside of the centre
- Market draws people in on Monday and Saturday

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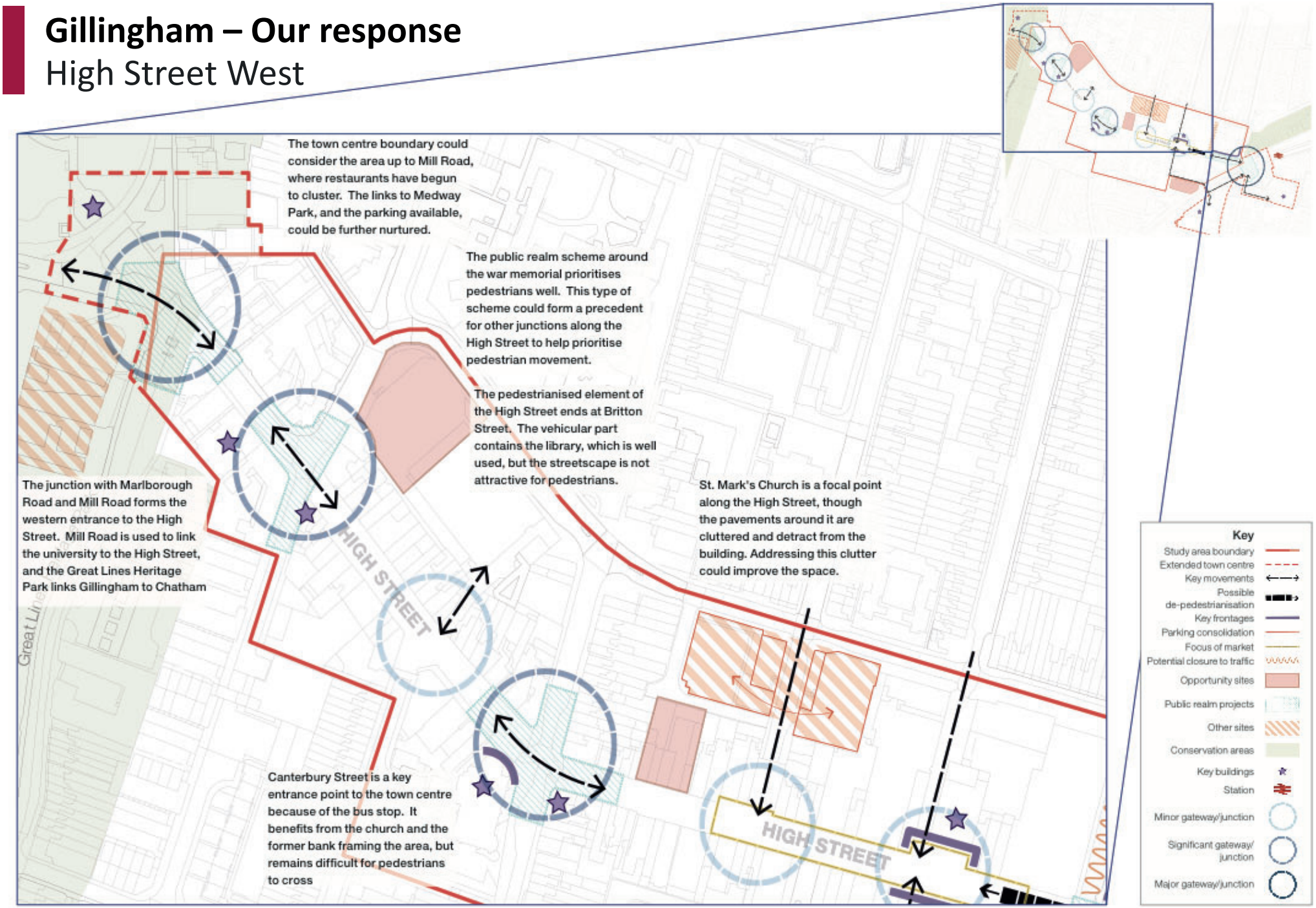
Gillingham

Engagement and consultation

- desire for a better town centre – more shops, greater diversity and more independent shops
- but people used the town centre for much more than retail and valued the other services
  - the leisure centre
  - the library
  - the health centre and play space
  - food and drink
- dispersal and decline of retail in the town centre threatens to take those other services with it
- it also undermines the effectiveness, or reason to invest in, of other forms of travel
- those more vulnerable to decline were at risk of becoming more isolated
- the accessibility of the town centre and the range of services – beyond the retail functions – creates critical mass and linked trips

Gillingham – Our response

High Street West



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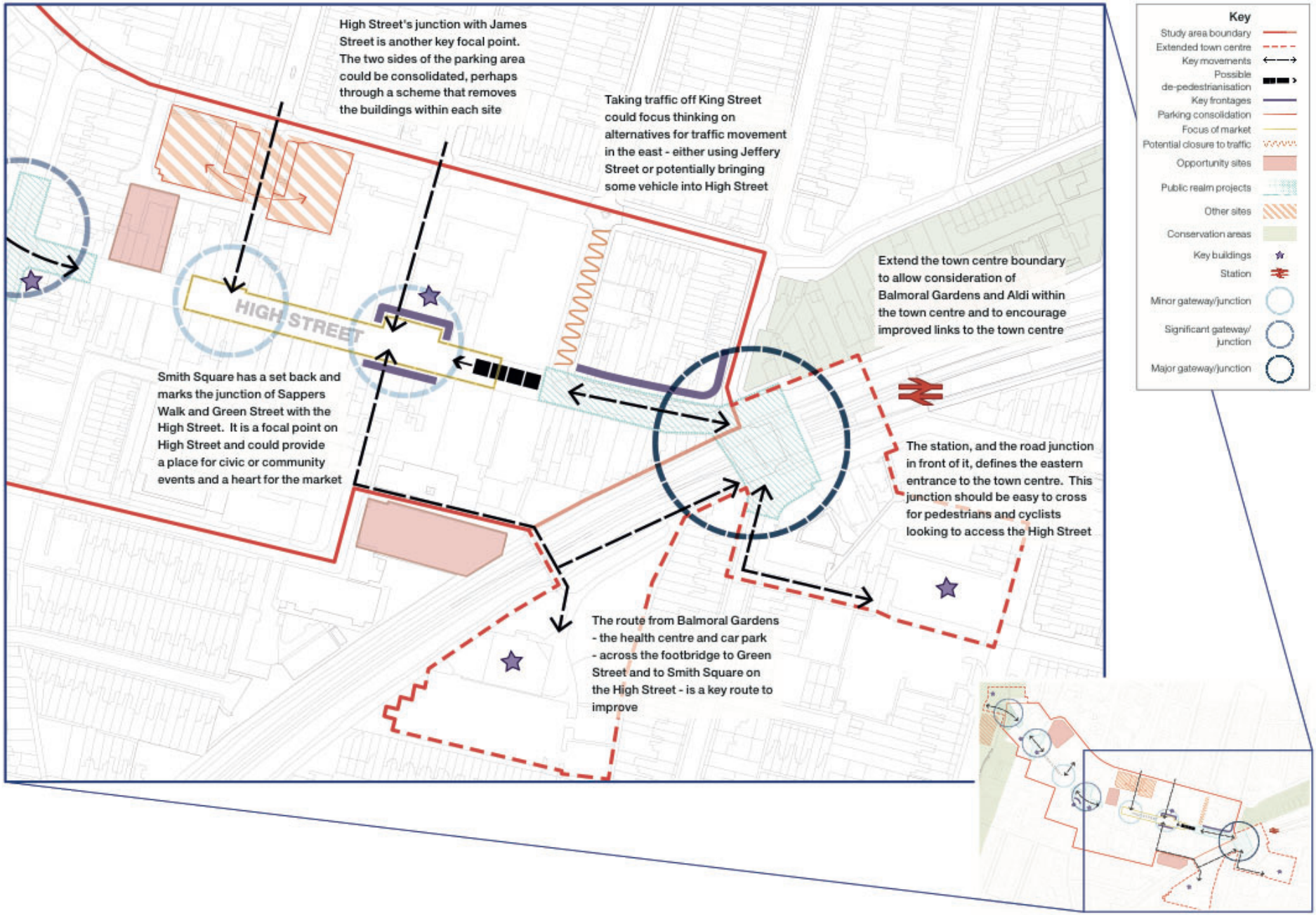
Gillingham – Our response

High Street East



Key factors

Summary of the main points from Gillingham

- Think about the town centre more broadly than retail
- Widen the boundary to make linkages between retail and non-retail uses
- Support non-retail assets, address their issues
- Define character areas and nurture uses where they are establishing / established
- Thinkabout a broad demography; who is using the centre, at what times and why
- Create good linkages between areas (public realm / wayfinding)
- Homes in the town centre