

# Hester's Way Cyber-Hub Masterplan

## Quality information

Document name	Ref	Prepared for	Prepared by	Date	Reviewed by
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## Revision history

Revision	Revision date	Details	Authorised	Position
01	12/12/18	Draft	BW	Associate Director
02	21/01/19	Draft	BW	Associate Director
03	08/02/19	Draft	BW	Associate Director
04	24/04/19	Final	BW	Associate Director

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**Introduction**

**01**

## Current Position

Through the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government, AECOM has been commissioned to help Hester's Way Neighbourhood Development Forum (the Group) to deliver a Masterplanning support package for their Neighbourhood Area.

Hester's Way sits at an interesting point, with future proposals for a Cyber Park and up to 1,200 homes planned for the west of the area. The opportunity to increase sustainable transport links across the area, improve open space provision for recreation and biodiversity and development which contributes to a vibrant economy and unlocks new employment in the west of Cheltenham is very exciting.

The area's main landmark in the area is the Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ) and surrounding car park, which sit within the centre of the Neighbourhood Planning (NP) area. The rest of the area is primarily residential in character, with Gloucestershire College,



### GCHQ

GCHQ in the distance along Hubble Road.

Hester's Way Community Resource Centre and police station forming a civic centre within the area. Coronation Square is a large shopping centre located east of Princess Elizabeth Way opposite the police station. Although outside of the NP area it makes a significant contribution to the civic and commercial centre of Hester's Way.

The primary issues around the existing neighbourhood and future development revolve around connectivity, future traffic congestion, open space provision and concerns over the future built environment.

The group are engaged and proactive, looking to influence future development, to ensure it makes a positive impact on the surrounding built and natural environment.



### Coronation Square

View from Evington Road, just outside of the NP area, it's adjacent to Hester's Way Community Resource Centre and Police Station forming part of a centre to the area.

## The Purpose of This Document

The objective of this piece of work is to develop and articulate a deliverable vision and masterplan for the future of Hester's Way. Whilst holistic in its analysis, there will be particular focus on the interface between the existing built areas and the future proposed West Cheltenham Masterplan.

The objective of the masterplan will be to re-imagine the relationship between the existing site and future proposals in ways which would assist in regenerating the existing area, improving pedestrian and cycle networks into Cheltenham, improved facilities and access to open space.

This document will support the Hester's Way Neighbourhood Plan as a tool for achieving positive and transformational change within Hester's Way.



### Fiddlers Green Lane

View south along Fiddlers Green Lane, with a large number of vehicles belonging to staff of GCHQ parked along the side of the road.

# Planning Policy documents

Several National and Local Planning Policy documents are influential in the development of Hester's Way. The role of these documents, are discussed in brief below, alongside key policies which are likely to have an impact on development options.

## National Planning Policy

### National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (2018)

The NPPF sets out that a key objective of the planning system is "to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development", which will be achieved through three overarching objectives including "an environmental objective- to contribute to protecting and enhancing our natural, built and historic environment..." (Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, 2018).

Part 8. Promoting healthy and safe communities state that "Planning policies and decisions should aim to achieve healthy, inclusive and safe places...(and) strong neighbourhood centres, street layouts that allow for easy pedestrian and cycle connections within and between neighbourhoods, and active street frontages....(and) enable and support healthy lifestyles...(and) for example through the provision of safe and accessible green infrastructure, sports facilities, local shops, access to healthier food, allotments and layouts that encourage walking and cycling".

Part 9. Promoting sustainable transport, states that "transport issues should be considered from the earliest stages of plan-making and development proposals, so that ... "the potential impacts of development on transport networks can be addressed ... (and) opportunities to promote walking, cycling and public transport use are identified and pursued ... (and) patterns of movement, streets, parking and other transport considerations are integral to the design of schemes, and contribute to making high quality places".

Part 12. Achieving well-designed places, states that "Design policies should be developed with local communities so they reflect local aspirations, and are grounded in an understanding and evaluation of each area's defining characteristics. Neighbourhood plans can play an important role in identifying the special qualities of each area and explaining how this should be reflected in development". Part 12 goes on to state: "policy and decisions should ensure that developments... are visually attractive... (and) are sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting, while not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation or change (such as increased densities)."

Part 7. Ensuring the vitality of town centres, state that "Planning policies and decisions should support the role that town centres play at the heart of local communities, by taking a positive approach to their growth, management and adaptation".

## Local Planning Policy

The new Cheltenham Plan is within the final stages of being published, and is currently with the Secretary of State for independent inspection. The Cheltenham Plan will be a new planning document which will guide development in the local area and will be used in combination with the Joint Core Strategy for Gloucester, Cheltenham and Tewkesbury (JCS).

### Gloucester, Cheltenham and Tewkesbury Joint Core Strategy (2017)

The JCS is an important part of the development plan for Cheltenham. It reflects the priorities of government, residents, businesses, local service providers and other stakeholders. It was prepared within the context of national policy and having regard to the diverse aspirations and local characteristics that make up the area.

Policy SD6: Landscape, states that: "Development will seek to protect landscape character for its own intrinsic beauty and for its benefit to economic, environmental and social well-being" and Proposals will be required to "demonstrate how the development will protect or enhance landscape character and avoid detrimental effects on types, patterns and features which make a significant contribution to the character, history and setting of a settlement or area".

Policy INF1: Transport Network, states that: "Developers should provide safe and accessible connections to the transport network to enable travel choice for residents and commuters. All proposals should ensure that... Safe and efficient access to the highway network is provided for all transport modes; Connections are provided, where appropriate, to existing walking, cycling and passenger transport networks and should be designed to encourage maximum potential use;(and) All opportunities are identified and taken, where appropriate, to extend and / or modify existing walking, cycling and public transport networks and links, to ensure that credible travel choices are provided by sustainable modes".

Policy INF3:Green Infrastructure, States that: "The green infrastructure network of local and strategic importance will be conserved and enhanced, in order to deliver a series of multifunctional, linked green corridors across the JCS area by Improving the quantity and / or quality of assets; Improving linkages between assets in a manner appropriate to the scale of development, and designing improvements in a way that supports the cohesive management of green infrastructure".

The JCS also has a specific policy on West Cheltenham. Policy A7 – West Cheltenham, states that a masterplan for the area includes: "A positive impact on the regeneration of neighbourhoods in west Cheltenham; Integrates built form and a comprehensive network of accessible green infrastructure, including local green space. The network will incorporate and protect notable natural features, including the Hatherley Brook, the Fiddlers Green Key Wildlife Site and important trees and hedgerows, and

contribute to water quality enhancements...(and) High quality public transport facilities and connections within and adjacent to the site...(and) Safe, easy and convenient pedestrian and cycle links within the site, to key centres and with neighbouring existing development and the wider green infrastructure network; and A layout and form that respects landscape character, significance and setting of the heritage assets at Hayden Farmhouse and Barn".

## **Reflection**

Both the NPPF and the JCS place a strong emphasis on well designed places, promoting thriving commercial centres and communities which are well connected, and encourage sustainable forms of transport.

**Site Analysis**

**03**

# Contextual Analysis

A contextual analysis was undertaken to understand wider issues outside of the NP boundary area and identify opportunities which look beyond the borders of the area.

## Connectivity

The A40 is the primary road in the west of Cheltenham and connects the town centre to the M5 to the south-west. It also connects to Princess Elizabeth Way which runs north-south and forms part of Hester's Way eastern NP boundary.

Cheltenham Spa Railway Station is located 1km east of Princess Elizabeth Way; it is accessed from Gloucester Road via the A40. Libertus Road provides an alternative route, it is less direct, but well used.

Cycle infrastructure is mixed across the area, routes north south are generally more common, east west links are few which affects connectivity between Hester's Way, the railway station and the centre of Cheltenham.

The area has a poor street hierarchy. The A40 is the primary road in the area and forms part of the southern boundary of the NP area. Princess Elizabeth way runs north to south and forms part of the areas eastern boundary. There are few secondary roads through the area, and local residential roads dominate. Developed on looped systems with a large number of cul de sac, their layout hinders pedestrian and cycle movement. This result in poor connectivity east-west towards the railway station and the centre of Cheltenham, and encourages greater use of cars as a mode of transport locally.

Cycle infrastructure is ad-hoc in its provision. The area, as part of Cheltenham West would benefit from a cycle infrastructure strategy to encourage greater numbers of people towards more sustainable forms of transport, particularly for short journeys, and those working in GCHQ and within the future Cyber Park.

(west) to Hatherly Park (east) and connects to open fields south of Cheltenham.

There are few inter linked green spaces north of GCHQ, but there are some quite large open spaces like Hester's Way Park, some are associated with schools and not open to the public but contribute to the wider character of the area and benefit local biodiversity.

North of GCHQ Hester's Way Park and Fiddlers Green Park are large open spaces and there is an opportunity to better connect them to the wider area and for both parks to become integral to a future green infrastructure strategy. There are few green spaces in the housing estates south of Hester's Way, and the existing spaces offer little in the way of recreation or leisure opportunities for the surrounding local communities.



**Fiddlers Green Park**

There are no footpaths through the park, which hinders connectivity and access to the park, particularly for those with disabilities and those with mobility issues.



**Hester's Way Park**

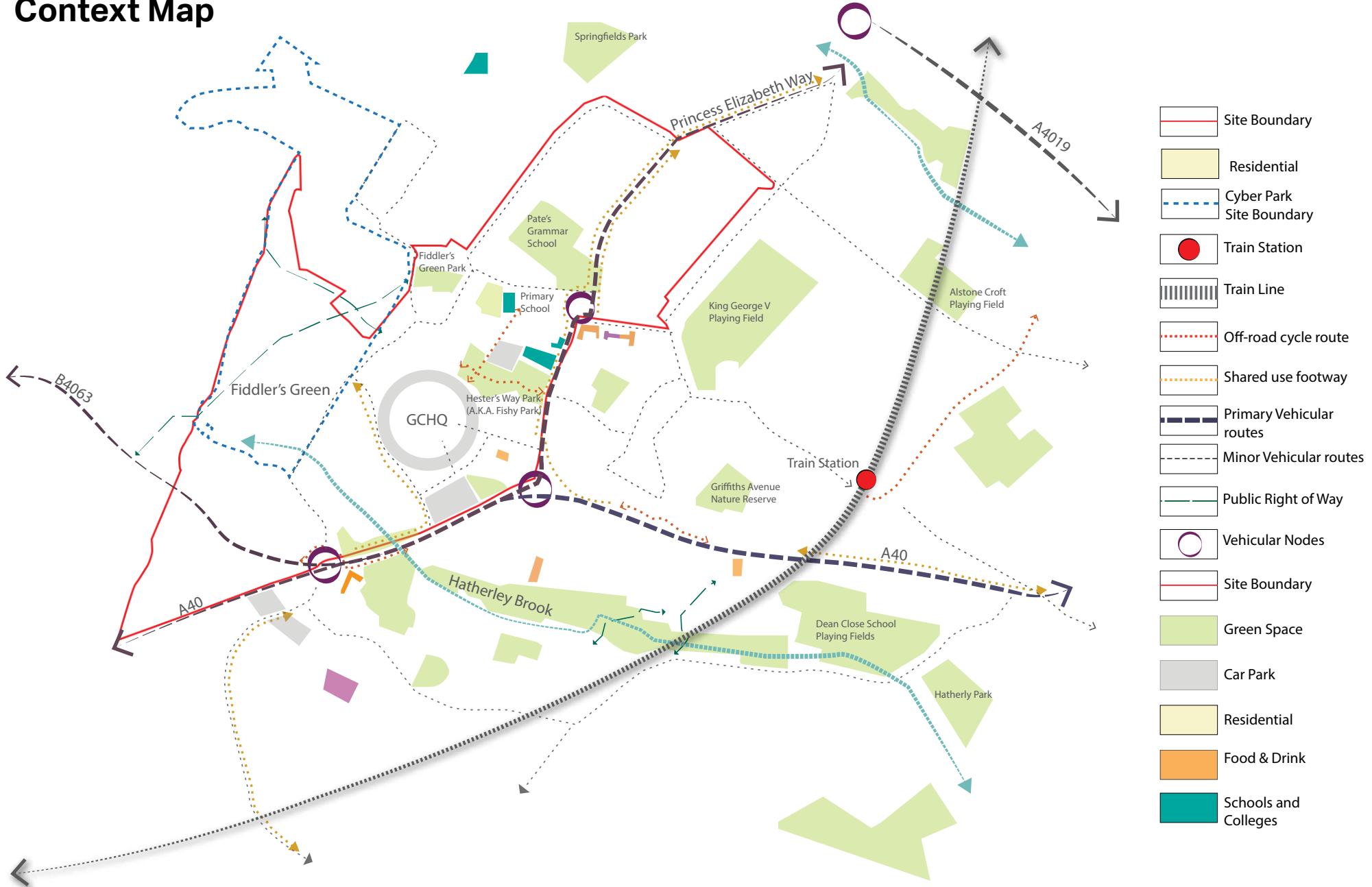
View from Kempton Grove West of the park. There is only one primary access point to the park via Princess Elizabeth Way. The park also contains gated access to GCHQ.



**Fiddlers Green Lane**

Hedgerows and trees along the edge of the road provide an important ecological corridor within Hester's Way

# Context Map



## Existing Plans Review

There is an existing masterplan for West Cheltenham and the plan illustrates broad principles for the area. As part of this study a review was undertaken of the current proposals, with a focus on infrastructure and the interface with the existing built environment and surrounding communities.

- Doesn't represent the significant amount of existing natural assets already existing on site;
- Primary gateway to Hester's Way is via a vehicular roundabout creating a traffic dominated gateway environment;
- Poor use of secondary and tertiary gateways to link with the surrounding community;
- Primary road and bus corridor route is too far from existing community;
- Poor links to the central green space particularly for people living south-west of GCHQ who already lack adequate green space; and
- There are few quality secondary and tertiary routes through the development.

Key	
	Connectivity
	Gateways
	Singular road connectivity
	Impermeable green buffer
	Impermeable urban grain
	Centre connectivity
	Gateways



## S.W.O.T Analysis

As part of the NP process, the Hester's Way Forum (HWF) have conducted a Street Audit Analysis which documents trees, pavements, safe crossings and accessibility across the area. In addition the following strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats have been identified.

### Strengths

- Contains an existing urban centre, with retail focused around Hester's Way Community Resource Centre, Gloucestershire College and Coronation Square;
- High quality green spaces in the way of Hester's Way Park (A.K.A. Fishy Park) and Fiddlers Green Park;
- Mature vegetation, trees, hedgerows within the fields east of Fiddlers Green Lane;
- Some reasonable good cycling infrastructure in the area.
- Good play spaces for toddlers and young children

### Weaknesses

- Domination of cars throughout the area, with unmanaged parking along some streets by GCHQ employees, which leads to some dangerous road conditions and is a nuisance to the local community;
- Cycling infrastructure disappears at some points and joins busy roads leading to tricky conditions;
- Poor connectivity through Fiddlers Green Park, as there are no footpaths through the park,
- Few play spaces for older children, or teenagers

### Opportunities

- To create better connectivity across the area particularly to Coronation Square
- Make Fiddler's Green Lane a safer street, reducing car speeds and reducing ad-hock parking along the road.
- Increase recreational activity opportunities for the local community and people working in the area.

### Threats

- Future traffic congestion due to an increase in the numbers of workers and residents living in the area.
- Pavement and verge parking is already widespread, if this continues and increases, this would be detrimental to the quality and character of the area.
- Construction works could have significant impact on the local community.
- Transport infrastructure is already stretched, changes may need to be implemented before development can proceed with the development.



**Masterplan**

**04**

# Landscape Vision

***The local community would like to see a sustainable future for the local area, in which new development enhance Hester's Way as a place to live and work, is well connected to open spaces and transport infrastructure and where future public amenities is of benefit to all communities within the area.***

The output produced in this document will not be fixed. Instead, it is intended to act as a visioning document and a flexible platform of ideas from which development can be guided. The size of the site lends itself to a multitude of potential futures, this document explores the new development in relation to the existing communities and is based on local demands, planning policy requirements, and urban design analysis.

The priority will be to blur the edges of the site, to deliver a well-connected, high quality development which will enhance open space provision and public infrastructure. Most importantly, the site should create a sociable and attractive spaces for both old and new communities to come together and enjoy, allowing them to connect with each other, whilst serving their needs on a social and functional level.

Pedestrian and cyclists should be given priority across the area, to encourage greater use of sustainable forms of transport, and to encourage greater use of the existing facilities within Hester's Way. Pedestrian and cycle networks should allow for better connectivity between Hester's Way, the railway station and Cheltenham Town Centre.

## Priorities

The following landscape principles have been developed and implemented as part of the masterplan:

- Retaining Key Features  
Identify key features and trees to retain on the site;
- A New Community Hub  
Create a community centre and park which acts as the primary focal point within the development and connects the area to Hester's Way;
- Park Edge + Connectivity  
Fiddlers Green Lane becomes in effect a park edge, creating a positive interface to the new development and create several gateways points into the Cyber-Park;
- 'GREEN' Routes  
Develop a network of 'GREEN' routes for wildlife pedestrians and cyclists to travel through the area, which support existing wildlife corridors; and
- Public Transport  
Ensure public transport routes service both new and existing communities.

# Landscape Principles

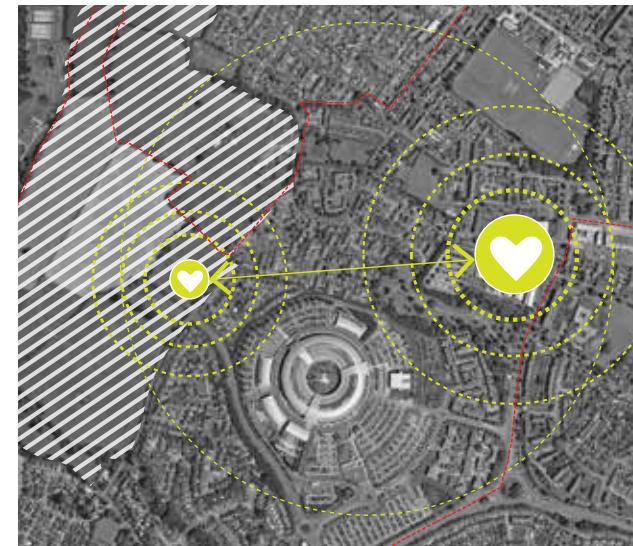
## Retaining Key Features

- There is a large number of mature trees and hedgerows within the site (four trees are covered by Tree Preservation Orders). Efforts should be made to retain as many of the existing landscape features to ensure the development retains some of the important characteristics of the site;
- There are also some rights of way through the agricultural fields, which should be retained in providing convenient access across the site; and
- Important views of the surrounding countryside, and important landmarks should be respected in order that future development respects its context.
- Landscaped areas where practicable should incorporate functional and artistic design features including park benches, gateway features, paving and planting etc.



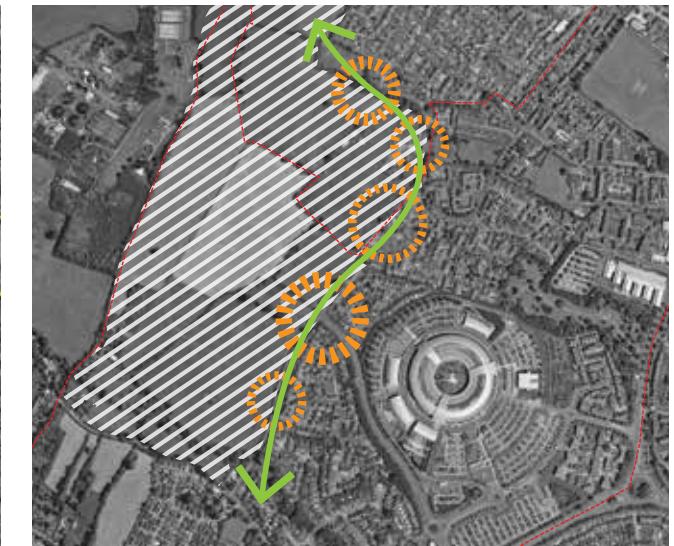
## New Community Hub

- The social and cultural heart of the new development should be centred around a new community centre and community park, which provides facilities for new and existing communities;
- The community centre could also provide food and beverage space, and could support local markets, food stalls and gym; and
- The community park should support year round recreation for all ages and abilities. All weather pitches would be popular with employees of GCHQ and the new cyber-park at evenings during the week and by local communities and schools during the day and at weekends.



## Park Edge + Connectivity

- The park edge should create a positive interface between the existing community and future development;
- Gateway points should be welcoming, encouraging the existing community to make use of the park and encourage greater connectivity from the cyber park to the existing centre of Hester's Way. Gateways should encourage connectivity for pedestrians, cyclists, public transport users and vehicles;
- Parking and traffic along Fiddlers Green lane needs to be address to reduce speeds, on pavement parking and increase safety for pedestrians and cyclists; and
- Future development should not overlook existing homes, and be somewhat screened and blend into the landscape.



## 'GREEN' Routes

- Fiddlers Green Lane Meadow is a semi-natural grassland and is a non-statutory conservation site as set out in the Bio-diversity Audit by Cheltenham Borough Council
- Deer, Sparrow Hawks and Red Kites have been observed in the area, it is therefore important to create 'Green' landscape corridors which connect green spaces and improve biodiversity resilience both towards the countryside and the town ;
- New habitats should be created to protect existing wildlife and encourage greater biodiversity throughout the area; and
- 'Green routes' are also important for pedestrians and cyclists, to provide connected high quality landscape environments.



## Public Transport

- The community have an aspiration that public transport routes could provide better connection to important assets such as community centres, doctors surgeries etc.; and
- Connections to the bus route should be easily accessible from existing communities, to ensure the service is sustainable and of benefit to new and old communities.







- ① Community Centre
- ② Community Park
- ③ Wetland Park
- ④ Park Edge Road
- ⑤ Greenways
- ⑥ Pocket Parks
- ⑦ Gateway Art

**Note:** The NP boundary for the area cuts through the Cyber-park. However because of the nature of the future development areas north of the NP boundary along Fiddlers Green Lane which interface with the local NP area are considered as part of this study

# Design Analysis

## Movement

Movement networks have been considered in order to encourage use of sustainable forms of movement including walking, cycling and public transport use.

## Pedestrian Movement

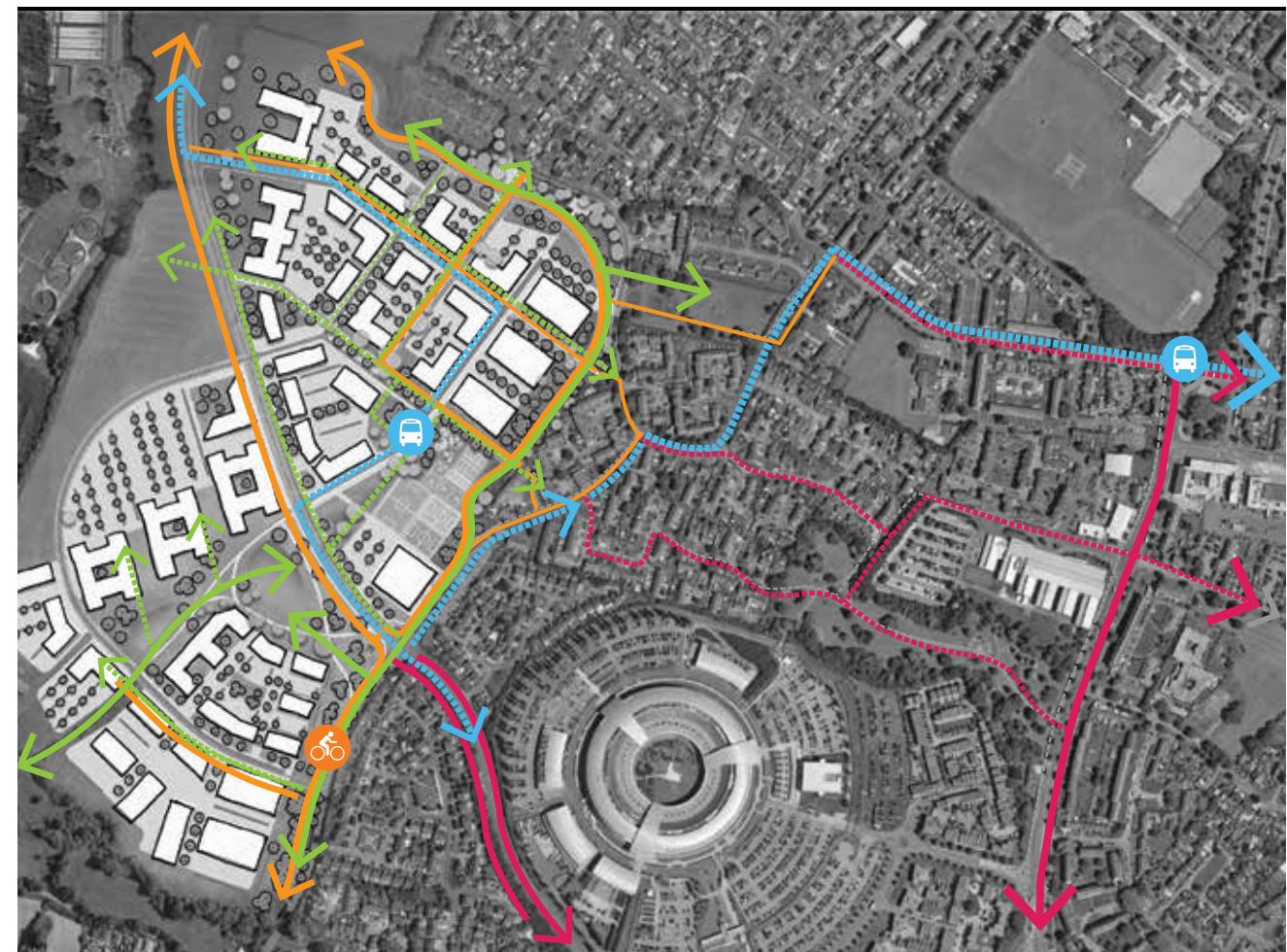
The masterplan responds to existing urban fabric. It is important to provide connectivity to Fiddlers Green Park, Hester's Way Park, Hester's Way Community Centre, Coronation Square and the surrounding communities. Pedestrian routes are identified within the masterplan; design and treatment of these spaces and environments should be designed to encourage walking.

## Cycle Movement

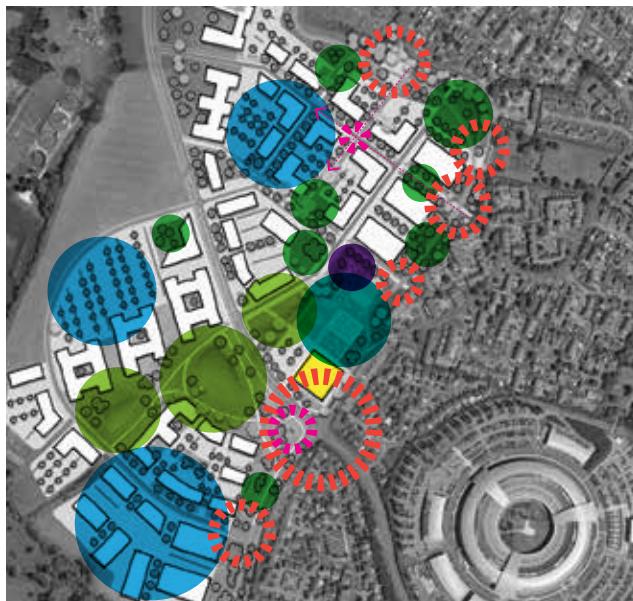
Cycle networks through the masterplan have been designed to encourage cycling and connect into the existing cycling networks. This included protected cycle lanes along some of the primary roads including along Princess Elizabeth Way, Telstar Way and Gloucester Road. There are also informal cycle networks along local streets including Shakespeare Road and through parks like Hesters Way Park.

## Public Transport Routes

The bus route has been reorganised so that it's brought into closer proximity to existing communities, and has a sustainable future servicing the local communities.



-  Pedestrian Movement
-  Public Transport Route
-  Existing Protected Cycle Network
-  Existing Informal Cycle Network
-  Proposed Cycle Network



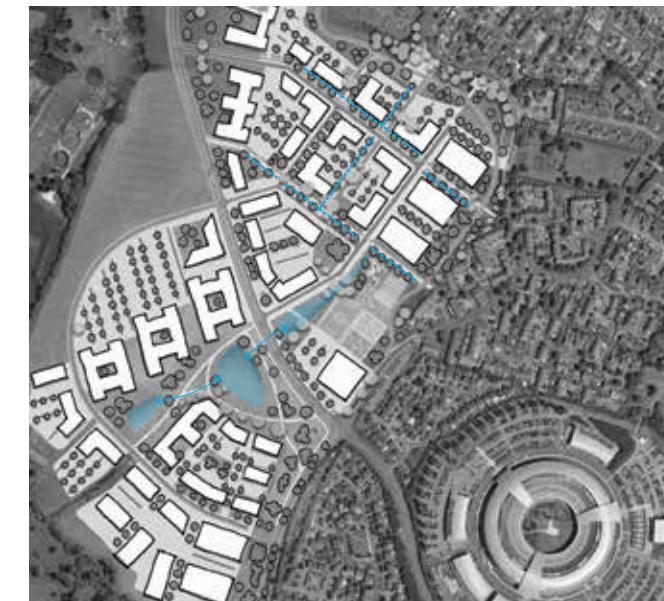
### Land-use

<span style="background-color: #8c9e3d; border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; width: 10px; height: 10px;"></span>	Parkland
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<span style="background-color: #00aaff; border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; width: 10px; height: 10px;"></span>	Sports + Recreation
<span style="background-color: #6a5acd; border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; width: 10px; height: 10px;"></span>	Playground
<span style="background-color: #ffff00; border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; width: 10px; height: 10px;"></span>	Community Centre
<span style="background-color: #0072bc; border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; width: 10px; height: 10px;"></span>	Car Parking
<span style="border: 2px dashed red; display: inline-block; width: 10px; height: 10px;"></span>	Gateways
<span style="border: 2px dashed pink; display: inline-block; width: 10px; height: 10px;"></span>	Gateway Art



### Ecological Corridors

Ecological corridors weave through the masterplan, connecting with pedestrian and cycle networks in order to create high quality landscape environments around movement routes.



### Open Drainage Systems

Using open landscape drainage systems can be significantly cheaper than engineered solutions while also providing visual interest and ecological and environmental benefits to the surrounding area.

## Transport Routes Study

The opposite diagram shows the primary and secondary routes into the cyber-park via the A40. There is existing concern about the extent of parking by employees and contractors from GCHQ along Fiddlers Green Lane. Future concern within the community that a secondary route via Fiddlers Green Lane to the Cyber Hub will become further over-subscribed and unmanaged, leading to a detrimental effect on the area and on the local community. The following options should be considered:

- Secondary access to the cyber hub via Pheasant Lane may provide a better alternative to existing plans;
- Closure of the junction of Pheasant Lane and Fiddler's Green Lane to remove any secondary access to the Cyber Hub; and
- Changing Fiddlers Green Lane south of Telstar Way into a one way street.

The community is also opposed to any loss of hedgerows along Fiddlers Green Lane. The local community would like to see further transport analysis and studies carried out to determine routes with the least impact on the local community. It is the view of the local community that additional infrastructure for transport capacity should be in place prior to the Cyber Hub being developed.

- Primary route
- Preferred secondary route
- Inappropriate route
- ■ Junction closure option



## Traffic Calming Measures

A key principle for achieving traffic calming, and managing parking along Fiddler's Green Lane should be through the use of passive townscape design rather than bolt on engineering measures such as speed humps or dividing refuges.

The example traffic calming measure below relies on the use of inset on-street parking, protruding into the carriageway. This requires vehicles either to deflect and slow, or create narrowings where they must either slow or wait. This also restricts where people can park vehicles.

Pictures opposite display further strategies to discourage and stop on road/pavement parking.

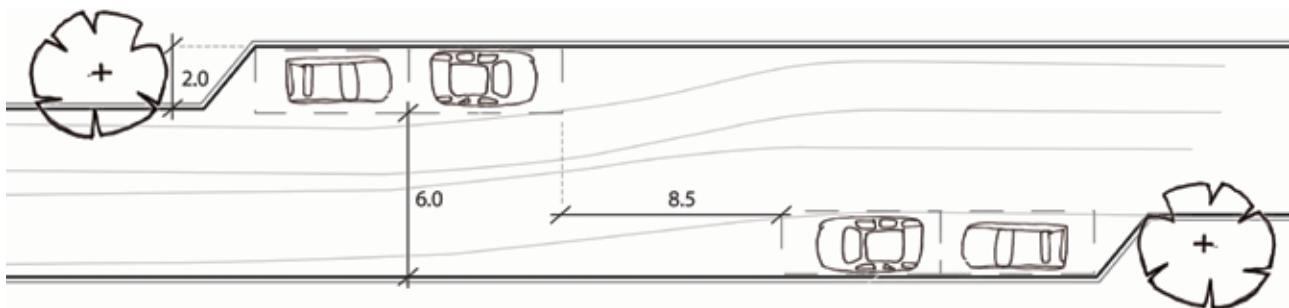


Trees with low level stone bollards restrict cars from parking along pavements.



Road is narrowed to reduce traffic speeds, with parking on both sides of the road.

(Above) Traffic is deflected through the use of planting beds and trees with bollards to reduce traffic speeds along the carriageway.



### Deflection created through parking

Since a full carriageway width is retained throughout there is no additional risk of motorists squeezing cyclists in negotiating the feature. The recommended gap between bays allows a single-deck bus and large car to pass.

## Biodiversity

Waters bodies and ponds are vital habitats for frogs, toads, newts and a variety of insects including dragonflies.

Meadow planting and species rich grasslands provide habitats and food for insects and bees. Other opportunities include:

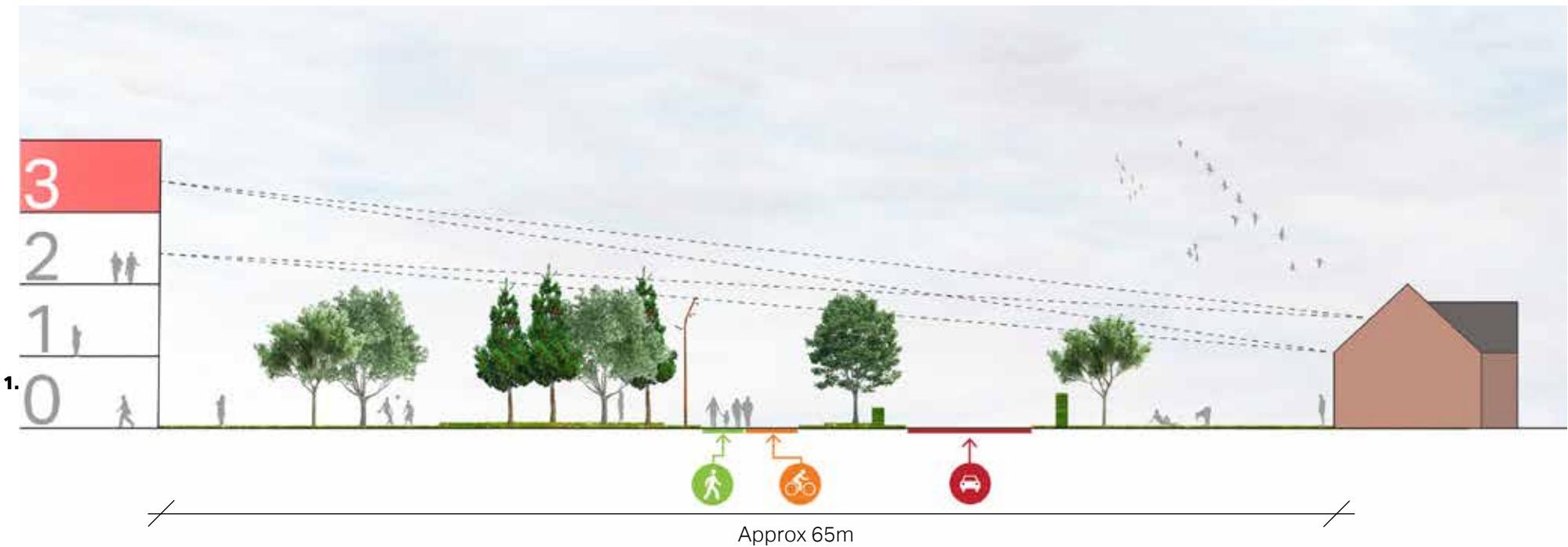
- Open bonded brickwork within detailing of infrastructure buildings allows for bat roosting;
- Nest boxes provide enclosures for birds and other mammalian species to nest in;
- Log piles simulate fallen trees, and are valuable habitat for mosses, lichens and fungi, as well as many insects; and
- Crushed aggregate pathways along secondary pathways allows water to permeate naturally through the soil, without the need for drainage channels and associated infrastructure.



## Building Heights

The below section demonstrates the relationship between a building in the cyber-hub and existing dwellings along Fiddlers Green Lane. The local community have reservation around building heights within the new development. In the below example it can be demonstrated why a four storey building would be inappropriate. Therefore building height should be limited to three storeys (ground, first and second floors only) where in close proximity with the community.

In other areas, topography change may allow for taller buildings. Mitigation measures such as tree planting to provide screening is best provided close to the existing buildings.



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**Next Steps**

**05**

## Next Steps

This study is intended to provide evidence to support the development of policies which enhance future development in the area for the HWF. It should be considered alongside other evidence gathered through the plan making process and the evidence base of the Cheltenham Local Plan (not yet published) as well as the Gloucester, Cheltenham and Tewkesbury Joint Core Strategy.

Other work which would strengthen the evidence base and provide a basis to monitor and manage future change includes:

- Transport Study to review routes, parking and public transport across the area; and
- A green space audit to determine the tree species mix, biodiversity and resilience of open space across the area, plus recreational facilities information.

A wealth of further information and support is available to assist the Hester's Way Forum in applying the principles set out in this document. The Locality website is a useful starting point and is updated regularly. Further information is available in the Neighbourhood Planning Grant Guidance Notes produced by Locality:  
[www.neighbourhoodplanning.org](http://www.neighbourhoodplanning.org)

Further technical support is also available to priority neighbourhood planning groups and forums through Locality, funded by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. The other packages of support currently available are:

- Housing Needs Assessment (HNA);
- Site Options and Assessment;
- Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA);

- Evidence Base and Policy Development (EBPD);
- Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA);
- Design including Design Codes;
- Habitats Regulation Assessment (HRA); and
- Plan Health Check Review.

Further information is available in the Neighbourhood Planning Grant Guidance Notes produced by Locality: <https://neighbourhoodplanning.org/toolkits-and-guidance/>

