



the case for a better town centre PART 2

## THE CASE FOR A BETTER TOWN CENTRE

### 2.1 Getting the best return on investment

The Council identified that a better 'return on investment' in the town centre is necessary to enable long term community wellbeing. Three key progress indicators have been identified:

- Increase in visitor numbers and significant positive economic impact on the CBD;
- Increase in property values within the town centre and surrounding areas; and
- A positive community experience and local pride.



### 2.2 Growth and development trends

The need to invest in the Blenheim Town Centre should be understood against the background of some headline trends pertaining to economy, employment, population, and tourism in Marlborough.

Marlborough has transitioned from a horticulture-based economy to high value viticulture. This has led to employment growth but at the same time to a less diversified and therefore more vulnerable economy. Little growth should be expected in the need for land for employment uses located within the town centre. Tourism and visitor attraction seems to offer the greatest economic growth potential.

One third of visitors to Blenheim are day visitors (450,000 of the 1.3m visits per year). This is more day visitors than tourists Blenheim is estimated to attract from the Inter Island ferries. Only about 50% of the 1 million ferry passengers per year travel past Blenheim, and less than a third of these are believed to stop and engage with Blenheim. Most Inter Island ferry visitors are older free independent travellers over 60 years old. The other major component of Inter Island ferry passengers are young independent travellers aged 20 to 29 years old. Only a third of Blenheim visitors stay over-night, with the average overnight stay of business and recreational visitors being only 1.6 nights.

Current retail supply is estimated at 73,200 square metres by Market Economics Ltd. in the town centre and 84,700 square metres in the Marlborough District. Currently around 43,200 people reside in Marlborough District, 29,000 of which live within Blenheim. It is suggested that the area is generally well served by the current provision of retail floorspace based on an industry rule of thumb of 2 square metres per person. That is not to say that more retailers should not be welcomed, but rather that the District does not appear to have an under provision of retail floor space.

Marlborough population projections to 2031 suggest a low decline to modest population growth (from the current 43,200 people to between 41,800 and 53,800). Therefore, population growth alone is unlikely to drive economic and retail growth. The resident population is aging and the highest population growth comes from the over 60s, and those approaching retirement who are already over 50 years old. The contribution of these groups to the local economy, economic growth and retail expenditure will likely decline as they age. Statistics trend a loss of those aged 39 years and younger over time. This extends beyond Marlborough's young adults leaving for higher education, overseas, or big city attractions. The loss includes those in the family formation stages of their life.

Figures show a large turnover of residents, with 50% of residents arriving within the last 10 years (but population growth in that period being less than 16%). Like many other districts, Marlborough is facing the challenge of attracting residents to settle permanently in the district. The Blenheim Town Centre could play a major role for Marlborough District in attracting and retaining young people, through the creation of employment, education and training opportunities.

### 2.3 Enhancing Wellbeing

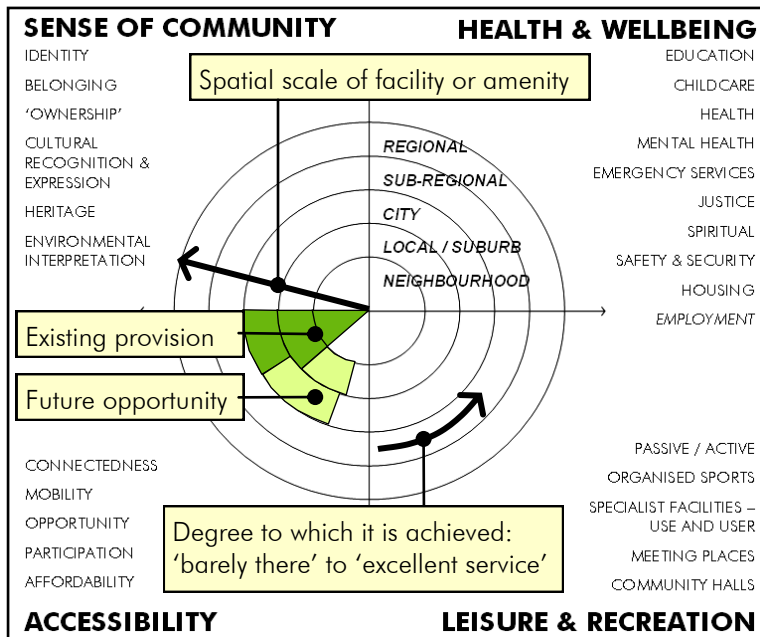
A look at the wider social network provides a more complete picture of the town centre in its context.

A successful social network facilitates community building, provides good accessibility to facilities and opportunities to participate. The provision of social infrastructure such as educational, healthcare and community facilities, and also the qualitative, less tangible aspects of community such as 'fostering a sense of place' and 'identity' in Blenheim were analysed against a range of criteria. This was done for all the different 'community catchments' of Blenheim as well as the central area. Refer to figure 2-1 for the summary of this approach. The composite result is shown in figure 2-2. The Town

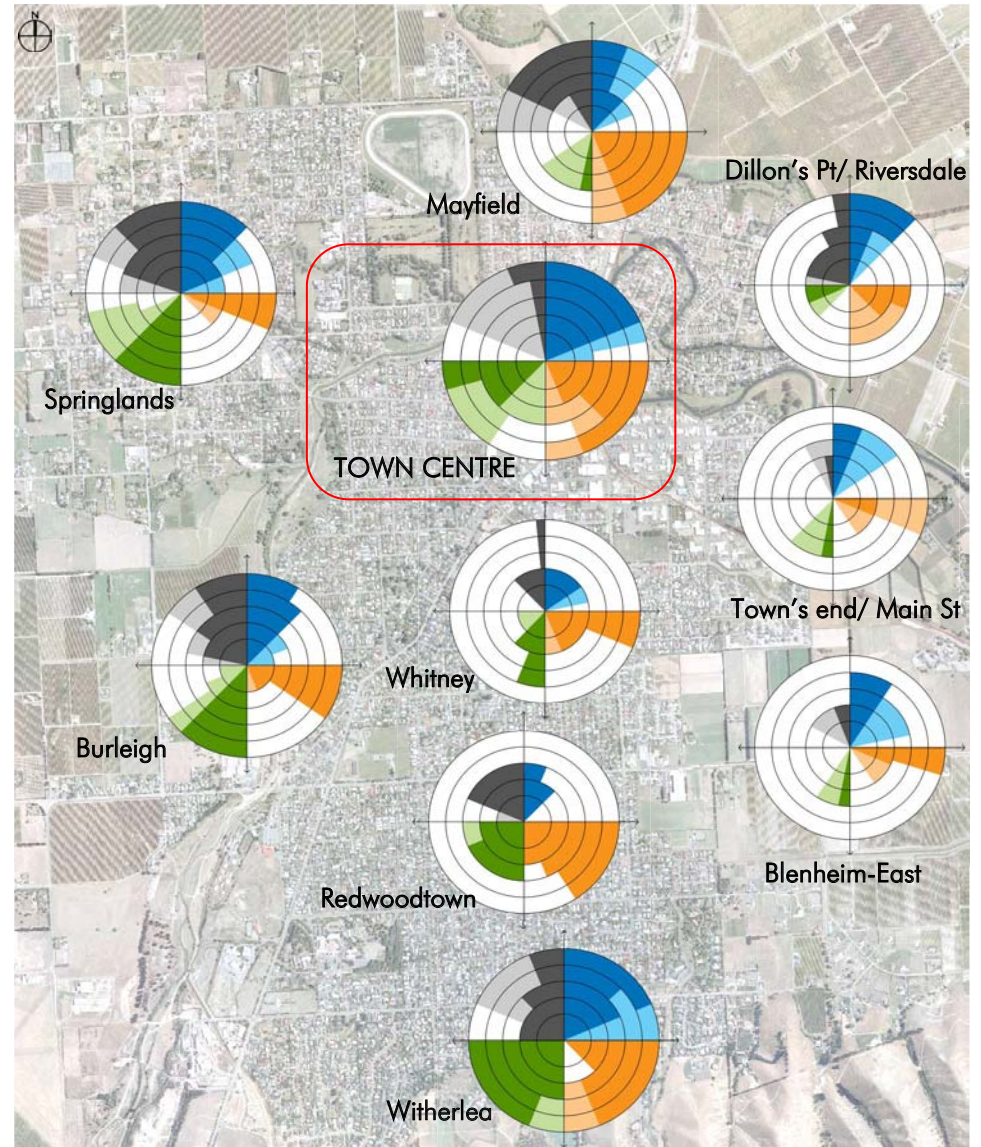
Centre circle depicts a representation of physical community infrastructure on the right hand side of the circle. This is explained by the presence of facilities located in Blenheim that cater not only for the town, but also for the wider district. However, it is clearly shown that the town centre lacks the more intangible qualities, such as sense of community and accessibility.

The areas east of the town centre appear the least strong in this context. This might mean that special attention should be paid to connections between the town centre with all its facilities and the weaker areas to east and south of the town centre. Targeting the barrier formed by State Highway 1 should be part of this.

Specific projects outside the scope of this project could help address these issues as well.



LEFT FIG. 2-1: Base for the radial plots for each individual catchment



ABOVE FIG. 2-2: plot of existing and future social wellbeing of major community catchments in Blenheim

## 2.4 Opportunities & Challenges

The performance and role of the town centre in the wider Blenheim economic context appears strong.

The 'brand' of the town centre is not considered to be as effective as that of the Marlborough District. A mismatch exists between the expectations of the visitor market, based on the internationally recognised Marlborough brand and the ability of the town centre to add a distinct and meaningful cultural experience to the Marlborough journey. There could be an opportunity for the town centre through a leveraging strategy tied to these attractive regional resources. The challenge in this context is to extend the 'high season' and cater for the off season and weekends.

The Taylor and Opawa Rivers, flowing on the edges of the town centre, represent major green open space opportunities. Blenheim has recognised these opportunities in recent and earlier developments of open spaces and walkways. An opportunity exists to add to these through strengthening of existing connections or implementing new connections and developments of additional open space. The river could also be recognised as a high amenity setting for high quality new developments.

Blenheim is located on the busy SH1 between Picton and Christchurch and on the intersection with SH6 to Nelson. This offers an opportunity to present the town centre to a large amount of 'passing trade' and entice them to engage with the town centre. High quality areas around the entrances into the town centre will be crucial for this purpose. The legibility of the town centre (a logical and understandable urban structure) is of similar importance for both visitors and locals. This would best be achieved through an efficient, safe and balanced movement network for pedestrians, mobility scooters, bicycles, private vehicles, and tour coaches that provide interest for all users.

The presence of the State Highways also poses challenges for the functionality of the town centre. Severance effects have weakened the connections with areas north and east of the town centre for pedestrians and cyclists and, to a lesser extent, for vehicular traffic. Areas of significance such as the station area, open spaces around the Opawa River and Pollard Park are in close proximity to the town centre, but difficult to access.

The quality of the streetscape is an important factor for the amenity of the town centre. Blenheim has not long ago invested in a streetscape upgrade of Market Street. Important considerations would be to define if this streetscape upgrade has resulted in the desired high quality amenity in the town centre and whether this or another treatment should be extended to other areas within the centre. This offers an opportunity to consider existing and new vegetation. Closely related to this is the distribution of hard and soft open spaces and connections between these.

Another opportunity for investment in the town centre is offered by the required new accommodation for the library or an upgrade of the existing one. The same opportunity exists for the art gallery, as the current building constrains the operation of the gallery. Strategic investment into these facilities could have positive spin-off effects for (certain parts of) the town centre.

Council has planned for a new theatre to be built next to the Combined Clubs. This means that the current theatre building in Queen Street may become available for other uses.

The Council is progressing plans for a new carpark building in Alfred Street with space for other uses on the ground floor. This offers the opportunity to attract the desired uses to this area, strategically located at the northern entrance to the town centre. It will also assist in improving the legibility of the town centre as visitors could park in a logical place. Convenient and logical pedestrian connections will be crucial to generate benefits from this investment in the town centre.



ABOVE FIG. 2-3: Grove Road (SH1) leading into Blenheim



ABOVE FIG. 2-4: The Taylor River, a valuable asset for the town centre



ABOVE FIG. 2-5: Council is progressing plans for a car parking structure in Alfred Street

## 2.5 Issues facing the town centre

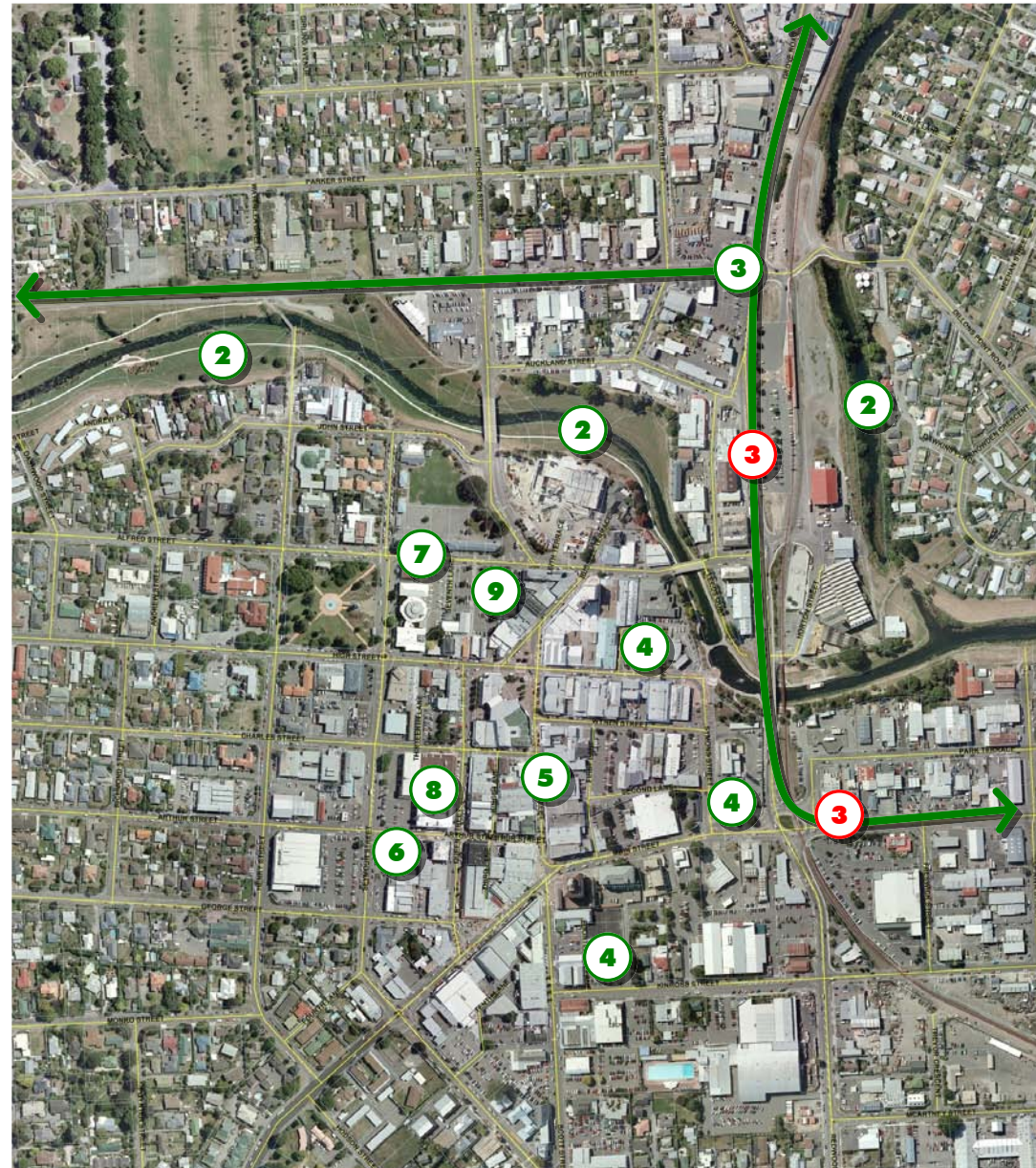
### Opportunities

1. The wider Marlborough amenity (natural, economic and cultural) could be leveraged from.\*
2. The Taylor and Opawa Rivers in close proximity to the town centre offer potential for greater amenity.
3. The large flow of traffic that passes the town centre on SH1 and SH6 could be better taken advantage of.
4. Vacant or underutilised land is present in the town centre. Some of it is in Council ownership.
5. Market Street has been upgraded recently. This or another treatment could be extended to other areas.
6. The library needs more space or a new building.
7. The art gallery needs more space or a new building.
8. The current theatre building will become available when the new theatre is built next to the Combined Marlborough Clubs.
9. The Council has planned for investment into a new carpark building in Alfred Street with space for other uses on the ground floor.

### Challenges

1. Whereas Marlborough has established a certain brand or identity, it is difficult to define the identity of the Blenheim Town Centre.\*
2. Blenheim's economic growth is not as strong as that of the District.\*
3. The State Highways create severance effects between the town centre and areas to the north and east.
4. Demographic projections show static or little growth, an aging population, loss of young people, and a quick turnover of residents.\*
5. Legibility within the town centre is poor.\*
6. There is little demand for retail and office growth.\*

\* = not shown on map



LEFT FIG. 2-6:  
Opportunities and  
challenges in the town  
centre