

4 Newhaven Town Centre: Physical SWOT Assessment

- 4.01 As part of the healthcheck assessment an analysis of the physical characteristics of the town has been carried out. This analysis then feeds into later sections concerning opportunity sites and overall conclusions. This assessment draws on work previously carried out (e.g. “Newhaven Town Centre Strategy and Action Plan”, 2001 and “Regeneration Strategy for Newhaven”, 2003) and introduces some of DTZ’s views and visions. Appendix 1 summarises this analysis in graphic form.

Image and identity

- 4.02 Newhaven lacks a clearly defined identity having been fragmented by intrusive highway changes and large scale development, which has damaged the uniformity of the townscape. Newhaven still has a strong association with its function as an industrial port that is exacerbated by the presence of industrial uses and uninspiring sheds at key gateway sites.



Poor perception of Newhaven as a 'dirty' industrial working port.

- 4.03 The town centre lacks any local distinctiveness with few obvious buildings of historic character or interest. The ground floors of many of the retail units have a neglected appearance and a tired and uncoordinated mismatch of styles and treatments. Many of the original shop fronts across the town centre for example have been replaced with insensitively designed modern fronts with large signage and garish colour schemes.



Deteriorating and poorly maintained shop fronts



Insensitively designed modern additions with large signage and garish colour schemes

Introverted Town Centre

- 4.04 The town centre is largely hidden from view as a result of its inward looking urban form. There is a distinct lack of active frontage onto the ring road and impenetrable development blocks to the south along with the continuous barrier of fencing across the north eastern and south western sections of the centre gives little indication of any town centre activity.



Multi-storey car park along the southern edge of the town centre presents a poor image to those passing on the ring road



Large scale, impenetrable development blocks along the ring road – town centre activity hidden from view

- 4.05 The river and the coast are major assets of the town and the main image drivers. Unfortunately the town centre again turns its back on these positive aspects and is further isolated by the heavily trafficked ring road.

A Lack of Gateways

- 4.06 Newhaven presents a poor sense of arrival to vehicles and pedestrians. The main gateways into the town are junctions which although in most areas are well maintained serve only to channel vehicles around the ring road rather than into the town. The principle vehicular gateway into the town centre is at the bridge, unfortunately this offers initial views of the North Quay scrap yard, unattractive industrial uses and functional retail warehouses.



Swing Bridge – primary vehicular gateway into the town centre

- 4.07 For pedestrians, in some places, the experience of arrival can be confusing, with elevated bridges or narrow alleyways. Sight lines are particularly poor at key entrances into the centre which together with the inadequate lighting along these routes create an unsafe environment and perception.



Subway on South Way – lack of lighting and activity creates unsafe perception



Alleyway between South Way and South Lane – poor visual connection with the town centre

4.08

Recently much work has been undertaken to improve the gateways and entrances into the town centre, for example at the entrance of Bridge Street there is new lighting, railings and an extension to the War Memorial green space. At the junction of South Way and Riverside North there have been improvements to the street furniture including new railings and co-ordinated signage, benches and lighting stands. On a larger and more dominant physical scale, this could be further improved given the identified development opportunities, with architectural landmark buildings at key entrances into the town centre.



New public realm works at the entrance to Riverside North



Entrance into South Way off Bridge Street – co-ordinated street furniture and landscaping

Landmarks and Vistas

4.09

The identity of a town is created through landmarks, monuments and tall buildings. Newhaven has very few major landmark buildings within its central core. There are, however, a number of buildings just outside the ring road which if given the correct treatment and context could become memorable features of the town. These include the Victorian, classical inspired office building at the junction of South Way and Meeching Road, the 19th century Congregational Church at the junction of South Way and South Road and St. Michael's Church, Church Hill. The Denton Island Training and Business Centre and West Quay housing development offer contemporary examples of prominent building forms.



19th Century Congregational Church at the junction of South Way and South Road



Victorian classical inspired office buildings at the junction of South Way and Meeching Road.



Training and Business Centre, Denton Island



New housing development at West Quay

4.10 The topography of the town means that there are stunning glimpses of the Downs from the top of the High Street. These need to be maintained and enhanced with buildings effectively 'framing' the views.



The High Street with views of the Downs in the distance

Distinct Quarters

4.11 Over time parts of the town centre have taken on distinct characters. For example, the section of the High Street between Bridge Street and Meeching Road is emerging as an 'entertainment' area, incorporating bars, cafes, and restaurants. The High Street, between Brighton Road and Bridge Street is where the outdoor markets takes place two days a week.

Bridge Street provides the key link to the town centre, between West Quay and the High Street the scale of the streetscape and buildings lend itself as being characterised as shopping area, with niche market shops or small independents.

- 4.12 The town centre still lacks a true 'heart' where people can congregate and events can take place. Newhaven Street Market provides an important contributor to the vitality of Newhaven although the setting of the market could be improved.



Bridge Street characterised as a shopping area with niche and smaller independent shops

Newhaven Street Market along the High Street

Access

- 4.13 Many of the problems associated with the town centre stem from poor cycle and pedestrian links with surrounding residential areas. Connections between key activity areas such as Denton Island, the Harbour, West Quay and the Railway station, town attractions including the riverside, the Fort, West Beach, the Marina and the proposed South Downs National Park are improving, but the dominance of the ring road is still heavy. This is primarily the result of the barrier effect created by the ring road which essentially isolates the town centre from surrounding residential areas. The disjointed and sporadic stretches of pedestrian routes and cycleways and the lack of adequate signage are also contributing factors. This is currently being improved between the town centre, Denton Island and West Quay.
- 4.14 Newhaven is located at the crossroads of transport routes, as a result vehicular access is generally slow. The key route into the town centre along the swing bridge is frequently congested and causes long traffic delays during peak times. Traffic congestion at the confluence of north-south routes and the east-west A259 route is also apparent. The centre is currently well served by car parking spaces with two large central car parks. The surface car park off Essex Place has approximately 60 spaces and the multi-storey has 180 spaces. The High Street is pedestrianised but there is limited short term on street parking available along Bridge Street.
- 4.15 In terms of public transport, Newhaven railway station is approximately 300m from the shopping area, the service is twice hourly and appears poorly co-ordinated with the bus service. The bus service is impeded by ring road congestion and does not fully meet the needs of the population especially for cross-town journeys. The north bus stop in the town centre is located off Essex Place and offers a bleak view for those arriving effectively flanked by service yards and blank facades, with the bus stop on South Way located opposite Seahaven Leisure centre some distance away.



The pedestrian underpass is the most direct link from the bus stop on south way to the High Street/Newhaven Square.



The bus stop in North Lane offers a bleak view of the town centre.

Public Realm

- 4.16 There is already evidence of improvements to the appearance of entrances to the town centre which it is hoped will help to create stronger links between the town centre and surrounding areas. In addition, key streets such as the High Street and Bridge Street are being enhanced through the introduction of new street furniture and street lighting. The improvements provide the opportunity to tidy up the ring road. This coupled with new crossing facilities and signing should encourage inward movement to the centre and break down the impenetrable barrier created by the ring road.
- 4.17 The High Street itself is poorly maintained with a large amount of street clutter in the form of brick planters, benches and bins. It offers a harsh environment with a lack of functional green space and street trees. Standardised design treatments and universality of materials used for example in Newhaven Square does little to define the towns local character. A more co-ordinated, better designed and located specimen would benefit the town.
- 4.18 The recent public realm works and public art at West Quay give some indication of the standards which could be adopted in the town centre. The design approach at West Quay promotes simplicity of design and the use of high quality materials. In addition it avoids clutter and promotes the co-ordinated design of street furniture and signage that reinforces local character and identity.



Newhaven Square – standardised design treatment – lack of local character *High quality public realm works at West Quay*

Mix of Uses

4.19 Appendix 2 sets out the mix of uses within the town centre. It is evident that there is a concentration of shops within the central section of the town along Newhaven Square and the section of the High Street between Meeching Road and Bridge Street. Bridge Street offers a mix of uses including cafés; pubs, restaurants and business uses however there are also several vacant outlets. The western end of the High Street also displays a broader mix of uses including shops, businesses, financial and professional services. The row of Victorian terraces outside the ring road west of South Way continues this mix although a number of the shops are boarded up. Within the ring road there are also a number of dwellings concentrated to the north west. The Hillcrest Centre provides the community centre which runs a range of clubs, charities and services for the local residents.

4.20 The buildings in the town centre mostly range between two and three stories in height. The upper floors are a mixture of uses including office, residential, storage or vacant space. There is a street market on Thursdays and Saturdays and a Flea Market housed in the former Congregational Church which adds to the vitality of the centre.



Vacant upper floors along Bridge Street

Row of terraces along South Way – some boarded up shops

4.21 Table 4.1 summarises the key physical SWOTs facing Newhaven town centre and its environs.

NEWHAVEN TOWN CENTRE URBAN DESIGN SWOT	
<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unique location – coastal, beside a river, surrounded by natural environment of The Downs (Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty/proposed National Park). • Strategic Views and vistas of the river and the Downs from the High Street. • Key town centre sites available for development. • Public realm enhancements including a new lighting scheme, benches and railings – co-ordinated approach to use of materials and street furniture • Victorian and Edwardian heritage/architecture, Conservation Areas • Changing perceptions – West Quay development. • Town centre has a pleasant intimate scale. 	<p>Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Negative perception of town because of the neglected appearance of the town centre and presence of industrial uses and uninspiring sheds at key central sites. • Prominent locations and vistas are dominated by industrial uses. • Lack of welcoming ‘gateways’ into the town centre. • Lack of adequate links between the town centre, key activity areas and town attractions. • Inward looking urban form of the town centre. • Outside appearance of town centre - ‘back ends’ of properties and large block structures. • High levels of traffic around the ring road create inaccessible island effect. • Town centre turns its back on key features – river and sea. • Poor crossing provision into the town centre – subways, untidy, narrow alleyways, perception of unsafety. • Poor local character - lack of coherent public space and landmark buildings. • Lack of high quality public spaces and recreational areas - left over space, not functional, neglected and underused. • Evidence of anti-social behaviour graffiti and vandalism. • Lack of activity – vacancies along Bridge Street and South Way. • Neglected shop fronts – lack of co-ordination, insensitive treatment, deterioration and poorly maintained buildings. • Harsh landscape particularly along key pedestrian and vehicular routes. • Traffic congestion particularly along the swing bridge.
<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recreational and aesthetic potential of the River Ouse must be maximised. • Consider town centre in wider context – improve connections with key attractions and activity areas. • Promote natural assets including beaches, coastline, river, valley, Downs and other attractions including West Beach, the Marina and the Fort. • Upgrade the appearance of the town and its public spaces, especially along the A259 corridor, in the town centre and where this will enhance the relationship between the town and the river. • Develop a well-lit, maintained and landscaped network of footpaths and cycleways that link shops, services and the town’s main attractions. • Develop gateway features at the entrance to the town to enhance first impressions and the image 	

5 Newhaven Town Centre: Benchmarking Assessment

- 5.01 As part of this research, DTZ has carried out a more detailed benchmarking exercise using the key performance indicators (KPI's) as set out in figure 1 of PPG 6. It allows us to identify any potential issues in the continued vitality and viability of Newhaven as well as opportunities for potential growth.
- 5.02 Benchmark centres have been selected on the basis of having a similar sized retail offer and catchment population as Newhaven town centre. We have not benchmarked Newhaven against the main competing centres of Brighton and Eastbourne, as their size and scale of retailing is not comparable with Newhaven.
- 5.03 Newhaven is a small centre and it has therefore been difficult to collate much economic data on the centre or the chosen benchmark centres. However using GOAD and the Management Horizons National Retail Rank we have been able to carry out the following benchmark assessment of Newhaven as a retail and leisure centre.
- 5.04 Management Horizons (MH) rankings cover the top 1,672 shopping venues in the UK, including town centres, stand-alone malls, retail warehouse parks and factory outlet centres. Towns and centres are rated using a weighted scoring system, taking account of provision of multiple retailers and anchor store strength. Major anchor stores such as John Lewis (classed as a major dept Store) and Marks and Spencer (classed as a premier variety store) are given a higher score than other multiple operators such as Woolworths (classed as a local anchor).
- 5.05 GOAD data evaluates the quality of individual retail locations examining:
- Car parks
 - 'Anchor' Stores
 - Competitors
 - Comparison and convenience outlets (includes major A1 uses, such as Woolworths, less sizable A1 outlets such as Thomas Cook, Banks, recognised name charity shops, e.g. Help the Aged, etc).
 - Pedestrian zones
 - Bus stops.
- 5.06 Using population data and GOAD data, the following centres have been selected as comparable benchmarks to the town.

Study Centre	Newhaven
Benchmark Centres	Seaford (East Sussex) Hythe (Kent) Seaton (Devon) Sidmouth (Devon) Dawlish (Devon) Whitby (N. Yorks) Ambleside Whitehaven Maryport

5.07 The benchmark centres selected are all coastal towns of a similar size in terms of population and retail offer. All the towns have the similar geographical issues to Newhaven (i.e. their catchment area is constrained by the sea and surrounding larger centres). Most of the benchmark centres are successful holiday destinations and have created a successful market niche for themselves.

5.08 The following is a brief commentary, using the data available, which examines Newhaven's standing in comparison to the benchmark centres selected. The full healthcheck summary tables are set out in Appendix 3.

National Rank

5.09 In comparison to the benchmark centres, Newhaven has the lowest position in the Management Horizons Rank. Unfortunately, we have not been able to track Newhaven's movement in the rankings as 2003/4 is the first time the rank has been expanded to include such centres. However considering the higher position of the benchmark towns with similar population sizes (such as Sidmouth and Dawlish), it seems evident that Newhaven is under-performing as a retail and leisure destination.

Table 5.1	Newhaven	Seaford	Hythe (Kent)	Seaton (Devon)	Sidmouth (Devon)	Dawlish (Devon)	Whitby (N. Yorks)	Ambleside	Whitehaven	Maryport
Population	11,000	23,000	13,800	6,200	13,000	11,900	13,000	N/A	N/A	11,572
Rank 2001 / 2	N/A	699	N/A	N/A	614	828	670	931	331	N/A
Rank 2003 / 4	1,268	829	1,063	N/A	649	1,194	743	1,268	404	N/A

Scale of Shopping Provision and Size of Units

5.10 In terms of shopping provision, Table 5.2 summarises the floorspace, number of units and multiple representation in Newhaven and the benchmark centres:

Table 5.2	Newhaven	Seaford	Hythe (Kent)	Seaton (Devon)	Sidmouth (Devon)	Dawlish (Devon)	Whitby (N Yorks)	Ambleside	Whitehaven	Maryport
Total Space	117,200	300,800	227,500	157,400	265,400	157,600	356,100	196,600	451,300	174,200
Total Outlets	82	181	168	117	178	125	305	135	235	124
Gross Space Per Outlet	1,429	1,662	1,354	1,345	1,491	1,261	1,168	1,456	1,920	1,405
Total Multiple Space	59,100	147,300	90,100	49,300	78,100	50,700	134,200	43,800	193,500	40,300
Total No of Multiple	20	39	35	16	36	24	63	24	69	16
Multiple Space as a % of Total Gross Space	50%	49%	40%	31%	29%	32%	38%	22	43	23

5.11 The table shows that Newhaven has the smallest retail offer (117,200 sq ft) of all the centres and this explains its relatively low standing in the national retail rankings.

5.12 Newhaven's retail offer is also characterised by small average unit sizes. This is not surprising considering their role as local centres and the fact that they are all historic fishing ports. The small but historic nature of the buildings can create the ambience that people look for on holiday and in their leisure time. However, modern retailers prefer larger shop units as they are more economical and allow them to display a wider range of products and

goods. Even potentially smaller scale 'High Street' retailers, such as Superdrug look for units upwards of 7500 sqft, a size which does not appear prevalent in Newhaven

- 5.13 Newhaven has only 20 multiples trading in the town centre which is relatively poor. Only Seaton has fewer multiples (16 units). However those 20 multiples account for some 50% of the town centres space, higher than any of the other benchmark centres.

	Less Than 232 sq m (2,500 sq ft)	Between 233 – 929 sq m (2,500 – 9,999 sq ft)	More than 930 sq m (10,000 sq ft)	Total (%)
Newhaven	88%	11%	1%	100%
Seaford	89%	10%	1%	100%
Hythe (Kent)	92%	7%	1%	100%
Seaton (Devon)	91%	7%	2%	100%
Sidmouth (Devon)	88%	11%	1%	100%
Dawlish (Devon)	90%	10%	0%	100%
Whitby (N. Yorks)	91%	8%	1%	100%
Ambleside	90%	10%	0%	100%
Whitehaven	84%	13%	3%	100%
Maryport	89%	10%	1%	100%
UK Base	83	14	3	-

Source: GOAD

- 5.14 Table 5.3, confirms that, compared to the national average, Newhaven and the benchmark centres have small average unit sizes. However in comparison to the other centres, Newhaven has more units over 2,500 sq ft which retailers, especially multiple retailers look for.

Retail and Service Offer

- 5.15 Table 6.4 highlights the main uses of floorspace within the town centre in comparison to the other benchmark centres. The figures presented are an index against the national average for all 1,100 GOAD centres.
- 5.16 The benchmark centres are all local centres / holiday destinations and therefore have a strong service offer. Most also have a strong convenience offer.

	Newhaven	Seaford	Hythe (Kent)	Seaton (Devon)	Sidmouth (Devon)	Dawlish (Devon)	Whitby (N. Yorks)	Ambleside	Whitehaven	Maryport
Convenience Total	118	123	148	105	62	98	130	59	85	129
Comparison Total	87	90	81	78	111	72	92	119	95	79
Service Total	116	115	135	107	124	164	113	112	85	62
Vacant	79	46	47	126	21	111	62	44	197	228

- 5.17 In its principal role as a local centre, Newhaven town centre has a relatively strong convenience and service offer. However it is underrepresented in its comparison offer. Encouragingly Newhaven and the other benchmark centres (apart from Seaton and Dawlish) also have a relatively low vacancy rate, in comparison to the national average for all GOAD centres.

5.18 The emerging results would seem to indicate that, in purely quantitative terms, if Newhaven is to become a more attractive retail and leisure destination for both its local catchment population and its potential to tap into the wider tourist/visitor market, then it will need to increase and enhance its retail offer, to make the centre more attractive and capture passing trade. In line with this expansion Newhaven should look to boost its restaurants, cafés, and fast food outlet representation, as well as gift and variety shops, as these offers are currently under-represented. These sub sectors should be areas that Newhaven should have a strong offer in, if it wishes to encourage people to stop and spend leisure time (and expenditure) in the town.

Retailer Demand

5.19 There is limited demand data for the listed centres, however for Newhaven and Seaford we have drawn the following information from Focus and our own in-house team.

Table 5 – Retail Demand				
Date	Newhaven		Seaford	
	No of Requirements	Ranking	No. of Requirements	Ranking
Oct 2003	9	555	2	1010
Oct 2002	5	688	0	N/A
Oct 2001	3	734	1	994
Oct 2000	1	962	0	N/A
Oct 1999	2	743	0	N/A
Oct 1998	2	763	0	N/A

Source: Focus

5.20 Although both centres lie low down the national ranking in terms of demand, both centres particularly Newhaven, have increasing demand among retailers according to Focus. This demand will offer confidence as the town looks to expand its retail offer in its efforts to become a more attractive centre.

Summary

5.21 Relative to the benchmark centres, Newhaven has a small retail offer in comparison to its population size. This small retail offer has resulted in its low position in the Management Horizons National Retail Rank.

5.22 However the town, as far as the data allows us to investigate, looks to be relatively healthy with low vacancy rates and up to half of its floorspace occupied by multiples. According to Focus data there are growing signs of demand for retail space in the town. Average unit sizes although small are bigger than almost all the benchmark centres.

5.23 The town has a strong convenience and service offer which is what one would expect from a local centre serving the day to day needs of the local populace.

5.24 However we believe, that if Newhaven is to attract more people from its local catchment and increased tourist/visitor numbers, it should look to further improve its service and leisure offer as well as some aspects of its comparison offer. This will encourage people to stop and spend time in the town.