

## Midhurst Town Centre Improvement Study

In October 2007 we were commissioned by Chichester District Council to produce a town centre improvement study for Midhurst. Our appointment followed the success of the Selsey High Street Improvement Study, and although the conditions and issues faced in Midhurst differ greatly from Selsey, there is the same need to address economic decline within the town. This set the aim of the study: to identify ways to improve the economic prosperity of the town by addressing the retail environment and the underlying issues of quality and mix of retail.

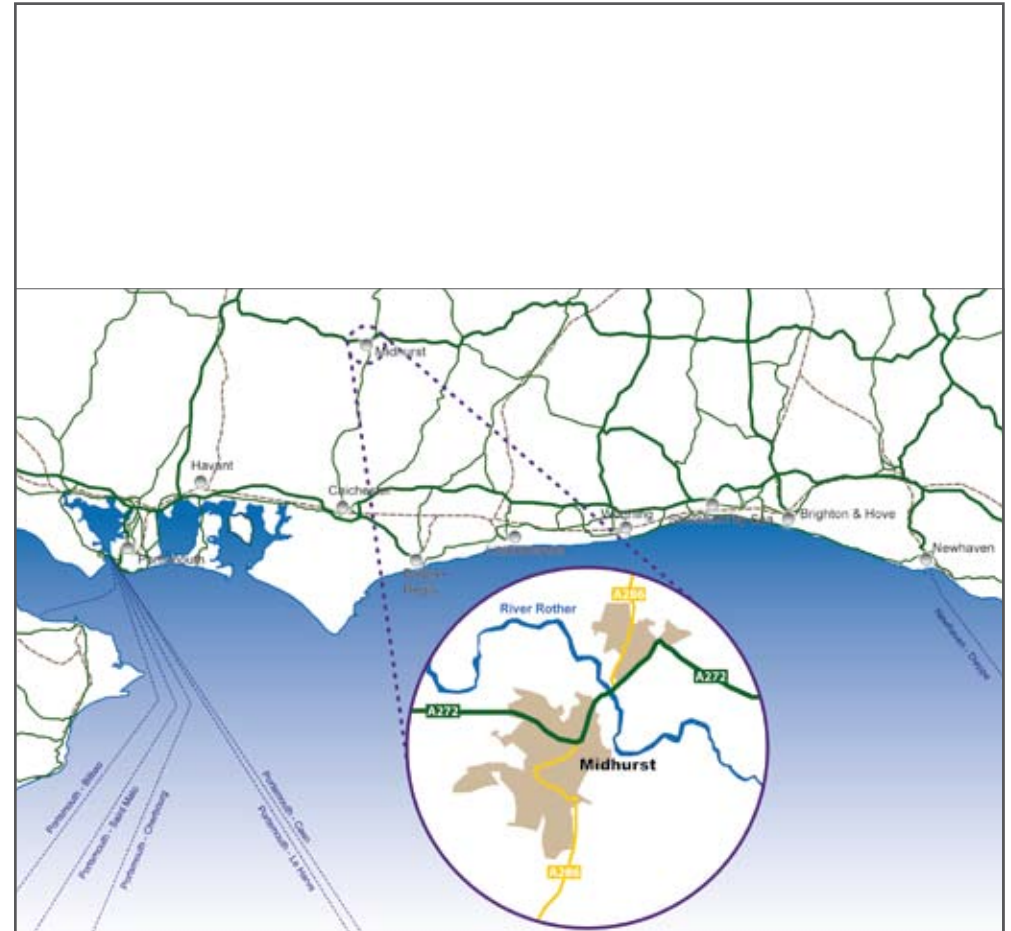
Midhurst is a small West Sussex market town with a population of around 5000. Like many other market towns, Midhurst is facing a national trend of declining retail. This is due to increased mobility and changing shopping habits. Towns such as Midhurst are now competing with larger urban centres, out of town shopping facilities, internet retailers and major supermarkets. However Midhurst has a good independent retail provision despite its recent decline. One of the overriding aims of the study was to form proposals that would help this retail sector improve and effectively serve the town and hinterland.

Building on the process developed for Selsey we were able to compress the programme from 18 months to 6 months, placing greater emphasis on consultation and wider involvement of the stakeholders. The Study was undertaken in three phases:

**Survey** – To visually record the overall condition of the study area, assessing and commenting on the quality of the built environment and identifying any specific issues that need addressing.

**Consultation** – A vital element of the study was the gathering of information and opinions from residents, businesses, community groups, Town Councillors, community leaders, members of the District Council and members of West Sussex County Council. Not only did this serve as a source of local thinking and preference but also acts to engage the community at the beginning of the process and ensures future involvement.

**Proposals** – Building on the survey and consultation processes, a preliminary phase of work has been undertaken resulting in a range of proposals aimed at improving physical and administrative aspects of the town.



Location map



## 2

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Midhurst has benefited from a number of studies and plans previously undertaken which provided a great deal of background to the Study. The four main documents from which the study follows are:

- The Chichester District Local Plan (1999)
- Retailing in Chichester District (1999)
- Midhurst Town Plan (2006)
- Midhurst Strategy and Sustainable Opportunities – (2007) CACI

The above helped to inform both the process and the outcomes.

The consultation phase comprised of interviews with community leaders and two questionnaires; one for residents and one for businesses. The questionnaires received an excellent response rate of over 30% and provided both numerical data and insightful anecdotal information. This phase managed to effectively capture the views and opinions of the wider community on a range of issues affecting Midhurst. We then compiled the information gathered in the first two phases of the study to form the background to the proposals, under the following headings or 'affinity' groups.

- Retail environment
- Sense of place
- Co-ordinated management

One role of the study was to help articulate and visualise ideas suggested by the consultees and respondents. In doing so, it was important that the scale, character and context of Midhurst was understood and respected. It was also important to identify improvements that could be completed in the short and medium term, with or without agency support or levels of capital funding.



North Street - Midhurst, Cowdray Ruins - Midhurst

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After publication of the Study, BroomeJenkins facilitated four public consultation events to obtain feedback from Midhurst's community and invite attendees to join the Improvement Study Steering Group which is responsible for implementing the proposals. Implementation and funding was a key element to raise to provide encouragement for the steering group and set a realistic programme of delivery.

Our ongoing relationship with Chichester District Council, our local knowledge and other work within the district, was very important providing both a local context and levels of efficiency.

The study has been well received by the local community, the District Council, the County Council and local Chamber of Commerce. A clear enthusiasm to join the steering group was demonstrated following the public meetings with a high number of volunteers offering their time and support.

The steering group will be formed by July 2008 and the action plan will be published in the Autumn 2008. The group will be responsible for overseeing the selection, development and implementation of the proposals.



Visual depicting an example of a retail branding scheme - West Street, Midhurst



Visual depicting an example of a soft landscaping scheme - North Street, Midhurst

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