



masterplan: other key elements

Barton Hill car park



11.1 Barton Hill Action Plan

The action plan focuses on the **public car park** and the **riverside walk** between Barton Hill and the Manor Grounds. The car park is on a sloping site, and the upper level next to Dawlish Museum commands a good view north across the valley. However, the car park itself is a scruffy, undulating **field of tarmac**, screened on the south side by mature trees. It is a dispiriting point of arrival for visitors to the town, and a place where the dense urban form of Dawlish breaks down. It is an undistinguished setting for the town's museum. Our proposals aim to restore a more **integrated character** to the landscape and to **improve connections** with the town centre and the river valley.

Barton Hill has been considered as a possible site for **supermarket**, but this would result in an unacceptable loss of parking capacity, as well as severe traffic impact. However, this does not rule out any form of **built development** on the east side of the site by Barton Hill. We recommend that the corner site overlooking the river should be the site of the **Dawlish Incubator**, which will provide serviced workspace for start-up businesses, focusing on high-order knowledge-based activities, including spin-outs from local universities. The Incubator will provide 1000 sq m of good quality space in a 2-storey building. The design of the building will incorporate an attractive covered arcade for the **riverside walk**¹.

¹ This proposal will require the relocation of the public toilets.



Fig 11.1 Barton Hill Action Plan



The **riverside walk** will be the subject of a simple, but robust improvement scheme, with new **lighting** and an upgraded **boundary** for the car park, and **tree planting** next to the footpath. The main pedestrian route into the car park from the riveride will be aligned with the museum. This axis – which will be reflected in paved surface and planting in the car park - will create a new visual link. It may be possible to create a new **footbridge**, creating a pedestrian route to Brook Street and the Strand.

The **car park** will be resurfaced, with reserved paths for pedestrians, and new trees and planting to break up tracts of parking. There will improved **signposting** of routes to the town centre, the healthcare complex, the Manor Grounds and other destinations. The scheme will enhance the **public realm** around two key public buildings: creating a garden setting for the museum and landscaping around the Citizens Advice office. In both cases, small public spaces will be created, with outdoor seating and planting. Finally, we propose work on the southern boundary of the site to restore the **mill leat**. This project forms part of the heritage walks initiative described below.

The Town Council has aspirations to obtain new premises in the town, and Barton Hill has been identified as a preferred location. These proposals are still at an early stage, but if a decision is made to proceed they will need to be factored into the detailed design of the site.

11.2 Seafront action plan

Work on the seafront between the station and Lea Mount will be implemented as part of a planned programme of work by Network Rail to repair and upgrade the sea wall. Generally, we recommend a **light touch** in what is already a **memorable seaside promenade** with a strong and distinctive character. In particular, the **rich palette of materials** – cast-iron columns supporting the station platform, powerful masonry blocks, stone steps – should be treated with respect. Equally, the utilitarian sheds at Boat Cove and the nearby row of bathing huts contribute to a strong **sense of place**.

We therefore confine our recommendations to three interventions:

- **upgrading** of the area where Dawlish Water enters the sea which is an important and busy gathering place
- replacement of the **kiosk** next to the jetty: the new structure should be a functional building, a contemporary version of a traditional seaside form, and robust enough to withstand the rigours of an exposed site, and
- introduction of a discreet new **lighting system** set into the walls/footpaths.



seafront kiosk exemplars | above: Headland Beach Cafe, Bridlington below: Porto



11.3 Lea Mount action plan

Lea Mount is a classic Devon cliff-top park commanding a superb view across Dawlish and the bay from the south. Paths wind up the cliff from Boat Cove, above the railway tunnel entrance, and there is a small park at the top. This is a key site and a natural destination for a short walk from town – it is already a stage on the Brunel trail - but Lea Mount is a sadly neglected place which needs to be **rediscovered** and **regenerated**.

The action plan will **restore the key features of Lea Mount**: paths, fences, seating, shelters, lighting and planting as well as the hill-top park. Selective clearance of overgrown trees and bushes may be required to **open up views** that have become obscured, and create a **safer and more comfortable** place to walk. Lea Mount is an important landmark as well as a viewpoint: the cliffs will be **floodlit** and delicate lighting of the paths will help to re-establish the romantic quality of the site.

11.4 Townscape heritage initiative

We recommend the design and implementation of a **townscape heritage initiative** for the whole of the conservation area. Dawlish has a number of valuable buildings, but its real strength lies in the quality of its



distinctive **townscape**, and in the contrast between the Regency and Victorian resort occupying the seaward end of the valley, and the artisan quarter to the west.

This urban form has survived remarkably well. There are some jarring notes, but the historic town is still largely intact. However, as in many places, the **quality of the townscape has been eroded** by ill-judged new developments, insensitive additions to buildings and, especially, a rash of crass and inappropriate shop fronts.

Two points should be noted:

- like any other successful place, **Dawlish needs to change**; this will require **new development** and, in the spirit of this report, we believe there is every opportunity for **contemporary design** and no need to resort to historical pastiche: quality should be the **key determinant**
- secondly, the good news is that much of the damage inflicted on the architectural fabric of Dawlish is **retrievable** if some simple **guiding principles** are adopted.

We therefore propose a 5-year programme to deliver **high quality townscape throughout the town centre conservation area**. Working with the District Council, and with support

King Street



from English Heritage, the first task will be to develop **policy guidelines** for property owners and prospective developers. These guidelines will cover:

- **existing buildings**, providing guidance on refurbishment, adaptation and extensions, including advice on materials and paint colours, and
- **new development**, providing direction on scale, density and form.

The guidance will be underpinned by a townscape heritage initiative (THI) which will introduce targeted programmes to:

- repair and reuse listed vacant and underused **listed and landmark buildings**
- provide grant support to help traders to improve **shop fronts** in the Strand and other streets
- facelift or replace **eyesore buildings**
- promote high quality **new developments** on gap sites and opportunity sites.

11.5 Dawlish: a hub for walkers and cyclists

Dawlish is a **superb centre for walking**. There is a train service for visitors who want to start their journey in Dawlish, there are numerous coastal and landward routes to follow, and it is also an ideal stopping-off point for

long distance walkers on the South West Coast Path.

Opportunities for cyclists are more limited: NCN Route No 2 (a section of which currently tracks the Exeter Canal) will pass through the town, but there is no set date for completion.

DCT, the Town Council and the District Council should continue to **lobby** for early completion of the cycle route, and we recommend that the partners should actively **promote Dawlish as a walking and cycling centre**, perhaps by negotiating ride and walk/cycle deals with rail operators. This will require the development of a **town-wide network of walking and cycling routes**, linked to countryside and coastal walks around the town such as the route up Long Lane to Mamhead. The definition of the town-wide network is beyond the scope of this study, but it could encompass a number of **heritage trails**.

The Brunel Trail already brands a section of the South West Coast Path between Dawlish and Dawlish Warren, and other walks can use the **presence of the past** as represented by places, buildings, artefacts and stories to bring the history of Dawlish to life. We have already proposed actions to improve the appearance and biodiversity of **Dawlish Water** and to make it more accessible: this story will be told in the new eco-centre. Another walk could tell the story of **Dawlish Mill Town**, with opportunities to restore and interpret the

the coastline south of Dawlish



sites of mills, wheels, weirs, leats and other artefacts. The **restoration of the mill leat** that served the town's two known mills would be a useful community project.

11.6 Traffic, parking and movement

Traffic and parking were recurring themes of our research and consultations. The issues in Dawlish are typical of a town which is affected by seasonal trade. At most times of the year, and at most times of the day, **traffic flows freely through the town** on the A379. The road is quite narrow and there are steep hills out of the town in both directions. On the north side of the town centre, Iddesleigh Terrace has sharp bends which can cause delays when large vehicles try to pass. Nevertheless, vehicle movement through the town is generally straight-forward.

However, during the peak summer months – and especially at weekends – traffic flows on the A379 are heavy and queues build up at all the principal settlements, including the notorious pinch-point at Starcross. This is inconvenient, but – as there is no practicable means of by-passing Dawlish – it is a situation the town will have to live with. As far as **through traffic** is concerned the strategy must be to actively **promote public transport** alternatives, especially the rail service and to introduce a regime which **mitigates the impact of traffic** on the life of the town. We have already



described our proposals for removing the gyratory system at Tuck's Plot and returning Jubilee Bridge to two-way working. By making the new layout more pedestrian friendly these arrangements will slow the pace of traffic, and we recommend a **20mph speed limit** through the town centre.

During our time working in Dawlish we saw very little evidence of traffic congestion on **local routes** in the town centre, except at the summer peaks. There is almost always ample spare **parking** at Barton Hill, but the smaller Strand car park is often full as is on-street parking in the Strand and Brunswick Place. These streets, like most in the town centre, are narrow and delays occur when delivery vehicles block the carriageway or cars are carrying out parking manoeuvres. The situation is not ideal, but the town centre is **generally accessible** and users can almost always find parking within an easy walking distance of the shops and attractions. Long stay visitors and rail users can use the all-day parking by the station.

Nevertheless, there is a *perception* in some quarters that the performance of the town centre is **constrained** by congestion and, especially, a shortage of parking next to the shops. We are sceptical about this: hundreds of small towns experience similar conditions and, in our experience, many of the most popular and successful places have pedestrianised main streets served by nearby shoppers'



car parks. The views expressed by traders and others reflect serious concerns about the declining fortunes of the town centre, but this is a function of a weak retail and food offer, not the availability of parking. All the evidence shows that, if the shops, cafes and restaurants are good enough, people will be willing to make a short walk from their cars. Indeed, people treat speciality shopping as a **leisure activity**; they want a good experience in an **attractive and stylish environment**, not a street choked with traffic and parked cars.

The reality is that the options in Dawlish are limited by the town's **topography and the intimate scale of its streets**, which are an essential part of its special character and charm. In principle, pedestrianising the Strand would be desirable but the street is an essential part of the traffic circulation system, so this is not practicable. Our approach is therefore a pragmatic one, directed towards the goals of maintaining **vehicle access** to the town centre, maintaining **parking capacity** at about the present level, and creating a more **pedestrian-friendly environment**.

The master plan addresses three key objectives for traffic and planning:

- making the **Strand and Brunswick Place** safe, comfortable and attractive pedestrian environments, strongly integrated with the Lawn

- **reducing traffic congestion** in the centre of town
- **maximising the use of Barton Hill car park** and discouraging on-street parking.

These objectives will be achieved by:

- improving **direction signs** on the A379, so that cars entering the town from the north are clearly encouraged to use High Street/Queen Street, and cars coming from the south to use John Nash Drive/Oak Hill/Barton Road; parking signs on these routes will direct drivers to Barton Hill – the Strand car park will not be signposted
- a strict **short-stay parking** regime in the Strand car park, with visits limited to one hour
- as described above, restricting **on-street parking** to the north side of the Strand, with many places reserved for disabled access
- a ban on **delivery and service vehicles** in the Strand/ Brunswick Place at designated peak times.
- courteous but active **enforcement** of the parking regime.

This regime will confirm the status of **High Street** as the principal entry route to the town from the north. An **improvement scheme** will be required to address concerns including:

- pedestrian safety: High Street is used by children walking to the Community College and Gatehouse Primary School as well as by residents and shoppers: sections of the footpath are dangerously narrow
- elderly and disabled people using electric powered wheelchairs are forced to use the road, sometimes travelling against the traffic flow
- a very poor road surface, reflecting years of heavy traffic and service excavations, is hazardous for cars and pedestrians.

A programme of works is needed to maintain traffic flow, reduce speeds and improve the safety of pedestrians and wheelchair users.

The rationale for these measures is based firmly on the need to create a more **comfortable and attractive pedestrian environment** in Dawlish town centre. Measures to achieve this goal have been described above, but they can be summarised as follows:

- encouraging the **separation of people from traffic** by creating a sequence of outstanding public spaces in the heart of the town
- **reducing the impact on traffic** on the Strand by removing parking from the south side of the street and widening the pavement on the north

- **replacing the gyratory system at Tuck's Plot**
- establishing a **20 mph speed limit** in the town centre
- complementary **improvements to High Street**
- **improving pedestrian movement** throughout the town by measures including:
 - stronger north-south pedestrian links across the Lawn
 - widening the footpath on the north side of the Strand
 - creating an expansive stepped link between the Strand and the Lawn
 - reconfiguring pedestrian crossings at Jubilee Bridge so that they follow desire lines
 - improving the signposting from Barton Hill to the town centre.