



# CORNHILL STRATEGY

August 2023

DRAFT



### The Cornhill has been the beating heart of the town centre since the Middle Ages. **When it thrives, the town thrives.**

In the last decade the Cornhill has been transformed:

- Improved public realm, with water feature and event space
- New use for the Old Post Office – now The Botanist
- Rejuvenated Town Hall with register office, café, as well as events and conferences and cinema in the adjoining Corn Exchange

But there are challenges. There remain some large empty units around the Cornhill, the former Debenhams and Grimwades stores, and in parts of the Town Hall / Corn Exchange complex. It's vital that these vacant units are brought back into beneficial use to increase vibrancy and footfall.

The Cornhill sits at the centre of the town – the heart of Ipswich.

The heart of:

- **CIVIC LIFE** – Home to the Town Hall with its Mayor's Parlour and Council Chamber; home to vigils, protests, Royal proclamations, Freedom of the Borough ceremonies, weddings and so much more
- **CULTURAL LIFE** – Home to events such as a surprise gig from Ed Sheeran, Windrush celebrations, Wimbledon and the World Cup screenings, dinosaur puppets, flashmobs and choirs
- **A CONNECTED TOWN** – The geometric connection to all points of the compass. The retail & hospitality businesses that radiate out East and West, the southerly connection to much of the town's office space, independent retailers and the historic waterfront and the northerly connection to the town's neighbourhoods via the bus station, taxi rank and multi-storey car park



### Strategic Context

Ipswich Borough Council's overarching new Corporate Strategy, "Proud of Ipswich" includes a priority about a "thriving town centre". The council is determined to continue to revitalise the town centre and we have made it our number one priority. We want to make Ipswich Town Centre the heart of our community. A place where everyone feels safe and welcome, and where people can shop, socialise, and experience brilliant culture, and access the services they need. **As the heart of the town centre, the Cornhill is vital to achieving this priority.**

The recent Policy Development Panel report from Suffolk County Council includes 20 recommendations to help Ipswich maximise its potential.

The proposals, supported by £2m in funding, are intended to support Ipswich in becoming the first City in Suffolk, commission projects that celebrate the town and support the growth of the arts, culture, and leisure offer.

The Cornhill is part of the Central Conservation Area within the Ipswich Local Plan. It plays an important part because of the dominance and significance of the listed buildings around the Cornhill many of which were developed during the town's Victorian heyday.

The Ipswich Vision Partnership's Connected Town Centre strategy places the Cornhill at the heart of the connected town.

## The History of the Cornhill

The Cornhill is Ipswich's most prominent public space and sits across the line of the former Roman road, now the main east-west shopping street.

It was important in Anglo Saxon times, when there may have been connections with the East Anglian Kings. An early church, St Mildreds, stood on the site of the present town hall. This ancient building became associated with the local government assembly in the 14th century and survived in a modified form until the building of a new town hall in the early 19th century.

The Cornhill has always been commercially important, its name refers to the trading of corn in the Middle Ages, and it was the location of The Shambles - a covered butchers' market - and later the Corn Exchange, both in the position where the post office building now stands.

A Market Cross stood in the square from the early 16th century to the early 19th century, and the figure of Justice (now in the town hall foyer) was originally set on its roof.

In the 19th and 20th century the Cornhill became the focus of the town's busy commercial centre. Tramlines were laid out and commercial premises such as quality retailers e.g. Grimwades and banks were built at its edge.

The present town hall was built in 1868 and is the Cornhill's most prominent architectural landmark.

In the later 20th century, the square was pedestrianised and in 2018 this was further enhanced with a paving, lighting and seating scheme which transformed the space into the heart of Ipswich's shopping and entertainment offer.



About the  
Cornhill

KEY FACTS



1.1m people

Footfall in 2022



Vacant buildings:

former Debenhams,  
former Grimwades,  
Golden Lion Public House



7 Listed Buildings:

Nos 7, 8, 13 and 15,  
Golden Lion Hotel, Town  
Hall & Post Office form a  
group of Grade II listed  
buildings



43

Event days in 2022

Public realm

A Hall McKnight designed public realm scheme completed in 2018 resulted in a modern, flexible space with water feature, lighting, seating and planters, addressing the 2m height differences on the Cornhill through ramps and steps.

The new space is regularly used for events including the Christmas lights switch on (it also hosts the Christmas tree), a Freedom Parade for the 4 Army Air Corps based at nearby Wattisham Airbase.

The project was jointly funded by Ipswich Borough Council, Suffolk County Council, Ipswich Central and the New Anglia Local Enterprise Partnership.

The investment in this space has been instrumental in attracting interest from hospitality and retail in buildings around the Cornhill most notably leading to the opening of The Botanist in the Old Post Office, as well as others who are currently negotiating leases or have yet to secure the right space.



Cornhill Strategy 2023

## The Cornerstones of the Cornhill



Photo: Emily Fae

### Town Hall

A yellow stone building built in 1867-68, it is an example of high Victorian civic architecture. The entrance is approached by a flight of stone steps leading to the grand interior which is home to the Ipswich Register Office Ceremony room, a café run by St Elizabeth Hospice and will soon be home to Kinetic Science.

It remains key to the town's civic life with the Mayor's Parlour, and Council Chamber and is connected to the Corn Exchange, where a host of events and shows take place each year. The Corn Exchange is also home to the King Street Cinema and the former Little Waitrose unit which is expected to become a hospitality space soon.





### The Old Post Office

The Old Post Office opened in 1881 and is owned by Ipswich Borough Council. It was surrendered by its previous tenant in early 2018.

The restoration and fit out for the New World Trading Company to open The Botanist in April 2022 was part funded by the government's Towns Fund and has created c.60 jobs.

With outdoor seating, interior design that recognises the heritage and green spaces of Ipswich and great reviews The Botanist draws people to dwell on the Cornhill. It's frequently mentioned by other hospitality businesses seeking a new premises in Ipswich which want to be close to The Botanist and the new public realm on the Cornhill itself.



## Lloyds Bank

The Lloyds bank building on the Northern boundary of the Cornhill, designed by an Ipswich architect and built in 1889, is an example of late Victorian commercial architectural exuberance.

The building has recently been acquired and Lloyds Bank retain their lease. The new owners intend to liaise with Lloyds Bank to ascertain whether any of the currently unused space which extends to some 22,302 sqft over 5 floors and a basement, can be brought back into beneficial use potentially as a boutique hotel, residential or office space.

The new owners also intend to ensure that the Grade II listed building is brought back into good repair.

Lloyds Avenue, a Tuscan arcade with a wide central traffic opening and flanking semi-circular arched pedestrian openings was created in 1930 when the ground storey of the Lloyds bank building was broken through.

Lloyds Arch is now the 'gateway' through which many visitors to the town centre arrive.



## Waterloo House

The former Debenhams department store building built in the late 1970's, which stands on the site of the original Footmans Department store built in 1842, was acquired by The Unex Group in 2021. The Unex Group have been stripping out the building and are now in the process of undertaking various improvements. It is understood that negotiations are ongoing with various potential occupiers, including two national retailers, which will hopefully lead to occupation of various parts of the ground floor in the next 12 months.

The Unex Group continue to seek alternative uses and additional occupiers for the first and second floors.

Bringing this building back into useful occupation is key to the delivery of this Cornhill Strategy given its dominance to the north west corner of the Cornhill.

## Ipswich Market

Ipswich was first granted the power to hold a market in the town by virtue of a Royal Charter from Edward II in 1317.

Using powers granted by the more recent Ipswich Market Act 2004 a traditional market is held on 4 days every week on the northern side of the Cornhill. The market is an important part of the town centre economy, particularly in relation to independent retailing, local employment and business start-up opportunities.

The market is particularly important to Ipswich's diverse communities by providing access to affordable healthy fresh produce and other commodities. The traditional market is supplemented by regular stand-alone themed speciality markets such as artisan, producer and vegan.





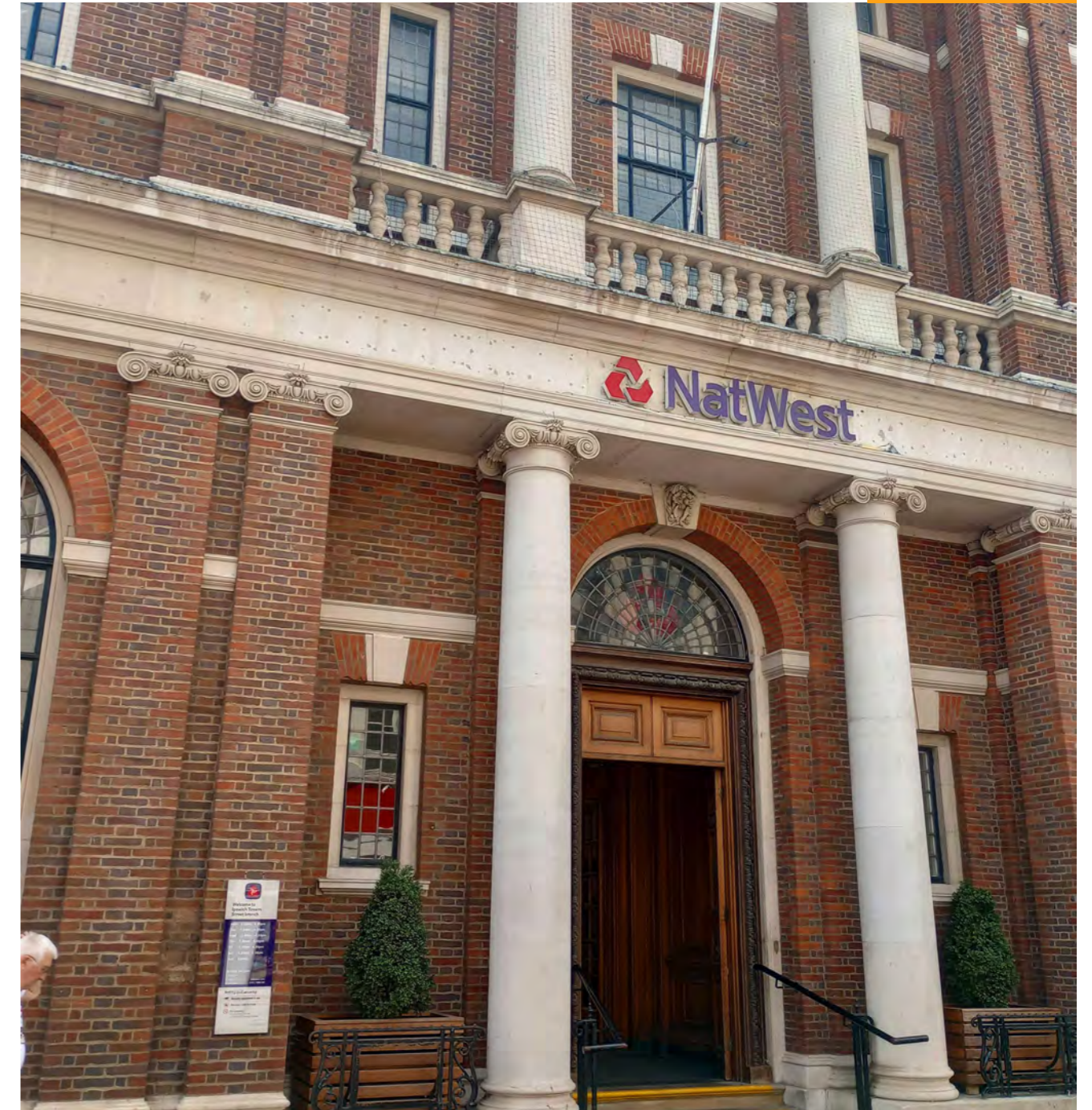


### Retail Store at No 17-19

No 17-19 Cornhill, owned by Ipswich Borough Council's property investment company, Ipswich Borough Assets (IBA), has been occupied by Deichman Shoes since December 2020. Previously occupied by the Arcadia Group for its Burtons menswear and Dorothy Perkins brands, IBA took advantage of a break clause in the Arcadia lease just prior to Arcadia going into administration. This meant a new lease could be signed with Deichman without the building being vacant while the lease was tied up in the Arcadia Administration. In total the shop was vacant for less than a year for Arcadia to move out, landlord works, Deichman fit out and pandemic restrictions.

### Nat West Bank

An early 19th Century building which forms the Eastern Boundary to the Cornhill and creates significant footfall to the Cornhill through its customer visits.



## Grimwades

This building on the North West corner of the Cornhill dates to 1884 and was occupied by Grimwades department store until 1996. The unit was occupied by a number of tenants until 2012 when the occupant at the time, Clintons, went into administration. It has remained vacant ever since.

In June 2023, Ipswich Borough Council announced its intention to seek to acquire the building via Compulsory Purchase having failed to secure a private treaty sale. The Council considers bringing this building back to beneficial use is key to the town centre economy and an important part of this Cornhill Strategy. The building suits a number of uses including retail and hospitality on the ground floor with offices or residential accommodation on the upper floors.



## Golden Lion Hotel

This Grade II listed inn on the west side of the Cornhill which is built around an 18th century timber-framed and plastered building is currently closed. However, part of the ground floor of the original inn is occupied by "Mizu" which continues to trade, contributing to the vibrancy of the Cornhill. The Council will work with the owner of the Golden Lion to encourage a reopening.

## Mannings

On the western boundary of the Cornhill this small timber-framed and plastered building probably built in the 17th Century, with a late 18th Century or early 19th Century front is a popular public house offering indoor and outdoor service, contributing significantly to the vibrancy of the west side of the Cornhill.



### Town Centre Experience

As national trends show, increasingly people are using town centres more as places to socialise and spend their leisure time than purely for shopping. Therefore, the quality of the leisure offer and overall experience in town centre locations is becoming a key factor in their success.

### Place making and public realm

With increasingly fierce competition for both visitors time and their disposable income from the internet and out-of-town shopping centres, we need to ensure the town centre presents a compelling reason to visit.

The use of the Cornhill changes during the course of the day, week, and year. The flexible design allows for permanent uses and temporary event usages such as skating rinks, outdoor cafés, markets and the location for a temporary stage to host regular music events.

The cleanliness of the Cornhill has a significant role to play, regular cleansing including pressure washing, litter picking, bin emptying and street sweeping ensure the Cornhill is the attractive heart of the town.



### Connectivity and Wayfinding

The Cornhill is the gateway to the town centre for many of the visitors who arrive by public transport, by taxi or who have parked in the town centre multi-storey car park. Elements within the Cornhill are visible from a distance in all directions and the activity on the Cornhill entices visitors to move towards it. Arriving from the North of the Cornhill through Lloyds Arch, visitors first interaction with the town centre is the Cornhill. Retail & hospitality businesses radiate out East and West from the Cornhill which is at the centre of the traditional town centre shopping area. Exiting out of the Cornhill on the Southern side the hospitality venues continue and this route provides the connection to much of the town's office space, independent retailers and the historic waterfront.



Photo: Miff Pleasant

### Attraction and Destination

The Cornhill appeal to the various needs of visitors, including amenities that make it comfortable for people to use - seating is available all year round and in the summer deck chairs are available, hospitality venues also surround the Cornhill with both indoor and outdoor seating. Vendor carts provide further choice for visitors and are a popular destination.

Directly in front of the Town Hall the interactive vertical water feature provides water jets for display and play. These fountains include visually exciting lights, which can be choreographed for shows or used regularly as night lighting.



Photo: Emily Fae

### Events, markets and other use

Regular special events and markets, especially those which are community based, provide a distinctive flavour to the Cornhill and are an effective driver of footfall.

Public events on the Cornhill develop more active links between the businesses and wider community. They can provide a test trading environment for new businesses, and as trailblazers for new culture and leisure concepts.

The Cornhill events and enlivenment programme ensures there is something happening on the Cornhill almost every week.



Cornhill Strategy 2023

**The vision**

As the heart of our town, the Cornhill will be:

- Vibrant, busy, and enjoyable
- A clean and safe place for everyone
- Surrounded by fully occupied buildings
- A key part of the town's night time economy
- An inviting place to spend time



Ipswich Borough Council in partnership with Ipswich Central, Suffolk County Council, Suffolk Constabulary and landlords will achieve this by:

- Ensuring full CCTV coverage, good lighting, natural surveillance and policing are in place
- Regular cleansing including pressure washing, litter picking, bin emptying, street sweeping
- Keeping vehicular use to a minimum enabling pedestrians to freely and safely use the space
- Delivering an events and enlivenment programme so that there's something happening on the Cornhill almost every week
- Supporting the Market by creating a market trading environment that compliments the surrounding area and retail offer
- Ensuring the Cornhill is well lit and well maintained with seasonal planting
- Bringing empty buildings and units back into beneficial use including through the use of Compulsory Purchase powers where necessary
- Ensuring that while property is vacant it is visually appealing e.g. though the use of window vinyls
- Delivering a public realm scheme on the Lloyds Avenue route to the Cornhill as part of the £25m Town Deal
- Enabling hospitality businesses to utilise outdoor spaces and seating
- Providing interactive vertical water jets for display and play. These fountains include visually exciting lights, which can be choreographed for a show or used regularly as night lighting.
- Utilising the space for civic events such as parades, vigils and proclamations

We will measure success through:

- Measuring footfall
- Building occupancy rates
- Feedback from Cornhill businesses
- Resident and visitor feedback





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