WINCHEAP 2020 VISION

A new vision for Wincheap

PRODUCED AND PUBLISHED BY THE WINCHEAP SOCIETY

Foreword

The Coronavirus pandemic has affected all of us in different ways. Some are feeling extreme mental strain, coping with home schooling, difficulties with shopping, employment uncertainties, and isolation. Others have been inspired by the lockdown and extra time on their hands to resume a long-neglected project or start something new.

The latter applied to several members of The Wincheap Society who, noticing how much better things were with less traffic and greatly improved air quality, decided to form a sub-committee and draw up ideas for improvements that could be implemented across the Wincheap area..

Thus, I have pleasure in introducing ***Wincheap 2020 Vision: a new vision for Wincheap,*** published by The Wincheap Society. It has been produced by local people for local people.

The document details proposals that will enhance the quality of life in Wincheap, where I have lived for almost fifty years.

Some are simple, easily-achieved improvements; some are major, long-term redevelopment projects. We believe that all of our proposals are workable, and we hope that the city councillors and officers will take the time to digest the content of our document and act upon the suggestions when planning for the future.

John Osborne, Chairman, The Wincheap Society



Executive Summary

This document updates two earlier 'Visions' for improving the Wincheap area:

- The Wincheap Society's 'Vision for the New Millennium' (1999)
- The 'Development Brief' produced by Capital and Counties in collaboration with CCC (2007)

Both are available on The Wincheap Society's website.

Like its predecessors, the current document envisages the regeneration of Wincheap by:

- revitalising the Wincheap Industrial Estate and re-routing the A28 through it
- freeing up the main Wincheap road to become a thriving village community, and a destination for tourists and Canterbury residents alike.

Additionally, however, our 2020 Vision looks at low-cost, achievable ideas for improving the Wincheap neighbourhood in the shorter term.

This is **Part 1,** and it includes a plan of action for:

- improving the street scene (through planting, benches, street art, etc)
- preserving and enhancing the area's open spaces and green assets
- tackling graffiti
- providing community meeting spaces (for performance, rehearsals, clubs, etc)
- improving provision for cyclists and pedestrians.

Part 2 outlines longer-term, more ambitious aspirations for redeveloping the Wincheap Estate and transforming the main Wincheap road.

For the Estate, we propose

- a comprehensive housing-led redevelopment, with high density and high environmental standards, often building over existing retail units to protect existing businesses and employment
- pocket parks and community spaces
- re-routing traffic to enhance the main Wincheap road and reduce congestion on the ring road

For the historic Wincheap district

- a largely traffic-free main road, to make Wincheap an attractive destination for city residents and tourists alike
- a massively improved environment for residents, shoppers, cyclists and pedestrians

Introduction

Back in 1999, The Wincheap Society published its **Vision for the New Millennium**.
This document presented ideas for regenerating the Wincheap area by:

- revitalising the Wincheap Industrial Estate (hereafter 'the Estate') and re-routing the A28 through it
- freeing up the main Wincheap road to become a thriving village community, and a destination for tourists and Canterbury residents alike.

In 2007, the city council, in conjunction with developer Capital & Counties (aka CapCo) created an ambitious, retail-led plan which would have fulfilled most of the aspirations in our 1999 Vision: the Estate would be comprehensively redeveloped, with a mix of housing, small business use, leisure, and retail. The A28 would be routed through the Estate, giving the Wincheap road itself a new lease of life.



The CapCo plans were well advanced when the financial crash of 2008 put everything on hold. Since then there have been no significant new initiatives, and Wincheap has suffered the consequences of ever-increasing volumes of road traffic — in terms of poor air quality, noise pollution, and damage both to the built environment and any sense of community. Yet, as local residents know, there is a complexity to the Wincheap area that is perhaps lost to those who merely rush through (or sit stationary) in their cars when entering or leaving the city..

Wincheap is far more than the busy A28 or a run-down trading/ retail estate. It is an area of great charm — an ancient suburb dating back at least to the 13th century, with many buildings of historical and architectural interest, and a local economy which boasts many unique, high-quality small businesses. The Estate, meanwhile, has enormous potential. It is a large and valuable chunk of land in a strategic location, offering exceptional opportunities for improving the whole area.



Wincheap water meadows at dawn

Re-imagining Wincheap: background to this document

The stimulus for updating our 1999 Vision was the first Covid-related lockdown during the spring of 2020. For a few weeks, residents enjoyed an unaccustomed period of peace: minimal traffic, quieter streets, birdsong, cleaner air. This led us to think about how we could make these gains permanent, rather than simply returning to an unsustainable and sub-optimal status quo. A leaflet drop encouraging local participation drew a positive response, and we assembled a working party of over 20 Wincheap residents. This group, under the auspices of the The Wincheap Society and with the support of our ward Councillors Nick Eden-Green and Derek Maslin, held several meetings to develop ideas for improving the area.

This document sets out our proposals for re-imagining Wincheap. It is in two main parts:

Part 1 describes low-cost, achievable ideas for improving the Wincheap neighbourhood in the shorter term.

Part 2 draws on our 1999 Vision and on the 2007/8 CapCo development brief, to outline longer-term aspirations, with an ambitious plan to redevelop the Estate and transform the main Wincheap road.

Part 1. Low-cost ways of enhancing the neighbourhood

Individuals working on the new Vision broke into a number of sub-groups, each focussing on a specific issue. Part 1 of this document looks at the current and planned activities of these smaller groups.

Planting and Street Scene

We agreed that a lot could be done to brighten up the neighbourhood through a combination of planting and street art. More trees, bushes, and gardens would also contribute to carbon capture, pollution absorption, and improved air quality, and thus play a small part in dealing with the climate emergency — as proposed in the 'Land Management' section of Canterbury Climate Action Partnership's Action Plan.

This group identifying (on an ongoing basis) suitable sites in the area for installing planters and benches, or for planting trees, bushes, hedges, and small gardens. (There are several examples of similar activity in other parts of the city.)

There are some issues around consent (from the City or County Council, depending on location), but these are not insurmountable. Several people also mentioned 'guerrilla gardening' as an option for uncared-for spaces.

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Maintenance (watering, pruning etc) also needs to be taken into consideration, but this can be managed by careful selection of low-maintenance plantings and by assigning local volunteers to each site. Funding could be raised locally (through crowdfunding), but some public money might be available too — for example from the discretionary budgets of our county councillors, or from Canterbury in Bloom which, though mainly a city-centre initiative, has supported some projects outside the central area.

Street art is another way of adding colour and character, as can be seen in Kingsmead and other parts of the city. We are looking into potential sites, especially private spaces where owners would be willing to host art projects. We have been given contacts of possible artists. If public funding isn't available for ventures like this, we still have options for raising the money locally, including the involvement of local businesses as sponsors.

Open Spaces and green assets

This group is making an inventory of all the 'green assets', large and small, in our neighbourhood, to help ensure that they are preserved and protected.

Wincheap's most precious open space is the **Great Stour Way.**

Always a popular and well-used amenity since its opening in 2011, the path's value during the pandemic can hardly be overestimated. The idea of paving over the water meadows to create a car park was met with universal horror by Wincheap residents, and there was huge relief when this project was shelved. Our task now is to work with other interested parties to protect and enhance this exceptional local resource, which is so important to our collective well-being, and which is designated as part of the functional floodplain, part of the Great Stour Local Wildlife Site, and part of the Stour Valley Green Corridor. There is growing awareness of the fact that there are only just over 200 chalk streams in the world with unique flora and fauna, so this gives us a responsibility to look after our stretch of the Stour very carefully.



The Kentish Stour Countryside Partnership has proposed creating a **Stour Valley Regional Park,** which would include the section in the Wincheap area. This is all still under discussion, and could be an exciting development.

Canterbury City Council also has plans to create a **local nature reserve** on land between Cotton Road and the River Stour. (See the discussion at https://news.canterbury.gov.uk/news/article/124/early-ideas-for-local-nature-reserve-set-out.) For the moment, this project is stalled because its funding would have come from the budget for the now-abandoned Park and Ride extension in Wincheap water meadows. But this is an appealing future possibility, and we would hope that the Wincheap water meadows would be included in the adjoining local nature reserve when it is created.

The abandoned public toilet block adjacent to the Wincheap play park (which was sold by the council to a private buyer in 2012) has the potential to be refurbished as a small café (with toilet facilities) for parents and children using the the park. We have established the ownership of the building and will follow up.



There are examples of similar projects elsewhere, like this converted toilet block in Plumstead, now a café for park users.



We have also discussed the idea of providing some public access to the adjacent Nonconformist burial ground, for example through occasional open days, perhaps with a guided tour and historical talk.

For the future, we aim to produce a map of off-street walks in Wincheap (such as the orchards and Great Stour Way) and of local cycle routes.

Graffiti

In Wincheap, as in many other parts of the city, graffiti is a persistent problem. The railway bridge at the top of the main road (covered in tags, and badly in need of a lick of paint) forms the 'gateway' to Wincheap, setting a scruffy, down-at-heel tone for the rest of the street and much of the wider Wincheap area, where graffiti abounds.

In collaboration with the council's own graffiti team (Environmental Enforcement), we have been working hard to find solutions which will give the whole area a lift.





Our graffiti group has been very active. They have been photographing graffiti-blighted sites, especially on the Industrial Estate and main road. These go into a spreadsheet which indicates the site and its status (whether the location has been reported to the council, whether action has been taken, etc). They have been delivering leaflets to affected properties, informing owners of their right to request free graffiti removal by the council's team, with details of who to contact.

The group has also done its own community graffiti-cleaning session (focussing on the main road) and there are plans for more of these.

The City Council is also expanding its activities on this front: it has recently appointed a new enforcement officer, removed a lot of tags locally, plans to install more CCTV, and is offering a £500 reward for information on taggers. They have produced postcards publicising their activities and the reward scheme, and one of our members has helped with the distribution of these to newly-tagged premises.

We will continue to photograph, log and report graffiti as we encounter it, and hope that together we can start to make a difference.



Community meeting spaces

Wincheap lacks good spaces for public meetings.

With lower accommodation costs than some other parts of the city, Wincheap has become an attractive destination for people involved in the arts, and many of us see the potential for positioning Wincheap as an artistic and musical hub.

But we need spaces for performance,,rehearsals, exhibitions, and the like, and these are currently lacking.

One member of our group has had a productive meeting with the Head of Outreach at CAT (Canterbury Archaeological Trust), which now occupies the old Adscene building (on the corner of Cow Lane and Simmonds Road). This is all at an early stage but they are discussing the possibility of making some of their space available for public use.

The Jubilee Hall is currently unfit for purpose, but we have discussed possibilities for its redevelopment with the Council's property management team.



Cycling and pedestrianisation

Even without the climate emergency and the need for significant modal shift, it should be clear that cycling and walking have so many benefits (in terms of health, cleaner air, and the 'liveability' of the city) that they should not merely be encouraged but prioritised.

We welcome news of the (likely) new cycle route from the city centre to Littlebourne Road, being funded through the DfT's Active Travel Fund; This will go some way towards creating the network of safe, joined-up cycle routes which the city badly needs. Meanwhile,, Wincheap residents who would like to cycle or walk have the option of using the Great Stour Way and the off-road route through the Horses and Goats tunnel towards Toddlers Cove, Westgate Gardens, and Canterbury West station..





But in other respects, Wincheap is not well served: cycling on the Wincheap road itself is dangerous (so many cyclists use the pavement), there is poor connectivity between Wincheap and the city centre or Thanington, and there are no safe cycle routes around the Wincheap neighbourhood itself.

The dangers and shortcomings in provision for cyclists and other non-car-users from Wincheap are explained in impressive detail in a report by Gillian Bull for The Wincheap Society, published in 2017 and available here.

Our cycling and pedestrianisation group has looked at best practice in a number of other cities both in the UK (such as Oxford and Lincoln) and elsewhere (Tokyo, Dublin, Copenhagen, etc), and has a number of ideas for how the main road and surrounding streets could be remodelled in order to facilitate and prioritise cycling and walking.

We plan to link up with other interested parties, including Spokes, The Canterbury Society, the Canterbury Alliance for Sustainable Transport (CAST), and especially the Canterbury Climate Action Partnership (CCAP), whose 'Top Ten Asks' include the need for a 'comprehensive cycle network [which] will promote cycling to work/school in Canterbury and the surrounding areas'.

Part 2. Aspirations for the longer term

Our goals in a nutshell

The aspirations of Wincheap residents in 2020 are not significantly different from the goals outlined in both The Wincheap Society's 1999 'Vision' document and CapCo's 'Development Brief' of 2007. (Both documents can be found on The Wincheap Society's website.) They also chime with the city council's aims, as quoted in the CapCo brief (Introduction, 1.19), to 'achieve a high quality mixed use development, with major improvements to traffic management/highways use whilst maintaining the viability and character of Wincheap'. The only thing that has really changed is that the problems we identified back in 1999 have become even more acute, with further degradation of the built environment, deterioration in air quality, loss of a sense of community, and serious implications for the health and quality of life of residents.

(Technically, the current plan for the Estate is the one proposed in 2016 by G L Hearn Ltd, informing Policy TCL7. This envisages a 'comprehensive retail-led mixed-use redevelopment' — essentially involving large-floorspace coverage of the Estate in an uninspiring form of slab development. These proposals seem to have been developed with no thought for visual amenity or environmental improvement. But we assume — given the major hit taken by bricks-and-mortar retail since this plan was created — that Policy TCL7 is no longer a viable option.)

This calls for a comprehensive solution, which in essence, would entail closing the main Wincheap road to through traffic and diverting the A28 through the Estate. This would create conditions in which both the main road and the Estate can thrive and achieve their potential, and would additionally represent a positive response to the climate emergency.

Meeting these goals requires that:

- All through traffic should be removed from the Wincheap road (removing its designation as an A-road)
- The historic Wincheap road should be used only for local traffic, with sympathetic interventions to enhance pedestrian and cyclist environment while at the same time retaining and increasing its retail and business uses to enable it to thrive as a quality local destination
- The Estate should be reinvigorated by means of a flagship project — a high-quality, mixed-use development, led by housing, and designed and constructed to the most ambitious environmental standards.

In the pipeline

Currently all through traffic using the A28 travels along the historic Wincheap road. This road is predominantly lined with residential properties with narrow pavements and little chance of relief for the residents from the noise and pollution.

This situation is set to be exacerbated by two projects coming down the pipeline:

- major developments in Thanington (already in progress), which will add housing, commercial, and educational traffic to the A28 — and hence to Wincheap — as many users are likely to want to access the City and most will not use public transport, cycle or walk from these out-of-centre locations.
- the proposed '4th slip road' coming off the Dover-bound A2 would inevitably funnel yet more traffic into Wincheap, while reducing the traffic coming off at the Harbledown junction — which joins a largely dual carriageway road with virtually no houses on it..



Proposed fourth slip road

The consensus among Wincheap residents is that the 4th slip project is misguided and unnecessary. The proposed new Park & Ride connected with the Mountfield Park development in south Canterbury is only marginally further along the A2 by-pass, so drivers coming from the London direction would have two perfectly good options for accessing the city. (Given the climate emergency, any counter-arguments based on 'convenience' will not wash. Maximising convenience for motorists is the last thing we should be concerned about.)

The proposed layout of the spine road coming off the 4th slip was comprehensively eviscerated by The Wincheap Society's Gillian Bull, whose report (which can be found here) plainly demonstrates it to be be both dangerous and unworkable. A recent government decision to permit the use of long semi-trailers (LSTs), which are over 2 metres longer than the current maximum, can only exacerbate the already severe risks. Ms Bull's report was passed to the DfT by Rosie Duffield MP in 2018, and was ignored. But Highways England's initial confidence in the scheme eventually collided with reality, and the slip road design is now being reconsidered.

Meanwhile, related proposals indicate piecemeal and wholly unsatisfactory traffic management layouts for Wincheap, Cow Lane, and Simmonds Road. They take little account of the effect of stationary traffic at new traffic lights on Cow Lane; the dangers of two lanes of traffic at the Maiden's Head trying to reduce to one lane to turn into the city, or the effect of three traffic lanes in Wincheap at the city end.

All of which illustrates the problems which flow from the fact that proposals for road redesign are led by private developers in a piecemeal fashion. This is the antithesis of the required solution, which should be designed and promoted by the City Council and Kent Highways for the overall good of residents.

The Estate (aka the Wincheap Industrial Estate

)The Wincheap Estate is a hugely valuable asset. A large area of land, most of it council-owned, it occupies a strategic position in walking distance to the city centre and transport links.
Though currently run-down in appearance, with a growing number of empty units, the Estate nevertheless houses many long-established businesses, and potentially holds the key to the solution of Wincheap's problems.
Much thought has already been devoted to these ideas. Back in 2007/8 the city council, together with its partners Capital and Counties, invested a great deal of time in developing proposals for a comprehensive revitalisation of the area. Many of the thoughtful and far-reaching plans in CapCo's Development Brief can still, 12 years later, form the basis for a renewed effort to redevelop the Estate..



The key difference between the CapCo plans and what we are proposing now is that any new scheme should be housing-led, not retail led. This would be in line with current commercial trends, and would protect retail businesses in the city centre. The many valuable businesses on the Estate, who employ a considerable number of people, would still need to be accommodated or found suitable premises nearby. However, a housing-led scheme could be achieved partly by building over existing retail uses, as is explored later..

In the rest of this section, we present some options.

Occupation

Although the city council is the principal landowner within the Estate, many of the businesses occupying council-owned premises have long leases. However, emerging trends in retail offer opportunities for consolidation and relocation. As we can see in Wincheap, in the city centre, and in the country as a whole, there is a shift away from large retail towards small scale and on-line shopping, with widespread closures of many long-established enterprises — a trend accelerated (though not caused) by the pandemic.

On the Estate itself and on the adjacent BNP Paribas site (home to Morrisons and Boots) there are empty units. Existing businesses could be relocated within these two sites, as leases expire or businesses close. This would gradually free up some sites for new development, while remaining units could have redeveloped premises, with businesses retained on the ground floor, and upper storeys devoted to housing.

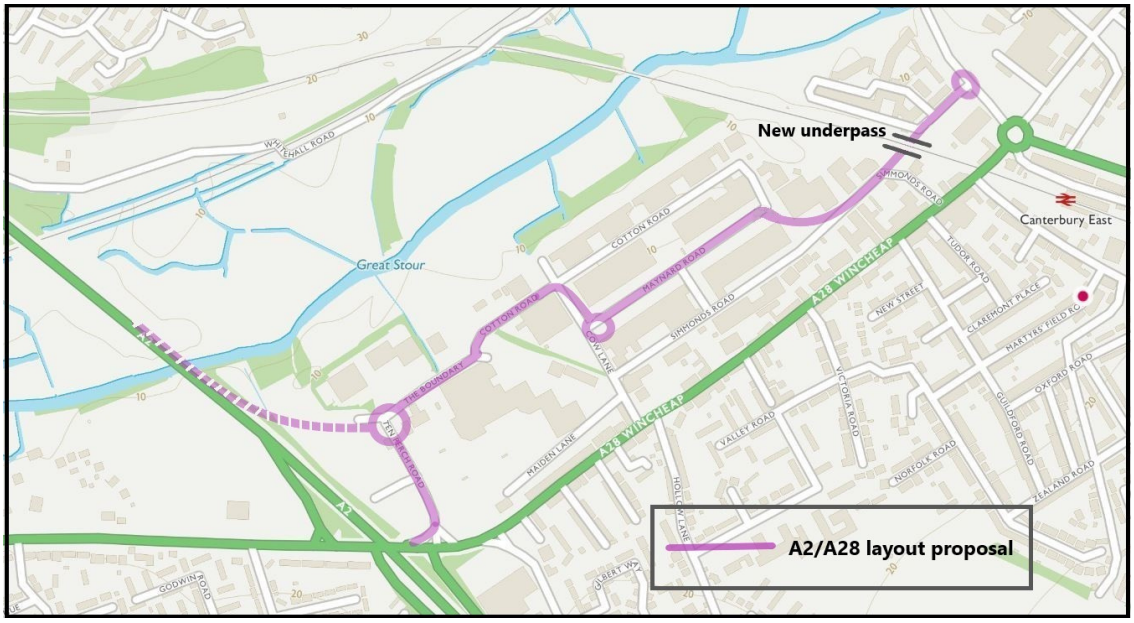
Empty units on the Estate



Road layouts

At the heart of our vision is the realignment of the A28. There are a number of variables here, but in any scenario, the existing A28 would be diverted down Ten Perch Road. Then, if the 4th slip road is built, incoming traffic from the A2 would merge with A28 the at the roundabout opposite B&M (which would need to be enlarged). All traffic would then be routed along The Boundary and on to Cotton Road or (probably better) Maynard Road, given the higher flood risk on the northern boundary of the Estate.

Next, if re-development of the Estate generated sufficient funding, the realigned A28 would continue under the railway into St Andrews Close, with a new enlarged gyratory on the ring road, incorporating Wincheap roundabout and a new St Andrews/ring road junction. (This is very similar to proposals in the 2007/8 CapCo plans.)



If funding issues precluded this radical solution, the A28 and A2 traffic would continue from The Boundary via Simmonds Road towards the Maiden's Head. This would require an enlarged junction with the historic Wincheap road, which in turn would require the compulsory purchase of the Timberite site.

Under all the above scenarios, the Wincheap road itself would be closed to through traffic (more on this below).

Developing the Estate

We envisage a mixed-use development, with housing the dominant component. It is recognised that dense development will be necessary to maximise value and to help fund road schemes and community facilities.

The CapCo plans allowed for up to 1300 housing units, and something similar should still be possible. Housing should cover the whole gamut from social housing (desperately needed in Canterbury, and entirely missing from the big developments earmarked in the Local Plan) through to high-end private accommodation (which could include luxury apartments on Cotton Road with views over the water meadows).



Drawing reproduced from CapCo Development Brief

In addition to the established businesses which remain on the Estate, there could be a small amount of new retail, such as a 'metro' sized supermarket that would enable Estate residents to meet their daily needs without having to go further afield.

Though the development would be housing-led, there should also be open spaces, pocket parks, and community facilities, such as the ones identified in the CapCo development brief:

- ‘restaurants, cafes and other leisure-related uses such as theatres, community centres or arts centres’ (CapCo 4.24)
- ‘a possible new health facility, a market, [and] new community hall’ (CapCo 4.36)

Above all, we should aim for an ambitious flagship development, so that:

- all buildings would conform to BREEAM Grade 5/Passivhaus standard
- landscape provision and enhancement is crucial and all roads should be tree/hedge lined
- car parking provision for residents should be low, given the proximity of the Estate to the city centre and transport links, and should reflect the likelihood (and desirability) of reduced car ownership. (The trend away from car ownership towards other modes, including occasional car use via car clubs, is already observable in cities like London and Manchester.) However, new properties along Cotton Road could have parking spaces on the ground floor, with accommodation above. Existing retail parking is generally underused and could also accommodate some residential parking.
- a possible complement to a mainly car-free development could be a small parking space for (say) half a dozen car-club cars, available to the whole community when needed (along the lines of Zipcar and similar car-share clubs)
- there should be a safe, well-connected pedestrian and cycle network within the Estate, and between the Estate and Wincheap and the city centre

The historic Wincheap road

The Wincheap Society's 1999 Vision and the 2007 CapCo development brief both envisaged the closure of Wincheap to through traffic, and this is the model we propose here. The historic road has the potential to be the centre of the community, rather than a congested A-road continually clogged with traffic and fumes. A vibrant pedestrian-friendly Village High Street feel would enable increased small-scale retail businesses to flourish, foster an enhanced sense of community, and make Wincheap an attractive destination for city residents and tourists alike.

With a comprehensive traffic realignment and redevelopment of the Estate, through traffic can be removed from Wincheap itself. Some two-way traffic would be retained for access to streets such as Tudor, York, and Victoria Roads. We should also make provision for more short-term shopper parking. But the needs of pedestrians and cyclists would be prioritised with:

- traffic reduced in both volume and speed by careful road design.
- wider pavements
- a dedicated cycle route along the entire road (as well as cycle and pedestrian links to the Estate)
- a 20 mph speed limit
- trees planted wherever possible, and benches at regular intervals

The reduction of passing traffic/trade for businesses and retail would be balanced by a greatly improved environment for pedestrians and shoppers. It is recognised that some businesses such as the Esso garage may be affected, but that site could be redeveloped as small units around a new informal square.

Conclusion

Back in 2007, the Capital and Counties development brief concluded that its proposals were 'realistic, viable and deliverable'. We submit that our current, revised Vision can also be so described. And, as CapCo said (8.2), 'Once implemented, the proposals … will deliver a modern, vibrant and exciting environment, to be used, lived in and enjoyed by residents, workers and visitors alike'.

Acknowledgements

The Wincheap 2020 Vision only exists because of the enthusiasm and hard work of many local residents with a commitment to improving the area where they live and to ensuring that Wincheap's great potential is fully realised.

Thanks are due to everyone who generously contributed their time, ideas, and expertise, especially:

- John Osborne, Chairman of The Wincheap Society, who wrote the Foreword and has been supportive of the project throughout
- Sian Pettman, Richard Norman, and our two ward councillors Nick Eden-Green and Derek Maslin. It was their idea to update the Wincheap Vision of 1999, and they have been involved throughout and supplied a great deal of valuable help and information.
- Steve Skinner, who wrote large parts of the text in Part 2

Above all, the numerous local people who contributed so much to making this document, through their ideas, their research, and their work on the ground. Special thanks are due to the various sub-groups who gathered information on specific topics, especially:

- Planting, street scene, green assets: Anemone Jones, Catriona Darke, Allyson Nicholson-Taylor
- Graffiti: Paul Eason, Amanda Bates, Giles Toman, Alastair Duncan
- Community Meeting Spaces: Diana Gabriel
- Cycling and pedestrianisation: Yoriko Otomo, Paul Eason

Michael Rundell, Project Manager and Lead Writer

