

Portswood
Road



↑ Swaythling

← University of Southampton
Southampton Common

St Denis Station →
Bitterne Park



Welcome to Portswood

Key services

- Portswood Primary School
- Portswood Surgery
- Portswood Post Office
- Portswood Library
- Portswood Community Centre

Local highlights

- Portswood Park
- Portswood Pond
- Portswood Wood

Transport

- St Denis Station
- Portswood Bus Stop

Active Travel

Portswood is a green and healthy place to live. It has a high level of green space and is a great place to walk, cycle and play.

Walking	0.25	30
Cycling	1	50

Southampton City Council

Portswood District Economic Impact Assessment

March 2023



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Introduction

Following the announcement by Southampton City Council of its intention to reduce the detrimental impact on residents and visitors of too much through traffic in Portswood District Centre, Rise Associates and Didobi were commissioned as independent consultants to provide an economic assessment of their improvement plans.

The Portswood Broadway scheme would see an important stretch of the traditional high street part-pedestrianised to make Portswood District Centre a more attractive and greener place for people to spend time. In prioritising walking, cycling and public travel, the scheme will also deliver new safer crossings and afford priority to bus flows, including via upgraded signalling.

The following high level assessment of Economic Impacts is focussed on assessing likely longer-term Full Time Equivalent (FTE) employment and Gross

Value Added (GVA) returns that could be achieved to the surrounding business community through the delivery of the scheme proposals.

Our assessment follows the principles set out in the HM Treasury Green Book, namely by considering longer-term gross and net (to Southampton) FTE employment and GVA impacts, over and above the likely counterfactual 'no scheme' position. In practice, the no investment position assumes no material change in the performance of Portswood Road, accepting that in practice some market churn and inevitable changes in performance (upturns and downturns) are likely.

As part of our work, we also undertook engagement activities with businesses in the Portswood District area that will be affected by the scheme. Their feedback is included along with a summary of wider economic, social and environmental impacts.



Background

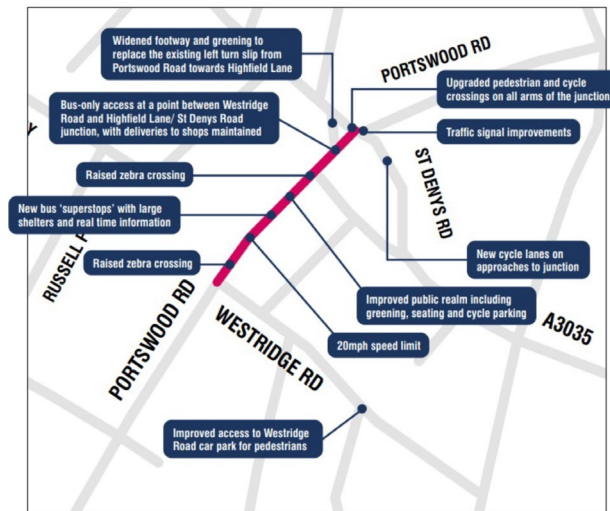
Our assessment of the Council's proposals was conducted against a highly charged backdrop of protests and impassioned claims about the scheme's impact on the area. The plans have also been the subject of considerable local media coverage and our report acknowledges that it is an emotive issue to many in the area. Our team had many frank conversations with businesses in Portswood and these exchanges are included as part of our evidence.

However, our history of working on regeneration projects across the country and studying other similar schemes tells us that change of this nature is often resisted. In Walthamstow, London, for example, a similar scheme to what is proposed in Portswood saw considerable opposition to the plans back in 2015 and a large protest.

The scheme went on to be a stunning success with new businesses springing up, more people spending their money locally and increased civic pride generated. Policy makers and visitors from all over the world have subsequently visited to learn about the scheme.

With this in mind – and there are other similar examples – we have taken an objective and evidence-led approach to conducting our assessment and business engagement. Much of the 'noise' surrounding this scheme has generated more heat than light and failed to provide answers or solutions. Our report aims to provide solutions to the challenges raised by businesses and a clear assessment of the likely impact of the Council's plans.

The Portswood Broadway scheme



Scheme Proposals

The Portswood Broadway scheme proposals would see the part-pedestrianisation of a large section of Portswood Road, the primary focus for the main high street.

The scheme involves a number of measures designed to (a) improve walking and cycling connectivity to and through the centre (b) provide safer crossing opportunities and (c) afford more priority to buses via upgraded signal technology.

In doing so, the scheme also seeks to (d) make Portswood District Centre a more attractive and more enjoyable place to spend time, including via (e) the provision of new greenspace and more pedestrian space.

Design work is underway to determine favourable designs and scope, including options to maximise the available use of the newly created and repurposed public space.

At this stage, options are being explored to provide capacity for new outdoor seating areas, linked to food and beverage provision along the road. This would increase the trading capacity of the food service businesses present and create a more vibrant environment.

The design process is also exploring the potential for the road to house new pop-up events, including options for new pop-up market stall provision, which will also create a stronger sense of place as well as support new economic activity.

At this stage, it is estimated that the overall cost of the Portswood Broadway scheme will be around £3.6m.



Scheme Ambitions and Intended Outcomes

As well as delivering planned connectivity improvements, the ambition extends to providing a much improved and safer experience. The installation of CCTV will have an impact in driving down crime and the scheme's wider aim is to drive new footfall and encourage greater dwell times and spending along the road.

In turn, this has potential to improve the profitability of the resident business community and there is also the opportunity to encourage those businesses present to extend their trading hours.

Greater profitability potential could also be critical for attracting new occupiers, with the opportunity to bring some empty properties back into commercial use, as well as attracting higher-value businesses to the road.

Alongside the potential effects on business performance, the scheme will ultimately encourage new interactions between the different communities present, and it therefore has a significant place shaping role in bringing together the community and providing a renewed pride of place. Expected social benefits include a stronger sense of community, improved health and stronger social capital.

The Portwood Broadway Scheme forms a major part of the wider transport strategy for Portswood, which also includes complementary proposals for network improvements at Lodge Road/Portswood Road Junction and at the Highfield Lane/St Denys Road Junction.

Overview

Portswood District centre is a reasonably large local centre located around 1.3km to the north of Southampton City Centre. It can be characterised as a fairly traditional centre, encompassing part of a long high street (Portswood Road) which has commercial units running along either side.

The high street and its surroundings are home to around 93 commercial units, the majority of which are secondary commercial units alongside some larger units. The stretch of road is bookended by two large supermarkets (Waitrose and Sainsbury's).

Around 97% of the units are currently occupied and the majority of businesses trading are in the retail and food service sectors, with a small number of leisure and other service sector businesses also present.

The road is home to multiples and independents, but there has been a notable shift in recent years towards typically lower-value provision, including a significant number of charity shops.

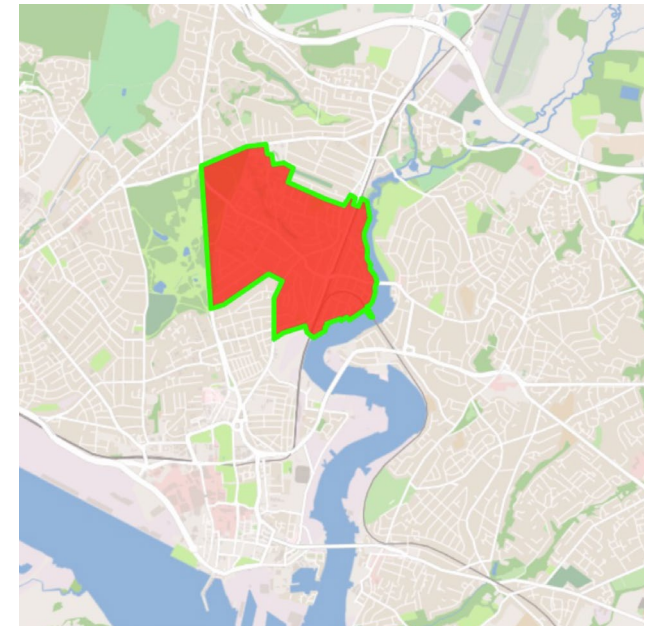
Based on the latest trip-counter evidence, the road attracts around 5,000 trips daily. The vast majority

of trips are from repeat visitors from the local area, although the road also attracts some new footfall regularly.

A Transforming Cities consultation carried out in October 2021 found that the vast majority of people visiting Portswood came on foot and that the proportion of people who walked or took the bus to get there was over three times that of people who drive there. The number of walkers was still considerably more than the proportion of people who used the bus or car combined.

The District Centre largely serves a very diverse and, in parts, affluent local community. Included in the wider Portswood area are significant high earning communities sat close to a significant student university population. The area also has a diverse ethnic population.

Overall, Portswood Road like many local centres has received limited piecemeal investment over the years and today the road feels outdated and in need of renewal.



Map 1. Portswood Ward, Southampton.

Evidence base

Typology

Portswood is defined by the Consumer Data Research Centre (CDRC) as a 'District and Urban Service centre' (Group definition) and as a 'Local every day goods and service centre' (Supergroup definition). It is a Ward of Southampton and has a population of 14,726 (2021 Census) which is a marginal decline on the 2011 Census figure of

14,831. The breakdown by gender is Males (51%) and Females (49%). The significant age group in the area are the 20-29 years age band which reflects its proximity to university and student accommodation. The majority of residents are White (10,942) but there is also a significant Asian community (2,238).

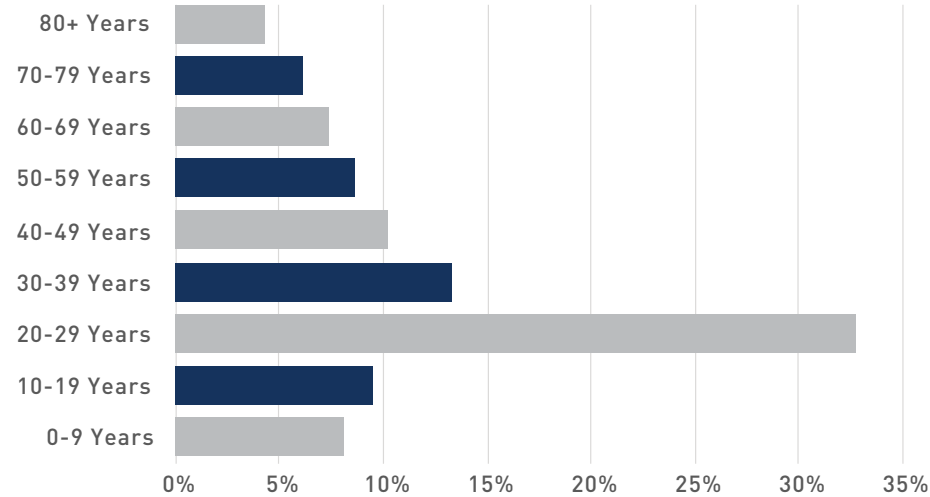


Chart 1. Portswood population by age band (2021 Census)



Portswood is a significant retail centre as a 'High Street' has two supermarkets at either end. Its catchment will therefore be large, presenting an opportunity for Portswood high street to capitalise on this footfall. The neighbouring retail centres are shown below.

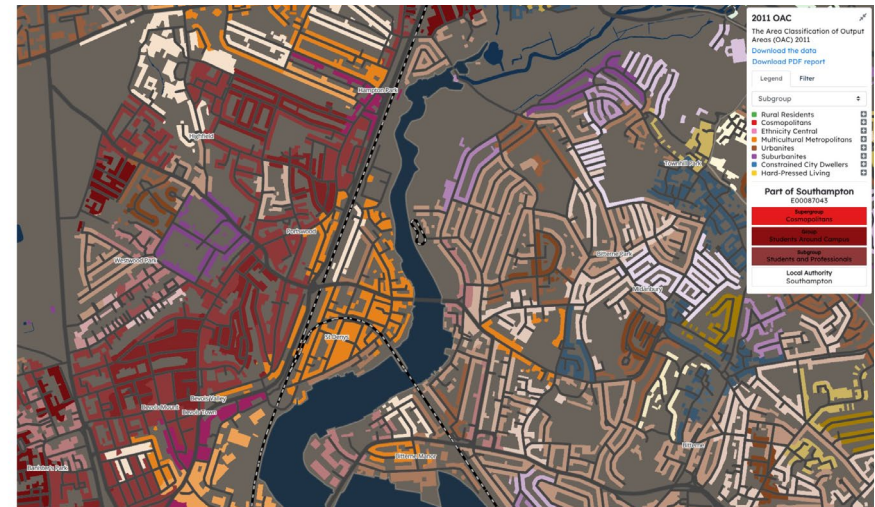


Map 2. Portswood and nearby retail centres (Source CDRC)



Local catchment

Portswood’s immediate catchment to the west and east of the high street are markedly different. Analysis of the residential areas to the west of the high street show house prices in excess of £500,000 along with broad leafy avenues with the east of the high street being around £150,000 with a number of houses having multiple flats and occupants and being more run down streets with rubbish and boarded up properties.



Map 3. Output area classifications for Portswood (Source CDRC)

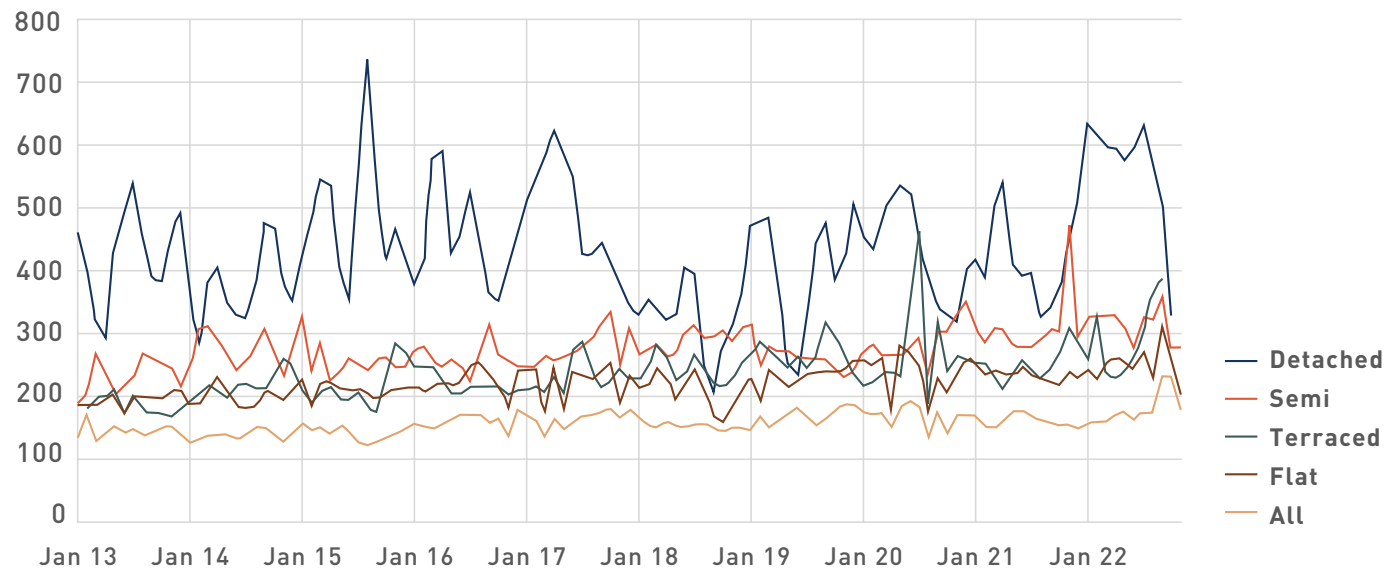
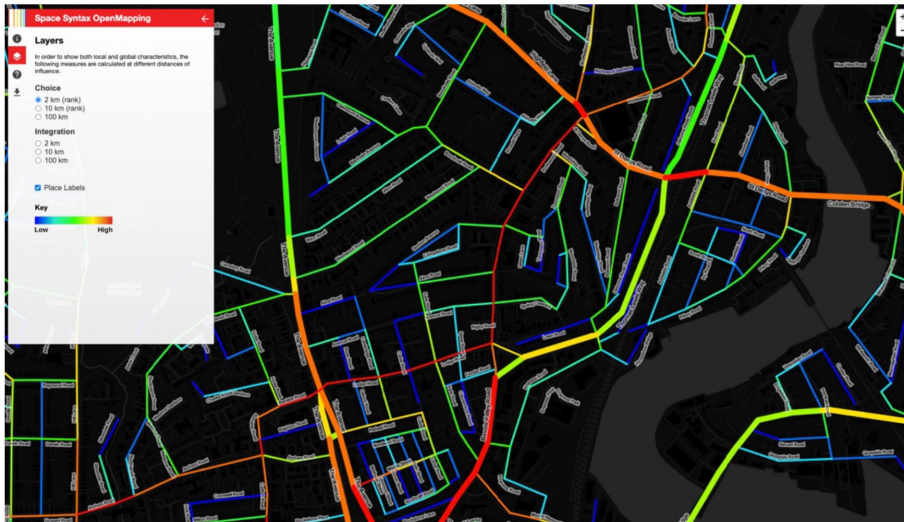


Chart 2. Average property selling prices in S017 (Source Home.co.uk)



Map 4. Choice model of Portswood movement infrastructure – pedestrian movement – 2km rank (Source Space Syntax)



Map 5. Choice model of Portswood movement infrastructure – vehicular movement – 10km rank (Source Space Syntax)

Accessibility

Access to the high street is by the main roads as no pedestrian access points exist due to the presence of housing or buildings that occupy the area. The lack of pedestrian/bike access is likely to limit levels of engagement with the high street businesses.

The map below illustrates the significance of the high street as the key central thoroughfare for the neighbourhood. Choice is based on the graph measure of Betweenness Centrality which is a measure of centrality. Space syntax adapts this to measure how often a street segment appears on the

simplest route between all other street segments in the network. The simplest route is defined as the route that undergoes the least total change in direction from start point to end point when linking all segments within a defined distance - e.g. 2,000m, 10,000m. They have included choice in the dataset as it often describes the distribution of movement. At 2,000m this will identify where pedestrian movement is likely to be higher, at 10km it will identify where vehicular movement is likely to be higher.

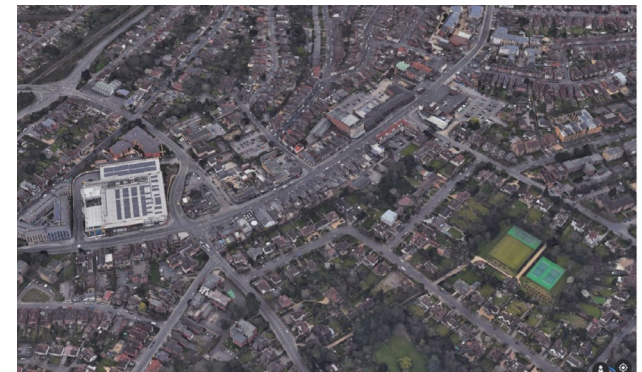


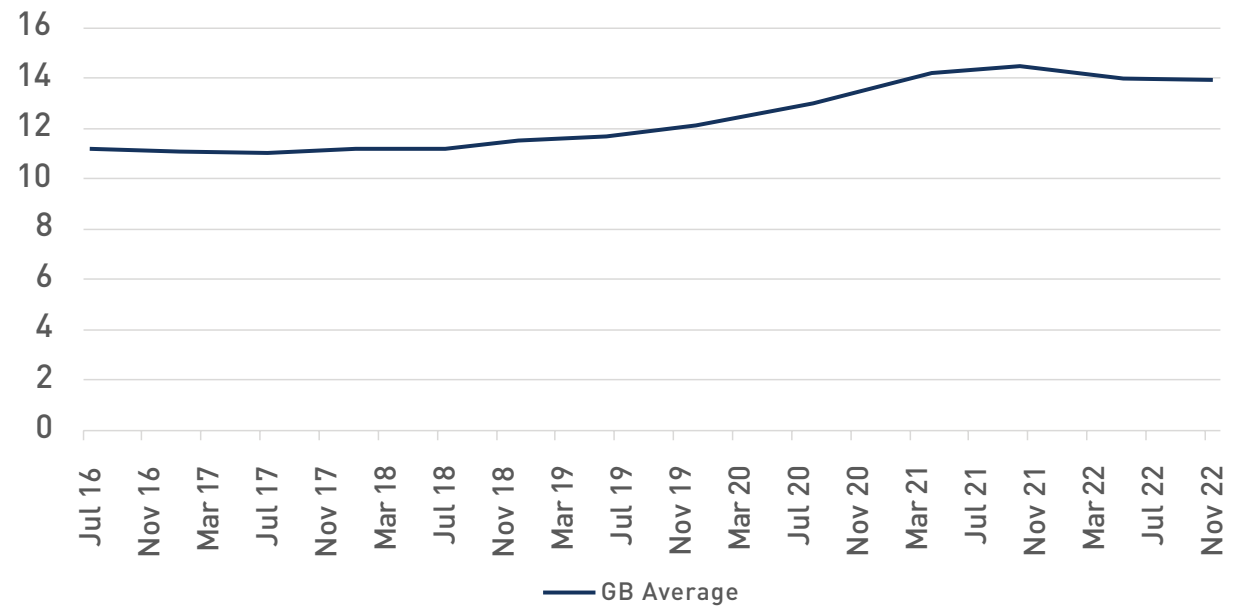
Image 1. Portswood (Google Earth)

Retail and Leisure offer

Portswood high street has a total of 93 retail and leisure units (Sainsbury’s not included as outside centre boundary), of which 55 are classified as retail (shops) and 38 as leisure (food, drink and entertainment). As at November 2022 (Source Local Data Company) there were just three vacant units which makes the vacancy rate 3.2% versus the national average of 13.8%.

Analysis of the type of businesses present showed the ratio between national chains and independents (Less than 5 units nationwide) is 41% to 59%. For the type of centre, this is a higher weighting towards chains than one would expect for a district centre. In Totton, for example, the ratio is 44% chains and 56% independents. The national average is 35% and 65% respectively.

Chart 3. Portswood and GB vacancy rate 2016-2022 (Source LDC)



The estimated retail and leisure floorspace of Portswood *(excluding Sainsbury's) is 17,300 Sq M (based on 80% match rate to VOA and modelled up). The average unit size is 197 Sq M across all units. The spread of unit sizes is detailed in chart 4.

The last 12 months have seen a net increase in openings as a result of an increase in openings of Comparison Goods retail and Leisure businesses.

Chart 5. Retail and Leisure occupancy changes 2021 v 2022 (Source LDC)

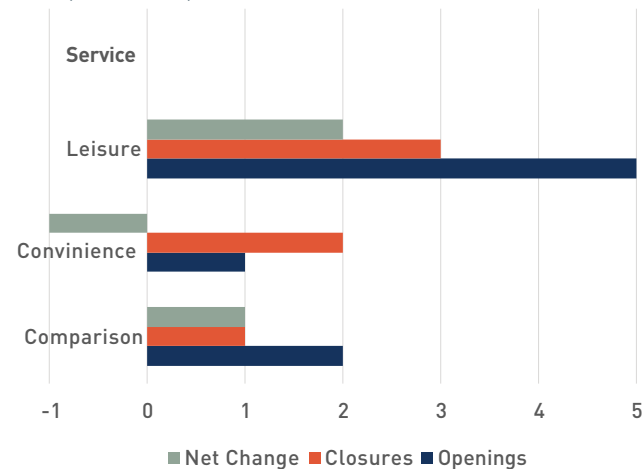
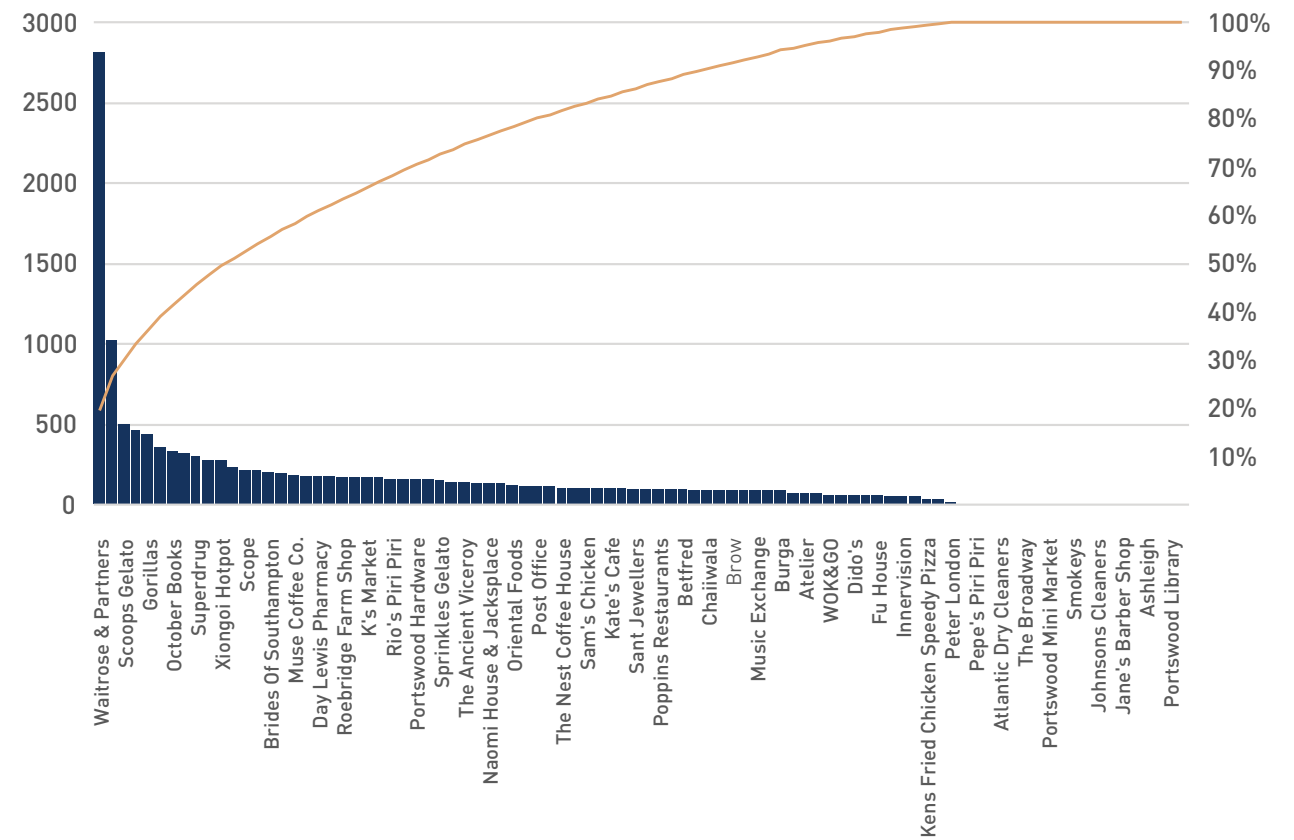


Chart 4. Floorspace profile (Source VOA/LDC)



Impact Mechanisms and the Theory of Change

There are a range of potential impacts that could be achieved through investment in the works to Portwood Broadway, including those typically assessed through transport appraisal to the Department for Transport's (DfT's) Transport Appraisal Guidance (TAG). These include a mix of journey time savings, improved safety and amenity, air quality and noise impacts.

Alongside TAG impacts, there is potential for the scheme to bring about improved business performance and whilst efforts nationally to accurately assess the contribution of well performing high streets / local centres towards economic and social agendas have proved challenging, owing largely to a lack of a 'control case' counterfactual position, there is a general consensus that well performing centres can act as a critical driver for local economic performance, as well as having an influence on wider socio-economic outcomes.

High street performance is affected by a range of factors (macro and micro) and these include externalities such as recession / loss of consumer confidence, centralised decision-making by property owners / retailers and the loss of major employers, alongside spatial and physical factors such as the delivery of new residential areas, demographic change and shifts in transport accessibility and amenity. Market forces and competition are also key drivers for performance, as are trends in out-of-town retail and online shopping. Regulation, legislation and management can also impact the vitality of local centres.

What is clear, however, is that efforts to maintain vitality and bring vibrancy to a local centre can have a significant bearing on the performance of surrounding proximate businesses, most notably though increased footfall, dwell times and spending along the high street in question, which in turn would

lead to the increased profitability of businesses who may opt to also extend their trading hours, with the potential to take on more staff.

Similarly, increased business turnover potential can be a critical driver for bringing any currently vacant properties back into productive use, and in providing additional capacity for new trading, existing businesses can also extend their offers to generate additional turnover.

The logic chain and theories of change for the FTE Employment and GVA impacts associated with the Portswood Broadway scheme is as follows:

- 

Investment in Portswood Broadway improvements will help to create a renewed sense of destination and this will bring a much improved consumer experience
- 

Improved amenity and connectivity will change consumer behaviour, thereby driving new footfall along the road and increasing dwell times and spending
- 

Additional spending will increase turnover among existing businesses trading along the road, thereby increased business profitability
- 

New outdoor seating capacity will also enable food service businesses to extend their trading offer, bringing opportunities for further business profitability
- 

Renewed confidence in trading in a much improved environment will encourage extended trading hours among existing businesses, with some businesses taking on additional staff and others offering extended hours to their existing employees
- 

Improved turnover prospects will improve property marketability and ensure fewer void periods / vacancies among unlet properties, thus encouraging agglomeration
- 

Potential new capacity for pop-up events along Portswood Broadway could also enable new activity to form, further reinforcing the success and vitality of the road

Economic Impact Scenarios and Results

Scenarios

Two scenarios have been developed to enable the high-level assessment of economic impacts as follows:

The following sections set out the impact assessment approach and findings in each scenario.

- **Scenario 1: No Scheme Investment** – reflecting the counterfactual position without the delivery of the Portswood Broadway scheme
- **Scenario 2: With Scheme Investment** – reflecting the position with the scheme delivered

Scenario 1: No Scheme Investment

Mapping of ONS and VOA data has identified that the Broadway stretch of Portswood Road and its immediate surrounds is home to around 93 businesses supporting 1,335 FTE jobs. Although there has been some smaller changes in the number of FTE jobs present along the road and its surroundings since 2015, ONS data suggests a reasonable ‘static’ population of businesses and FTEs present.

On this basis, the counterfactual scenario assumed no material change in the FTE jobs present along the road over the longer term, so 1,335 gross FTE jobs are claimed. For context, this represents around 1% of FTE jobs in Southampton.

To derive net FTE estimates to the Southampton labour market, adjustments for leakage and indirect and induced (multiplier) effects have been made as follows:

- **Leakage (-10%)** – reflecting known job roles within Portswood that are likely to be filled by those living outside of Southampton
- **Multiplier Effects (1.25 indirect and induced)** – reflecting a mix of wider FTE jobs supported within the supply chain (indirect) and by direct and indirect employee spending (induced), derived from ONS Supply-Use tables to reflect reasonably low multiplier effects.

Note, no adjustment for displacement has been included in the net adjustments, on the basis that the retention of existing activities will not ‘displace’ any alternative activities elsewhere.

On this basis it is estimated the Portswood Broadway and its immediate surroundings supports around 1,524 net FTE jobs within Southampton’s labour market, with leakage effects effectively ‘offset’ by local level multiplier effects.

Application of relevant sector-based GVA per FTE job benchmarks for Southampton have been used to determine the overall contribution of the road to the economy. For FTE jobs present along the road, the sector-based modelling equates to an average of £48,229 per direct (Portswood road) FTE and for indirect and induced FTE jobs, a current Southampton-wide GVA per FTE job benchmark of £65,507 per indirect and induced FTE has been applied. This has enabled longer-term GVA estimates to be derived and estimated at £78,786,000 of net GVA support per year.

Over an assumed 10-year appraisal period, it is therefore estimated that the road would support around £787,865,000 in cumulative GVA to the Southampton economy, or £655,236,000 of net GVA at NPV.

Scenario 2: With Scheme Investment

In delivering a much-improved road experience, the Portswood Broadway scheme will bring renewed vitality and spending locally, with consequential positive impacts on the performance of businesses trading along the road and its immediate surroundings.

A very prudent view would be that businesses along the road trading in relevant service sectors (retail, leisure, food services and other business services) could expect around a 5% uplift in trade, with subsequent effects on improved turnover/profits resulting in improved GVA outcomes.

It is also considered that a small proportion (10%) of businesses present within these sectors may also extend their trading hours by around 3 hours, with 50% of these businesses taking on additional staff to manage workloads. When expressed in FTE terms, this could bring a small increase in the number of FTE jobs present along the road among the existing business community – modelled at +17 FTEs.

In bringing renewed business confidence, it is considered that the scheme may also enable three currently vacant properties to be re-let and brought back into productive use, thereby bringing additional 13 gross FTE jobs to the road.

On this basis it is considered that the scheme scenario will enable a total of around 1,385 gross FTE jobs to be supported along the road and its immediate surroundings.

Adjustments for leakage, displacement and multiplier effects have then been made. For existing FTE, leakage (10%) and multiplier effects (1.25) have been modelled as per the no investment scenario, with no adjustments for displacement made on the premise that existing activities will not displace other jobs within Southampton's labour market.

For new FTE jobs that could be supported adjustments for leakage (-10%), displacement (-50%) and multiplier effects (1.25) have been

made. Displacement is modelled at the medium level, reflecting typically high levels of displacement observed among the retail, food service, leisure and other business service sectors.

Through this modelling it is expected that with the scheme in place, a total of around 1,541 net FTEs could be supported within Southampton's labour market. Modelling of relevant sector based GVA impacts has then been completed as per the no investment scenario. Note, this includes a 5% uplift on retail, food service, leisure, and other business service FTEs, reflecting the potential of the investment to bring improved business productivity, most likely observed within these sectors.

When modelled over 10 years post-completion, it is expected that a total of around £820,569,000 in net GVA could be supported, or around £682,435,000 in net GVA at NPV.

Impact Summary and Overall Additionality

A summary of gross and net FTE employment and GVA impacts achieved in both scenarios is provided in the table below. Deductions of the no investment counterfactual scenario from the ‘with scheme’ scenario has then enabled an understanding of the overall potential of Portswood Broadway scheme.

Through this modelling, it is considered that the Portswood Broadway Scheme could enable around 30 gross FTEs along the road and its immediate surroundings. When reflecting on a mix of leakage, displacement and multiplier effects, it is considered that around 17 net new FTEs could be supported within Southampton’s labour market.

Modelling of employment-related GVA impacts suggests that the scheme could support around £32,705,000 in net GVA returns over 10 years following the completion of the scheme, or around £27,199,000 in net GVA at NPV.

	Without Investment	With Investment	Overall Scheme Additionality
Gross FTEs	1,355 FTEs	1,385 FTEs	30 FTEs
Net FTEs	1,524 FTEs	1,541 FTEs	17 FTEs
Net GVA over 10 years	£787,865,000	£820,569,000	£32,705,000
Net GVA (NPV)	£655,236,000	£682,435,000	£27,199,000

Against an estimated scheme cost of around £3.6m and the £27.2m of NPV economic returns, it is estimated that each £1 of investment in the Portwood Broadway scheme will generate around £8 in long-term economic benefits to the Southampton economy.

Business engagement

On 21st and 22nd February 2023, Rise Associates carried out a series of face-to-face interviews with business owners, supervisors and store managers along Portswood Road.

In total we engaged with a sample of 30 businesses and organisations, which represented the full range of occupiers on the high street. These ranged from micro businesses and sole traders to large employers like Sainsbury's, who employ over 300 people. Our sample included service providers like hairdressers, the post office and library, food and drink stores, restaurants, takeaways, cafes, charity shops, high street chains, book shops, hardware stores, estate agents and jewellers.

Awareness of the scheme was varied with some having a more detailed understanding than others of what was being proposed. Some were very informed of the scheme and had attended several meetings organised by the Council, while others had little understanding of the plans, having picked up (often inaccurate) information from social media or word of mouth.

Discussions were extensive, sometimes lasting up to an hour, and the views of traders and business owners could be categorised under the following responses.

- **Supportive of the scheme**
- **Neutral, as they do not think it will affect their business**
- **Firmly (and often passionately) opposed to the scheme**

In all our discussions with business owners, managers and supervisors, we were informed that there were no plans to close businesses as a result of the scheme.

In recognition of the fact that schemes of this nature work best when they command the support of key stakeholders, we will address the responses from each category to guide the local authority in the design of the scheme. Our recommendation is that some tweaks and modifications to the plans are necessary in order to provide businesses with the support they need.

“There is so much we could do here, but look outside, all you can see is traffic, congestion and concrete. Imagine if we had street markets, trees, better public realm with people dining al fresco and street carnivals.”

Those in favour

Some of those in favour of the scheme did not want to be named and were fearful of reprisals if they were to be identified as supporters. “The debate has got too toxic,” said one. “You can’t have a rational discussion about it anymore.”

Others said they were impressed with the ambition of other active travel zones and want Portswood to be safer with a stronger community feel.

“There is so much we could do here, but look outside, all you can see is traffic, congestion and concrete,” explained another owner. “Imagine if we had street markets, trees, better public realm with people dining al fresco and street carnivals. We have to do something different because it’s not been easy since we came out of lockdown. Things are getting worse.”

Views were mixed among the food and drink operators, but a good number were very pleased at the prospect of being able to extend their business by having more tables outside.

“If it’s done up nice with smart pavements, some greenery and CCTV then I think the atmosphere will change considerably,” said one. “We could create a real café culture where people eat outside because it’s a pleasant environment. At the moment we can’t do that.”

“We were one of the first businesses to put tables outside on this street and we would love to put more and encourage a culture of outside dining here,” added another.

Neutral

People in this camp seemed to be quite aware of the plans and were confident that they were not a direct threat to their business.

“It’s not too much of a problem to us,” said a supervisor at a café bar. “We have good access and we get a lot of students. No one has complained or said anything against the scheme. We don’t anticipate it having much of an effect on our business.”

Others had a similar view but did not want to take sides, as they were aware that some of their

customers were divided on the issue.

“Our young customers are fine with it, but some of the older customers are really against it,” said one. “We value all our customers and don’t want to alienate anyone.”

Against

This category could be broken up into sub categories, as those who opposed the scheme tended to be either incredibly hostile to it, often for reasons that didn’t stand up to much scrutiny, cautiously opposed out of fear of change (and not knowing all the details of the scheme) or opposed due to legitimate business concerns.

It was difficult to rationally engage with the first group, as they were not interested in hearing of evidence of the impact of other similar schemes or of changing high street trends more generally. They did not want to engage around the issue of the area benefitting from £20million of investment and had quite entrenched views.

Most worryingly, they often did not share ambition for the area or feel that it could be improved. “You can’t

“We don’t use the Internet. We don’t need it. Our customers see us from their cars when they’re passing our shop and that’s why they come to us. If we lose passing traffic our business will be finished. There’s no point in us advertising.”

give Portswood a fancy upgrade, it won’t work. Just look at the place,” was a view we heard. “Give the £20million back,” someone else added. “Schemes like this only work in nice middle class areas.”

During our engagement, we asked about the performance of each business to get a measure of how the scheme could help improve their takings. Unfortunately, some of the reasons that owners used to oppose the scheme demonstrated a worrying lack of knowledge around modern consumer behaviour.

“We don’t use the Internet. We don’t need it. Our customers see us from their cars when they’re passing our shop and that’s why they come to us. If we lose passing traffic our business will be finished. There’s no point in us advertising,” was a view expressed on more than one occasion.

However, several legitimate concerns were raised and these are highlighted below.

Charity shops

Concern: There is a considerable number of charity shops in Portswood and a concern that was

frequently raised was their fear of losing out on Gift Aid if people cannot complete a Gift Aid form at the till when delivering goods.

Solution: There is national evidence of charities using (particularly during lockdown) QR code stickers that can be stuck onto items when donating to identify the donor. This avoids the necessary form completion at the till and means charity goods can be left at charity banks or through street collections.

Fast food takeaways

Concern: As a result of pandemic changes to consumer behaviour, many more people now order food through apps like Just Eat, Deliveroo and Uber Eats. Food delivery represents an important part of the business for some takeaways in Portswood and they are worried that reducing access to vehicles will harm their business.

Solution: Where possible, there needs to be a greater emphasis on cycle deliveries, but we acknowledge this is not always practically possible. Consideration to allowing some delivery vehicles the same status as taxis could address this problem.

A few businesses also raised concerns around customers being able to transport heavy items – such as DIY goods or a 10kg bag of rice if they do not have vehicle access.

Further discussions need to be held between the Council and these businesses to clarify where the car reduction part begins and/or the possibility of early morning access for collections.

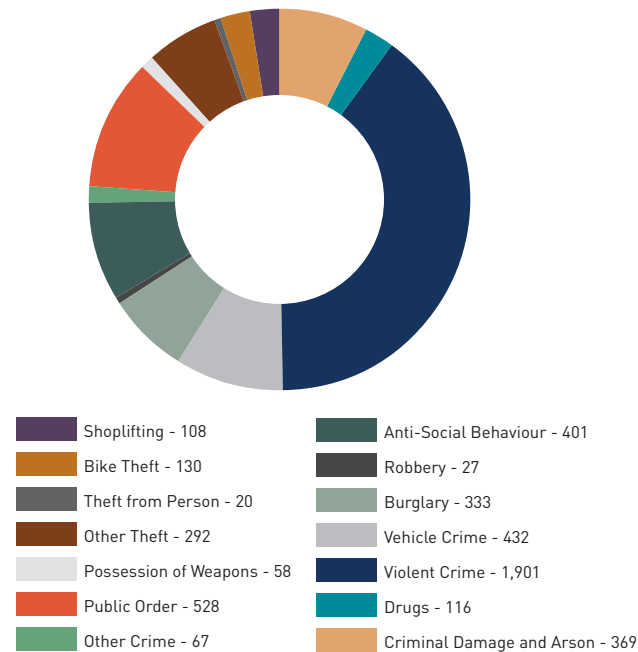
Crime

A further concern that was raised by almost all businesses was the issue of anti-social behaviour, personal safety and crime.

Many business owners related stories of how their staff had been victims of crime and we know from previous surveys that people have concerns about their safety when going out in the evening here.

If the £20million investment to improve Portswood is to achieve its desired aim of making the area become more of a destination that's welcoming to all, then tackling crime must be a serious priority.

Chart 6: UK Crime Stats – crime breakdown in Portswood, Feb 2022-Jan 2023



Some of the concerns and experiences raised by businesses are included below.

- “Anti-social behaviour is getting worse. Our security guard was attacked the other week and our female manager has been abused and spat at in the face. It’s very distressing.”
- “We’ve reported one shoplifter eight times this week and still the police won’t do anything. They say they won’t do anything unless goods over the value of £200 are stolen. I’ve been threatened with a syringe and staff continually get abused.”
- “Our shop was broken into and the thieves caused lots of damage just to get £50 of petty cash out of the till. The police didn’t help.”
- “The police don’t help us with shoplifters. They keep telling us that they won’t come unless they have stolen more than £200 worth of stock. It’s really soul destroying. What do we pay our business rates for? There used to be a regular police presence here, but we don’t see them very much now.”

Conclusion

Portswood Road has received limited piecemeal investment over the years and the prospect of significant investment to improve the area is a once in a generation opportunity.

Our assessment is that the likely impact of this investment will bring about improved business performance, most notably through increased footfall, dwell times and spending along the road, and there is a general consensus nationally that well performing centres can act as a critical driver for local economic performance, as well as having an influence on wider socio-economic outcomes.

We recognise that fear of change has caused some anxiety in the area. But as our analysis shows, Portswood stands to benefit considerably from this scheme if it is delivered successfully. The most obvious benefits are:

- Generating £32.7 million in net GVA contributions for Southampton's economy over 10 years (or £27.2m in net GVA at NPV)

- Every £1 of investment generates £8 in long-term returns to the local economy
- New jobs
- Expected 5% uplift in trade
- Reduced shop vacancies
- A wide range of social benefits including safer streets, improved air quality and noise levels and better social cohesion among communities
- Improved safety and connectivity
- Improved footfall, increased dwell time
- Improved bus reliability
- Creating amenity impacts
- Complimenting the wider planned transport for Portswood
- Improving air quality and noise levels

It should also be noted that this scheme reflects a broader trend in making high streets more people friendly with fewer cars. Seismic technological and consumer behaviour changes are forcing high streets to adapt to modern needs. Those that rely on a pre-Internet 20th century model that is built for people nipping in and out to buy things are less likely

to flourish, as they lack a distinct identity and the pull of 'destinations' to make people stay longer.

As retail continues to shrink, the growth of hospitality, leisure and culture on high streets requires improved public space. Initiatives to reduce cars are giving communities the opportunity to reimagine their high streets and from Bradford and Birmingham to London and Manchester, pedestrianisation schemes are continuing apace.

Although our report's primary focus is the economic impact on the area and views of businesses, there is a wealth of evidence from other areas of additional social benefits that would also flow from the scheme.

Organisations like Living Streets and Sustrans have delivered considerable research on the social benefits that schemes like this bring - creating healthier streets with cleaner air, stronger communities with more human interactions and places with more distinctive identities and economic vitality.

The proposed plans will remove much of the traffic and this provides a golden opportunity to significantly increase footfall and ensure that people visiting Sainsbury's and Waitrose spend more time – and money – in the area after their shopping visit.

By creating a safer, greener and cleaner environment for residents, visitors and workers, Portswood will be much more attractive to pull people in and increase dwell time.

There is a broad and diverse catchment for Portswood from wealthy professionals to students, young and old and this spend is not being fully captured. A consultation carried out in October 2021 interviewed over 500 people on Portswood Road and found that 92% of respondents spent less than £50 during their visit. Many wanted a more aspirational

offer, greener spaces and reduced traffic.

Access to Portswood high street is via main roads and there is no clear signposting within the area to the high street. The value offer of the high street provides no incentive for the wealthier catchment or supermarket customers to visit Portswood but to just use it as a thoroughfare to get to and from home.

There are a low number of vacant units, but the proposed plan presents an important opportunity to create some quality events that can attract a broader group from the catchment and re-engage people in the area who could walk or cycle to Portswood.

It also offers an opportunity to move away from Portswood's 'identikit town' feel to create an authentic and distinctive identity that would boost

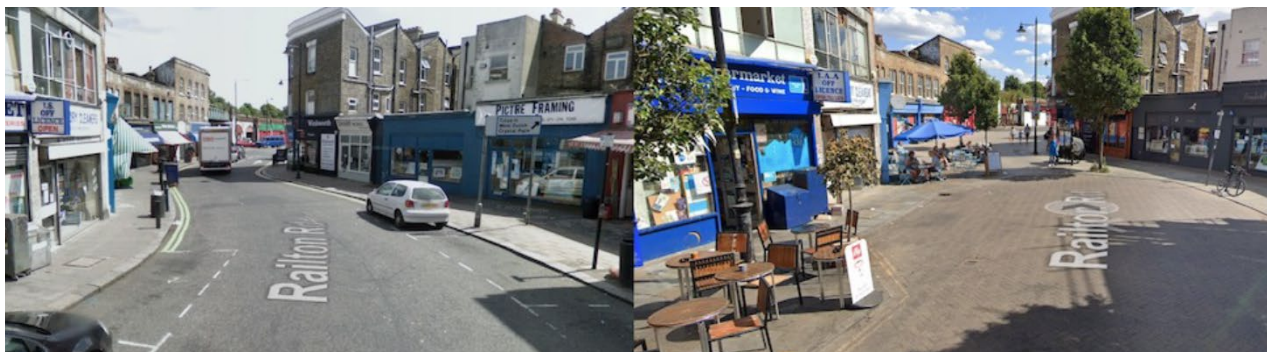
civic pride and make the area stand out.

All of the proposed changes from public realm, to curating the offer and events, are critical if Portswood is to increase its social and economic value as a district centre. There needs to be other reasons to visit Portswood aside from the supermarkets – and things like health, education, culture and a more diverse food and drink offer can assume a greater prominence in an improved environment. Food and drink events along with music and culture also present a great opportunity for Portswood high street to be much more than a major road with heavy traffic.

To realise these goals, and lift the ambitions of the area, the Council must not only address some of the business concerns we have identified, but also work with the police and other partners to make sure enhanced safety is a key feature of the scheme. This should be the bedrock upon which improved confidence in the area can grow.

After years of underinvestment in Portswood, this scheme could finally begin to unlock the hidden potential of the area and also bolster the wider city brand, which, in turn, will help Southampton attract talent, tourism and investments.

Before and after – the impact of pedestrianisation in Herne Hill, London



Portswood Road



↑ Swaythling
← University of Southampton
Southampton Common St Denis Station
Bitterne Park →



Welcome to Portswood

Key services
[Icons for various services]

Local highlights
[Icons for local highlights]

Transport
[Icons for transport services]

Active Travel
[Icons for walking and cycling]

Distance table
[Table with columns for mode of transport and distance]

Southampton City Council



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