



LOCAL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK



Alsager Town Centre

Draft Supplementary Planning Document

DRAFT

ALSAGER TOWN CENTRE STRATEGY

Draft Supplementary Planning Document

May 2009

On the [insert appropriate date], the Council approved the draft Alsager Town Centre Strategy Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) for the purpose of public consultation.

For consultation between Date Month Year and Date Month Year

Comments can be

Made online at: <http://consult.congleton.gov.uk/portal>

Emailed to localplanning@congleton.gov.uk

Or posted to the following address:

Local Planning Policy Section
Cheshire East Council
Westfields
Middlewich Road
Sandbach
Cheshire
CW11 1HZ

Foreword

This is your chance to have your say about shaping future development within Alsager town centre. This consultation is about positive change in Alsager to create a more vital and viable town centre.

The Supplementary Planning Document will set the scene for town centre regeneration in Alsager. It will contain a Vision and planning policies to guide new development that will look to conserve the best and change the rest with a determination to accept only the highest quality. The key to this success will be for public, private and community organisation to work together over the long term with the combined aim to create an improved town centre.

Our future is in our hands . . .

Please look at the objectives and options in this document.

Think about how Alsager's town centre can be preserved or enhanced to increase benefits from retail development, improve the range of services and facilities in the Town, improve recreational and leisure opportunities and improve the local environment. Let us know what you think are the best options for our future.

Throughout the document, a number of questions are posed upon which we would particularly like your views. We also welcome your comments and feedback on any other relevant issues or options.

Councillor Dave Brown
Cabinet Portfolio Holder

Equal Opportunities and Access

Cheshire East Council recognises that it can improve the quality of life of people in the area by seeking to ensure that every member of the public has equal access to its services, facilities, resources, activities and employment.

We want these to be accessible to everyone in the community regardless of gender, age, ethnicity, disability, marital status or sexual orientation. Furthermore, we are keen to respond to the individual requirements of our customers to develop services that recognise their diversity and particular needs.

We use Language Line as a translation service, and have hearing induction loops in our reception areas.

Information can be made available in large print, in Braille or on audiotape on request.

If you would like this information in another language or format, please contact us.

如欲索取以另一語文印製或另一格式製作的資料，請與我們聯絡。

如欲索取以另一語文印制或另一格式制作的资料，请与我们联系。

Jeżeli chcieliby Państwo uzyskać informacje w innym języku lub w innym formacie, prosimy dać nam znać.

ਜੇ ਇਹ ਜਾਣਕਾਰੀ ਤੁਹਾਨੂੰ ਕਿਸੇ ਹੋਰ ਭਾਸ਼ਾ ਵਿਚ ਜਾਂ ਕਿਸੇ ਹੋਰ ਰੂਪ ਵਿਚ ਚਾਹੀਦੀ, ਤਾਂ ਇਹ ਸਾਥੋਂ ਮੰਗ ਲਓ।

اگر آپ کو معلومات کسی دیگر زبان یا دیگر شکل میں درکار ہوں تو برائے مہربانی ہم سے پوچھئے۔

اگر این اطلاعات را به زبانی دیگر و یا در فرمتی دیگر میخواهید لطفاً از ما درخواست کنید

Se deseja obter informação noutra idioma ou formato, diga-nos.

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1 Introduction

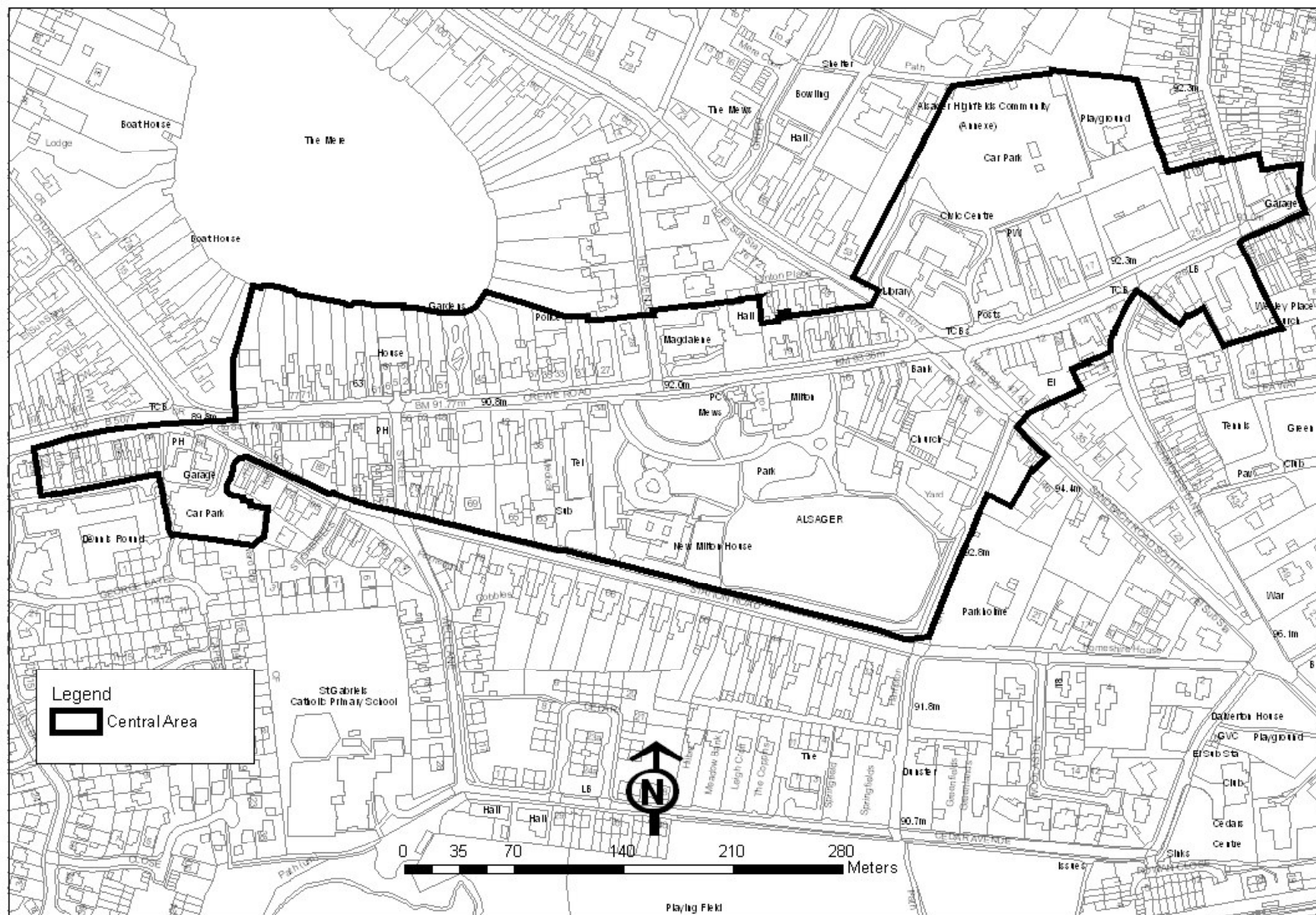
Introduction

- 1.1 Alsager is one of the towns in the new Cheshire East Authority and is situated on the south-western fringe of the Authority, approximately 5 miles to the west of Crewe.
- 1.2 This document has been prepared to provide a Strategy for Alsager Town Centre, providing additional guidance to that contained in the now saved policies adopted in the Congleton Borough Local Plan First Review¹ (referred to throughout this document as Congleton Local Plan). The scope of this document is intended to be wider than that of land use planning and covers all those aspects of policy guidance with a spatial dimension relevant to town centres, including economic, environmental and social well being and matters such as community safety, community facilities, traffic management, marketing and delivery.
- 1.3 The extent of the Town Centre is currently defined in the Congleton Local Plan and is shown in the diagram below (Diagram 1). In essence the Town Centre is focused around the crossroads of the B5077 (Crewe Road / Lawton Road) and the B5078 (Sandbach Road North / Sandbach Road South), this is a traffic-lighted junction, which from our general observation, appears to be functioning within its capacity. Within this area two Principal Shopping Areas are defined; one to the east along Lawton Road and one to the west on Crewe Road. In addition, the defined town centre includes a large area of open space; namely Milton Park.

Local Development Framework

- 1.4 This document is being prepared under the provisions of the 2004 Planning and Compensation Act and will be adopted as a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD), which will form part of the Local Development Framework (LDF) for Cheshire East.
- 1.5 The 2004 Planning and Compensation Act introduced major changes to the planning system replacing 'old style' development plans, which could take 5 or more years to prepare, with a system of smaller more focused documents that together will guide development at the local level. Collectively, these documents will be known as the Local Development Framework (LDF). Policies and proposals within these documents will eventually replace those in the Congleton Local Plan. The documents that will contain the statutory policies and proposals, which form the development plan, will be known as Development Plan Documents (DPDs), with further, more detailed planning advice, such as technical guidance relating to how to design shop fronts or advice relating to the development of a particular part of the Authority contained in Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs). These SPDs also form part of the LDF, but are not part of the statutory development plan.

¹ This document is available to download from the Council's website (Currently, www.congleton.gov.uk), or to view at the Council's offices at Westfields, Sandbach.



- 1.6 This SPD has been prepared in line with saved policies, however, it should be noted that it may be necessary to revise this document in future to bring it in line with new policies in the Core Strategy or other DPDs.

Local Government Reorganisation in Cheshire

- 1.7 In December 2007, the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government announced that there would be a reorganisation of local government in Cheshire from April 2009. This review will create two unitary authorities covering the Cheshire area, with Congleton becoming part of a Cheshire East unitary authority, comprising of Congleton, Crewe & Nantwich and Macclesfield Borough Councils whilst the remaining Cheshire authorities will form Cheshire West and Chester unitary authority and Cheshire County will be integrated across the two. All four councils which currently cover Cheshire East (Cheshire County Council, Congleton Borough Council, Macclesfield Borough Council and Crewe and Nantwich Borough Council) will be abolished in April 2009 and the new unitary authority established.
- 1.8 This document has been prepared in line with the Cheshire East Local Development Scheme and will form part of the Local Development Framework for Cheshire East.

2 Alsager Town Centre SPD

Purpose

- 2.1 The purpose of this SPD is to complement policies adopted within the Congleton Local Plan and saved as part of the Cheshire East Local Development Framework (LDF), particularly policies S1, S4, S5 and S6, (further details of which are provided in para. 3.13 and Appendix C) to provide additional practical guidance and support for those involved in the planning of new development within Alsager Town Centre. The Proposed Vision and Objectives for the town centre are set out in section 5 of this document.
- 2.2 The Council will seek to improve through its function as a Local Planning Authority any development proposal that does not provide for, or meet the principles encouraged and required within this SPD and the Congleton Local Plan or as replaced by the LDF. This SPD is also intended to encourage all of those who have or will have an interest in the vitality and viability of the town centre to follow the practical guidance it contains wherever opportunities arise whether or not planning permission or other consents are required.
- 2.3 This guidance note should be read in conjunction with the relevant policies of the Development Plan.

Structure of the document

- 2.4 This document comprises: a vision for the town centre, a series of objectives, whereby progress can be monitored, and planning principles and proposals for the centre, including opportunity sites. The document sets down, in terms of broad principles and examples, how the objectives may be met, the approach towards new retail provision and urban design in the centre, as well as broad proposals for improving the public realm, managing and improving transport and town centre management.

Sustainability Appraisal and Habitats Regulations

- 2.5 The Council has produced a Sustainability Appraisal² (SA) to accompany this Draft SPD, the SA will assist the consultation process and has been used to test and refine the policies and proposals in this SPD.
- 2.6 Sustainability Appraisal is a systematic process, which is carried out during the production of planning documents to ensure that policies and proposals contribute towards relevant environmental, social and economic objectives.
- 2.7 In addition to Sustainability Appraisal, amendments made to the UK Conservation (Habitats and etc) Regulations 2006 require a Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) under Article 6(3) and (4) of the Habitat Directive 92/43/EEC for all land use plans likely to have a significant effect on a European site. To satisfy the requirements Habitats Regulations Assessment should be undertaken before adoption of this SPD. European sites consist of

² This document is available to download from the Council's website (Currently, <http://consult.congleton.gov.uk/portal>), or to view at the Council's offices at Westfields, Sandbach.

Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), Special Protection Areas (SPAs) and Offshore Marine Sites (OMS). A HRA Screening Report³ has been prepared to accompany this SPD to determine if this document is likely to have a significant effect on any European sites. If necessary further stages of the HRA will also be carried out.

How to participate

2.8 This Draft SPD has been structured to include a number of consultation questions on which we would like to hear your views. These questions cover a wide variety of issues and your feedback will help us to ensure that we have identified all the relevant spatial planning issues of concern.

2.9 There are a number of ways in which you can get in touch with us.

Online: <http://consult.congleton.gov.uk/portal>

Post: Cheshire East Council
Local Planning Policy Section
Westfields
Sandbach
Cheshire
CW11 1BR

Email: localplanning@congleton.gov.uk

Fax: 01270 529 889

By hand at: the One Stop Shops in Sandbach, Middlewich, Alsager, Holmes Chapel and the Tourist Information Centre in Congleton Town.

2.10 Please submit your comments and suggestions during the consultation period, which runs from xx month 2008 until 5.00 pm on xx month 2008. Representations may be accompanied by a request to be notified at a specific address of the adoption of the SPD.

2.11 Following the closure of the consultation period your views will be reported to the Council. Once the Council have had the opportunity to consider all the responses, these will be used to refine, shape and develop the Alsager Town Centre SPD. Once the Council have prepared a document that is the most appropriate for Alsager Town Centre this will be adopted by the elected Cabinet members.

2.12 The Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) provides further details in relation to how the Council will involve all sectors of the community: businesses, local residents, landowners, statutory agencies or community groups in the planning process and can be obtained from the Council's website at (<http://www.congleton.gov.uk/?t=511>) or from the Council Offices in Sandbach.

³ This document is available to download from the Council's website (Currently, <http://consult.congleton.gov.uk/portal>), or to view at the Council's offices at Westfields, Sandbach.

3 Policy Background

- 3.1 This Alsager Town Centre SPD has been produced to ensure that through its function as a Local Planning Authority, the Council is in accordance with national and regional guidance and advice and contributes, wherever possible, to meeting the priorities of the community it serves. This document has been informed by and will inform other strategies and approaches including those by other agencies. In particular this strategy should be seen as contributing to the Borough's vision and proposals in its Sustainable Community Strategy.

National Policy

- 3.2 **Planning Policy Statement 1 (PPS1): Delivering Sustainable Development**, states that planning policies should promote high quality inclusive design in the layout of new developments and individual buildings in terms of function and impact, not just for the short term but over the lifetime of the development. It also highlights the need to focus developments that attract a large number of people, especially retail, leisure and office development, in existing centres to promote their vitality and viability, social inclusion and more sustainable patterns of development.
- 3.3 **Planning Policy Statement 6 (PPS6): Planning for Town Centres**, states that the Government's key objective for town centres is to promote their vitality and viability by:
- planning for the growth and development of existing centres; and
 - promoting and enhancing existing centres, by focusing development in such centres and encouraging a wide range of services in a good environment, accessible to all.
- 3.4 It affirms that it is essential that town centres provide a high-quality and safe environment if they are to remain attractive and competitive. Policies for the design of development for main town centre uses, regardless of location, and for development in town centres, should promote high quality and inclusive design, in order to improve the character, quality and function of areas.
- 3.5 Section 17 of the **Crime and Disorder Act** (1998) imposes a duty of the Local Authority to exercise its functions with due regard to the need to do all that it reasonably can to prevent crime and disorder in its area. The SPD deals with the matter in relation to land use planning considerations only.
- 3.6 **Planning for Town Centres: Guidance on Design and Implementation Tools** provides further detailed design guidance, stating that the issues which should be considered for inclusion in Local Development Documents, include:
- identifying the capacity of each centre to accommodate growth, and making provision for this;
 - providing a comprehensive plan for any area of renewal or development;
 - addressing the location and layout of new development;
 - developing an urban design strategy, which establishes a comprehensive urban design vision and is supported by specific urban design policies, guidelines or proposals for specific sites;

- addressing the spatial implications of strategies for parking, traffic management and improvement of the pedestrian environment; and
- setting out a detailed implementation programme for bringing forward development on key sites, including, where appropriate, proposals for addressing issues such as land assembly through compulsory purchase orders.

3.7 **Going to Town – Improving Town Centre Access** is a good practice guide and was published in 2002 by ODPM. It highlights what can be done to improve the key routes from the arrival points to the main attractions and provides the principles of route quality. These are:

- **Connected:** good pedestrian routes which link the places where people want to go, and form a network;
- **Convenient:** direct routes following desire lines, with easy-to-use crossings;
- **Comfortable:** good quality footways, with adequate widths and without obstructions;
- **Convivial:** attractive, well lit and safe, and with variety along the route; and
- **Conspicuous:** legible routes easy to find and follow, with surface treatments and signs to guide pedestrians.

3.8 CABE's **Design Reviewed – Town Centre Retail**, states that when translated to town centre retail development, we can judge proposed designs against a number of key principles:

- Good urban design – the principles of which are set out in 'By Design', and include the importance of character, legibility, ease of movement, adaptability and a mix of uses.
- Good architecture – buildings with civic quality that enhance their internal and external environments through their scale, massing, proportions and detailing.
- Good for retail – the development must work for retail and leisure providers in their core business, selling products to customers.
- Good for everyone – the development must minimise any negative impacts on the environment and promote a safe and inclusive environment for all who want to use the town centre, including those with special access needs.

Regional Policy

3.9 The statutory Development Plan for Alsager Town Centre comprises the Congleton Local Plan and the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) for the North West.

3.10 **Policy W5 – Retail Development**, of the **RSS** does not identify Alsager within its list of town centres. However, it does state that *'investment, of an appropriate scale, in centres not identified . . . will be encouraged in order to maintain and enhance their vitality and viability, including investment to underpin wider regeneration initiatives, to ensure that centres meet the needs of the local community'*.

Local Policy

3.11 The **Congleton Borough Local Plan First Review** (adopted January 2005 and referred to throughout this document as the Local Plan) provides the Development Plan for the area formerly covered by Congleton Borough. However, the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 introduced major changes to the way the planning system operates, with each Local Authority now required to prepare a Local Development Framework (LDF). As part of the transitional arrangement for the new planning system a number of policies from the Congleton Local Plan have been 'saved' and will continue to provide the Development Plan for the former Congleton Borough area as part of the Cheshire East LDF. This allows SPDs to be linked to existing 'saved' Local Plan policies.

3.12 This SPD supplements Policies S1, S4, S5 and S6 of the Congleton Local Plan, which provide policy for the development of the town centres within the Borough.

- **Policy S1 – Shopping Hierarchy**, provides the hierarchy of retail centres within the Borough and requires development to be of a scale, nature and location in relation to its position in the hierarchy
- **Policy S4 – Principal Shopping Areas**, provides a policy to ensure that these areas retain a concentration of retail uses.
- **Policy S5 – Other Town Centre Areas**, allows for the development of non retail town centres uses providing they do not detract from the overall town centre function.
- **Policy S6 – The Use of Upper Floors within the Town Centres**, allows for the development of non retail uses within the upper floors provided they meet a number of criteria.

3.13 The full text of the above policies can be found in Appendix C. There are also a number of other policies which are relevant to the SPD including:

- **Policy GR1 – New Development**, which requires all new development to be of a high standard, to conserve or enhance the character of the surrounding area and to have regard to the principles of sustainable development.
- **Policy GR2 – Design**, which requires development to meet a number of design criteria.
- **Policy GR9 – Accessibility, Servicing and Parking Provision**, provides the criteria that must be met for all developments requiring access, servicing or parking facilities.
- **Policy S11 – Shop Fronts and Security Shutters**, provides the criteria for new shop fronts, alterations to shop fronts and replacement shop fronts.
- **Policy RC1 – Recreation and Community Facilities Policies**, provides the policy to ensure that recreational and community facilities accurately reflect the needs of the Borough and that the development does not adversely affect the surrounding area.
- **Policy RC11 – Indoor recreation and community uses**, provides the criteria that must be met for the development of indoor recreation and community facilities.

- 3.14 This SPD is intended to contribute to the implementation of the Cheshire East Interim Sustainable Community Strategy. This strategy co-ordinates the resources of the local public, private and voluntary organisations towards common purposes. The priorities of the Sustainable Community Strategy are provided below:
- Reducing inequalities / narrowing the gap between the most disadvantaged and successful areas of Cheshire East and sectors of the community
 - Addressing the key issues surrounding our ageing population
 - Addressing the priority services for children and young people
 - Improving access to and availability of affordable and appropriate housing
 - Reducing anti-social behaviour, arson and criminal damage
 - Reducing re-offending
 - Tackling the adverse impact of alcohol
 - Achieving sustainable management of waste resources
 - Responding to the challenge of climate change
 - Reducing worklessness and improving skills
 - Improving road safety, maintenance
 - Improving environmental cleanliness
 - Maintaining an efficient transport network
 - Reducing the risk of industrial and commercial emergencies
- 3.15 The SPD has potential to address a number of these priorities through the provision of a vibrant, vital and safe town centre at Alsager.
- 3.16 The **Cheshire Local Transport Plan** covers the period 2006 to 2011 and contains a number of objectives intended to ensure that a safe, integrated, sustainable and well maintained transport network is provided. These include promoting accessibility to everyday services for all, especially those without access to a car; improve safety for all travellers; promoting the integration of all forms of transport and land-use planning, leading to a better, more efficient transport system; and, managing a well maintained and efficient transport network. It is expected that the SPD will also consider these objectives during its production.
- 3.17 There are other **Supplementary Planning Documents** (SPD) and **Supplementary Planning Guidance** (SPG) notes that will be of relevance to developments within Alsager Town Centre. Key amongst these is the Congleton Borough Shop Front Security SPG and the Congleton Borough Sustainable Development SPD.

4 Spatial Portrait and Town Centre Issues

History and context

- 4.1 Alsager was for centuries an agricultural village with a manor, which was in the ownership of the Alsager family, from where the town takes its name. The male line of the Alsager family died out towards the end of the eighteenth century, but the family survived on account of three sisters. It is to the 'Misses Alsager' that the modern town owes its origins. They were responsible for the construction of the Christ Church in 1789-90, a Georgian structure built of ashlar and they also provided houses and other facilities for the budding community.
- 4.2 But the real impetus for growth came half a century later. A frequent rail passenger service between Alsager and Stoke-on-Trent allowed the more prosperous potters to commute to their work daily, while their families enjoyed the fresh air and rural charms of south Cheshire, including the picturesque Mere near the centre.
- 4.3 The 1909 Plan below shows that the area around the Station Road Conservation Area was largely built up including the villas which still remain today as an important aspect of the area.

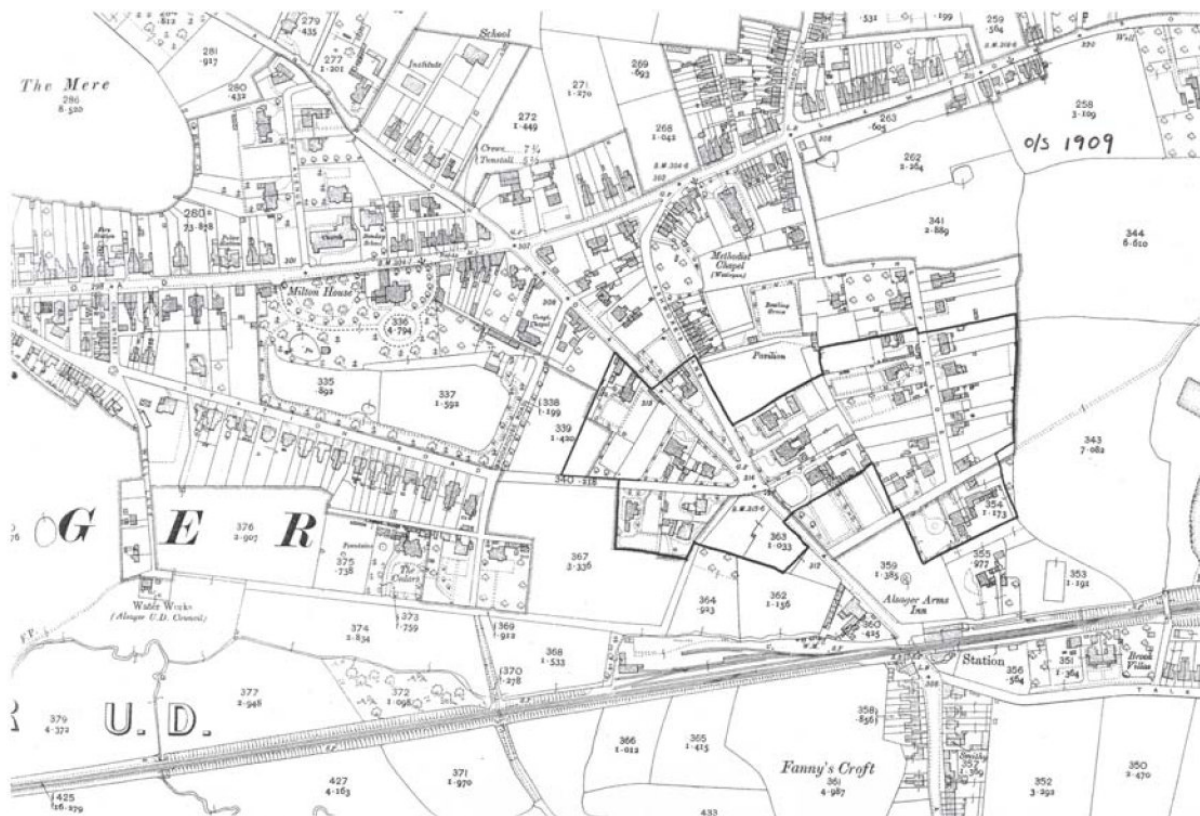


Diagram 2: 1909 Plan of Alsager highlighting the villas

Diagram 3: Orientation Plan



2 Storey Units on Crewe Road



Access to the Mere



Alsager Civic Centre



Fairview Car Park



Co-op



Council Offices



Milton Park

Skate Park

Council Depot



- 4.4 In more recent times, Alsager was the latest town in the Authority to become involved in the Market Towns Initiative, with a project manager appointed in January 2007. The project raised match funding of £98,000 to fund project management, marketing of Alsager, establishing a chamber of trade, and purchasing new street furniture. Diagram 3 provides an orientation plan of Alsager to allow you to familiarise yourself with the town centre and with the plan which will frequently be used throughout this document.

National Issues

- 4.5 There are several national trends regarding shopping and town centres that may be of significance to Alsager Town Centre. These include:
- Competition from **retail parks** which have a competitive advantage in terms of ease of access and abundant free surface level car parking which can result in loss of trade or relocation of traders;
 - **Superstores** selling an **increased range of non-food goods** (including clothing) as they seek new profit and growth opportunities;
 - **Growth in unit sizes** to meet occupier requirements for fewer, larger units;
 - **Growing disparity between large destination centres and medium and smaller centres** as key operators focus their attention on a limited number of locations.
 - **The current economic situation**, which has led to an increase in retail closure and may lead to a general decrease in footfall as shoppers become more cautious.

Local Issues

- 4.6 This section provides a summary of the key issues that have been drawn out from a number of evidence sources, such as the Cheshire Town Centre Study 2006 to 2021, carried out by White Young Green in 2006, the August 2006 Shopper Survey carried out by NEMS Market Research on behalf of White Young Green, the Annual Retail Schedule produced by Congleton Borough Council and consultation with the Alsager Town Council, Alsager Partnership and the local Councillors. Further detailed analysis of this information can be found in Appendix D. This summary has also considered the SWOT analysis of the town centre carried out by the Alsager Partnership which is included within Appendix E.
- 4.7 The Key local issues that the Town Centre Strategy should look to address include:
- Image and character of Alsager **town centre**;
 - Unfulfilled shopping potential and loss of trade to other Towns;
 - Deficiencies in recreation, leisure and culture;
 - The appearance and quality of the Civic Centre and other public buildings;
 - Infrastructure – quality of roads and paving, pedestrian facilities, signage in and around town;
 - Ageing population;
 - Fear of crime and anti-social behaviour; and
 - The lack of youth facilities.

- 4.8 However, there are also a number of areas of local pride or areas which are considered to be strengths. These are areas which the Town Centre Strategy should look to maintain and enhance, including:
- Character of Alsager 'the Village';
 - Natural environment – the Mere, Milton Park and town centre trees and planting;
 - Bank Corner Pub;
 - Civic Centre – good location and well used;
 - "Destination businesses";
 - Market;
 - Pro-active community with a strong community spirit;
 - Availability of free parking;
 - The 'personable' environment within the town centre and the friendly nature of the people;
 - The Christmas light display within the town centre; and
 - The Victorian Heritage of the town.

Question 1:

Do you think that the issues and areas of pride which have been identified are appropriate and reflect the current situation in Alsager Town Centre?

Question 2:

Would you like to contribute any further issues or areas of pride, which should be considered by this SPD?

5 Vision and Objectives

- 5.1 As town centres throughout the UK compete increasingly with one another for shoppers, businesses and jobs, Alsager must ensure that it remains vibrant.
- 5.2 However, the ongoing process of development and change within Alsager town centre can either add to or detract from the existing character and ultimately determine the social, environmental and economic sustainability of the town. It is this process that we seek to understand and influence in order to ensure a better quality town centre for all.

Vision

- 5.3 Based upon the work which has been undertaken to date, the following “Draft Vision” for Alsager Town Centre is proposed for consultation. The “Draft Vision” draws upon the policy context within which the Strategy will operate.
- 5.4 It is suggested that the Vision for the future development of Alsager is:

“Alsager Town Centre will be developed as a strong and viable town centre.....”

- Development in the town centre will allow the town to reach its full potential whilst recognising its role within the wider South Cheshire context.

“..... attracting and meeting the needs of a wide range of residents, visitors and workers providing a self-sustaining mix of use.....”

- This component of the vision will ensure that the scale and mix of development provided for within the town centre will be compatible with the town’s catchment and role reflecting local, regional and national policy which seeks to deliver “sustainable development”.

“..... in a well designed, focused and integrated centre.....”

- The existing town centre extends from the primary shopping area in the east to the secondary area in the west. The objective should be to link these areas with a consistent high quality of public realm.

“..... in a safe, accessible and well maintained environment.”

- The quality of the town’s public realm and environment should be of the highest quality to inspire a strong sense of pride amongst workers, residents and visitors.
- The quality of the environment, and the safety of the town centre are already key assets of Alsager and these elements should be built upon.
- Issues of licensing management and policing should be considered holistically to ensure that the town is welcoming to all.

Objectives

- 5.5 Turning the vision into reality requires that more detailed objectives be identified to shape the creation of policies. The suggested objectives will require action and agreement from a range of partners, such as Cheshire East

Council, the Town Council and Alsager Partnership. However, it should be noted in some cases objectives will take a number of years to come to fruition.

5.6 It is suggested that the objectives for Alsager Town Centre are:

- 1. To create a distinctive character for the Town Centre that will inspire a sense of pride amongst local residents, workers and visitors.***
- 2. To maintain Alsager Town Centre as a vital and viable town centre area, with a variety of shops to meet the needs of the local residents, as well as a number of specialist shops and stalls that draw in visitors from further a field.***
- 3. To support a good range of high quality, accessible, leisure, cultural and community facilities, to meet the needs of all local residents, workers and visitors.***
- 4. To improve accessibility within the Town Centre for all pedestrians and cyclists and to the Town Centre by pedestrians, cyclists and all other means of transport.***
- 5. To provide an accessible, high quality, safe and attractive public realm and new public spaces that will form the heart of civic life.***
- 6. To provide a well managed and safe Town Centre.***

Question 3:

Do you agree with the proposed vision for Alsager Town Centre? If not, please explain why, for example should the proposed vision be expressed differently or are there other issues it should focus on?

Question 4:

Do you agree with the proposed objectives for the Alsager Town Centre SPD? If not, please explain why, for example should the proposed objectives be expressed differently or are there other issues they should address or are there other objectives which should be included?

6 Introduction to the Policies and Proposals

- 6.1 The following set of policies and proposals will be applied to Alsager Town Centre. They are not presented in any particular order either in terms of importance, timetable or deliverability. There are a number of general principles that will apply across the centre as a whole and a number of proposals which may only apply to specific areas - where this is to be the case the areas involved will be identified. For ease of reading the policies have been split into sections relating to:
- The establishment of a distinctive character for the town centre;
 - The creation of a Vital and Viable Shopping Area;
 - The provision of Leisure, Cultural and Community Facilities;
 - Accessibility of the town centre;
 - The creation of quality Public Spaces; and
 - The management of the town centre.
- 6.2 The policies and proposals within this Strategy are intended to guide development in order to achieve the Vision and Objectives (set out in Section 5), whilst allowing enough flexibility for future proposals to show innovation, creativity and imagination, and to appreciate the changes that may occur in the physical and economic condition of Alsager Town Centre.
- 6.3 The policies and proposals are based on the assumption that the Strategy will be delivered through partnerships between the Alsager Partnership, Alsager Town Council, Cheshire East Council, development partners and other key stakeholders including public sector agencies and landowners. The Council, as a landowner in the study area and local planning authority, will play the lead role utilising its property assets, planning and potentially Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO) powers and providing leadership to facilitate the overall delivery process. In addition development partners will bring the necessary private sector investment and property development expertise to take development proposals forward.
- 6.4 It is also of note that there are several principals and proposals that promote the use of planning obligations to assist in the improvement of the town centre. However, this document cannot prescribe the exact nature of obligations being sought, as this must be done on a case-by-case basis in compliance with Circular 05/05.
- 6.5 As a SPD, this document is unable to formally designate sites for development. However, it is able to identify development principles for existing opportunities. Sites that are identified as new opportunities can, if necessary, be taken forward as designations through the Local Development Framework.

7 Distinctive Character

- 7.1 A clear and positive town centre image improves attractiveness for visitors, shoppers and investors as well as helping the local community to understand and make the best use of their town centre.
- 7.2 It is important to recognise and reinforce the structural elements that form the 'backbone' of the town centre. These 'assets' may be used as a foundation for the development and marketing of a strong town centre image and identity and to reinforce general local pride.
- 7.3 The image presented to visitors as they approach and arrive in the town centre is fundamental to developing a positive first impression and sense of place. The quality and appearance of approach routes and the outer edge that the town centre presents to the 'outside world' are crucial to the formation of a positive town centre image and identity. Attention should be paid to two areas:
- Entry or arrival points (often referred to as 'gateways'); and
 - The outer edge of the town centre, that is, the 'face' that the town centre presents to the 'outside' world'.

Orientation points

- 7.4 The development of memorable locations heighten the sense of arrival and welcome and help regular users of the town centre navigate through and around the town. Therefore **buildings with civic, community and/or cultural functions (such as the library and civic centre) will be expected to have a strong presence on a principal shopping street and be of outstanding architectural merit and quality of design.**

Gateways and Landmark Buildings

- 7.5 Gateways are formal or informal designated features that signal a sense of arrival to a place, in this case Alsager town centre. They can be features such as landmark buildings/structures, or landscape features such as planting, water features and public art. Again, gateways have been considered for both vehicular, pedestrian and public transport approach routes.
- 7.6 **The Council will promote the use of memorable architecture at key locations, sited to respond to major vistas.** These features should help people find their way around the Town Centre and help to enrich its character. The development of gateways and landmarks should make a clear statement to reinforce the identity and character of their location.
- 7.7 This could be done for example: through the quality of their design; the way a building may be set apart by its design or scale from others in its frontage; or by the way it turns a corner.
- 7.8 **The Council will expect all development and initiatives within Alsager Town Centre to reinforce visual connections along key routes, between spaces and at landmark locations with appropriate landscaping, lighting and signage.**

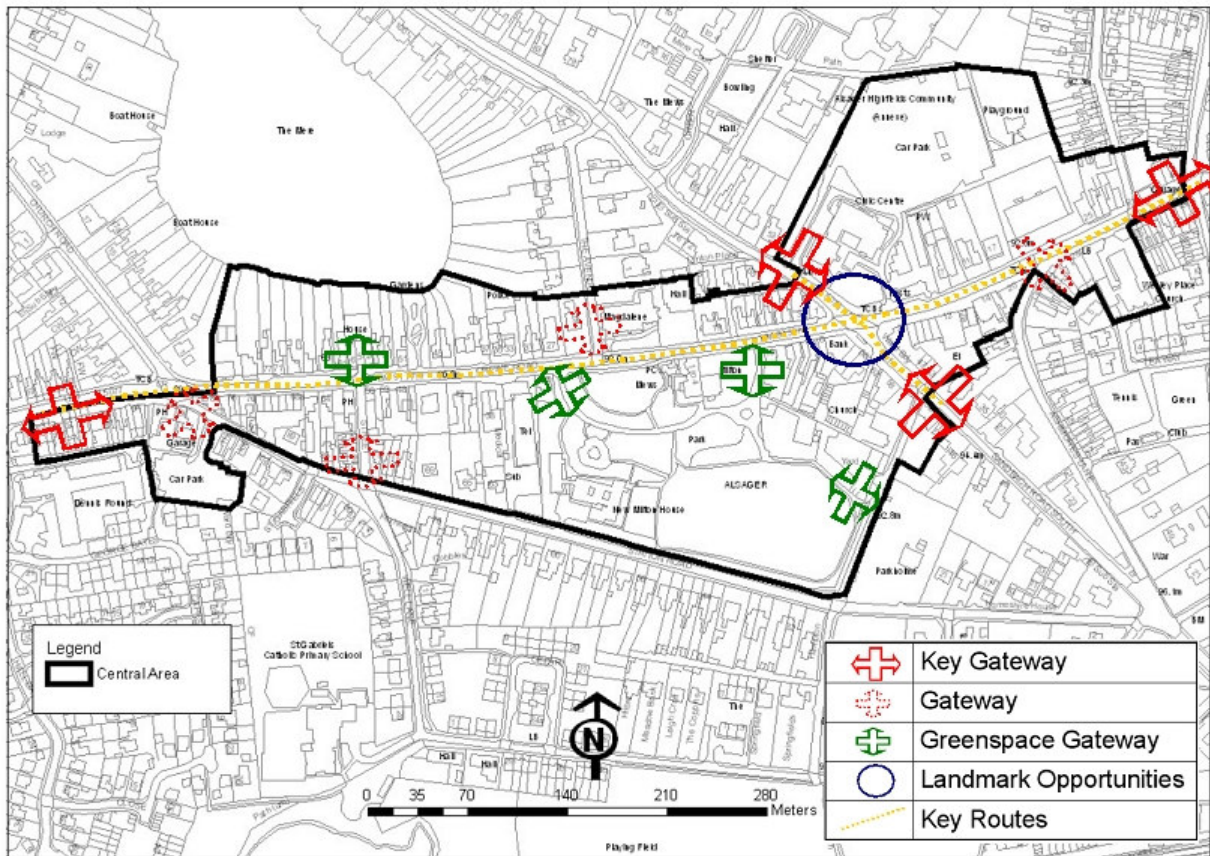


Diagram 4: Map of key routes and potential sites for gateways and landmark buildings

Public Art

7.9 The inclusion of Public Art within the Town Centre is expected to lead to the creation of a visually stimulating and animated place that is unique and encourages the interaction of all ages. The Council will look to increase public art within Alsager Town Centre to add to its attraction and interest. A Public Art Strategy will be produced to ensure a coordinated approach is undertaken within the town centre.



Good quality Public Art in Birmingham

7.10 Any development within the town centre will be expected to contribute to the Public Arts Fund, which will look to realize the work promoted by the Public Art Strategy.

7.11 The Public Art Strategy is likely to encourage commissions by artists to be incorporated within the development of the town to accompany streetscape proposals for key spaces. Temporary

artworks may also be used enliven the town centre's streets and spaces. It is hoped that the Public Art Strategy will also encourage artists to work with local

residents, young people, schools and colleges to encourage people's understanding and appreciation of their environment and foster a greater awareness of the role and importance of contemporary art, architecture and urban design to the quality of life.

- 7.12 The Arts Council of Great Britain initiated the 'Percent for Art Campaign' to enhance the built environment by encouraging developers to devote a proportion of capital expenditure of the construction of a new building to the provision of new works of art, craft or decoration in the building or its environs.
- 7.13 The Council will therefore look to developers to provide 1% of the total construction costs for public art commissions. This figure is used as a starting point and ensures that there is always a minimum expenditure on public art within a scheme and its value and scale is directly related to the size of the project. Contributions will also be expected towards the long term maintenance of any commissions.

Design of new development

- 7.14 Design is a subjective issue and we all have our preferences, but most would agree that well-designed developments are those that add something to the environment. Design can be key to the success of a building or development not just because our lives are connected through our common built environment, but also because good design can bring economic benefits to both developers and occupiers.
- 7.15 **The Council will expect that all new development will positively improve the appearance and character of the site in its setting, will improve the functionality of the area and will create a new quality benchmark for further development in the immediate locality.** This is particularly important where the existing site and context are of poor visual or environmental quality or are weak and lacking in character.
- 7.16 Policy GR1 of the Local Plan states that *'proposals will only be permitted if considered to be acceptable in terms of . . . design'*. **Within Alsager Town Centre proposals will only be considered acceptable, in terms of design, where they:**
- **maximise the amount of 'active' building frontage;**
 - **minimise blank walls, service areas and other 'dead' frontages onto the public realm;**
 - **locate building entrances so that they are convenient for pedestrians and cyclists, rather than the drivers of private cars;**
 - **ensure that entrances to major facilities are welcoming, appropriately scaled and detailed and visible along or at the end of one or more major view corridors;**
 - **are designed to relate to the scale, form and massing of the local area;**
 - **incorporate high quality landscaped boundary treatments to provide enclosure and continuity to the street or space;**
 - **designed to reduce crime and fear of crime; and**

- **incorporate inclusive design.**

Active Frontages

7.17 Development should face on to and reinforce streets and public spaces.

Buildings that face onto streets and other open spaces help give life to the public realm. Well-designed buildings will have a clear definition between public and private space and relate positively to the public realm. In town centres, buildings that front directly onto the pavement contribute to viability and vitality, whilst providing good enclosure to a street.

7.18 Development should have active frontages including entrances and exits, windows, arcades, balconies and seating areas that overlook and provide activity onto the street or open space.

Making frontages 'active' adds vitality and interest to the public realm. Lively interior activities oriented towards outdoor places can enliven spaces for instance. The use of active frontages can also help to maximize informal surveillance, as buildings with live edges and doors directly to the street, enable people to keep an eye on public space, making it feel safer.



Non-active frontages should be avoided

7.19 'Active' building frontages can be created by:

- incorporating smaller uses such as individual shops, restaurants and small business units at ground floor level; or
- wrapping smaller uses around the perimeter of the larger uses, so creating an active frontage to the street; and
- locating uses such as cafes within supermarkets or leisure complexes on the frontage, with views in from outside.

Entrance Points

7.20 Main entrances will be expected to be located on the street. If this is not possible then they should be directly visible, easily accessible and as close to the street as practically possible to allow for convenient access for both pedestrians and cyclists. The function(s) of the building should also be readily apparent to passers by.

Scale and massing

7.21 The scale of the development or building will be largely dependent upon the location and size of the site but also its position within the hierarchy of the built form. It should also relate to the width and importance of the space which they enclose. For example, a gateway position may demand a greater mass, along with a higher quality of design and materials, than its neighbours, whilst an infill development may require a 'quieter' building, which is more responsive to the prevailing storey heights and articulations.

7.22 The height of new building will be managed across the town centre to ensure that they fit appropriately into their setting, this may be by ensuring that

development incorporates upper floor uses such as residential flats, business or leisure or by ensuring that development does not become overpowering.

Boundary treatments

- 7.23 The choice of boundary treatment can either add to, or detract, from the quality of the frontage. The choice of material and scale should be appropriate to achieve both security and a good appearance, and it should provide enclosure and continuity to the street or public space.

Crime Prevention

- 7.24 Secured-by-design principles are to be considered in the design of all development in order to create spaces that minimise crime and make people feel safe.

Inclusive Design

- 7.25 'Inclusive design' is not a fixed set of criteria - it is a constantly changing thing. The goal is to create environments that everyone can use equally. For example this is likely to include consideration of access for the disabled, elderly and those people with prams or pushchairs and wheelchairs to all principal public entrances / exits.

Refuse and Recycling

- 7.26 **Provision for refuse storage and recycling facilities must be made within the curtilage of the property, unless otherwise agreed.**
- 7.27 Ensuring that rubbish bags, litter bins and recycling facilities are stored within the curtilage of the premises avoids the accumulation of unsightly rubbish and allows streets and particularly back lanes to be kept clean and litter free, protecting the visual amenity of the area, avoiding negative impacts on the appearance of the area and the image of the city centre. This is particularly important close to residential properties, as not only does it look unattractive but it can also cause problems with health and safety.

Fumes and Odours

- 7.28 **Appropriate measures to control fumes / smells from the premises shall be put in place in order to protect the amenities of nearby properties/ residents.**
- 7.29 Adequate ventilation and extraction systems allow premises to operate without being detrimental to the amenities of neighbouring properties. When installing the appropriate measures careful consideration should also be given to the appearance of the systems, where they are sited and hours of operation, in order to ensure that visual amenity is not compromised and noise problems are not introduced.

Noise

- 7.30 Where new restaurants, cafes, pubs, bars and take-aways are permitted they will be carefully conditioned to ensure no adverse impact on the residential and other noise sensitive uses being encouraged to locate within the town centre.

- 7.31 The Council will expect all applicants to submit information with planning applications on the noise attenuation levels proposed in order to ensure the amenities of nearby residential properties and the character of the area are protected.

Existing Developments

- 7.32 Many existing commercial buildings have opportunities for radical remodelling and upgrading for the benefit of the townscape as well as improving the value and use of the accommodation. **Where planning permission is required the redevelopment of existing buildings will be expected to meet the design requirements set out for new developments as set out above.** Where planning permission is not required the Council would encourage developers to apply these principles in order to enhance the character of Alsager Town Centre.
- 7.33 Within Alsager Town Centre the Council will allow for the removal of unattractive or inappropriate buildings, elements or features that detract from the quality and/or character of the site and its surroundings.

Shop Frontages

- 7.34 Shop fronts are an important part of the street scene, as they create both the initial impression of the quality of the shop, and allow the customer to see at first glance what goods the shop have to offer, acting as an advertisement. It is in the best interest of the shop owner, therefore, to project an appropriate and effective image to the public through the shop frontage.
- 7.35 **Wherever possible traditional shop fronts and features should be retained** (this includes frontages on pubs, banks, solicitors, estate agents etc). In some cases, original features may have been hidden behind more modern fascias and panelling. Good modern designs will be acceptable, providing that they relate well to the building on which they are to be installed, that they are imaginative and creative and that they respect the character of the building and the street scene in terms of scale, proportions and materials.

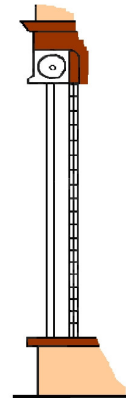


- 7.36 **The Council will expect the design of the shop front to take into account the rhythm and characteristics of the street in which it is located.** Many buildings will have a strong vertical emphasis and this combined with an average plot width of 5-7m will create an agreeable

and proportion, producing visual harmony within the street. This proportion is destroyed by fascias which are over-long and/or too deep. This destroys the relationship between the ground and upper facade and creates a jarring

horizontal emphasis. This can be overcome by using mullions or recessed entrances to break up long displays and ensuring that fascia box width is in proportion to the building and usually not extending above the cornice.

- 7.37 **The Council will expect that any commercial security measure does not create an inappropriate or intimidating frontage which may reduce the overall vitality of the area.** Security measures should always form an integral part of the design of a shop front and should not simply be "added on" as an after thought. **There is a general presumption against the use of solid lath roller shutters** as their horizontal emphasis is invariably at odds with the scale and detailing of many buildings. Solid external roller shutters will only be permitted in exceptional circumstances, as they create a hostile frontage and can attract vandalism and graffiti. Well-lit interiors, visible internal CCTV systems, and adequate locks and alarms, including alarmed glass, can all reduce the risk to vulnerable premises without significant detriment to the street-scene.



Best practice:
Shutter mechanism behind fascia and invisible from outside. Shutters are located internally and are of a roller grille style.

Question 5:

Do you agree with the proposed policies and proposals to create a distinct character for Alsager Town Centre? If not, please explain why, for example should the policies or proposals be expressed differently or are there other issues they should focus on?

8 Vital and Viable Shopping Area

- 8.1 Shopping is often considered to be the lifeblood of a successful centre. It is usually the primary incentive for regular trips into centres from surrounding residential areas, moreover, shopping is an essential service. Convenient access to a comprehensive range of competitively priced goods can be considered as a key component of a good quality of life and social inclusion.
- 8.2 Vitality is determined by actual and perceived activity at different times of day. This includes pedestrian activity in the street and activity 'visible' within buildings, including the presence of displays in shop windows and lighting at night; the maintenance of buildings and spaces; the perception of safety and occurrence of crime; and the ease of access to/from and within the centre.
- 8.3 Viability is concerned with economic issues including retailer representation, rental levels, the returns on investment in property and vacancy rates. Diversity of use is also an indicator but more appropriate to the centre overall rather than the retail core.

Principal Shopping Areas

- 8.4 It is important to protect the shopping core of the Town Centre. This is done through Policy S4 of the Local Plan, which defines the Principal Shopping Areas and protects them from non-retail uses at ground floor level. The loss of retail (A1) uses in these areas to non-retail uses such as housing or offices is prevented. The loss of A1 uses to other retail uses such as financial and professional services (A2), restaurants and cafes (A3), drinking establishments (A4), and takeaways (A5) is strictly controlled.
- 8.5 Current policy suggests that a change of use from A1 to A2, A3, A4 or A5 would not be permitted where it would lead to a concentration of non-A1 uses. The Council considers a 'concentration' to be a row of more than two non-A1 uses. In addition, where a unit is vacant, the most recently authorised use class will be considered. **Where a non-A1 use is permitted it must retain a display frontage appropriate to a shopping area.**
- 8.6 The Principal Shopping Areas are shown in Diagram 5.

The Evening Economy

- 8.7 Restaurants and cafes are essential to the vitality of the Town Centre and encourage a safer feeling in the evening by attracting visitors of all ages. However, it is recognized that too many drinking establishments or take-aways in one place can have an adverse impact on residential amenity and the town centre environment by creating noise and disturbance and potentially anti-social behaviour.
- 8.8 **The Council will support a greater mix of uses including cafes, bars and other evening economy uses to support the vitality of the retail offer, in line with Policies S5 and S6 of the Local Plan.**

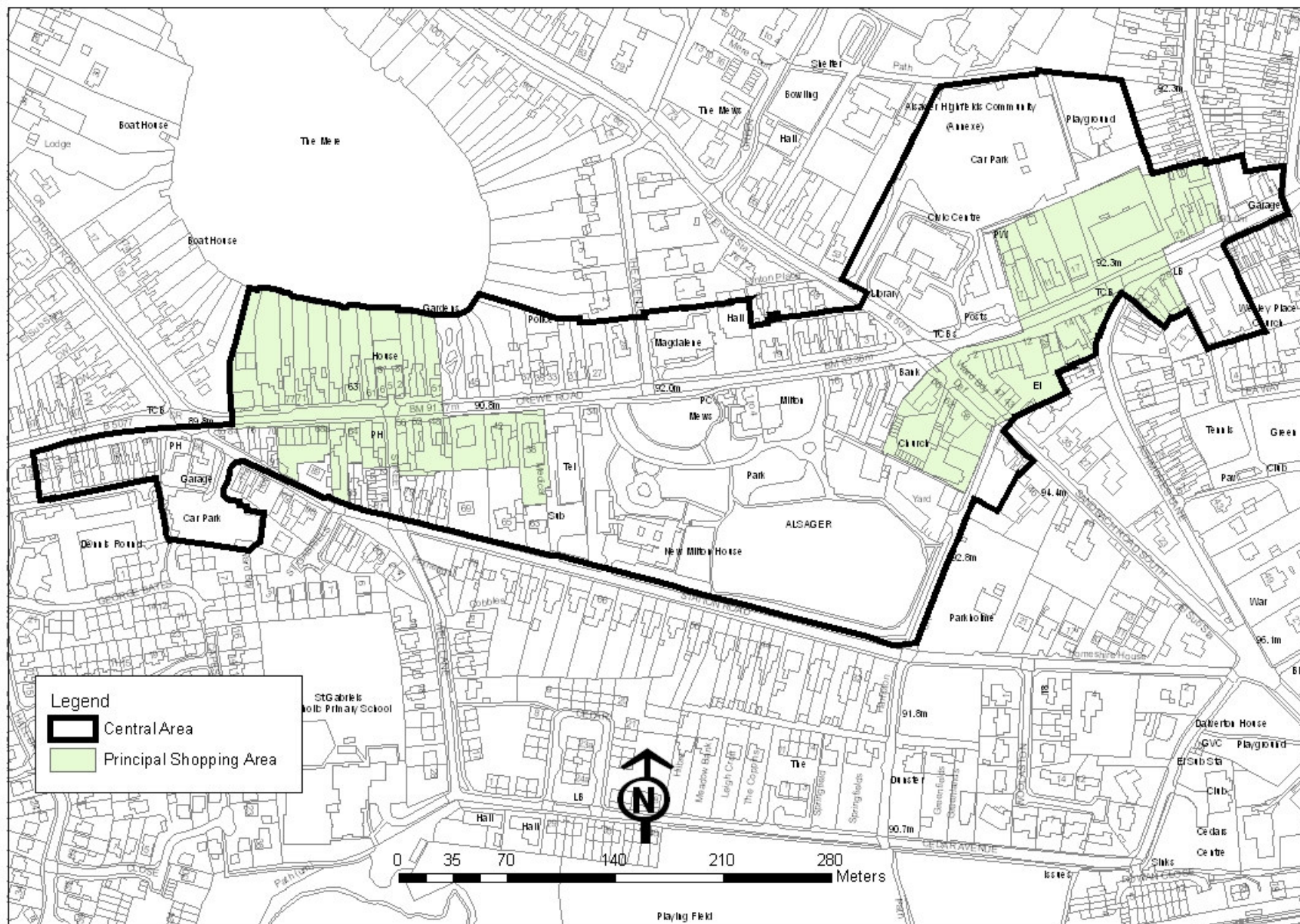


Diagram 5: Map to show the Principal Shopping Areas within Alsager Town Centre

- 8.9 However, in assessing each application the Council will need to be satisfied that the proposed development will not cause detrimental impacts on the character and/or amenity of the area. Where there is evidence of potential harmful impacts the development will be carefully conditioned to ensure no adverse impact on any residential and other noise sensitive uses in the area, restrictions on opening hours/ closing times may be imposed or if mitigation is not possible the application may be refused.
- 8.10 **Proposals that would result in a concentration of evening economy uses will be carefully assessed to ensure that the character of the area does not become detrimental to the wider appeal of the town centre.**
- 8.11 In order to ensure that cafes, bars and other evening economy uses do not adversely affect the vitality and viability of the town centre by creating 'non active frontages' during the day the Council will seek to enter into a Section 106 agreement with the applicant/s to ensure that premises are open throughout the day as well as in the evening (where appropriate consideration may be given to lunch time opening hours rather than daytime).
- 8.12 Outdoor seating areas on the public highway should be discussed with the Highways Engineer but may be permitted within appropriate locations in the town centre. Outdoor seating areas can add to the activity within streets, both throughout the day and in the evening. This type of facility adds vibrancy to the street scene and encourages more people to take advantage of the facilities on offer. Bringing licensed premises out onto footpaths also helps create a more relaxed feel to the environment and acts as a form of natural surveillance.

Town Centre Market

- 8.13 Markets can help to make the Town Centre more lively and can add to the overall town centre experience. The Alsager Market will remain a foundation of the town centre. However, the possible relocation of a part-enclosed, part open-air market connected to a public building or public space, would create a new market focus for the town centre should the Fairview Car Park area be redeveloped or altered. **The Council will expect a Market to be maintained within the town centre of Alsager.**

Question 6:

Should the Council provide support for the market to be held more frequently or to be held indoors as well as outdoors?

New Retail Provision

- 8.14 The main focus for new retail provision will be within the Principal Shopping Area and the development opportunity site at Fairview Car Park. Further information about the development opportunity site at Fairview Car Park can be found in Section 13. The Cheshire Town Centre Study 2006 to 2021, produced by White Young Green in 2006 on behalf of the Cheshire Authorities, identifies that there is additional capacity for between 860sqm and 1,720sqm

(net) of convenience floorspace and between 1,380sqm and 1,971sqm (net) of comparison floorspace over the period to 2021.

- 8.15 An increase in new retail provision is also supported by local residents, when asked if they thought *'an improved range and choice of food shopping would encourage more people to shop in Alsager'*; 81% of those questioned by Erinaceous Planning agreed.
- 8.16 A successful town centre provides accommodation for a range of retailers extending from small units for independent operators to larger units for the high street multiples. There is currently a lack of larger units to meet modern retail needs. However, it will also be important to retain a number of smaller specialist units for destination shopping. **Development of new retailing should compliment the existing provision within the centre, and not undermine its vitality and viability.**
- 8.17 It is difficult for planning policies to change the type and quality of retail stores, because both discount lower order retailers and high-end department stores are part of the A1 Use Class and the Council cannot restrict who owns or occupies these stores. However, by providing a better quality shopping environment and units of a size and design that would suit higher order retailers, it is expected they are more likely to be attracted to the town.

Question 7:

Do you agree with the proposed policies and proposals to create a vital and viable shopping area within Alsager Town Centre? If not, please explain why, for example should the policies or proposals be expressed differently or are there other issues they should focus on?

9 Leisure, Cultural and Community Facilities

- 9.1 Leisure, culture and community facilities are an essential part to a rounded quality of life in a town centre. They can help to attract prospective investors and enhance the quality of the town centre for existing local residents, workers and visitors. When Erinaceous Planning asked local residents if they '*used the existing community and leisure facilities in the Town Centre*' 85% agreed.
- 9.2 **The loss of buildings used for community uses/purposes will not be considered acceptable unless it can be shown that it no longer makes a positive contribution to the social or cultural life of the community, or that suitable alternative provision will be made** in line with Policy RC12. This **alternative provision will be expected to be at least equivalent to the current facilities and preferably of a higher quality in terms of design, access and usage.**
- 9.3 The Council will work in partnership with appropriate community service providers to ensure that health, education and community service needs arising from a development are provided for. The use of planning obligations and conditions on planning permissions may be used in pursuit of this policy. The Council recognises the need for the provision of flexible community spaces in the town centre, and is supportive of the inclusion of such space within any redevelopment proposal.
- 9.4 Community facilities are seen and used by many people, and should therefore aspire to be models of good practice in terms of sustainable design. These buildings can help to raise awareness of sustainability issues and their solutions, and thereby contribute to achieving sustainable communities. It should be noted that renewable energies are often accompanied by energy efficiency gains, and therefore cost savings can also be made.

Question 8:

Do you agree with the proposed policies and proposals for leisure, cultural and community facilities within Alsager Town Centre? If not, please explain why, for example should the policies or proposals be expressed differently or are there other issues they should focus on?

10 Accessibility

10.1 This section examines the quality of existing and potential physical connections with a view to optimising and balancing user movement around the town centre. Traffic management (all modes), street furniture design and surfacing within and around the town centre core will be fundamental to this.

10.2 When assessing the strengths and weaknesses of existing town centre access and movement routes we have considered the following two factors:

- **Permeability**

This describes the ease with which people can walk, cycle or drive through an area by a variety of routes. Directness of route is also an important consideration. The smaller the number of viewpoint changes required to reach a destination the better. Successful areas usually have a high level of permeability which in turn generates lively streets that can support a range of uses.

- **Legibility**

This describes the ability to understand an area. Before people can make use of a route or shortcut they need to understand that it exists and have an idea of where it may lead. For example, approach routes should not only be attractive, but should provide physical affirmation of entry into the town centre, through an appropriate gateway feature or visible known landmark within the centre.

10.3 Distances between all parts of the town centre are all possible to walk, but the ease and attractiveness of walking has to be enhanced. New and improved linkages for safe, legible and unobstructed routes into the town centre from neighbouring residential areas are essential. Whilst improving the choice and attractiveness of pedestrian routes within the town centre will help to spread footfall across the Town Centre. **The Council will expect pedestrian routes to be along clearly defined routes that are direct, safe and as short as possible and fully accessible to all people.**

10.4 The Council will seek to provide a comprehensive system of safe and well signposted walking and cycling routes, both through and to the town centre.

10.5 The Council will also seek to ensure there are clear, direct and well-lit routes and paths between key destinations, with clear forward visibility and gentle changes of direction, avoiding places hidden from view or in darkness.

10.6 **Development will only be permitted where the most active uses are concentrated on main routes and around focal points.** This will contribute to the vitality of a place, as enabling both real and perceived access and mobility to your business is key to providing a vital and viable town centre and to creating a prosperous business.

10.7 The Council will look to ensure that pedestrian routes remain free from obstructions and unintended hazards that would restrict accessibility (e.g.

uneven pavements, temporary barriers, and inappropriate resurfacing prior to, during or after construction and maintenance works). Alongside this, **the Council will look to remove all inappropriate signage located on the highway** and will encourage town centre occupiers to give careful consideration to where they locate goods and signage outside of their premises, and within their curtilage, to ensure that pedestrian routes are free from obstruction.

- 10.8 **Planning permission will only be granted for developments which provide for the access needs of everyone**, including people with disabilities and those with prams and pushchairs. This includes dealing with approach and access to buildings, adequate and convenient parking for disabled people and use of colour and tactile materials to assist blind and partially sighted people. Designing for people with disabilities makes access easier for everyone and encourages more people to use public buildings and spaces.
- 10.9 The Council will also look into the development of 'shared space' concepts that overcome the barrier effect of busy roads and integrate the town centre with its surroundings.

Signage

- 10.10 Currently, much of the signage throughout the town centre is of a low quality. This is partly because many additions and changes to signage have occurred incrementally over time and in the absence of a strategy that provides guidelines, signs will inevitably lack coherence and appear haphazard. **All signage in Alsager Town Centre should be clear, unambiguous and avoid being unnecessarily intrusive.**
- 10.11 It is likely that an audit of signage will need to be undertaken to identify signs that could be rationalised, removed, repositioned, or otherwise changed to help improve the appearance of the urban environment. Clearly, highways safety cannot be compromised, therefore, the audit will need to be undertaken in partnership with, and agreed by the Council's Highways division.

Reducing clutter

- 10.12 Unnecessary clutter of streets signs, bollards, benches, railings, litter bins, and light columns in a street can significantly detract from its appearance. In addition, street clutter can obstruct pedestrian movement, especially for the partially sighted. This clutter arises because there is a lack of coordination between the different organisations responsible for the signs and street furniture. Reducing clutter requires a coordinated effort, especially along major corridor. Streetscape elements can be organised more efficiently by:
- removing obsolete signs and street furniture;
 - maximising the clear pavement area for pedestrians by locating street furniture in a single strip;
 - avoiding excessive 'fencing in' of pedestrians with guard rails;
 - where possible, combining signs and street furniture (e.g. fixing signs to lighting columns);

- coordinating types, styles and colours of street furniture for the length of the street; and
- using a limited palette of paving and other materials to keep the street visually simple.

Car Parking Strategy

10.13 The regeneration in the town centre will create both increased levels of development, generating a demand for car parking, as well as potentially creating opportunities for the development of existing surface car parks. It is therefore suggested that a car parking strategy be developed to help manage this change in demand and guiding significant developments to provide appropriate on-site provision. The strategy will need to balance accessibility with attractiveness and this is likely to involve a level of partnership working with the Highways Section and the developer to deliver attractive and appropriate on-site parking.

10.14 **The Council will expect all town centre public car parks and secure cycle parking areas to be accessible and well-lit, with secure and visible entrances and exits.**

10.15 **The Council will expect all developments involving car parking to consider the needs of the pedestrian when designing their car parks** not just those of the car user. The Council will expect the car park to provide:

- desire lines across the car park to the various buildings it serves, and design safe and attractive routes for people on foot using high quality materials;
- include a pedestrian only zone adjacent to the building frontages, so that there is some 'breathing space' from parked cars;
- break up the mass of car parking through a well considered structure of vertical elements such as trees, attractive light columns, public art and high quality structures such as trolley shelters;
- ensure that security measures such as CCTV are carefully designed into the layout from the outset; and
- opportunities for the car park to be used for alternative purposes such as local markets and civic events.

Question 9:

Do you agree with the proposed policies and proposals to make Alsager Town Centre accessible? If not, please explain why, for example should the policies or proposals be expressed differently or are there other issues they should focus on?

11 Public Spaces

- 11.1 Public space, including the street, squares and green places within the urban environment, provide free of charge physical and visual access for the public to enjoy. These are the areas that can benefit the town centre by encouraging greater interaction between different groups in the community and provide a space where the vivacity of the town centre can take place, providing a setting for many public events and activities. All public spaces should offer an environmental and visual quality that allows for and encourages high levels of sustainability, safety, interest, diversity and ultimately vitality.
- 11.2 Open spaces (green/soft spaces) are an essential component of any town centre, providing a valuable contrast to the built urban environment. These spaces, often described as 'green lungs', are enjoyed by residents, workers and visitors and are home to a variety of flora and species.
- 11.3 **The Council will expect development to clearly distinguish between private and public space, and to concentrate activity at ground level in streets and public spaces.** This will help to create a vital and viable mixed used town centre.
- 11.4 **Streets and spaces should facilitate a broad range of creative and economic activities and multiple uses such as markets, public art, and open-air performances.** The design of public open spaces should allow for a variety of pedestrian uses at a range of times of the day, for example street trading during the day, and eating out at the weekend.
- 11.5 Tables and chairs in public space promotes a café culture and adds to the vitality of a space. The co-ordination of tables and chairs licensing and the identification of spaces for street trading, performance and events can help towards creating a diverse economy.
- 11.6 **Streets and spaces should be guided by a clear signage strategy to enhance and coordinate access to services, way finding and interpretation.** The minimum level of information necessary to effectively direct people should be used to ensure a maximum degree of simplicity and clarity. Traffic signs can be incorporated into street furniture elements or affixed to buildings to help reduce visual clutter.

- 11.7 **Streets and spaces should use materials and furniture that are of a high quality.** Appendix G provides a 'Materials Palette' that aims to achieve a consistent approach and high quality public realm that has contemporary relevance. Furniture designs should be simple, elegant and robust.



High quality public space –
Exchange Square, Manchester

11.8 **The Council will expect all areas of public space to be well designed**, this will include:

- providing coordinated elements of street furniture including seating, litter bins, railings, bollards, lighting, cycle stands, bus shelters and kiosks;
- avoiding visual clutter and confusion in the siting, amount, nature and design of signage, railings, recycle bins, lighting and other elements of street furniture;
- using paving and surfacing materials that are visually attractive, durable, easy to maintain and replace, and reflect the character of the street or space. Where possible, use paving materials that are reclaimed and recycled, preferably locally;
- integrate trees and other soft landscape elements with other elements of street furniture and paving in a coordinated way;
- incorporate works of public art and provide opportunities for local artists to be involved in the design of the public realm and the elements with it; and
- contribute where appropriate to the on-going costs of management and maintenance of the public realm.

11.9 To reveal and exploit the presence in the town centre of Milton Park, the Mere and associated green spaces, the Council will seek to provide a coherent network of open spaces and landscape features. This may include the creation of a network of tree lined streets and 'pocket parks' that provide green corridors for people and wildlife, and link to strategic open space.

Question 10:

Do you agree with the proposed policies and proposals to provide for high quality public spaces within Alsager Town Centre? If not, please explain why, for example should the policies or proposals be expressed differently or are there other issues they should focus on?

12 A Well Managed Town Centre

Partnership Working

- 12.1 An important factor in the success of the Town Centre is the creation of partnerships between the various stakeholders in the town. There are a number of key stakeholders within the Town Centre including the Borough and County Council, landowners, the Town Council and the Alsager Partnership. The future prosperity of the Town Centre will, in part, rely on the ability of different groups to communicate with each other and take forward the vision set out in this SPD. Regular communication between the key stakeholders involved should be established, maintained and improved, as appropriate, to ensure that progress to deliver the SPD is monitored and delivered. It is the role of all stakeholders to ensure that the vision for a transformed Alsager Town Centre is a success and this communication will assist in realising this.
- 12.2 **Partnership working must be maintained and where appropriate improved in Alsager Town Centre to build on existing synergies and further enhance the dialogue between the different stakeholders in order to implement policies and proposals and support the long term successful development of the Town Centre.**

Infrastructure and Developer Contributions

- 12.3 The overall scale of development envisaged in the Town Centre up to 2026 will generate demand for new infrastructure, in the form of both works and services. This will include improvements to the road network, public transport services, utilities, public realm improvements, and other social and community facilities and services. The Council will work with infrastructure providers to identify what new provision needs to be made to meet the growing needs of the local community and visitors to the Town Centre. The Council will seek the provision of facilities or contributions to the cost of infrastructure from developers through planning obligations where this is fairly and reasonably related in scale and kind to the proposed development. Due to the scale of some of the expected improvements and the levels of contributions it is possible that the contributions will be pooled until a time when larger projects can be implemented.
- 12.4 It should be noted that the Government is currently reviewing the system of obtaining planning obligations, therefore the method of seeking developer contributions in the Town Centre may need to be reviewed.
- 12.5 **Contributions will be sought from all developments, which have a direct or indirect impact on the Town Centre, towards the cost of delivering infrastructure including improvements to the environment, transportation, social and community facilities and resources, and the public realm.**

Question 11:

Do you agree with the proposed policies and proposals for a well-managed town centre? If not, please explain why, for example should the policies or proposals be expressed differently or are there other issues they should focus on?

13 Development Opportunities

- 13.1 Development potential has been assessed through a visual examination of buildings and structures. This considered the condition, conservation or listed status, business or economic use, surrounding context and contribution to townscape quality (character, continuity and enclosure, ease of movement, legibility, quality of the public realm, adaptability, and diversity). There are a number of areas and / or buildings, which do not contribute positively to the town's character, identity or urban structure and these are identified for redevelopment either now or in the future to enable the restructuring of the town and to allow a more efficient use to be made of land.

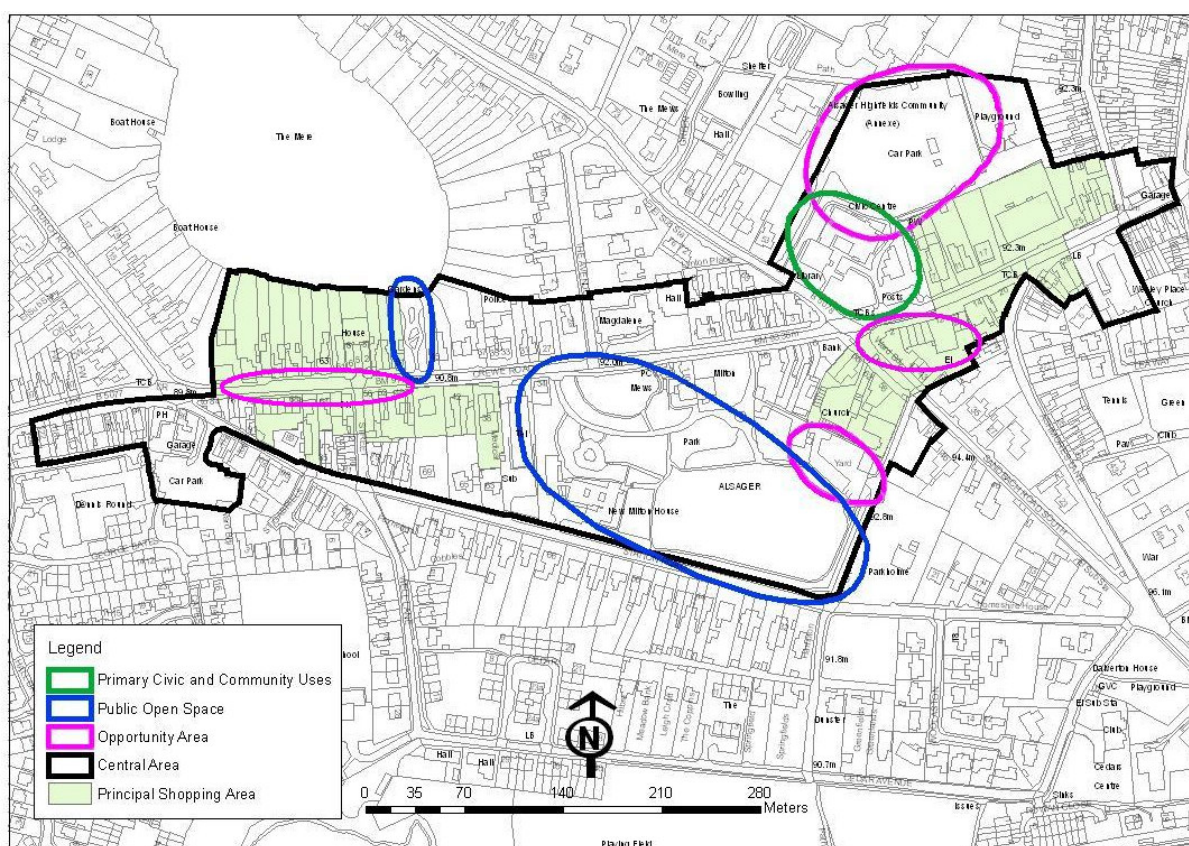


Diagram 6: Development Opportunities

Crewe Road Frontage

- 13.2 There is particular scope to encourage the development of restaurants and cafes within key areas of the Town Centre area. This would provide a focus to the town and would help stimulate the daytime and evening economy. Such an initiative would also act as a draw to capture the wealth identified within Alsager and its hinterland. The image of Alsager would be changed positively, and would have a beneficial effect on the retail provision.
- 13.3 The **Crewe Road Frontage** is considered to have potential to provide an improved evening economy offer. The success of the recently opened Café Wine Bar on Sandbach Road is a testament to this potential. Care should however be taken in relation to the potential provision of such facilities. The

residents' consultation exercise, undertaken by Erinaceous Planning, suggests that residents of Alsager have definite concerns over the provision of such facilities.

Within the Crewe Road Frontages proposals for A3 uses (Restaurants and Cafes) will be encouraged, particularly where they are utilising the upper floors. A4 (Drinking Establishments) and A5 uses will be permitted where they do not lead to a concentration of these uses, they retain a display frontage appropriate to a shopping area and accord with other policies of this SPD and the Local Plan.

No. 2-12 Lawton Road and 43-45 Sandbach Road South

- 13.4 **No. 2-12 Lawton Road and 43-45 Sandbach Road South** are considered to provide a significant opportunity for future development in the town centre.

The Council will support a suitable comprehensive redevelopment scheme of No. 2-12 Lawton Road and 43-45 Sandbach Road South provided that the resultant development provides:

- a. an improved sense of place;**
- b. an appropriate building to mark its landmark location in the town centre;**
- c. improved elevational and corner treatments, particularly to the key Lawton Road / Sandbach Road intersection;**
- d. for uses in conformity to the prevailing development plan policy; and**
- e. active frontages onto both Lawton Road and Sandbach Road South.**

Council Yard off Brookhouse Road

- 13.5 It is understood that the **Council Yard off Brookhouse Road** is now considered surplus and may be likely to come forward for redevelopment. The site adjoins Milton Park, a key strategic asset for the town centre and the way in which it is now developed is of importance to the area, and the park's environment.

- 13.6 Milton Park is an under-utilised asset within the Town Centre and there is a very clear desire to maximise its benefits for leisure in the town's renaissance. This area has the potential to be an important leisure / community hub for Alsager, maximising its frontage and relationship to the Park.

- 13.7 **The Council will support an appropriate redevelopment scheme where it enhances the links between the town centre and Milton Park and where the development provides an appropriate frontage on the Park.**

Civic Quarter

- 13.8 The **Civic Quarter** comprises a number of buildings in the ownership of the Council and others primarily used for civic functions including the Civic Hall and Library. Both the Civic Hall and Library are now somewhat dated and this SPD represents an opportunity to review these facilities and seek modern high quality provision. Library Services have indicated a willingness to work with any development on this site to ensure that Library Services are provided in

the best possible environment. It is also noted that the Council's Offices in Alsager are not fully occupied although they do contain One-Stop Shop facilities for Council services and as such represent an under-utilised asset.

- 13.9 **The Council will expect that any redevelopment of these buildings addresses the junction of Crewe Road, Lawton Road and Sandbach Road North and South. A landmark building or corner feature will be encouraged here. Any proposals should include replacement facilities for the Library, Civic Centre and Council Offices.** The Council will expect the buildings on this site to remain within the town centre and within a central and accessible location. If these buildings were to be redeveloped it will be important to ensure that the replacement buildings are fit for purpose and accessible for all.
- 13.10 A new and improved public space will also be expected to be provided if the current area is developed. The scheme should include improved surfacing and new street furniture. Any design should respond to the surrounding buildings and should help to create links to other areas of public space.

Town Centre Car Park

- 13.11 The **Town Centre Car Park and the surrounding area** have been identified by two developers as being suitable for redevelopment to provide a modern foodstore. The Council owns much of the land in this area and therefore an element of control of for the future development of this site lies with the Council. Currently, there is a valid planning permission to allow this site to be developed for retail development and another application has also been approved subject to a legal agreement.
- 13.12 The Council believes that this site is suitable for a retail development, in particular a convenience retail store.

The Council will support a suitable retail convenience development provided that the resultant development:

- a. provides an improved sense of place;**
- b. creates a well designed development which will help to make the town more attractive to potential shoppers;**
- c. is easily accessed from both Sandbach Road North and from Lawton Road;**
- d. provides a high quality frontage on to either / both Sandbach Road North and from Lawton Road;**
- e. retains an appropriate level of parking for the town centre and for the development itself;**
- f. provides a suitable alternative to replace the existing playground area;**
- g. creates an appropriate layout to manage the safe and efficient flow of traffic and people associated with the local schools;**
- h. provides an appropriate layout to limit the impacts of servicing the development; and**

- i. **makes provision for the retention of the local market, preferably in the form of a public space which can be used for a variety of occasional events and activities.**

Development Briefs

13.13 It is likely that the Council will now consider preparing Planning / Development Briefs for a number of these development opportunity areas before they are brought forward for development. The briefs will provide the necessary level of site specific detail to give prospective developers clarity on development and design requirements. They will also provide the opportunity for further consultation work with land owners and other key stakeholders. The briefs should build on the recommendations of this Strategy, and set out:

- Uses/mix of uses sought;
- Infrastructure and facility requirements;
- Planning standards to be applied and the degree of flexibility;
- Layout of the development including access, parking and circulation;
- Scale, massing and height of buildings;
- Landscaping;
- Buildings to be retained;
- Design criteria; and
- Off-site requirements (i.e. section 106 contributions).

Question 12:

Do you agree with the proposed development opportunities? If not, please explain why, for example should the policies or proposals be expressed differently or are there other issues they should focus on?

14 Next Steps, Monitoring and Implementation

Next Steps

- 14.1 This document will be subject to public consultation, after which all the representations received will be considered and amendments will be made to the SPD as appropriate. The SPD will then be adopted and will become a material consideration in the determination of planning applications.

Implementation

- 14.2 There are 5 main ways of implementing the strategy:

1. Determination of Planning Applications

2. Developer Contributions

The Council will seek developers to provide the infrastructure or measures required of the development.

3. Commercial Delivery of Development

Many of the aims of this strategy require the delivery of development, much of which will be provided by the private sector. Their skills need to be harnessed, and an open dialogue pursued where issues occur.

4. Provision of Public Services

The needs of public service providers (e.g. education, health, etc) will have to be taken into account in preparing this SPD. The same providers are asked also to consider the spatial objectives of this plan in the delivery of these services. This can be achieved by dialogue through the community strategy, Local Strategic Partnership and Local Area Agreement processes.

5. Regeneration Programmes

There are several complementary regeneration programmes that can deliver funding to carry out various works to the Town Centre area, mainly environmental improvements. Close working with the relevant organizations can realize both their visions and that of the SPD.

- 14.3 The Council also owns a number of key sites within Alsager Town Centre including the Civic Centre, the One Stop Shop, Fair View Car Park and the Depot site. As part of the process of stimulating investor interest and encouraging the development of other identified sites the Council will endeavour to bring forward Council owned land for redevelopment as an early phase of the implementation process. In bringing forward these sites particular emphasis will be given to the realisation of the Council's objectives as a showcase for best practice.
- 14.4 The key to the regeneration of Alsager, lies in the forming of robust and sustainable public – private partnerships. This brings together the leadership, planning powers, local knowledge and property assets of the public sector partners together with the development experience and investment potential of the private sector. There are several ways, in which development can be taken

forward; the most appropriate approach is dependent on the nature of ownerships and other complexities facing the site in question. These three approaches are:

- *Private Led*
Sites where private land owners can, under the guidance of a detailed planning brief, take forward land assembly and the development process themselves.
- *Public Asset Based*
Sites that are in public ownership and can be taken forward quickly to the private sector and delivered through a development agreement.
- *Public-Private Partnership*
Sites where the complexities of land ownership are likely to necessitate a combined public/private approach to acquiring and if necessary 'CPO-ing' the land before development can take place.

Monitoring

- 14.5 Within the Government's 'plan, monitor and manage' approach to the planning system, review and monitoring have become increasing important tools, particularly in relation to ensuring that LDF objectives and policies are being delivered and achieved.
- 14.6 The Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires local planning authorities to produce an Annual Monitoring Report (AMR), which forms the main assessment of the LDF. These cover the period from 1 April to 31 March each year and assess the implementation of the Local Development Scheme and the extent to which the policies in LDF are being achieved.
- 14.7 The AMR will highlight each of the objectives / indicators / targets set out in the LDF and will provide details on their progress and effectiveness. Regular monitoring will make sure that the SPD remains up to date and in line with current issues facing the Locality.

Appendix A: Contacts and Useful Information

General information

Further information relating to the purpose of the intended SPD:

To access a downloadable copy of the Planning Policy Guidance notes or Planning Policy Statements detailed in Section 2, or for further general planning information visit the Communities and Local Government website at <http://www.communities.gov.uk/> or for a hard copy contact Communities and Local Government by phone on 0870 1226 236.

Going to Town: Improving Town Centre Access can be downloaded free of charge from the National Retail Planning Forum (NRPF) at www.nrpf.org. A hard copy can also be purchased online at the same website address.

Vital and Viable Town Centres: Meeting the Challenge, is out of print. However, a photocopy of the original document can be purchased from The Stationery Office online at www.tso.co.uk or by phone: 0870 600 5522, Fax: 0870 600 5533 or email: customer.services@tso.co.uk.

You can find out about the planning system and how it works at www.planningportal.gov.uk.

Local Information

For further information on the local framework including: the Sustainable Community Strategy; Corporate Plan; the Local Transport Plan; and the Housing Strategy visit the Council website at www.cheshireeast.gov.uk or for a hard copy contact us via phone on 01270 529 529.

Appendix B: Glossary of Terms

Accessibility	The ease with which facilities of any kind can be reached by people wishing to use them.
Adoption	The point at which the final agreed version of a document comes fully into use.
Allocated site	Land which is acceptable in principle for development for a particular purpose and which is not already in use for that purpose and is therefore 'allocated' within the Development Plan. The development of such sites is still dependent on planning permission being obtained.
Annual Monitoring Report	A report on the progress of the Local Development Scheme and the policies of the Local Development Framework.
Brownfield	Brownfield land is that which is or was occupied by a permanent structure (excluding agricultural or forestry buildings), and associated fixed surface infrastructure. The definition includes the curtilage of the development. Brownfield land may occur in both built-up and rural settings. A precise definition is included in Planning Policy Statement 3 'Housing'.
Community Strategy	A Plan or Strategy for enhancing the quality of life of the local community which each local authority has a duty to prepare under the Local Government Act 2000. The plan is developed and implemented by the Local Strategic Partnership.
Conservation Area	An area of special architectural or historic interest, the character and appearance of which is desirable to preserve or enhance. Within a Conservation Area there are special controls over development and the felling of trees.
Cultural heritage	Places or things that are valued because they give us a sense of the past and of our cultural identity.
Development Plan	Comprises the relevant Regional Spatial Strategy and the Development Plan Documents contained within the Local Development Framework.
Development Plan Document	A Local Development Document with significant weight in the determination of planning applications. Independent scrutiny is required before its adoption.

Economic Development	The development of the economy of the Council area by the creation of employment opportunities.
Greenfield Sites	Land that has never been built on, usually grassland, farmland or heath.
Heritage	Things of value inherited or passed on from generation to generation, qualities which are worthwhile to preserve for prosperity.
Infrastructure	Roads, sewers, drainage and the availability of energy supplies at the most basic level, through to social infrastructure such as schools and community centres.
Listed Building	A building contained in a list of buildings of special architectural or historic interest prepared by the Secretary of State for the Culture, Media and Sport (under Section 1 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990).
Local Development Document	The collective term for Development Plan Documents, Supplementary Planning Documents and the Statement of Community Involvement.
Local Development Framework	New local planning policy documents, which collectively will be replacing the Local Plan.
Local Development Scheme	A programme setting out the proposed documents within the Local Development Framework and the timetable for their production.
Local Plan	These were produced by District Councils, such as Congleton Borough Council. A Local Plan, once adopted, provided detailed policies to guide development in the whole of the local authority area and includes detailed proposals for specific sites. The Local Development Framework will replace the Local Plan as it is produced.
Local Transport Plan	Plan prepared by Cheshire County Council detailing transport priorities and actions to be taken.
Local Strategic Partnership	Local strategic partnerships are bodies with representatives of the community, public, private sector and other agencies that work to encourage greater public participation in local governance by drawing together local community plans and producing an overall community strategy for each local authority area. LDFs must have regard to, and should be the spatial expression of, the community strategy.

Objective	A statement of what is intended, specifying the desired direction of change in trends.
Planning Policy Guidance (PPG)	A series of notes issued by the Government, setting out policy guidance on different aspects of planning. Local Planning Authorities must take their content into account in preparing their LDF.
Planning Policy Statement (PPS)	A series of statements issued by the Government, setting out policy on different aspects of planning. Local Planning Authorities must take their content into account in preparing their LDF.
Previously Developed Land (PDL)	Previously-developed land is that which is or was occupied by a permanent structure (excluding agricultural or forestry buildings), and associated fixed surface infrastructure. The definition includes the curtilage of the development. Previously-developed land may occur in both built-up and rural settings. A precise definition is included in Planning Policy Statement 3 'Housing'.
Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS)	Planning policy produced at a regional level to tackle issues of strategic importance that can be best dealt with over a larger area.
Renewable Energy	Energy flows that occur naturally and repeatedly in the environment (e.g. from sun, wind or wave or fall of water). Plant and some waste materials are also potential sources.
Spatial	Spatial planning goes beyond traditional land use planning to bring together and integrate policies for the development and use of land with other policies and programmes which influence the nature of places and how they function. This will include policies which can impact on land use, for example, by influencing the demands on or needs for development, but which are not capable of being delivered solely or mainly through the granting of planning permission and may be delivered through other means.
Stakeholders	Groups, individuals or organisations which may be affected by or have a key interest in a development proposal or planning policy. They may often be experts in their field or represent the views of many people.
Statement of Community Involvement	A Local Development Document setting out how the Council intends to engage the community and stakeholders in the Local Development Framework

Involvement	and the determination of planning applications.
Supplementary Planning Document (SPD)	A Local Development Document that holds less weight than a Development Plan Document when determining planning applications. An SPD provides additional guidance to development plan policies. It is not subject to an independent examination, but is subject to community and stakeholder involvement.
Sustainability Appraisal (SA)	Appraisals of plans, strategies and proposals to test them against the four broad objectives set out in the Government's sustainable development strategy.
Town centres	Town centres will usually be the second level of centres after city centres and, in many cases, they will be the principal centre or centres in a local authority's area. In rural areas they are likely to be market towns and other centres of similar size and role which function as important service centres, providing a range of facilities and services for extensive rural catchment areas. In planning the future of town centres, local planning authorities should consider the function of different parts of the centre and how these contribute to its overall vitality and viability.

Appendix C: Plans, Policies and Strategies

Local Plan

This SPD supplements Policy S1, S4, S5 and S6 of the Local Plan, which provide policy for the development of the town centres within the Borough. The full text of these policies is provided below:

S1 - Shopping Hierarchy

Proposals for shopping and commercial development will only be permitted where the scale, nature and location reflects the following hierarchy of settlements and areas as specified in the subsequent policies of the local plan:

- Towns (policies S2 to S6)
- Villages (policies S7 & S8)
- Open countryside and green belt (policy S9)

S4 - Principal Shopping Areas

Within the principal shopping areas as defined on the proposals map⁴ proposals for further non-retail uses at ground floor will not be permitted (other than proposals involving the change of use of A1 premises to A2 or A3 uses).

Proposals for the change of use of existing A1 ground floor retail uses to A2 or A3 uses will only be permitted where all of the following criteria are satisfied:

- i) The proposed use is complimentary to adjacent shopping uses in terms of its operational characteristics;
- ii) The proposed use retains a display frontage appropriate to a shopping area;
- iii) The proposed use does not lead to a concentration of non A1 uses;
- iv) The proposal accords with other policies of the local plan.

S5 - Other Town Centre Areas

Within the town centre not otherwise defined as a principal shopping area, proposals for non-retail uses at ground floor level will be permitted where the proposed use is a commercial, leisure, entertainment, community or civic use appropriate to the town centre, or for residential use on the periphery of the town centre, where all of the following criteria are satisfied:

- i) The proposed use does not on its own or in combination with other existing non-retail uses detract from the overall town centre function of the area;
- ii) There is no detrimental impact on the amenities of any future occupier from existing adjacent uses;
- iii) The proposal has no detrimental impact on the amenities of adjacent properties;

⁴ (The Proposals maps are too large to be included within this document, however they are available on the Council's website at www.congleton.gov.uk)

- iv) The proposal accords with other policies of the local plan.

S6 - The Use Of Upper Floors Within Town Centres

Proposals for the use of upper floors within town centres for non-retail use, including B1 office use or conversion into self-contained flats, will be permitted where the proposal meets the following requirements:

- i) A reasonable standard of accommodation is capable of being provided;
- ii) No detrimental impact on the amenities of any future occupier, from existing adjacent uses;
- lii) No detrimental impact on the amenities of other occupiers of the property or adjacent properties;
- iv) Separate access to the accommodation is provided;
- v) No detrimental alterations are required on principal facades;
- vi) Availability of car parking in the vicinity;
- vii) Accordance with other policies of the local plan.

Appendix D: Local Issues

Retail

- 14.8 In recent years the health and vitality of the town centre has suffered from a decline due to a lack of private sector investment. The retail offer is currently limited. The main shopping area of the town at the junction of B5077 and the B5078 comprises approximately 102 retail units⁵, the majority of which are based within the main retail area. This area contains a mix of units dated from the Victorian era but with considerable modern (1970s) infilling. The retail frontages are separated by Sandbach Road which although provided with traffic-light controlled pedestrian crossing facilities is an impediment to free movement between the two areas.
- 14.9 The table below indicates the composition of Alsager Town centre at July 2006 based on a survey undertaken by WYG. The results obtained are compared with the average composition for UK town centres at 2006 as defined by Goad.

Sector	No. of Outlets	% of Outlets		Floorspace (sq. m)	% of Floorspace	
		Alsager	GB		Alsager	GB
Convenience	12	12.37	8.47	2,222	20.05	13.87
Comparison	22	22.68	37.34	2,586	23.34	40.36
Retail Service	27	27.84	12.62	2,301	20.76	6.92
Leisure Service	16	16.49	20.67	1,475	13.31	22.34
Financial & Business Services	13	13.40	11.59	1,386	12.51	9.12
Vacant	7	7.22	9.30	1,111	10.03	7.39
TOTAL	97	100	100	11,081	100	100

Source: Cheshire Town Centre Study 2006 to 2021, WYG (2006)

- 14.10 The comparison goods sector of the retail market is generally represented by franchised or family run local businesses catering for day-to-day requirements. The range of foods on offer is limited and relates to everyday consumables as opposed to larger comparison purchases.
- 14.11 The August 2006 Shopper Survey of Alsager and other centres carried out by NEMS Market Research on behalf of White Young Green confirms the position of those people surveyed visiting Alsager. The survey revealed that 0.0% of users indicated that their main reason for visiting was to purchase clothes and shoes, with similar responses in relation to furniture and carpets and jewellery and gifts, trips to carry out higher order purchases were completely absent from Alsager.
- 14.12 Outside food shopping, which we discuss below, the main reasons given for visiting Alsager were:

- Work / school / college 14.6%
- Chemist 7.3%

⁵ Congleton Borough Council Retail Schedule 2008

- Library 7.3%
- Bank / Building Society / Post Office 7.3%
- Social / Leisure Activity 5.2% ⁶

14.13 To some extent, the results are a function of Alsager's position in the overall shopping hierarchy. Given comparison goods retailers desire to comprise part of a critical mass, the town's future commercial prosperity should not be based upon attracting comparison goods retailers. If comparison retailers are attracted to the town on the strength of other investment this should be seen as a "spin off" benefit. The amount of new floorspace required to establish Alsager as a comparison goods retailing location would run counter to national, regional and sub-regional planning policies. The principal locations for non-food shopping favoured by those questioned in Alsager were:

- Crewe Town Centre 25.9%
- Stoke-on-Trent 17.6% ⁷

14.14 In relation to food retailing, this currently is anchored by a stand alone Co-Op food market with 642 square metres net (775 square metres gross) floorspace offer. The store is somewhat dated and is set back slightly from the main road, separated by a row of mature trees; a change in levels with the store sitting lower than Sandbach Road. Customer car parking facilities are provided to the front and rear of the store.

14.15 Worryingly from a commercial prospective the NEMS market research found that only 21.9% of people questioned viewed Alsager as their main food shopping location. The town is suffering considerable "shopping leakage". That is to say a flow of expenditure out of the town centre. It is clear however, from the Residents Survey that the provision of a new food superstore within the Town Centre would be welcomed. Of those people responding to the Residents Survey 81% considered that more people would shop in Alsager if food shopping provision were improved.

14.16 Principal alternative shopping locations were given as being:-

- Kidsgrove 20.8%
- Crewe 11.5%
- Newcastle-under-Lyne 11.5%
- Stoke-on-Trent 9.4% ⁸

14.17 Further the NEMS research shows that of the people questioned who visited Alsager who were carrying out food shopping 88.5% indicated that they would not be buying anything else.

14.18 The existing businesses within the town were also asked what they considered to be the main constraints upon business performance in the town (other than high rents and overheads). The two most significant constraints were considered to be:

⁶ NEMS Market Research

⁷ NEMS Market Research

⁸ NEMS Market Research

- Competition from elsewhere 8.6%
- Lack of footfall outside premises 10.9%⁹

14.19 In terms of potential prime rents in Alsager, the Valuation Office Rating List 2005 shows that Zone A rents on Lawton Road are in the region of £215 per sq. m (£20 per sq. ft) and around £140 per sq. m (£13 per sq. ft) on Station Road.

Leisure

14.20 The NEMS survey found that only very limited numbers of people visited the town centre for non-retailing leisure related activities. Only 1% of those questioned visited Alsager for entertainment as frequently as fortnightly with 34.4% and 37.5% answering that they never visited Alsager or that they visited “elsewhere” respectively. The town centre fared little better in terms of the use of its pubs, bars and clubs, with only 15.4% visiting more frequently than fortnightly.

Employment

14.21 There are currently 7,810¹⁰ people of working age within Alsager, with an unemployment rate of 1%¹¹. CACI household paycheck data from 2007 suggests that the average household income in Alsager is £36,200, this compares to an average of £36,100 for Cheshire and £37,300 for Congleton Borough.

14.22 Work carried out by Land Use Consultants, Rural Innovation and Jacqui Blenkinsip on behalf of the North West Regional Assembly shows that the Alsager Travel to work area is a net exporter of employment with some 2,371 employees net travelling each day to work elsewhere. The work concluded that:

“Alsager and Sandbach lose around a third of their working population a day in net terms, and for their size are relatively weak employment centres. In addition these outflows are disproportionately made up of employees of more senior occupational groups, and employment in the town is based towards traditional sections of employment.”¹²

Residential

14.23 Work carried out by Land Use Consultants, Rural Innovation and Jacqui Blenkinsip on behalf of the North West Regional Assembly also identified Alsager has a housing market with a comparatively strong property price with a need to ensure affordable housing exists within the market place.

14.24 The current¹³ average house price for property in Alsager (£217,258) is higher than the averages for both Congleton and Cheshire. Diagram 7 compares these prices graphically and the prices for different types of houses. It should

⁹ White Young Green Business Survey

¹⁰ Office for National Statistics (ONS) population estimates and Cheshire County Council small area population estimates

¹¹ Office for National Statistics, NOMIS, December 2007

¹² The North West Key Service Centres – Roles and Functions, South Cheshire sub Region – Final Report

¹³ Jan – March 2008

be noted that as only a small number of properties will have been sold in Alsager during this period the house price data may be subject to discrepancies.

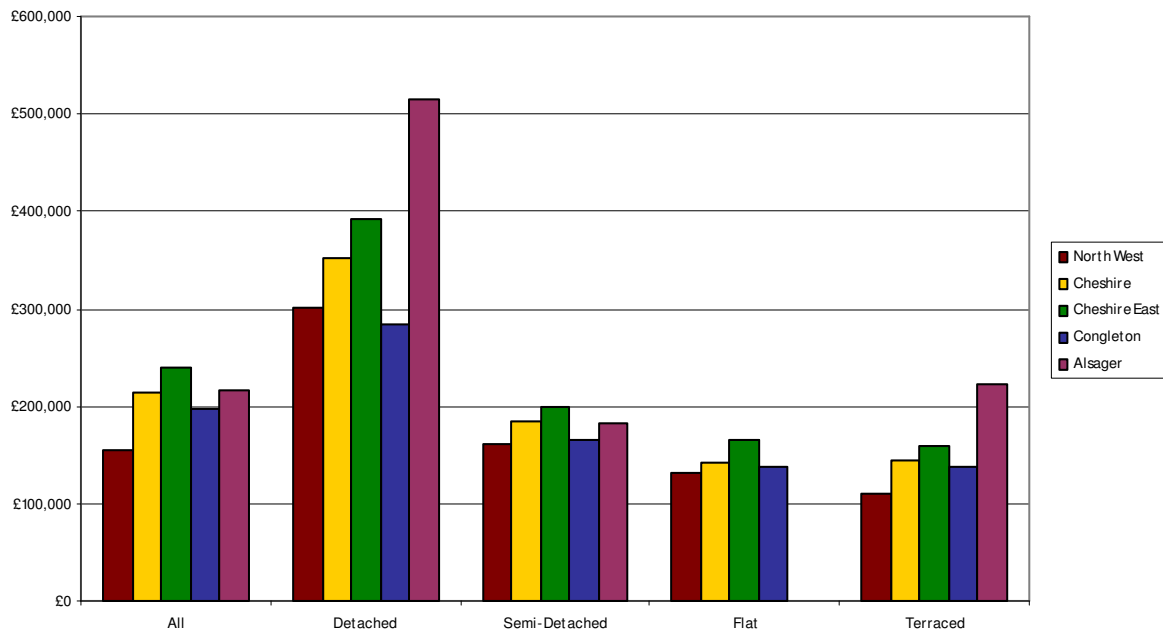


Diagram 7: Comparison of average house prices for the North West, Cheshire, Congleton and Alsager

Source: Land Registry for period January to March 2008, Alsager – www.home.co.uk

Accessibility

14.25 The town of Alsager is situated on the B5077. It is located approximately 3 miles to the north-east of Junction 16 of the M6 Motorway. Buses (Number 20 service) operate to Crewe and Hanley every 20 minutes. Regional Route 70 passes to the west of the town. The 78 bus service links Alsager with Sandbach and Congleton. Covered bus shelters with seats are provided in the centre.

14.26 There is a railway station on Sandbach Road South, a 10 minute walk south of the town centre. The Trent and Mersey Canal runs just to the north-east of the town, forming part of the Cheshire Ring Canal Walk and the South Cheshire Way footpath. The canal's towpath and the nearby 'Salt Line' are also national routes of the National Cycle Network. Bike racks have been provided in certain parts of the town centre.

14.27 The town has two off-road car parks. To the rear of the Civic Centre, Library and Council offices off Sandbach Road North is the largest off-road parking facility, although another car park is located off Station Road. Furthermore the Co-op supermarket on Lawton Road has dedicated off-road customer parking. Parking in the town is free. Elsewhere in the town centre along Crewe Road on-street parking is also available.

14.28 The street layout in the centre encourages movement by foot, although the two Principal Shopping Areas appear separated and there is little evidence of

shoppers walking between them. Pavements around the town are wide and smooth. The eastern town centre area is busy with vehicular traffic which does create an additional pedestrian hazard, mitigated to some extent by several pedestrian crossings. There is also an issue with traffic congestion which can lead to traffic tailing back from the traffic lights at the Lawton Road/ Crewe Road/ Sandbach Road junction.

- 14.29 The western end of Alsager is quieter in terms of vehicles although traffic flows at greater speed. In this part of town pavements are lowered at their edges to provide a continuous surface for pedestrians. However, no pedestrian crossings currently exist in the area.

Environmental Quality

- 14.30 Retail units in the west of the town centre area are predominately semi detached two-storey properties, although some purpose built units also exist. This area is dominated by leisure services and retail units are interspersed with residential properties.

- 14.31 The eastern end of Alsager is centred upon a green, in front of the town's civic buildings. This colourful area is well planted with shrubs and flowers and appears well maintained. Units in the area are a range of styles and types with occupied units generally well maintained. Units in this area are also two-storey in the main, with footfall being relatively high. As highlighted previously the road here is busy with traffic which causes negative externalities, including noise and pollution.

- 14.32 The town centre has adequate street furniture. CCTV is in operation throughout the centre, bins and covered bus stops with seating provided throughout, whilst a public notice board and benches are provided in the eastern town centre area. Pedestrian signage is also incorporated. Alsager as a whole is clean and tidy with no litter, fly-posting or graffiti evident.

Population

- 14.33 Population forecasts to 2016 estimate that the population in the Borough will continue to grow in the medium term. This is likely to be accompanied by significant changes to the age range of the population - the number of children and young adults is likely to decline whilst the number aged above 45 is projected to grow significantly by 2016. This has significant implications for the provision of housing and services.

Appendix E: SWOT Analysis

Undertaken by the Alsager Partnership (January 2008)

STRENGTHS

Population

- Good life expectancy supported by modern health care – new medical centre

Community

- Charities (strong volunteering body and identity)
- Strong community spirit – “Village” image and identity with strong local heritage
- Local action groups e.g. Bloom Group, Milton Park Volunteers

Environment

- The Mere
- Countryside – Green and wide open spaces and green fields
- Trees – important feature of the town (many with TPOs)
- Victorian architecture and designs
- Quality new businesses/buildings – e.g. Senate Training
- Manor House Hotel – quality accommodation

Education

- Excellent pre-school/nursery provision
- Outstanding local schools attracting students from out of the area

Leisure Offering

- Varied offer with clubs and activities (gym, dance, ACT) appealing to various population segments, and also including a skate park for the youth
- Leisure centre (indoor/outdoor) also running good youth clubs
- Sports Organisations
- Community Theatre
- Civic facilities in centre of town – accessible to all
- Students’ population (MMU) – to 2010

Recreation

- The Bank Corner Pub (great success – trendy, modern, convivial atmosphere) – attracting visitors from outside, and now creating need for a Hackney cab stand in town
- Open countryside/walks for all age groups
- Well used Civic Centre, centrally located with parking
- Quality independent shops
- “Destination businesses” encouraging visitors (e.g. William R, Wall Street, Sash, Craft Addicts)

Events

- Regular market, Carnival, Christmas market and lights, one world week, bonfire, old peoples concert, fair trade fortnight.

Location and Access

- Good transport links
- Free parking in central location
- Close to M6 motorway and airports (Liverpool, Manchester, Birmingham & Midlands)
- Closeness to three major cities – Manchester, Liverpool, Birmingham

WEAKNESSES**Branding and Identity**

- Lack of coordinated design and vision
- No unique selling points e.g. top quality restaurants to bring in outside visitors
- Negative postcode connotation – Postcode: ST7 viewed as a negative. Alsager is perceived to be in Stoke on Trent as opposed to Cheshire. This affects issues such as perception of the quality of businesses, cost of insurance, and tourism.

Buildings

- Lack of affordable housing
- Dated civic centre

Recreation

- People Dine away, Dance away, Entertain away
- Proliferation of charity shops (strong volunteering identity)
- Limited food offering – lack of gourmet restaurants
- No visitor attractions
- Lack of cultural input – museum, gallery space
- Lack of some services e.g. top quality restaurants and gentlemen's outfitters

Youth Needs and Behaviour

- “Tired” leisure facilities e.g. ageing leisure centre, needs updating, lack of quality gym,
- Lack of youth entertainment with limited socialising opportunities
- Drinking culture – teenager residents

Crime related issues

- Limited policing – not enough police presence at the times required (“no go zone” on Friday/Saturday evenings)
- Vandalism – In all areas of the town
- Litter
- Inflated crime perceptions?

Infrastructure

- Poor road quality
- “Challenging” town centre layout
- Location – Town centre sited on a busy ‘b’ road
- Poor image of some buildings e.g. One shop building in prime central position
- Public buildings – unattractive sixties/seventies designs, not catering to

- modern standards e.g. civic centre
- Poor standard paving and road surfaces.
- Unkempt shop frontages
- Lack of pedestrian area.
- Poor signage – car parks, play areas, Milton park, the mere etc
- Lack of adequate street lighting, dated lighting columns
- Poor access to the Mere which has visitor potential,
- Limited parking on peak days – Mondays for U3A and market day.

East Ward

- Disadvantaged area
- Poor cultural integration
- Split homes
- Poor policing
- Drugs
- Anti-social behavior
- Litter and graffiti
- Damage through vandalism
- Crime

OPPORTUNITIES

POLITICAL OPPORTUNITIES

EU Policy and Funding

- Grants – East Ward of Alsager if criteria were broadened

Waste recycling

- EU recommendations.– green open spaces/green belt

Domestic Government policy

- LGR- potential increased support/input for Town Council
- Dialogue with new authority
- Alsager Town Council becomes stronger second tier in new structure
- More scope for cooperation and joint initiatives

Trade

- Legislation – Chamber of Trade's opportunity to define strategy
- Trade associations – Local Chamber of Trade
- Fair Trade Town

National government

- Planning (Regional Spatial Strategy)
- Partnership needs to be briefed and further involved
- Housing allocation and schemes (30 % new estates have to be affordable)
- Promote outdoor/health activities
- Grants for East Ward of Alsager if criteria were broadened

ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES

Retail

- One-stop shopping Freeport- possibility to link in to visitor opportunities
- Diversity of shopping opportunities

MMU closure

- Opportunity to support community use of retained facilities and influence appropriate and acceptable development of North side of site

Funding

- Community charge (revenue regeneration). This however needs further consultation and explanation (“What money is spent on – better services”)
- Funding increasingly available to voluntary organizations
- QUIRK report – Transfer of assets to third sector
- Need for managerial and financial skills to capitalize on opportunities
- High residence income
- Alsager focused (White Young Green retail capacity report highlighting opportunities to channel local spend)

Town Management

- Town Centre Management’s position and role to be considered
- Town design and strategic vision
- Town Centre redevelopment
- Emerging European markets with associated immigration & migrant workers
- Maximise economic and social benefits of MMU redevelopment

SOCIETAL OPPORTUNITIES

Retail

- White Young Green Paper (retail capacity in Cheshire Towns)
- More shopping opportunities generating greater footfall:
 - Supermarket
 - More small shops
 - More of a variety of shops
 - Chamber of Trade marketing activities

Recreation

- Rural leisure offering – walking, canal, golf club, tennis, football, cricket
- Voluntary organizations (over 100 in Alsager)
- Identify, improve, map and promote local tourist walks
- Weaver Valley Scheme (potential)
- Enhancement of Northolme and Coronation Gardens
- Adult and children physical activities features in town’s park
- **Milton Park**
 - Develop and improve play area
 - Attraction for older population
 - Community use and focus (events)

- **The Mere**

- Attractive natural environment with historical/geographical interest with potential development for wildlife observation, wildlife information boards, field visits (pond dipping), public art displays (temporary and permanent) and leasing of adjacent property for additional public access

Population

- Ageing population – added local experience and revenue
- Housing increased need for retirement properties and bungalows
- Residents are prepared to invest on improvements to Alsager if they are informed of the reasons and the improvements to services (e.g. investment in Partnership Projects from the Town Council- additional precept raised without objection).
- Partnership involvement/support to develop improvement strategy and encourage involvement of wider community

Crime Concerns

- Police presence in response to crime levels' perception (PCSO's)

Heritage

- Town's industrial (tourism and exhibitions), Victorian (architecture), historical (tourism and events) heritage e.g. famous residents / alumni
- The above need further protection and enhancement
- Opportunities to further develop strong community sense (Alsager's belonging and ownership feeling)

Clubs and Organisations

- Mentoring opportunities for young people groups (educational skills and leisure time), encouraging involvement with local organizations.
- Local action groups – Clean Team /Bloom group
- Refurbishment or replacement of the Civic Centre (depending on funding)

TECHNOLOGICAL OPPORTUNITIES

Community

- Library - Buddy IT system
- Alsager Youth project
- U3A Computer courses (academic and languages courses)
- Develop tailored IT packages to address the specific needs of the local population
- Schools (reviving Learn Direct Centre)
- Developing IT links and training with local private and business sector e.g. Senate Training

Information Technology

- Broadband – Loyalty scheme (potential to develop town scheme)
- New website – Marketing Alsager with dedicated and IT literate Town Press Officer

- WiFi in Bank Corner Public House – Internet Café possibility to encourage social mix
- CAT (Community Action Team) meetings – Open for public, additional means of communication

THREATS

POLITICAL THREATS

EU policy

- Lack of information and expertise
- Climate change

Domestic Government policy (current uncertainty)

- Town Council – extent of power and budget limited
- Dilution of local representation in new authority
- Legislation – codes of practice and health and safety processes slow down initiatives
- Uncontrollable and dictated from above
- LGR – what voice will Alsager /The Partnership have in the new authority?

ECONOMIC THREATS

Financial concerns

- H.M. Government's fiscal policy
- Community charge (local resentment)
- Unemployment rates are higher in East Ward compared to rest of Borough average
- Residents spending power does not necessarily come to Alsager
- Financial crisis: Income higher, but there is lower disposable income, due to fiscal policies, taxation, utility price increases.

Employment issues

- MMU entirely relocating to Crewe – Loss of major employer
- Migrant workers' increasing population
- Poor railway link (commuting and ageing population needs)

Retail

- MMU Closure: Some businesses in the town rely heavily on student custom, and will suffer as the student population moves to Crewe.

SOCIETAL THREATS

Population

- Ageing population
- Changing housing needs
 - Failure to address home starters / young professionals / family markets
 - Increased need for retirement properties and bungalows
 - Vulnerable population with accrued perception of insecurity

Employment

- Failure to retain younger population through employment opportunities.

Crime related issues

- Drinking culture
- Friday and Saturday nights insecurity (town centre – “no-go zone”)

Environment

- Area’s larger supermarkets
- Litter – particularly around school areas
- Under-used Milton Park
 - Lack of policing
 - Undesirable location at night time
 - Noise nuisance
- **The Mere**
 - Limited access
 - Poor local awareness

TECHNOLOGICAL THREATS**Information Technology**

- Library with limited IT facilities
- New website – lack of expertise and maintenance
- Lack of interest in the website
- No Press Officer – lack of local representation

Skills and Training

- Loss of the local “Learn Direct” facility
- MMU (Loss of major learning centre)

Town’s IT print

- ST7 postcode area – confusion leading to:
 - Increased insurance premiums
 - Customer and supplier confusion
 - Confusing branding perception of Alsager as a Staffordshire / Stoke town, NOT a Cheshire town

Appendix F: Relationships between Issues, Vision and Objectives

Issue	Vision	Objective
Need to sustain and enhance the vitality and viability of town and village centres across the Borough	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> strong and viable town centre 	To maintain Alsager Town Centre as a vital and viable town centre area, with a variety of shops to meet the needs of the local residents, as well as a number of specialist shops and stalls that draw in visitors from further a field.
Low level of comparison floorspace and units compared to national averages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> strong and viable town centre meeting the needs of a wide range of residents, visitors and workers providing a self-sustaining mix of use 	
Lack of people visiting Alsager for certain comparison goods, such as clothes, furniture and jewellery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> meeting the needs of a wide range of residents, visitors and workers providing a self-sustaining mix of use 	
Low proportion of people visiting Alsager as their main shopping location	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> strong and viable town centre meeting the needs of a wide range of residents, visitors and workers 	
Outstanding retail capacity for both convenience and comparison shopping	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> strong and viable town centre meeting the needs of a wide range of residents, visitors and workers providing a self-sustaining mix of use 	
Low proportion of people visiting Alsager for leisure purposes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> strong and viable town centre meeting the needs of a wide range of residents, visitors and workers providing a self-sustaining mix of use 	To support a good range of high quality, accessible, leisure, cultural and community facilities, to meet the needs of local residents, workers and visitors.

Issue	Vision	Objective
Quality of public buildings such as the Civic Centre and One Stop Shop	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> meeting the needs of a wide range of residents, visitors and workers well designed 	
Deficiency of cultural facilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> meeting the needs of a wide range of residents, visitors and workers providing a self-sustaining mix of use 	
Main vehicular route runs through town centre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> strong and viable town centre safe, accessible and well maintained environment. 	To improve accessibility within the Town Centre for all pedestrians and cyclists and to the Town Centre by pedestrians, cyclists and all other means of transport.
Lack of cohesive image and distinctive character	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> well designed, focused and integrated centre 	To create a distinctive character for the Town Centre that will inspire a sense of pride amongst local residents, workers and visitors.
Need to improve the quality of the building architecture and design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> well designed, focused and integrated centre safe, accessible and well maintained environment 	
Need to preserve and enhance trees and green spaces within and adjacent to the town centre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> well designed, focused and integrated centre well maintained environment 	
Increasingly ageing population	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> meeting the needs of a wide range of residents, visitors and workers safe, accessible and well maintained environment 	To provide an accessible, high quality, safe and attractive public realm and new public spaces that will form the heart of civic life.
Perceived community safety issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> safe, accessible and well maintained environment 	To provide a well managed and safe Town Centre.

Appendix G: Materials Palette

A robust selection of simple, sustainable finishes is suggested to emphasise the quality of the town centre. It is proposed that this palette be rigorously applied to the town centre.

Paving

- Street design shall comply with the Highways Authority standards
- Paving materials should be of a high quality, durable and suitable for the anticipated loading.
- Kerb lines should be retained and defined by both material and a low change in level (25 mm drop) to improve accessibility for disabled people and shopmobility vehicles.
- Pedestrian crossing points shall be defined by tactile paving where necessary at crossing points and contrasting paving materials/ colour at uncontrolled crossings.
- Inspection chamber covers shall be carefully integrated within the paving.

Street Furniture

- High quality street furniture should reflect and enhance the character of the town centre and should be appropriately placed to reduce clutter while enhancing pedestrian spaces.
- The design of the street furniture should be coordinated using a limited pattern of traditional materials such as stone, wood and metal. The design should have a timeless quality that is capable of accommodating future additions or changes.
- It should be sustainable, durable, easy to maintain and resistant to vandalism.
- Where appropriate the design and layout of seats and benches should define and enclose spaces as well as provide seating.

Signage

- An integrated hierarchy of pedestrian and traffic signage should be developed to minimise the overall size and number of signs.
- Finger posts will need to be carefully sited to avoid creating unnecessary clutter and/or hazards for the visually impaired.
- Traditional wall-mounted signs or signs set in paving should be included at features of interest and at main pedestrian orientation points.

Lighting

- Primarily, lighting will be designed to provide the required levels for safety, security, traffic management and pedestrian flow.
- Feature lighting should be used to enhance landmarks.
- Pedestrian links should be clearly and attractively lit for safety, security and to encourage night time activity within the town centre.