



Cheshire East Town Centre Vitality Plans

Town Centre Vitality Plan Report

December 2022



Prepared by Cushman and Wakefield,
Optimised Environments and Mott
Macdonald for Cheshire East Council

December 2022

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Context of the Study

Town Centres across the UK are facing unprecedented challenges. Changes in how we shop, in particular the growth in internet shopping, has significantly decreased footfall in Town Centres resulting in numerous store closures, leaving many centres struggling. Trends that have only been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Government has stated its commitment to helping high streets and Town Centres evolve and adapt to both the structural changes that are occurring in the retail market as well as to COVID-19. It has identified a number of measures to support Town Centres at this challenging time including the Future High Streets Fund, a High Streets Task Force, changes to the planning system and direct support to local authorities and local businesses. Alongside these national measures the government has stressed the need for strong local leadership in supporting Town Centres.

Town Centre Vitality Plans

Cheshire East Council (CEC) is committed to supporting the vitality and viability of all Town Centres within the borough. Whilst acknowledging that in areas of low deprivation, there may be limited opportunity to bid for centralised funding. When funding opportunities do become available, there is generally a need to have clear proposals already agreed before bids can be submitted.

It is also recognised that there are often initiatives which can be taken to support the vitality and viability of local centres which do not require significant capital funding, but rather require the support of local volunteers and/or businesses.

In addition, the reports could be used to support discussions regarding the allocation of S106 monies resulting from development within and in the vicinity of the local centres.

With an almost overwhelming array of options and opinions on what is the best way to support Town Centre vitality and viability, CEC has commissioned Cushman & Wakefield (regeneration and property advisors), supported by Optimised Environments (urban designers) and Mott Macdonald (transport planners), to work with the Town Council’s and their stakeholders to produce bespoke Town Centre Vitality Plans (TCVP) for the nine Key Service Centres (KSC):



The 9 Key Service Centres which form part of this study

Aims and Objectives

The TCVP provides a sense of direction and identify initiatives to support the nine key service centres to better fulfil their potential recognising that each centre is distinct, with its own unique opportunities and specific challenges and local groups/stakeholders. The unique characteristics of each centre is identified along with tailored solutions for each.

The TCVPs:

- Are bespoke in nature, based on a thorough analysis of individual circumstances affecting the health of each Town Centre, local stakeholder views and any local specific policy considerations.
- Are cross functional and holistic, and recommend a practical, realistic set of priority actions for supporting the vitality and viability of each Town Centre.
- Are informed and tested by existing relevant national and local public policy and strategies, local stakeholder views, relevant research and a thorough understanding of commercial markets and spatial considerations.
- Identify a set of recommended clear priority physical and other (e.g. marketing) interventions/actions to support the vitality and viability of each Town Centre both in recovery from COVID-19 impacts and beyond to enhancement.
- Recommend deliverable actions including who should be involved in delivering of each action identified, to enable Town Councils, community groups, occupiers, property owners etc., to all work towards a common vision.
- Take account of proposals developed/being developed by Town Councils and develop such plans further.

Responding to the Impacts of COVID

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic hit, high streets and Town Centres were having to respond to changing consumer demands driven in part by technological changes. Many recognised the increasing importance of the consumer experience - an attractive place to dwell, shop, see friends, to eat out and be entertained. COVID-19 has led to an acceleration of changes to the reasons people visit and use local centres.

COVID-19 has not and will not be universally negative for all local centres. The requirement to stay local has supported residents to use their local facilities and where the local offer aligns with the demands of residents, local businesses have benefited. The need to work from home has also resulted in an re-evaluation of where we work going forward and it is anticipated that there has been a fundamental shift, for some, in the balance between the amount of time we spend in an office and the amount of time we work from home.

It will be some time before a clear picture emerges of the impact of new forms of working (a hybrid between office and home) have on our high streets in the longer-term. The impact will be felt differently from place to place depending on the local economy's dependency on particular sectors. It is likely that those centres that perform best going forward will be those able to reconnect with

their communities and use them to meet local needs including access to housing, culture, leisure, health etc.

The Town Centre Vitality Plans have been prepared post the outbreak of COVID-19. The impact of COVID-19 on each of the centres has been different. The bespoke Vitality Plans will provide an action plan to support recovery and future success.

Vitality Plan and Toolkit

The Vitality Report comprises of two sections:

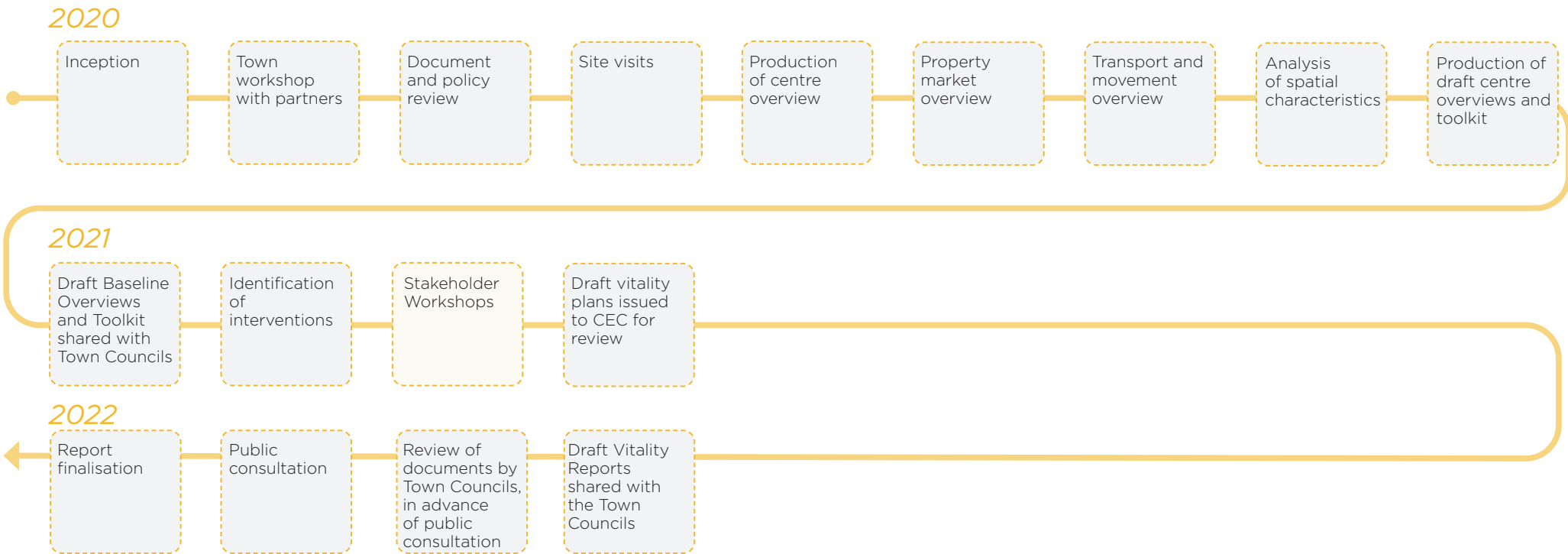
- Baseline – which was undertaken in 2020 and describes the Centre in terms of its offer and key characteristics. It brings together evidence and opinion in respect of the buildings, green and open spaces, access and its residents and businesses
- Action Plan – has been prepared in collaboration with the Town Council and its Partners and identifies actions which seek to support the established Vision and Objectives for the Centre responding to its challenges and opportunities. It sets out a series of actions, identifying a small number of priorities

for intervention which will have the greatest impact on improving the vitality of the Centre

The draft TCVPs went to public consultation for six weeks from September 2022. Feedback was reviewed and where appropriate amendments have been made to the final report. A summary of other key messages have been shared with key stakeholders.

The Action Plan should be read in conjunction with the Toolkit. The Toolkit presents exemplar projects from other centres (including from within Cheshire East) nationally and internationally to assist key stakeholders to determine a set of actions to support their centres to thrive. There is not a pot of money available to support the delivery of the Vitality Plan. Rather the Vitality Plan has been prepared as a resource to support accessing funding.

The preparation of the Vitality Plans has involved the following stages:



Baseline

Note:
The Baseline analysis was undertaken in 2020. The information in the Baseline was correct and the sources were the most update at that time. It is recognised that in some cases more up to date information is available. Whilst it is not possible to keep updating all the evidence where a significant change has happened, it has been noted that Census 2011 data is provided for some indicators. Whilst the 2021 Census has just been completed, a release of this data will not be made available until March 2023 therefore making the 2011 Census the most recent consistent data source across the 9 centres for some key indicators.

02 Introduction to Alsager

Alsagers’s Location within Cheshire East

Alsager is located in the south of the Cheshire East borough, 7 miles east of Crewe and 10 miles north of Stoke-on Trent in the adjoining borough. The town’s proximity to the M6 provides excellent strategic road connectivity to Manchester, Manchester Airport, Birmingham and beyond. Alsager Train Station is a short walk from the Town Centre and has a regular daily service to Crewe, Stoke-on-Trent and Birmingham allowing connections to London via the West Coast Main Line. As such, the town enjoys excellent local, regional and national connectivity.

Although Alsager has the status of a town and key service centre, it has retained its village atmosphere despite significant development that has led to population growth.. The town has established itself as an attractive residential location offering easy commuting to employment destinations, set within open countryside surroundings and providing a range of high quality homes within walking distance of its centre.

Many of the homes in Alsager are detached or semi-detached and there is a greater number of bungalows than many other parts of the borough reflecting both a relatively affluent and older population.

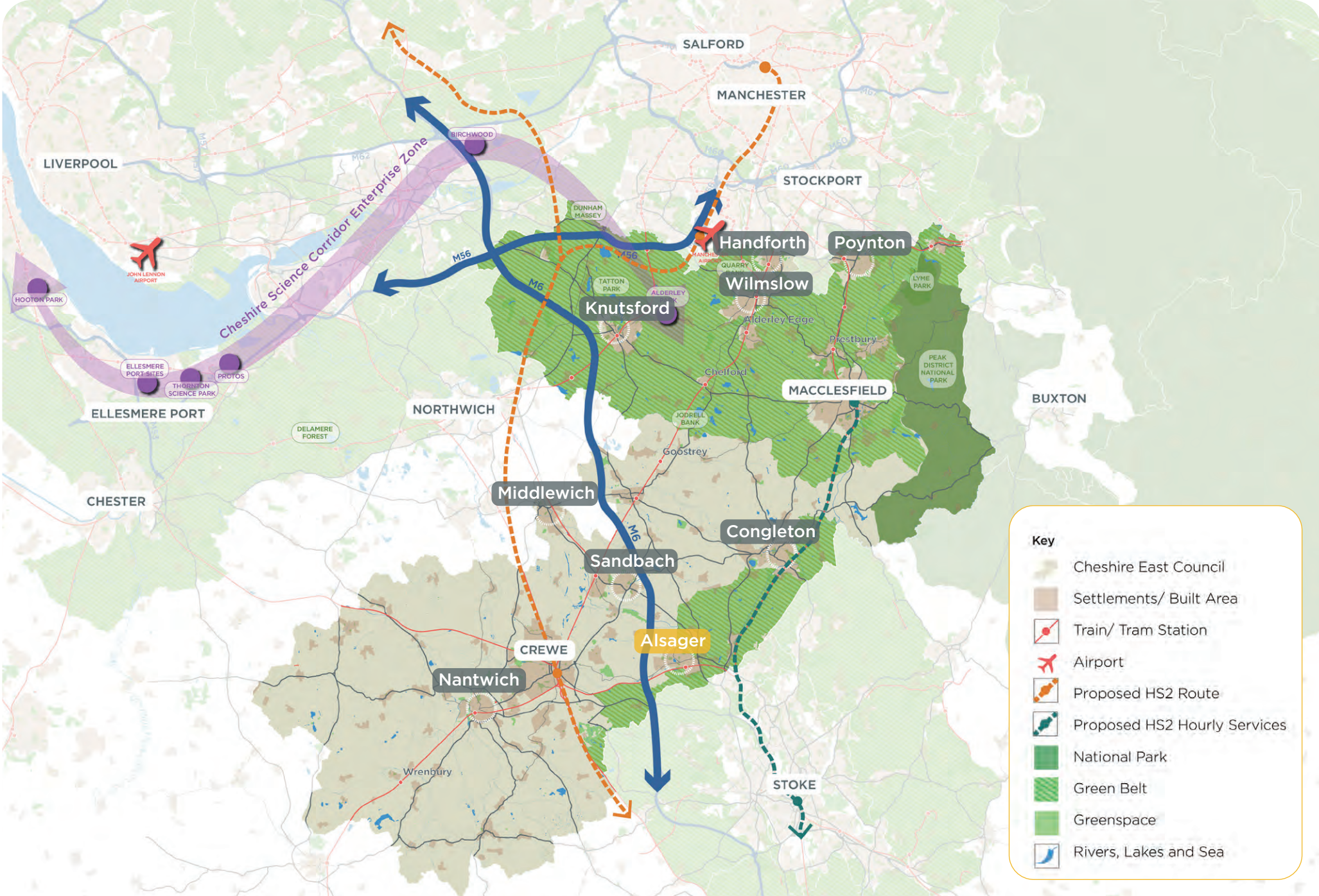
There is a need for more affordable housing in Alsager and smaller terraced and flatted homes to meet the needs of starter families and an aging demographic.

The population of Alsager is anticipated to grow significantly over the next decade owing to a large volume of proposed housing development. Housing growth presents an opportunity to support and expand Town Centre services and businesses. The schools in Alsager, including five primary schools and Alsager Secondary School, have an excellent reputation which further drives demand for family homes.

The main employment and industry functions are found on the southwest edge of town where BAE Systems and Radway Green Business Park are situated. Whilst the town has suffered the loss of some of its major employers including Twyfords and MMU, the position of Alsager, adjacent to the M6, makes it an attractive location for future investment. The further extension of Radway Green is expected to enhance the town’s employment role, boost economic growth and reduce the strong prevalence of out-commuting.

Alsager Town Centre is compact and focused along a single high street at Crewe Road to the west and the cross-roads between Sandbach Road North/South and Lawton Road to the east. It benefits from a mix of convenience retail including an Asda supermarket and weekly Wednesday Market; a Civic Hub comprising the Library, Alsager Civic community venue and council offices; and leisure uses including a range of cafés, bars and restaurants.

Strategic Context Plan



02 Introduction to Alsager cont.

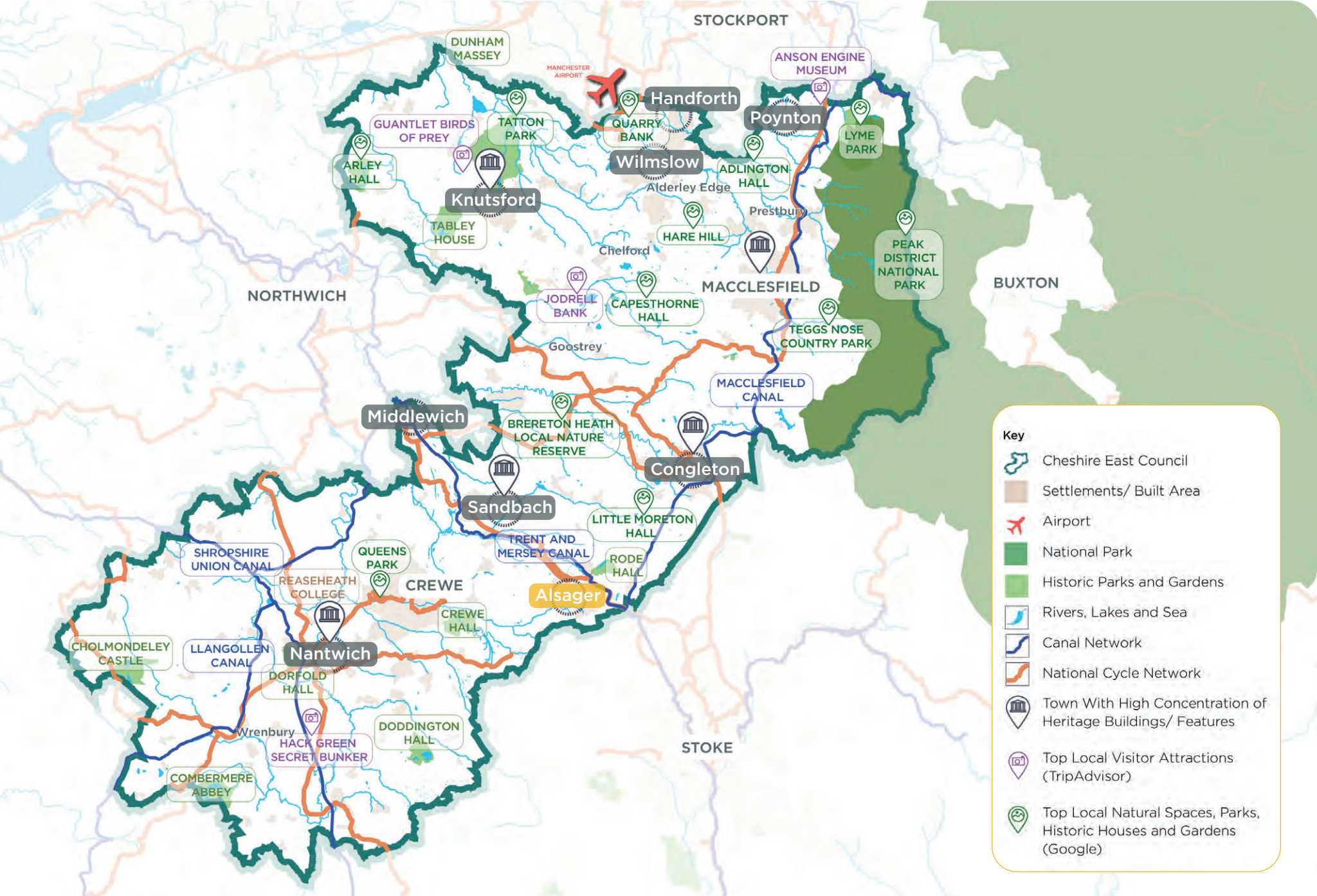
The town regularly achieves awards from Britain in Bloom and the Best Kept Railway Station but there is a recognition that improvements to the public realm are required to enhance the physical environment of the Town Centre to create a clearly identified sense of place.

Alsager has a wide range of leisure, sports and social facilities and clubs. Alsager Leisure Centre, co-located with Alsager School, has spacious outdoor sporting areas, a swimming pool, gym and sports hall which are open to the public when not in use by the school.

Milton Park is a large well used area of green space and formal garden within the Town Centre boundary which is often used for community events such as the annual Music Festival that attracts visitors from neighbouring towns and villages. Across the road from Milton Park is one of two public viewpoints over The Mere, a haven for wild birds. Beyond the Town Centre is open countryside and much used public rights of way.



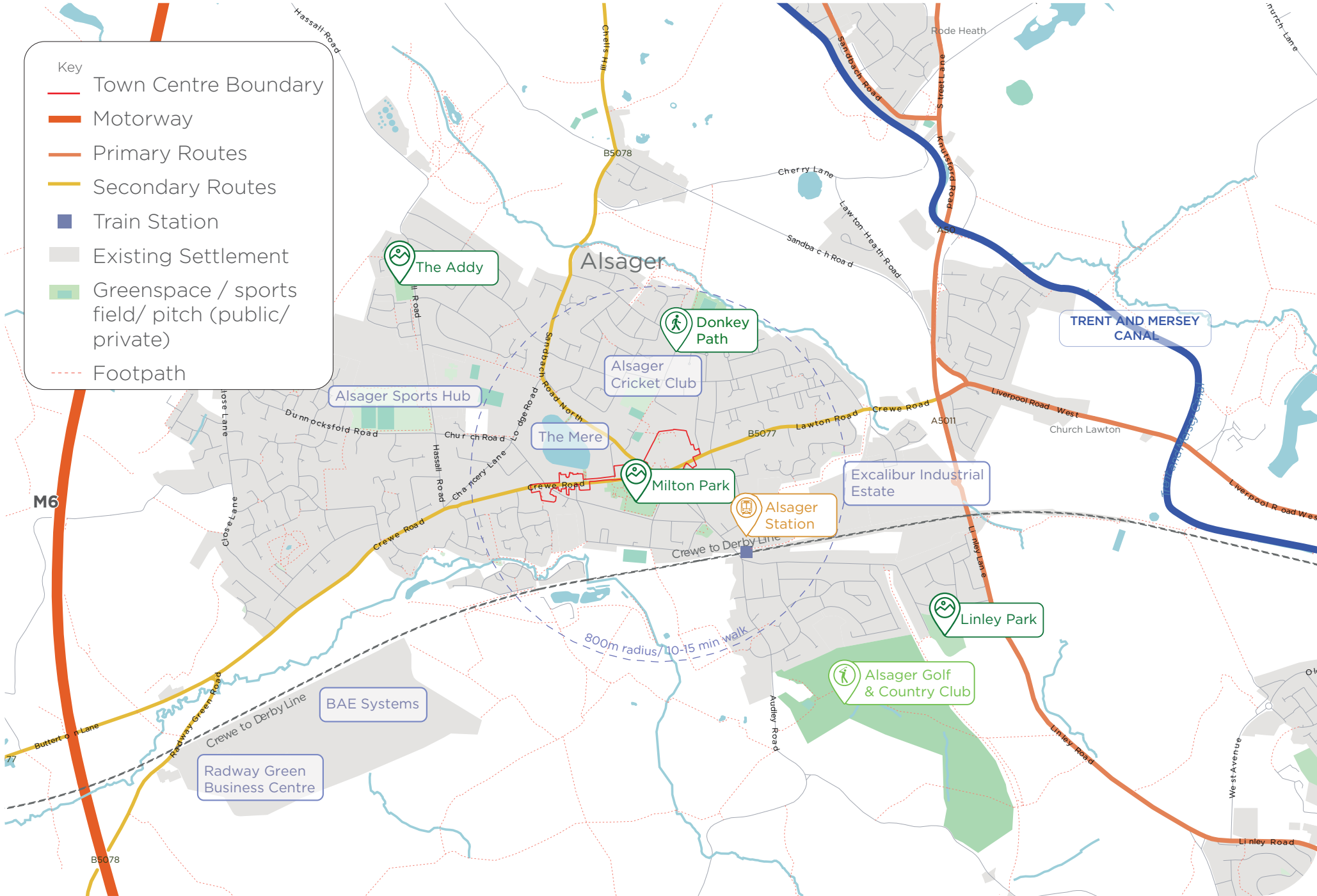
Strategic Connections and Assets Plan





Key Characteristics

- Small town with population of 11,800
- Close to M6, serves commuters to larger settlements of Crewe and Stoke
- Train Station close to Town Centre provides services between Crewe and London Euston
- 100 retail units in the Town Centre
- Recently remodelled Milton Park



Alsager Neighbourhood Plan Vision and Objectives

Alsager Town Council is proactive and initiated the preparation of a Neighbourhood Plan which was delivered in consultation with the local community by the Alsager Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group and adopted in February 2020. The Neighbourhood Plan identifies the following vision and objectives:

Vision

- In 2030 Alsager will be a vibrant town. It will have extended its current strong community spirit and civic pride to all the new planned developments. It will provide for the needs of the whole community and will capitalise on its many advantages, including its railway station, the proximity to Junction 16 of the M6 Motorway, closeness to the conurbations of North Staffordshire and the surrounding countryside. Alsager will have a thriving Town Centre with attractive public spaces, a vibrant and varied shopping experience, a successful independent sector and a wide range of services
- Alsager will offer an excellent quality of life for its residents. A range of housing will be provided to meet local needs and there will be high levels of local employment. There will be good access to education and important services and the town will continue to have access to sustainable transport
- Alsager will have high quality open spaces and improved access to the surrounding countryside. It will continue to have its own unique identity by the retention of Green Belt and open countryside around the town

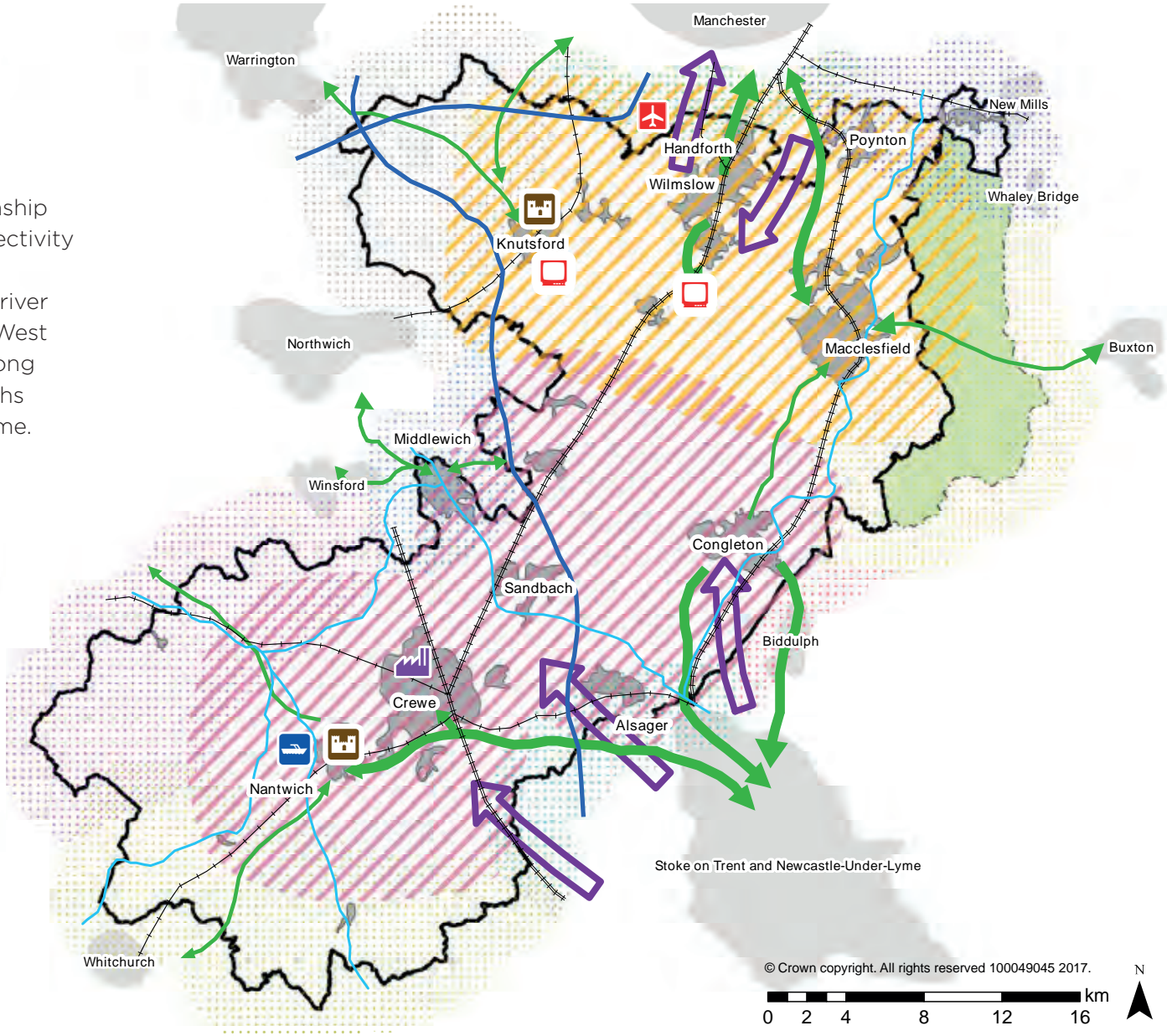
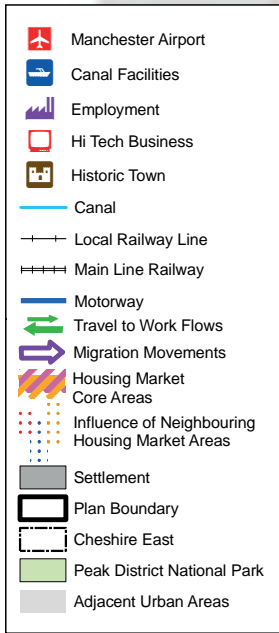
Objectives

The Neighbourhood Plan includes a large number of objectives which can be summarised as follows:

- **Economy and Employment** - To provide a range of good employment opportunities for local residents, to support local economic development, to encourage investment, and create a balanced local economy that allows new businesses to develop, retains existing businesses and creates an environment for innovative and creative businesses and technologies to locate. Facilitate the Town Centre as a location for small-scale employment, business and investment; and ensure that new employment developments incorporate best sustainable design practices
- **Town Centre** - To achieve a vibrant, prosperous and sustainable Town Centre, a civic space where people go for a social experience, becoming the hub of the Alsager community in which its residents take pride
- **Housing** - To provide a range of housing within the settlement boundary to meet the requirements of the Cheshire East Local Plan Strategy, changing demographics and demands for different housing types whilst ensuring that the size, scale and density of new development is proportional to the established need which includes affordable housing, homes for the older generation and starter homes for first time buyers. To provide suitably high quality designed and sustainable new homes that provide attractive and safe places to live and meet the social, economic and environmental requirements of Alsager. Early consultation with the Town Council is encouraged to ensure that the impacts upon the town's infrastructure and environment are mitigated
- **Natural and Built Environment** - To protect, preserve and enhance Alsager's Public Open Spaces, local landscapes and wildlife for future generations, and to recognise that green spaces are very much a part of Alsager's character and heritage. Wildlife corridors and habitats, including trees and hedges should be retained and expanded upon in new developments. Both designated and non-designated heritage assets in the town should be protected
- **Community and Wellbeing** - To maintain and improve the health and wellbeing of Alsager residents by protecting and enhancing local services, community facilities, recreational areas and open spaces whilst ensuring that they are suitable, appropriate, affordable and accessible for everyone in the community. All new development should provide for safe and accessible routes for pedestrians and cyclists to the Town Centre and to places where public transport can be accessed
- **Traffic, Transport and Services** - To develop an integrated and sustainable transport framework to alleviate congestion and maintain air quality; improve safety and accessibility, particularly for those with mobility issues and the increasingly elderly population; enhance walking and cycling routes between shops, services, open spaces and the surrounding countryside in order to reduce car reliance; and improve public transport links between services, amenities and neighbouring towns with any new development making a contribution to the level of services available. High-speed broadband connections will support home-working, business and residential access. Drainage and sewerage will be managed to a high standard and ways to provide additional burial space will be considered

Cheshire East Local Plan

The plan opposite identifies the functional relationship that Alsager has with other centres through connectivity and proximity within and beyond Cheshire East. It highlights the centre's proximity to Crewe, a key driver of housing and employment growth in the North West driven by the arrival of HS2, but also Alsager's strong connections to the adjoining Staffordshire boroughs including Stoke on Trent and Newcastle Under Lyme.



Source: Cheshire East Local Plan: Strategy 2010-2030 2017, Functional Diagram, pg 22

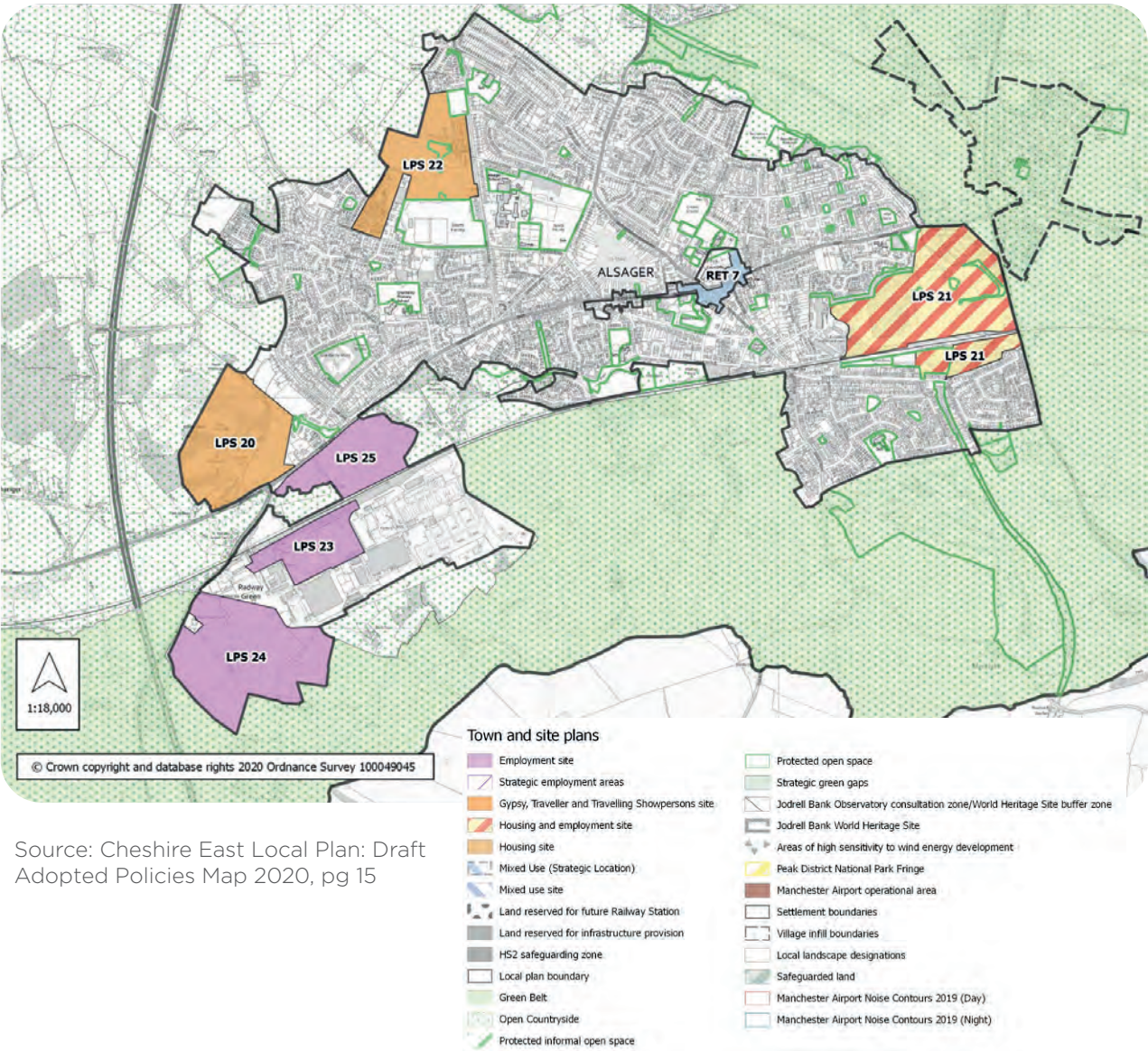
Local Plan Strategy 2017 (LPS) and Revised Publication Draft Site Allocations and Development Policies Document (SADPD) 2020

The Cheshire East Local Plan Strategy was adopted in 2017 setting strategic development sites around the borough. The SADPD will form the second part of the Local Plan, supporting the policies and proposals in the LPS by providing additional non-strategic policy detail and allocating additional sites to assist in meeting the overall development requirements set out in the LPS. The plan opposite identifies both Local Plan Strategy sites in and around Alsager and draft allocations in the SADPD.

Alsager is identified as a key service centre within the Town Centre hierarchy and is surrounded on two sides by Green Belt to the south and east, and by open countryside to the north west.

Key sites close to the Town Centre which have been allocated for development have capacity for 1,326 dwellings and 38 hectares of employment land:

- White Moss Quarry (LPS20) with outline permission for 350 housing units by Persimmon Homes
- Former MMU Campus (LPS 22) for residential development
- Radway Green (LPS25 and LPS23) and Radway Green Extension (LPS 24) for employment
- Twyforde and Cardway (LPS 21) for mixed use housing and employment development
- RET 7 'Supporting the vitality of town and retail centres' which identifies Town Centre locations for main Town Centre uses to support their long term vitality and viability, in line with LPS Policy EG 5 'Promoting a Town Centre first approach to retail and commerce'



Source: Cheshire East Local Plan: Draft Adopted Policies Map 2020, pg 15

03 Policy Context cont.

Alsager Neighbourhood Plan, April 2020

The Alsager Neighbourhood Plan was prepared by the Alsager Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group over three years and adopted in April 2020. The Group was made up of skilled and enthusiastic volunteers who are resident in Alsager and actively engaged with the local community resulting in a referendum result of Yes 92%, No 8%.

The plan can be accessed at: <https://www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/planning/neighbourhood-plans/neighbourhood-plans-a-f/alsager-neighbourhood-plan.aspx>

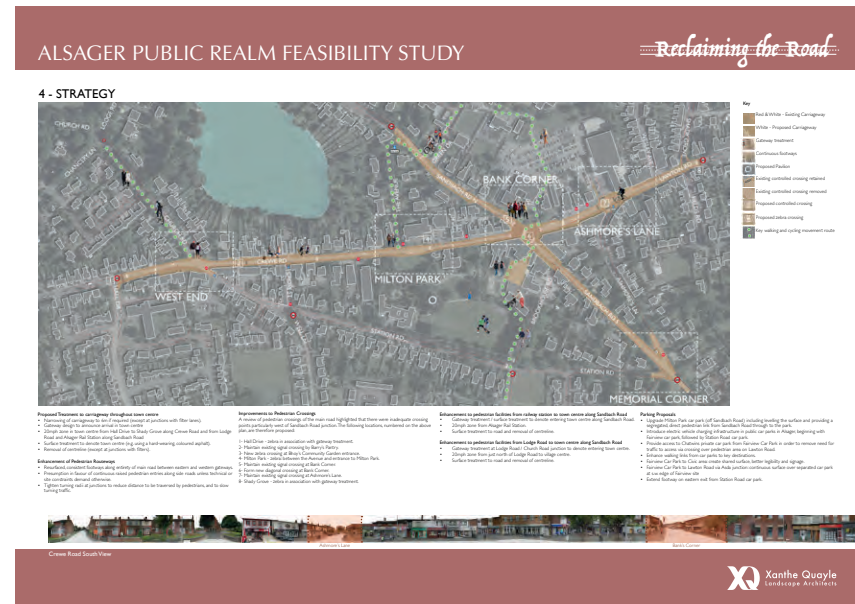
The Neighbourhood Plan forms an important document in informing and encouraging positive development within Alsager and will be used to influence individual planning decisions as they come forward.

Keen to progress the aspirations of the Neighbourhood Plan, a series of working groups have been established to address the key areas of concern identified by Alsager residents, including the Public Realm Working Group who are seeking to implement the Plan's recommendation for an enhanced physical environment within the Town Centre.

Alsager Public Realm Feasibility Study, 2019, Xanthe Quayle Landscape Architects

The study was commissioned by the Neighbourhood Planning Committee who were seeking bold, creative solutions for the re imagining of the public spaces, rebalancing the use of the space in favour of pedestrians whilst allowing commercial activity to thrive. Proposals include:

- Treatment to carriageway throughout Town Centre
- Enhancement of pedestrian routeways
- Improvements to pedestrian crossings
- Enhancement to pedestrian facilities from railway station to Town Centre along Sandbach Road
- Enhancement to pedestrian facilities from Lodge Road to Town Centre along Sandbach Road
- Car Park upgrades, electric vehicle charging and car park public realm improvements

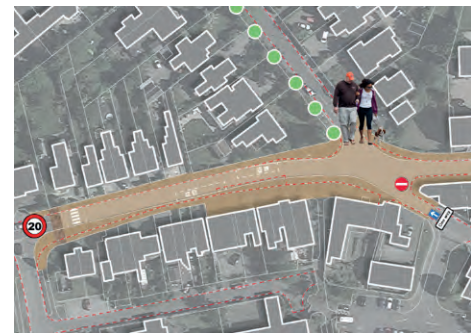


Source: Alsager Public Realm Feasibility Study 2019, pg 4, 6 and 5

ALSAGER PUBLIC REALM FEASIBILITY STUDY

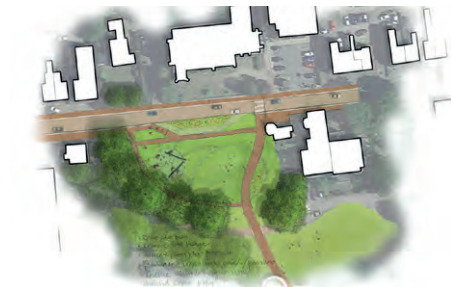
Reclaiming the Road

5 - STUDY AREAS



West End

- Issues**
- Traffic dominated junction with wide junctions making a difficult pedestrian crossing (linked to the Town Trail).
 - Constrained footways in front of shops.
 - Crossing over Crewe Road from Church Road to Station Road, well used but difficult.
 - Crossing over Station Road (Southside) very dangerous.
- Proposals**
- Entry treatment immediately to the east of Hall Drive to include raised carriageway and narrowing zebra crossing and signs for 20mph zone.
 - One way Station Road entrance (southbound) and infill of Hall Drive filter lane (westbound).
 - 20mph speed restriction applied to Church Road.
 - Junction tightened where possible to create a more generous setting for shops.
 - Maintain existing crossing at Barry's Pantry.
 - Incorporate on-street parking at West End into footway.
 - Explore further opportunities to address pedestrian crossing issues.



Milton Park

- Issues**
- Currently feels relatively remote from the town centre and is not visible from Bank Corner, despite proximity resulting in being under appreciated/underutilised by visitors.
 - Entrances relatively unwelcoming, with circuitous route from Crewe Road into the centre of the park.
 - Formal gardens do not invite use beyond passive activity.
 - Car parking along internal roadway adds visual clutter.
 - Crewe Road infrastructure dominates the character of the corridor and disassociates space with St Mary Magdalene Church.
- Proposals**
- Relocate bus stop into the park to draw people in and support both bus travel and park use.
 - This will also reduce perceived width of road corridor and bring relationship with church closer together through components. A further feature could be located in Bhoys Community Garden too.
 - Redesign bus stop setting and roadside area to include Sustainable Urban Drainage as town centre demonstrator.
 - Re-purpose formal gardens for informal play.
 - To enable views into park from Crewe Road consider tree thinning and canopy lifting. Replace shrub layer with ground cover to further support view lines.
 - Provide a more direct, generous access route through space and into park.
 - Impose a parking ban in the park.
 - The Avenue to become one way (south bound) to promote the road as a sustainable route way.
 - Prevent through access on Brookhouse Road, using barriers making a more pedestrian/cycle friendly route.



Views into park improved with 'eye-catcher' pavilion, Roadside SUDS, 'Informal Play' opportunity associated with the relocated bus stop, Bespoke bus stop



Milton Park Pavilion - Possible designs



Milton Park Pavilion - Possible designs



Milton Park Pavilion - Possible designs



Milton Park Pavilion - Possible designs

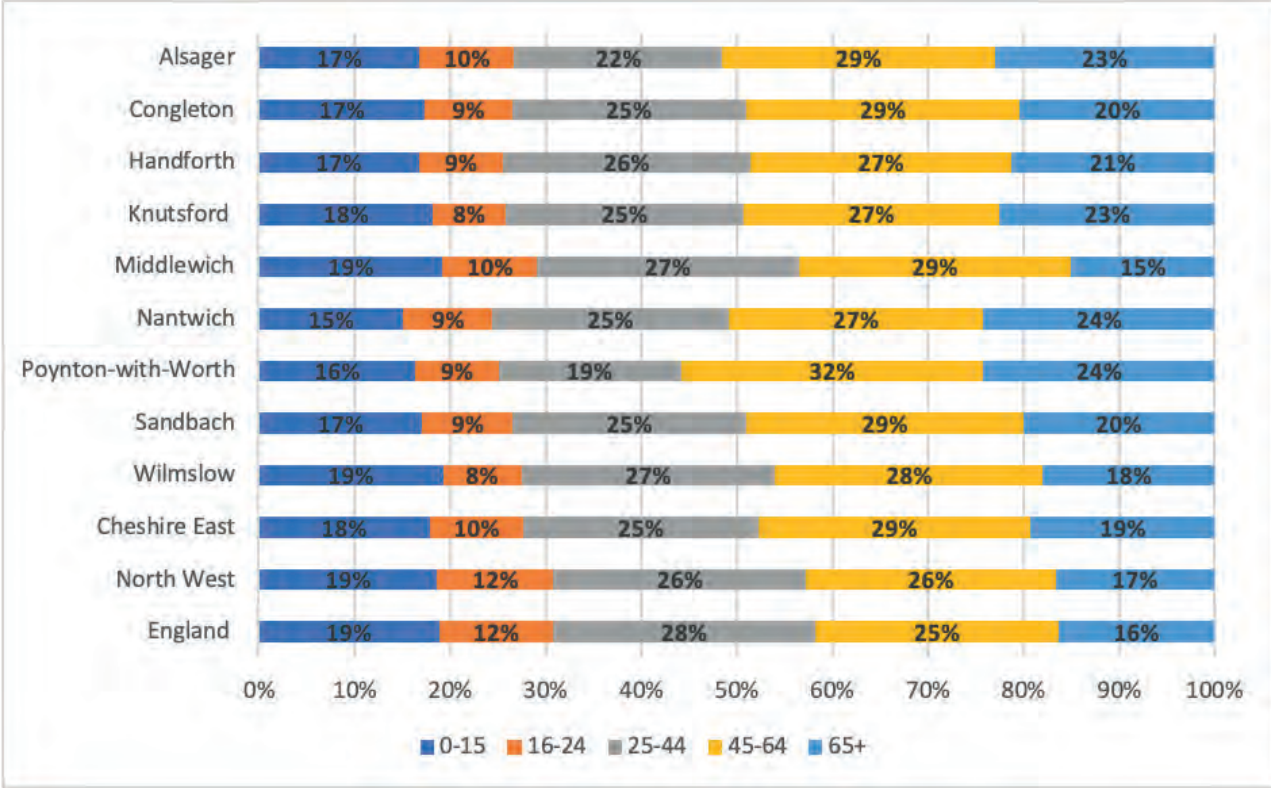


Milton Park

Age

The 2011 Census data indicates that the Alsager parish area had a population of 11,775 residents representing 3.2% of Cheshire East's total population (370,127). The town's age profile is similar to that of Cheshire East but compared to the other Key Service Centres has one of the lowest proportions of 25-44 year olds (22%) which is the most economically active age group, and a higher proportion of those aged over 65 (23%) suggesting an aging population. Alsager also has one of the higher average (mean) ages across the 9 KSC's at 44 years old which is older than the Cheshire East (42), North West (40) and English average ages (39).

It is anticipated that when the 2021 Census data is available it should show an increase in younger residents given the number of family homes that have been delivered in the area over the last decade.



Age Structure.
Source: Census 2011, Office for National Statistics (ONS)
Most recent consistent data available across the 9 centres

Ethnicity

Broken-down by ethnic group the Census 2011 (latest) shows the resident population across Cheshire East is predominantly white at 96.7% which is a higher proportion than the wider geographies of the North West (90.2%) and England (85.4%). The vast majority of the population in Alsager is also white (97.6%) with a relatively small proportion of mixed/multiple ethnic (1.1%/130 people) and Asian/Asian British residents (1.0%/121 people).

Area	White	Mixed/ multiple ethnic groups	Asian/ Asian British	Black/ African/ Caribbean/ Black British	Other ethnic group
Alsager	97.6%	1.1%	1.0%	0.2%	0.1%
Congleton	98.0%	0.6%	1.1%	0.2%	0.2%
Handforth	93.1%	1.5%	3.9%	0.9%	0.7%
Knutsford	96.5%	1.2%	1.8%	0.3%	0.3%
Middlewich	98.5%	0.8%	0.6%	0.1%	0.1%
Nantwich	98.1%	0.7%	0.7%	0.3%	0.1%
Poynton-with-Worth	98.0%	0.5%	1.1%	0.1%	0.2%
Sandbach	98.1%	0.7%	0.9%	0.2%	0.2%
Wilmslow	92.6%	1.7%	4.4%	0.5%	0.7%
Cheshire East	96.7%	1.0%	1.6%	0.4%	0.2%
North West	90.2%	1.6%	6.2%	1.4%	0.6%
England	85.4%	2.3%	7.8%	3.5%	1.0%

Population by Ethnic Group
Source: Census 2011, Office for National Statistics (ONS)
Most recent consistent data available across the 9 centres

Occupational Profile

At the time of the 2011 Census, a large proportion of Alsager residents were employed in higher order occupations including ‘managers, directors and senior officials’ (12.8%) and ‘professional occupations’ (22.3%) – whilst a higher rate than the regional and national benchmarks, this broadly aligns with the wider Cheshire East borough (13.6% and 19.6% respectively).

Conversely, just 14.6% were engaged in manual or elementary occupations. This is lower than the Cheshire East (16.7%), North West (19.8%) and England rate (18.3%). The occupational structure of Alsager suggests a skilled workforce, which will in turn be attractive to businesses (who want to attract highly skilled employees) seeking to locate in the borough.



Built Up Area	Alsager	Congleton	Knutsford	Middlewich	Nantwich	Poynton	Sandbach	Wilmslow	Cheshire East	North West	England
Managers, directors and senior officials	12.8	11.7	17.2	11.9	14.3	14.9	12.6	18.3	13.6	9.9	10.9
Professional occupations	22.3	18.9	26.2	15.8	21.8	24.0	19.9	24.6	19.6	16.3	17.5
Associate professional and technical occupations	12.6	13.2	15.1	13.4	12.3	15.1	13.3	16.3	13.0	11.5	12.8
Administrative and secretarial occupations	11.4	10.3	9.4	11.8	10.0	12.2	11.0	9.9	10.4	11.7	11.5
Skilled trades occupations	10.1	11.6	6.4	11.0	9.8	8.6	10.2	6.6	10.4	11.3	11.4
Caring, leisure and other service occupations	8.7	9.5	8.0	9.9	8.2	7.7	9.2	7.8	8.9	10.1	9.3
Sales and customer service occupations	7.5	7.0	5.7	7.4	8.3	8.0	8.2	6.9	7.5	9.4	8.4
Process, plant and machine operatives	5.8	7.9	3.8	8.5	6.0	3.3	6.6	3.0	6.5	8.1	7.2
Elementary occupations	8.8	9.9	8.2	10.4	9.3	6.3	9.0	6.6	10.2	11.7	11.1

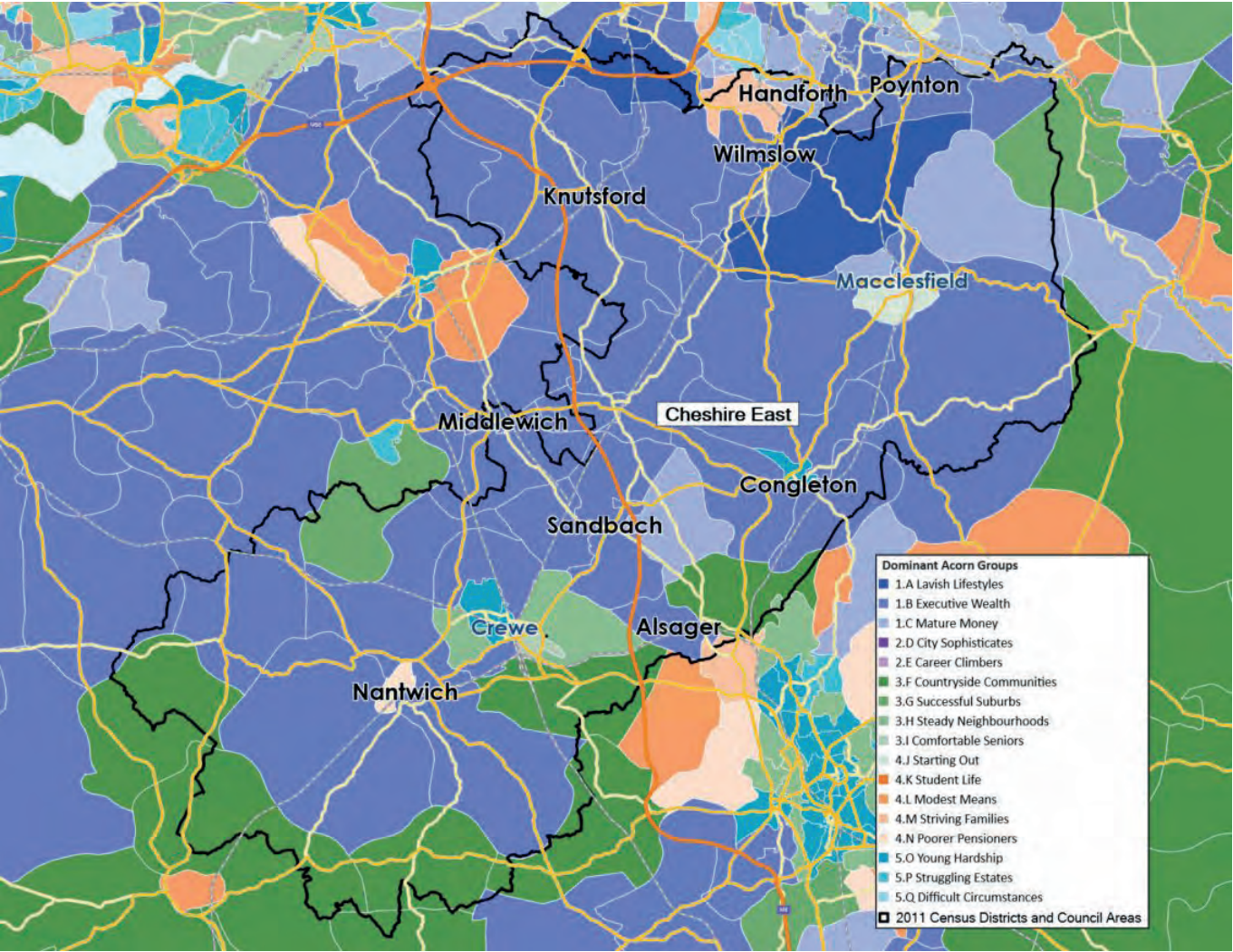
Occupational Profile
Source: Census 2011
*Wilmslow BUA includes Alderly Edge and Handforth
Most recent consistent data available across the 9 centres

Demographic Characterisation

CACI Acorn classifications of local postcode geographies provide precise information and an in-depth understanding of different consumer types by analysing significant social factors and consumer behaviour. Demographic analysis of Cheshire East area demonstrates diverse segmentation groups across the area. The dominant Acorn groups in Alsager is Executive Wealth (Affluent professionals with families living in large homes).

Dominant Age Groups

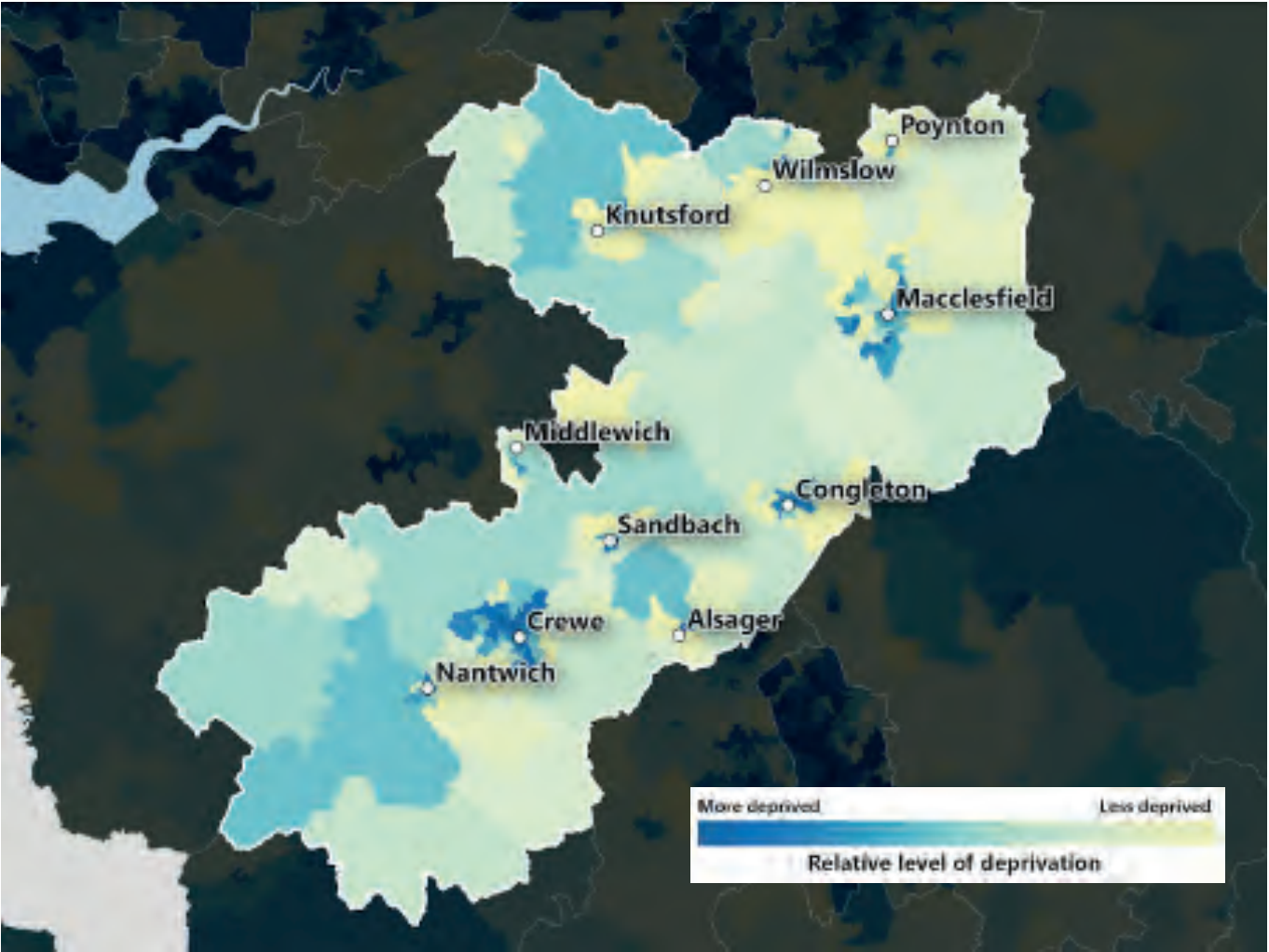
- 1. A Lavish Lifestyles
- 1. B Executive Wealth
- 1. C Mature Money
- 2. D City Sophisticates
- 2. E Career Climbers
- 3. F Countryside Communities
- 3. G Successful Suburbs
- 3. H Steady Neighbourhoods
- 3. I Comfortable Seniors
- 4. J Starting Out
- 4. K Student Life
- 4. L Modest Means
- 4. M Striving Families
- 4. N Poorer Pensioners
- 5. O Young Hardship
- 5. P Struggling Estates
- 5. Q Difficult Circumstances
- 2011 Census Districts and Council Areas



CACI Acorn Classifications
Source: CACI

Index of Multiple Deprivation

The Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) 2019 illustrates the spatial distribution and pockets of deprivation relative to national averages. Cheshire East ranked 228th most deprived out of 317 local authorities in 2019 indicating relatively low levels of deprivation. Just 1.7% of the Borough is within the top 10% most deprived areas in England, with these most deprived areas being concentrated around Crewe and to a lesser extent, Macclesfield. The majority of Alsager is within the 20% least deprived areas of deprivation nationally.



Source: MHCLG, IMD 2019

Local Context

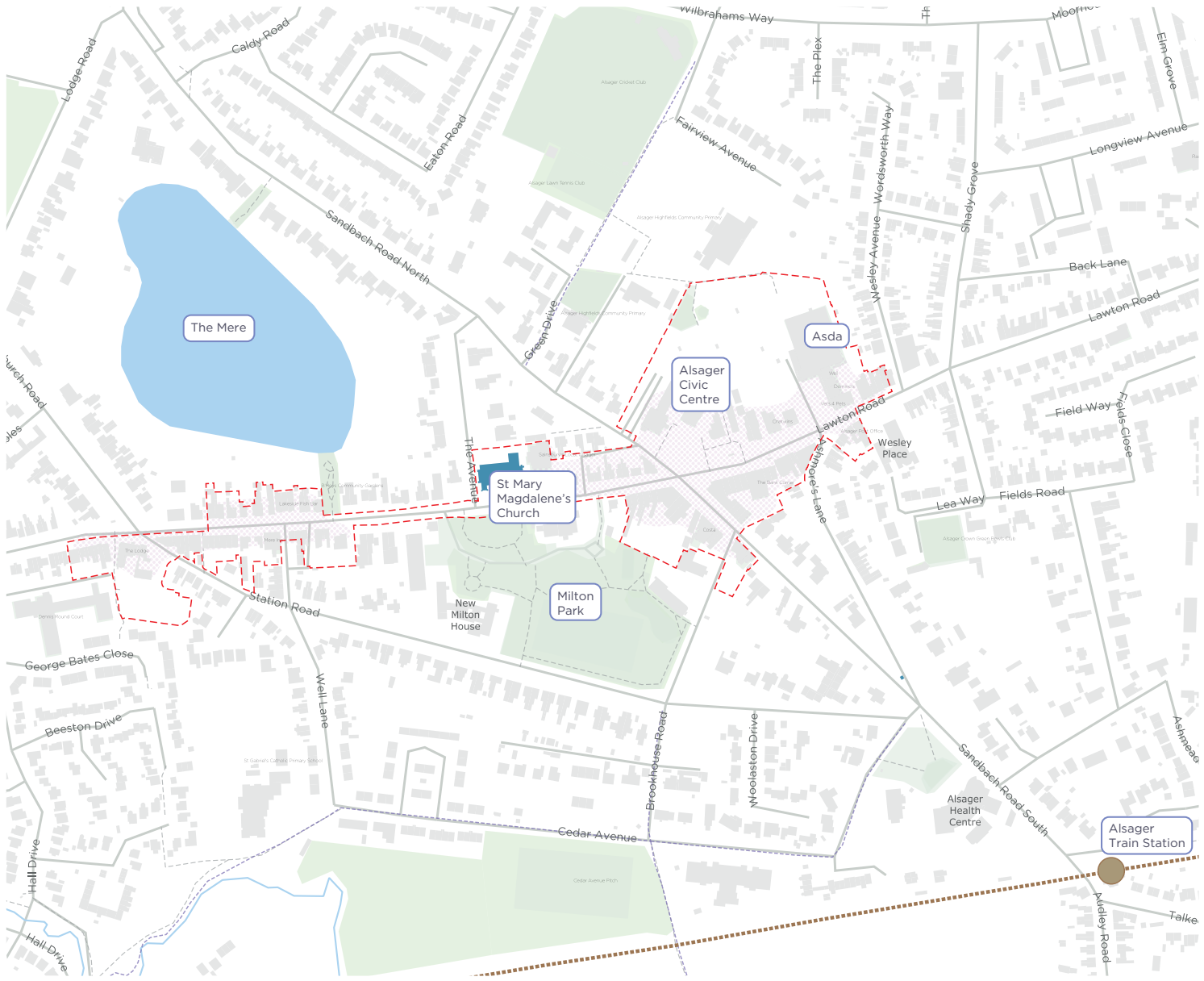
Alsager is located in the south of Cheshire East, 10 miles north west of Stoke-on-Trent and 7 miles east of Crewe. It lies 3 miles from the M6 (junction 16).

Alsager is one of the smaller Town Centres in the study, with a high street divided into two zones, one at the western end and one at the eastern end of Crewe/Lawton Road, which also includes a civic hub.

Alsager Train Station can be reached within a 10 minute walk from the Town Centre.

Key

Town centre boundary

Shopping core

Spatial Review

An analysis of the experiential quality of the Town Centre is provided over the next few pages. The review is based on information gathered from a number of site visits to the Town Centre during October and September 2020 and is assessed by the key vitality indicators listed below:

- Quality of the place
 - People
 - Sense of Community
 - Accessibility
 - Gateways
 - Wayfinding
 - Attractions
 - Amenities
- Sense of a Centre
 - Character
 - Public realm
 - Green space
 - Derelict Sites/ Vacant units
 - Housing
 - Covid measures

Visit information

	Visit 1	Visit 2
Date of visit:	Monday 7th September 2020	Wednesday 28th October 2020
Time of day:	12-1:30pm	1:30-3pm
Weather:	Grey skies, Cloudy, Light drizzle	Grey, Cloudy
Mode of transport:	Train	Car
Covid Lockdown Status	Eased Lockdown Restrictions	Three Tier Restrictions in Place

Quality of the place

- Small, well kept town
- Large houses close to the Town Centre
- Range of shops and services
- Number of quiet, green spots to sit in



People

- People sitting outside Costa coffee- mostly parents with children
- People sitting on central green having lunch
- High school students congregating outside and shopping in Sainsburys and using B'Hoys Community Gardens



Sense of Community

- Signage, community boards and award notices convey sense of community pride
- Noticeboards seem up to date
- Lots of planters
- Signs of awards being won



Accessibility

- 10 minute walk from train station, over level crossing
- Free parking in car parks (Station Road/ Fairview)
- No segregated cycle routes but a few people cycling
- Bus stops located along Crewe Road with good access to local shops and services



Gateways

- Overall scale of built form is consistent around 2 storeys. No strong sense of arrival. Partly due to the linear nature of the town
- Branching of roads and crossroads create some decision points but these are subtle and don't reinforce legibility
- Quite car dominated at Lawton Road/ Sandbach Road South junction, but pedestrian crossing at each road
- Environs and train station are car dominated and cluttered with some vacant sites



Wayfinding

- No distinctive signage but town quite small and easy to navigate
- Wayfinding and signage is quite disjointed along key routes to and from arrival points and from important local community infrastructure
- A group has now been appointed to look into improving the signage in the town



Housing

- Signs of new housing development towards the edge of town
- Large Victorian/ Edwardian houses close to the high street and along Crewe Road and Sandbach Road North & South
- Well kept properties at ends of high street/ shopping parades



Attractions

- Some cafés and restaurants, signs of outdoor seating
- No real attractions to draw people into the town. The collection of uses and amenities are primarily serving local and surrounding residents
- Some signage and notices advertising local events and activities



Amenities

- Library, Town Council, community club, churches, health centre
- Alsager Community Primary School and Alsager School
- ASDA supermarket, Sainsburys supermarket, post office
- Alsager Leisure Centre to the west of the Town Centre (c.1.3km)
- Several private Sports and Leisure Clubs sit within close proximity to the centre including Alsager Cricket Club and Alsager Institute Bowling Club
- Beyond the Town Centre other community and sports clubs including Radway Green Sports & Social Club and Alsager Sports Hub are located



Sense of a Centre

- The urban form of the town is linear in its arrangement and is focused along Crewe Road, creating a corridor and sense of moving through the town.
- Main sense of centre is focused around Crewe & Sandbach Road crossroads, where the town was historically focused and grew from over time.
- The collection of civic uses and open space around the crossroads creates a sense of activity and destination.
- A smaller, secondary area of interest along Crewe Road is Chapel Mews. The combination of more formal building lines, terraced buildings, a more enclosed street section and mix of active ground floor frontages creates a sense of activity and interest here



Character

- Built form character is mixed with a combination of heritage buildings (Victorian Villas, terraced housing, Town Hall, St Mary's Alsager, Milton Garden Walls and Gatehouses) as well as infill development of various ages along Crewe Road.
- More prominent recent developments include the refurbished 'The Junction' building and retail units connected with the ASDA store
- More modern shop fronts are well kept, with some older units degraded
- The 1894 Grade II Listed Church of St. Marys Magdalene along Crewe Road adjacent to Milton Park provides an attractive heritage landmark within the Town
- Flat topography



Public Realm

- Pavement and road surfaces are tired and worn in places
- Street section is dominated by vehicular carriageway with some particularly wide road junctions
- Footpaths are consistently wide along Crewe Road but reduce in size towards the train station.
- The quality of paving varies considerably and where spill out ground floor activities are possible, the quality of public realm is poor
- There are some newer areas of hard landscaping outside Asda but they are visually disconnected to other parts of the town



Green space

- Three main greens spaces within the town - Milton Park, the area outside the Town Council and B'hoys Community Gardens
- Milton Park is well kept and has a number of facilities, including a play park, herb garden, skate park, rose garden, ornamental floral displays, a junior football pitch and public toilets. The park is a significant high quality asset to the town and surrounding residential areas
- Access to Milton Park through the car park off Sandbach Road South needs improving
- B'hoys Community Gardens pocket park offers a secluded stop off Crewe Road with views over the Mere
- Sandbach Road North also has a small pocket park space offering access to and views of the Mere. Wider public access to the Mere is only possible via these two pocket parks.



Derelict Sites/Vacant Units

- Vacant site opposite the train station detracts from entry into the town and creates a poor sense of arrival
- Some vacant shop units along Crewe Road as well as a larger retail unit adjacent to Asda
- General impressions of vacancy during site visits was notable, given the linear arrangement of the town and that vacant units were located along well used routes

Update 2022: Since the site visit in 2020, many of the units that were vacant have now been occupied. For example a former solicitors is now a cafe bar, the bake house is a cafe, Cartwright's is now an opticians and the former Barclay's bank is a restaurant / bar.



Positive Features

Positive spatial elements are identified on the plan:

- Local centre boundary
- Local street network
- Primary vehicular route
- Arrival destinations (car parks/ train stations/ bus stops)
- Key pedestrian links
- Anchor retail locations
- Anchor open space / recreational areas
- Open space / recreational areas
- Areas with a concentration of F&B uses
- Areas with a concentration of retail uses
- Areas with concentration of community uses
- Well defined building frontages with active ground floor uses
- Buildings of historic or townscape quality that help reinforce character
- Local businesses within close proximity to the town centre
- Local residential areas within immediate proximity to the town centre
- 400m radius from Alsager train station/ town centre (approx 5 minutes walk)
- Key arrival gateways into the town centre



1 Milton Park is located at the heart of the town, is well maintained and offers a variety of different functional openspaces (sensory garden, skate park, playground, open field)



2 There is a mix of good quality, attractive family housing within walking distance to the Town Centre



3 There is a mix of restaurants and bars, good for the size of the high street, which is one of the smaller centres in the study

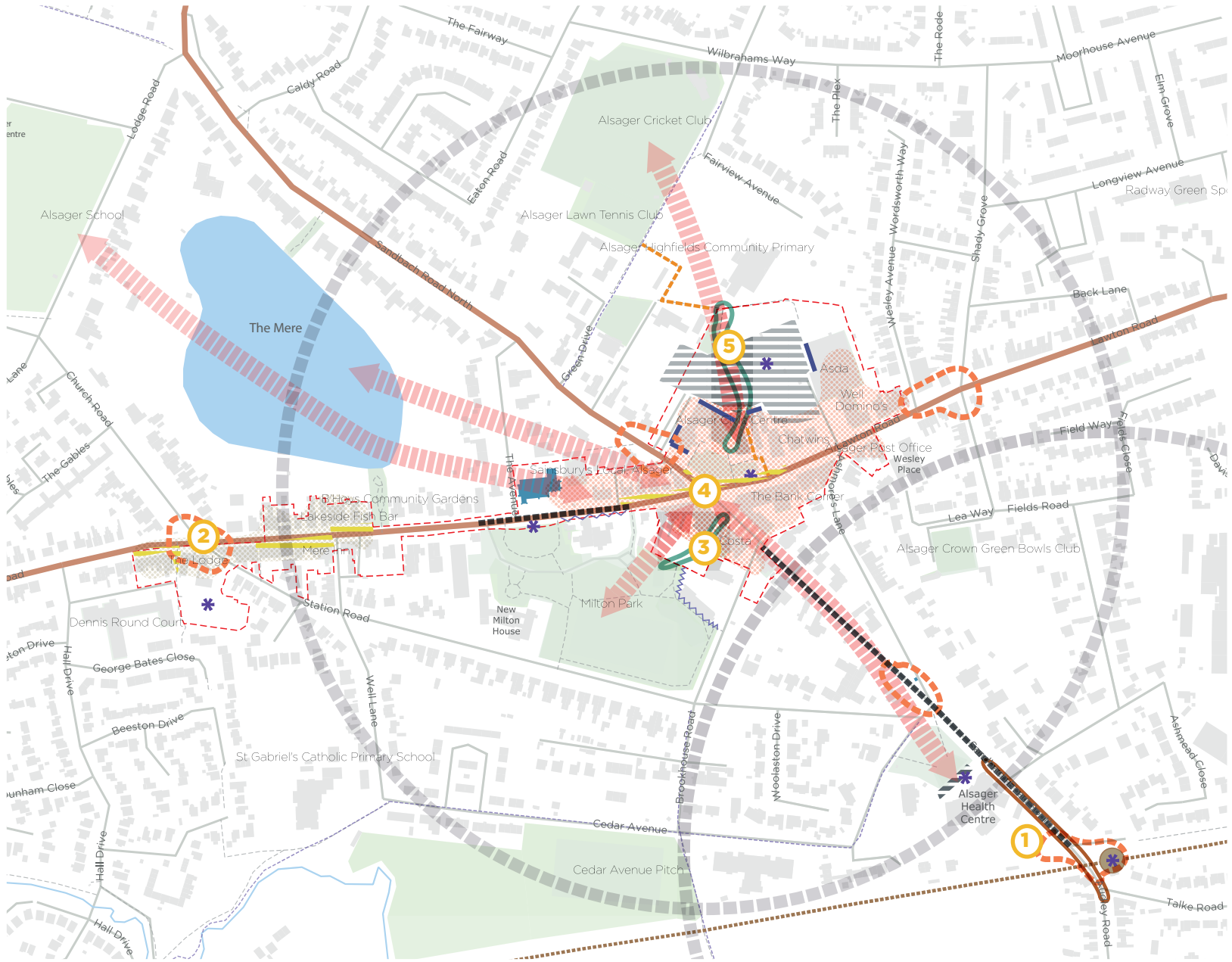


4 Civic hub (Town Council, church, community centre and library) at the centre of the town adds to the physical sense of centre and supports more varied uses within the Town Centre. It is also within walking distance of other services (ASDA, train station)

Negative Features

Negative spatial elements are identified on the plan:

- Key
- Local centre boundary
- Local street network
- Primary vehicular route
- Arrival destinations (car parks/
train stations/ bus stops)
- Streets and spaces dominated by
car parking
- Streets with narrow footways /
poor pedestrian provision
- Arrival gateways with a low
quality arrival experience
- Arrival gateway constrained by
railway over-bridge and narrow
footways
- Areas of poor quality public
realm (primarily low grade /
aged materials, lack of street
furniture and tree planting)
- Low quality frontages
- Links with poor legibility to and
from the town centre
- Local streets leading to
cul-de-sacs or unclear where
they connect to
- Extent of area which reads as
part of the Town Centre
- Areas which feel beyond the
extent of the Town Centre
- Key assets which feel
disconnected from the Town
Centre
- Severance
- 400m radius from Alsager train
station/ town centre (approx 5
minutes walk)



1 Gateway to the centre from the train station needs improvement, with constrained pavement widths and a vacant site opposite, creating a poor sense of arrival to the town



2 Western end of the high street has become disconnected from the main centre as number of high street uses have declined



4 Cross roads at centre of town is car dominated, and as a result pedestrian movements and crossings are weakened and disrupted



3 Pedestrian and disabled accessibility to Milton Park from Sandbach Road South is poor quality



5 Fairview car park is a key arrival point into the town by car, but suffers from low quality frontages and unclear through connections for pedestrians

Summary of Spatial Elements

The tables below and on the following page identify the key positive and negative spatial attributes for the Town Centre:

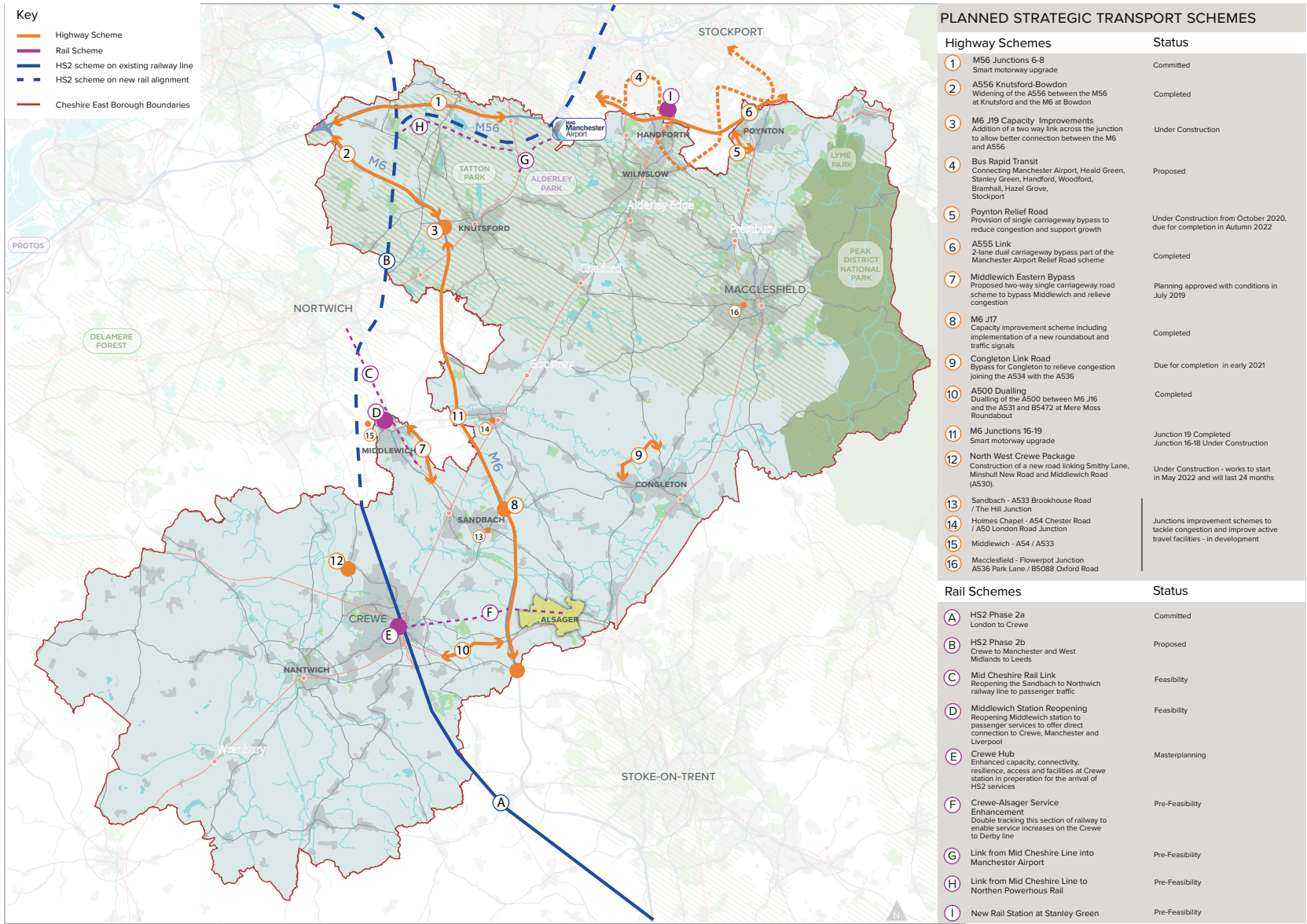
Public Realm	Gateways	Open Space	Heritage	Townscape Quality	Legibility
Positives					
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Wide pavements in some areas along the high street, providing outdoor seating and spill out opportunities, e.g. outside The Chinese Garden Restaurant, The Bank Corner and CostaNumber of trees along high street and around the civic hub adds to quality of spaceWithin the core of the Town Centre there are opportunities to dwell either adjacent to the Town Hall or within Milton Park itself	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Walkable distance (c. 10 mins) from the train stationHousing and new housing within walking distance from the centreAttractive Victorian and Edwardian Villas and terraced housing, as well as some new residential development, within walking distance to the centre provide an attractive townscape approach to the Town Centre	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Milton Park (c. 2ha) Public Park is well kept, close to the Town Centre and a high quality outdoor recreational asset to the townB'hoys is a small pocket park which offers views to the Mere and dwell space off Crewe Road.Opportunity for walks into the wider countryside along well used 'Donkey routes'	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Alsager has an attractive townscape along it's primary routes to the Town Centre, characterised by well kept period villas and terraces with many original features and which address the street with front doors and small garden spacesLarge period property in Milton ParkWar memorial on approach from the station enhances journey into Town CentreSt Mary's Alsager is a Grade II listed Church	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Mix of Victorian and newer shop fronts adds to varietyActive frontages along key retail areasAsda supermarket and newer retail units continue active frontage along Lawton RoadShop fronts mostly well kept	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Hub of civic uses and civic space focused on the Town Centre cross roads improves legibilityThe fairly compact and linear nature of the main centre means it is easy to navigate

Public Realm	Gateways	Open Space	Heritage	Townscape Quality	Legibility
Negatives					
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Public realm needs attention as the pavement is worn in places and combined with a patchwork of different materials leads to an overall incoherent and difficult to navigate environmentNo sense of arrival in the Town Centre experienced through the public realm treatment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Crewe Road is the main vehicular route through the town, resulting in a dominance of road space along the shopping streetCongestion at peak times and poor signage (for those not in a car)Key connections into Milton Park and to/ from the train station are poor quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Open space around the civic hub is somewhat dated and not realising its full potential to offer a high quality and flexible space within the centre of AlsagerAccess into Milton Park from Sandbach Road South needs improvement and better signage from the roadThe Mere is very much privatised, with property boundaries right up to the water, small stretch at B'hoys Community Garden allows views to the lake, but the railings here disrupt views	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Number of buildings of architectural interest are vacantMore modern units on high street not of high architectural quality, but fairly well kept	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Some dated shop front units and inconsistency in shop frontage appearance across the townMarket takes place in Asda Car Park which is a low quality spaceInterface between the central civic hub and Asda car park is poor, buildings have low quality frontage onto car park, even though this is a key arrival pointAlthough Crewe Road has predominantly attractive historic properties along it, more could be done around the Crewe Road, Station Road / Church Road junction and Lawton Road / Shady Grove junction to create a more coherent townscape character	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Signage to key areas could be improved and coordinated to encourage sustainable trips to surrounding community infrastructure and the Town Centre

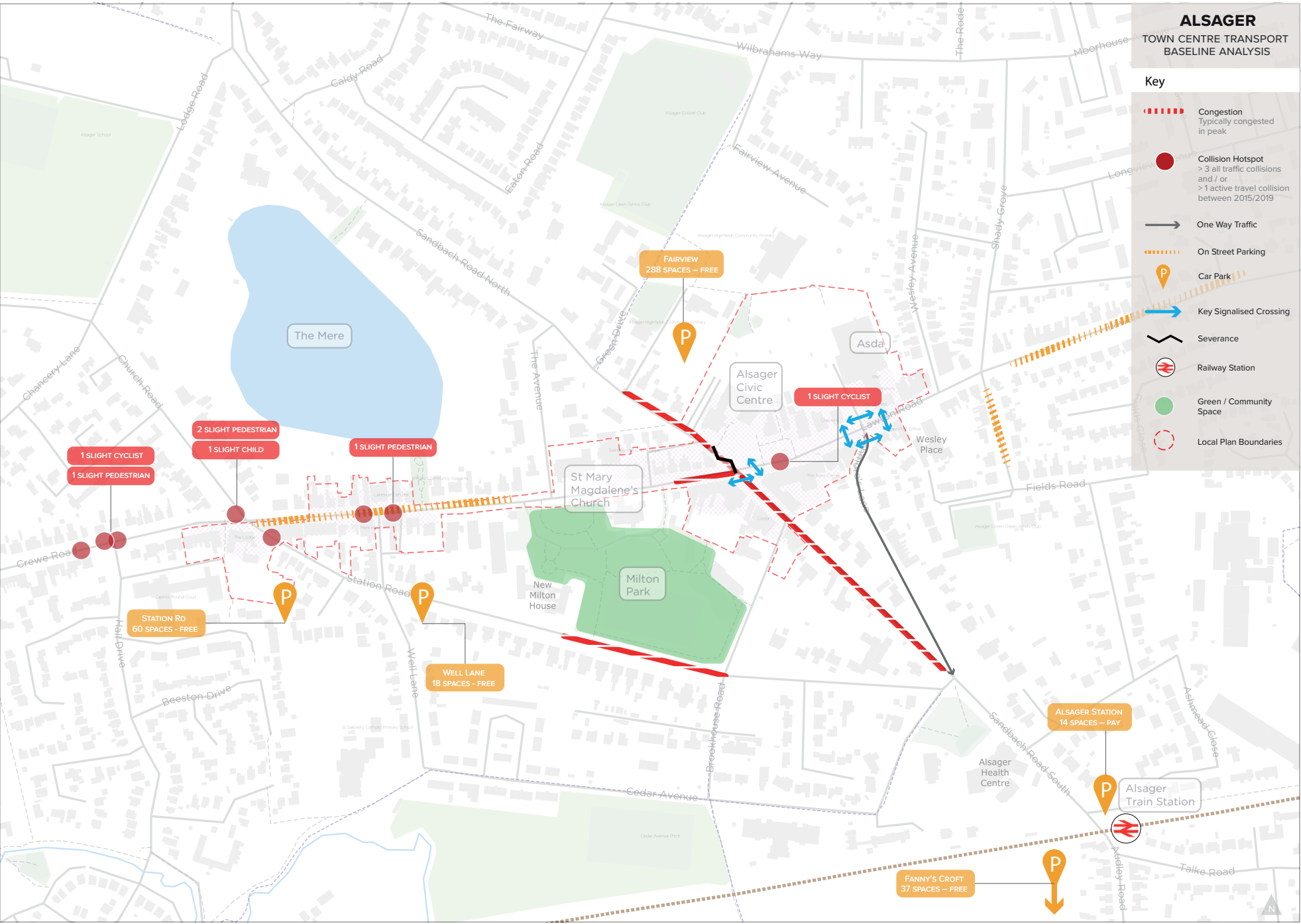
06 Connectivity and Accessibility

Alsager is located in close proximity to the M6, with access via either J16 (to the south) or Junction 17 (to the north). It is located approximately a 1-hour drive away from Manchester City Centre, with rail journey times comparable. Located in the south-east of the borough, it is also well connected to Crewe and Stoke-on-Trent via road and rail links.

Alsager Planned Strategic Transport Schemes



Town Centre Transport Baseline Analysis



Car Parking

Car parking is provided through a mix of free off-street car parks and on-street parking bays along Crewe Road and Lawton Road adjacent to residential properties and retail facilities. The provision of car parking within Alsager is seen by local stakeholders to be a strength of the town in terms of its location in proximity to key facilities and services with minimal impact upon the character and heritage of the area. Despite the proximity to the Town Centre, walking and cycling links from car parks could be enhanced creating clearer routes with improved legibility and signage and a higher quality environment.

The TCVPs consider the role of car parking in relation to the vibrancy and vitality of each town centre. However, any proposals to review or modernise car parking provision and management will be considered on a town by town basis as part of the Council's approach to travel demand management. Therefore the delivery of any car parking proposals is outside the scope of the TCVPs.

Town Centre	Car Park ID	Parking Spaces	Duration	Pricing
Alsager	Fairview Car Park	288	/	Free
	Station Rd Car Park	60	/	Free
	Well Lane Car Park	18	/	Free
	Alsager Train Station Car Park	14	Long Stay	Pay & Display
	Fanny's Croft Car Park	37	/	Free
	TOTAL	417		

Public Realm

Alsager has a good range of public open space in close context to the centre of the town, including Milton Park and B'hoys Community Garden, however the opportunities are not particularly clear to users and currently feel remote. They are therefore somewhat underutilised, particularly by visitors.

The centre of Alsager comprises a number of streets with cluttered and poor-quality footways. Surface materials, street furniture and planting appear tired and underwhelming - reducing the quality of the environment. A large number of obstacles are presents across streets including dished gulleys, uneven and steep surfaces, ponding and temporary obstructions which make it difficult for those with additional mobility needs, including mobility or visually impaired people or those with pushchairs.

Despite the space available along the main street, including pavement widths in front of retail facilities, there is a lack of public realm providing shelter or seating to allow people to stop and rest and encourage visitors and shoppers to dwell and spend time.

Key access junctions into the Town Centre such as Sandbach Road/Crewe Road and Lodge Road/Church road currently present poor-quality environments with few facilities for pedestrians and cyclists. These areas would therefore benefit from public realm enhancements and gateway treatments to enhance the sense of arrival and quality of place in the Town Centre.

Road Safety

Several junctions along Crewe Road have been identified as collision hotspots which may indicate a potential road safety issue. The town centre may therefore benefit from improved crossing facilities along Crewe Road to enable safer access to and between the key retail facilities.

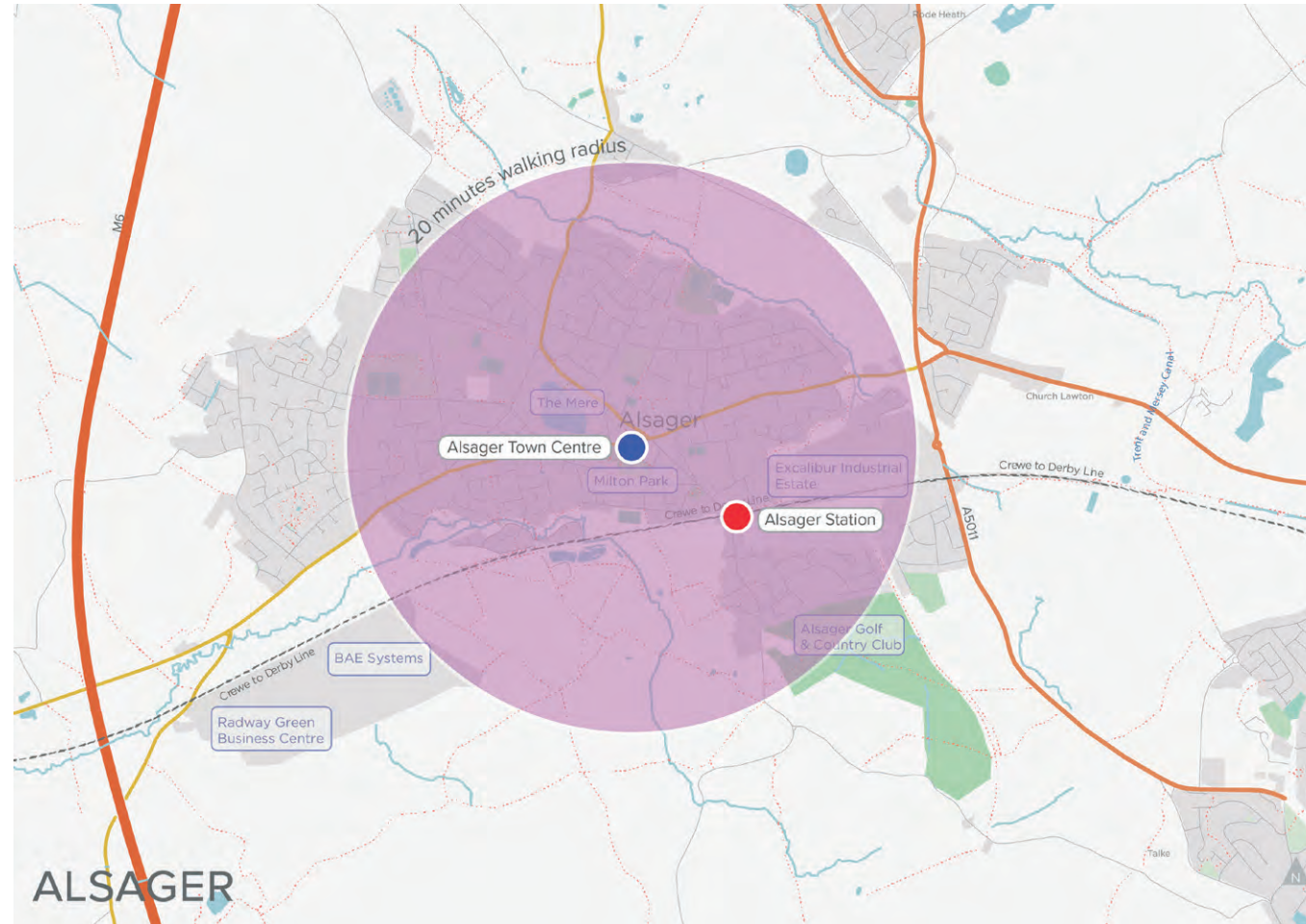
A number of issues with existing crossings have also been identified within previous studies such as the Alsager Public Realm Feasibility Study (2019). These include short phasings on controlled crossings giving pedestrians very limited time to cross (resulting in people moving diagonally across junctions), a lack of formal crossing points on Sandbach Road and a lack of crossing points in western end of the Town Centre.

Active Travel

Previous studies undertaken to assess the provision of active travel infrastructure in Alsager have established the need for a range of improvements to better connect strategic walking and cycling provision with the Town Centre and its assets, such as:

- The link between the station and the centre;
- Fairview car park with Milton Park; and
- Crewe Road with Alsager Sports Hub, via Church Road.

There is also a lack of provision for cyclists within the area with limited cycle parking and dedicated infrastructure.



Alsager 20-Minute Walk Isochrone

Public Transport

Alsager rail station is located around a 6-minute walk away from the Town Centre. The station is served by one train per hour in each direction providing connectivity to Crewe and Birmingham New Street. Although the station is well positioned within reasonable walking and cycling distance of the Town Centre, routes between the station and key facilities present a poor pedestrian environment with narrow footways and poorly lit streets. Routes are also poorly signed creating presenting issues of wayfinding particularly for visitors.

Bus stops along the main street (Lawton Road and Crewe Road) are served by 3 buses per hour providing connectivity to Hanley, Congleton, Sandbach and Leighton Hospital. As bus services are limited to serving local areas with low service frequencies it is important to ensure the rail station remains well connected in order to provide connectivity to more strategic destinations.









Movement Trends

Only 16% of residents living in Alsager do not have access to a car. With relatively poor links to public transport which offer limited frequency services, private car use is likely to be the dominant mode used for travel to the Town Centre. Increased provision of active travel infrastructure and access to public transport will therefore be essential to ensuring car use does not impact on the quality of environment in the town.

Although the rail station is accessible within 20 minutes walking time from the majority of residential areas, public transport accounts for only 6% of travel to work journeys. This demonstrates the need to lobby for improved service patterns and ensure the rail station is better connected to surrounding areas with active travel infrastructure.

Local Aspirations

The town council, with their consultant team, have developed early concepts for improved public realm throughout the Town Centre. Proposals generally address many of the key issues we have observed in this area. Funding streams to implement these proposals are yet to be identified.

-  10% of people living in Alsager work within the Town Centre
 -  25% of residents travel 40km+ to work
 -  Public transport accounts for 4% of commuter trips
 -  One train per hour to Crewe and Birmingham New Street
 -  16% of households in Alsager do not have access to a car, 33% have access to 2 or more vehicles
 -  75% of residents in Alsager in employment drive to work by car
 -  6 minute walk between Town Centre and railway station
 -  Active travel accounts for 8% of commuter trips

Source: Census 2011, Office for National Statistics (ONS)
Most recent consistent data available across the 9 centres

Cheshire East Council has approved Local Transport Development Plans (LTDP) for its principal towns, keys service centres and surrounding rural areas. The table opposite summarises the potential transport schemes included in the LTDP relating to the town centre at the point they went out to public consultation. Please note the majority of schemes are at concept stage, subject to feasibility work and must be viewed as potential schemes. Therefore the LTDP are live documents and this list of schemes is subject to change and will evolve as further work is undertaken.

In Alsager, the LTDP focuses strongly on active travel interventions to improve conditions for those on foot and cycle – across town and towards Alsager train station. There is also a clear focus on improving the public realm around the B5077 Crewe Road and B5078 Sandbach Road junction.

The table contains detail on the schemes set out in the LTDP.

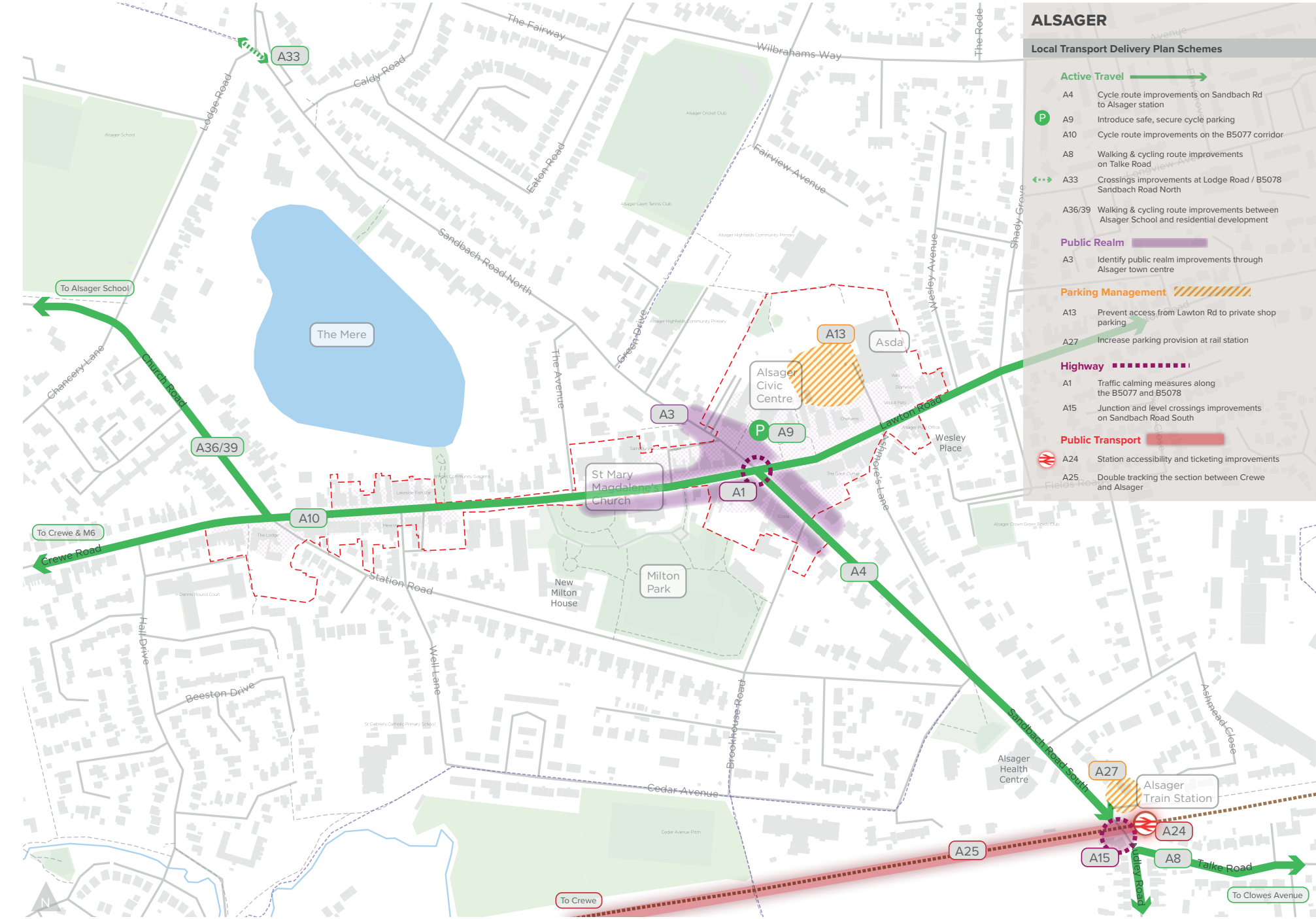
For full information on LTDP and the latest version of the LTDP please refer to the Highway pages of the CEC website.

Alsager LTP and LCWIP Schemes

Alsager Local Transport Development Plan - Schemes				
Type	Ref	Scheme	Description	Costing ¹
Active Travel	A4	Improve walking and cycling route on Sandbach Rd to Alsager station	Improve walking and cycling route on Sandbach Road South linking Alsager town centre to Alsager Station.	£1m-£5m
	A9	Introduce safe, secure cycle parking in the town centre	Introduce safe, secure cycle parking in the town centre.	<£100k
	A10	Improve cycling links on the B5077 corridor	Cycle improvements on the B5077 corridor.	£1m-£5m
	A8	Improve walking and cycling route on Talke Road	Improve walking and cycling route on Talke Road linking towards Clowes Avenue.	<£1m
	A33	Improve pedestrian crossings at Lodge Road/B5078 Sandbach Road North	Review experimental scheme to improve crossing at Lodge Road/B5078 Sandbach Road North and determine a permanent solution which would improve walking routes to the school nearby and address concerns raised.	<£1m
Public Realm	A36/39	Improve walking and cycling route between Alsager School and residential development	Improve walking and cycling route from proposed residential developments at former MMU site and Alsager School, which are located near each other.	<£1m
	A3	Identify public realm improvements through Alsager town centre	Undertake a feasibility study to identify public realm improvements such as new street furniture, maintenance of green space, lighting and seating throughout Alsager town centre.	<£100k
Parking Management	A13	Prevent access from Lawton Rd to private shop parking	Prevent access from Lawton Road to private shop parking behind shops on the north side of Lawton Road, instead creating access from Fairview Car Park.	<£1m
	A27	Increase parking provision at rail station	Work alongside Network Rail to consider provision of additional car parking spaces at Alsager Station.	£1m-£5m
Highway	A1	Junction improvements at Bank Corner	Implement improvements to the Bank Corner junction and introduce traffic calming measures along the B5077 and B5078 arms.	<£1m
	A15	Junction and level crossings improvements on Sandbach Road South	Work alongside Network Rail to improve level crossings at Sandbach Road South and Radway Green to improve traffic flow and safety.	<£1m
Public transport	A24	Install a ticketing machine at Alsager Station	Provision of ticket machines at Alsager Station.	<£100k
	A25	Double tracking the section between Crewe and Alsager	Work alongside rail industry partners with the aim of double tracking the section between Crewe and Alsager.	>10mil

¹ The costs presented are indicative only at this stage. Costs will depend on type and level of interventions delivered – and should be revised at subsequent design stages

Alsager Local Transport Development Plan Schemes



Retail and Leisure

Cheshire East Council recognises the importance of monitoring key information to assess and respond to issues in its centres and commissions regular reviews of the retail and leisure market across the Borough. The latest partial update of the Retail Study Report (2020) generally paints a positive picture for Alsager in terms of performance since the last Report (2016).

For its size and key service centre role, Alsager is considered to offer a good range of services. The centre retains a strong convenience goods offer and provides a well-balanced independent and national multiple store offering and a reasonably good night-time economy.

Overall, the centre provides 99 units (Experian Goad Plan, September 2019) which are primarily located on Crewe Road and Lawton Road.

The convenience sector is still well represented, with the proportion of units in the centre being broadly in line with UK average (10% compared to UK average of 9%) and the proportion of floorspace being significantly above the UK average (26% compared to UK average of 15%).

The centre is anchored by an Asda foodstore (and to a lesser extent a Sainsbury’s Local). There is an

extant planning permission for a new 1,975 sqm Sainsbury’s supermarket on the former Twyford site (granted January 2018) which would more than double Alsager’s convenience offer, however this is not anticipated in the near future. The convenience offer is complemented by a number of independent retailers.

The proportion of comparison goods units is reasonable having regard to Alsager’s service and shopping role, but the proportion of floorspace is significantly below the UK average (24% compared to 36%) reflecting the smaller units and dominance of Asda’s convenience goods floorspace occupancy.

Particular improvements were noted in the leisure service provision since the 2016 report, with the opening of two national food and beverage operators (Costa and Domino’s) and three new independent restaurants/wines bars (Caster’s, The Bar and Fifty5). However, it’s financial and business sector provision has significantly weakened following the closure of the remaining two banks in the centre (Natwest in 2017 and Barclays in 2018).

The number of vacant units has remained stable (10 units) and the vacancy rate in the Town Centre

is lower (10%) than the national average (12%). There is also evidence of a good churn of units over recent years through the reoccupation of units including new food and beverage operators taking the former bank units. The CEC Shopping Survey in March 2020 identified a further reduction to 5 vacant units (4%).

At this stage, it is unclear what the impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic will be on Alsager’s retail and leisure occupiers. Town Centre spend will have been, in part, compensated for by more people working from home and using local facilities. In the future, more flexible working habits should mean that Alsager benefits from its strong commuter town role.

The strength of Alsager’s independent and growing food and beverage offer, aligned with a relatively affluent catchment population, should provide some buffer to the continued challenges facing many of the national high street brands. Therefore, whilst there may be a short term impact on some occupiers, longer term the centre should return to being an attractive location for predominantly independent retail and leisure occupiers but may be constrained by the lack of available premises.



	Units			Floorspace		
	No.	%	UK Average (%)	Sq.m	%	UK Average (%)
Convenience	10	10	9	3,160	26	15
Comparison	26	26	29	2,350	19	34
Retail Service	24	24	15	2,280	19	7
Leisure Service	22	22	25	2,590	21	26
Financial and Business Service	7	7	10	590	5	7
Vacant	10	10	12	1,320	11	11
Total	99	100	100	12,290	100	100

Diversity of Uses in Alsager Town Centre in September 2018
Source: Experian GOAD Survey, September 2019. UK Average from the Experian GOAD Category Report (February 2020)

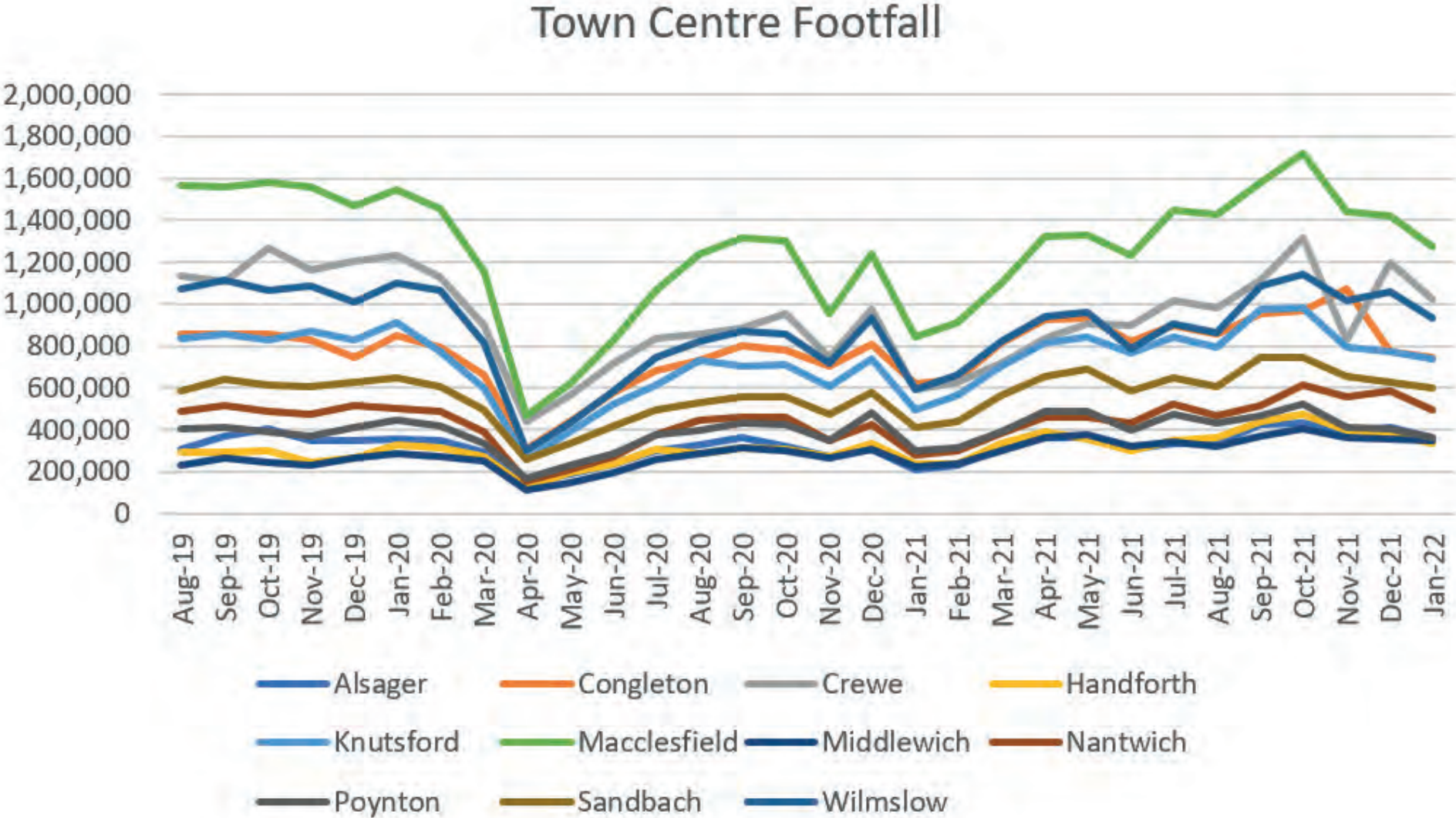
The finance and business space identified in the table (derived from the GOAD survey) only relates to ground floor office floorspace within the Town Centre. Alsager’s office market is considered further on p 59

Footfall

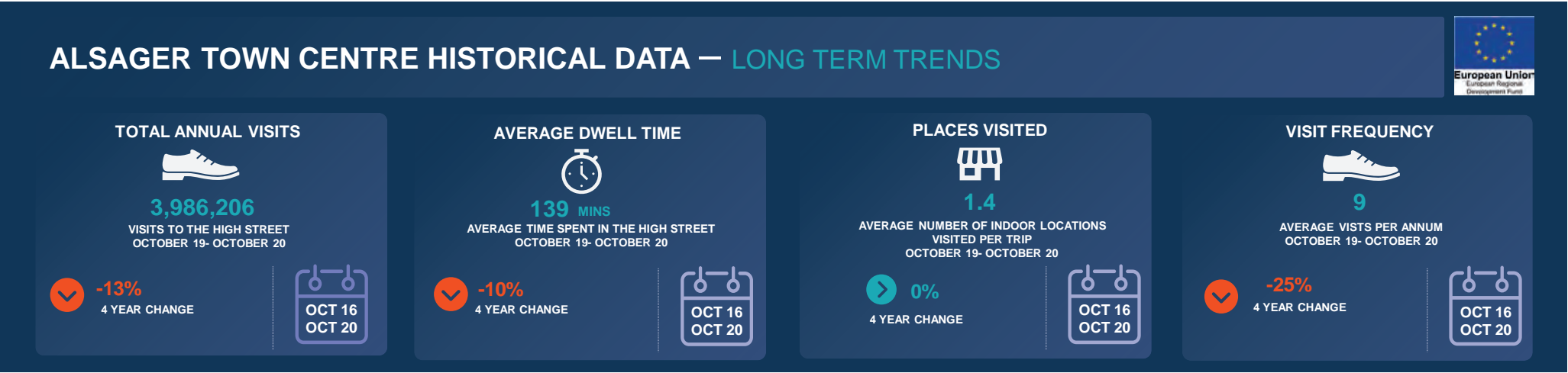
In recognition of the important relationship between footfall and vitality, Cheshire East Council is now commissioning regular monitoring of footfall across the centres. The following graph shows the footfall in all the key centres between August 2019 and December 2020. It starkly shows the impact of Covid on footfall, across Cheshire East particularly in March and November last year (during national lockdowns) and some bounce back in December.

Reflective of the town’s relatively small size, Alsager was the third least visited centre in Cheshire East in August 2019 and retained this position alongside Handforth and Middlewich throughout the period to December 2020 – with in the region of 350,000 visitors per month. Positively, whilst monthly footfall in Alsager fell by 21% on the year previously to 321,000 in October 2020, this was around half the national average benchmark rate of 40% suggesting many working from home were choosing to shop locally.

Covid has had a significant impact on footfall, both during enforced lockdowns but also in further accelerating online retail use. The ability of a centre to attract a wide range of visitors (rather than just relying on shoppers) will have a significant impact on how centres emerge from Covid.



Source: Visitor Insight Baseline Report: August 2019 - Jan 2022



Source: Visitor Insight Baseline Report: Alsager Town Centre: October 2019-2020

Most recent consistent data available across the 9 centres

Employment

The main employment offer in Alsager is situated on the edge of the town where BAE Systems and Radway Green Business Park are situated. The Business Park covers around 12 hectares and is currently home to over 70 companies across a wide range of sectors and in a variety of industrial, warehouse, office and managed office space. This will continue to be the principal employment area of the town through the provision of expansion land for further employment development.

Whilst the scale of office use within the Town Centre itself is limited, in the order of 3,000 sq m of existing office space has been retained at the Twyfords/Cardway site which will form part of a wider mixed employment and housing development.

Whilst the town has suffered the loss of some of its major employers including Twyfords and MMU over recent years, the position of Alsager, adjacent to the M6, makes it both an accessible location to a wide range of employment opportunities within the surrounding Crewe and Stoke-on-Trent area, and an attractive destination for future investment, with the extension of Radway Green expected to enhance the town’s employment role, boost economic growth and reduce the strong prevalence of out-commuting.

Towns like Alsager are also likely to benefit from the shift in working habits that have emerged during COVID-19 and are likely to continue. It’s residential and associated offer are likely to attract workers going forward who want to live in an attractive town, well serviced by local amenities and well connected to larger employment locations where they may work a few days a week. This will further support the vitality and viability of the Town Centre.



Location of Offices in the Town Centre. Source: GOAD (February 2020)

Residential Market Context

Alsager has established itself as an attractive residential location offering easy commuting to employment destinations, set within open countryside surroundings and providing a range of high quality and relatively affordable family homes within walking distance of its centre. The schools in Alsager also have an excellent reputation which further drives demand for family homes.

At the time of the 2011 Census the dominant house type across the Cheshire East area was detached housing (35.6%) which is a much higher proportion than the North West (18%) and England (22.4%).

The Alsager parish area had a total of 5,183 households, representing 3.3% of Cheshire East's total residential stock (159,441). In terms of housing mix, Alsager is characterised by larger house types with 39.9% being detached and a further 40.4% being semi-detached, which is one of the highest combined proportions across the 9 KSCs next to Poynton (81.9%).

There is also understood to be a greater number of bungalows than many other parts of the borough reflecting both a relatively affluent and older population. There is a need for more affordable housing in Alsager and smaller terraced and flatted homes to meet the needs of starter families and an aging demographic.

Average achieved house prices in Alsager were in the order of £200,000 to £250,000 in the twelve months to September 2020. This is relatively affordable compared to many parts of Cheshire East.

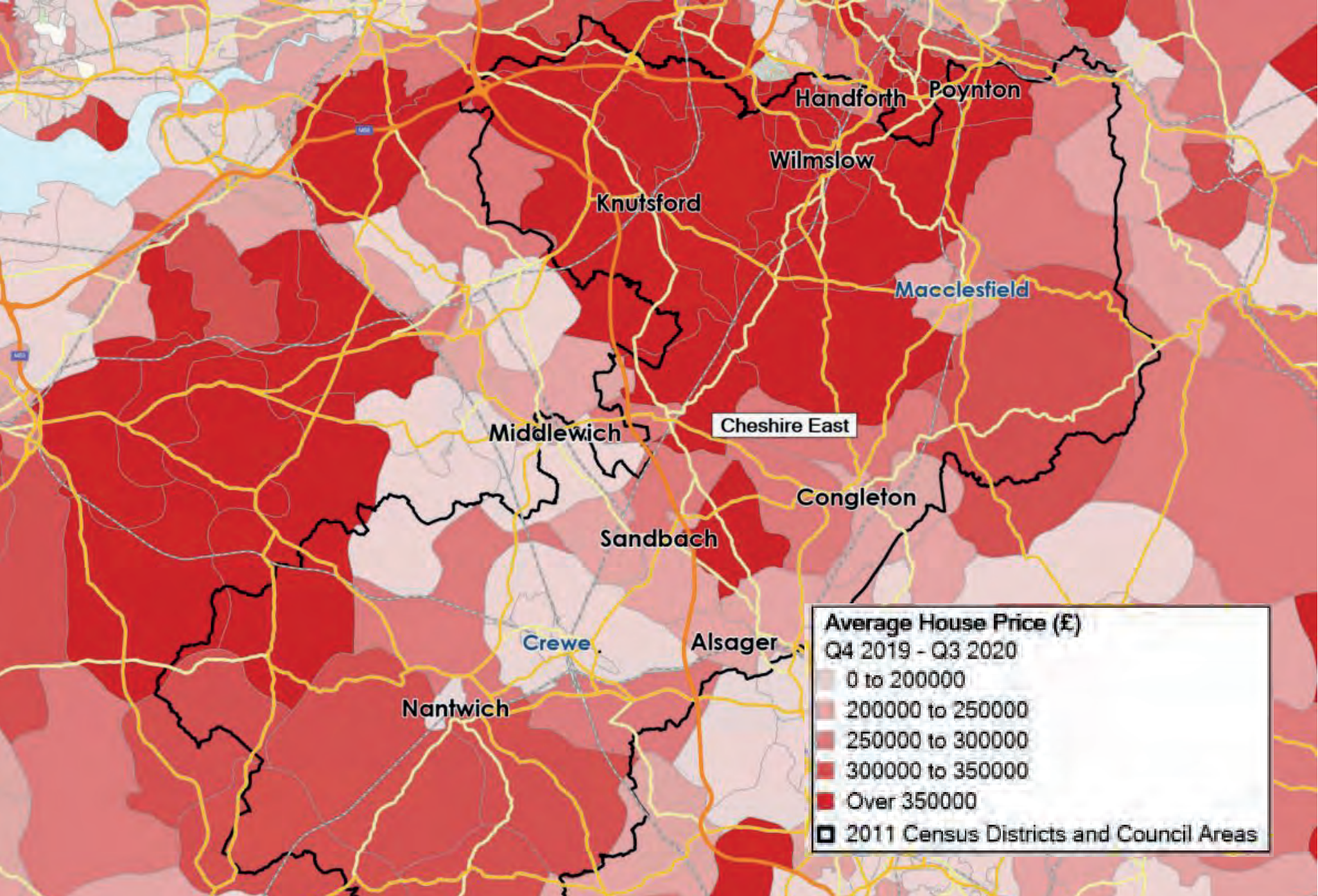
New housing developments by David Wilson Homes at Scholars Place on Hassall Road and The Stables on Close Lane by Stuart Milne Homes are currently offering a wide range of new homes from a 1 bed mews

at £126,000 to 4 bed detached at £430,000. Shared ownership initiatives and units reserved for those with local connections are in place.

The population of Alsager is anticipated to grow significantly over the next decade owing to a large volume of proposed housing development. Housing growth presents an opportunity to support and expand Town Centre services and businesses.

Dwelling Type/Area	Detached	Semi Detached	Terrace	Flat	Other	Total Households
Alsager	39.9%	40.4%	11.6%	8.1%	0%	5,183
Congleton	36.3%	35.4%	19.3%	8.9%	0.2%	11,561
Handforth	26.1%	23.1%	27.9%	22.8%	0.1%	2,936
Knutsford	38.8%	34.2%	19.7%	7.0%	0.4%	5,671
Middlewich	39.0%	26.0%	19.7%	15.3%	0%	5,910
Nantwich	20.8%	30.6%	26.8%	21.6%	0.2%	6,710
Poynton-with-Worth	42.7%	39.2%	10.5%	7.2%	0.3%	6,024
Sandbach	39.1%	36.1%	17.6%	6.8%	0.3%	7,840
Wilmslow	39.5%	26.6%	19.5%	14.3%	0%	10,615
Cheshire East	35.6%	32.6%	21.2%	10.2%	0.5%	159,441
North West	18.0%	36.3%	29.8%	15.4%	0.5%	3,009,549
England	22.4%	31.2%	24.5%	21.2%	0.7%	22,063,368

Housing Stock by Type.
Source: Census 2011, Office for National Statistics (ONS)



08 Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities & Threats

This SWOT is based on the analysis of the consultant team and discussions with the Town Council and other local partners including councillors.

Strengths

- Strategic location – good accessibility to the M6 and a train station providing national transport linkages
- A vibrant town that “punches above weight” in terms of its Town Centre offer which includes a mix of retail, health, community, leisure and civic facilities, a successful programme of events and a growing evening economy through the opening of new bars and restaurants
- Town Centre has not shown signs of deterioration since Covid – businesses have been flexible with opening hours and online trade. The resilience and adaptability of local businesses is noted as a real strength
- Lots of independent businesses and shops has meant Alsager has not been as negatively impacted by the loss of national retail chains
- Environmental assets including attractive open spaces such as Milton Park within the Town Centre, the Mere and surrounding open countryside accessed by well used ‘Donkey routes’.
- An attractive residential location given Town Centre amenities and accessibility to employment destinations and wider countryside
- An engaged community including numerous forums, sports and social clubs, and a large number of voluntary groups (e.g. U3A, Roundtable Lions, Alsager Music and Arts, Dementia Group, Animal Welfare Group and Maintenance of Milton Gardens)

Weaknesses

- Traffic and congestion negatively impacts upon the Town Centre environment
- A tired public realm is detracting from the Town Centre offer and presents issues such as poor quality footpaths, impacting upon mobility for the elderly and disabled (e.g. mobility scooters). A mix of ownerships also makes the cost and maintenance of consistent frontages and public realm challenging
- Anti-social behaviour surrounding the Sports Hub
- Long stay parking - commuters and those doing recreational activities using free car parks and occupying spaces for day
- The National Cycle Network to the north of town does not link into Town Centre itself
- Limited number of stalls at the weekly market (on Fairview Car Park)

Opportunities

- Neighbourhood Plan in place setting out the aspirations and guiding future development for the town
- Engaged community – residents are keen to engage and spend time to feedback on local proposals and provide opinions including those with a wealth of experience and commitment to Alsager
- Emerging public realm strategy setting out improved layout / configuration of the centre for traffic, parking & pedestrian movement
- For an overarching green space strategy would better connect the Town Centre green spaces with wider countryside walks, e.g. Donkey Paths
- Opportunity to co-ordinate Alsager’s programme of events to strengthen the offer and maximise footfall
- Aspiration to grow and enhance Alsager’s weekly Wednesday market but constrained by Asda car park footprint under license. A more visible and central location in front of library could be beneficial but traders like to have their vans adjacent to stalls.
- Large vacant units on the high street could be redeveloped to provide residential accommodation closer to local services and amenities
- Some vacant units on the high street could be turned into co working spaces, as fewer people commute back to the office
- Opportunity to create a more defined sense of arrival and identity to the town along Crewe Road and Sandbach Road (N & S) and Crewe Road to Lawton Road (E & W)

Threats

- Local scepticism around plan making including of Cheshire East Council due to issues at the time of the Local Plan consultation around scale of development and the recent Active Travel Plan process, and of external consultants due to lack of historic engagement and consultation fatigue
- Lots of local opinion - often results in opposition to anything regardless of proposal; incorrect news/details have hindered resident buy-in; and led to strong online commentary and reactions to proposals
- Concern that parking charges would result in commuter vehicles being parked on neighbouring residential streets (as experienced elsewhere in the borough)
- Impact of Covid 19 on employment and demand for Town Centre uses
- Dormitory commuter town for Manchester and Liverpool with an ageing population and loss of younger people to surrounding larger urban areas
- Potential for conflict between Town Centre residential and growing evening economy
- Impact on servicing and deliveries if car parking removed from in front of retailers e.g. Chatwin’s



ALSAGER ACTION PLAN

09 Priority Areas for Intervention

The Action Plan has been prepared in collaboration with the Town Council and its Partners and identifies actions which seek to support the established Vision and Objectives for Alsager responding to its challenges and opportunities. It sets out a series of actions, identifying a small number of priorities for intervention which will have the greatest impact on improving the vitality of the Centre.

For each of the actions further details are provided in terms of what, how, who and where (see Box opposite for further details).

The Action Plan is supported by a Toolkit which provides a wide range of actions across 25 intervention areas (which align with the High Street Task Force recommendations) which can be undertaken by a range of stakeholders.



Vision and Objectives

Vision Statement

Alsager will be a vibrant town with a strong community spirit that capitalises on its many advantages of the railway station, proximity to J16 of M6 and closeness to the conurbations of North Staffordshire and the surrounding countryside. Alsager will have a thriving Town Centre with attractive public spaces and a successful independent sector.

A range of housing will be provided to meet local needs and there will be high levels of local employment, good access to education and good access to sustainable transport. Alsager will have high quality open spaces through the retention of Green Belt and open countryside around the town.

Objectives

- **To provide employment opportunities and support economic development**
- **To achieve a vibrant, prosperous and sustainable Town Centre**
- **To provide a range of housing**
- **To protect, preserve and enhance the natural and built environment**
- **To maintain and improve community health and wellbeing**
- **To develop integrated and sustainable traffic and transport services**

Role of the Centre

Alsager plays a number of important roles:

- A local centre serving the needs of its local residents
- A civic hub comprising council offices, a library and community venue
- A community focus offering a range of amenities including attractive parks, leisure amenities, events and active community groups
- An employment hub offering a range of job opportunities

The Vitality Plan seeks to support Alsager to fulfil its potential across these important roles.

Areas for Intervention

The following have been identified as areas for intervention. Priority interventions identified through the public consultation are highlighted with a white border.

Potential actions are identified in Section 10:



Spatial Action Plan

The Spatial Action Plan illustrates key features of the Centre and identifies where proposed actions could be delivered. It demonstrates how the linkages between the Town Centre and the train station could be improved as well as ensuring local residential areas are well connecting into the Centre. It also highlights Alsager's civic and green assets.

The Three priority actions which have emerged from the public consultation are:

- Action 1: Enhance Alsager's Public Realm
- Action 4: Encouraging Walking and Cycling
- Action 7: Public Transport Strategy



Action 1:
Public realm enhancement zone:
Area of focus for public realm enhancements which could range from improved pavement materials and crossings to temporary seating areas and parklets



Action 4:
Priority corridors for enhanced connections between key destinations



Priority gateway for signage/wayfinding/artwork, to provide a clear sense of arrival into Alsager town centre



Better integrating all road users



Encouraging walking and cycling



Movement Action Plan

Building on the transport schemes suggested in the LTDP, additional Town Centre transport schemes are suggested as likely to be beneficial in supporting Town Centre vitality and viability. These additional schemes, which place a strong emphasis on public realm and enhancing the street environment are set out in the table and plan opposite

Town Centre Movement Schemes suggested in addition to LDTP potential Schemes

Alsager TCVPs Proposals				
Type	Ref	Scheme	Description	Costing ¹
Active Travel	A_AT1	Improve cycling and walking route on Sandbach Road North	Improve walking and cycling route on Sandbach Road North towards the M6.	<£1m
Public Realm	A_PR1	Enhance the pedestrian environment on Lawton Road	Extend the town centre public realm scheme on Lawton Road to upgrade the current underwhelming pedestrian environment and tired materials.	£1m-£5m

¹The costs presented are indicative only at this stage. Costs will depend on type and level of interventions delivered – and should be revised at subsequent design stages.
cheshireeast.maps.arcgis.com/apps/MapSeries/index.html?appid=48d6af7045d2495c81a1850a2c8a72c1

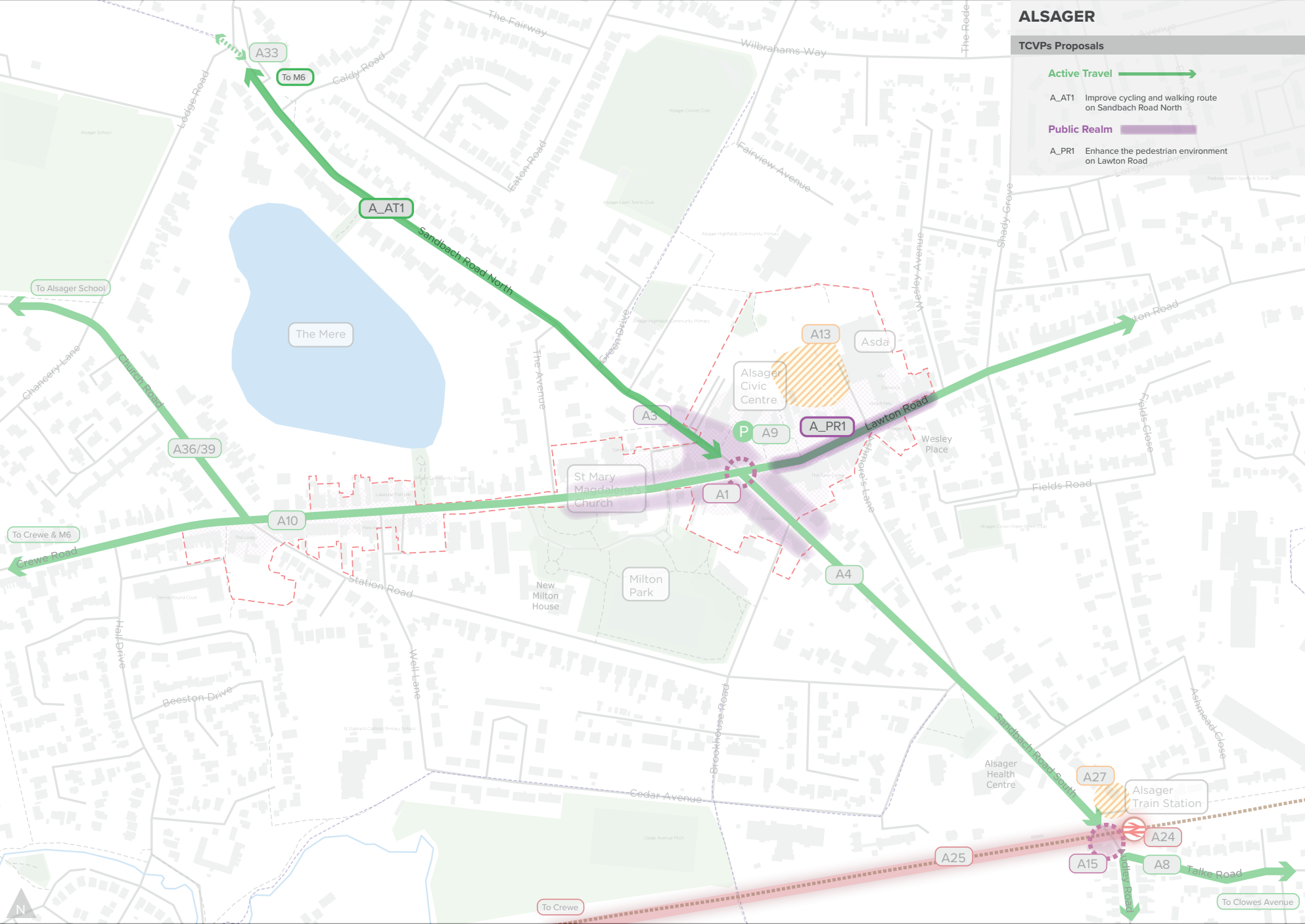


Peschiera, Italy : Shared walking & cycling route with landscape buffer
(Photo credit: MottMacdonald)



Poynton, Cheshire :Informal street design – street de-cluttered to remove obstacles to pedestrian movement and allow for businesses’ spill-out. Introduction of seating and trees to offer resting points and shade.(Photo credit: MottMacdonald)

Town Centre Vitality Plan Highways Proposals

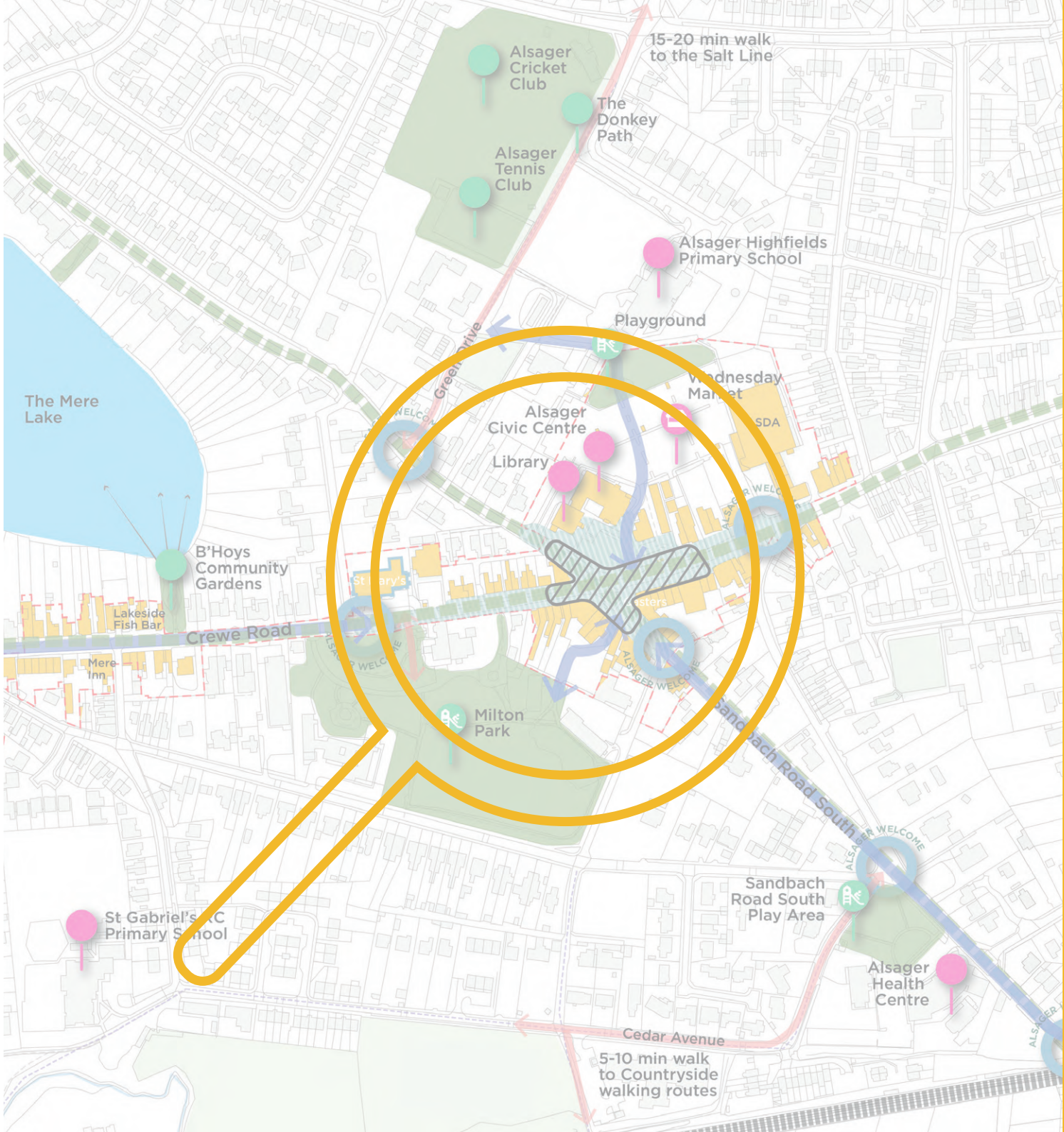


10 Potential Actions



Action 1: Enhance Alsager’s Public Realm (Priority from public consultation)

What	How
<p>Alsager is a vibrant Town but its tired public realm is detracting from the offer and in some cases, presenting issues to mobility where surface quality is poor. Partners have already prepared a Public Realm Strategy focused on the Crewe Road/Lawton Road (B5077) and Sandbach Road North/South (B5078) crossroad junction at the heart of the Town Centre. The delivery of an enhanced public realm could bring numerous benefits in terms of raising the town’s profile and perceptions, encouraging walking, increasing dwell time and showcasing what Alsager has to offer. Greening the public realm will help improve attractiveness and biodiversity.</p>	<p>Areas of focus for public realm enhancements have been identified around the Crewe Road/ B5077 and Sandbach Road South/ B5078 junction. This area, which includes the civic hub and shopping core, acts as a central space and key arrival point into the Town Centre, but at present is dominated by highways and poor quality paving and materials used along pavements and at crossings.</p> <p>Commissioned by the Neighbourhood Planning Committee, the Alsager Public Realm Feasibility Study was carried out in 2019 and suggests proposals for improvements to the public realm, which are endorsed under this action.</p> <p>Public realm enhancement should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Prioritise works around the crossroads, up to the Crewe Road entrance to Milton Park• Address poor quality highway and footway surfaces to ensure pavements and crossings are suitable for those with limited mobility or disabilities.• Create a street environment that welcomes and values pedestrians- not one that feels hostile.• Look at re-wilding pocket spaces as part of the works• Review proposed public realm scheme principles to pick out quick delivery wins e.g. de-cluttering• Progress the vision for Alsager’s public realm to next stages of design (RIBA2/3), including identification of quick wins and an estimation of costs.• It is important to ensure that all public realm is well maintained including pavements and landscaping
Who	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Town Council• CEC• Neighbourhood Planning Committee
Where	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Alsager Town Centre focussed on Crewe Road/ B5077 and Sandbach Road B5078 junction



Action 1 supports the following objectives:

- To provide employment opportunities and support economic development
- To achieve a vibrant, prosperous and sustainable Town Centre
- To protect, preserve and enhance the natural and built environment



Toolkit Actions

- 4d – Planting in pots to define space for certain uses
- 5a - Upgrade public realm with high quality materials
- 5d – Instant greening
- 11a – Holistic public realm scheme that improves pedestrian provision
- 18b – Provide new places to sit
- 22a – Creating exciting new spaces
- 25b – Prioritise environmental performance credentials when delivering new or improved public realm proposals
- 25d – Raise awareness in the public realm



Action 1: Enhance Alsager's Public Realm (PRIORITY)

Public realm feasibility study

As detailed in the baseline, Xanthe Quayle were commissioned in 2019 by the Neighbourhood Planning Committee to carry out a Public Realm Feasibility Study for Alsager Town Centre and produce proposals for improving the public realm. CGIs of proposals for the cross roads and the Crewe Road entrance to Milton Park are provided below. These proposals would contribute positively to Action 1, and as a next step should be costed up to give stakeholders an idea of funding required.



Views into park improved with
'eye-catcher' pavilion

Roadside SUDS

'Informal Play' opportunity associ-
ated with the relocated bus stop

Bespoke bus stop

Source: Extracts from
Alsager Public Realm
Feasibility Study 2019, p5



Trees removed

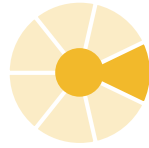
New Diagonal Crossing

Route from Fairview car park
improved

Boundary wall removed and
replaced with sitting steps

Crossings to remain at same
locations on Lawton Road

Source: Extracts from
Alsager Public Realm
Feasibility Study 2019, p6



Action 2: Improve Connections between Key Destinations and the Centre

What	How	Who
<p>Improving linkages across and through the Town to the surrounding transport and community infrastructure assets and recreational destinations. The Town has several community assets located on the edge of its local centre that are currently disconnected. Improvements to the linkages between these assets and the Town Centre will encourage more sustainable movements through better connections with the train station and the promotion of walking and cycling via easier, more attractive routes.</p> <p>It will also encourage more trips into the Town Centre. Improvements can create enhanced links between the station, open spaces, planned residential development, existing residential areas, community infrastructure and wider outdoor recreational routes back into the Town Centre.</p>	<p>Improved connections can be achieved by the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Establishing a series of gateway points along important connector routes across the Town to help with wayfinding and sense of arrival.Create a ‘Activity and Accessibility’ map for the Town to showcase the wider connectivity to outdoor assets for pedestrians and cyclistsConsider opportunities for footway widening where possible to create improved walking provision and accessible access.Provide co-ordinated directional signage between Town Centre locations and surrounding assets to ensure people understand direction and time between destinations.Improve crossings adjacent to key assets to enhance pedestrian accessibilityPromote trails and linked activities across wider outdoor recreational destinations to encourage families to undertake cycle trips and outdoor activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Cheshire East CouncilTown CouncilNetwork Rail/East Midlands Railway <p>Where</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Connecting the train station, Highfields Primary School, Alsager School, Milton Park (from Sandbach Road South) and Radway Green employment area to the centre and enhancing routes to the western end of the high street.



Culture Mile Part 2, City of London. Used with permission from Richard Wolfströme. <https://richardwolfstrom.com/culture-mile-part-2>



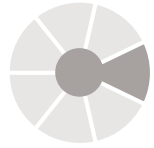
Action 2 supports the following objectives:

- To provide employment opportunities and support economic development
- To achieve a vibrant, prosperous and sustainable Town Centre
- To maintain and improve community health and wellbeing
- To develop integrated and sustainable traffic and transport services



Toolkit Actions

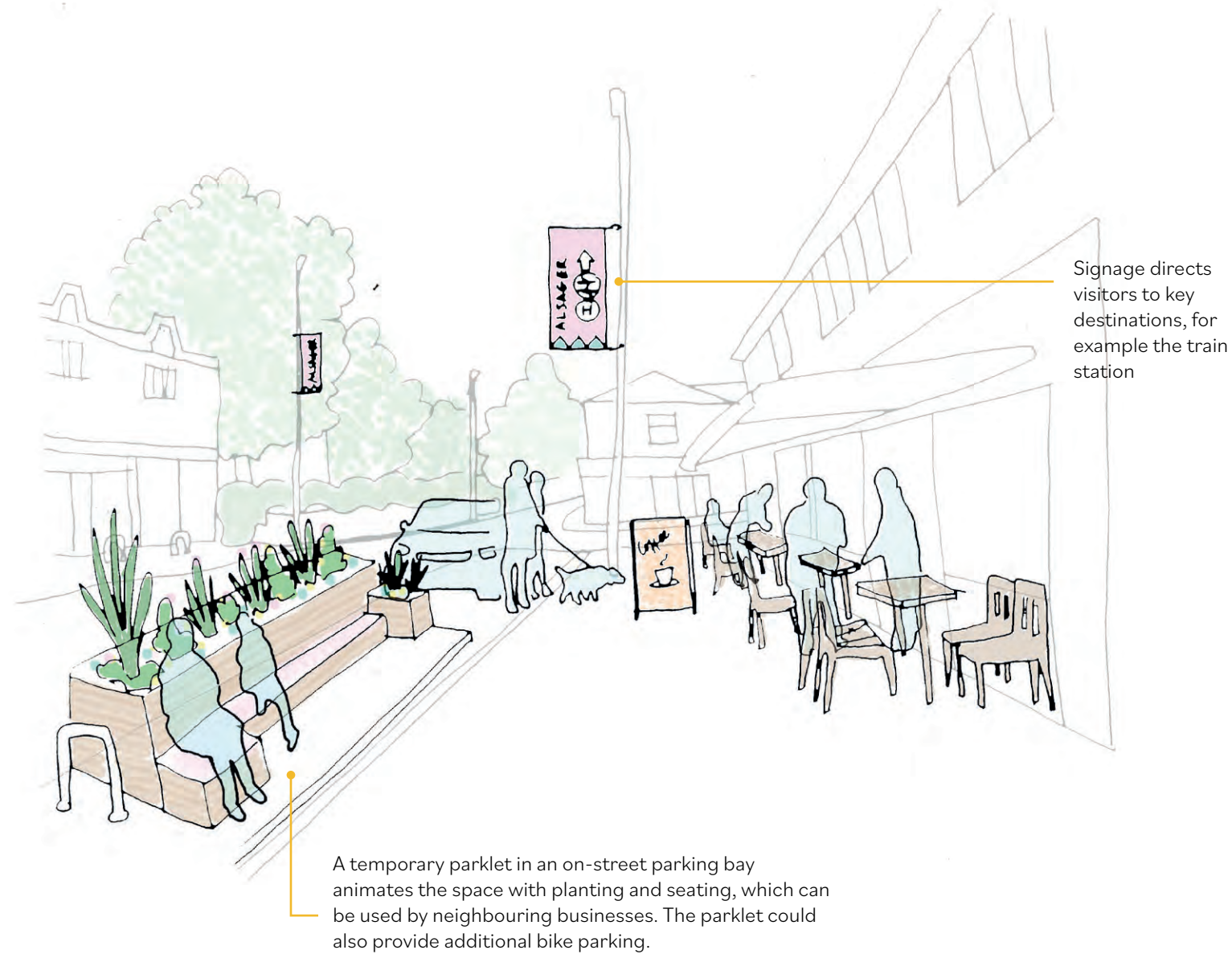
- 4b – Better signage
- 4e – Enhance gateway sites
- 14c – Enhanced crossings
- 20b – Use space and activities to attract people to a forgotten part of Town Centre and create new place identity/ Reinvigorated alleyways



Action 2: Improve Connections between Key Destinations and the Centre

Wayfinding and temporary activity spaces

Quick wins could include improving signage to key destinations and creating temporary spaces, such as parklets, to encourage activity along key arrival routes.

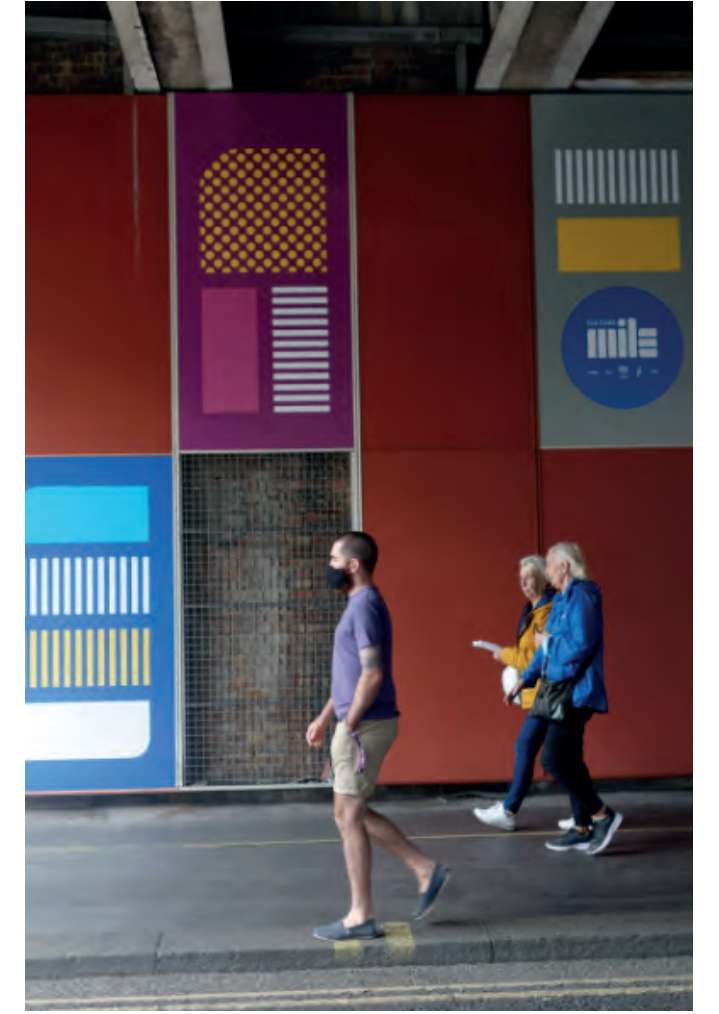


Precedent projects

Richard Wolfströme's meanwhile use installations and signage as part of the Culture Mile project between Farringdon and Moorgate in London act as a good example for wayfinding, creating temporary activity spaces and reducing car dominance along key gateways and arrival spaces. The scheme was a collaboration across a number of public and private sector partners.



Culture Mile Part 2. Used with permission from Richard Wolfströme. <https://richardwolfstrom.com/culture-mile-part-2>



Culture Mile Part 2. Used with permission from Richard Wolfströme. <https://richardwolfstrom.com/culture-mile-part-2>



Action 3: Reduce Car Dominance – better integrating all road users

What

Better integrating all road users on Crewe Road and at the heart of the Town Centre to encourage visitors to be able to dwell, creating a safer and more pleasant place to shop and relax. Re-prioritising pedestrians and reducing the space for cars allows Town Centre visitors to browse more comfortably without worrying about cars passing by, which in turn benefits businesses through increased footfall, dwell time and linked trips across previously dominant roads. Shop fronts are also more visible when not hidden behind a large and/or heavy vehicle movements. This action is closely linked to Action 1 which seeks to enhance Alsager’s public realm and seeks to ensure footways are attractive and usable to all.

Whilst seeking to reduce the dominance of cars in the Centre it is acknowledged that people do need to be able to use their cars in some circumstances.

How

The highway is currently too engineered and urban, with too much space for cars. Techniques to reduce car dominance and soften the street environment that could be considered include:

- Removal of street clutter (e.g. remove guardrails), improve pedestrian crossings, and introduce good quality and consistent street furniture. Explore opportunities for tree planting and green infrastructure.
- A 20mph speed limit through the Town Centre could be implemented to improve safety. This could be supported by complementary traffic speed reduction measures such as centre line removal.
- Narrowing of splayed junctions could be an agreeable option and include potential turning move bans.
- Incremental change may work well – unless major funding source can be found to deliver transformational change.
- Initiatives do not need to be expensive. For Example, in Macclesfield CEC covered the £1,000 cost for licenses to enable outdoor eating and drinking and local businesses paid for furniture/planters. Ideas can be tested as temporary measures to demonstrate how they will not impact negatively on businesses. Some initiatives could remain as they will not impact on businesses while others could remain as temporary options, such as the space outside Lost and Found in Knutsford which is used for some events.

Consideration should also be given to establishing an Alsager Car Share Community.

Who

- Town Council
- CEC
- Local Businesses

Where

- Part of Crewe Road and main crossroads at B5077 and B5078 (traffic calming)

Benchmark Location

Lawton Road is a busy key road connecting Alsager Town Centre toward the A50 (east). Despite the numerous active frontages along the route, the public space for pedestrians and visitors is currently grey and underwhelming. The public realm enhancements in Poynton showcase how to improve conditions for those on foot and cycle encouraging footfall, while retaining traffic capacity.

The street should be de-cluttered to eliminate obstacles to pedestrian movements and the footway treated with quality materials to improve the look and feel of the route – allowing business to spill out in a welcoming environment. Reducing the carriageway width, introducing quality paving materials, street trees, planters and cycle parking will add significant value to Alsager Town Centre. Informal street design can also encourage lower driving speed and reduce the need for hard protection such as bollards and guardrail.



Poynton, Cheshire Informal street design – wide stone-paved footway for commercial and dining spill-out. Introduction of new street furniture, cycle parking, street trees and planting. (Photo credit: MottMacdonald)



Action 3 supports the following objectives:

- To achieve a vibrant, prosperous and sustainable Town Centre
- To protect, preserve and enhance the natural and built environment
- To develop integrated and sustainable traffic and transport services



Toolkit Actions

- 4c – Better bus stops
- 4d – Planting in pots to define space for certain uses
- 9c – Enable a café culture
- 14a – Quick wins and temporary interventions to manage traffic speeds and create more pedestrian friendly spaces
- 14c – Enhanced crossings
- 18e – Prioritise environmental considerations in the design of new public spaces
- 25c – Facilitate modal shift



Action 4: Encouraging Walking and Cycling (Priority from public consultation)

What

The majority of cycle routes are on roads with little segregated routes not segregated from the cars and are therefore not considered suitable by many people. They would benefit from improved cycling routes across Alsager. The Local Transport Development Plan (LTDP) identifies the B5077 and Sandbach Road South as priorities for improved cycling facilities.

The Town Centre is within a walkable distance for much of the wider community, but the quality of walking journeys is key to prosperity. A detailed audit of key walking routes should be undertaken to identify finer grain improvements to local streets to support more journeys being made on foot. It should be acknowledged that walking and cycling is not an option for everyone depending upon age, distance of travel and ability.

How

Alsager is a walkable town in terms of size but needs to improve surface quality of paths (some private ownership) and comfort levels for pedestrians. This is especially the case on the higher design speed links outside of the Town Centre.

- Create a network of streets that better support active travel across the wider residential catchment. This could include wider footways, improve crossing facilities and interventions to reduce traffic levels on important walking and cycling streets
- The Alsager Partnership has created walking and cycling maps of the Town. These need updating and making more people aware of the routes, through wayfinding, signposting, social media for example
- Links to local cycling clubs
- Introduce safe, secure cycle parking in the Town Centre and at key transport/services/shopping destinations e.g the Station

Who

- Town Council
- ‘CEC including Cycling Champion
- Alsager Harlequins Cycling Club

Where

- Alsager Town Centre
- Sandbach Road North
- Alsager train station and Milton Park (from Sandbach Road South) to the centre and reconnecting the western end of the high street.

Precedents

Alsager is characterised by a busy crossroad in the Town Centre and then residential uses expanding along four key routes: Sandbach Rd North, Lawton Rd, Sandbach Rd South and Crewe Rd.

These four busy roads will require wider footways and segregated cycle tracks to create more comfortable conditions for people on foot or cycle – separating them from vehicular traffic.

For example, the segregated cycling facilities introduced on Park Lane in Liverpool and in Fuerteventura’s residential streets allow cyclists to run separated from traffic and pedestrians. This maximises the use of space and reduces conflicts between different users.

Crossings should also be designed as direct as possible, such as the example at Maid Marian Way in Nottingham – to enhance pedestrian priority and comfort.

As Alsager aims to deliver strong cycling and walking connections through the Town Centre towards the residential zones – Low Traffic Neighbourhood schemes- should also be considered. Modal filters and road closures can be implemented on a trial base using barriers like planters and street furniture – to reduce vehicular traffic and enhance local active travel in residential areas surrounding the Town Centre.



Park Lane, Liverpool Segregated cycle tracks
(Photo credit: MottMacdonald)



Fuerteventura Bi-directional cycle track, on a one-way residential street.
(Photo credit: MottMacdonald)



Maid Marian Way, Nottingham Supercrossing – direct, wide crossing and integrated green features (Photo credit: MottMacdonald)



Action 4 supports the following objectives:

- To maintain and improve community health and wellbeing
- To develop integrated and sustainable traffic and transport services



Toolkit Actions

- 5b Redesign existing shop fronts to provide a fresh and consistent experience
- 5c Dressing vacant sites
- 9a Repurposing of assets
- 15a Annual/ regular events
- 19a Affordable start-up space to help new businesses establish themselves
- 20b Use space and activities to attract people to a forgotten part of Town Centre and create new place identity/ Reinvigorated alleyways
- 21a managed activation of underutilised space
- 21b Flexible office space
- 21c Empty unit exhibitions
- 22b Bringing vacant buildings back into residential use



Action 5: Raise Alsager’s Profile

What

Create a platform from which to promote Alsager’s great assets and numerous events to ensure that residents, visitors and local businesses are aware of what is on offer in the Centre and its unique characteristics. This should support the centre to be recognised as the heart of the community.

How

Currently the Town Council provides basic information about Alsager, key policy documents and Council meetings on its website. The Alsager Partnership website also details some key projects, events and provides a local business directory. However, many centres now have their own websites to showcase what their centres have to offer.

As a first step a revamped or new website for Alsager should provide a single point for information that is relevant to existing and new residents; local businesses; community groups; and visitors. It should provide information on:

- The existing offer in terms of shops, bars, restaurant etc
- Events programme e.g Antiques Market
- How local businesses can get together to identify collaboration opportunities
- How to get involved in local groups
- What’s on offer in the local and surrounding area including tourism attractions

Consideration could be given, as has just be done in Wilmslow, to work with a local marketing company to develop a brand linked to the website and other media channels - www.wilmslowswaybetter.co.uk. It showcases many exciting aspects of the town such as it’s wellbeing, F&B, cinema, businesses, shopping and how to explore the wider area. The website was created by local businesses who wanted to support Wilmslow.

Next steps could include linking up with other partners’ websites such as CEC, other market centres with a similar profile and local visitor attractions in the wider area to enhance “footfall” on the Alsager’s pages. The Cheshire Vibe business directory is already starting to do this for Alsager.

Further, whilst Alsager has a page on the Visit Chester and Cheshire website that promotes the Town, additional content could be added to really showcase the town including profiles of local businesses (and individuals to make it more personal), local walks, cycle routes etc. Links to related websites could also be provided.

Other mechanisms to raise the profile of the centre could include:

- Wider promotion of the town’s established programme of popular events – a “what’s on” in Alsager
- Improved signage (physical and virtual via app/QR code) to stop people just passing through
- Establish Town Ambassadors and encourage brand loyalty
- Promotion through positive PR and good news stories such as the establishment as a Fair Trade Town and local churches supporting refugees
- Ensure that key messages from the Vitality Plan are fed into the Visitor Economy Strategy that is being prepared for Cheshire East
- Link in with Marketing Cheshire to see if there are any opportunities to collaboration
- Engage with other similar market towns and see if there is scope to showcase each other’s assets to broaden the appeal of the Town to attract new visitors e.g. Leek, Buxton etc
- Review the potential of promoting Alsager’s history to encourage more tourists to visit

Who

- Town Council
- The Alsager Partnership
- Marketing Cheshire
- Local Businesses

Where

- N/A



Action 5 supports the following objectives:

- To provide employment opportunities and support economic development
- To achieve a vibrant, prosperous and sustainable Town Centre



Toolkit Actions

- 2a – Create a smarter High street
- 3b – Appointment of Town Centre champions
- 3c – Destination management plans
- 4b – Better signage
- 10a – Independent shop guides
- 12a – Create an App
- 12b – Creation of Local Brand
- 12c – Set-up an online platform
- 12d – Introduce WIFI/ digital high street/ Town Centre app
- 15a – Annual/ regular events



Action 6: Mobilising the Business Community

What

Alsager already has a strong network of local community through corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives. It is recommended that this energy is harnessed and extended to the business community (those in the centre and in employment locations around its edges such as Radway Green). Engaging with these local stakeholders and businesses and encouraging them to collaborate more effectively will support the economic growth of the area. In addition, many businesses are considering how they can add value to their local communities. Many independents are passionate about the towns in which they are located as they often have personal links to the town and respond to their unique characteristics. Supporting independents to locate within Alsager will broaden the centre’s offer and enhance its vitality.

How

Encouraging local stakeholders and businesses to collaborate can generate new opportunities to share customers, cross sell etc. Special events could be organised by a group of businesses.

Groundwork have recently been appointed by Wilmslow Town Council to support local business engagement and to test the appetite to establish a Business Improvement District (BID). However, a lighter approach could be pursued in Alsager by supporting local businesses to network and understand how they could get involved in supporting the actions identified in the Vitality Plan. If actions can be identified around issues/opportunities that relate to their core function, businesses may be able to provide the following to support the Town’s aspirations:

- Sponsorship
- Materials
- Technical support
- Volunteers
- Promotion

Business networking could also identify “themes” where businesses can drive opportunities forward for example retailer and F&B hosting a fashion show or beauty event. This should not just be focused on retailers but should also target businesses on the local business parks. It could also generate opportunities for business to business referrals.

Other ways to engage local retailers and businesses could be through bringing them into events and initiatives such as extended opening hours for key events or window display competitions.

Businesses could also come together to established loyalty schemes to support shoppers to stay local. This has worked well in Belper <https://lovebelper.co.uk/>

Who

- Town Council
- Local businesses especially larger and dynamic/innovative/creative businesses. It is recognised that some retailers may be struggling but other local businesses may be keen to get involved and support their community
- Groundwork

Where

- Across Alsager including Radway Green Business Park



Action 6 supports the following objectives:

- To provide employment opportunities and support economic development
- To achieve a vibrant, prosperous and sustainable Town Centre



Toolkit Actions

- 10a – Independent shop guides
- 13a – Business profiles
- 13b – Community wealth building
- 25f – Tap into local talent



Action 7: Public Transport Strategy (Priority from public consultation)

What

As a small town Alsager struggles to support a fully integrated and high frequency public transport network. However the railway station in particular is a major asset. Before Covid disruption to travel habits, Alsager Station saw annual rises in entries and exits over the past four years for rail usage, with 3.5% increase between 2017-2018 and 2018-2019. There is scope to improve its connections to the Town Centre and overall accessibility.

The CEC Bus Service Improvement Plan seeks to build on previous collaborative working between CEC, bus operators, public transport user groups and rail stakeholders.

How

- The public transport offer of Alsager could be strengthened in several ways:
- Support double tracking of rail connection to Crewe Hub
 - Ensure Alsager is equipped to reap the full benefits of HS2 at Crewe and any risks have been identified and appropriately mitigated against
 - Explore design options for improved connections between the Town Centre and railway station on Sandbach Road South, Station Road, Ashmore’s Lane, Audley Road and Talke Road
 - Provide ticket machines at Alsager railway station
- Explore options to increase parking provision at Alsager railway station
 - Improvement in real time timetable information potentially via apps and/or digital signage

Who

- CEC
- Town Council
- Network Rail
- East Midlands Railway
- Bus Operators

Where

- Alsager train station
- Bus routes and stops



Action 7 supports the following objectives:

- To achieve a vibrant, prosperous and sustainable Town Centre
- To develop integrated and sustainable traffic and transport services



Toolkit Actions

- 4x - Better bus stops
- 14d - Digital timetable signage for public transport
- 14f - Better managed car parks



Centre Wide Actions

In addition to the specific actions identified for Alsager, a number of actions have been identified that are relevant to all of the nine centres. These are:

1. Appointment of CEC Centre Champion

The identification of a nominated officer (go to person/champion) within CEC management team for each of the Centres who would understand local priorities for the Centre and would support them to access appropriate officers within key departments and also would seek to unblock issues. It is understood that this is something CEC is currently considering. This would be supported by an providing each of the Centres with a clear organogram (including contact details) of who within CEC is responsible for what to make engagement easier.

2. Creation of a Centres Forum

Establishment of forum where key representatives from each of the centres could come together on a regular basis to receive updates from CEC about common issues/ opportunities would be beneficial. It is also recognised that during the preparation of the Vitality Plans that a number of the centres are making great progress overcoming specific

issues. By coming together and sharing progress and discussing issues it is considered that the centres would be better able to share best practice and to identify actions where they could collaborate with other centres to drive economies of scale/value for money. Some meetings may just be held between the centres (without representation from CEC officers) whilst others could include CEC and/or other partners such as C&W LEP, Groundwork etc.

3. Centre Focused Meetings in CEC

The process of preparing the Vitality Plans has involved internal workshops with relevant department leads within CEC to ensure that all departments are considering challenges and opportunities in the round rather than just in terms of their individual responsibility. It would be beneficial to continue to hold more regular Centre focused workshops. The best decisions for the centres will be taken when the implications of proposals are considered in the round taking into account both potential investment and long term maintenance.

4. Streamlining maintenance of public realm and greenspace

In light of the local desire for improved maintenance combined with recognition that CEC budgets are under severe pressure, to ensure maintenance of public realm can be optimised, it is recommended that further engagement would be beneficial to agree how the resources of CEC, the Town Council and wider stakeholders could be targeted to support maintenance. Work to establish a more comprehensive schedule of local assets in each centre and who is responsible for their maintenance should be the starting point of drive for improved maintenance. Going forward any future capital investment must be supported by appropriate consideration as to how assets will be maintained over their lifetime. It is also important to recognise that better maintenance does not necessarily just relate to grass being cut regularly. In recognition of the importance of biodiversity, going forward it is anticipated that consideration will be given to allocating parcels of land to the “wild” to support biodiversity.

5. Increasing importance of sustainability

Sustainability is now a critical issue for many organisations and important for local residents both in terms of operational implications (for example energy costs) but also in terms of local impact on the local community and the planet. As such sustainability can no longer be positioned as another priority action but rather must be a concept that is considered in every aspect of proposed actions to minimise their carbon footprint and maximise their positive benefits for the local area and its community.

6. Improved platform for communicating activities

The preparation of the Vitality Plans has demonstrated that all of the Town Councils are proactively trying to improve their centres. However it is recognised that many stakeholders will not be aware of all these efforts. Consideration therefore needs to be given as to how to amplify to more local residents, shoppers, visitors and

7. Enhanced engagement with local businesses

businesses what is going on. Wilmslow has just launched a new website which is a significant step to support this. Now the focus should be on adding more content and sharing this through a variety of channels and to ensure that these are also linked to other key partners for example CEC and the other centres (so collectively they reinforcing each other’s profiles).

Many of the centres benefit from having a range of national, and in some cases international businesses, many of which are innovating in their specialist areas. There is a significant benefit to the centres and their businesses to collaborating. Whilst restrictions on public sector revenue budgets is putting pressure on what CEC can support there is an increasing recognition by businesses, especially corporates, for the need to support their local communities (Corporate Social Responsibility). This can be in the form of grants, offering expertise or encouraging their employees to volunteer. Even smaller businesses often want to give back to the communities in which they operate. This

can be in the form of materials and/ or specialist expertise (e.g. marketing which has been harnesses by Wilmslow in setting up the Wilmslow’s Way Better brand and website). All centres should seek to better engage with their local businesses to determine how they can collaborate to support each other’s objectives. This type of collaboration can give centres a significant boost particularly when it happens around public realm (investment and maintenance), marketing and branding.

8. Greater ownership of community assets

A couple of Town Councils have taken responsibility for their community assets (both in terms of ownership and/or management). CEC is willing to engage with each of the Town and Parish Councils to discuss whether there could be benefits from greater local ownership of local assets. A process is in place to support this to happen. This is an area where centres who are already doing this could share pros and cons with other centres looking to take greater responsibility in their areas.

Governance and Delivery

Alsager Town Council is responsible for supporting Alsager to fulfil its potential. Going forward the Town Council will continue to be a major driver in the delivery of the agreed actions emerging from the Vitality Plan.

Having established a range of potential projects that will support Alsager to thrive, further work is now required to determine a detailed action plan setting out who will do what and by when.

As has been done, it is recommended that dedicated working groups are set up to drive specific short term priority actions forward. The action focused working groups will be responsible for:

- Defining the details of the proposed action
- Considering how it could be funded
- Determining who needs to be involved in supporting its delivery and what their role will be
- Seeking funding - this might require support from other partners

- Determining the timetable for intervention
- Monitoring and evaluating progress against key performance indicators and refining actions if agreed outcomes are not being met
- Reporting progress to relevant partners including the WIP and CEC
- Recommending that CEC, Town Council and any other key local stakeholder groups be invited to adopt the TCVP as a shared common plan. This would allow easy demonstration to potential funders that there is a consensus of approach and buy in from the local community

The makeup of the working groups will vary depending on the specific actions they are focused on. It is important to ensure that the same people are not tasked with getting involved in all the working groups as this will impact on progress. As such, the number of working groups and pace of delivery will depend on the number of stakeholder partners that can be engaged with and encouraged to get involved.

Consideration should be given as to whether specific stakeholders need to be invited to be involved to provide technical support. For example, CEC, national organisations like the Canal and River Trust or local businesses with specific expertise around specific actions already. CEC Connected Community officers may be able to provide development support.

Progress will be reported into the Town Councils who will in turn also report regularly to CEC. Where issues regarding progress/delivery are identified discussions will need to be taken to determine the required refinements to get progress back on track.

It is acknowledged that partners will need to determine their appetite and ability to deliver the proposed actions. Depending on resources it may be determined that additional staff need to be recruited to support the pace of delivery of the Vitality Plan and supporting Action Plans.

Communication and Engagement

There is scope to expand on the current website to use it to engage more effectively with a wider range of residents, visitors, workers and businesses. There is a need to begin to share important messages with key stakeholders including:

- Recent and proposed investment in the centre
- Projects that are being worked up
- Funding that is being sought and accessed
- How to get involved

The key partners to be engaged with on a regular basis include:

- Local businesses
- Residents
- Local community and interest groups
- Other towns centres generally and specifically those who are focusing on common actions

Quality engagement should generate potential volunteers to get involved in the delivery of specific actions and potentially resources to support their delivery.

The following mechanisms should be used to engage with key partners:

- Further enhancement of the website and strengthen profile on social media
- Public engagement consultations – the draft Vitality Plan will be consulted upon and this be used to continue the dialogue with local residents
- Piggybacking Events – for example a stall at markets showcasing what’s on and how to get involved
- Existing and enhanced business networking events – to share emerging ideas, test support and encourage ideas to refine and support their delivery

- Identification of a team of local ambassadors – ambassadors could be trained and then kept up to date about what is going on in Alsager and then they can showcase positive messages to their contacts. Ambassadors can be proactive local independent businesses leaders and other individuals who come into contact with lots of local people e.g. shop keepers

Consideration could be given to the appointment of a part time marketing officer for the centre as Alsager has just done.

In addition, as set out in Section 10, it is important for enhanced communication and engagement between CEC and Alsager Town Council.

Funding

There is not a pot of money available to support the delivery of the Vitality Plan. Rather the Vitality Plan has been prepared as a resource to support discussions with potential funders. As such it provides a useful tool with which can be used to:

- Articulate priorities for Alsager to CEC - the Vitality Plan will be used to articulate local priorities to CEC to guide them in their negotiations with developers in respect of contributions linked to planning applications (especially to support improvements in cycling, public realm and public transport) and also in determining their own capital budgets. Formal adoption of the TCVP by key stakeholder organisations can help demonstrate common objectives and priorities for any party submitting funding bids.
- Support external funding bids – having a clear action plan which provides an evidence base and priorities that have been consulted upon is now essential for most funding bids. It is important to recognise that often funding bids have specific funding leads. In some cases, this may be CEC or Cheshire & Warrington LEP, in others it might need to be a community group. Whoever may be responsible for

- leading and submitting a specific funding application, demonstration of collaboration between stakeholders and community support is essential
- Engage with local businesses – to determine whether there are actions that they can get involved in which align with their priorities for supporting their local communities
- Another approach to generating more revenue to spend locally is for the Town Council to take responsibility for owning or managing assets with any surpluses generated being invested back into the local centre

It is important to note that when determining potential interventions consideration must be given to both initial capital investment and longer term revenue implications such as maintenance. In proposing capital investment, the whole life of a project must be considered to ensure that appropriate revenue is available for ongoing costs. In Alsager, the need for some support in both the identification of funding sources and writing of business cases to secure funding to meet aspirations for the town has been identified, for example in respect of delivering a much enhanced public realm. There are various organisations that can both support this task and may offer some capacity including CEC, the LEP and bodies such as Groundwork UK who work with local partnerships.

Phasing

The actions identified in Section 10 range from projects which are already being progressed to long term aspirations which will require feasibility and funding before they can be delivered.

The public consultation has identified the following as priority interventions which will have the greatest impact:

- Public Transport Strategy
- Enhancing Alsager’s Public Realm
- Encouraging Walking and Cycling

Partners now need to determine a detailed action plan related to funding that they are able to access and the resources that they have available or can access to support delivery.

It is important to acknowledge that this indicative programme is not fixed and if specific sources of funding are identified the programme should be adapted to respond to the opportunity.

Covid has taught us important lessons about testing new approaches. For example temporary road closures to gauge whether reducing car access to encourage cycling or to provide outside dining space would benefit local centres. This approach should be continued so that rather than a public realm project having to be worked up in huge detail and then significant resources

found to deliver it more temporary solutions can be tested in terms of their impact and determine whether a more permanent solution is required or desirable. Changes are much more likely to be embraced by businesses and supported by local residents if they know that ideas are being tested and monitored and if they do not work can be reverted back to how they were.

A broad phasing plan for the identified actions is identified opposite where short term relates to 1-2 years, medium 3-5 and long 5+ years.

- A number of interventions will require further feasibility and this can be ongoing but intervention on the ground is likely to be a few years off whilst planning permission and funding is sought
- A number of interventions are interrelated in particular reducing car dominance and encouraging walking and cycling alongside a public transport strategy.



Monitoring and Evaluation

As noted above the programme and the action plan will not be set in stone but must be capable of responding to new opportunities or challenges as they arise. As such it will be important to monitor impact to determine whether the established vision and objectives are being met. Suggested key performance indicators (KPIs) and how they could be measured and how often are identified opposite:

KPI	How measured	Frequency
Footfall	External provider	Monthly
Number of vacancies	Town Clerk	Quarterly
New businesses opened	Town Clerk	Quarterly
Businesses engaged	Town Clerk to keep a list	Ongoing
Area of greenspace/ open space/ cycleways and footpaths improved	CEC	Annually
Hits on website	Traffic on Social Media	Quarterly
Increased air quality	CEC	Quarterly

Note: CEC has recently commissioned monthly footfall data to end Sep 2026. Recommend all those involved regularly share useful monitoring data with other parties so that all can be aware of progress.

Technical Terms

Term	Explanation
Comparison Goods Sector	Retail that stocks higher value goods that are purchased infrequently such as furniture
Convenience Sector	Retail that stocks everyday items such as groceries, newspapers, toiletries, confectionery
F&B	Food and Beverage
Green Belt	A designated area of countryside, protected from most forms of development to help stop urban sprawl but can be used for agriculture, forestry and outdoor leisure
Greenspace	Parks, public gardens etc
HS2 route	The UKs new high speed rail network
KSC	Key Service Centres
Linkages	The connections between two or more places/ sites within the Town Centres
Public Realm	Space between and within buildings that is publicly accessible for everyone
S106 monies	Money that developers can use towards the development of community and social infrastructure
TCVP	Town Centre Vitality Plans
Wayfinding	The ways in which people orient themselves in a physical space and navigate from place to place
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
Dwell time	The time a person may spend in a particule place or area. For example, the length of time spent sat on a public bench.



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Cheshire East Town Centre Vitality Plans

December 2022



Prepared by Cushman and Wakefield,
Optimised Environments and Mott
Macdonald for Cheshire East Council

December 2022

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Context of the Study

Town Centres across the UK are facing unprecedented challenges. Changes in how we shop, in particular the growth in internet shopping, has significantly decreased footfall in Town Centres resulting in numerous store closures, leaving many centres struggling. Trends that have only been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Government has stated its commitment to helping high streets and Town Centres evolve and adapt to both the structural changes that are occurring in the retail market as well as to COVID-19. It has identified a number of measures to support Town Centres at this challenging time including the Future High Streets Fund, a High Streets Task Force, changes to the planning system and direct support to local authorities and local businesses. Alongside these national measures the government has stressed the need for strong local leadership in supporting Town Centres.

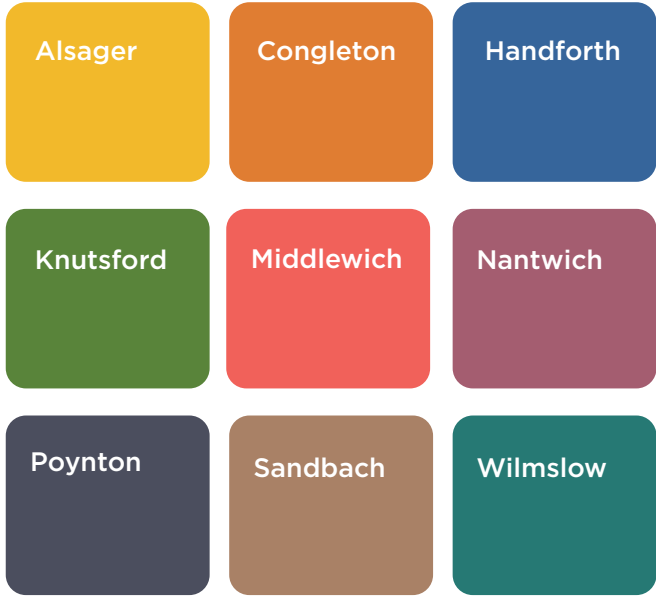
Town Centre Vitality Plans

Cheshire East Council (CEC) is committed to supporting the vitality and viability of all town centres within the borough. Whilst acknowledging that in areas of low deprivation, there may be limited opportunity to bid for centralised funding. When funding opportunities do become available, there is generally a need to have clear proposals already agreed before bids can be submitted.

It is also recognised that there are often initiatives which can be taken to support the vitality and viability of local centres which do not require significant capital funding, but rather require the support of local volunteers and/or businesses.

In addition, the reports could be used to support discussions regarding the allocation of S106 monies resulting from development within and in the vicinity of the local centres.

With an almost overwhelming array of options and opinions on what is the best way to support Town Centre vitality and viability, CEC has commissioned Cushman & Wakefield (regeneration and property advisors), supported by Optimised Environments (urban designers) and Mott Macdonald (transport planners), to work with the Town Council’s and their stakeholders to produce bespoke Town Centre Vitality Plans (TCVP) for the nine Key Service Centres (KSC):



The 9 Key Service Centres which form part of this study

Aims and Objectives

The TCVP provides a sense of direction and identify initiatives to support the nine key service centres to better fulfil their potential recognising that each centre is distinct, with its own unique opportunities and specific challenges and local groups/stakeholders. The unique characteristics of each centre will be identified along with tailored solutions for each.

They

- **Are bespoke in nature, based on a thorough analysis of individual circumstances affecting the health of each Town Centre, local stakeholder views and any local specific policy considerations.**
- **Are cross functional and holistic, and recommend a practical, realistic set of priority actions for supporting the vitality and viability of each Town Centre.**
- **Are informed and tested by existing relevant national and local public policy and strategies, local stakeholder views, relevant research and a thorough understanding of commercial markets and spatial considerations.**
- **Identify a set of recommended clear priority physical and other (e.g. marketing) interventions/actions to support the vitality and viability of each Town Centre both in recovery from COVID-19 impacts and beyond to enhancement.**
- **Recommend deliverable actions including who should be involved in delivering of each action identified, to enable Town Councils, community groups, occupiers, property owners etc., to all work towards a common vision.**
- **Take account of proposals developed/being developed by Town Councils and develop such plans further.**

Responding to the Impacts of COVID

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic hit, high streets and Town Centres were having to respond to changing consumer demands driven in part by technological changes. Many recognised the increasing importance of the consumer experience - an attractive place to dwell, shop, see friends, to eat out and be entertained. COVID-19 has led to an acceleration of changes to the reasons people visit and use local centres.

COVID-19 has not and will not be universally negative for all local centres. The requirement to stay local has supported residents to use their local facilities and where the local offer aligns with the demands of residents, local businesses have benefited. The need to work from home has also resulted in an re-evaluation of where we work going forward and it is anticipated that there has been a fundamental shift, for some, in the balance between the amount of time we spend in an office and the amount of time we work from home.

It will be some time before a clear picture emerges of the impact of new forms of working (a hybrid between office and home) have on our high streets in the longer-term. The impact will be felt differently from place to place depending on the local economy's dependency on particular sectors. It is likely that those centres that perform best going forward will be those able to reconnect with

their communities and use them to meet local needs including access to housing, culture, leisure, health etc.

The Town Centre Vitality Plans have been prepared post the outbreak of COVID-19. The impact of COVID-19 on each of the centres has been different. The bespoke Vitality Plans will provide an action plan to support recovery and future success

Vitality Plan and Toolkit

This report builds upon the Draft Baseline Report (which was a summary of the key stages undertaken in 2020 – see below) and incorporates potential actions which have been identified in consultation with local stakeholders during 2021 to form a bespoke Vitality Plan for Congleton.

The Vitality Report comprises of two sections:

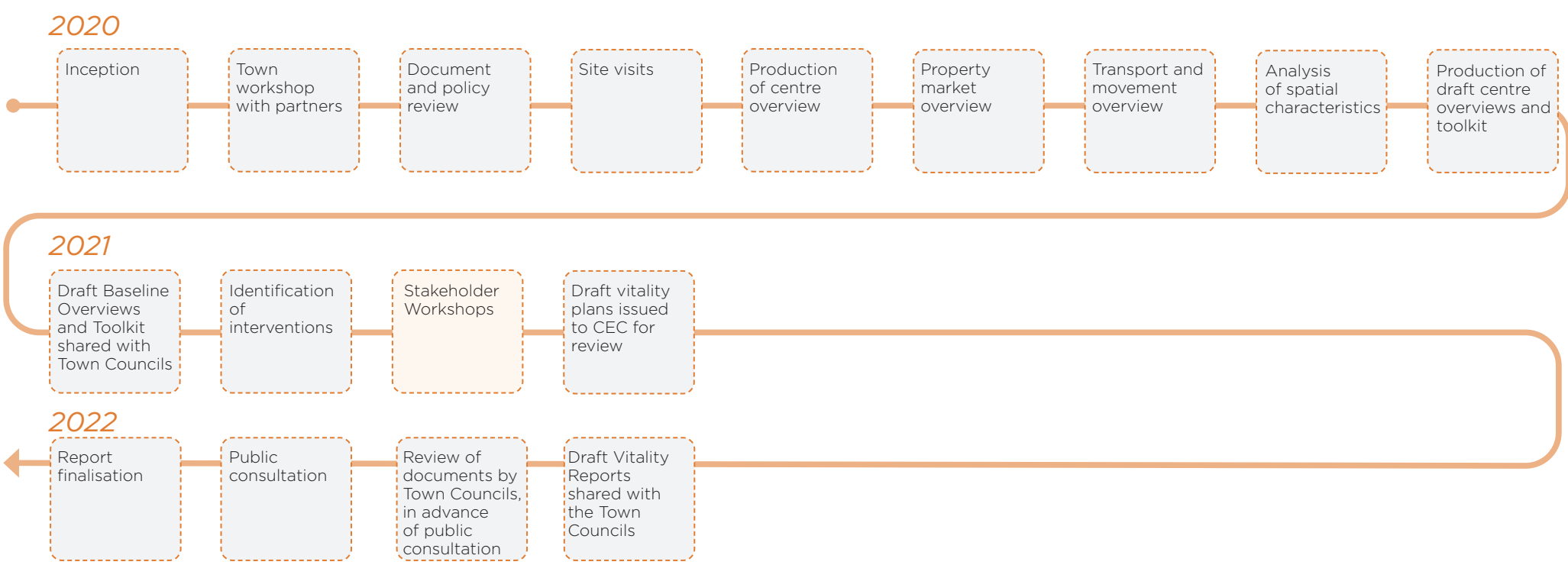
- Baseline – which was undertaken in 2020 and describes the Centre in terms of its offer and key characteristics. It brings together evidence and opinion in respect of the buildings, green and open spaces, access and its residents and businesses.

- Action Plan – has been prepared in collaboration with the Town Council and identifies actions which seek to support the established Vision and Objectives for the Centre responding to its challenges and opportunities. It sets out a series of actions, identifying a small number of priorities for intervention which will have the greatest impact on improving the vitality of the Centre.

The draft TCVPs went to public consultation for six weeks from September 2022. Feedback was reviewed and where appropriate amendments have been made to the final report. A summary of other key messages have been shared with key stakeholders.

The Action Plan should be read in conjunction with the Toolkit. The Toolkit presents exemplar projects from other centres (including from within Cheshire East) nationally and internationally to assist key stakeholders to determine a set of actions to support their centres to thrive. There is not a pot of money available to support the delivery of the Vitality Plan. Rather the Vitality Plan has been prepared as a resource to support accessing funding.

The preparation of the Vitality Plans has involved the following stages:



Baseline

Note:
The Baseline analysis was undertaken in 2020. The information in the Baseline was correct and the sources were the most update at that time. It is recognised that in some cases more up to date information is available. Whilst it is not possible to keep updating all the evidence where a significant change has happened, it has been noted. It should also be noted that Census 2011 data is provided for some indicators. Whilst the 2021 Census has just been completed, a release of this data will not be made available until March 2023 therefore making the 2011 Census the most recent consistent data source across the 9 centres for some key indicators.

02 Introduction to Congleton

Congleton’s Location within Cheshire East

Congleton is located in south east Cheshire at the foothills of the Pennines. The town is surrounded by spectacular countryside, yet is just ten minutes’ drive from the M6 motorway. It sits roughly in the middle of Crewe, Stoke and Macclesfield, each are within 10 miles from the Town Centre. Congleton Railway Station is located around a 20-minute walk east of the Town Centre and provides an hourly service to Manchester and Stoke-on-Trent.

The centre has a rich history which can be seen in a number of its attractive building including the Town Hall, a number of historic pubs and Little Street. These add to the experience of visiting the town. It is affectionately known as Beartown.

With over 200 units Congleton is one of the larger towns in Cheshire East. The Town Centre extends over half a mile from Mill Street to Lawton Street. It accommodates a good mix of independents and some national brands including Morrisons, Gregg’s, Boots and Holland & Barrett. This retail provision is supplemented by a retail market on Princess Street and ‘The Makers Market’. The latter is a monthly food and craft market on Bridge Street which attracts a wide catchment of visitors.

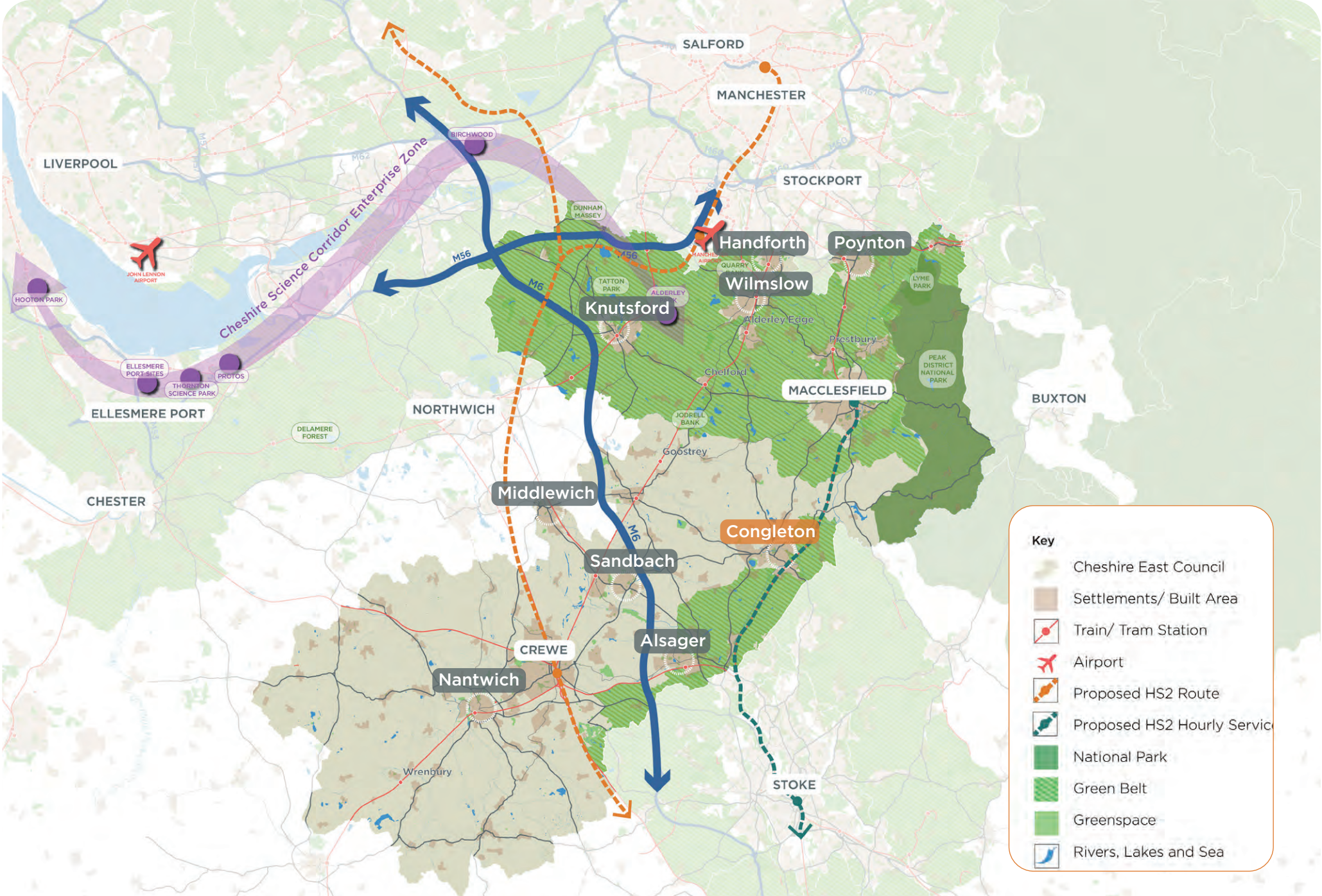
Congleton has reasonable evening/night-time economy, with a number of bars, restaurants and pubs concentrated on Swan Bank, High Street/ Lawton Street and West Street. It also offers a range of local facilities and amenities including the Town Hall, Library Complex, Community Centre, Advice Centre, Council Office, as well as health facilities and places of worship. The town also provides a range of sporting, leisure and cultural opportunities including the Daneside Theatre and Congleton Museum.

The towns historic buildings and street create an attractive character encouraging visitors to explore the centre. Recent investment (£1m) in the centre’s public realm has enhanced the experience along Swan Bank, Duke Street, Market Street, Victoria Street and Bridge Street. However, environmental quality in other parts of the town detract from the visitor experience in particular Market Street and the bus station. The vacancies on Mill Street contribute poorly to the environmental quality of the Town Centre. Mountbatten Way also acts as a barrier for movement into the Town Centre by foot from the north.

The centre also accommodates a range of offices including the Congleton Business Centre housed in a converted mill offering serviced offices space and supporting services. Wider employment opportunities are offered in Congleton Business Park, Eaton Bank Industrial Estate and John Bradshaw Court.

These assets, along with good schools, means that Congleton is a desirable place to live. Its current population is just over 25,000. The existing residential stock is dominated by detached and semi-detached home (over 70%) which means that access to smaller homes is limited. It is however, a relatively affordable location compared to many parts of Cheshire East. National house-builders are active on a number of sites which will support the future vitality of the centre.

Strategic Context Plan



02 Introduction to Congleton cont.

As identified in the Strategic Connections and Assets Plan, in addition to local green and blue assets, the town is surrounded by attractive countryside and a number of visitor attractions including: Little Moreton Hall, Jodrell Bank, Astbury Mere, Glebe Farm.

The River Dane runs to the north of the Town and through the attractive Congleton Park, a major asset for the town which accommodates a wide range of events throughout the year including concerts. Its paddling pool has entertained generations of children since the 1930s. Macclesfield Canal also offers further waterside opportunities.

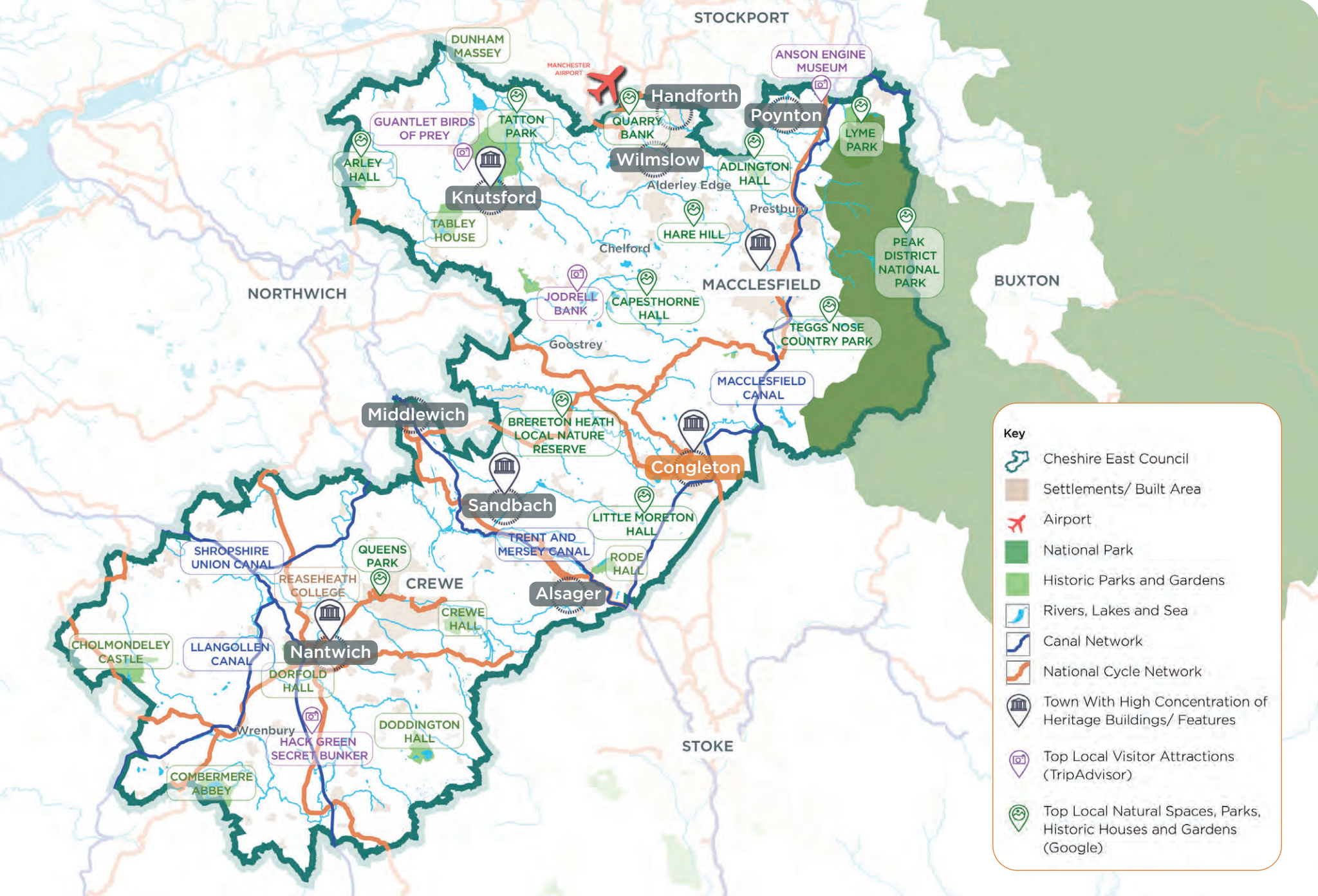
Congleton also benefits from a wealth of voluntary organisations and groups (over 150) who are active in shaping the town, keeping it attractive and supporting it and its residents and businesses to thrive. The Congleton Town Council website offers an excellent platform for residents and visitors to find out more about the town and what is on offer including the extensive programme of events and festivals.

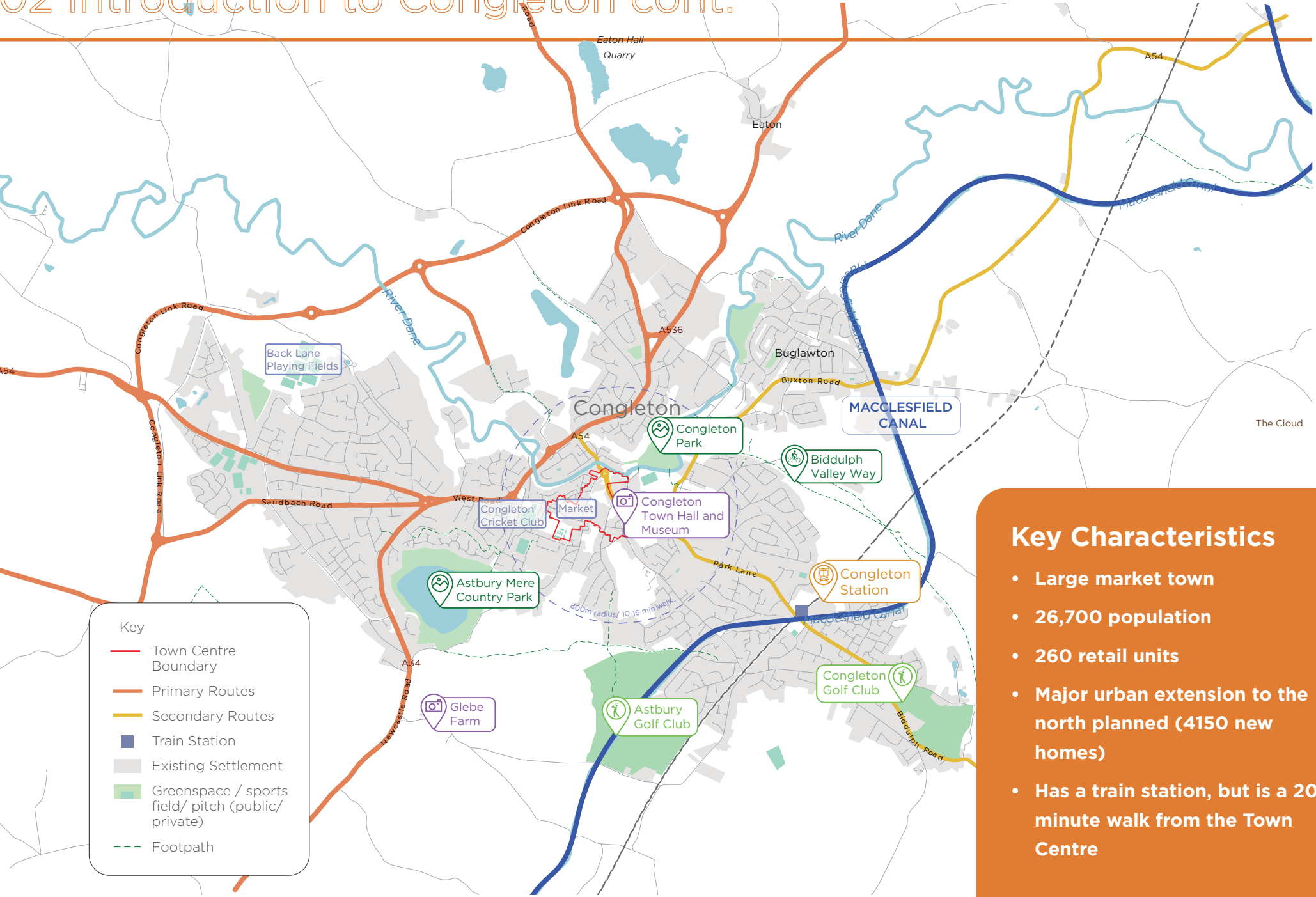
Congleton has been identified by CEC as having the potential to make a significant contribution towards the economic growth of Cheshire East and its future prosperity. It is proposed

that land to the north of the Town Centre will accommodate over 4,000 new homes and 24 ha of employment land. Proposals for how this will be accommodated are set out in the North Congleton Masterplan. The ability to deliver this employment and residential development requires the delivery of the Congleton Link Road (connecting A534 to A536) which opened in April 2021.



Strategic Connections and Assets Plan





Key Characteristics

- Large market town
- 26,700 population
- 260 retail units
- Major urban extension to the north planned (4150 new homes)
- Has a train station, but is a 20 minute walk from the Town Centre

Congleton Neighbourhood Plan Vision and Objectives

The draft Neighbourhood Plan identified the following vision for the Town:

Vision

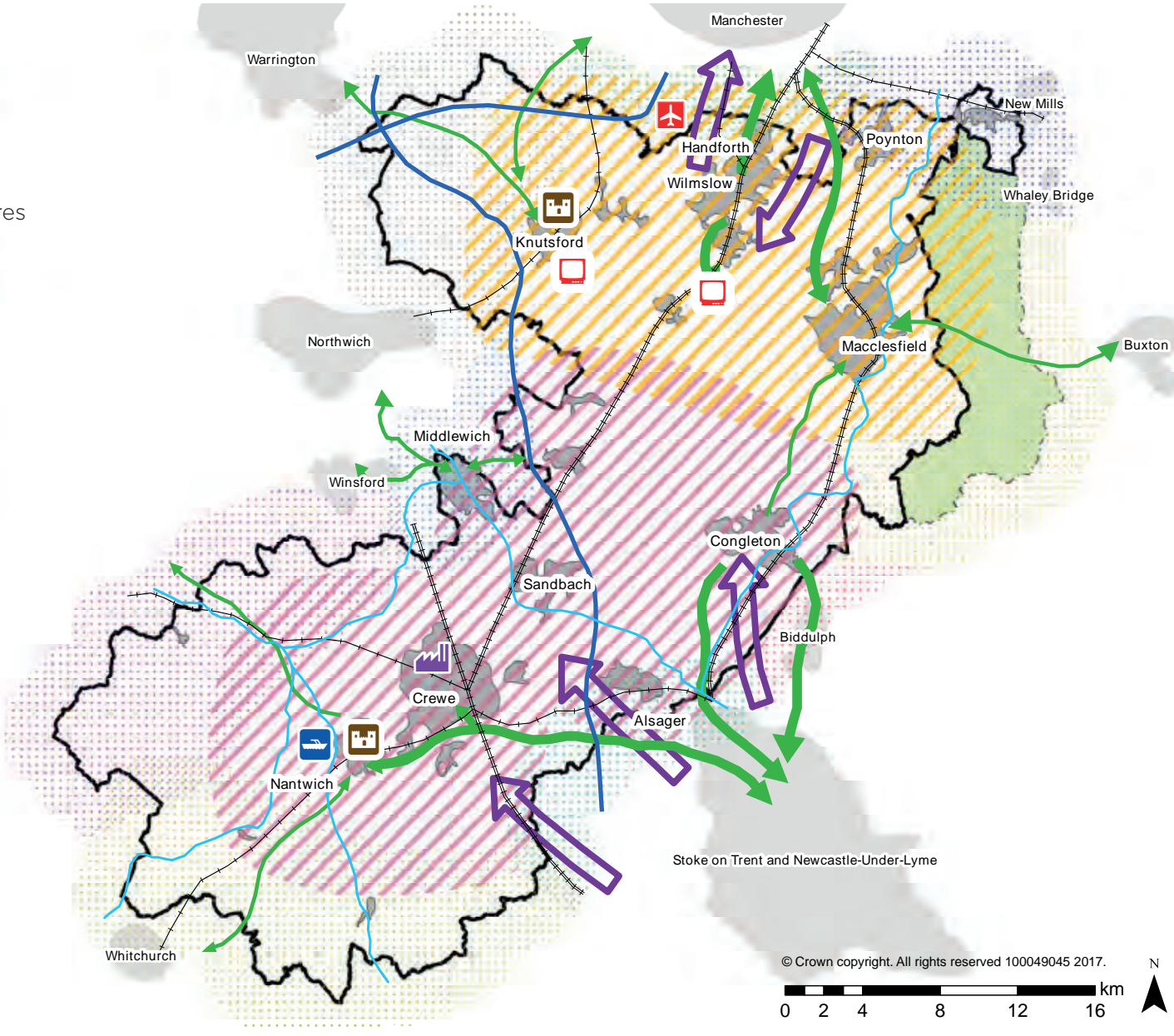
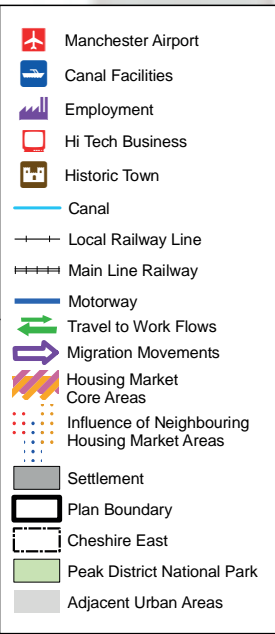
“My Congleton will thrive as a distinctive town that offers a comprehensive range of homes, shops, jobs, services and facilities supported by the required infrastructure to cater for the needs of all our residents. The special and unique character of Congleton, including its heritage assets and the surrounding countryside, will be protected, enhanced and promoted to make the town an attractive place in which to live, work and visit.”

Objectives

- To meet the objectively assessed local **housing** needs of Congleton especially the needs of the existing and future residents of the town, particularly the aging population, to create a vibrant and inclusive local community
- To **improve** the attractiveness and vibrancy of the **Town Centre**
- To secure the future prosperity of Congleton it is important to retain and attract a variety of **new employment opportunities** within the town to meet local needs and to support the local economy
- To develop an integrated **sustainable transport** framework within the town improving walking and cycling routes between everyday facilities such as shops, services, open spaces and the surrounding countryside
- The long-term objective for Congleton is to have a range of **good quality community, leisure, health and social facilities** available and accessible to everyone who lives in the town
- The object of the Environmental and Sustainability policies is to **preserve our green spaces**, enhance our environment and implement where practical renewable energy
- To deliver **high quality, distinct and safe places** which respect the Town's heritage and character

Cheshire East Local Plan

The plan opposite identifies the functional relationship that Congleton has with other centres through connectivity and proximity within and out with Cheshire East. It highlights the centre’s location in the central southern part of the Borough close to the border with Staffordshire east of the M6.

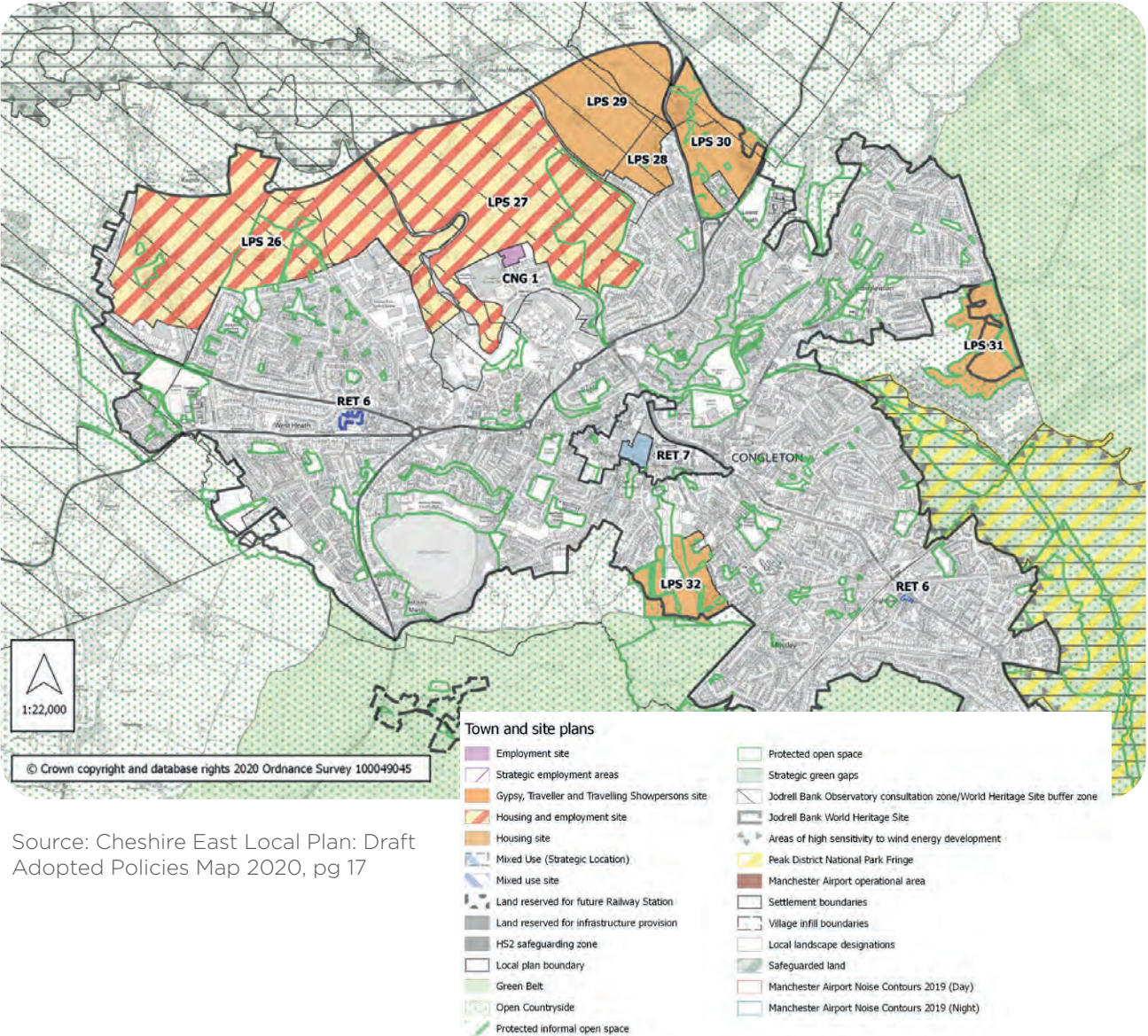


Source: Cheshire East Local Plan: Strategy 2010-2030 2017, Functional Diagram, pg 22

Local Plan Strategy 2017 (LPS) and Revised Publication Draft Site Allocations and Development Policies Document (SADPD) 2020

The Cheshire East Local Plan Strategy was adopted in 2017 setting strategic development sites around the borough. The SADPD will form the second part of the Local Plan, supporting the policies and proposals in the LPS by providing additional non-strategic policy detail and allocating additional sites to assist in meeting the overall development requirements set out in the LPS. The plan opposite identifies both Local Plan Strategy sites in and around Congleton and draft allocations in the SADPD.

- LPS 32 ‘North of Lamberts Lane’ will see the delivery of around 225 new homes with a pedestrian and cycle link to the Town Centre.
- LPS 26 ‘Back Lane, Radnor Park’ will provide around 750 new homes and 7 hectares of employment land and 1 hectare of commercial or employment development
- LPS 27 ‘ Congleton Business Park Extension’ is allocated for delivery of around 625 new homes and 13 hectares of land for commercial and employment uses. It needs to be developed in line with the North Congleton Masterplan and provide pedestrian and cycle links set in green infrastructure to the Town Centre



Source: Cheshire East Local Plan: Draft Adopted Policies Map 2020, pg 17

- RET 7 ‘Supporting the vitality of town and retail centres’ which identifies Town Centre locations for main Town Centre uses to support their long term vitality and viability, in line with LPS Policy EG 5 ‘Promoting a Town Centre first approach to retail and commerce’
- Aligned to the M6 Growth Corridor Strategy the LPS plans for substantial expansion in employment and housing, much of which will be developed adjacent to the new Congleton Link Road connecting the A534 Sandbach Road to A536 Macclesfield Road and providing a new strategic link to support development and connectivity. The LPs sets out that Congleton is expected to accommodate 24 hectares of employment land and 4,150 new homes during the period covered by the LPS.

Congleton is identified in the LPS as a key service centre.

Revised Publication Draft Site Allocations and Development Policies Document 2020 (SADPD)

The SADPD will form the second part of the Local Plan, supporting the policies and proposals in the LPS by providing additional non-strategic policy detail and allocating additional sites to assist in meeting the overall development requirements set out in the LPS.

The revised publication draft SADPD identifies a boundary for the Town Centre and the extent of the Primary Shopping Area as set out in the Draft Adopted Policies Map, setting out planning policies which seek to protect the vitality and viability of the Town Centre through the appropriate management of new development.

West Heath Shopping Centre is also defined in the SADPD as a Local urban centre.

Congleton Plans & Strategies

Congleton Town Centre Plan (TCP), March 2008

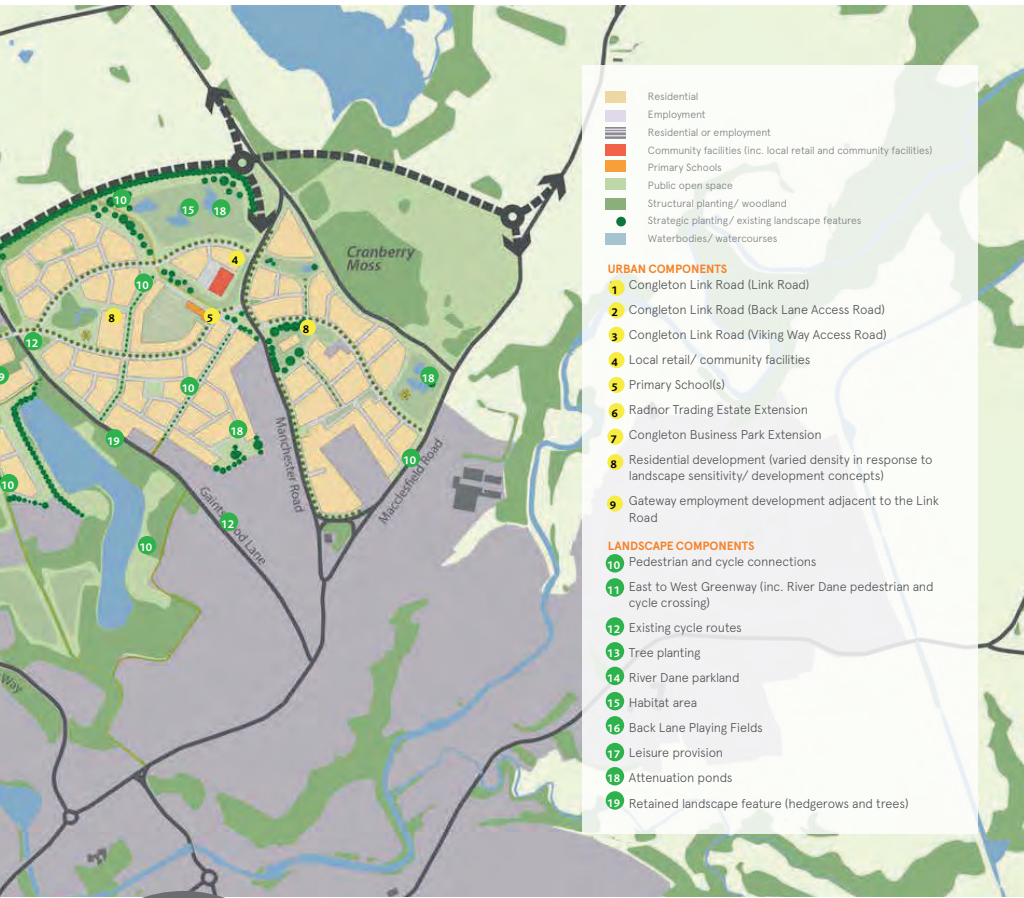
In March 2008 the Congleton Partnership - a group comprising of representatives from Congleton Town Council, Congleton Borough Council, South East Cheshire Enterprise (SECE), businesses and community groups prepared the Congleton Town Centre Plan (TCP) to outline a vision, objectives and conceptual proposals for the Town Centre.

It was adopted by Congleton Borough Council as informal planning guidance in July 2008 and it was anticipated that the TCP would be taken forward by Congleton Borough Council as a statutory Area Action Plan (AAP).

However, as a consequence of Local Government Re-organisation and changes to regulations for the preparation of Local Development Documents it did not progress as an AAP. The TCP Delivery Strategy was therefore prepared to set out a programme for the delivery of the TCP.



Source: North Congleton Masterplan 2015, Illustrative Masterplan, pg 59-60



Town Centre

Congleton Draft Neighbourhood Plan, 2017

Like a number of other areas in Cheshire East, Congleton set out to prepare a Neighbourhood Plan in 2014, consultation was undertaken in 2017. The Neighbourhood Plan was submitted to the examiner. A series of queries were raised by the independent examiner, the plan was withdrawn from examination and was not taken to a Referendum vote.

Key Themes identified in the draft Neighbourhood Plan (2017) included the following:

Stimulating Employment:

- Supporting existing businesses and provide opportunities for new employment to securing a sustainable future for Congleton
- Working with local schools and businesses to improve an appropriate skill base in the town

Providing For An Ageing Population:

- Encourage the provision of specialised accommodation, health care and leisure facilities for the ageing population of Congleton

Improving Traffic Flow:

- Improving movement around and through the town, including walking and cycling
- Improving the air quality of specific areas of the town

Regenerating The Town Centre:

- To develop an attractive, welcoming, prosperous and dynamic Town Centre with a broad retail offer of quality shops and businesses
- To create a place where people will wish to visit, work, live and shop and experience our heritage and be entertained during daytime and evening
- Develop and expand the Key Service Centre role of the town

Ensuring The Right Housing Supply:

- To make sure that housing development satisfies the need of both existing and future generations
- Ensure that development provides high quality buildings, streets and spaces that reflects the established character of the town and its surrounding countryside

Protecting And Enhancing The Environment:

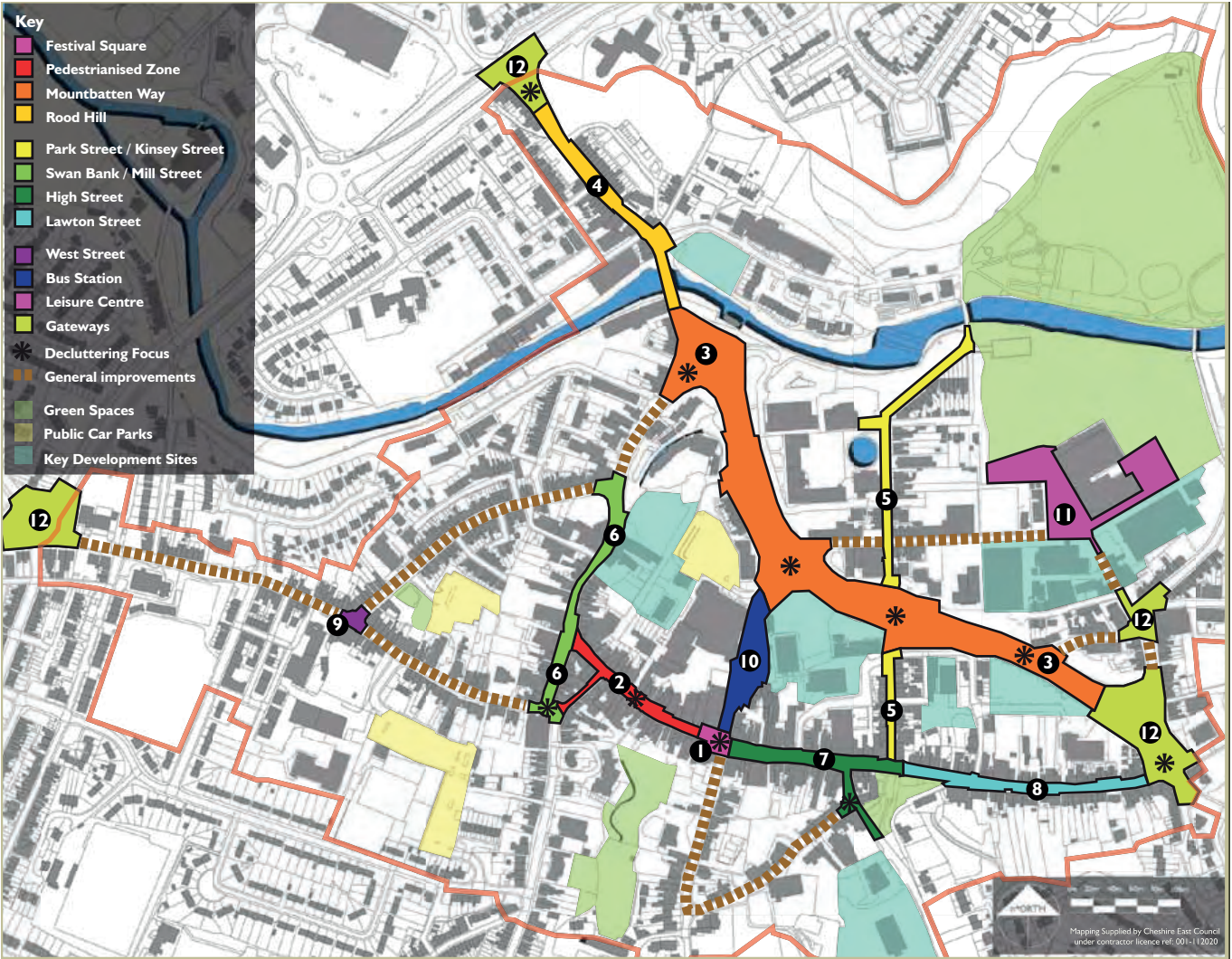
- Residents recognise Congleton as a special place regarding its green spaces and green infrastructure. All new developments should add or enhance significantly to the current stock
- Provide linked paths and cycleways to enable easy and safe access to the key facilities within the town
- Encourage the use of renewable energy technology and innovations

Health, Education And Wellbeing:

- Ensure that Congleton has health and leisure facilities that are suitable, appropriate, affordable and accessible for everyone in the community
- To ensure the educational facilities are state of the art and able to support the growing population of the town and the surrounding area
- The draft Plan also identified an series of policies to improve the attractiveness and vibrancy of the Town Centre. These covered location of retail, leisure and service development, car parking and design

A number of studies have been undertaken in the area to support investment in the Town Centre. These include:

- **Congleton Development Appraisal and Delivery Strategy** - was commissioned by CEC in 2011 to review the development potential of Congleton's publicly-owned assets and present a delivery strategy to guide the use of these assets to further the comprehensive regeneration of the Town Centre. The sites considered included CEC car parks, Congleton Leisure Centre, Congleton Library, Police Station, Market Square Office, Congleton Fire Station and GP Surgeries
- **Congleton Public Realm Strategy** - in 2011 CEC, Congleton Partnership and Congleton Town Council commissioned the preparation of a public realm strategy to provide guidance to ensure that an integrated strategy was in place to improve the quality of the environment.
- **North Congleton Masterplan** - in 2016 CEC commissioned the preparation of the North Congleton masterplan to set out the design objectives for the future development of land to the north of Congleton.
- **Cycling Masterplan for Congleton** - in 2019 the Town Council and other partners prepared a strategy to support improvements in cycling infrastructure inspired by the Tour of Britain in Cheshire in 2016 to make Congleton to the heart of cycling in Cheshire

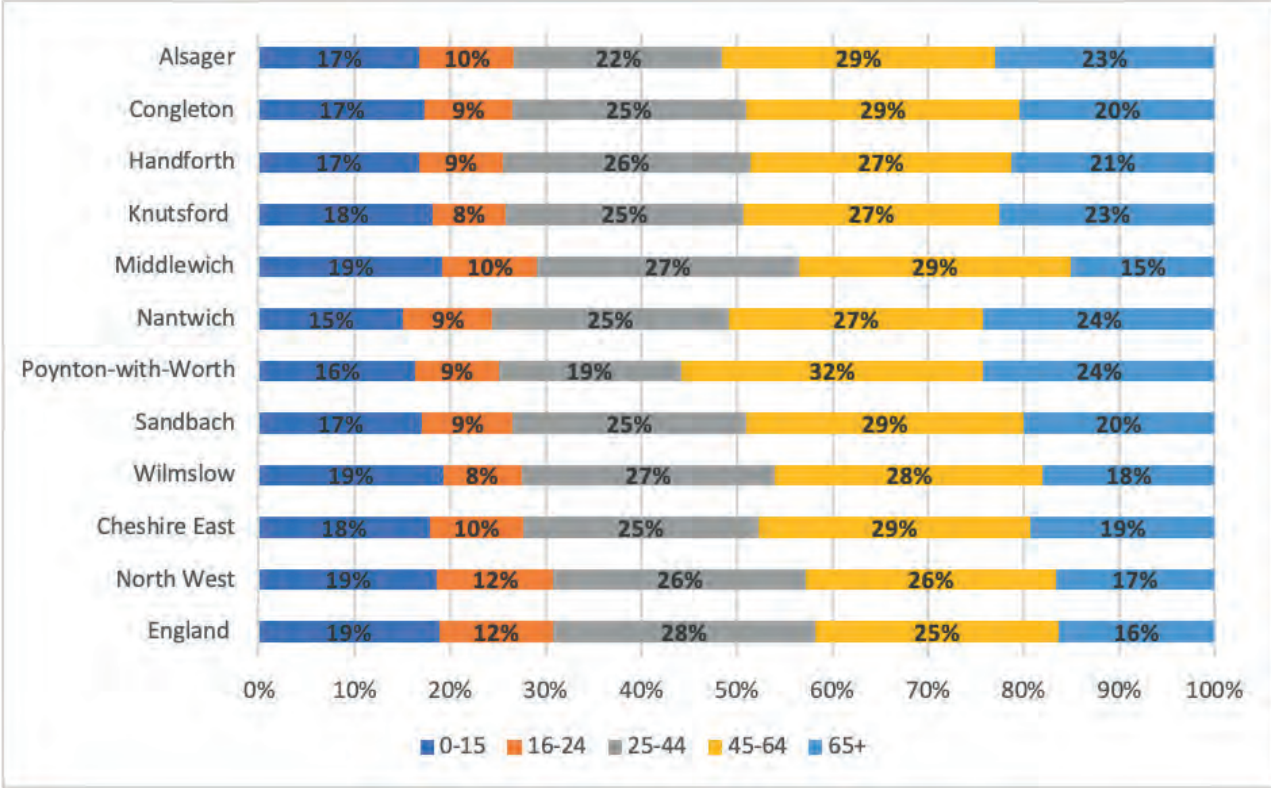


Source: Congleton Public Realm Strategy 2011, pg 74

Age

The 2011 Census data indicates that the Congleton parish area had a population of 26,482 residents representing 7.2% of Cheshire East’s total population (370,127). Congleton’s age profile is similar to that of Cheshire East. Congleton sits in line with the other Key Service Centres in terms of proportion of 25-44-year olds, the most economically active age group. Congleton also has one of the lowest average (mean) ages across the 9 KSC’s at 43 years old however higher than the Cheshire East mean age and the wider geographies of the North West (40) and England (39).

It is anticipated that when the 2021 Census data is available it should show an increase in younger residents given the number of family homes being delivered in the wider area.



Age Structure.
Source: Census 2011, Office for National Statistics (ONS)
Note: Most recent consistent data available across the 9 centres

Ethnicity

Broken-down by ethnic group the Census 2011 (latest available) shows the resident population across the Cheshire East is predominantly white at 96.7% which is a higher proportion than the wider geographies of the North West (90.2%) and England (85.4%).The majority of the population in Congleton is also white (98.0%), and when compared to other KSC’s Congleton has the second lowest proportion of Mixed/ Multiple Ethnic groups residents (0.6%/156 people), after Poynton.

Area	White	Mixed/ multiple ethnic groups	Asian/ Asian British	Black/ African/ Caribbean/ Black British	Other ethnic group
Alsager	97.6%	1.1%	1.0%	0.2%	0.1%
Congleton	98.0%	0.6%	1.1%	0.2%	0.2%
Handforth	93.1%	1.5%	3.9%	0.9%	0.7%
Knutsford	96.5%	1.2%	1.8%	0.3%	0.3%
Middlewich	98.5%	0.8%	0.6%	0.1%	0.1%
Nantwich	98.1%	0.7%	0.7%	0.3%	0.1%
Poynton-with-Worth	98.0%	0.5%	1.1%	0.1%	0.2%
Sandbach	98.1%	0.7%	0.9%	0.2%	0.2%
Wilmslow	92.6%	1.7%	4.4%	0.5%	0.7%
Cheshire East	96.7%	1.0%	1.6%	0.4%	0.2%
North West	90.2%	1.6%	6.2%	1.4%	0.6%
England	85.4%	2.3%	7.8%	3.5%	1.0%

Population by Ethnic Group
Source: Census 2011, Office for National Statistics (ONS)
Note: Most recent consistent data available across the 9 centres

Occupational Profile

At the time of the 2011 Census, Congleton had the lowest proportion of residents employed in the highest order occupation of ‘managers, directors and senior officials’ (11.7%) when compared to the other KSC’s and overall Borough. However, a large proportion of Congleton residents were employed in occupations including ‘professional occupations’ (18.9%) and ‘associate professional and technical occupations’ (13.2%) – a higher rate than the regional and national benchmarks.

Conversely, 17.7% were engaged in manual or elementary occupations. This is higher than in all other KSC’s besides Middlewich and Cheshire East (16.7 %). It is just below the North West (19.8%) and England rate (18.3%). The occupational structure of Congleton suggests a varied skilled workforce, which will in turn attract a variety of businesses (who want to attract highly skilled employees) to locate in the area.

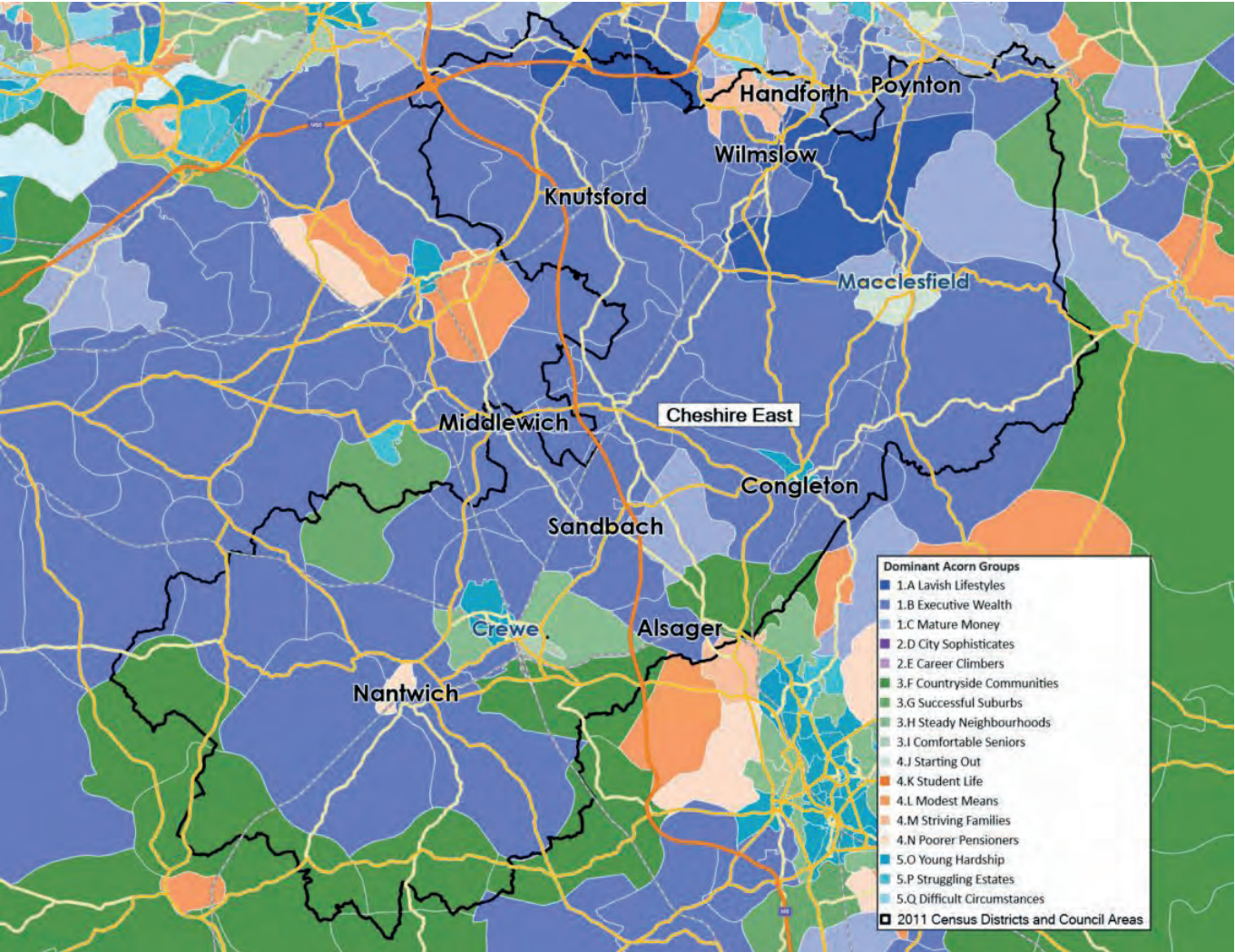


Built Up Area	Alsager	Congleton	Knutsford	Middlewich	Nantwich	Poynton	Sandbach	Wilmslow	Cheshire East	North West	England
Managers, directors and senior officials	12.8	11.7	17.2	11.9	14.3	14.9	12.6	18.3	13.6	9.9	10.9
Professional occupations	22.3	18.9	26.2	15.8	21.8	24.0	19.9	24.6	19.6	16.3	17.5
Associate professional and technical occupations	12.6	13.2	15.1	13.4	12.3	15.1	13.3	16.3	13.0	11.5	12.8
Administrative and secretarial occupations	11.4	10.3	9.4	11.8	10.0	12.2	11.0	9.9	10.4	11.7	11.5
Skilled trades occupations	10.1	11.6	6.4	11.0	9.8	8.6	10.2	6.6	10.4	11.3	11.4
Caring, leisure and other service occupations	8.7	9.5	8.0	9.9	8.2	7.7	9.2	7.8	8.9	10.1	9.3
Sales and customer service occupations	7.5	7.0	5.7	7.4	8.3	8.0	8.2	6.9	7.5	9.4	8.4
Process, plant and machine operatives	5.8	7.9	3.8	8.5	6.0	3.3	6.6	3.0	6.5	8.1	7.2
Elementary occupations	8.8	9.9	8.2	10.4	9.3	6.3	9.0	6.6	10.2	11.7	11.1

Occupational Profile
Source: Census 2011
*Wilmslow BUA includes Alderly Edge and Handforth
Note: Most recent consistent data available across the 9 centres

Demographic Characterisation

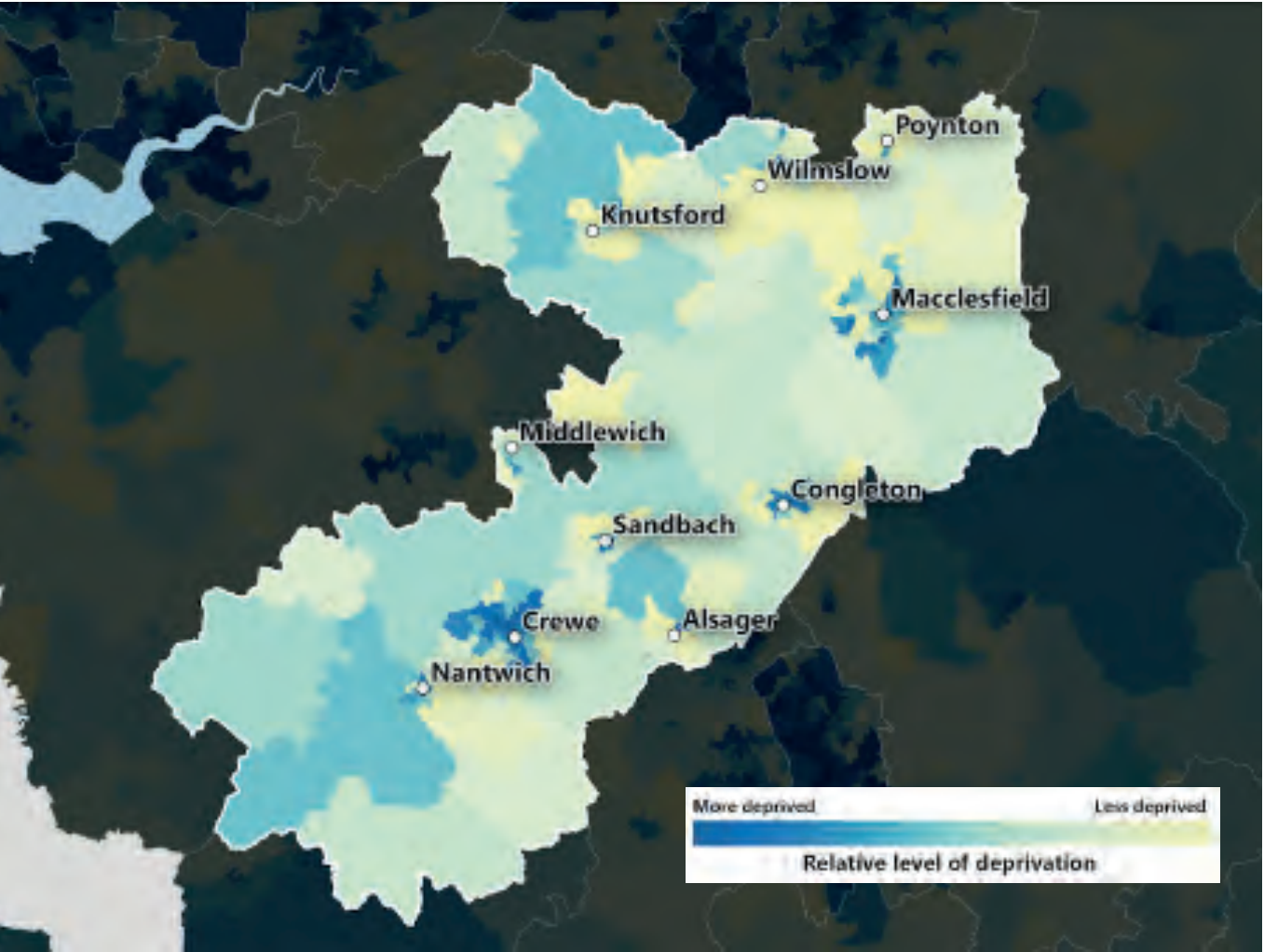
CACI Acorn classifications of local postcode geographies provide precise information and an in-depth understanding of different consumer types by analysing significant social factors and consumer behaviour. Demographic analysis of Cheshire East area demonstrates diverse segmentation groups across the area. The dominant Acorn groups in Congleton are Young Hardship (Young people, often single parents, with low levels of education/employment living in terraced properties) and Executive Wealth (Affluent professionals with families living in large homes).



CACI Acorn Classifications
Source: CACI

Index of Multiple Deprivation

The Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) 2019 illustrates the spatial distribution and pockets of deprivation relative to national averages. Cheshire East ranked 228th most deprived out of 317 local authorities in 2019 indicating relatively low levels of deprivation. Just 1.7% of the Borough is within the top 10% most deprived areas in England, with these most deprived areas being concentrated around Crewe and to a lesser extent, Macclesfield and Congleton. More than half of Congleton is within the 20% least deprived areas of deprivation nationally.



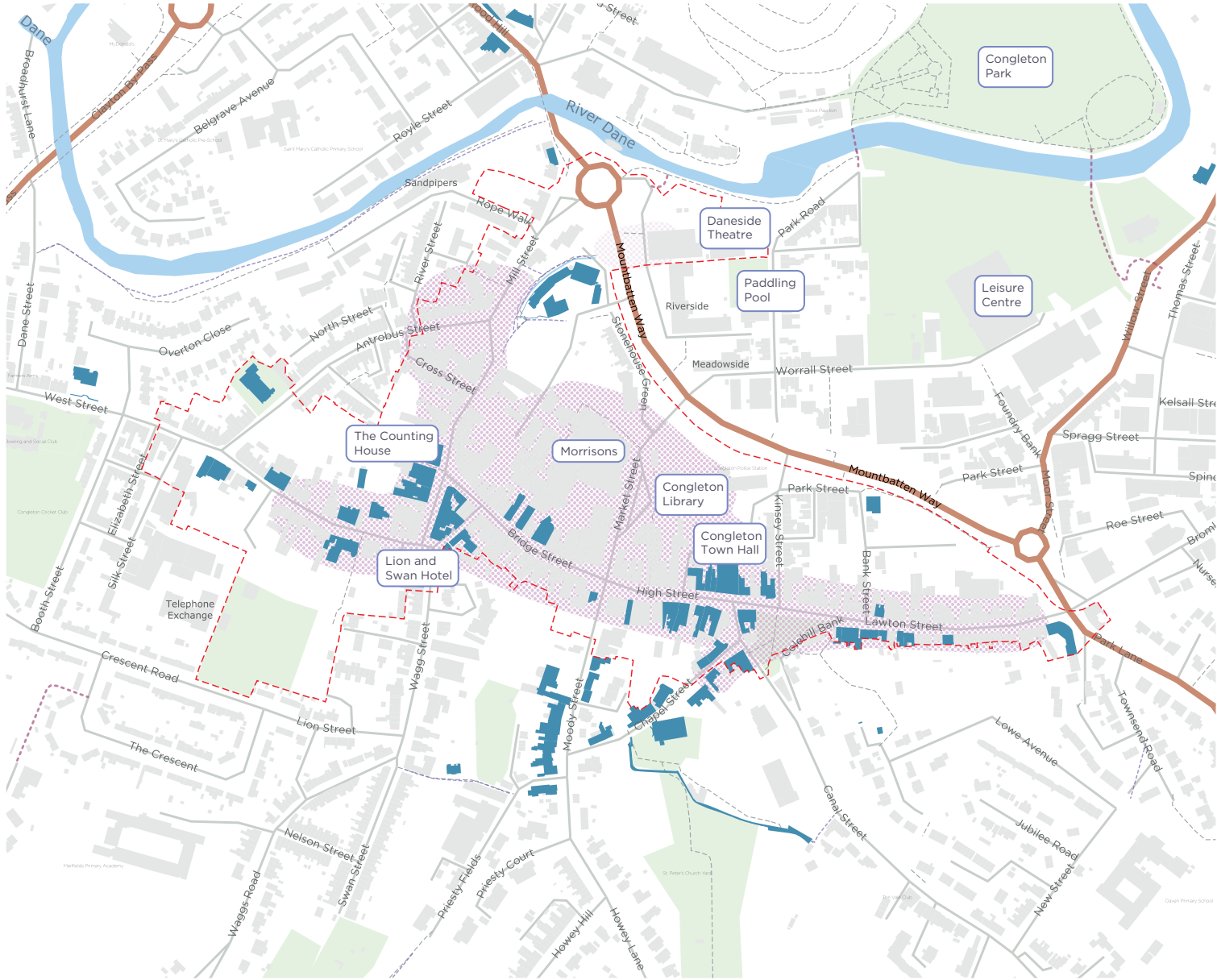
Source: MHCLG, IMD 2019

Local Context

Congleton is one of the larger towns in the study, located close to the central southern boundary of Cheshire East. It sits roughly in the middle of Crewe, Stoke and Macclesfield, each are within 10-15 miles from the Town Centre. Congleton train station is located 1 mile east of the Town Centre (which is approximately a 20 minute walk). The Town Centre extends over half a mile from Mill Street to Lawton Street. Congleton Park lies to the north of the centre, reached within a 5 minute walk, but requires crossing over the Mountbatten Way dual carriageway.

Key

Town centre boundary

Shopping core

Spatial Review

An analysis of the experiential quality of the Town Centre is provided over the next few pages. The review is based on information gathered from a number of site visits to the Town Centre during October and September 2020 and is assessed by the key vitality indicators listed below:

- Quality of the place
 - People
 - Sense of Community
 - Accessibility
 - Gateways
 - Wayfinding
 - Attractions
 - Amenities
- Sense of a Centre
 - Character
 - Public realm
 - Green space
 - Derelict Sites/ Vacant units
 - Housing
 - Covid measures

Visit information

	Visit 1	Visit 2
Date of visit:	Tuesday 15th September 2020	Wednesday 4th November 2020
Time of day:	12-1pm	4-5pm
Weather:	Sun	Sun
Mode of transport:	Car	Car
Covid Lockdown Status	Eased Lockdown Restrictions	Three Tier Restrictions in Place

Quality of the place

- Pleasant Town Centre with a variety of shops
 - Historic buildings define the Town Centre character and are focused primarily along Lawton Street, Bridge Street and High Street
 - Tight streets competing with traffic
 - Grade II* Listed Town Hall
 - Recent public realm works, focused along
- western extent of the Town Centre create uniformity, and enhance the shopping experience

 - Number of sites in need of regeneration measures
 - More recent development, particularly north of Bridge Street, has a lower quality character than that of the historic core



People

- Lots of people shopping and milling around
- Al fresco eating along Bridge Street which adds to sense of vitality
- People taking advantage of sun traps along Bridge Street with front of unit seating



Sense of Community

- Abundance of flowers and planters along the main shopping parade
- Noticeboards with information and events
- Congleton in Bloom flower boxes
- Sense of community pride and positive community spirit



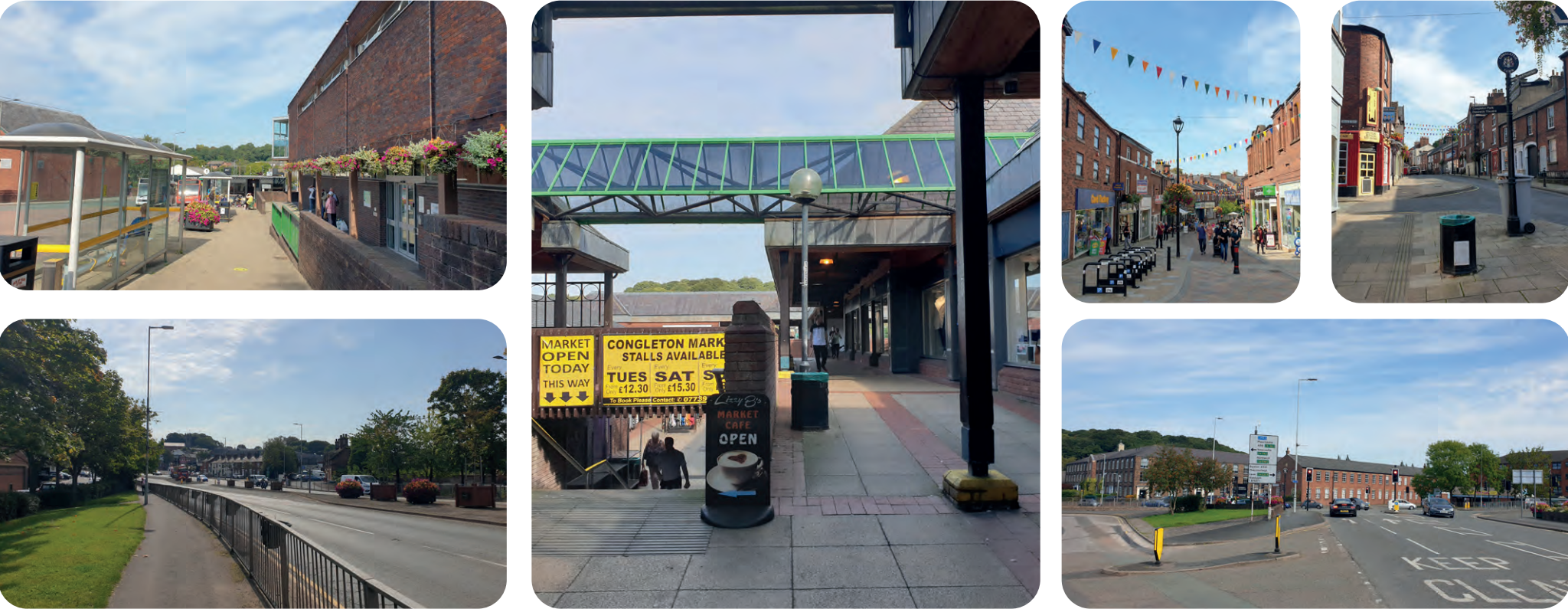
Accessibility

- Train station 20 minute walk from Town Centre
- Bus stops outside library well used, but gateway dominated by road infrastructure
- Mountbatten Way - wide road with high traffic speeds, which bypasses the centre and creates a significant barrier to pedestrian links from the Town Centre to Congleton Park and surrounding residential neighbourhoods
- Lots of parking available, some of which is proximate to the retail core of the town
- Uninviting/ dark routes through the Bridestone Shopping Centre down to the car park



Gateways

- Heavily car dominated along Mountbatten Way, reducing arrival experience into the Town Centre for pedestrians and cyclists
- Gateways along linear shopping street are good, with recent public realm works and upgrades helping to further define areas of interest/ gateways
- Tighter streets along Bridge St/ High St/ Lawton St create good street enclosure and shopping experience
- Change in levels and layout of market is uninviting, with dated appearance and difficult to navigate arrangement
- Arrival along Market Street is dominated by road infrastructure and poor quality/ blank building façades (Morrisons and former B&M Bargains)



Housing

- Converted apartments and new build apartments
- Smaller housing at edge of the high street
- Signs of stalled regeneration sites
- Signs of new housing development on edge of centre



Wayfinding

- Good, clear signage
- New public realm works help unify centre
- Sign posts and totems styled to complement historic townscape areas. Consistent signage colouring (Black) across the town helps with legibility and reducing sense of obtrusive wayfinding clutter



Attractions

- Grand Grade II* Listed Town Hall which is open for events. (Note that during the vaccination roll out programme, the Town Hall was used as a vaccination centre for Congleton).
- Congleton Museum - small museum with exhibitions on local history
- Exceptional park and gardens along river
- Covered Market - but dated, limited offer during visit
- Popular monthly market along Bridge Street (Makers Market) with an upmarket, bespoke and boutique offer
- Various pubs, restaurants, cafes and bars
- Popular paddling pool on the edge of Congleton Park
- Daneside Theatre
- Entrance to the Biddulph Valley Way long distance walk to the east of centre (20 minutes walk)



Amenities

- Morrisons supermarkets in Town Centre
- Converted mill/ business centre
- Variety of shops and amenities
- Library complex
- Police station



Sense of a Centre

- Linear nature of the shopping parade, opens out slightly by the Town Hall and pedestrianised section along Bridge St, which creates a sense of centre
- Well kept and inviting side streets
- On approach from Market Street, Mill Street and Albert Place the sense of being in or arriving into the Town Centre is clear
- Further east along Lawton Street towards Mountbatten Way, the sense of Town Centre begins to erode, with streets becoming quieter and less activity on the ground floor
- The rising topography of High Street towards the Town Hall creates a sense of separation and detachment of Lawton Street shops and uses from the centre, High Street heading west



Character

- A lot of well kept, attractive historic buildings e.g. the timber framed Lion and Swan Inn (17th Century), Counting House (Late 19th Century) and Gothic style Town Hall (19th Century)
- Linear shopping parade, inviting to shoppers to continue along the street with good variety and character in the buildings that define the street
- Levels of topography create intrigue and enhance views
- Continuous shop frontage and detailing on buildings creates a well defined street and sequence of public spaces



Public Realm

- Public realm scheme along Bridge Street picks up the red and orange hues of the buildings
- Real effort in planting and 'dressing' the centre



Green space

- River Dane a real asset - sizeable river bounded by greenery
- Congleton Park immaculate, holds Green Flag status and includes ornamental gardens, town wood, playground and bowling park
- Congleton community garden and memorial (works being carried out at time of visit), offer a pleasant place to dwell or walk through, off the main shopping parade



Derelict Sites

- Vacant shops seem more prolific than other centres, with sites at key gateways and along main shopping street highlighting voids - prominent site at Mill Street gateway, units in Capitol Walk Shopping Centre and vacant units dotted along Bridge Street and High Street
- Large car parks which were underutilised at time of visit
- Evidence of stalled schemes



Update 2022 - Since the site visit in 2020 a number of the units identified in these photos have been occupied including all of Capital Walk and a number of others including the former B&M and Aldi sites have been purchased

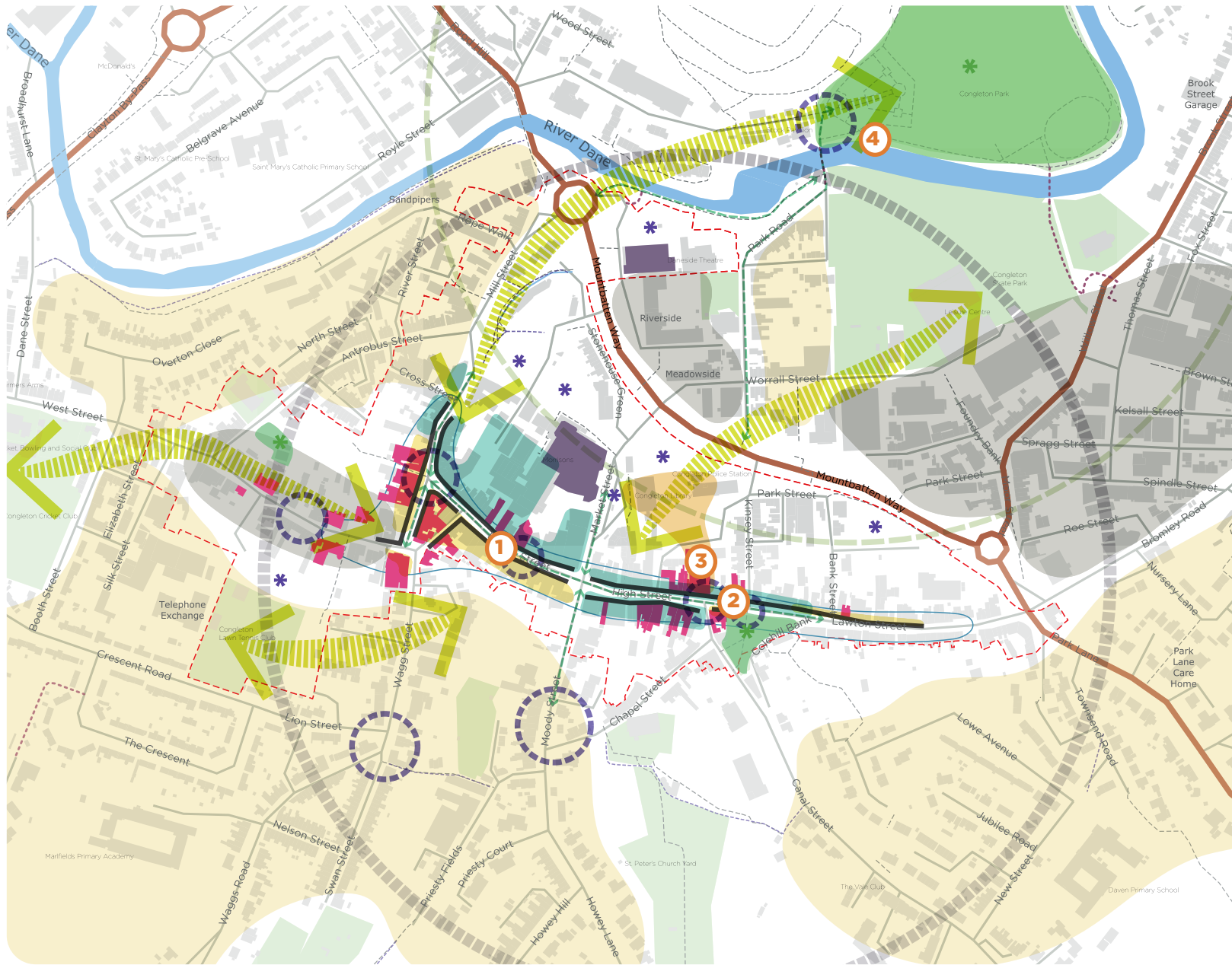
The unit circled below has now been occupied, as have some units in Capitol Walk.



Positive Features

Positive spatial elements are identified on the plan:

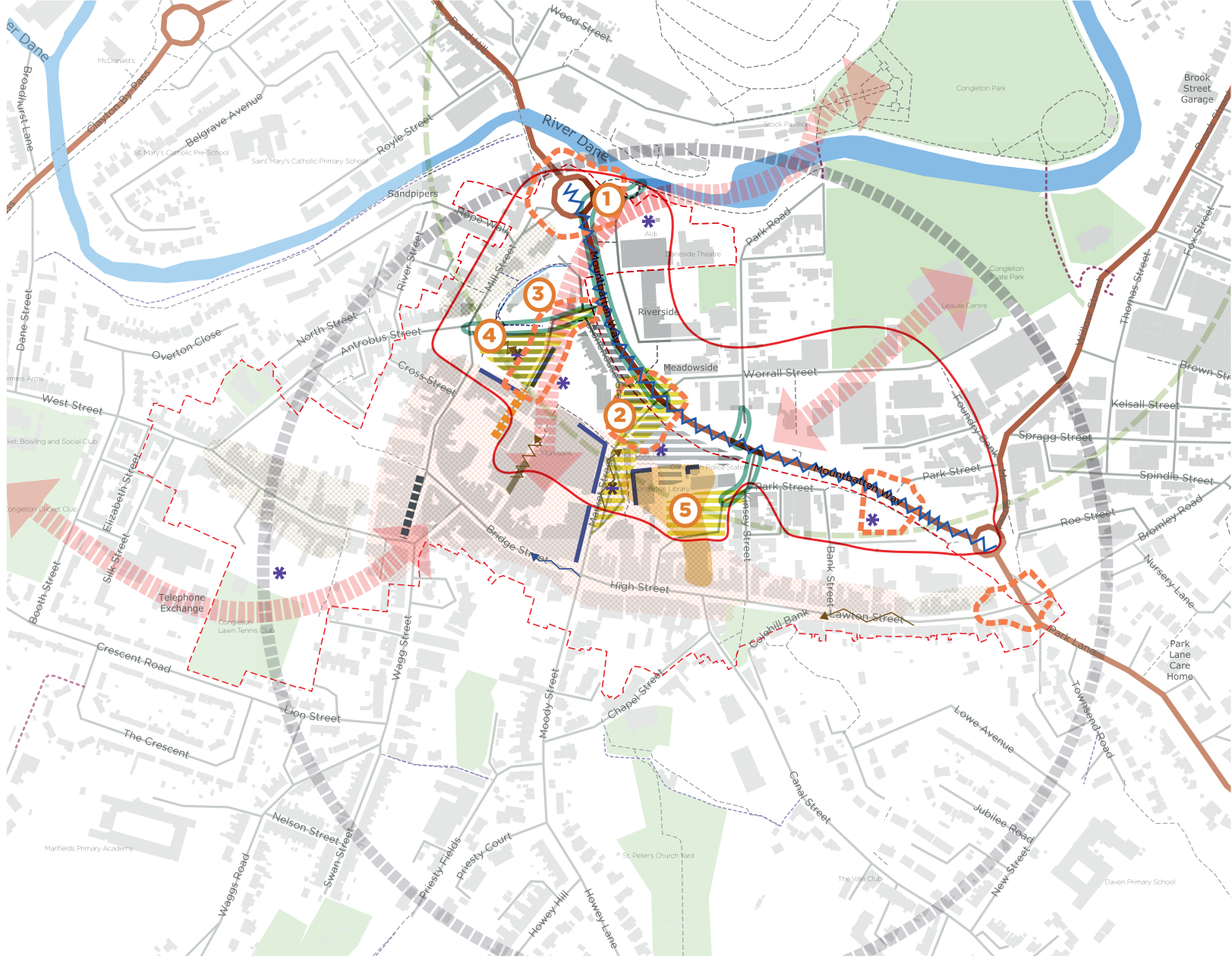
- Key
- Local centre boundary
 - Local street network
 - Primary vehicular route
 - Arrival destinations (car parks/ train stations/ bus stops)
 - Key pedestrian links
 - Surrounding social infrastructure within close proximity to town centre
 - Positive arrival experience
 - Anchor retail locations
 - Anchor open space / recreational areas
 - Local pocket park space offering dwell time
 - Open space / recreational areas
 - Areas with a concentration of F&B uses
 - Areas with a concentration of retail uses
 - Areas with concentration of community uses (library, Town Hall)
 - Well defined building frontages with active ground floor uses
 - Buildings of historic or townscape quality that help reinforce character
 - Intact historic core creating a positive setting and complementing buildings of historic quality
 - Local businesses within close proximity to the town centre
 - Local residential areas within immediate proximity to the town centre
 - Congleton town hall 400m (5 minute walk)
 - Congleton park 400m (5 minute walk)



Negative Features

Negative spatial elements are identified on the plan:

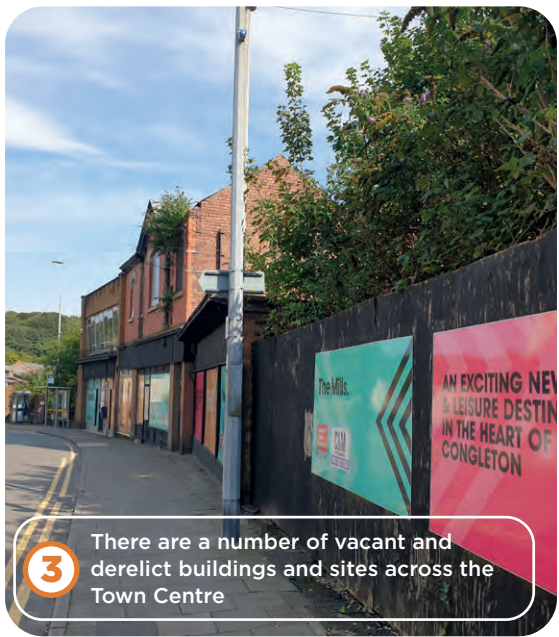
- Key
- Local centre boundary
 - Local street network
 - Primary vehicular route
 - Arrival destinations (car parks/ train stations/ bus stops)
 - Streets and spaces dominated by car parking
 - Streets with narrow footways / poor pedestrian provision
 - Arrival gateways with a low quality arrival experience
 - Areas of poor quality public realm (primarily low grade / aged materials, lack of street furniture and tree planting)
 - Pedestrianised high street with dated public realm and aesthetic
 - Low quality frontages
 - Links with poor legibility to and from the town centre
 - Local streets leading to cul-de-sacs or unclear where they connect to
 - Extent of area which reads as part of the Town Centre
 - Areas which feel beyond the extent of the Town Centre
 - Key assets which feel disconnected from the Town Centre
 - Congleton town hall 400m (5 minute walk)
 - Congleton park 400m (5 minute walk)
 - Land slope/ change in levels
 - Areas of severance
 - Area which has seen erosion of historic grain



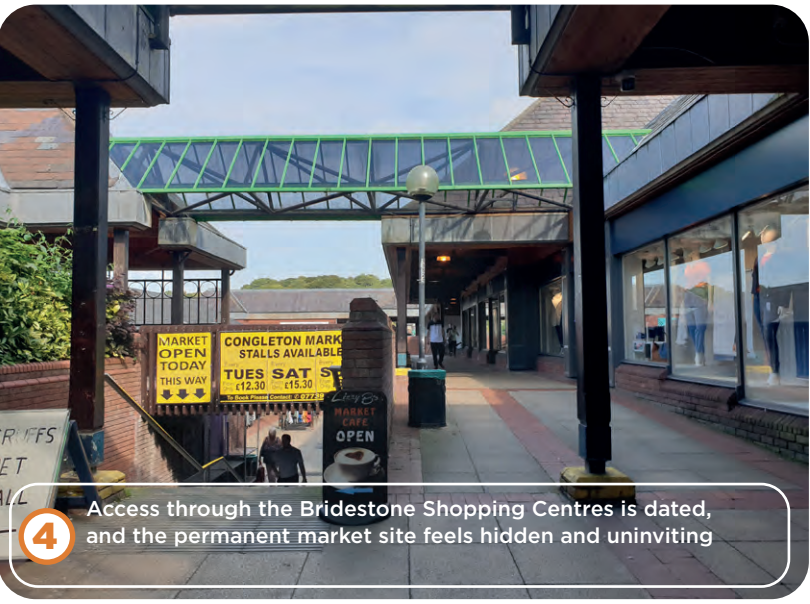
1 Mountbatten Way dual carriageway acts as a significant barrier to pedestrian movement into the Town Centre from the north and Congleton Park



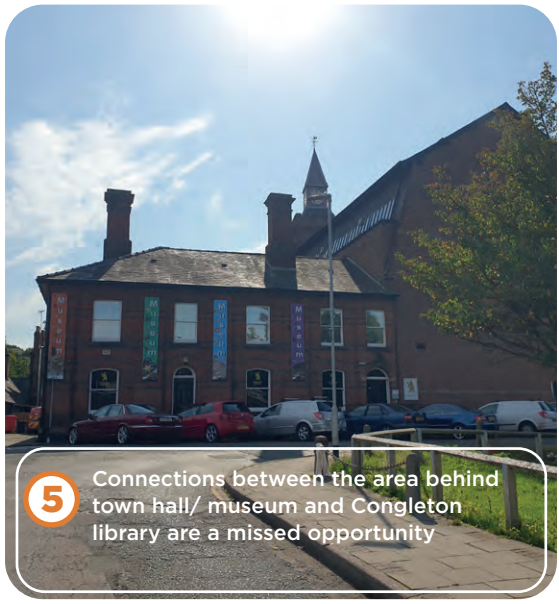
2 Low quality frontages along Market Street promote a negative arrival into the centre. The bus stop and taxi rank dominate the space



3 There are a number of vacant and derelict buildings and sites across the Town Centre



4 Access through the Bridestone Shopping Centres is dated, and the permanent market site feels hidden and uninviting



5 Connections between the area behind town hall/ museum and Congleton library are a missed opportunity

Summary of Spatial Elements

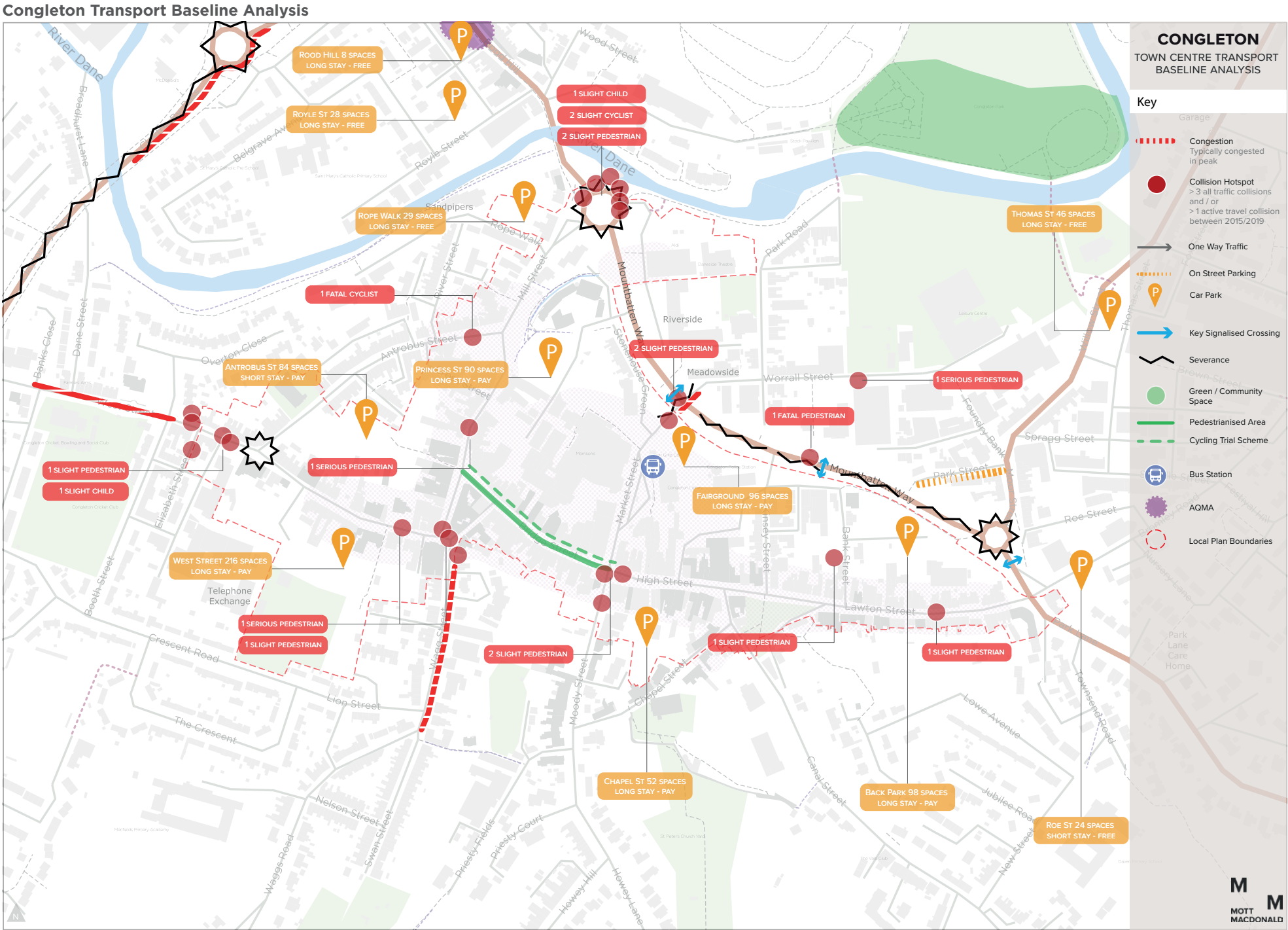
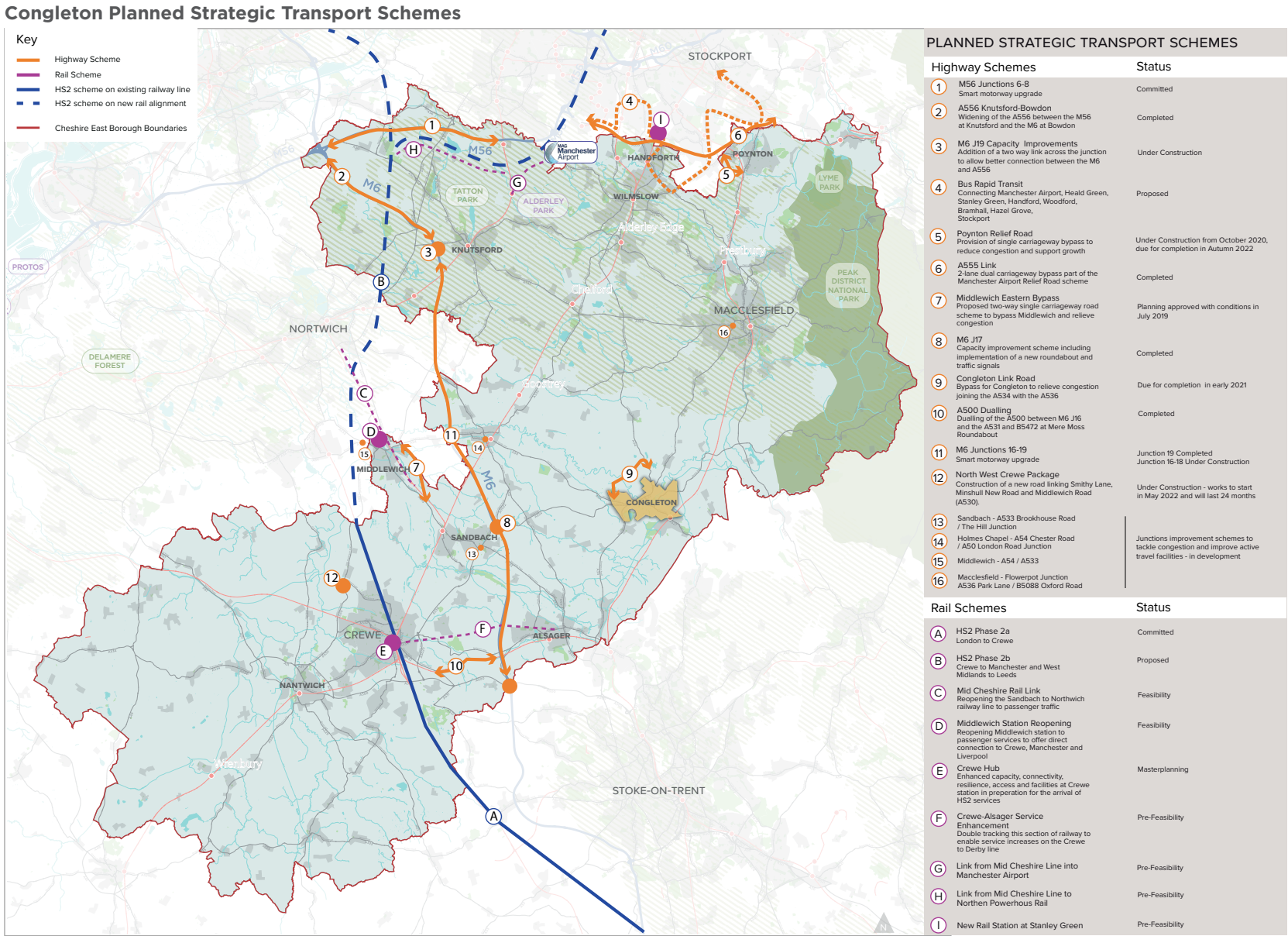
The tables below and on the following page identify the key positive and negative spatial attributes for the Town Centre:

Public Realm	Gateways	Open Space	Heritage	Townscape Quality	Legibility
Positives					
<ul style="list-style-type: none">New public realm works at top of Bridge Street create a welcoming environment and enhance shopping offer, celebrate historic townscape and promote alfresco eating opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">New public realm works greatly enhance east-west gateway into the Town Centre at Market Street/ Bridge Street/ High Street junction, and Mill Street/ Bridge Street junctionApproaches from the south and west also have some attractive qualities, namely the enclosed street character and attractive, formal buildings which define the routes into the centre	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Congleton Park is a large well kept park and gardens, located along the River Dane, 5 minutes walk of the Town CentreCongleton Community Garden and memorial provides a pleasant area to the east of the shopping street	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Number of high quality heritage buildings and prestigious listed buildings. The centrepiece Grade II* listed Town Hall sits at the centre of the historic streetThe Counting House Hotel and the Lion & Swan Hotel (recently refurbished) are both heritage buildings which sit at key gateways into the centreHeritage buildings are well kept, including the Black and White timber Ye Old White Lion Pub, Ye Old King's Arms Pub and 28 Lawton Street (17th Century shophouse)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Very prominent building line along shopping street (Bridge Street, High Street and Lawton Street), creates high quality spaceWidth of the shopping street which narrows and widens around the town hall enhances Cheshire town 'feel'Variety of attractive, period historic buildings which are in use adds to the quality of the townscape along High Street and Bridge Street	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Linear nature of the main shopping steet itself makes it easy to navigateLocal topography helps draw you into and along local streets towards the Town Centre

Public Realm	Gateways	Open Space	Heritage	Townscape Quality	Legibility
Negatives					
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Pavements are mostly well kept and consistent, however new public realm works emphasises quality difference between the new and old public realm	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Mountbatten Way, which runs to the north of the main shopping street, severs the town from the residential neighbourhoods to the north and is an obstacle to pedestrian and cyclists travelling to and from Congleton Park. It also negatively impacts upon gateways from here into the Town Centre - spaces are car dominatedBlank Morrisons facade and then blank former B&M facade along Market Street also reduce quality of gateway here for those arriving from the bus stop, or the other across Mountbatten Way.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Access from the Town Centre to Congleton Park is poor, with limited crossing points and a car dominated approachThere is a lack of functional open or civic space within the Town Centre, perhaps constrained by the historic street arrangement or cleared areas given over to car parking or large format building design	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Some heritage buildings vacant or at risk of vacancy, which could result in little or no maintenanceMoody Hall in poor conditionBosson's Mill (which was a Grade II listed building) lost due to neglect	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Erosion of street frontage towards Mountbatten Way, add to car dominated feel along hereThe townscape quality around the covered market is poorThe historic grain has been eroded between Mountbatten Way towards Bridge Street and High Street causing a shatter zone and areas of poor townscape quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Routes along Market Street, north of the Town Hall and around the covered market lack legibility and purposeWayfinding and ability to navigate towards the Town Centre from the north and east are governed by highway infrastructure meaning local streets do not form part of the approach to the centre

06 Connectivity and Accessibility

Congleton is bound by a number of key A-roads, including the A536, A534, A54 and A34 which offer a direct route to the nearby towns such as Macclesfield, Sandbach, Holmes Chapel, Stoke-on-Trent and towards the M6 motorway. Congleton Railway Station is located around a 20-minute walk from the Town Centre and provides an hourly service to Manchester and Stoke-on-Trent.



Car Parking

Car parking within the centre of Congleton comprises of a mix of free and paid, long stay and short stay off-street car parks. Although there is a wide variety of parking in the Town Centre to suit different needs and lengths of stay, routes between car parks and the key areas of the Town Centre lack legibility. In particular, a lack of signage, poor wayfinding and the requirement for pedestrians to use narrow footways and cross roads freely using no formal crossing facilities.

The TCVPs consider the role of car parking in relation to the vibrancy and vitality of each town centre. However, any proposals to review or modernise car parking provision and management will be considered on a town by town basis as part of the Council's approach to travel demand management. Therefore the delivery of any car parking proposals is outside the scope of the TCVPs.

Town Centre	Car Park ID	Parking Spaces	Duration	Pricing
Congleton	Rood Hill Car Park	8	Long Stay	Free
	Royle St Car Park	28	Long Stay	Free
	Princess St Car Park	90	Long Stay	Pay
	Antrobus Car Park	84	Short Stay	Pay
	Fairground Car Park	96	Short Stay	Pay
	West St Car Park	216	Long Stay	Pay
	Chapel St Car Park	52	Long Stay	Pay
	Back Park Car Park	98	Long Stay	Pay
	Thomas St Car Park	46	Long Stay	Free
	Roe St Car Park	24	Short Stay	Free
	TOTAL	742		

Note: Information relates to CEC car parks. In addition Morrison's car park is free and short stay

Public Realm

The quality of public realm varies across the centre of Congleton with high-quality and well-maintained public realm provided within the pedestrian areas at Bridge Street and Mill Street. However, the quality of public realm in areas around West Street and Market Street is significantly lower.

Mountbatten Way is one of the key A roads providing access to the Town Centre. This route currently comprises a dual carriageway subject to high vehicle speeds. This road also currently cuts through the town and reduces the visibility of facilities and services from the surrounding highway network. There are significant opportunities to reconsider the role of this route and make better use of available space to significantly enhance the quality of public realm, provide better infrastructure for pedestrians and cyclists, enhance the visibility of the town and create a sense of arrival into the Town Centre. Gateway treatments can also be considered at key junctions such as the A54/ Mill Street junction creating more space and priority for pedestrians and cyclists and enhancing the safety of crossings into the Town Centre.

Road Safety

A number of junctions around the Town Centre of Congleton have been identified as collision hotspots reducing the safety of pedestrians and cyclists accessing retail and leisure facilities.

In some locations, such as the A54/ Mill Street junction, this creates a major barrier for pedestrian movements between the main area of the Town Centre and its residents to the north. Within the last 5 years, 5 collisions have occurred at this junction involving pedestrians, cyclists and a child - all resulting in slight injury(p49). Improved pedestrian crossing facilities should therefore be considered at this junction.

To further enhance the safety of road users, particularly vulnerable road users such as pedestrians and cyclists, improvements to existing or new crossing facilities should also be considered along High Street, Mountbatten Way and West Street.

Designed with the aim of reducing Town Centre congestion, the Congleton Link Road is now open, joining the A534 Sandbach Road with the A536 Macclesfield Road. This offers a major opportunity to reshape routes in the Town Centre. However, this scheme may present a less positive impact on Mountbatten Way from reduced traffic flows, and does not seem to significantly relieve traffic from the A34 route coming up from the south.

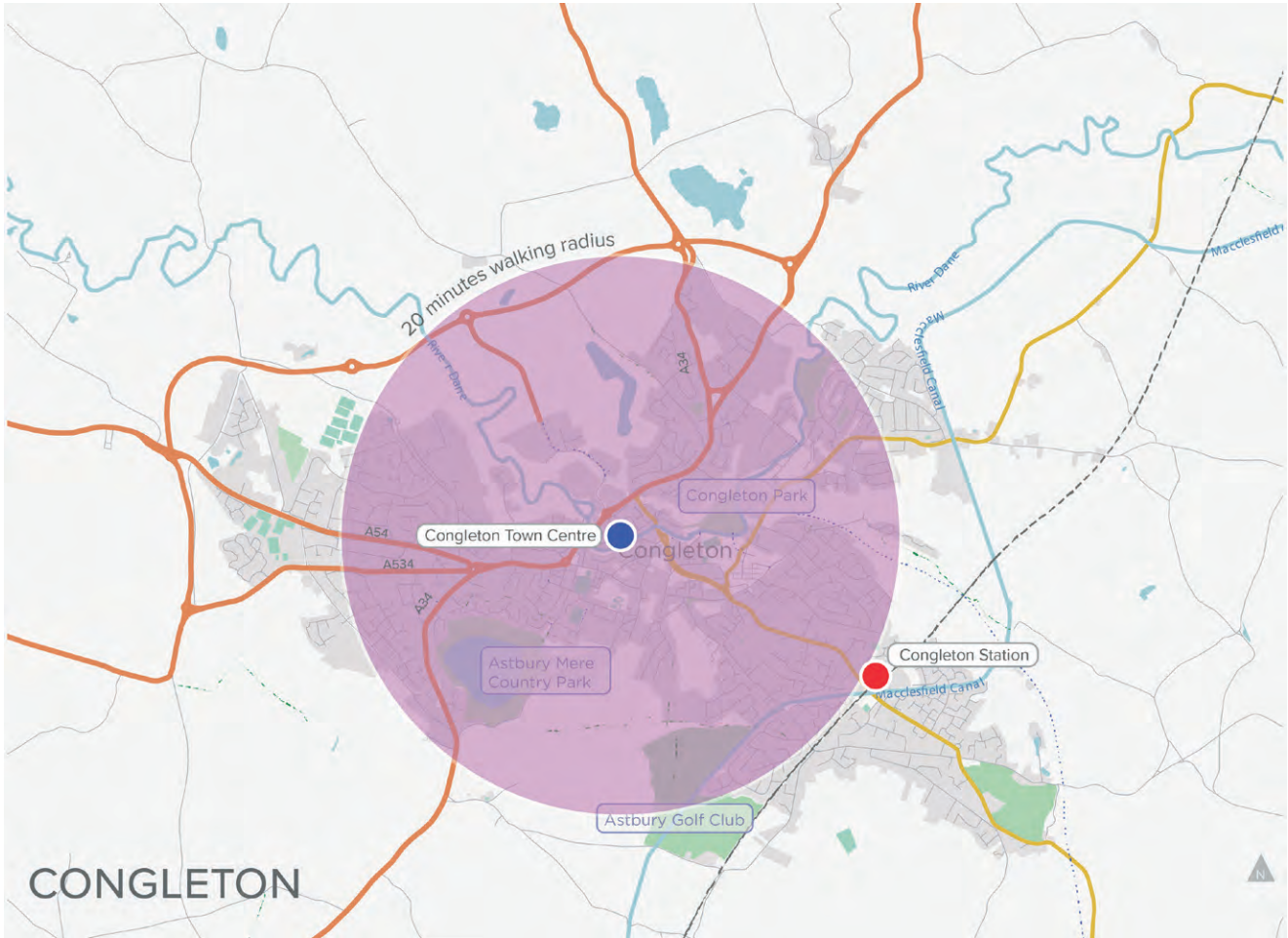
Active Travel

The main area of pedestrian movement within the Town Centre is along the pedestrianised area of Bridge Street. However, surrounding streets such as High Street, Lawton Street, Mill Street and Swan Bank are dominated by vehicles with narrow footway widths reducing the quality and safety of the environment. These streets may therefore benefit from a reduction or removal of through-traffic to allow repurposing of space.

Congleton Town Centres location in proximity to key attractions and green spaces such as Congleton Park provides a good opportunity to enhance levels of walking and cycling in the area. However, links to the park from the Town Centre are unclear particularly for visitors who may be unfamiliar with the area.

The AQMA's present across the centre of Congleton demonstrate the need to consider reducing the impact of vehicular travel in the area in order to improve air quality. Enhancing the provision of walking and cycling infrastructure across the town, giving more space and priority to pedestrians and cyclists over vehicles and increasing the ease and attractiveness of active modes should be central to proposals outlined within Congleton. This would help encourage access to, from and around the Town Centre by more sustainable modes.

Congleton 20-Minute Walk Isochrone



Public Transport

Congleton rail station is located around a 20-minute walk from the Town Centre and offers connectivity to Manchester Piccadilly and Stoke-on-Trent via one hourly service in each direction. On Sundays, services are reduced to six trains in each direction throughout the day. Bus services provided in the vicinity of the rail station on Park Lane offer 1 bus per hour between Congleton and Newcastle-Under-Lyme. This service provides a connection between the rail station and Town Centre however is extremely limited in terms of frequency and is therefore unlikely to offer a viable or attractive option.

Additional bus services are provided from Congleton Bus Station on Market Street offering connectivity to Macclesfield, Crewe, Mossley, Newcastle-Under-Lyme and Alsager however the frequency of the majority of these services is also limited to a maximum of 3 buses per hour. The bus station itself appears tired and has an oversized marshalling space.

Movement Trends

Unlike a number of other towns in the Cheshire East region, a large proportion of residents in Congleton (32%) travel less than 5km to work and active modes accounts for 13% of travel to work trips.

11% of people living in Congleton work within the Town Centre

4% of residents travel 40km+ to work

Public transport accounts for 3% of commuter trips

One train per hour to Manchester and Stoke on Trent

17% of households do not have access to a car, 31% have access to 2 or more vehicles

72% of residents in Congleton in employment drive to work by car

24 minute walk between Town Centre and railway station

Active travel accounts for 13% of commuter trips

Source: Census 2011, Office for National Statistics (ONS)
Most recent consistent data available across the 9 centres

Cheshire East Council has approved Local Transport Development Plans (LTDP) for its principal towns, keys service centres and surrounding rural areas. The table opposite summarises the potential transport schemes included in the LTDP relating to the town centre at the point they went out to public consultation. Please note the majority of schemes are at concept stage, subject to feasibility work and must be viewed as potential schemes. Therefore the LTDP are live documents and this list of schemes is subject to change and will evolve as further work is undertaken.

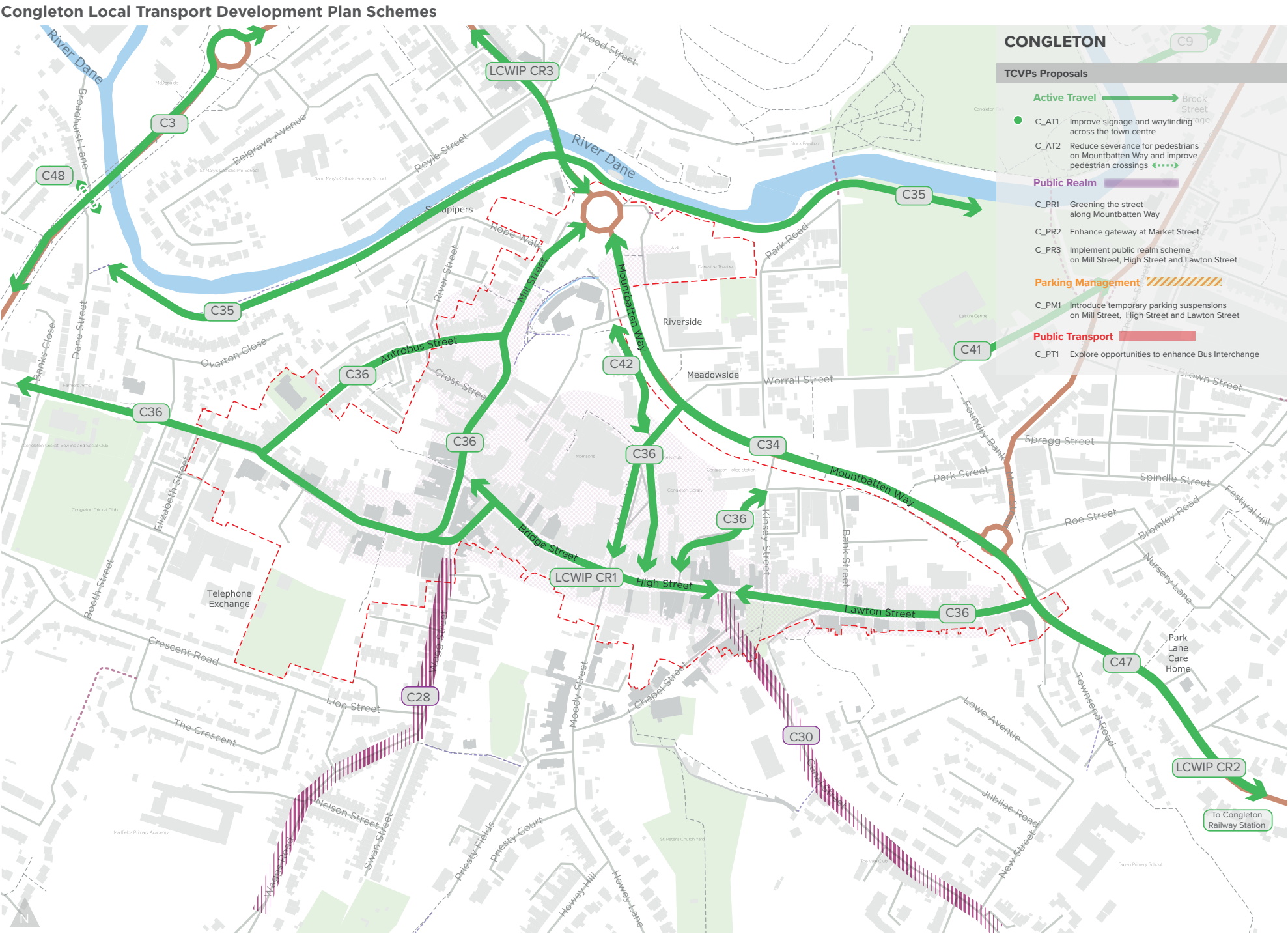
In Congleton, the LTP focuses strongly on active travel interventions to improve conditions for those on foot and cycle – creating a joined-up active travel network through the town. The are also other strategic actions focused around implementing traffic calming measures to reduce through traffic on Waggs Road and Canal Road.

The table contains detail on the schemes set out in the LTDP.

Congleton LTP and LCWIP Schemes

Type	Ref	Scheme	Description	Costing ¹
Active Travel	C3	Improve walking and cycling route on the A54/A34	Introduce complementary measures on the A53/A34 Congleton Link Road to improve walking and cycling.	<£1m
	C9	Deliver a pedestrian and cycle bridge over the River Dane	Deliver a pedestrian and cycling bridge over the River Dane as part of the Astbury Place development connecting to Congleton Park.	£5m-£10m
	C34	Provide a cycle route along Mountbatten Way	Provision of a cycle route between Townsend Road and the Mill Street roundabout along Mountbatten Way	£1m-£5m
	C35	Provide a walking and cycling route alongside the River Dane	Introduce a walking and cycling route alongside the River Dane between Dane Street and Congleton Park.	£1m-£5m
	C36	Provide a joined-up walking and cycling network though the town centre	Create a joined up walking and cycling network though the town centre including improvements to Market Street, West Street, Antrobus Street, Mill Street, Lawton Street, Bridge Street, Little Street and Market Square.	£1m-£5m
	C41	Provide a walking and cycling route on Worrall Street alongside St Stephens Church	Introduce a walking and cycling route from Worrall Street to the footway / cycleway alongside St Stephens Church to improve access for pedestrians.	<£1m
	C42	Provide a cycle route on Stonehouse Green	Create a cycle route on Stonehouse Green, parallel to Mountbatten Way.	<£1m
	C47	Improve walking and cycling route to Congleton train station	Improve walking and cycling access to Congleton Railway Station via Park Lane, links to Sefton Avenue and improve cycling facilities at the station itself.	<£1m
	C48	Introduce pedestrian crossing on the A34 Clayton Bypass	Introduce pedestrian crossings at the A34 Clayton Bypass near the fire station roundabout and near Dane Street.	<£1m
	LCWIP-CR1	LCWIP West Heath to Congleton Town Centre	LCWIP route West Heath to Congleton Town Centre identified in Congleton LCWIP	£1m-£5m
Highway	LCWIP-CR2	LCWIP Congleton Rail Station to Town Hall	LCWIP route Congleton Rail Station to Town Hall identified in Congleton LCWIP	£1m-£5m
	LCWIP-CR3	LCWIP Lower Heath to Congleton Town Centre	LCWIP route Lower Heath to Congleton Town Centre identified in Congleton LCWIP	£1m-£5m
	C28	Traffic calming measures on Waggs Road	Implement traffic calming or traffic management measures on Waggs Road to reduce through traffic.	<£100k
	C30	Traffic calming measures on Canal Street and Canal Road	Canal Street and Canal Road traffic calming to reduce through traffic.	<£100k

¹The costs presented are indicative only at this stage. Costs will depend on type and level of interventions delivered – and should be revised at subsequent design stages.



Retail and Leisure

Cheshire East Council recognises the importance of monitoring key information to assess and respond to issues in its centres and commission regular reviews of the retail and leisure market across the Borough. The latest partial update of the Retail Study Report (2020) generally paints a positive picture for Congleton in terms of performance since the last Report (2016).

Congleton is identified as one of the Key Service Centre’s within Cheshire East, with its vitality and viability continuing to be varied. The general retail and service provision of the town has remained stable following a previous decline in the financial and business sector, with a strong occupation of independent retailers providing important services and facilities to the catchment population. The enhanced pedestrianised areas of the town also appear to be in good condition. However, with high vacancy rates and poor environmental quality, in particular on High Street and Mill Street, Congleton’s Town Centre is showing some signs of decline and that the Town Centre is vulnerable.

Overall, the centre provides 242 units (Experian Goad Plan, September 2019) which are primarily located around High Street, Bridge Street and Lawton Street.

The convenience sector in Congleton is anchored by a Morrisons food store, and supported by other nationals such as Holland and Barrett, Gregg’s Bakery and Boots along with a number of independent operators. The proportion of units in the centre sits just below the UK average (7% compared to UK average of 9%), as does the floorspace proportions (13% to UK average of 15%). The food store offering within the Town Centre also faces competition from out of centre retailing of Tesco and M&S on Barn Road.

The comparison goods offering in Congleton is strong with 69 units, representing 29% of all units in the Town Centre, exactly the same as the UK average. Floorspace proportions are slightly below the UK average (31% compared to UK average of 34%). Whilst 80% of units in the Town Centre are occupied by independent retailers, there remains a small number of national comparison retailers including Boots and WH Smith. Some national occupiers can also be found in out of centre locations such as Halfords.

Leisure provision in the Town Centre has remained fairly consistent during the period between the retail updates with a minor increase in the number of units to 46 from 43. The proportion of leisure service units and floorspace however still remains

below the UK average. Whilst national operators Costa Coffee is found within the Town Centre, most leisure units are occupied by independent food and beverage operators located primarily on High Street/ Lawton Street and Swan Bank. A reasonable number of public houses can also be found in the Town Centre.

The retail provision within Congleton Town Centre is supplemented by a retail market on Princess Street and ‘The Makers Market’. The latter is a monthly food and craft market on Bridge Street which can attract a wider catchment of visitors outside of just local residents to visit the town.

In 2019 the Retail Study recorded 39 vacant units in Congleton’s Town Centre, a decrease from 42 in 2016. This proportion is 4% more than the national average of 12%, whilst a vacant floorspace amount of 4,370 sqm is again also above the UK average of 11%, but by just 1%. The Capitol Walk Shopping Centre located in prime location on High Street has recently changed hands and efforts are being made to support reoccupation.

At this stage, as with all other locations it is unclear what the impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic will be on Congleton’s retail and leisure occupiers. Although it would be expected that spend will have been, in part, compensated for by

more people working from home and using local facilities.

Whilst containing 80% independent occupiers, Congleton also has a good national brand presence with a strength of two major food stores located in the Town Centre. This offering can appeal to the young hardship and affluent catchment population of Congleton. The volume of vacant units, and specifically within Capital Walk Shopping Centre, may suggest a lack of interest or an opportunity for new businesses/ mixed uses to be located in the Town Centre.



	Units			Floorspace		
	No.	%	UK Average (%)	Sq.m	%	UK Average (%)
Convenience	16	7	9	4,690	13	15
Comparison	69	29	29	10,960	31	34
Retail Service	49	20	15	4,320	12	7
Leisure Service	46	19	25	7,710	22	26
Financial and Business Service	23	10	10	2,920	8	7
Vacant	39	16	12	4,370	12	11
Total	242	100	100	34,970	100	100

Diversity of Uses in Congleton Town Centre in September 2019
Source: Experian GOAD Survey, September 2019. UK Average from the Experian GOAD Category Report (February 2020)
Note financial and business space only relates to space on the ground floor in the retail core. Further details are provided on employment on p59.

Footfall

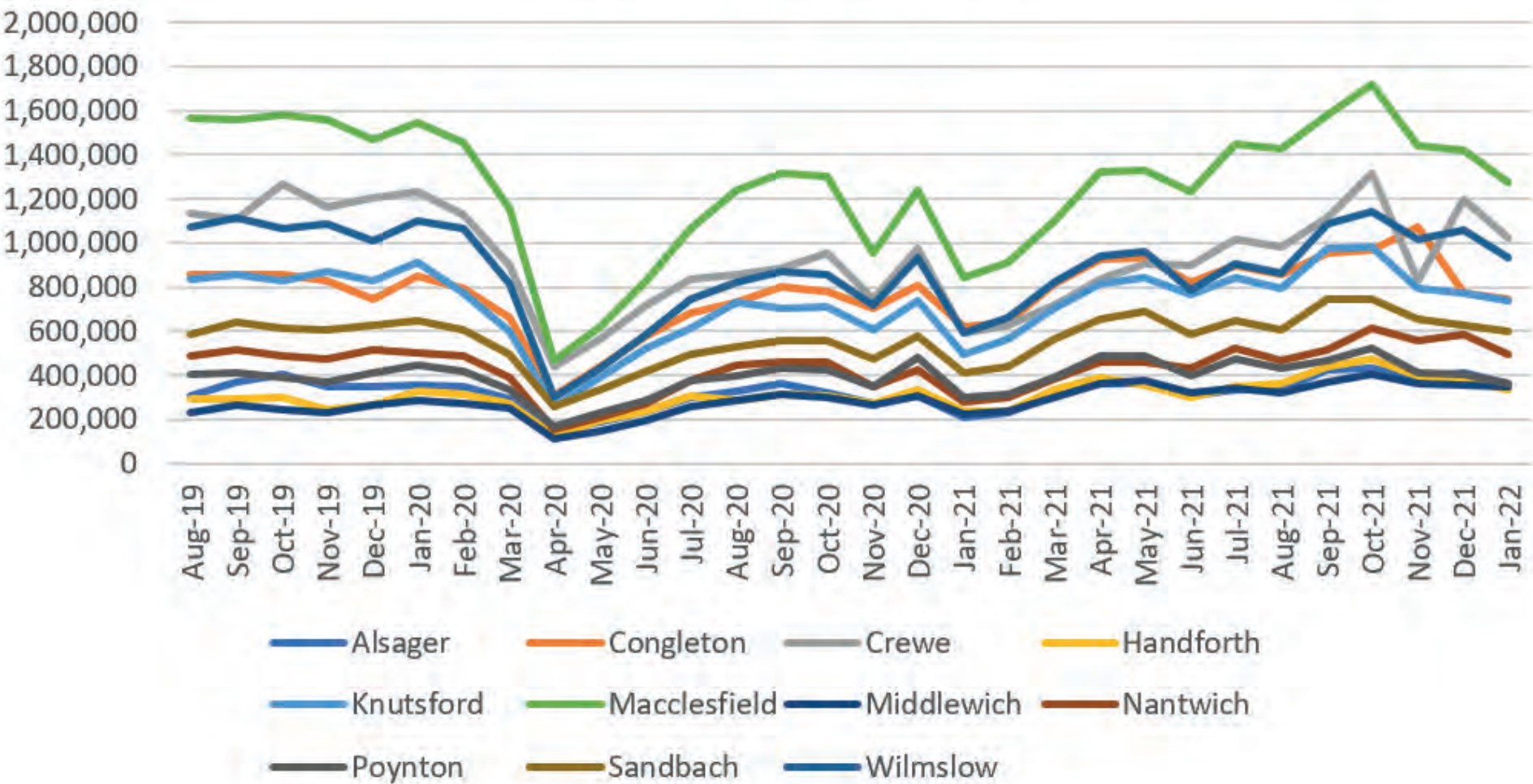
In recognition of the important relationship between footfall and vitality, CEC is now commissioning regular monitoring of footfall across the centres. The following graph shows the footfall in all the key centres between August 2019 and December 2020. It starkly shows the impact of Covid on footfall, across Cheshire East particularly in March and November last year (during national lockdowns) and some bounce back in December.

Congleton was the fourth most visited centre in Cheshire East in August 2019 and retained this position alongside Knutsford throughout the period to December 2020 – with in the region of 850,000 visitors per month at its peak. Positively, whilst the national average benchmark saw monthly footfall figures fall by 40% on the year previous, Congleton only experienced a 15% fall from its largest monthly footfall figure, to 730,000 in August 2020. This would suggest many working from home were choosing to shop locally. Additionally, monthly footfall in Congleton grew by 8.4% on the year previously to 804,000 in December 2020, with only three other KC’s experiencing growth over this same period.

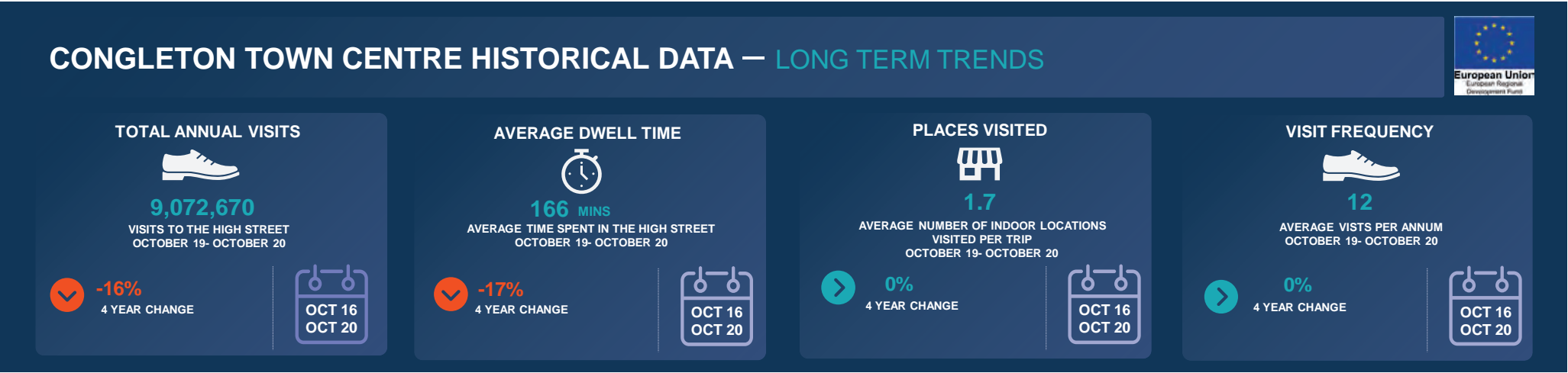
Covid has had a significant impact on footfall, both during enforced lockdowns but also in further accelerating online retail use. The ability of a centre to attract a wide range of visitors (rather than just relying on shoppers) will have a significant impact on how centres emerge from Covid.



Town Centre Footfall



Source: Visitor Insight Baseline Report: August 2019 - Jan 2022



Source: Visitor Insight Baseline Report:
Congleton Town Centre: October 2019-2020
Note: Most recent consistent data available
across the 9 centres

Employment

The Local Plan Strategy for Congleton identified a need for 24 ha of additional employment land. As of March 2018, with commitments, completions, take-up and losses calculated, Congleton had almost reached their target, leaving a requirement of only 1.32 ha over the remaining plan period. The Town Council consider that there is scope for further employment land within the area.

The main employment offering in Congleton can be found on the western edge of the town at Congleton Business Park. This largely comprises average quality B2/B8 warehousing and industrial units and some ancillary single-storey office buildings. The site is well occupied by a mix of local businesses from sectors such as engineering, transportation and manufacturing, with no national occupiers present. Eaton Bank Industrial Estate, located north of the town, includes national occupier Siemens along with a range of manufacturing and engineering businesses and wholesalers.

John Bradshaw Court, a modern business park, is located on Alexandria Way and was developed by Gladman Developments. The business park comprises 2-3 storey high quality office buildings with substantial car-parking on site. The buildings comprise single or multiple occupancy in sectors such as marketing, property, financial and ICT. These businesses are all local occupiers as opposed to national brands. Airbags International occupies one of the largest industrial units.

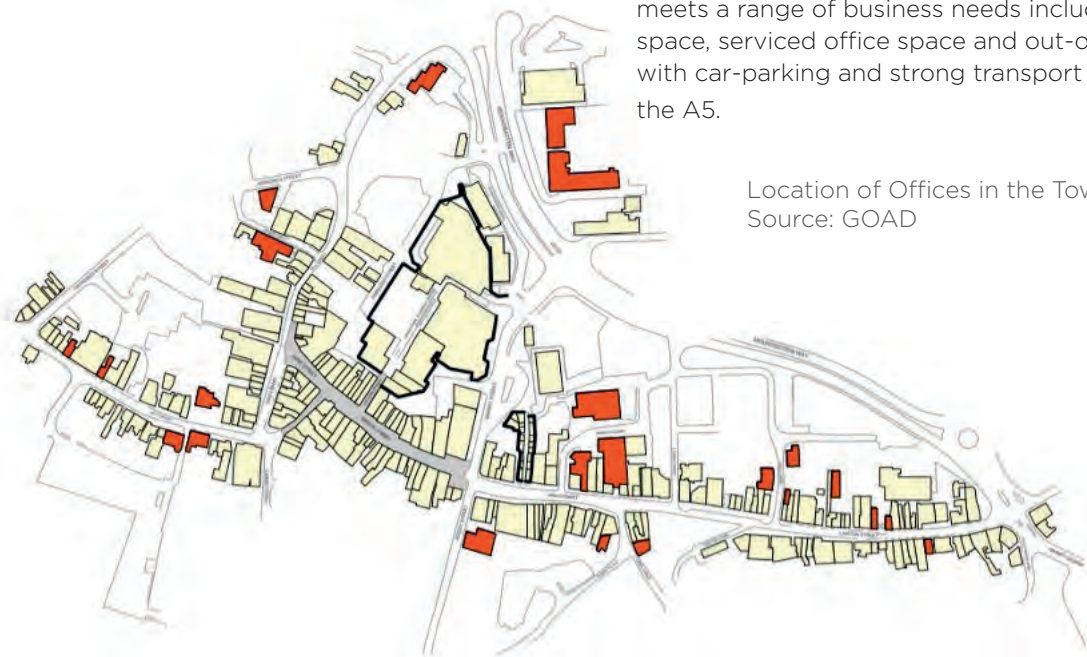
As of the latest data from 2019, there can be found 23 office use class premises within Congleton Town

Centre. These are spread throughout the Town Centre, with more than half found on High Street. These mainly comprise of office suites above retail units and are occupied by local businesses in the financial sector, charities and some public sector offices. One of the significant employment spaces within the Town Centre is Riverside and Meadowside - 2 and 3 storey converted cigar factories offering modern serviced offices to rent from 15-465 sqm. This offering will be a key feature for improving the vitality and viability of the Town Centre

by bringing in businesses looking for modern space who's workers will in turn use the local amenities of the Town Centre.

On the southern edge of the Town Centre is Congleton Business Centre, located on Chapel Street, offering serviced and virtual office space as well as meeting rooms and services for start-up companies and website development. Serviced office space is available from £299/ month, with meeting rooms available from £46/ day.

Congleton's provision of industrial and office premises meets a range of business needs including modern space, serviced office space and out-of-town locations with car-parking and strong transport connections to the A5.



Location of Offices in the Town Centre.
Source: GOAD

Residential Market Context

Congleton provides an attractive residential location offering easy commuting to employment destinations, being located 5 miles off J17 of the M6 yet set within open countryside and providing a vibrant historic Town Centre.

The Congleton parish area had a total of 11,561 households, representing 7.3% of Cheshire East’s total residential stock (159,441). In terms of housing mix, Congleton is strongly characterised by detached homes (36.3% of housing stock) and semi-detached homes (35.4% of housing stock). Together these two housing types make up almost three quarters of housing stock in Congleton. There is therefore a need to rebalance the housing offer away from additional family housing to provide more starter homes, affordable housing and homes for older people in order to meet local needs and changing demographics.

In the last year, to January 2021, an average house price achieved in Congleton was £240,000, an increase of 25% on the previous year. This is relatively affordable compared to many parts of Cheshire East. This increase will have been driven by the delivery of new homes in the area.

Congleton has several currently active new housing developments including:

- Falcon Rise by Seddon Homes
- Cranberry Gardens, Macclesfield Road by Redrow
- Elmwood, Padgbury Lane by Seddon Homes

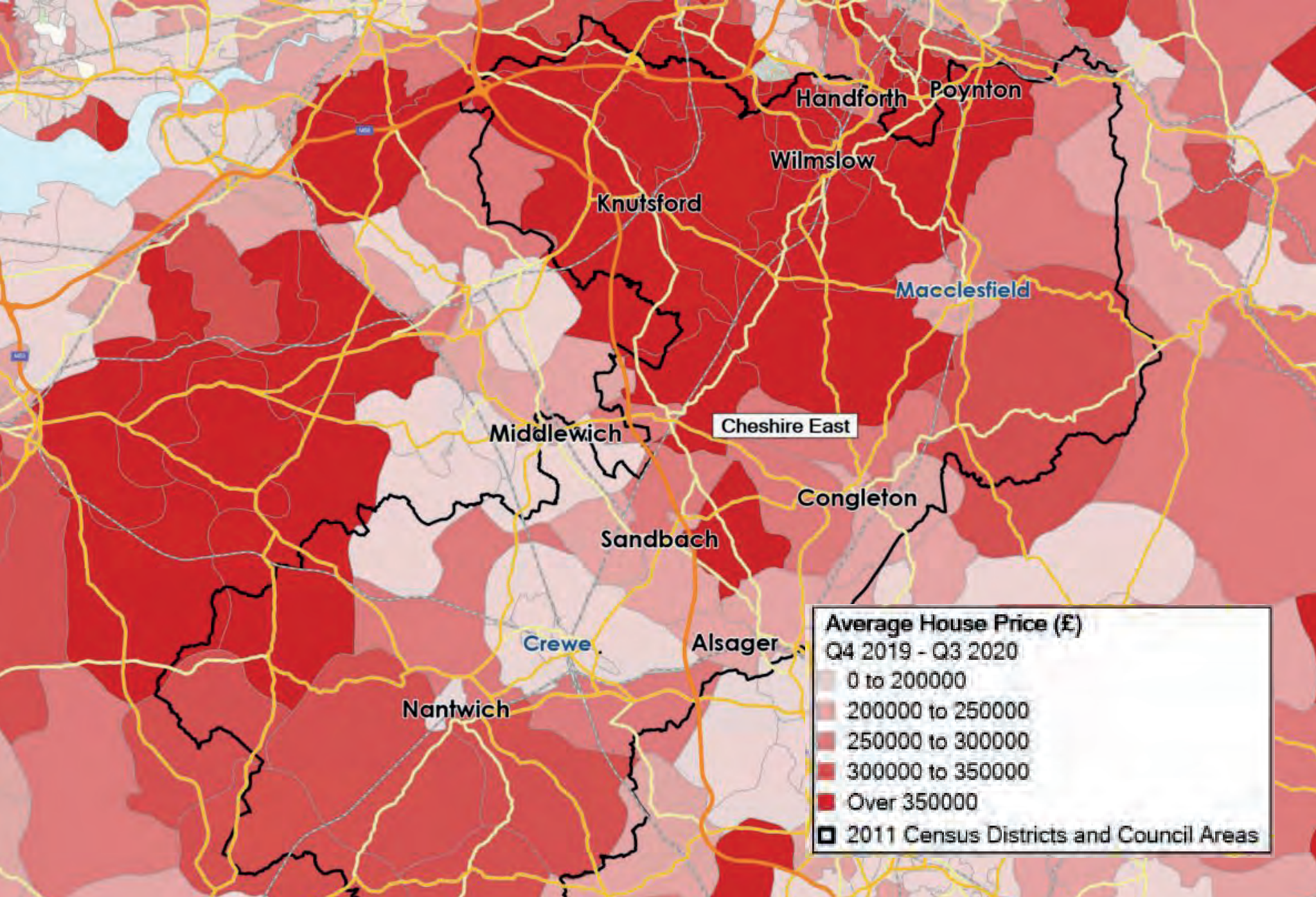
- Giantswood Grove, Manchester Road by Laurus Homes
- Hudson Meadows, Buxton Road by Bloor Homes.

Located in the north and south of the town, these new housing developments all predominantly have detached homes available with prices ranging from £267,000 for a 3-bed to £550,000 for a 5-bed. Giantswood Grove is offering shared ownership on 3-bed detached homes from £257,500.

Dwelling Type/Area	Detached	Semi Detached	Terrace	Flat	Other	Total Households
Alsager	39.9%	40.4%	11.6%	8.1%	0%	5,183
Congleton	36.3%	35.4%	19.3%	8.9%	0.2%	11,561
Handforth	26.1%	23.1%	27.9%	22.8%	0.1%	2,936
Knutsford	38.8%	34.2%	19.7%	7.0%	0.4%	5,671
Middlewich	39.0%	26.0%	19.7%	15.3%	0%	5,910
Nantwich	20.8%	30.6%	26.8%	21.6%	0.2%	6,710
Poynton-with-Worth	42.7%	39.2%	10.5%	7.2%	0.3%	6,024
Sandbach	39.1%	36.1%	17.6%	6.8%	0.3%	7,840
Wilmslow	39.5%	26.6%	19.5%	14.3%	0%	10,615
Cheshire East	35.6%	32.6%	21.2%	10.2%	0.5%	159,441
North West	18.0%	36.3%	29.8%	15.4%	0.5%	3,009,549
England	22.4%	31.2%	24.5%	21.2%	0.7%	22,063,368

Hudson Rise, Falcon Rise and Elmwood developments are all containing 2-5-bed semi-detached and detached homes. This strong residential development and housing growth in Congleton presents an opportunity to support and expand Town Centre services and businesses. However, it also presents challenges in respect of the ability for the town’s infrastructure including health, schools and highways to accommodate the increased demand generated from new housing.

Housing Stock by Type.
Source: Census 2011, Office for National Statistics (ONS)



08 Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities & Threats

This SWOT is based on the analysis of the consultant team and discussions with the Town Council and other local partners including councillors.

Strengths

- Historic market town (market town charter since 1272), distinguished notable people linked to town, historical buildings including the grand Town Hall
- Congleton Inclosure Trust - set up in the 17thC and a life-blood to enable things to happen and to protect those most in need in the town.
- Growing town - 4,000 new houses, 10,000 new people in Congleton's catchment - how to ensure that new residents use the centre?
- Long standing, deeply rooted local business - set up here and stay here - creating stability and trust in local shops
- Supportive and engaged community. 150 local groups and organisations. One of the biggest U3As in the Country. Massive support for events and activities. The Makers Market takes place on the last Saturday of the month, along Bridge St pedestrianised section. Jazz and Blues festival very popular
- Attractive, recently renovated pedestrian area
- Congleton Park and a number of pocket parks including Congleton Community Garden and Memorial Park, In Bloom finalist 4 times in past decade, promotes community pride
- Proximity to main attractions such as Little Morton Hall. Own attractions include Astbury Mere, Congleton Park, Paddling Pool, Daneside Theatre, Victoria Mill Antiques Centre, Glebe Farm
- Home of some award winning micro-breweries - Beartown Brewery, Cheshire Brewhouse.
- Very prominent building line along shopping street (Bridge Street, High Street and Lawton Street)
- Public realm works at top of Bridge Street create a welcoming environment and enhance shopping offer and alfresco eating here
- Wild and Wild is a Vegan cafe that offers additional services such as yoga and holistic events. They have won an award; people travel to visit the cafe
- Proximity to Peak District and Jodrell Bank and access to the Dane Valley

Weaknesses

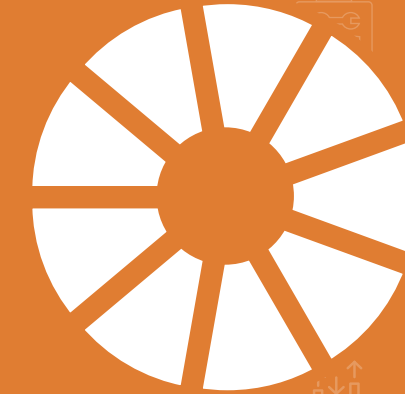
- Town Centre is hidden from the bypass - town park, mere, Town Centre, pocket parks, paddling pool - you wouldn't know there were there unless told. Mountbatten Way is an issue - cuts through the town and hides offer. Need better gateways/sign posting
- Vacant buildings/sites detract from the general attractiveness of the centre
- Diversity of activity/leisure facilities is lacking - not enough for young people to do
- Historic Lack of good quality places to eat/evening economy offers in the Town Centre (but this position is changing with several recent additions to the hospitality/evening economy offer)
- Limited open space in the town. Medieval street pattern means lack of public space or square for events. This impacts/limits capacity at large events
- Constrained medieval street pattern limits movement - disconnect between pedestrian area and beyond B&M. Lots of the town is 'hidden'
- Dormant regeneration sites which need to be brought forward
- Traffic congestion issues around Congleton - bad reputation for time taken to get into town
- Public Transport is poor and infrequent
- No coach parking anywhere in the town.
- Loss of 'anchor' shops - which are a draw into town
- Perception of a lack of hotels - anecdotally Siemens delegates each year stay at airport hotels due to lack of offer in the Town Centre
- Legibility through the Bridestones shopping centre is poor, the space is very dark (precinct style shopping centre, covering 2 levels and integrated with the Morrisons and a large car park)
- Covered market is in a forgotten area of the town, the space is dark

Opportunities

- 4,000 new houses, 10,000 new people in the in the North Congleton Masterplan area - need to entice new residents into Congleton Town Centre which will attract new investment/businesses
- Less people commuting out to Manchester, Stoke, Leeds - more people working at home earning good salaries - encourage residents to re-engage with their hometown.
- New link road provides opportunity to re-imagine traffic flow and improve accessibility to Congleton
- Infrastructure connectivity and cycle path improvements will encourage more people to cycle and walk to town. People that walk and cycle to town spend more than those who drive. As part of the Congleton business plan and Neighbourhood Plan there is desire for a modal shift from vehicles to walking and cycling more
- No through traffic in the High Street, Lawton Street, Mill Street and Swan Bank would encourage more people to town - will make Congleton more enjoyable to visit
- Turn Mountbatten Way into a green boulevard - removal of the metal barriers on Mountbatten Way may help to reduce speeding traffic
- Determine strategy to bring underutilised and vacant buildings back into productive use
- Greenspaces - upgrading to add environmental value and could link with sustainability
- Opportunity for better connection to Bidulph Valley Way walking route
- Ensure that the North facing side of the Town Centre, adjacent to Mountbatten Way, is redeveloped in an architecturally attractive manner in order to encourage visitors into the Town Centre
- Promote the town as a Niche Market Town - i.e. Ludlow, Leek
- Provide a retail/leisure experience to rival online shopping
- Heritage curation – make more of existing heritage trails and uncovering the town's heritage. Opportunity for more events such as ghost tours/pub trails - these have been successful in the past, could be resourced by town council
- Town Hall is under-utilised - opportunity for a market, Community Hub, Post office, event space
- Market Place or square needed for a Market Town - potential to repurpose the lawned area behind the town hall, opposite the police station, for the market - was the original location for the market
- Improved marketing - QR Codes and virtual presence to entice more people into the town - had previously explored a "Congleton App" but this was put on hold due to costs
- Encourage hotel to locate in the town
- Opportunity to continue public realm works along whole stretch of shopping street
- Opportunity to establish a new 'quarter' in area around Mill Street, street pattern and buildings have an interesting character which could suit a variety of uses (co working spaces, cafes, cycle hubs, workshops)
- Opportunity to rethink area around Bidstone shopping centre - better augment links here and challenge amount of parking required

Threats

- Signs of increasing vacancy in the centre and stalled development likely to deter potential investors - e.g. The Mills shopping centre on Mill Street
- Lack of outward facing initiatives in terms of marketing the towns boutique shopping experiences
- Loss of anchor stores
- Surrounded by 5 areas where parking is free - Barn Road, West Heath, Talke Outlet, Lyme Green, Sandbach - other areas become and easier/cheaper option for locals and visitors
- Further rise in car parking charges further disincentivises visits from locals and visitors especially when the perceived offer of the town is poor
- Many buildings owned by long distance trusts - no interest in the town, hard to contact
- Shops coming to end of leases - will they renew / shops facing financial difficulties following COVID
- Increase in homeless people in the Town Centre
- More HMOs in the Town Centre changing the nature of the town



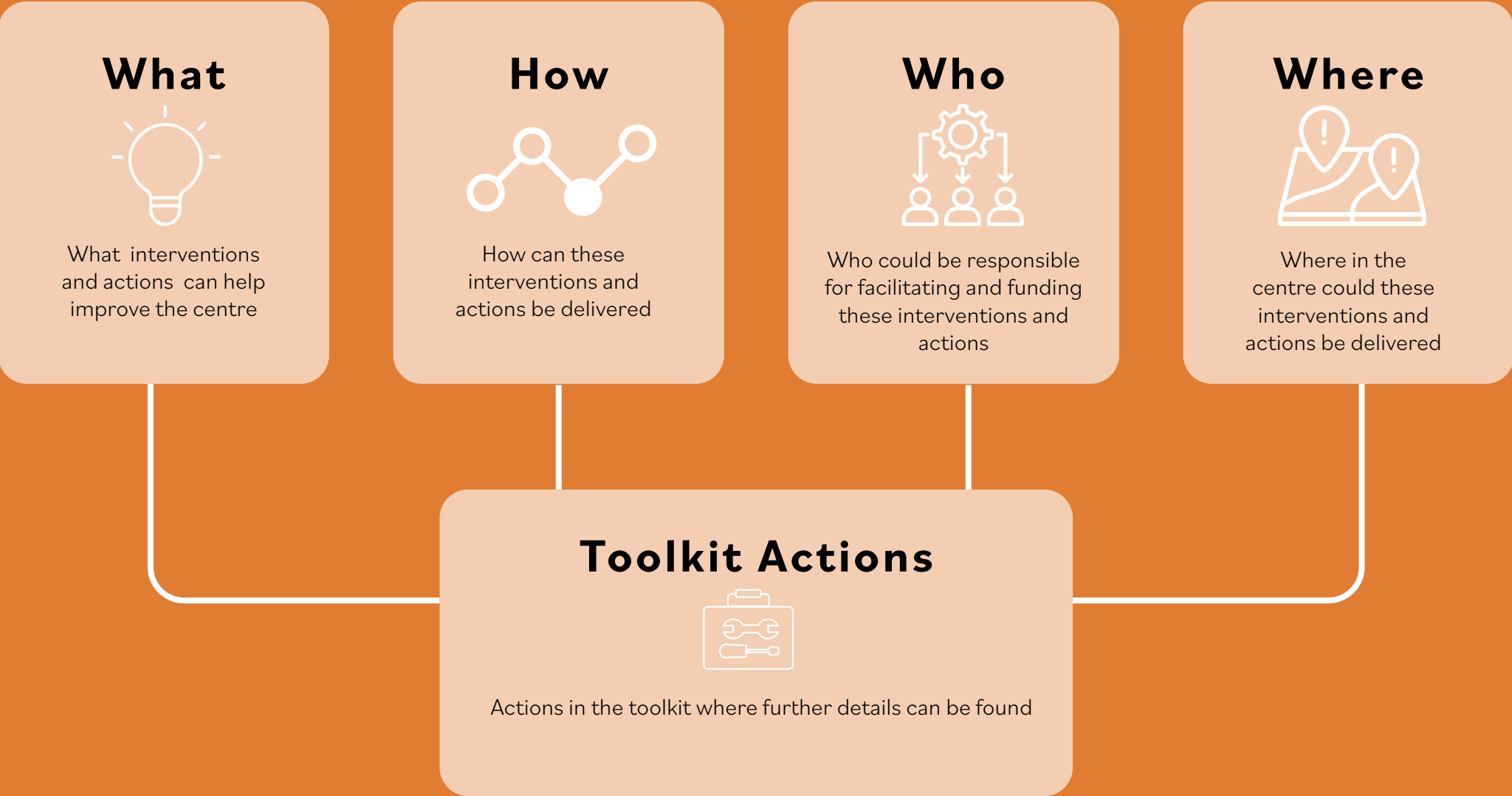
CONGLETON ACTION PLAN

09 Priority Areas for Intervention

The Action Plan has been prepared in collaboration with the Town Council and its Partners and identifies actions which seek to support the established Vision and Objectives for Congleton responding to its challenges and opportunities. It sets out a series of actions, identifying a small number of priorities for intervention which will have the greatest impact on improving the vitality of the Centre.

For each of the actions further details are provided in terms of what, how, who and where (see Box for further details).

The Action Plan is supported by a Toolkit which provides a wide range of actions across 25 intervention areas (which align with the High Street Task Force recommendations) which can be undertaken by a range of stakeholders.



Vision and Objectives

Vision Statement

Congleton will offer a comprehensive range of homes, shops, jobs, services and facilities to cater for the needs of all residents. The unique character of Congleton, including its heritage assets and countryside, will be protected, enhanced and promoted to make the town an attractive place to live, work and visit.

Objectives

- **Improve the attractiveness of the Town Centre**
- **Retain and attract new employment opportunities**
- **Develop an integrated sustainable transport strategy**
- **Offer a good range of facilities**
- **Preserve our green spaces**
- **Deliver a high quality places**

Role of the Centre

Congleton plays a number of important roles:

- A local centre serving the needs of its local residents
- An employment hub offering a range of job opportunities
- A community focus – providing amenities including attractive parks and accommodating a number of active community groups
- A visitor destination offering a range of heritage assets and other leisure amenities
- Supporting a growing catchment with a significant number of new homes proposed through the North Congleton Masterplan

The Vitality Plan seeks to support Congleton to respond to the opportunities that the proposed growth will offer whilst also supporting the needs of its existing local community.

Areas for Intervention

The following have been identified as areas for intervention. Priority interventions identified through the public consultation are highlighted with a white border.

Potential actions are identified in Section 10:



Spatial Action Plan

The Spatial Action Plan illustrates key features of the Centre and identifies where proposed actions could be delivered.

It highlights the opportunities to better connect the Town Centre with the river and park corridor to the north of Mountbatten Way and the potential for change around the Market and Morrisons.

The three priority actions which have emerged from the public consultations are

- *Action 4 Improvements around the Market Hall*
- *Action 9 Tackling void properties*
- *Action 10 Enhancing public transport*

Actions

Action 1: Opportunities for Change: Around Congleton Museum

Re purposing of open space to the north of Congleton Museum

Action 2: Repairing severance and impact of Mountbatten Way

Highways re-design

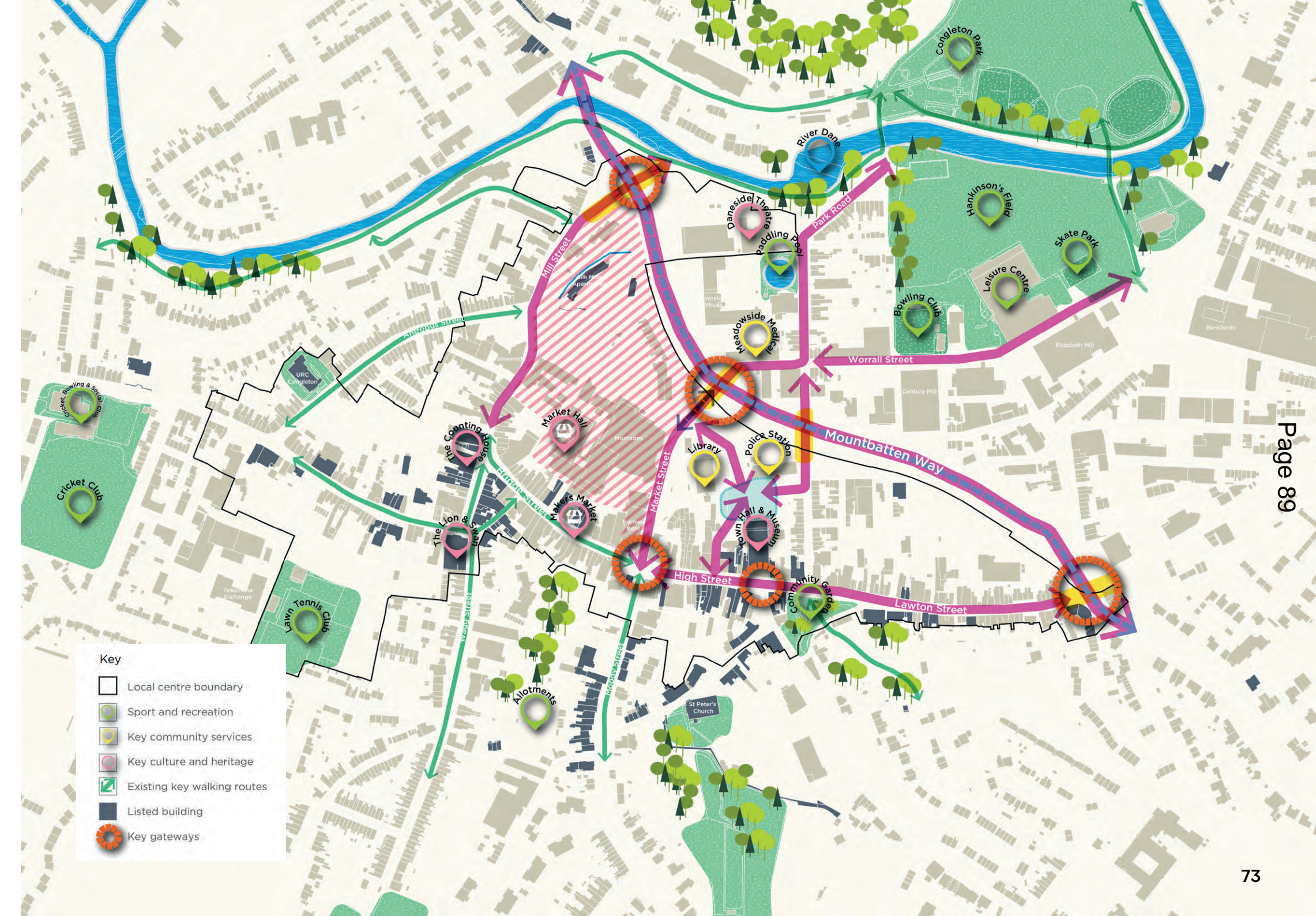
Improved/ new crossings

Action 3: Enhancing walking and cycling routes

Key routes for enhanced walking and/or cycling

Action 4: Opportunities for Change: Around Market Hall

Proposed masterplan area



Movement Action Plan

‘Building on the transport schemes suggested in the LTDP, additional Town Centre transport schemes are suggested as likely to be beneficial in supporting Town Centre vitality and viability. These additional schemes, which place a strong emphasis on public realm and enhancing the street environment are set out in the table and plan opposite

Town Centre Movement Schemes suggested in addition to LDTP potential Schemes

Type	Ref	Scheme	Description	Costing ¹
Active Travel	C_AT1	Improve signage and wayfinding across the town centre	Improve signage and wayfinding across the town centre to enhance proposed walking and cycling links across the town centre and towards the Rive Dane.	<£100k
	C_AT2	Improve pedestrian crossings on Mountbatten Way	Introduce new pedestrian crossings in suitable locations along Mountbatten Way to reduce severance – for example to enhance Park Road connection towards the River Dane.	<£1m
Public Realm	C_PR1	Greening the street along Mountbatten Way	Improve Mountbatten Way street environment introducing green features such as street trees, planters and SUDS – to improve pedestrian experience and support better air quality.	<£1m
	C_PR2	Enhance gateway at Market Street	Enhance the gateway point at Market St as opening welcome to the town centre, which currently turns its back to Mountbatten Way.	<£1m
	C_PR3	Implement public realm scheme on Mill Street, High Street and Lawton Street	Expand the public realm palette implemented on Bridge St to other key town centre streets such as Mill Street, High Street and Lawton Street.	£5m-£10m
Parking Management	C_PM1	Introduce temporary parking suspensions on Mill Street, High Street and Lawton Street	Introduce temporary parking suspensions on Mill Street, High Street and Lawton Street for trial pop-up uses for the service roads.	<£100k
Public Transport	C_PT1	Explore opportunities to enhance Bus Interchange	Explore opportunities to enhance Bus Interchange through an assessment study including improved access, quality of waiting facilities and public realm.	<£100k (study only)

¹ The costs presented are indicative only at this stage. Costs will depend on type and level of interventions delivered – and should be revised at subsequent design stages.
cheshireeast.maps.arcgis.com/apps/MapSeries/index.html?appid=48d6af7045d2495c81a1850a2c8a72c1



Frodsham Street, Chester
Quality public realm and enhanced frontages
(Photo credit: MottMacdonald)

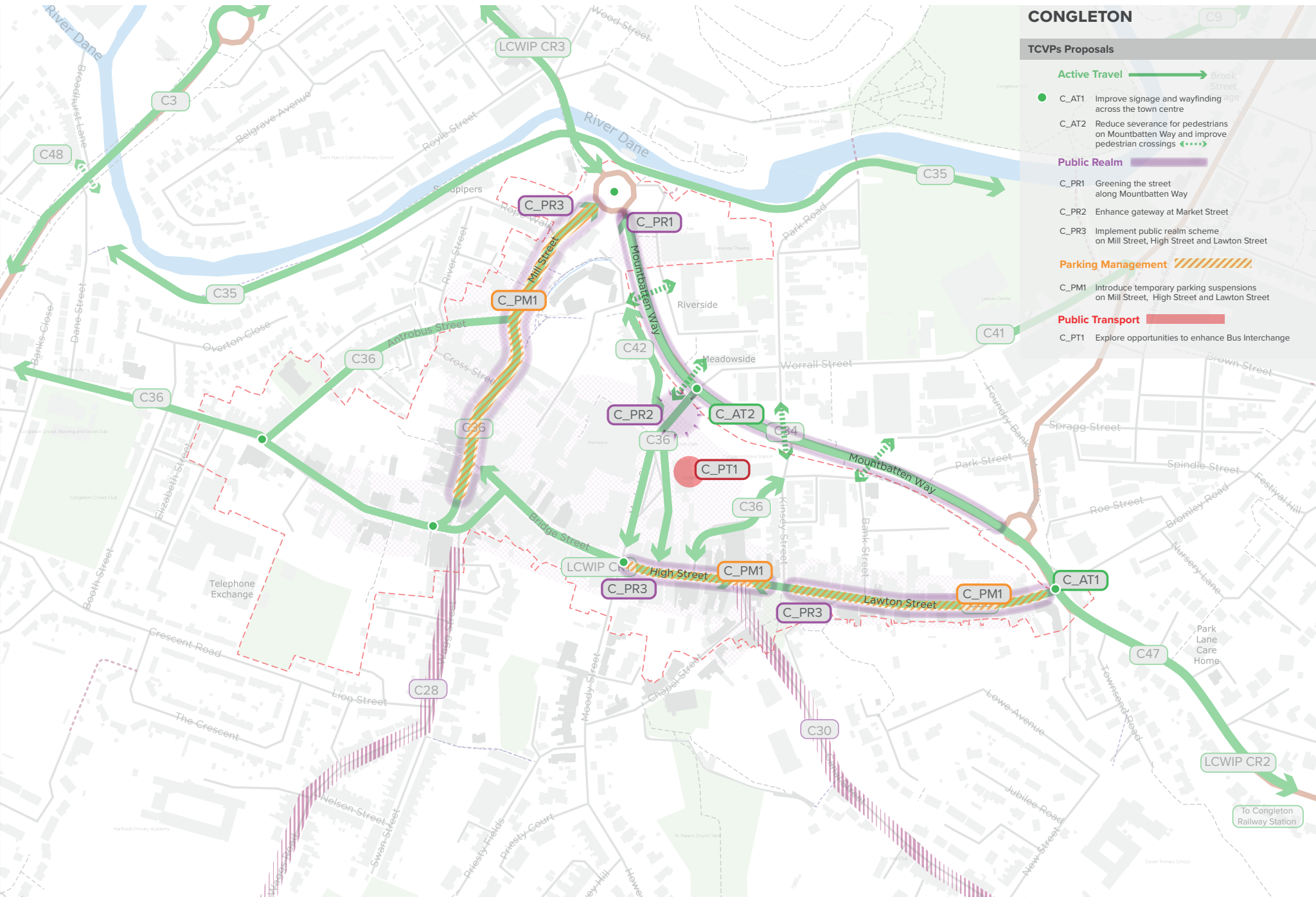


Passeig de Sant Joan, Barcelona
Linear green space introduced along busy main road, to provide opportunities to stop and rest. (Photo credit: MottMacdonald)



Maid Marian Way, Nottingham
Supercrossing – direct, wide crossing and integrated green features (Photo credit: MottMacdonald)

Congleton Town Centre Viability Plan Proposals



10 Potential actions



Action 1: Opportunities of Change Around Congleton Town Hall and Museum

What

The space to the north of the Museum and Town Hall (currently a grass square surrounded by highway on two sides) is underutilised and has a poor relationship with the Museum and Town Hall. The space was historically the town’s Market Square and there is an opportunity to reinstate a function to the space that supports uses and functions within the Museum and Town Hall as well as a space that could accommodate town wide outdoor events/fairs, for example a Makers Market.

Creating this type of space could be central to supporting the expansion of Congleton’s evening economy. Scope exists on the back of people staying more local during lockdown and increased residential development in the area. Recent footfall data is showing an increase in early evening activity. A programme of early evening events linked to encouraging local F&B operators to stay open later should give a boost to the Centre and support this trend to grow. This would also support the planned reopening of Capital Walk in 2022 as a world food and beverage cluster.

How

Whilst it is recognised that there may be a long term aspirations by CEC for the area to be developed it has been vacant for a number of years and there is scope for it to be better used as a communal area to host outdoor gatherings and events e.g. markets, pop up café, children’s play. However, care must be taken to ensure any adverse impacts (light/ noise etc.) on surrounding residential areas are mitigated, including those on Kinsey Street.

Short term:

- Appropriate lighting to create a safer environment
- Coordination with landowners and licensing
- Closure to car parking on event days
- Removal of post and rail fencing
- Introduce seating and shelter for dwell space on non-event days
- Ensure this area is well maintained e.g. grass is mowed
- Create inviting signposted walking routes to from the town centre including Market Street, Moutbatten Way and local car parks

Longer term:

- Consider improving the appearance of more dated buildings fronting this area such as the police station and library
- Public realm design strategy for the square to determine optimum design to support future uses – consider materials, lighting, movable features i.e. seating, planters
- Enhance the surrounding streets that enclose the square – manage the on-street car parking. Potential to close through route or remove all through traffic. Create spill out space for the Museum to use and link to the Market Square
- Introduce more robust materials to support a greater range of uses
- Introduce infrastructure to support a wider variety of events i.e outdoor power plugs, canopies, stage and storage

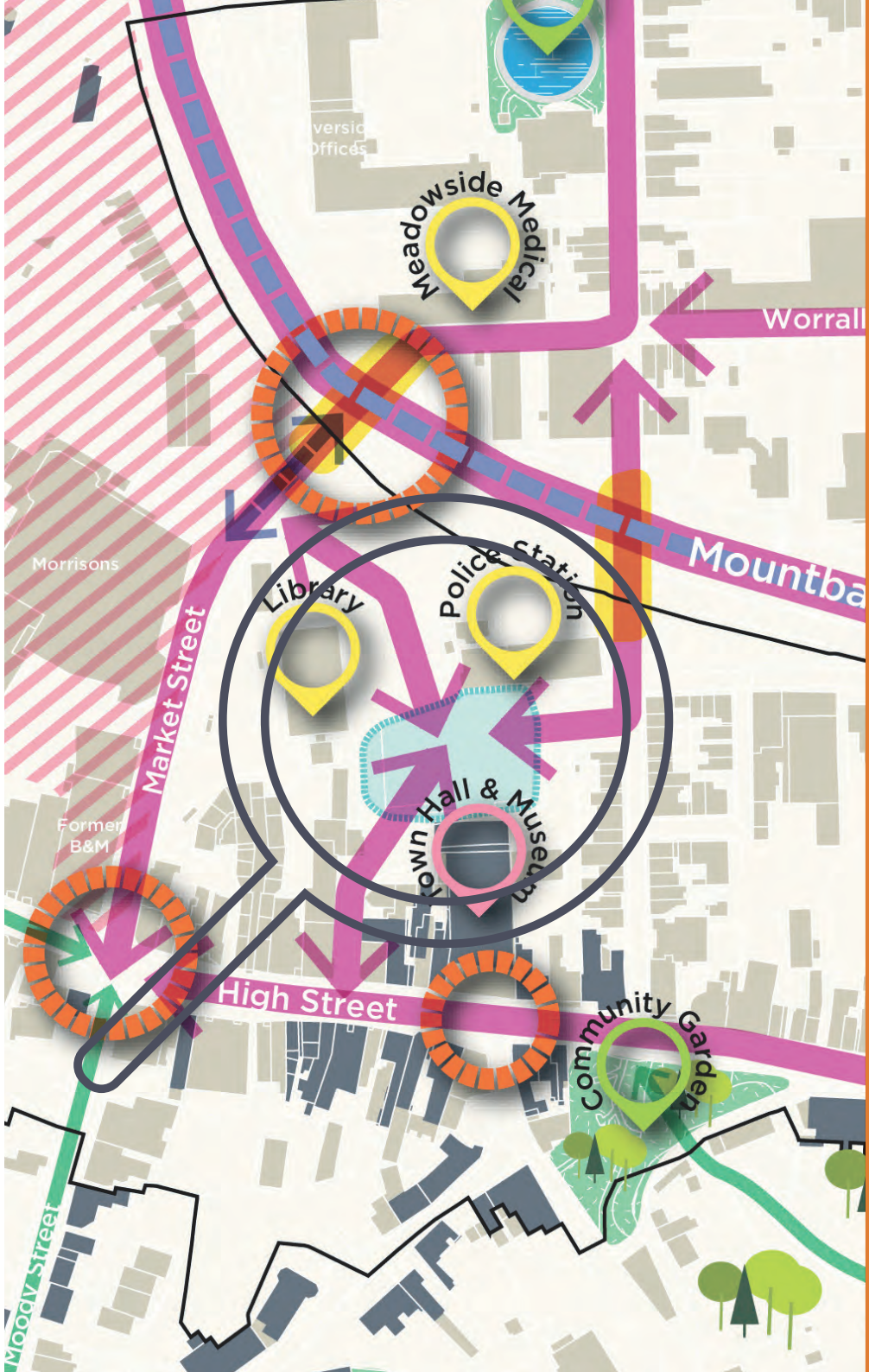
- Options for increased greening including trees, planting, wildflower meadows or community allotment
- Site investigation to understand development potential and required site remediation/ groundworks. The site could suit a range of town centre developments such as residential uses or a new market hall

Who

- Town Council
- CEC
- Congleton Museum

Where

- Market Square located to the north of Congleton Town Hall



Action 1 supports the following objectives:

- Improve the attractiveness of the Town Centre
- Offer a good range of facilities
- Preserve our green spaces
- Deliver a high quality places



Toolkit Actions

- 1b - Introduce a programme of events which open-up and connect different parts of the centre for a limited time
- 3a - Managing assets
- 4a - Pop-up seating
- 4d - Planting in pots to define space for certain uses
- 5d - Instant greening
- 9b - Curated events focused on historic buildings, public spaces, gardens and parks
- 18b - Provide new places to sit
- 20b - Use space and activities to attract people to a forgotten part of town
- 21a - Managed activation of underutilised space



Action 1: Opportunities for Change Around Congleton Museum & Police Station

Short term meanwhile uses

Quick wins could include removing the barriers and opening up greenspace for events such as markets, outdoor cinemas (with projections onto the back of the town hall), small festivals and moveable playspaces.



Victoria Road play space, London, [Duncan & Grove](#)





Action 2: Repairing the Severance and Impact of Mountbatten Way

What

Mountbatten Way is an imposing feature of Congleton’s urban fabric. This highway infrastructure is vehicle dominated and creates severance between the historic Town Centre and it’s northern extents. As a result, an urban shatter zone exists between Mountbatten Way and High Street and between Congleton Park and Mountbatten Way, and it effectively forms a concrete collar to the Town Centre, significantly limiting its ability to grow to the north.

Mountbatten Way is also a major severance to pedestrian movement in Congleton, effectively cutting off connections between the Town Centre and Congleton Park (a high quality Green Flag Awarded Park). The roundabouts present at the north and south end also create major barriers to pedestrian and cycle movement.

There is potential to reconfigure the alignment of the corridor to improve pedestrian crossings and the quality of the environment both across and along Mountbatten Way. By addressing this issue of pedestrian severance, poor quality public realm and vehicle dominated roads, the Congleton Action Plan supports improved integration and accessibility between the park and the Town Centre.

These ideas will need to be modelled in order to test feasibility and the impacts they will have on traffic movement and air quality.

How

Addressing the severance of Mountbatten Way can be achieved in several ways, each creating their own benefits to the Town Centre. A primary driver for any future interventions around Mountbatten Way should be to create a street based environment, with a more balanced arrangement of pedestrian and vehicle spaces, more pedestrian activity and an improved relationship to surrounding or adjacent development;

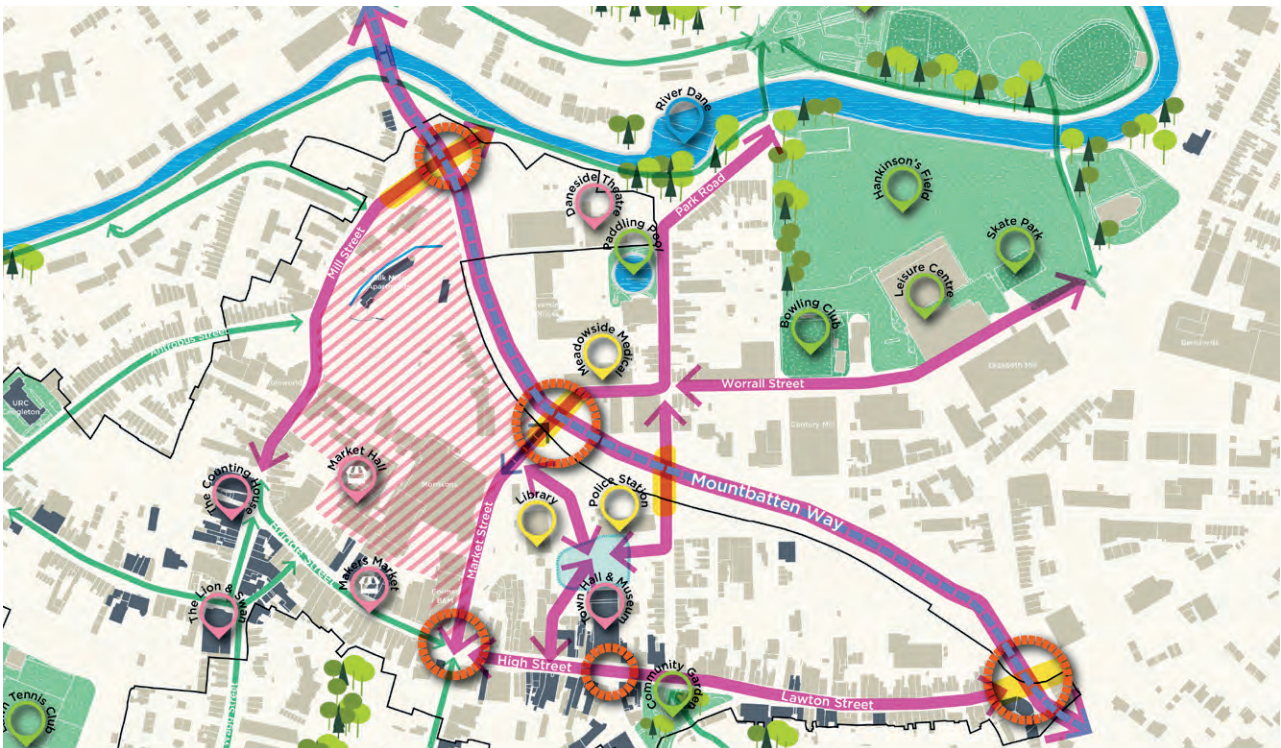
- Reducing the width of the vehicle carriageways, including potentially reducing the number of vehicle lanes to create a shorter distance for pedestrians to cross
- Traffic calming along Mountbatten Way to slow traffic speeds and allow for more opportunities to incorporate additional or enhanced pedestrian crossings
- Reinstating historic Park Road across Mountbatten Way to connect the Park with the Town’s historic Town Hall
- As a result, creating redevelopment opportunities to the south, with scope for active ground floor uses to front onto and address Mountbatten Way – a combination of spill out space and residential front doors
- Introduce more soft landscape features to visually enhance the corridor as well as provide opportunities for carbon and particulates management. Flower boxes are starting to do this but greening could be extended to create a tree lined boulevard or central carriageway subject to safety considerations.
- Introduce cycle lanes and bus routes to promote more sustainable development
- Expand the public realm palette implemented on Bridge St to other key Town Centre streets. This should include High St, Lawton St, Mill St, Swan Bank and West St
- Progress a concept design study for Mountbatten Way to consider the potential options for significantly reducing this severance. This should include a phased and costed programme of works
- Enhance the gateway node at Market St to reveal the Town Centre, which currently turns its back to Mountbatten Way
- Enhance the connection with the riverside particularly via Park Road

Who

- CEC/Ansa
- Town Council

Where

- Mountbatten Way
- High St, Lawton St
- Park Rd, Market St



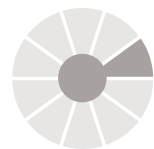
Action 2 supports the following objectives:

- Improve the attractiveness of the Town Centre
- Develop an integrated sustainable transport strategy



Toolkit Actions

- 1a - Design a holistic public realm scheme that improves pedestrian provision
- 4e - Enhance gateway sites
- 5a - Upgrade the public realm with high quality materials
- 5d - Instant greening
- 7a - Parklets
- 14c - Enhanced crossings
- 18d - Provide allotments and concrete gardens on leftover space



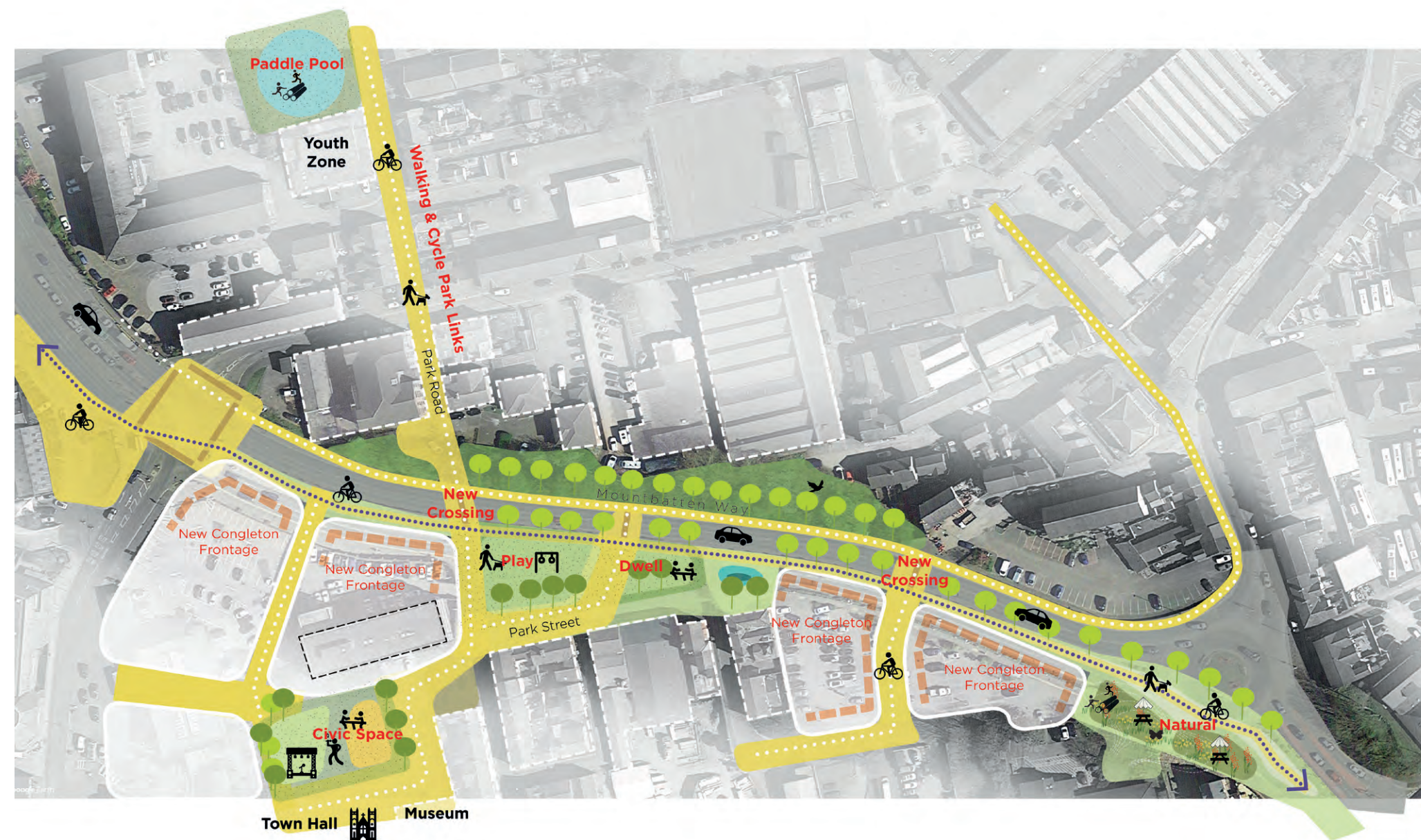
Action 2: Repairing the Severance and Impact of Mountbatten Way

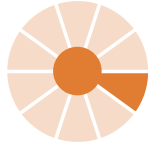
Taming Mountbatten Way

There is an opportunity to improve movement across Mountbatten Way for pedestrians to better connect the Town Centre with local assets to the north, such as the river, Congleton Park, Daneside theatre and the swimming pool. Consideration could also be given to the development of some of the existing car parks to create development frontages onto Mountbatten Way.



Enhanced crossing with planting, Nottingham





Action 3: Enhancing Walking and Cycling

What

Congleton is connected to National Cycle Network Route 55 which links to Biddulph and Stoke-on-Trent and also north to Macclesfield. Whilst there are recognised challenges to walking and cycling in Congleton presented by its hilly topography (e.g. Canal Street and Park Lane), there is potential to improve the walking and cycle network and encourage more trips to be made to the Town Centre by active modes.

Support the introduction of high-quality safe cycling routes throughout the Town, as identified by the Local Cycling & Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) and Local Transport Development Plan (LTDP).

Consider the location of cycle hubs linked to improve green links and introduce secure, safe cycle parking.

How

- Explore design options to create a joined-up walking and cycling network through the Town Centre, as identified by the LTDP. The network should integrate with surrounding residential areas, schools and shopping areas
- Careful consideration should be given to balancing the requirements of each street in terms of its surrounding context and use, including reducing the potential for conflicts between bikes, pedestrians and cars in some areas e.g. High Street, along River Dane and pedestrianised area of Bridge Street
- Explore design options for West Heath to Congleton Town Centre, as identified in the LCWIP
- Explore design options for the connection between Congleton Railway Station and Town Hall, as identified in the LCWIP
- Provision of new/enhanced cycle routes along the River Dane, ensuring compliance of connections with the Equalities Act 2010
- It is important to ensure that all pathways are well maintained and safe for all users including even pavements, dropped kerbs and landscaping
- Ensure cycle and walking route are well signposted and identified on local maps

Who

- Town Council
- CEC Cycling Champion
- Congleton Cycling Club

Where

- Congleton Town Centre
- Mountbatten Way
- Congleton train station

Precedent Images

Mountbatten Way is a key corridor connecting north towards the Clayton Bypass and south with Park Lane towards Congleton train station. But the current road design is hard engineered and the wide carriageway creates severance for people on foot and cycle – particularly at junctions with considerably large footprints like at Mountbatten Way / Worrall St node.

The carriageway space could be better distributed between different road users while still maintaining capacity – like on The Strand in Liverpool. Here the new segregated two-way cycle lane allows to safely integrate active travel along the busy road and the buffer space between the cycle and traffic lane – offers an opportunity to plant trees and/or SUDS.

While dedicated walking and cycling spaces would encourage active travel trips along Mountbatten Way corridor, severance towards the Town Centre also needs to be addressed. Here the value of introducing direct, wide crossings allowing safe pedestrian and cyclists movement.



Precedent Images

To create a more walkable, cycle-friendly and attractive Congleton, better balance of the street space is required, particularly in the Town Centre.

A good starting point is the existing public realm treatment of Bridge St, where the choice of stone textures and placement of street furniture prioritise pedestrians across the space – and this approach can be extended on the nearby Mill St, High St and Lawton St.

A similar tactic has been implemented along Cannon St in Preston - where the pedestrian priority design of the street makes drivers feel like guests enhancing freedom of movement for pedestrians.

The street has been transformed into a public space where people can safely dwell, shop and rest.



Cannon St, Preston
Pedestrian priority design: stone pavements, and space for businesses' spill-out. Signage has been located along the building line to avoid clutter.



Action 3 supports the following objectives:

- Improve the attractiveness of the Town Centre
- Develop an integrated sustainable transport strategy
- Preserve our green spaces



Toolkit Actions

- 1a - improve the evening offer
- 4b 4b - Better signage
- 4e - Enhance gateway sites
- 7e - Bike and scooter parking
- 20a - Remove clutter from key pedestrian routes





Action 4: Opportunities for Change Around Market Hall (Priority from public consultation)

What

The areas north of the existing Market Hall are in a key gateway location within the Town Centre, with direct access and visibility from Bridge Street and Mountbatten Way. A number of barriers to development in this area currently exist including topography, notably a change in levels, smaller sites in multiple land ownerships and existing buildings of historic value falling into structural disrepair (the Grade II Listed building - Bossons Mill had to be demolished in 2016 due to safety concerns).

The sites collectively have huge potential for a new development which can -

- Provide a mix of uses such as retail, leisure, residential and community based on local need and further demand assessment
- The areas north of the existing Market Hall are in a key gateway location within the Town Centre, with direct access and visibility from Bridge Street and Mountbatten Way
- Better address frontage onto Mountbatten Way, Mill Street and Market Street
- Improve links from shopping areas along Bridge Street through to Market Street and Mountbatten Way and onto the river and park, and from the north via Princess Street
- Provide more efficient parking solutions, to allow land to be used for Town Centre uses

How

There is an opportunity to look at different sites within this area collectively, either informally with different landowners coming together or using a masterplanning or development framework approach. This would provide a more holistic view of potential for change, combining several sites together to ensure the right mix of uses and open space can be provided, any buildings of value can be sensitively incorporated into the scheme and space can be used most efficiently for car parking. A phased approach may be appropriate within the parameters of an overarching vision for the area. A list of key stakeholders can be created to include landowners, members of Town Council and CEC, to ensure key decisions are consulted on and a robust brief is set at the start of the exercise.

Who

- Town Council
- CEC Planning department
- Key landowners

Where

The area of land bounded by Mill Street, Mountbatten Way, Market Street and up to the back of properties along Bridge Street.



Action 4 supports the following objectives:

- Improve the attractiveness of the Town Centre
- Offer a good range of facilities
- Deliver a high quality places



Toolkit Actions

- 5a Upgrade the public realm with high quality materials
- 9a Repurposing of assets
- 14e Decked and multi-storey car parks
- 22b Bringing vacant buildings back into residential use
- 23 Redevelopment Plans



Action 5: Showcasing Congleton's Heritage

What

Congleton boasts a number of high quality heritage buildings including the Grade II* Town Hall which sits at the centre of a historic street. A heritage trail is available providing details of a number of buildings of heritage value and a statue of woman's suffragette Elizabeth Wolstenholme Elmy who lived in Congleton has recently been unveiled. The town also benefits from the free Congleton Museum covering the local history of the area. Considerable scope exists to make more of the Town's heritage assets.

How

Advancements in technology has opened up lots of new opportunities to showcase heritage assets in new and exciting ways. The use of QR codes or apps mean that the current trail on the Town Council's website could be translated into an interactive walking tour. This could also be linked to other themed trails e.g. ghost trail or pub trail led by local historians/ volunteers or the Museum. Trails should be accessible to all and would support wider health objectives. Consideration should be given as to how to use these to encourage visitors to venture into other, and less well known, parts of the town such as the ruins behind Bridge Street, Astbury Mere, Congleton Park, Cockshoots and The Bath House. Whilst it is recognised that this was something that has been looked at in the past it would be worth revisiting this to see whether there is scope to engage with a local business who may be willing to provide expertise to support the Centre to develop a local app or QR codes. Other options including characterful signage, information boards, maps and pamphlets should also be considered for those less digitally connected.

A number of the other local centres are also looking to make more of their heritage assets and it would be worth engaging with them to share best practice and also to consider whether there is scope to collaborate with them and other organisations to encourage linked trips for visitors.

More events focused on heritage should also be considered with scope to link to showcasing the Centre's other assets including the River. Such events and initiatives should be well advertised.

Who

- Town Council
- CEC
- Local businesses
- Other towns with heritage assets

Where

- Visitor Centre
- Across centre such as; Congleton paddling pool. Congleton Leisure Centre, Congleton Community Garden and Congleton Park, as well as other buildings, car parks and parks.



Action 5 supports the following objectives:

- Improve the attractiveness of the Town Centre
- Deliver a high quality places



Toolkit Actions

- 3a - Managing assets
- 4f - Open up heritage buildings as venues or for visitors/ events
- 9a - Repurposing of assets
- 9b - Curated events focused on historic buildings, public spaces, gardens and parks
- 16a - Self guided heritage tours





Action 6: Making more of Community Assets

What	Who
There are a number of community assets in the Centre including buildings and parks. Consideration should be given as to how these assets would be better utilised to attract footfall into the Centre and serve the needs of the local community. These include the Town Hall and Congleton Park.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Town CouncilCECCommunity Groups
How	Where
<p>There are a number of public/community assets which sit within areas which have the potential to be brought back into more active use.</p> <p>The Town Council is also active and may be willing to take a proactive role in managing and maintaining some of these assets to ensure they remain attractive and maximise their opportunity for use.</p> <p>How assets could be used in the short term to activate areas or provide revenue whilst longer term development plans are worked up should be considered. E.g. could the land in front of the museum be used for events or activities (boules/pop up food festivals/specialist markets etc).</p> <p>The use of (low energy) lighting to animate areas and make key assets and connections between assets safer should be considered.</p> <p>A major £10m refurbishment of the Leisure Centre will boost local assets with the delivery of two new pools, a thermal suite, modern gym, café and play area.</p> <p>Consideration should be given as to how best to promote each of the town’s community assets to raise awareness and maximise their usage.</p> <p>Consideration should also be given to engaging and collaborating with the wider community assets across Congleton including local churches and community based organisations e.g. U3A, sporting groups etc.</p> <p>Congleton Park is a significant community asset which together with the nearby padding pool, theatre and playing fields, could be utilised more through a series of events (e.g. circus, fairground, concerts), for example at the bandstand, or sports which would also support health objectives.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Congleton paddling poolCongleton Leisure CentreCongleton Community GardenCongleton Park, as well as other buildings, car parks and parks



Action 6 supports the following objectives:

- Improve the attractiveness of the Town Centre
- Offer a good range of facilities
- Preserve our green spaces



Toolkit Actions

- 1b – Introduce a programme of events which open-up and connect different parts of the centre for a limited time
- 1c – Enable autumn and winter al-fresco dining
- 1d – Use lighting
- 3a – Managing assets
- 4a – Provide pop-up seating
- 9c – Enable a café culture
- 15a – Annual/ regular events
- Markets



Action 7: Raising Congleton’s Profile

What	
Congleton has a comprehensive website showcasing the Centre and whilst this is a great start there are lots of ways in which the Centre’s offer could be promoted to attract local residents, workers, visitors, and tourists.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Ensure that key messages from the Vitality Plan is fed into the Visitor Economy Strategy that is being prepared for Cheshire EastEngage with other similar market towns and see if there is scope to showcase each other’s assets to broaden the appeal of the town to attract new visitors e.g. Leek, Buxton etcContinuation of the popular Beartown leaflet through local doors to inform local residents of upcoming events
Consider what other information could be included on the website – local walks, cycle routes, key assets such as the canal etc . which would be useful to both tourists and local residents. It must be ensured that the website is kept up to date and could include a “What’s on” section covering local venues, pubs and events to support this.	
Like Congleton, Wilmslow has a comprehensive website but they have worked with a local marketing company to support them to develop a brand as well which they are then using in a variety of media channels - see https://wilmslowswaybetter.co.uk for information.	The Town Council’s new role taking in responsibility for the Tourist Centre will support this.
Who	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Town CouncilGroundworkLocal Businesses	
Where	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">N/A	



Action 7 supports the following objectives:

- Improve the attractiveness of the Town Centre
- Retain and attract new employment opportunities



Toolkit Actions

- 2a – Create a smarter High street
- 3b – Appointment of Town Centre champions
- 3c – Destination management plans
- 10a – Independent shop guides
- 12a – Create an App
- 12b – Creation of Local Brand
- 12c – Set-up an online platform
- 12d – Introduce WIFI/ digital high street/ Town Centre app



Action 8: Mobilising the Business Community

What

Congleton already has an impressive network of local community groups who support the town and its amenities. It is recommended that this energy is extended more to the business community (those in the centre and in employment locations around its edges). Engaging with these businesses and encouraging them to collaborate more effectively will both support the economic growth of the area and help to ensure that businesses are retained and flourish in Congleton.

How

Groundwork have recently been appointed by the Wilmslow Town Council to support local business engagement and to test the appetite to establish a Business Improvement District (BID). However a lighter approach could be pursued in Congleton by supporting local businesses to network and understand how they could get involved in supporting the actions identified in the Vitality Plan. If actions can be identified around issues/opportunities that relate to their core function, businesses may be able to provide support towards the Town's aspirations in the form of sponsorship, materials, technical support or volunteers. This is already starting to take place in Congleton with local businesses recently providing services for the installation of the new Elizabeth Wolstenholme Elmy statue:

- Sponsorship
- Materials
- Technical support
- Volunteers

Businesses networking could also identify "themes" where businesses can drive opportunities forward for example retailer and F&B hosting a fashion show or beauty event that promotes and showcases local businesses. Local businesses in Congleton already pull together for the Christmas, Congleton Pride and Jazz and Blues Festival, but could also get more involved in other events such as Halloween or Easter.

Businesses could also come together to established loyalty schemes to support shoppers to stay local. This has worked well in Belper <https://lovebelper>.

[co.uk/](https://www.congleton.co.uk/). The provision of an up to date business directory on Congleton's website could support greater collaboration and networking between businesses whilst also raising their profile locally.

Engagement with major employers in the locality and surrounding area to promote Congleton as a great place for staff to live or visitors to stay.

Who

- Town Council
- Local businesses especially larger and dynamic/innovative/creative businesses. It is recognised that some retailers may be struggling but other local businesses may be keen to get involved and support their community
- Groundwork
- Business Community via East Cheshire Chamber of Commerce

Where

Across Congleton



Action 8 supports the following objectives:

- Improve the attractiveness of the Town Centre
- Offer a good range of facilities



Toolkit Actions

- 10a – Independent shop guides
- 13a – Business profiles
- 13b – Community wealth building
- 25f – Tap into local talent



Action 9: Tackling Void Properties (Priority from public consultation)

What

The attractiveness of parts of Congleton is undermined by vacancies and the closure of a number of large stores, particularly around Mill Street, Cross Street and West Street within the town centre.

How

It is acknowledged that the ability to identify new retail occupiers for the large vacant units is likely to be difficult particularly as a result of Covid which has compounded structural change in the retail sector. Instead of focusing on new retail occupiers it is worth trying to target leisure operators, including those to improve the evening economy. For example could a cinema operator be attracted to the B&M store? Flexible workspace is being looked at in some vacant departments stores but usually in those with some character.

Residential is also another option to be considered for smaller units on the edges of the town or above shops e.g. Mill Street and Lawton Street. This has been successfully achieved in Burwash, Sussex where plaques identify which shops previously occupied the homes. The key is to work with local developers and to complement the wider new homes being developed on the edge of the town.

Meanwhile uses (until longer term occupation can happen) and pop up stores or activities can support footfall and allow potential occupiers to test the local area or support the local community e.g. local art or school exhibitions.

Other short term solutions which brighten up vacant shop-fronts include vinyl window displays or "wrappers" promoting the town and its businesses or using vacant shop-windows to showcase products of existing businesses or online stores.

Who

- Town Council and CEC working with landlords and local developers

Where

- Vacant units



Action 9 supports the following objectives:

- Improve the attractiveness of the Town Centre
- Retain and attract new employment opportunities



Toolkit Actions

- 5c – Dressing vacant sites
- 9a – Repurposing of assets
- 15b – Community organised artwork
- 19a – Affordable start-up space to help new businesses establish themselves
- 21a – Managed activation of underutilised space
- 25a – Meanwhile uses



Action 10: Enhancing Public Transport (Priority from public consultation)

What

Within Congleton there are a number of bus services that provide useful connections to key locations including Crewe, Macclesfield, Sandbach, Middlewich, Holmes Chapel, Alsager and Biddulph. Alongside these inter-town services, Congleton also benefits from the Beartown bus network, which is provided on behalf of Cheshire East Council, and serves Buglawton, Hightown and Congleton Railway Station with three circular routes.

Despite this, the public transport network within Congleton is neither fully integrated or high frequency at present. There are longstanding issues here relative to declining bus provision, coverage and utilisation that have been encountered across many years. To rectify this, the recently published CEC Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) sets long-term objectives and targets for the borough of Cheshire East to deliver transformational change across the bus network.

The railway station is a clear asset to the town, with hourly connections to Manchester, but connections between the town centre and railway station should be improved.

How

- The BSIP seeks to achieve these ambitions by facilitating collaborative working between CEC, bus operators, public transport users (and user groups), rail stakeholders and local communities.
- Deliver bus service improvements through collaborative working with CEC, bus operators, public transport users (and user groups), rail stakeholders and local communities.
- Look to strengthen bus services around Congleton to locations including the Congleton Rail Station and surrounding residential

and employment areas such as West Heath, Buglawton and Mossley.

- Explore design options for the connection between Congleton Railway Station and Town Hall, as identified in the LCWIP.
- Explore options for delivering an enhanced Bus Interchange area/structure for Congleton.
- Consider the opportunity to introduce digital route planning technology e.g. live bus and train timings and touch-in touch-out system for ease of use

Who

- CEC
- Town Council
- Bus Operators
- Network Rail

Where

- Congleton Town Centre
- Congleton train station



Action 10 supports the following objectives:

- Improve the attractiveness of the Town Centre
- Retain and attract new employment opportunities
- Develop an integrated sustainable transport strategy



Toolkit Actions

- 4c – Better bus stops
- 7e – Bike and scooter parking
- 14a – Tactical urbanism to manage traffic speeds and create more pedestrian friendly spaces
- 14c – Enhanced crossings
- 14d – Digital timetable signage for public transport



Centre Wide Actions

In addition to the specific actions identified for Congleton, a number of actions have been identified that are relevant to all of the nine centres. These are:

<p>1. Appointment of CEC Centre Champion</p> <p>The identification of a nominated officer (go to person/champion) within CEC management team for each of the Centres who would understand local priorities for the Centre and would support them to access appropriate officers within key departments and also would seek to unblock issues. It is understood that this is something CEC is currently considering. This would be supported by an providing each of the Centres with a clear organogram (including contact details) of who within CEC is responsible for what to make engagement easier.</p> <p>2. Creation of a Centres Forum</p> <p>Establishment of forum where key representatives from each of the centres could come together on a regular basis to receive updates from CEC about common issues/ opportunities would be beneficial. It is also recognised that during the preparation of the Vitality Plans that a number of the centres are making great progress overcoming specific</p>	<p>issues. By coming together and sharing progress and discussing issues it is considered that the centres would be better able to share best practice and to identify actions where they could collaborate with other centres to drive economies of scale/value for money. Some meetings may just be held between the centres (without representation from CEC officers) whilst others could include CEC and/or other partners such as C&W LEP, Groundwork etc.</p> <p>3. Centre Focused Meetings in CEC</p> <p>The process of preparing the Vitality Plans has involved internal workshops with relevant department leads within CEC to ensure that all departments are considering challenges and opportunities in the round rather than just in terms of their individual responsibility. It would be beneficial to continue to hold more regular Centre focused workshops. The best decisions for the centres will be taken when the implications of proposals are considered in the round taking into account both potential investment and long term maintenance.</p>	<p>4. Streamlining maintenance of public realm and greenspace</p> <p>In light of the local desire for improved maintenance combined with recognition that CEC budgets are under severe pressure, to ensure maintenance of public realm can be optimised, it is recommended that further engagement would be beneficial to agree how the resources of CEC, the Town Council and wider stakeholders could be targeted to support maintenance. Work to establish a more comprehensive schedule of local assets in each centre and who is responsible for their maintenance should be the starting point of drive for improved maintenance. Going forward any future capital investment must be supported by appropriate consideration as to how assets will be maintained over their lifetime. It is also important to recognise that better maintenance does not necessarily just relate to grass being cut regularly. In recognition of the importance of biodiversity, going forward it is anticipated that consideration will be given to allocating parcels of land to the “wild” to support biodiversity.</p>	<p>5. Increasing importance of sustainability</p> <p>Sustainability is now a critical issue for many organisations and important for local residents both in terms of operational implications (for example energy costs) but also in terms of local impact on the local community and the planet. As such sustainability can no longer be positioned as another priority action but rather must be a concept that is considered in every aspect of proposed actions to minimise their carbon footprint and maximise their positive benefits for the local area and its community.</p> <p>6. Improved platform for communicating activities</p> <p>The preparation of the Vitality Plans has demonstrated that all of the Town Councils are proactively trying to improve their centres. However it is recognised that many stakeholders will not be aware of all these efforts. Consideration therefore needs to be</p>	<p>given as to how to amplify to more local residents, shoppers, visitors and businesses what is going on. Consideration should be given as to how to enhance the current websites for example adding more content and sharing this through a variety of channels and to ensure that these are also linked to other key partners for example CEC and the other centres (so collectively they reinforcing each other’s profiles)</p> <p>7. Enhanced engagement with local businesses</p> <p>Many of the centres benefit from having a range of national, and in some cases international businesses, many of which are innovating in their specialist areas. There is a significant benefit to the centres and their businesses to collaborating. Whilst restrictions on public sector revenue budgets is putting pressure on what CEC can support there is an increasing recognition by businesses, especially corporates, for the need to support their local communities (Corporate Social Responsibility). This can be in the form of grants, offering expertise or encouraging</p>	<p>their employees to volunteer. Even smaller businesses often want to give back to the communities in which they operate. This can be in the form of materials and/or specialist expertise (e.g. marketing which has been harnesses by Wilmslow in setting up the Wilmslow’s Way Better brand and website). All centres should seek to better engage with their local businesses to determine how they can collaborate to support each other’s objectives. This type of collaboration can give centres a significant boost particularly when it happens around public realm (investment and maintenance), marketing and branding.</p> <p>8. Greater ownership of community assets</p> <p>Congleton Town Council has just taken over responsibility for the Tourist Information Centre and are keen to look at the potential of taking further responsibility for their community assets. This is an area where collaboration between centres who be beneficial to share best practice.</p>
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Governance and Delivery

Congleton Town Council is responsible for supporting Congleton to fulfil its potential and good progress is being made. Going forward the Town Council will continue to be a major driver in the delivery of the agreed actions emerging from the Vitality Plan.

Having established a range of potential projects that will support Congleton to thrive, further work is now required to determine a detailed action plan setting out who will do what and by when.

It is recommended that dedicated working groups are set up to drive specific short term priority actions forward. The action focused working groups will be responsible for:

- Defining the details of the proposed action
- Considering how it could be funded
- Determining who needs to be involved in supporting its delivering and what their role will be
- Seeking funding - this might require support from other partners
- Determining the timetable for intervention
- Monitoring and evaluating progress against key performance indicators and refining actions if agreed outcomes are not being met

- Reporting progress to relevant partners including the WIP and CEC
- Recommending that CEC, Town Council and any other key local stakeholder groups be invited to adopt the TCVP as a shared common plan. This would allow easy demonstration to potential funders that there is a consensus of approach and buy in from the local community

The makeup of the working groups will vary depending on the specific actions they are focused on. It is important to ensure that the same people are not tasked with getting involved in all the working groups as this will impact on progress. As such the number of working groups and pace of delivery will depend on the number of stakeholder partners that can be engaged with and encouraged to get involved.

Consideration should be given as to whether specific stakeholders need to be invited to be involved to provide technical support. For example CEC, national organisations like the Canal and River Trust or local businesses with specific expertise around specific actions already. CEC Connected Community officers may be able to provide development support.

Progress will be reported into the Town Councils who will in turn also report regularly to CEC. Where issues regarding progress/delivery are identified discussions will need to be taken to determine the required refinements to get progress back on track.

It is acknowledged that partners will need to determine their appetite and ability to deliver the proposed actions. Depending on resources it may be determined that additional staff may need to be recruited to support the pace of delivery of the Vitality Plan and supporting Action Plans.

Communication and Engagement

Given the potential growth of Congleton which will result from the delivery of the North Congleton Masterplan, it is essential that Congleton’s offer is clearly articulated to support new residents and businesses to move to the area and importantly to encourage them to use its local shops and services.

There is a need to begin to share important messages with key stakeholders including:

- Recent and proposed investment in the centre
- Projects that are being worked up
- Funding that is being sought and accessed
- How to get involved

The key partners to be engaged with on a regular basis include:

- Local businesses
- Residents
- Local community and interest groups
- Other towns centres generally and specifically those who are focusing on common actions for example centres looking to strengthen their programme of sport related events to support a stronger coordinated borough wide programme of events

Quality engagement should generate potential volunteers to get involved in the delivery of specific actions and potentially resources to support their delivery.

The following mechanisms should be used to engage with key partners:

- Further enhancement of the website and strengthen profile on social media
- Public engagement consultations – the draft Vitality Plan will be consulted upon and this be used to continue the dialogue with local residents
- Piggybacking Events – for example a stall at markets showcasing what’s on and how to get involved
- Existing and enhanced business networking events – to share emerging ideas, test support and encourage ideas to refine and support their delivery
- Identification of a team of local ambassadors – ambassadors could be trained and then kept up to date about what it going on in the

Centre and then they can showcase positive messages to their contacts. Ambassadors can be proactive local independent businesses leaders and other individuals who come into contact with lots of local people e.g. taxi drivers

In addition, as set out in Section 10, it is important for enhanced communication and engagement between CEC and Congleton Town Council.

Funding

Whilst there is not a pot of money available to support the delivery of the Vitality Plan, given the scale of new development around Congleton contributions will be available and the Vitality Plans can support discussions with CEC and developers on where resources should be focused to ensure that the new homes and jobs are linked to the centre of Congleton and its existing social infrastructure.

In addition the Vitality Plan will be a useful tool with which can be used to:

- Articulate priorities for Congleton to CEC - the Vitality Plan will be used to articulate local priorities to CEC to guide them in their negotiations with developers in respect of contributions linked to planning applications (especially to support improvements in cycling, public realm and public transport) and also in determining their own capital budgets. Formal adoption of the TCVP by key stakeholder organisations can help demonstrate common objectives and priorities for any party submitting funding bids.
- Support external funding bids – having a clear action plan which provides an evidence base and priorities that have been consulted upon is now essential for most funding bids. It is

important to recognise that often funding bids have specific funding leads. In some cases this may be CEC or Cheshire & Warrington LEP in others it might need to be a community group. Whoever may be responsible for leading and submitting a specific funding application, demonstration of collaboration between stakeholders and community support is essential

- Engage with local businesses – to determine whether there are actions that they can get involved in which align with their priorities for supporting their local communities

Another approach to generating more revenue to spend locally is for the Town Council to take responsibility for owning or managing assets with any surpluses being generated being invested back into the local centre. The Town Council is currently in discussion with CEC about how you could take greater responsibility for local assets.

It is important to note that when determining potential interventions consideration must be given to both initial capital investment and longer term revenue implications such as maintenance. In proposing capital investment the whole life of a project must be considered to ensure that appropriate revenue is available for ongoing costs such as maintenance.

Phasing

The actions identified in Section 10 range from projects which are already being progressed to long term aspirations which will require feasibility and funding before they can be delivered.

The Vitality Plan identifies 10 actions which support the established vision and objectives for the Centre. The Town Council is proactive and a number of the identified actions are already being pursued. The public consultation identified the following as priority interventions:

- Opportunities for change around the Market Hall
- Tackling void properties
- Enhancing public transport

Partners now need to determine a detailed action plan related to funding that they are able to access and the resources that they have available or can access to support delivery.

It is important to acknowledge that this indicative programme is not fixed and if specific sources of funding are identified the programme should be adapted to respond to the opportunity.

Covid has taught us important lessons about testing new approaches. For example temporary

road closures to gauge whether reducing car access to encourage cycling or to provide outside dining space would benefit local centres. This approach should be continued so that rather than a public realm project having to be worked up in huge detail and then significant resources found to deliver it, temporary solutions can be tested in terms of their impact and determine whether a more permanent solution is required or desirable. Changes are much more likely to be embraced by businesses and supported by local residents if they know that ideas are being tested and monitored and if they do not work can be reverted back to how they were.

A broad phasing plan for the identified actions is identified opposite where short term relates to 1-2 years and medium 3-5. The following should be noted:

- A number of interventions will require further feasibility and this can be ongoing but intervention on the ground is likely to be a few years off whist planning permission and funding is sought
- A number of interventions are interrelated in particular reducing road severance and encouraging walking and cycling



Monitoring and Evaluation

As noted above the programme and the action plan will not be set in stone but must be capable of responding to new opportunities or challenges. As such it will be important to monitor impact to determine whether the established vision and objectives are being met. Suggested key performance indicators (KPIs) and how they could be measured and how often are identified below:

KPI	How measured	Frequency
Footfall	External provider	Monthly
Number of vacancies	Town Clerk	Quarterly
New businesses opened	Town Clerk	Quarterly
Businesses engaged	Town Clerk to keep a list	Ongoing
Area of greenspace/ open space/ cycleways and footpaths improved	CEC	Annually
Hits on website	Traffic on Social Media	Quarterly
Increased air quality	CEC	Quarterly

Note: CEC has recently commissioned monthly footfall data to end Sep 2026. Recommend all those involved regularly share useful monitoring data with other parties so that all can be aware of progress.

Technical Terms

Term	Explanation
Comparison Goods Sector	Retail that stocks higher value goods that are purchased infrequently such as furniture
Convenience Sector	Retail that stocks everyday items such as groceries, newspapers, toiletries, confectionery
F&B	Food and Beverage
Green Belt	A designated area of countryside, protected from most forms of development to help stop urban sprawl but can be used for agriculture, forestry and outdoor leisure
Greenspace	Parks, public gardens etc
HS2 route	The UKs new high speed rail network
KSC	Key Service Centres
Linkages	The connections between two or more places/ sites within the Town Centres
Public Realm	Space between and within buildings that is publicly accessible for everyone
S106 monies	Money that developers can use towards the development of community and social infrastructure
TCVP	Town Centre Vitality Plans
Wayfinding	The ways in which people orient themselves in a physical space and navigate from place to place
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
Dwell time	The time a person may spend in a particle place or area. For example, the length of time spent sat on a public bench.



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Cheshire East Town Centre Vitality Plans

December 2022



Prepared by Cushman and Wakefield,
Optimised Environments and Mott
Macdonald for Cheshire East Council

December 2022

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Context of the Study

Town Centres across the UK are facing unprecedented challenges. Changes in how we shop, in particular the growth in internet shopping, has significantly decreased footfall in Town Centres resulting in numerous store closures, leaving many centres struggling. Trends that have only been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Government has stated its commitment to helping high streets and Town Centres evolve and adapt to both the structural changes that are occurring in the retail market as well as to COVID-19. It has identified a number of measures to support Town Centres at this challenging time including the Future High Streets Fund, a High Streets Task Force, changes to the planning system and direct support to local authorities and local businesses. Alongside these national measures the government has stressed the need for strong local leadership in supporting Town Centres.

Town Centre Vitality Plans

Cheshire East Council (CEC) is committed to supporting the vitality and viability of all Town Centres within the borough. Whilst acknowledging that in areas of low deprivation, there may be limited opportunity to bid for centralised funding. When funding opportunities do become available, there is generally a need to have clear proposals already agreed before bids can be submitted.

It is also recognised that there are often initiatives which can be taken to support the vitality and viability of local centres which do not require significant capital funding, but rather require the support of local volunteers and/or businesses.

In addition, the reports could be used to support discussions regarding the allocation of S106 monies resulting from development within and in the vicinity of the local centres.

With an almost overwhelming array of options and opinions on what is the best way to support Town Centre vitality and viability, CEC has commissioned Cushman & Wakefield (regeneration and property advisors), supported by Optimised Environments (urban designers) and Mott Macdonald (transport planners), to work with the Town Council’s and their stakeholders to produce bespoke Town Centre Vitality Plans (TCVP) for the nine Key Service Centres (KSC):



The 9 Key Service Centres which form part of this study

Aims and Objectives

The TCVP provides a sense of direction and identify initiatives to support the nine key service centres to better fulfil their potential recognising that each centre is distinct, with its own unique opportunities and specific challenges and local groups/stakeholders. The unique characteristics of each centre will be identified along with tailored solutions for each.

They

- Are bespoke in nature, based on a thorough analysis of individual circumstances affecting the health of each Town Centre, local stakeholder views and any local specific policy considerations.
- Are cross functional and holistic, with scope to recommend a practical and realistic set of priority actions for supporting the vitality and viability of each Town Centre.
- Are informed and tested by existing relevant national and local public policy and strategies, local stakeholder views, relevant research and a thorough understanding of commercial markets and spatial considerations.
- Identify a set of recommended clear priority physical and other (e.g. marketing) interventions/actions to support the vitality and viability of each Town Centre both in recovery from COVID-19 impacts and beyond to enhancement.
- Recommend deliverable actions including who should be involved in delivering of each action identified, to enable Town Councils, community groups, occupiers, property owners etc., to all work towards a common vision.
- Take account of proposals developed/being developed by Town Councils and develop such plans further.

Responding to the Impacts of COVID

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic hit, high streets and Town Centres were having to respond to changing consumer demands driven in part by technological changes. Many recognised the increasing importance of the consumer experience - an attractive place to dwell, shop, see friends, to eat out and be entertained. COVID-19 has led to an acceleration of changes to the reasons people visit and use local centres.

COVID-19 has not and will not be universally negative for all local centres. The requirement to stay local has supported residents to use their local facilities and where the local offer aligns with the demands of residents, local businesses have benefited. The need to work from home has also resulted in an re-evaluation of where we work going forward and it is anticipated that there has been a fundamental shift, for some, in the balance between the amount of time we spend in an office and the amount of time we work from home.

It will be some time before a clear picture emerges of the impact of new forms of working (a hybrid between office and home) have on our high streets in the longer-term. The impact will be felt differently from place to place depending on the local economy's dependency on particular sectors.

It is likely that those centres that perform best going forward will be those able to reconnect with their communities and use them to meet local needs including access to housing, culture, leisure, health etc.

The Town Centre Vitality Plans have been prepared post the outbreak of COVID-19. The impact of COVID-19 on each of the centres has been different and will vary as we emerge from it. The bespoke Vitality Plans draw out the specific challenges and opportunities as a result of COVID-19 and provide an action plan to support recovery and future success.

Vitality Plan and Toolkit

This report builds upon the Draft Baseline Report (which was a summary of the key stages undertaken in 2020 - see below) and incorporates potential actions which have been identified in consultation with local stakeholders during 2021 to form a bespoke Vitality Plan for Handforth.

The Vitality Report comprises of two sections:

- Baseline - which was undertaken in 2020 and describes the Centre in terms of its offer and key characteristics. It brings together

evidence and opinion in respect of the buildings, green and open spaces, access and its residents and businesses.

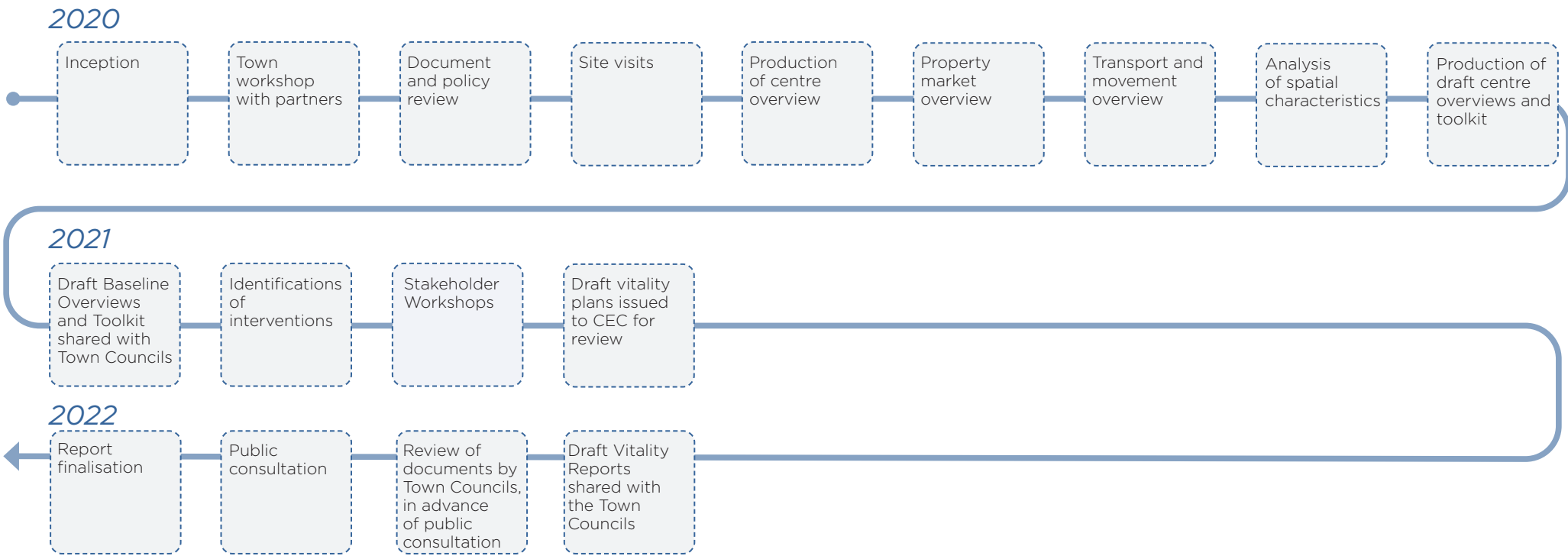
- Action Plan - has been prepared in collaboration with the Town Council and identifies actions which seek to support the established Vision and Objectives for the Centre responding to its challenges and opportunities. It sets out a series of actions, identifying a small number of priorities for intervention which will have the greatest impact on improving the vitality of the Centre.

The draft TCVPs went to public consultation for six weeks from September 2022. Feedback was reviewed and where appropriate amendments have been made to the final report. A summary of other key messages have been shared with key stakeholders.

The Action Plan should be read in conjunction with the Toolkit. The Toolkit presents exemplar projects from other centres (including from within Cheshire East) nationally and internationally to assist key stakeholders to determine a set of actions to support their centres to thrive. There is not a pot of money available to support the delivery of the Vitality Plan. Rather the Vitality Plan has been prepared as a resource to support accessing funding.

Approach

The preparation of the Vitality Plans has involved:



Baseline

Note:
The Baseline analysis was undertaken in 2020. The information in the Baseline was correct and the sources were the most update at that time. It is recognised that in some cases more up to date information is available. Whilst it is not possible to keep updating all the evidence where a significant change has happened, information has been updated. It should also be noted that Census 2011 data is provided for some indicators. Whilst the 2021 Census has just been completed, a release of this data will not be made available until March 2023 therefore making the 2011 Census the most recent consistent data source across the 9 centres for some key indicators.

02 Introduction to Handforth

Handforth Location within Cheshire East

Handforth sits at the heart of one of the most aspirational residential areas in the region. Located between Wilmslow, Heald Green and Styal, it is well connected by road and rail. Located just 9 miles south of Manchester City Centre and linked to Manchester Airport by the A555. As well as Manchester, Handforth is within a 1-hour drive of other major cities such as Liverpool and Chester via the M56. Handforth rail station is located around a 6-minutes walk away from the Centre. The station is served by two trains per hour in each direction providing connectivity to Crewe, Alderley Edge, Manchester Piccadilly and Southport. (See Strategic Context Plan opposite)

Handforth is an attractive residential location, well served by a range of amenities, within easy access of a variety of employment opportunities, located within a rural setting but within easy reach of the City. The key retail area is focused around The Paddock which accommodates a range of retail units (including the Tesco Express and a Costa Coffee) around a square. The Centre continues along Wilmslow Road accommodating a range of convenience units as well as takeaways, betting shops, cafes and restaurants. The Centre offers a good mix of independents including specialists. In addition to retail and leisure it also accommodates homes, community facilities and offices. The Centre's scale and catchment is restricted by its proximity to Wilmslow Town

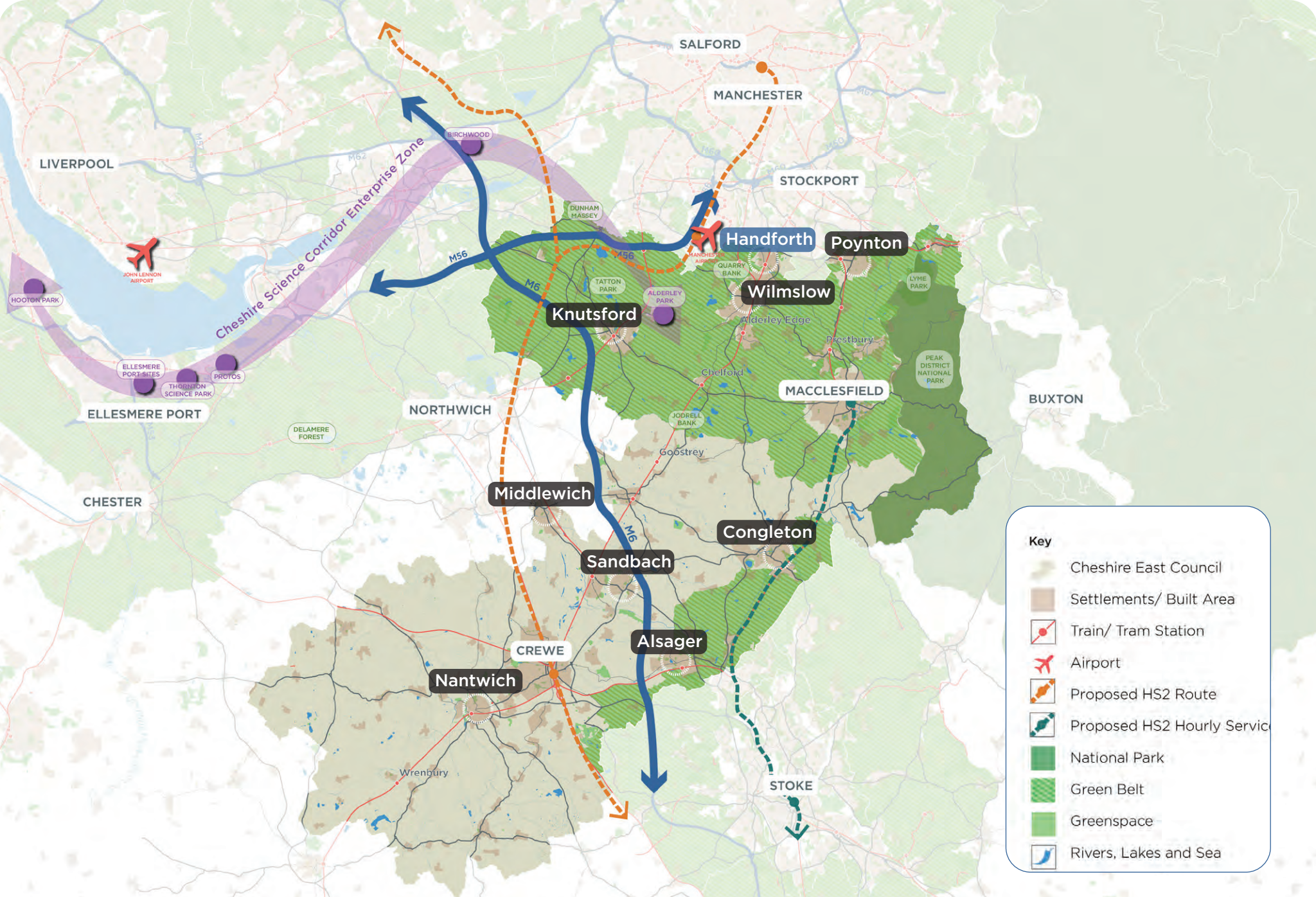
Centre and out of town retail at Handforth Dean (a little over 10 minutes walk from the centre accommodating a Tesco Extra and large format Marks & Spencers, Boots and Next stores) and Stanley Green (including B&Q, TK Maxx, Halfords and Homesense). As such it functions as a centre providing for the needs of its local catchment.

Whilst being surrounded by Cheshire Green Belt and benefiting from access to attractive countryside the centre itself offers a range of green space including a small area at The Paddock, Meriton Road Park (accommodating a multi-sport court and tennis courts and it previously used to host the Handforth Gala), Stanley Hall Park (accommodating play areas, picnic area and skate-park) and the banks of the River Dean.

At the last census Handforth accommodated 2,936 of the 159,441 households in the Borough. In terms of housing mix, Handforth offers a broad mix of homes across detached, semi-detached, terraces and flats. The area is mainly urban but some residents live in the surrounding rural hinterland. Whilst this mix means there is a good choice of homes. Handforth sits in the centre of one of the most expensive residential areas in the North West. Whilst this means it is an aspirational housing area it also means it is an area where affordability can be an issue for lower paid workers and those reliant on benefits.

The population is well served by a range of retail, employment and leisure opportunities and served by three primary schools: Handforth Grange (formerly Wilmslow Grange), the Wilmslow Academy and St Benedict's RC Primary.

Strategic Context Plan



02 Introduction to Handforth

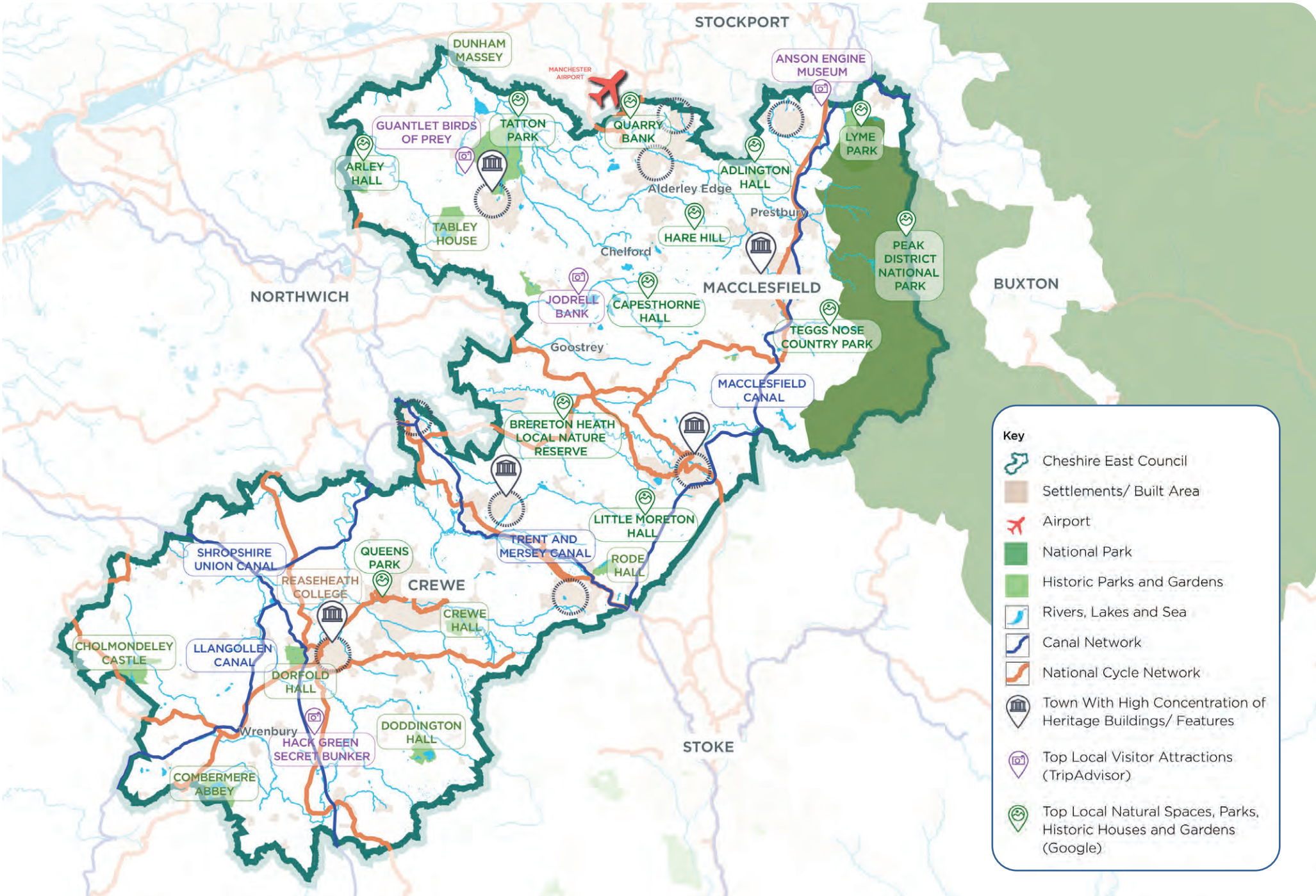
Handforth benefits from access to a wide range of employment opportunities at Airport City, the Cheshire Science Corridor and the City Region. Local employment opportunities are provided at The Deanway Business Park on Wilmslow Road, The Brooke Park industrial estate and Stanley Green Industrial Estate, as well as Handforth Dean.

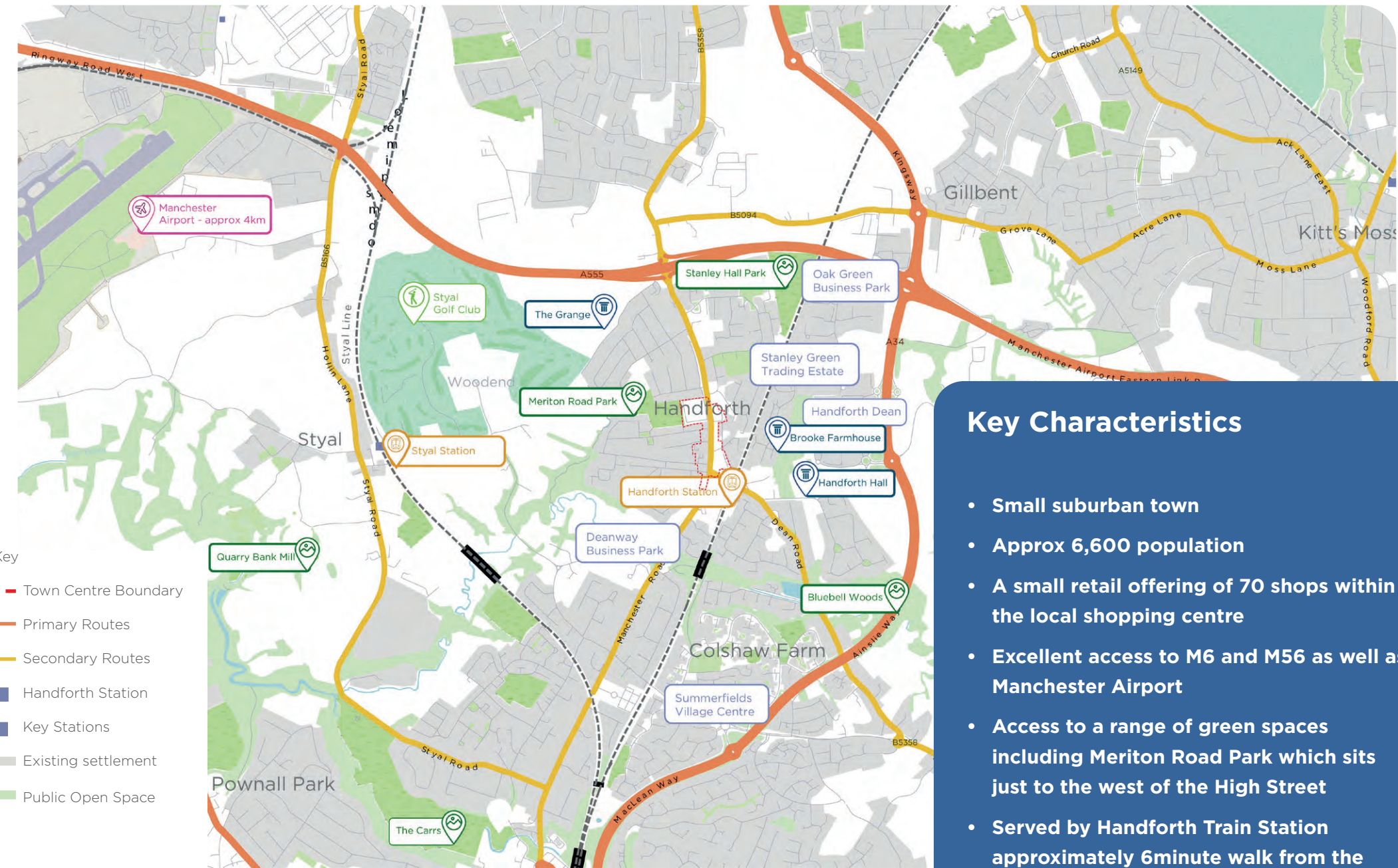
The Strategic Connections and Asset Plan sets Handforth in the context of blue and green assets and tourists attractions. It demonstrates Handforth’s connectivity to a number of local tourist attractions including Quarry Bank Mill, Tatton Park and Dunham Massey as well as attractive countryside including Alderley Edge and Styal Country Park.

Given these assets, the Local Plan recognises the strategic growth potential of Handforth and has identified a number of strategic sites to accommodate future residential and employment growth. This includes the Handforth Garden Village (Phase 1 has the potential for 1,500 new homes and up to 12 ha of employment land). This will significantly increase the number of residents within the catchment of the centre and should support investment in local facilities. These allocations could support around another 5,000 residents living in the area by 2030.



Strategic Connections and Asset Plan





Key Characteristics

- Small suburban town
- Approx 6,600 population
- A small retail offering of 70 shops within the local shopping centre
- Excellent access to M6 and M56 as well as Manchester Airport
- Access to a range of green spaces including Meriton Road Park which sits just to the west of the High Street
- Served by Handforth Train Station approximately 6minute walk from the Town Centre

Handforth Neighbourhood Plan Vision and Objectives

Handforth Council is proactive and initiated the preparation of a Neighbourhood Plan which was made in 2018 by the Handforth Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group. The Neighbourhood Plan identifies the following vision and objectives:

Vision

“In 2030 Handforth will be a vibrant village. It will have extended its current strong community spirit and civic pride to new housing developments both within the Garden Village at Handforth and within the parish of Styal. It will provide for the needs of the whole community and will capitalise on its many advantages, including its location next to Greater Manchester and the Cheshire countryside. Handforth will have an improved district centre with attractive public spaces, a vibrant and varied shopping experience, a successful independent sector and a wide range of services.

Handforth will offer an excellent quality of life for its residents. The provision of new affordable housing will reduce the degree of deprivation currently found in some areas of Handforth. There will be high levels of employment and increased average incomes. There will be good access to education and important services. Handforth will have better access to sustainable transport.

Handforth will have high quality open spaces and improved access to the surrounding countryside. It will be a progressive village with its own identity, reinforced by the retention of the greenbelt areas separating Handforth from Wilmslow to the south and Heald Green to the north.”

Overall Aim: To promote sustainable development in Handforth Parish up to 2030. This will be achieved through the following

Objectives

Housing

1 - To manage future housing growth so that it meets the needs of the local community whilst at the same time providing appropriate infrastructure.

2 - To ensure that new housing is provided in an appropriate range of size, type and tenure to meet the strategic development needs and the needs of the local community.

Community and Well-Being

3 - To protect and enhance local services, community facilities, recreational areas and Local Green Spaces within the Parish.

Protecting the Natural and Built Environment

4 - To protect the quality of the existing landscape of the Parish separating it from Wilmslow to the south and Heald Green to the north.

5 - To ensure existing trees are retained and ensure additional new planting.

6 - To encourage high quality design and sustainability of all new development.

7 - To protect both designated and non-designated heritage assets in the parish.

Local Economy

8 - To support appropriate local economic development, to encourage investment and to provide improved employment opportunities for local residents.

9 - To protect and enhance the district centre transforming it into a vibrant centre with a range of facilities.

10 - To improve the overall quality of the district centre including public realm improvements.

Traffic and Transport

11 - To improve pedestrian and cycle access throughout the designated area and to improve linkages to routes beyond the Parish.

12 - To ensure that traffic and transport improvements are carried out to improve road safety and the traffic congestion that may arise from both completion of the A555 link road to the airport and from new developments within and adjacent to the parish boundaries.

13 - To support the provision of sufficient car and cycle parking facilities.

14 - To support the development of an integrated transport system designed to meet the current and future needs of the community whilst supporting future growth.

Garden Village at Handforth

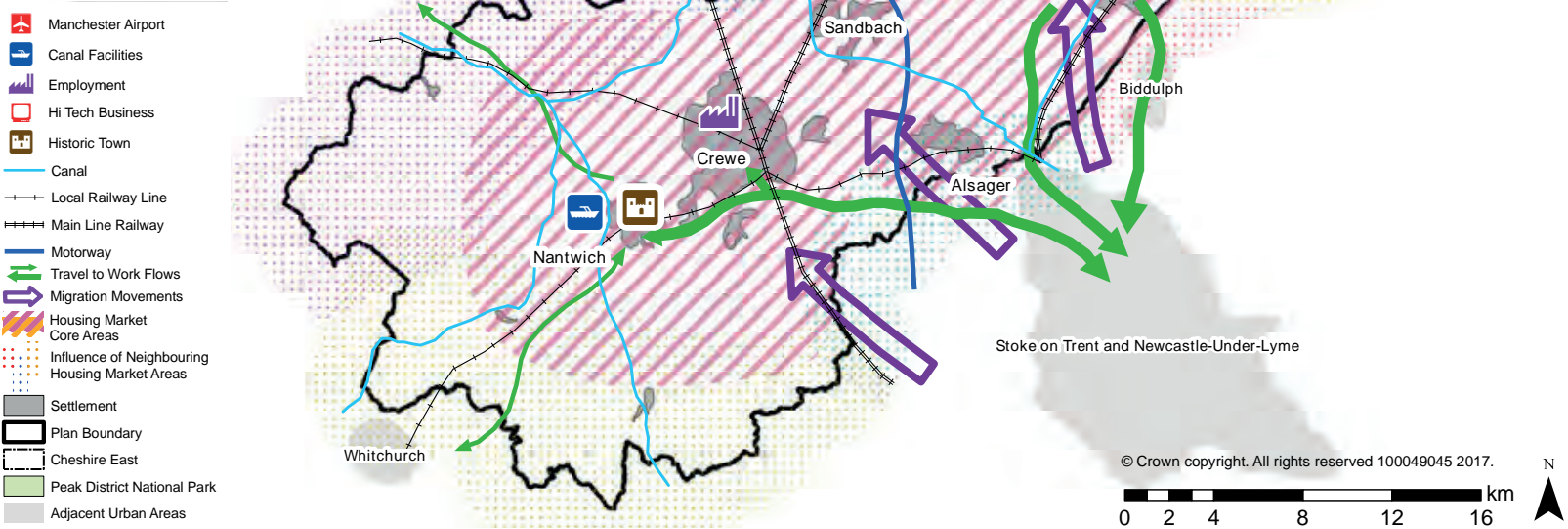
15 - To ensure that the Garden Village at Handforth is developed in a way that benefits the existing community of Handforth and creates a sustainable community.



Cheshire East Local Plan

Handforth is a key service centre within Cheshire East. The plan opposite identifies the functional relationship that Handforth has with other centres through connectivity and proximity within and out with Cheshire East. It highlights the centre's proximity to Manchester Airport and Manchester City Centre – key drivers of growth in the North West.

As such the area sees significant daily travel to work flows



Source: Cheshire East Local Plan: Strategy 2010-2030 2017, Functional Diagram, pg 22

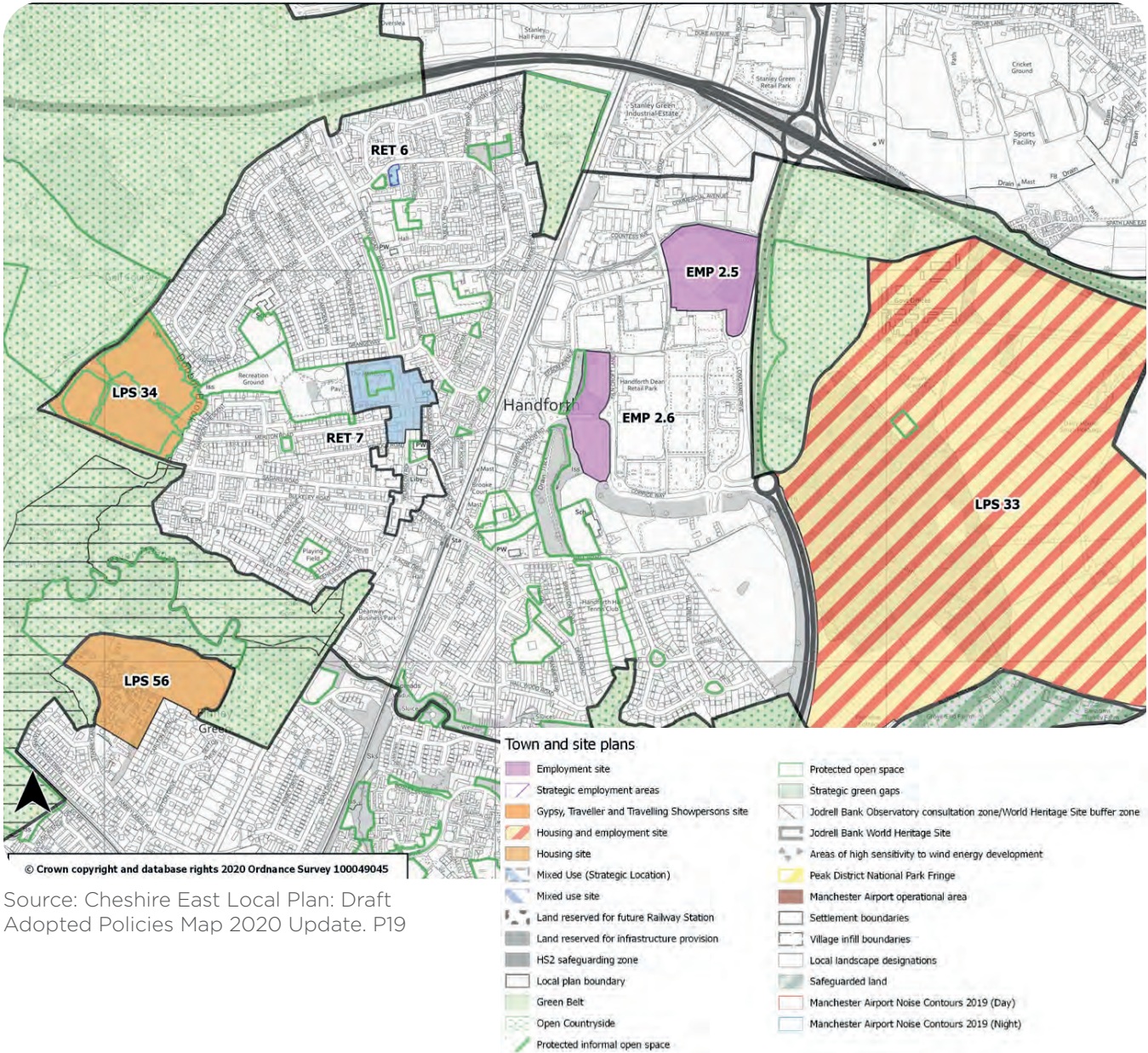
Local Plan Strategy 2017 (LPS) and Revised Publication Draft Site Allocations and Development Policies Document (SADPD) 2020

The Cheshire East Local Plan Strategy was adopted in 2017 setting strategic development sites around the borough.

SADPD will form the second part of the Local Plan, supporting the policies and proposals in the LPS by providing additional non-strategic policy detail and allocating additional sites to assist in meeting the overall development requirements set out in the LPS.

The plan opposite identifies Local Plan Strategy sites in and around Handforth for growth in the future:

- Site LPS 33: North Cheshire Growth Village, Handforth East (1. Phased provision of around 1,500 new homes, including a full range of housing types and tenures; Up to 12 hectares of employment land, primarily for B1 uses; and New mixed-use local centre(s))
- Site LPS 34: Land Between Clay Lane and Sagars Road, Handforth (250 new homes)
- North Cheshire Growth Village Extension, Handforth East (14ha of safeguarded land)
- RET 7 ‘Supporting the vitality of town and retail centres’ which identifies Town Centre locations for main Town Centre uses to support their long term vitality and viability, in line with LPS Policy EG 5 ‘Promoting a Town Centre first approach to retail and commerce’.



Source: Cheshire East Local Plan: Draft Adopted Policies Map 2020 Update. P19

Handforth Neighbourhood Plan
February 2018

The Handforth Neighbourhood Plan was prepared on behalf of Handforth Town Council by the Handforth Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group (HNPSG) and was made in August 2018 following a referendum in July 2018. The plan can be accessed at: <https://www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/planning/neighbourhood-plans/neighbourhood-plans-g-m/handforth-neighbourhood-plan.aspx>

The plan is used to guide planning decisions and to inform and encourage positive development across Handforth.

Based on consultation the following issues were identified as priorities in the Neighbourhood Plan:

1. The need to refurbish Handforth Centre and to maintain a good selection of retail outlets therein.

2. The need to reduce the impact of both the completion of the A555 link road to Manchester Airport, and new house building in Handforth and surrounding areas, on traffic congestion on local roads and on the A34 as a major commuter route into Manchester.

3. Improvement of car parking facilities within the village including provision of a station car park.

4. The need to achieve good connectivity between the Garden Village at Handforth (site LPS 33) and Handforth Station.

5. Improvement of car parking facilities within the Spath Lane and Knowle Park estates.

6. Improving the surfaces of roads and footpaths.

7. Maintaining and improving local bus services.

8. Maintaining existing and providing new footpaths and cycleways
9. The importance of reducing deprivation in the area of the Spath Lane estate by providing additional social housing.

10. The need to expand the current medical centre in Handforth.

11. The need to improve access to the platforms at Handforth station.

12. The importance of providing key infrastructure (e.g. new primary school and extension to health centre) at an early stage in the development of the Garden Village at Handforth.

13. Maintaining a band of greenfield/ greenbelt between Handforth and Greater Manchester.

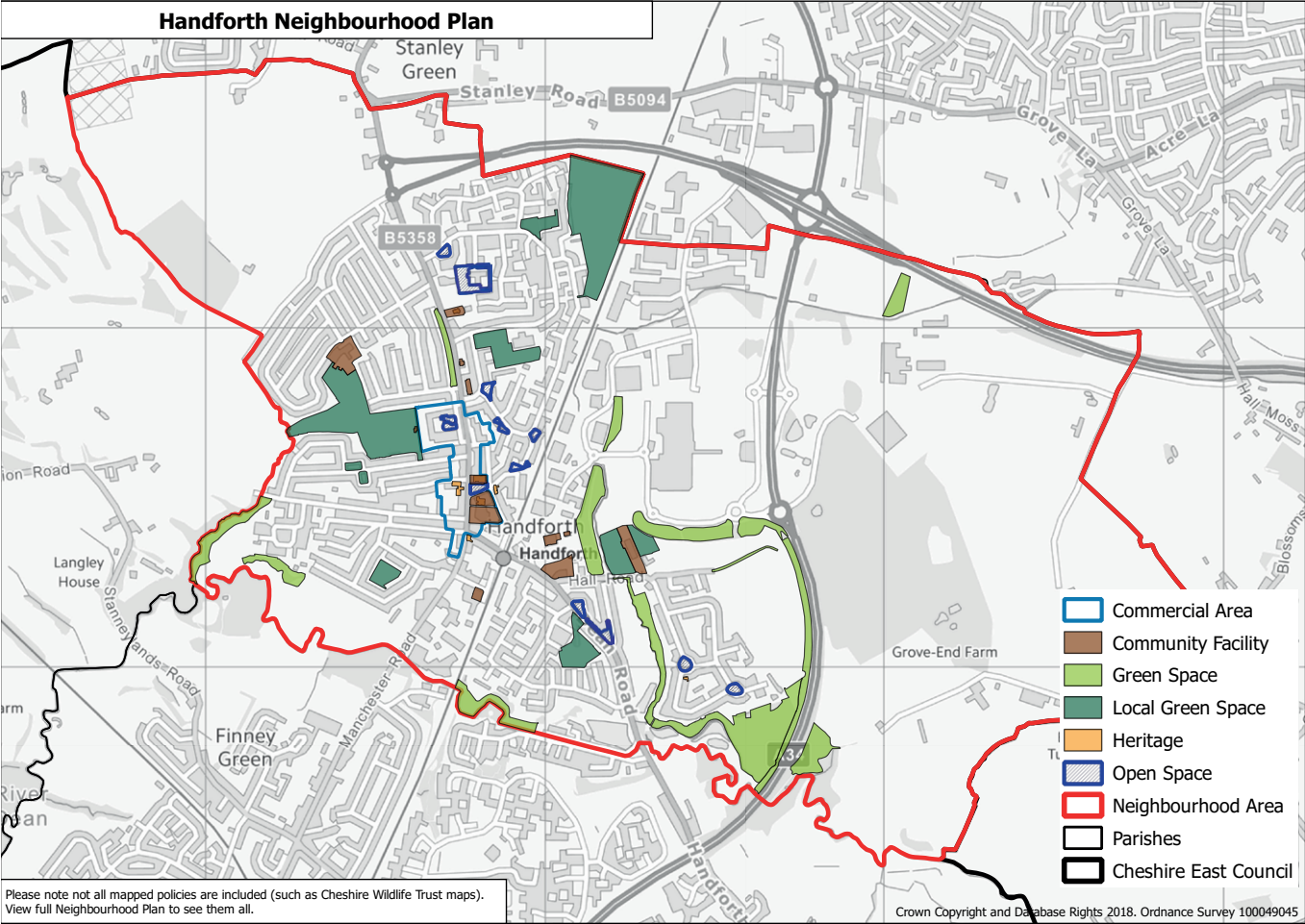
14. Maintaining Handforth's beauty spots in the River Dean Valley.

15. Conservation of Handforth's historic buildings including their settings

The Plan identifies the following policy in terms of the district centre (Policy H14).

Policy H14 seeks to:

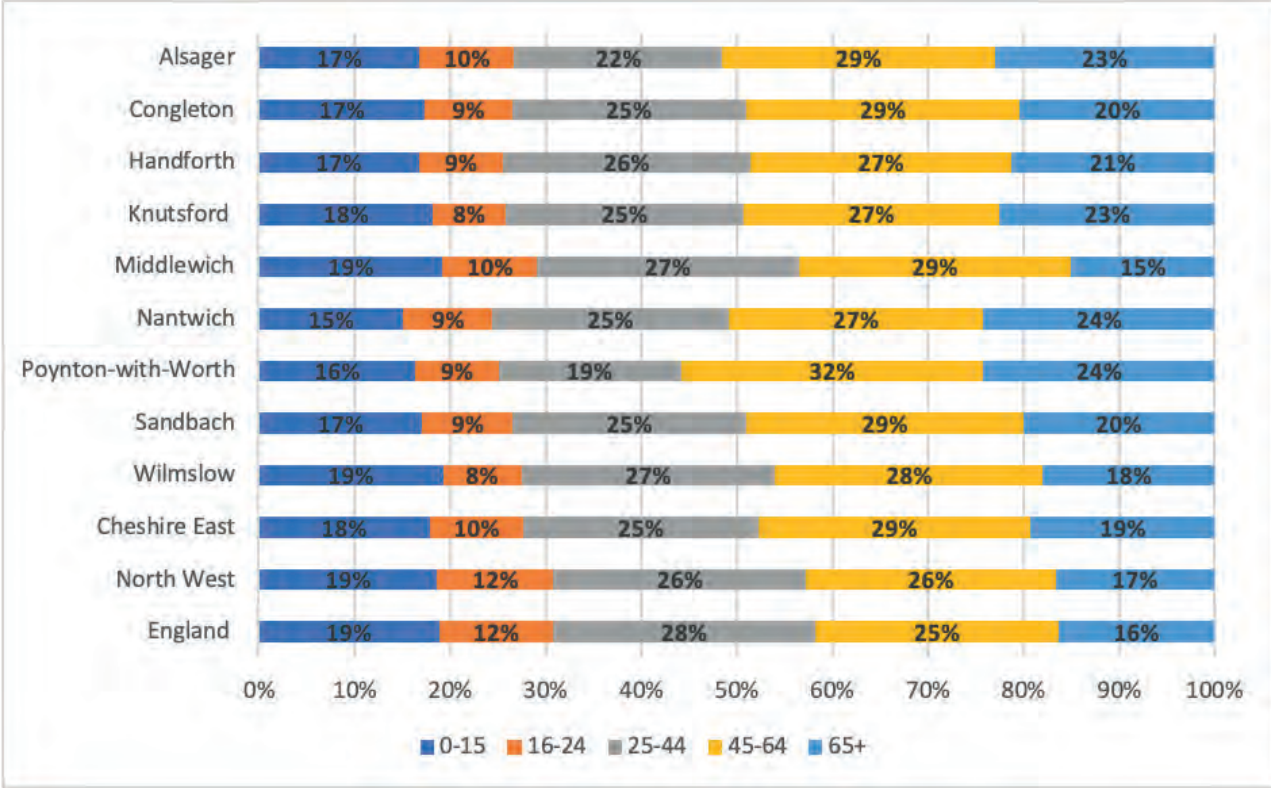
- Ensure good design and local distinctiveness to shop frontages;
- Encourage the re-use of upper floors for residential uses;
- Retain and enhance distinctive features of buildings and details;
- Provide secure screened areas for waste and cycle storage;
- Encourage new trees and other planting;
- Improve the district centre appearance, promoting a pedestrian-dominated environment;
- Ensure an appropriate approach to branding and signage;
- Retain commercial units for commercial uses where appropriate; and
- Set restrictions to apply to proposals for hot food takeaways.



Source: <https://www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/pdf/planning/neighbourhood-plan/made-np-policy-maps/handforth-made-policy-map.pdf>

Age

The 2011 Census data indicates that the Handforth parish area had a population of 6,600 residents representing 1.8% of Cheshire East's total population (370,127). Handforth broadly mirrors the age profile of Cheshire East, with a slightly smaller proportion of under 24 year olds and working aged (25 – 64) and slightly higher proportion of over 65s. Handforth has a slightly higher average (mean) age at 43 years old which is just above that of Cheshire East (42) and higher than the wider geographies of the North West (40) and England (39).



Age Structure.
Source: Census 2011, Office for National Statistics (ONS)
Most recent consistent data available across the 9 centres

Ethnicity

Broken-down by ethnic group the Census 2011 (latest) shows the resident population across the Cheshire East is predominantly white (96.7%) which is a higher proportion than the wider geographies of the North West (90.2%) and England (85.4%). After Wilmslow, Handforth is the most diverse of the KSCs with 93.1% of the population being white.

Area	White	Mixed/ multiple ethnic groups	Asian/ Asian British	Black/ African/ Caribbean/ Black British	Other ethnic group
Alsager	97.6%	1.1%	1.0%	0.2%	0.1%
Congleton	98.0%	0.6%	1.1%	0.2%	0.2%
Handforth	93.1%	1.5%	3.9%	0.9%	0.7%
Knutsford	96.5%	1.2%	1.8%	0.3%	0.3%
Middlewich	98.5%	0.8%	0.6%	0.1%	0.1%
Nantwich	98.1%	0.7%	0.7%	0.3%	0.1%
Poynton-with-Worth	98.0%	0.5%	1.1%	0.1%	0.2%
Sandbach	98.1%	0.7%	0.9%	0.2%	0.2%
Wilmslow	92.6%	1.7%	4.4%	0.5%	0.7%
Cheshire East	96.7%	1.0%	1.6%	0.4%	0.2%
North West	90.2%	1.6%	6.2%	1.4%	0.6%
England	85.4%	2.3%	7.8%	3.5%	1.0%

Population by Ethnic Group
Source: Census 2011, Office for National Statistics (ONS)
Most recent consistent data available across the 9 centres

Occupational Profile

For the purposes of occupation profile, Handforth is included within the Built Up Area (BUA) of Wilmslow (along with Alderley Edge). At the time of the 2011 Census, a large proportion of Wilmslow BUA area residents were employed in higher order occupations including ‘managers, directors and senior officials’ (18.3%) and ‘professional occupations’ (24.6%) – a much higher rate than the wider Borough, regional and national benchmarks.

Conversely, just 9.6% were engaged in manual or elementary occupations. This is around half the North West (19.8%) and England rate (18.3%). The occupational structure of Wilmslow BUA suggests a highly skilled workforce, which will in turn attract businesses (who want to attract highly skilled employees) to locate in the area.

Built Up Area	Alsager	Congleton	Knutsford	Middlewich	Nantwich	Poynton	Sandbach	Wilmslow	Cheshire East	North West	England
Managers, directors and senior officials	12.8	11.7	17.2	11.9	14.3	14.9	12.6	18.3	13.6	9.9	10.9
Professional occupations	22.3	18.9	26.2	15.8	21.8	24.0	19.9	24.6	19.6	16.3	17.5
Associate professional and technical occupations	12.6	13.2	15.1	13.4	12.3	15.1	13.3	16.3	13.0	11.5	12.8
Administrative and secretarial occupations	11.4	10.3	9.4	11.8	10.0	12.2	11.0	9.9	10.4	11.7	11.5
Skilled trades occupations	10.1	11.6	6.4	11.0	9.8	8.6	10.2	6.6	10.4	11.3	11.4
Caring, leisure and other service occupations	8.7	9.5	8.0	9.9	8.2	7.7	9.2	7.8	8.9	10.1	9.3
Sales and customer service occupations	7.5	7.0	5.7	7.4	8.3	8.0	8.2	6.9	7.5	9.4	8.4
Process, plant and machine operatives	5.8	7.9	3.8	8.5	6.0	3.3	6.6	3.0	6.5	8.1	7.2
Elementary occupations	8.8	9.9	8.2	10.4	9.3	6.3	9.0	6.6	10.2	11.7	11.1

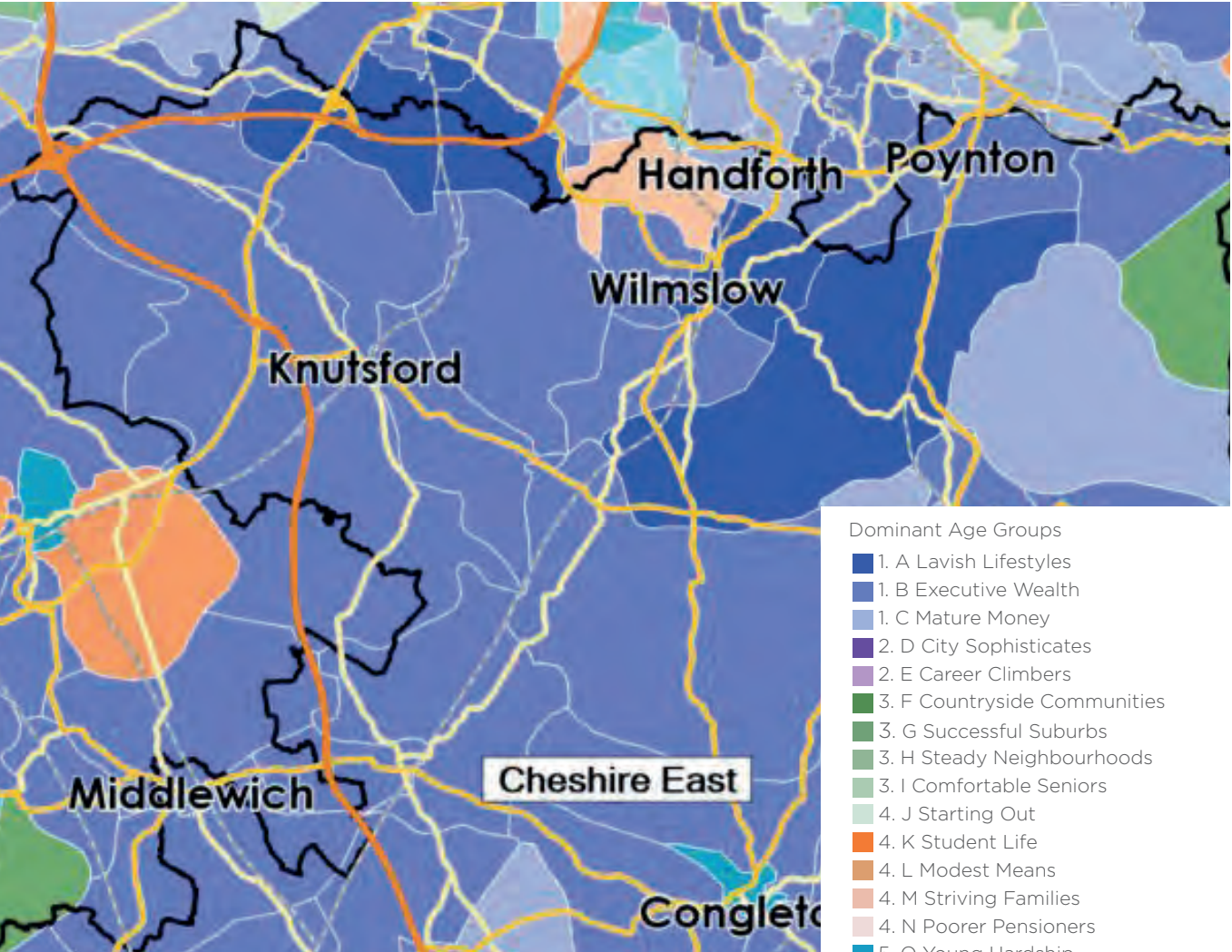
Occupational Profile
Source: Census 2011
*Wilmslow BUA includes Alderly Edge and Handforth
Most recent consistent data available across the 9 centres

Demographic Characterisation

CACI Acorn classifications of local postcode geographies provide precise information and an in-depth understanding of different consumer types by analysing significant social factors and consumer behaviour. Demographic analysis of Cheshire East area demonstrates diverse segmentation groups across the area.

Demographic analysis shows that the dominant demographic profile across the majority of the Cheshire East local authority is ‘Executive Wealth’ (mid blue). Attributed to Cheshire East’s desirable settlements and commutable distance to Manchester City Centre as well as its wider connectivity links, a high proportion of these people are employed in managerial and professional occupations with generally well above average incomes. This group of financially successful people live in wealthy, high status rural, semi-rural and suburban areas. While these are generally family areas there are also some empty nesters and better-off retired couples.

The dominant Acorn groups in Handforth are Striving Families (low income families living on council/housing association estates, general lack of educational qualifications) and Mature Money (older more wealthy residents in rural/semi-rural locations) but its wider catchment area is dominated by Lavish Lifestyles (most affluent people in the UK, high earners in very large homes) and Executive Wealth (affluent professional with families in large homes).

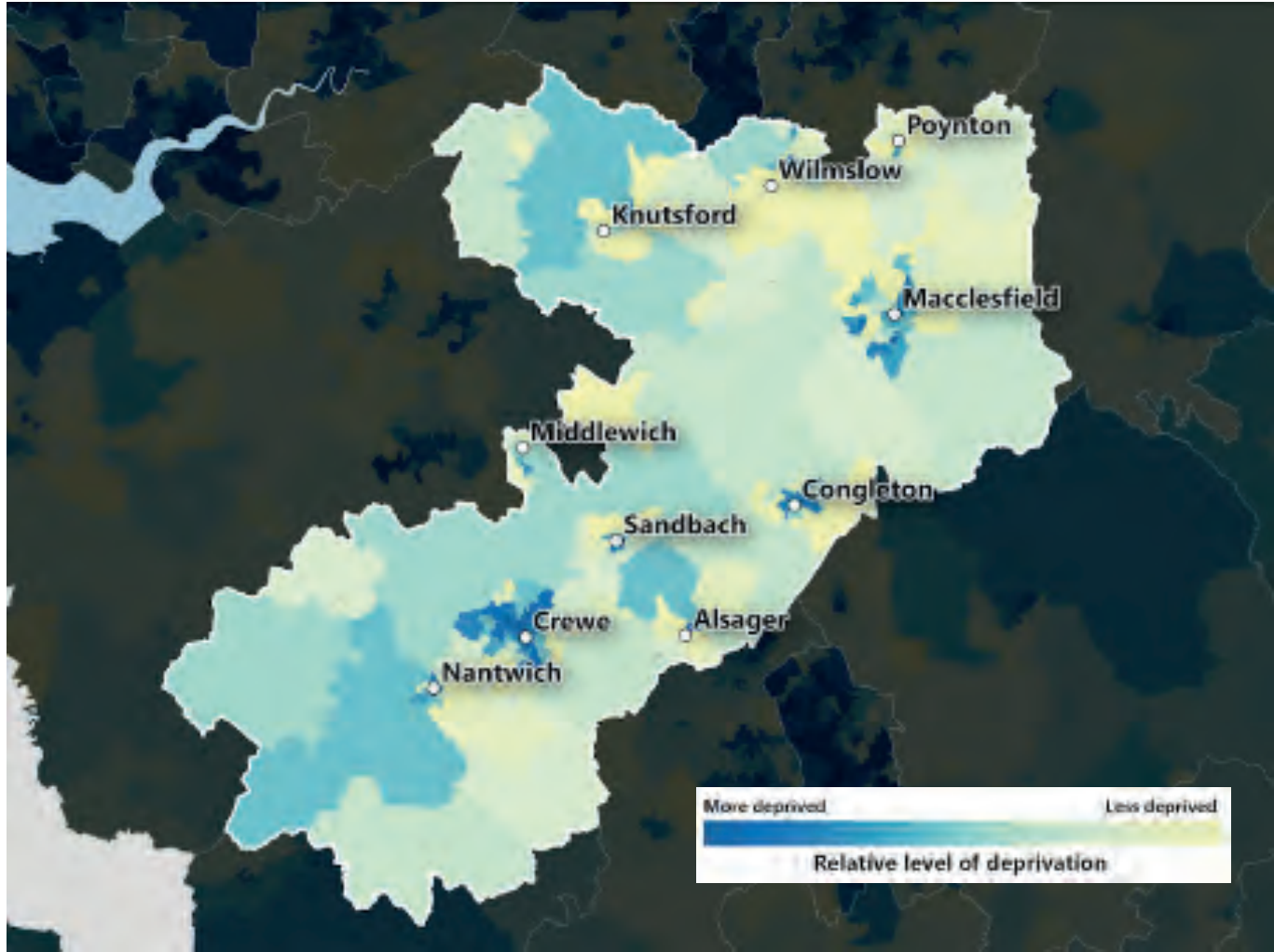


CACI Acorn Classifications
Source: CACI
Most recent consistent data available across the 9 centres

Index of Multiple Deprivation

The Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) 2019 illustrates the spatial distribution and pockets of deprivation relative to national averages. Cheshire East ranked 228th most deprived out of 317 local authorities in 2019 indicating relatively low levels of deprivation. Just 1.7% of the Borough is within the top 10% most deprived areas in England, with these most deprived areas being concentrated around Crewe and to a lesser extent, Macclesfield. The majority of Handforth is within the 10% least deprived areas of deprivation nationally.

It should be recognised that this could cause challenges for accessing centralised funding, as such funding is often prioritised to the most deprived areas.



Source: MHCLG, IMD 2019
Most recent consistent data available
across the 9 centres



Local Context

Handforth sits at the heart of one of the most aspirational residential areas in the region. Located between Wilmslow, Heald Green and Styal, it is well connected by road and rail. Located just 9 miles south of Manchester City Centre and linked to Manchester Airport by the A555.

Handforth is an attractive residential location, well served by a range of amenities, within easy access of a variety of employment opportunities, located within a rural setting but within easy reach of the City. The key retail area is focused around The Paddock which accommodates a range of retail units around a square. The Centre continues along Wilmslow Road accommodating a range of convenience units as well as takeaways, betting shops, cafes and restaurants. The Centre offers a good mix of independents including specialists. In addition to retail and leisure it also accommodates homes, community facilities and offices.



Spatial Review

An analysis of the experiential quality of the Town Centre is provided over the next few pages. The review is based on information gathered from a number of site visits to the Town Centre during September / October 2020 and is assessed by the key vitality indicators listed below:

- Quality of the place
- People
- Sense of Community
- Accessibility
- Gateways
- Wayfinding
- Attractions
- Amenities
- Sense of a Centre
- Character
- Public realm
- Green space
- Derelict Sites/ Vacant units
- Housing
- Covid measures

Visit information

	Visit 1	Visit 2
Date of visit:	Saturday 5th September 2020	Monday 26th October 2020
Time of day:	12-1pm	11-12pm
Weather:	Sun, Light drizzle	Heavy rain and sun
Mode of transport:	Car	Car
COVID 19 Lockdown Status	Eased restrictions, rule of six indoors and outdoors	Tier Two - rule of six indoors and outdoors

Quality of the place

- Small, well kept town
 - Locally centre
 - Range of shops and services - takeaways, beauty, car repairs, local supermarket
- The Town Centre is dominated by the Wilmslow Road corridor which has an impact on the overall quality of the place



People

- Mostly elderly / middle aged observed using the Town Centre during our site visits
- People popping to Tesco and convenience shopping



Sense of Community

- Noticeboards seem up to date
- Lots of well kept planters
- Historical signage - railway station
- Interpretive signage around the station explaining the town's rail heritage



Accessibility

- Under 10 minute walk from train station
- Designated parking within the local centre - free for up to 2 hours
- Although the Wilmslow Road corridor as a whole is wide, pedestrian and cycle accessibility is constrained due to wider vehicle lanes, parallel lanes and traffic islands
- Some narrow paving which is not ideal for wheelchair or pram access
- Poor pedestrian and cycle connectivity between Town Centre and Stanley Green Business Park due to the railway line



Gateways

- Quite car dominated at Wilmslow Road / Station Road junction, but pedestrian crossing at each road
- The station arrival is a gateway to the town but the quality of the environment means the station feels disconnected from the town



Wayfinding

- No memorable signage but town quite small and easy to navigate but the linear and compact layout of the town means it is relatively easy to find your way
- Wayfinding to surrounding community assets and infrastructure is limited and disjointed
- There is a disconnect between Meriton Road Park and the Paddock



Attractions

- As a commuter service town, the majority of attractions are those which provide local and daily services to local residents.
- Some cafes and restaurants, signs of outdoor seating
- Meriton Road Park is not well sign posted

Amenities

- Library, Paddock Shopping Centre, churches, health centre, takeaways and some local pubs
- Tesco Express
- Office space, and some local employment / commercial units

Sense of a Centre

- Larger employment sites to the east of the railway line (Stanley Green Business Park)
- Larger retail offer is also located close by at Handforth Dean
- Paddock Shopping Centre provides a central point to Handforth, however the area is car dominated and under-utilised.



Character

- Flat Town Centre
- Some heritage buildings, but no listed buildings within the study area
- Dated façades and inconsistency in shop frontage appearances
- Varied building height, but generally low sense of enclosure along Wilmslow Road due to wide corridor width and low rise surrounding buildings
- Mix of apartments and terrace housing along Wilmslow Road / Dean Road.
- Larger detached units on Meriton Road, Grangeway etc



Public Realm

- Pavement and road surfaces are tired and worn in places
- Newer areas of paving such as the Paddock are falling into disrepair
- Larger areas of public realm and civic space are inflexible and have no clear function or purpose.



- Many residual spaces along Wilmslow Road have no function. Some are typically hard paved and impermeable, whilst others are grassed but with little biodiversity or landscape use



Green Space

- Meriton Road Park is well kept and has a number of play facilities / outdoor gym and miniature railway
- Plenty of incidental green space however maybe over provided in part as there are a number of areas with no real use
- Central green of the Paddock seems under used due to the few direct connections it has with the rest of the centre



Derelict Sites and Vacant units

- Some vacant units in the Town Centre, large unit opposite library and clinic.
- For a smaller town, not as many vacant or derelict sites as expected?



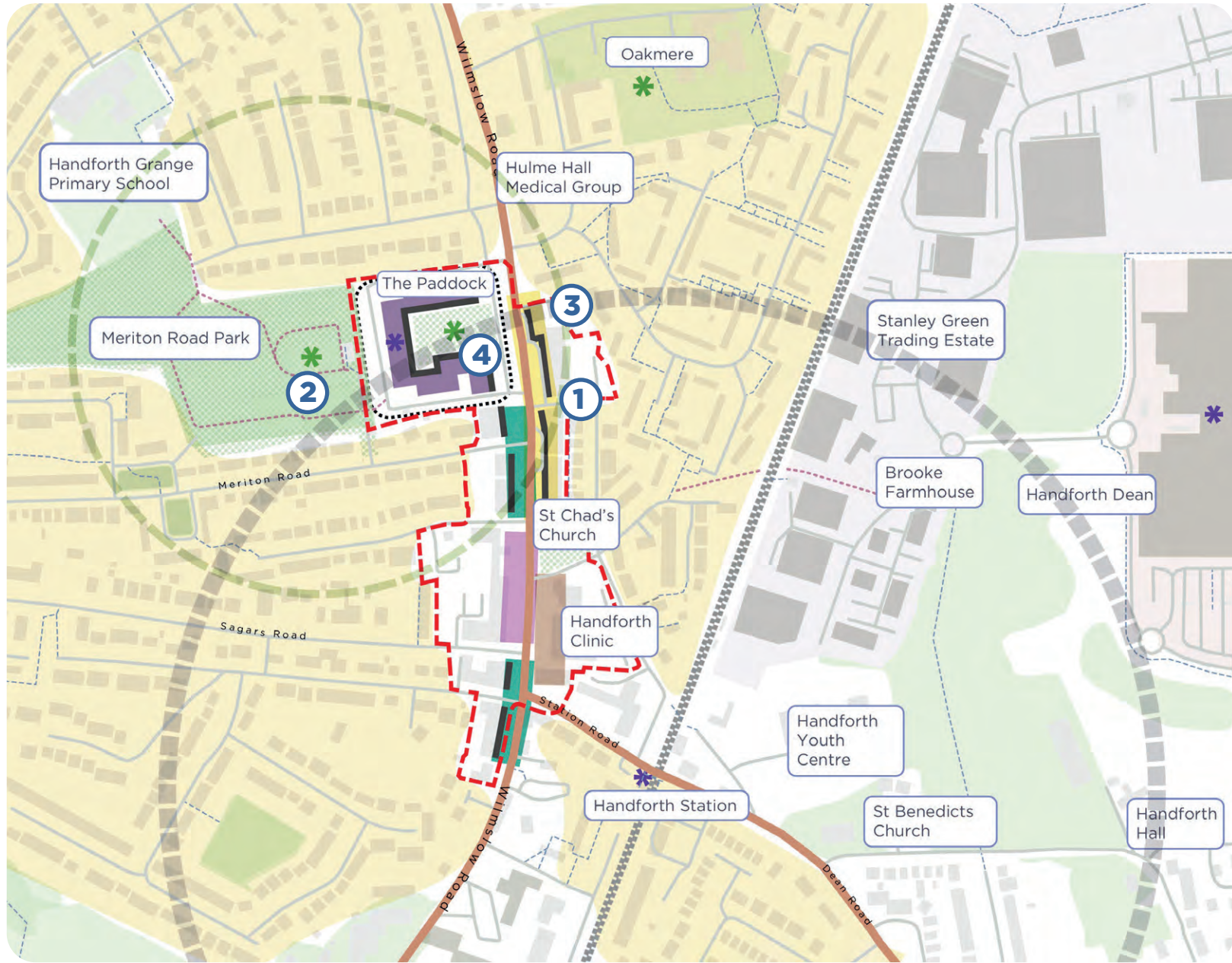
Housing

- Signs of new housing development to the south of the town on Wilmslow Road
- Mostly apartments or terraces throughout the centre
- Well kept properties on streets adjacent to Wilmslow Road

Positive Features

Positive spatial elements are identified on the plan:

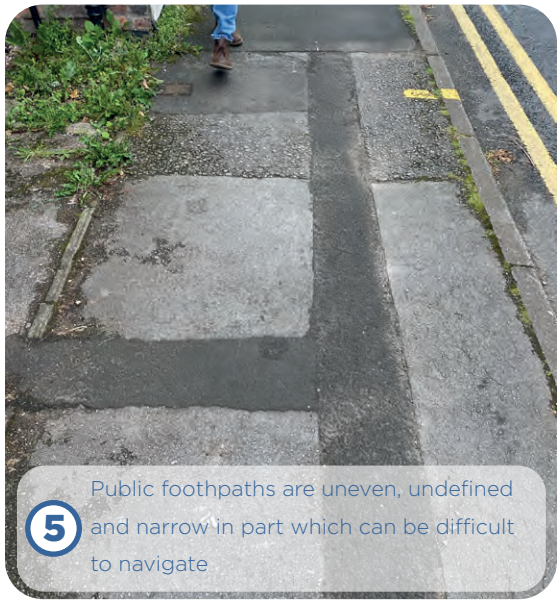
- Key
- Local Centre boundary
 - Local street network
 - Primary Road Network
 - Arrival destinations
 - Anchor retail locations
 - Anchor open space / recreational areas
 - Areas with a concentration of F&B uses
 - Areas with a concentration of retail uses
 - Areas with a concentration of office uses
 - Areas with a concentration of local amenities
 - Well defined building frontages with active ground floor uses
 - Local businesses within close proximity to the town centre
 - Local residential areas within immediate proximity to the town centre
 - Handforth Station 400m proximity to the town centre (5 minutes walk)
 - Meriton Road Park within 200m proximity to the town centre (under 5 minutes walk)



Negative Features

Negative spatial elements are identified on the plan:

- Local Centre boundary
- Streets and spaces dominated by car parking
- Streets with narrow footways / poor pedestrian provision
- Arrival gateways with a low quality arrival experience
- Arrival gateway constrained by railway and narrow footways
- Areas of requiring maintenance of public realm
- Low quality frontages
- Arrival destinations
- Links with poor legibility to and from the town centre
- Extent of area which reads as part of the Town Centre
- Key assets which feel disconnected from the Town Centre
- Area of severance / disconnect



Summary of Spatial Elements

The table below and on the opposite page identifies the key positive and spatial attributes for the Town Centre:

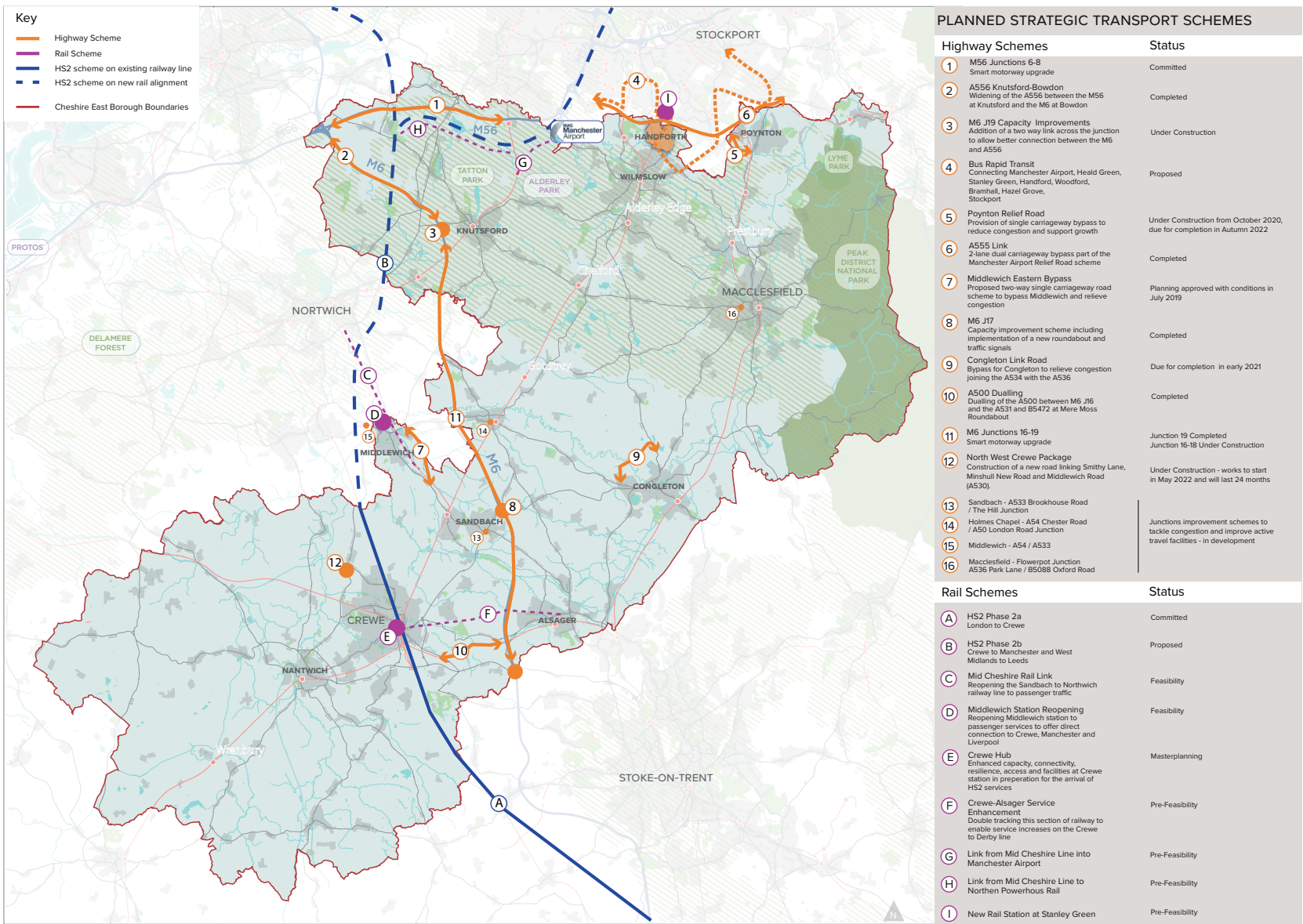
Public Realm	Gateways	Open Space	Heritage	Townscape Quality	Legibility
Positives					
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Pedestrianised area within the Paddock has potential to offer genuine dwell space and outdoor event space• Some temporary and retrofitted street greening and planting as well as good opportunities to sit• Potential opportunities for alfresco activity at the Paddock	<p>2 potential vehicular gateways into the town:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Wilmslow Road/ Dean Road Junction• The Railway Station as well as Station Road / Wilmslow Road junction have an opportunity to become well defined and welcoming gateways to the town	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Meriton Road Park is well kept and has a number of play facilities / outdoor gym and miniature railway• Plenty of incidental spaces across the Town Centre which could be better utilised	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A small number of heritage buildings are dotted throughout the town such as St Chads Church however there are no listed buildings within the Town Centre	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Retail and F&B offer along Wilmslow Road and at The Paddock.• Small centre which is easily accessible by foot to local residents	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Paddock offers an anchor retail destination which provides a focal point to the town• Information boards dotted across the centre• Some street-side wayfinding signage at the Station and other locations helps with wayfinding

Public Realm	Gateways	Open Space	Heritage	Townscape Quality	Legibility
Negatives					
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Pavement and road surfaces are tired and worn in places• Disconnect of public realm due to variation of materials and textures• Number of left over / residual spaces linked to highway infrastructure which have no public realm function and which serve as pedestrian and disabled movement barriers	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Car dominated Wilmslow Road Corridor• Built environment does not frame the gateways adequately• Sense of arrival could be strengthened, with more defined destination points	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Poor signage to areas of open space at Meriton Road Park• Larger spaces are over-designed meaning it lacks the ability to be flexible and support a variety of functions linked to the surrounding ground floor uses and commercial spaces above	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• No listed buildings within Handforth study area and those that do have historic charm aren't celebrated or well known within the Town Centre	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Centre is dominated by surface car parking which takes away from the overall aesthetic of Handforth• The Centre has been subject the various periods of infill and redevelopment creating an incoherent and mix townscape character. The dated appearance and design of some visually prominent buildings negatively impacts upon the townscape.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Poor signage makes it difficult to navigate from the station and to Meriton Park• Varied mix of old and new therefore hard to distinguish an identity for the town• Poor pedestrian links to the adjacent Stanley Green Business Park from the Centre and train station.

06 Connectivity and Accessibility

Handforth has excellent links to the strategic transport network with its surrounding A roads providing direct access to the M56 motorway, Manchester City Centre and Manchester Airport. Manchester Airport is accessible from Handforth within less than 10-minutes drive time making it an attractive place to live, work and invest. As well as Manchester, which is readily accessible by both road and rail, Handforth is within a 1-hour drive from other major cities such as Liverpool and Chester via the M56.

Handforth Transport Baseline Analysis



Handforth Transport Baseline Analysis



Car Parking

Car parking within the centre of Handforth is predominantly provided in the form of on-street parking adjacent to retail frontages. Two long stay car parks are provided free of charge within the Town Centre and an additional car park is provided at Handforth Dean. Wide stretches of pavement parking create obstructions along Wilmslow Road and therefore reduce opportunities and the quality of the environment for pedestrians and cyclists.

Due to the high level of car ownership amongst residents within the area (79%, Census 2011), parking management needs to be considered alongside attractive walking and cycling links and infrastructure to reduce the number of people driving to the Town Centre to reduce vehicle dominance and emissions.

The TCVPs consider the role of car parking in relation to the vibrancy and vitality of each town centre. However, any proposals to review or modernise car parking provision and management will be considered on a town by town basis as part of the Council’s approach to travel demand management. Therefore the delivery of any car parking proposals is outside the scope of the TCVPs.

Public Realm

The layout of the highway network and footways within Handforth presents a number of opportunities with wide footways and lots of available space adjacent to retail frontages. However, this space is currently dominated by on-street parking and presents poor quality outdated public realm. Reconsidering the level of provision and layout of on-street parking within Handforth presents significant opportunities to enhance the space for pedestrians and create new public spaces where people can dwell and spend time.

Town Centre	Car Park ID	Parking Spaces	Duration	Pricing
Handforth	Handforth Dean Car Park	1500	5 hours max	Free
	Handforth Library Car Park	50	3 hours max	Free
	School Rd Car Park	48	/	Free
	Wilmslow Rd Car Park	56	/	Free
	TOTAL	1604		

A consolidation of on-street parking along Wilmslow Road in front of The Paddock would open up the main retail facilities and increase visibility from the main road network.

Roads and footways in and around Handforth are also in need of maintenance in terms of surfacing. This would improve the quality of the environment and ensure all areas are fully accessible particularly for people with reduced mobility.

Road Safety

A number of junctions along Wilmslow Road have been identified as collision hotspots reducing the safety of pedestrian and cyclists as well as access to main retail facilities in The Paddock. The Town Centre may therefore benefit from improved crossing facilities along Wilmslow Road to enable safer access to the Town Centre for pedestrians and cyclists travelling from areas to the west.

Improvements have been made at Wilmslow Road / Dean Road junction in recent years, complementary to the South East Manchester Multi Modal Strategy (SEMMMS) scheme. However, this junction is of particular concern within the Town Centre as total of 5 collisions have occurred in the last five years: 2 slight, 2 severe, 1 fatal. Two collisions (one slight and one severe) happened between 2019-2020 (after improvements). As this junction is located along the main route between the station and the Town Centre, improvements to safety provisions for pedestrians and cyclists such as enhanced

crossing facilities should be considered at this location.

Active Travel

Key pedestrian desire lines within the centre of Handforth include the routes between the station, along Church Road towards the high street and along Hall Road towards Handforth Dean. These routes currently present poor walking and cycling environments comprising poorly lit streets with a lack of natural surveillance and a poor sense of wayfinding particularly for those unfamiliar with the area.

There is a lack of cycling infrastructure provision across the centre of Handforth in relation to cycle lanes and crossings along key routes such as Wilmslow Road. This is evident within the collision data across the area where a number of collisions have resulted in slight or serious injury to cyclists. There is also a lack of secure cycle parking within the vicinity of the high street. The wide pavements and space for enhanced public realm in the area presents a good opportunity to not only enhance public realm but also to enhance the level of provision and quality of facilities provided to support pedestrian and cyclist movement to, from and around Handforth.

Four key schemes are currently being progressed

to improve safety for pedestrians and cyclists across Handforth Town Centre:

- Access for All scheme at the rail station to install lifts and improved pedestrian links;
- Light segregation scheme on Manchester Road to provide a connection with the Tranche 1 scheme along Hawthorn Lane and the walking and cycle route currently under construction between Wilmslow Rail Station and Alderley Road;
- Design of shared use cycle path linking Handforth village centre northwards to the A555 and to Stanley Road linking further northwards into Greater Manchester;
- Design of pedestrian / cycle route from Handforth station to the Handforth Garden Village development including a new structure across the A34.

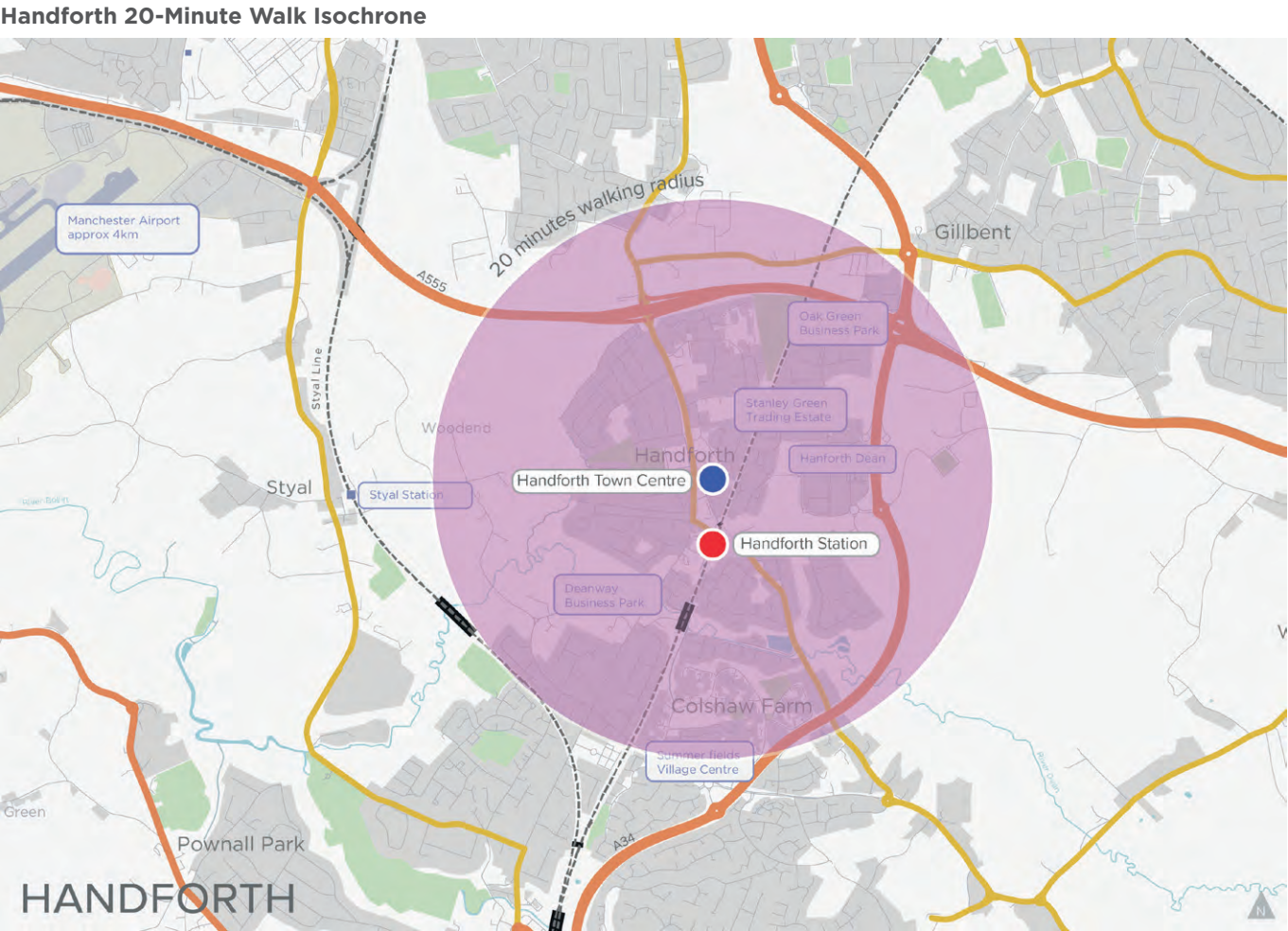
With the right infrastructure in place, there is likely to be a demand for walking and cycling within Handforth as the surrounding residential areas are all within 20 minutes walking time from the Town Centre. Enhancing the quality of the environment for pedestrians and cyclists through the provision of facilities such as cycle lanes and secure cycle parking will be essential to reducing the impact

of traffic and congestion within the centre of Handforth through encouraging a shift towards more sustainable modes

Public Transport

Handforth rail station is located around a 6-minute walk away from the Town Centre and around a 10-15 minute from the retail park at Handforth Dean. The station is served by two trains per hour in each direction providing connectivity to Crewe, Alderley Edge, Manchester Piccadilly and Southport. Although the station is in close proximity to the Centre, routes between the station and key facilities require upgrades in terms of signage, lighting and natural surveillance to enhance the safety and attractiveness of the route. The lack of car parking at the station also increases the need to ensure the station is well connected by walking and cycling links and provides adequate secure cycle storage. This will support access to the rail network from surrounding areas and provide opportunities to increase rail mode share for travel to work journeys.

Bus stop facilities are provided adjacent to The Paddock retail area. However, this provides a service limited to 1 bus per hour to Wilmslow,



Alderley Edge and Macclesfield and therefore is unlikely to be an attractive alternative to private car use for commuters, visitors and shoppers. Such infrequent services are unlikely to require dedicated lay-bys – removing these would prove more space for public realm/active travel as well as help traffic calm Wilmslow Road.

Movement Trends

75% of people living in Handforth travel to work outside of the Centre predominately to other towns across Cheshire East such as Wilmslow and Alderley Edge and towards Manchester. The Centre therefore predominantly serves residents in the surrounding areas with leisure and retail opportunities. Around 21% of households do not have access to a car, which is the highest of all nine TCVP areas.

Walking isochrones suggest that the edge of the town is well within 20-minute walking time of the Town Centre. If facilities and infrastructure for pedestrians and cyclists in the Town Centre are enhanced, there will be significant opportunities to increase levels of walking and cycling.

- 11% of people living in Handforth work within the Town Centre.
- 48% of residents travel more than 5km to work
- Public transport accounts for 8% of commuter trips
- 21% of households in Handforth do not have access to a car, 28% have access to 2 or more vehicles
- 68% of residents in Handforth in employment drive to work by car
- 6 minute walk between Town Centre and railway station
- Active travel accounts for 12% of commuter trips
- Station served by one service per hour in each direction to Crewe and Manchester

Source: Census 2011, Office for National Statistics (ONS)
Most recent consistent data available across the 9 centres

Cheshire East Council has approved Local Transport Development Plans (LTDP) for its principal towns, keys service centres and surrounding rural areas. The table opposite summarises the potential transport schemes included in the LTDP relating to the town centre at the point they went out to public consultation. Please note the majority of schemes are at concept stage, subject to feasibility work and must be viewed as potential schemes. Therefore the LTDP are live documents and this list of schemes is subject to change and will evolve as further work is undertaken.

In Handforth the LTDP sets out a wide range of actions that CEC are exploring. In Handforth, the LTDP focuses strongly on active travel interventions to improve conditions for those on foot and cycle. There are also other strategic actions focused around improving access to the railway station and connections to the proposed Garden Village site.

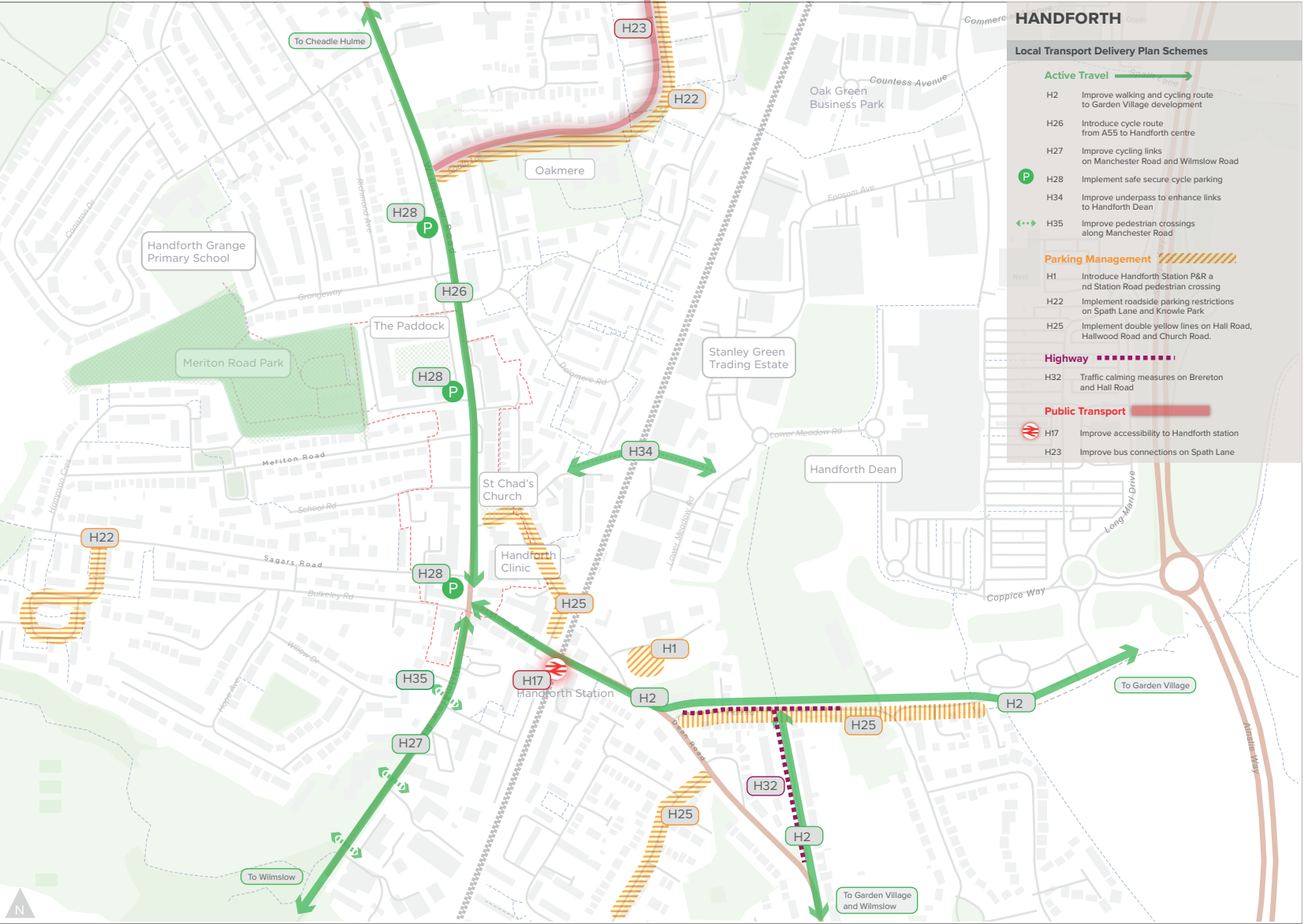
The table contains detail on the schemes set out in the LTDP

Handforth LTP and LCWIP Schemes

Type	Ref	Scheme	Description	Costing ¹
Active Travel	H2	Improve walking and cycling route to Garden Village development	Walking and cycle route between Handforth and the Garden Village development.	£1m-£5m
	H26	Introduce cycle route from A555 to Handforth centre	Introduce a cycle route from A555 to Handforth village centre along Wilmslow Road.	£1m-£5m
	H27	Improve cycling links on Manchester Road and Wilmslow Road	Improvements to cycle routes on Manchester Road and Wilmslow Road connecting Handforth to Wilmslow.	£1m-£5m
	H28	Implement safe secure cycle parking	Introduce secure, safe, cycle parking within the town centre.	<£100k
	H34	Improve underpass to enhance links to Handforth Dean	Improvements to underpass to enhance links to Handforth Dean.	<£1m
Parking Management	H35	Improve pedestrian crossings along Manchester Road	Increase the number and quality of pedestrian crossing points along Manchester Road between Wilmslow and Handforth.	<£1m
	H1	Introduce Handforth Station P&R and Station Road pedestrian crossing	Work alongside partners to introduce a Handforth Station Park and Ride Car Park, and provide a pedestrian crossing on Station Road.	£1m-£5m
	H22	Implement roadside parking restrictions on Spath Lane and Knowle Park	Consider introducing roadside parking restrictions on Spath Lane and Knowle Park to ensure roads can be accessed.	<£100k
Highway	H25	Implement double yellow lines on Hall Road, Hallwood Road and Church Road.	Implement double yellow lines on Hall Road, Hallwood Road and Church Road.	<£100k
	H32	Traffic calming measures on Brereton and Hall Road	St Benedict's School pedestrian access and traffic calming improvements on Brereton and Hall Road.	<£100k
	H17	Improve accessibility to Handforth station	Improved accessibility to Handforth Station through provision of lifts to both platforms, as currently there is no step-free access, and widening the footway on Station Road.	<£1m
	H23	Improve bus connections on Spath Lane	Improve bus connections to Spath Lane.	Revenue funding

¹ The costs presented are indicative only at this stage. Costs will depend on type and level of interventions delivered – and should be revised at subsequent design stages

Handforth Local Transport Development Plan Schemes



Retail and Leisure

Handforth is one of the smallest of all the centres with less than 10,000 sq m of retail and leisure floorspace across 69 units. The key retail area within Handforth is focused on The Paddock – which accommodates a range of retail units around a square including the Tesco Express and a Costa Coffee. The Centre continues along Wilmslow Road accommodating a range of convenience units as well as takeaways, betting shops, cafes and restaurants. Approximately 80% of occupiers in Handforth are independents with a small number of multiple operators (including Tesco and Spar store which act as important anchors for the centre). For its size and local service role, and the location of nearby retail parks, the balance of independent and multiple stores is considered to be reasonable. The range of comparison stores is quite wide and includes specialist uses (fishing equipment, security cameras, cycle shop). These types of uses bring their own customers to the Centre and it is a sign of strength that the centre can support them.

Its scale and catchment is restricted by its proximity to Wilmslow Town Centre and out of town retail at Handforth Dean (a little over 10 minutes walk from the centre accommodating a Tesco Extra, a large format Marks & Spencer’s ,

Boots and Next stores) and Stanley Green (B&Q, TK Maxx, Halfords and Homesense). As such it functions as a centre providing for the needs of its local catchment in particular in terms of convenience but also accommodates homes, community facilities and offices

CEC recognises the importance of monitoring key information to assess and respond to issues in its centres commission regular reviews of the retail and leisure market across the Borough. The latest partial update of the Retail Study Report (2020) generally paints a positive picture for Handforth in terms of performance since the last Report (2016). In particular at the time of the update in 2020 there were no vacant units in the centre. Increased occupation has been recorded by more comparison (up 7 units), retail services (up 4 units) and leisure (up 7 units). These positive messages are supported by evidence of increasing footfall (see below section). The reduction in vacancy levels is primarily due to a number of units with The Paddock Shopping Centre being reoccupied which has helped improve vitality and in turn perceptions.

In addition, for its size, the centre is still reasonably well represented by convenience stores including a Tesco Express and Spar convenience store. Convenience goods provision in the centre remains above the UK average. The increase in comparison stores is also encouraging given competition from out of town retail parks.

The centre has also seen growth in the retail service sector - dominated by health and beauty uses - which aligns to wider trends particularly in affluent catchment. There is significant under-provision in the number of financial and business services when compared to the national average. The leisure sector appears buoyant with numerous food & drink outlets, including a few restaurants. However, there are large numbers of take-away units which account for nearly half of the leisure offer in the Centre.

There are three main Hotels in Handforth. The Hallmark Manchester Airport Hotel is located at the northern extremity of the village. The Best Western Plus Pinewood Hotel is closer to the village centre. The Premier Inn Manchester Handforth is linked to the Bull’s Head public house and is situated at the southern end of the village. Handforth Lodge offers bed and breakfast accommodation.



The results of the retail update are encouraging and resulted in the recommendation that there was no longer a need for the Centre to be downsized, though it was recognised that the environmental quality of the Centre would benefit from enhancement. It was also acknowledged that the Centre’s evening economy offer would benefit from improvement to help extend the opening hours of the Centre. It will also be important to stay alert to further potential competition from further retail development at Handforth Dean

Given its affluent and growing catchment and its performance during lockdown there should be scope for more opportunities for more bars and restaurants to support extended hours of operation. It is clear that this potential need to be supported by ensuring the delivery of high quality pedestrian/cycling links with new development in particularly at the Garden Village and appropriate car parking.



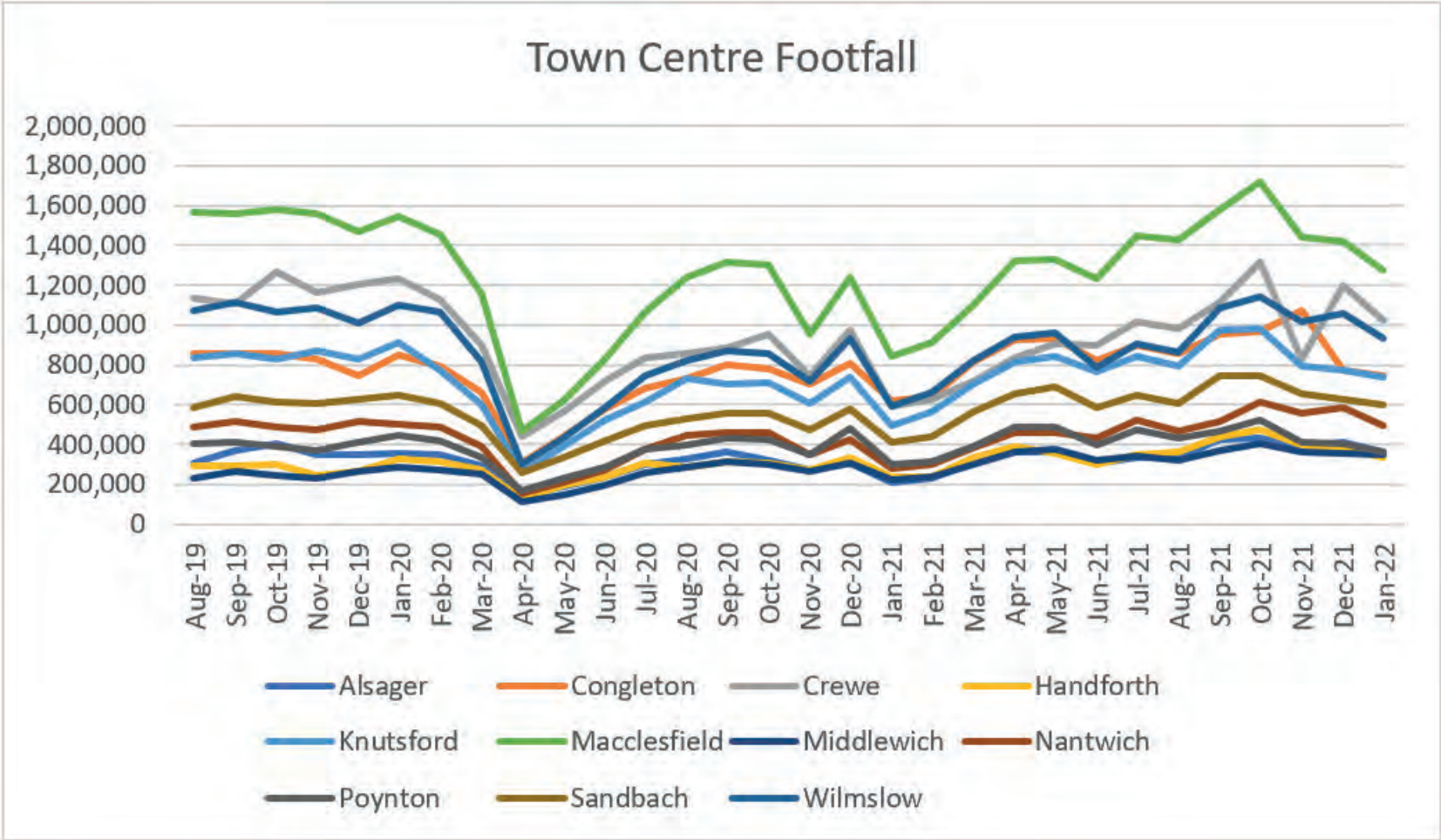
Diversity of Uses in Handforth Town Centre

	2015						2020		
	Units (2015)			Floorspace			Units		
	No.	%	UK Avenue (%)	Sq m	%	UK Average (%)	No.	%	UK Avenue (%)
Convenience	8	12	9	1524	28	15	9	13	9
Comparison	13	20	32	1790	27	36	20	30	29
Retail Service	10	15	14	651	12	8	14	20	15
Leisure Service	16	24	23	1892	22	23	23	33	25
Financial and Business Service	4	6	11	223	6	8	3	4	100
Vacant	15	23	11	1617	5	9	0	0	12
Total	66	100	100	7697		100	69	100	100

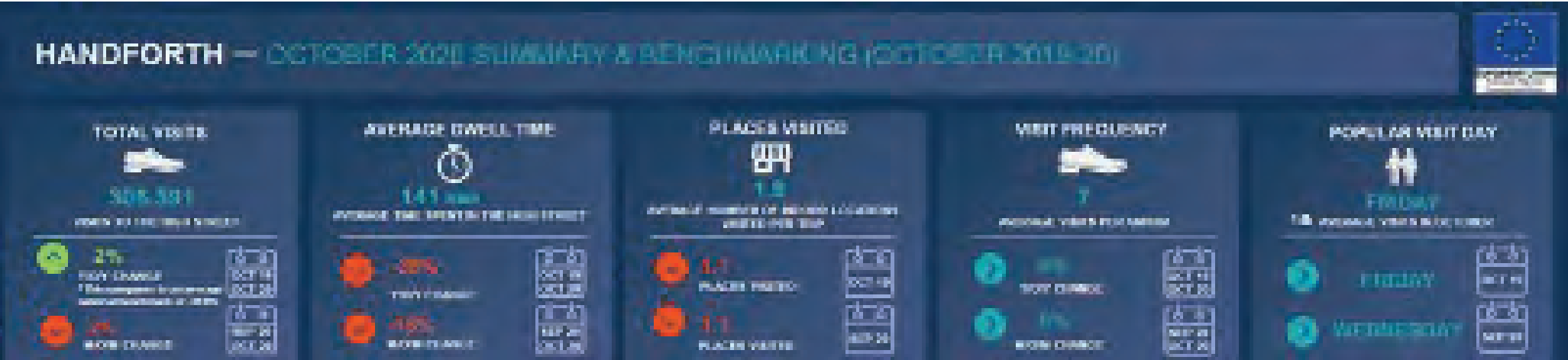
Source: WYG Survey, 2015 and Cheshire East Council Survey (March 2020)
UK average from the Experian Goad Category Report (2015, 2020)
Most recent consistent data available across the 9 centres

Footfall

In recognition of the important relationship between footfall and vitality, CEC is now commissioning regular monitoring of footfall across the centres. The following graph shows the footfall in all the key centres between August 2019 and December 2020. It starkly shows the impact of Covid on footfall, across Cheshire East particularly in March and November last year (during national lockdowns) and some bounce back in December. In August 2019 Handforth had the second lowest footfall of all the centres in Cheshire East (just under 300,000) however over the period the Centre suffered much less fluctuations than most other centres. Indeed, in terms of year on year change, unlike most other centres, it has seen year on year increases (25.8% increase from December 2019 to December 2020). The ability of Handforth to support its local catchment has been a key strength during lockdown and its ability to retain and attract residents from its growing catchment will be critical to its recovery coming out of the restrictions



Source: Visitor Insight Baseline Report: August 2019-2022



Source: Visitor Insight Baseline Report:
Handforth Town Centre: October 2019-2020
Most recent consistent data available across the 9 centres

Employment

Handforth also sits within a high-quality employment growth area which benefits from excellent locational advantages close to key transport routes, the Greater Manchester conurbation and the Airport City Enterprise Zone and Cheshire Science Corridor. As well as being accessible to a range of employment opportunities across the City Region, Handforth accommodates the following key employment areas:

- The Deanway Business Park on Wilmslow Road – accommodates a range of occupiers including award-winning pies and a vehicle repair company and a number of luxury car dealerships including Ferrari, Porsche and Rolls-Royce
- The Brooke Park industrial estate, Lower Meadow Road/Epsom Avenue - contains a number of finance houses, car body workshops, the offices of Pets at Home and a John Lewis depot. However, because of a lack of appropriate industrial tenants, a number of sites have been re-designated for leisure purposes (e.g. a trampoline centre and a fitness centre)

- Stanley Green Industrial Estate- bought by Schroders in 2020 with historic consent in place for an additional 48,000 sq ft of industrial space, in addition to the current 14 unit scheme already on site. Schroders plan to commence development on the additional units towards the end of 2021, creating further employment opportunity and adding to their already strong occupier mix, which includes Howdens, Toolstation and Screwfix.

The allocation for the Garden Village provides for up to 12 ha of employment for B1 uses.

Existing office space within these industrial estates and within the centre have in recent years struggled to attract tenants. It will take some time to determine whether changes in working habits will have an impact on demand for such space, close the smaller centres. It is considered that in contrast to recent years where there was a flight to vibrant city centres, corporate occupiers may going forward seek to have portfolio of office space – including collaboration space in larger centres and touch down space closer to workers’ homes. Handforth, given its location in and aspirational and growing housing area, may benefit from this trend if business do take up this new working model.

The large out of town retail centres at Handforth Dean and Stanley Green also provide a range of flexible employment opportunities

Residential Market Context

Handforth is an attractive residential location, well served by a range of amenities, within easy access of a variety of employment opportunities, located within a rural setting but within easy reach of the City.

At the last census Handforth accommodated 2,936 of the 159,441 households in the borough. In terms of housing mix, Handforth offers a broad mix of homes across detached, semi-detached , terraces and flat. The offer is much more similar to the national composition than any of the 9 other centres. It has the second lowest percentage of detached homes (after Nantwich). The area is mainly urban but some residential live in the surrounding rural hinterland

Whist this mix means there is a good choice of homes, as set out in the residential values map, Handforth sits in the centre of one of the most expensive residential areas in the North West with average house prices in excess of £350,000. Whilst this means it is an aspirational housing area it also means it is an area where affordability can be an issue for lower paid workers and this reliant on benefits.

The population is well served by a range of retail, employment and leisure opportunities

and accommodates 3 primary schools - served by three primary schools: Handforth Grange (formerly Wilmslow Grange), the Wilmslow Academy and St Benedict’s RC Primary.

Handforth is identified in the Cheshire East Local Plan Strategy as an area for strategic growth, through the allocation of The Garden Village at Handforth to the east of the Centre and the land

between Clay Lane and Sagars Road (Site LPS 34) to the west of the village. The latter development is located in Styal; however, access will be from Handforth. Planning permission has been granted for a care village (108 residences) on land adjacent to Handforth Hall, for 175 new houses on land to the east of Hill Drive, and for 10 town houses adjacent to Handforth Station. Planning

Dwelling Type/Area	Detached	Semi Detached	Terrace	Flat	Other	Total Households
Alsager	39.9%	40.4%	11.6%	8.1%	0%	5,183
Congleton	36.3%	35.4%	19.3%	8.9%	0.2%	11,561
Handforth	26.1%	23.1%	27.9%	22.8%	0.1%	2,936
Knutsford	38.8%	34.2%	19.7%	7.0%	0.4%	5,671
Middlewich	39.0%	26.0%	19.7%	15.3%	0%	5,910
Nantwich	20.8%	30.6%	26.8%	21.6%	0.2%	6,710
Poynton-with-Worth	42.7%	39.2%	10.5%	7.2%	0.3%	6,024
Sandbach	39.1%	36.1%	17.6%	6.8%	0.3%	7,840
Wilmslow	39.5%	26.6%	19.5%	14.3%	0%	10,615
Cheshire East	35.6%	32.6%	21.2%	10.2%	0.5%	159,441
North West	18.0%	36.3%	29.8%	15.4%	0.5%	3,009,549
England	22.4%	31.2%	24.5%	21.2%	0.7%	22,063,368

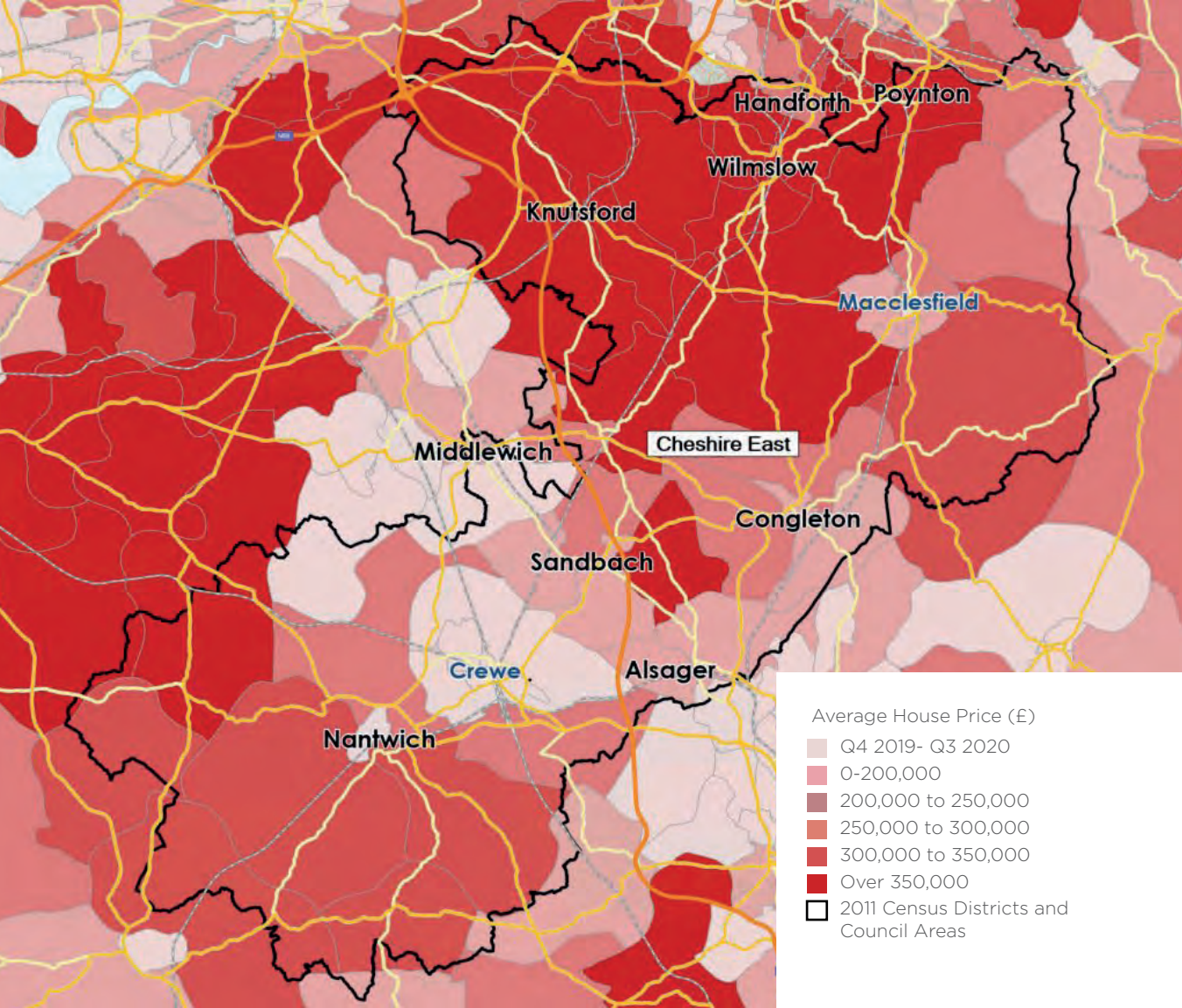
Housing Stock by Type.
Source: Census 2011, Office for National Statistics (ONS)
Most recent consistent data available across the 9 centres

permission has been requested for 44 apartments on the site occupied by Cypress House.

Currently active new housing schemes include Anwyl Homes The Fairways Development and Jones Homes’ The Sanctuary. Homes are currently available ranging from £320,000 for a 2 bed to £559,995 for a 4 bed property.

The population of Handforth could rise by approximately 1000 persons even before the house building proposed in the Local Plan commences. The 250 houses planned for land between Clay Lane and Sagars Road (Cheshire East Local Plan Strategy Site LPS 34) and the 1500 (approx.) houses planned for the North Cheshire Growth Village (Cheshire East Local Plan Strategy Site LPS 33) could result in an increase to the population of Handforth of around 5,000 by 2030. This will significantly increase the catchment of the centre.

Once delivered these scheme will significantly enhance the supply of modern, energy efficient homes in the area and guided by the Neighbourhood Plan planning contributions from these schemes should be available to support some of the priorities of the area including improved infrastructure.



08 Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities & Threats

This SWOT is based on the analysis of the consultant team and discussions with the Town Council and other local partners including councillors.

Strengths

- Strong community spirit in Handforth that needs to be maintained
 - Friends of Handforth Station - active and well organised community group with a track record of accessing funding
 - Handforth Town Council
- Compact centre offering a wide range of facilities and amenities for the local community
- Good food/drink offer - 26 food outlets in the centre (pre COVID-19)
- Greenbelt setting and proximity to good quality open spaces - River Dean and access to countryside
- Meriton Road Park - used for Mayfest, model railway.
- Stanley Hall Park - MUGA and skate-park
- The Paddock offers a local hub, with space for community events as well as local shopping
- Well maintained street planting and signage and public art
- Well connected by infrastructure - close to airport, motorway and train links to Manchester from Handforth Station
- Accessible to attractive countryside - including National Trust attractions include Quarry Bank Mill, and Styal Country Park and amenities such as Styal Golf Course
- Surrounding residential of high standard and good choice of homes
- Local catchment has supported the centre during COVID lockdown/stay local restrictions

Weaknesses

- Traffic - congestion is an issue in the Town Centre
- Car dominant centre with heavy on street parking
- Car-parking - recent parking study identifies a shortfall in car parking spaces. Passing trade is lost because people cannot park. A management strategy (including enforcement) is required to ensure car-parking is efficient and effective and provides parking for residents, shoppers and workers.
- A34 bypass road has resulted in a decline in passing trade - centre needs better gateways/sign posting
- Competition from Wilmslow, Stockport, Handforth Dean and Cheadle Royal with plentiful free parking
- Public transport - access to the centre is limited, especially in the evenings
- No joint marketing of the town and its businesses/assets
- Apathy amongst business owners to get involved in initiatives for the centre - many businesses are franchises and few businesses own the premises
- Dated frontages of shops and restaurants
- Deterioration in the appearance of the Town Centre - buildings and public space in need of investment. Refurbishment may attract more visitors and businesses
- No sporting facilities within the parish boundary
- Severance caused by railway line that disconnects centre with Handforth Dean
- Limited pedestrian linkages e.g. between Handforth centre and Handforth Dean and no link between the Paddock and Meriton Road Park
- Lack of public toilets. Facilities within the town (such as in Costa) that are open to public use are not well advertised
- Poor presence on-line. There is no coordinated website for the centre and no Wi-Fi hotspots

Opportunities

- North Cheshire Garden Village (1,500 new homes), Fairways, Stanneylands and Heathfield Farm developments - will expand the catchment of the centre need to entice new residents into Handforth which will attract new investment/businesses shops and make services more sustainable e.g. library and potential support for an enhanced evening economy/food and drink offer
- Associated Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) will provide funding sources for local infrastructure improvements e.g. footpaths, cycling, public space and sports facilities for example football pitch at Stanley Hall Park
- New park and ride proposed at the train station would create additional parking spaces in the centre and with bus linking station to Handforth Garden Village. Will also improve capacity in the vicinity of the health centre and library
- Review current car parking strategy so that it supports use of the Town Centre - e.g. short stay car parking and affordable long stay for local workers
- Encourage train station users to visit the Town Centre - improve signage, widening of footpath
- Raise profile of the what the centre has to offer - encourage engagement from local business owners
- Expansion at Handforth Dean - additional local investment and jobs, prestige occupiers (BMW)
- Investment in the Paddock - scope for residential conversions?
- Improve communication with Cheshire East decision making and implementation officers. Better engagement to assist with car parking management and enforcement strategy and usage of community facilities under control of Cheshire East (library, youth centre, Handforth Hall etc.)
- New primary and secondary school facilities within the Garden Village at Handforth. This will reduce the demand of Handforth pupils for places at Wilmslow High School.

Threats

- New homes will add to existing congestion and could have an impact on some existing facilities in particularly healthcare and schools
- Cheshire East Council assets - unclear intentions for the CEC owned buildings in the Town Centre
- Expansion at Handforth Dean - could further detract from the Town Centre
- Lack of outward facing initiatives in terms of marketing the towns retail, food and drink or events offer
- Inconsistent management of Meriton Road Park
- Loss of business and prosperity due to inadequate supply and management of car parking and traffic congestion
- Excess charges at pay and display car park do not move commuter parking from existing streets and public car parks



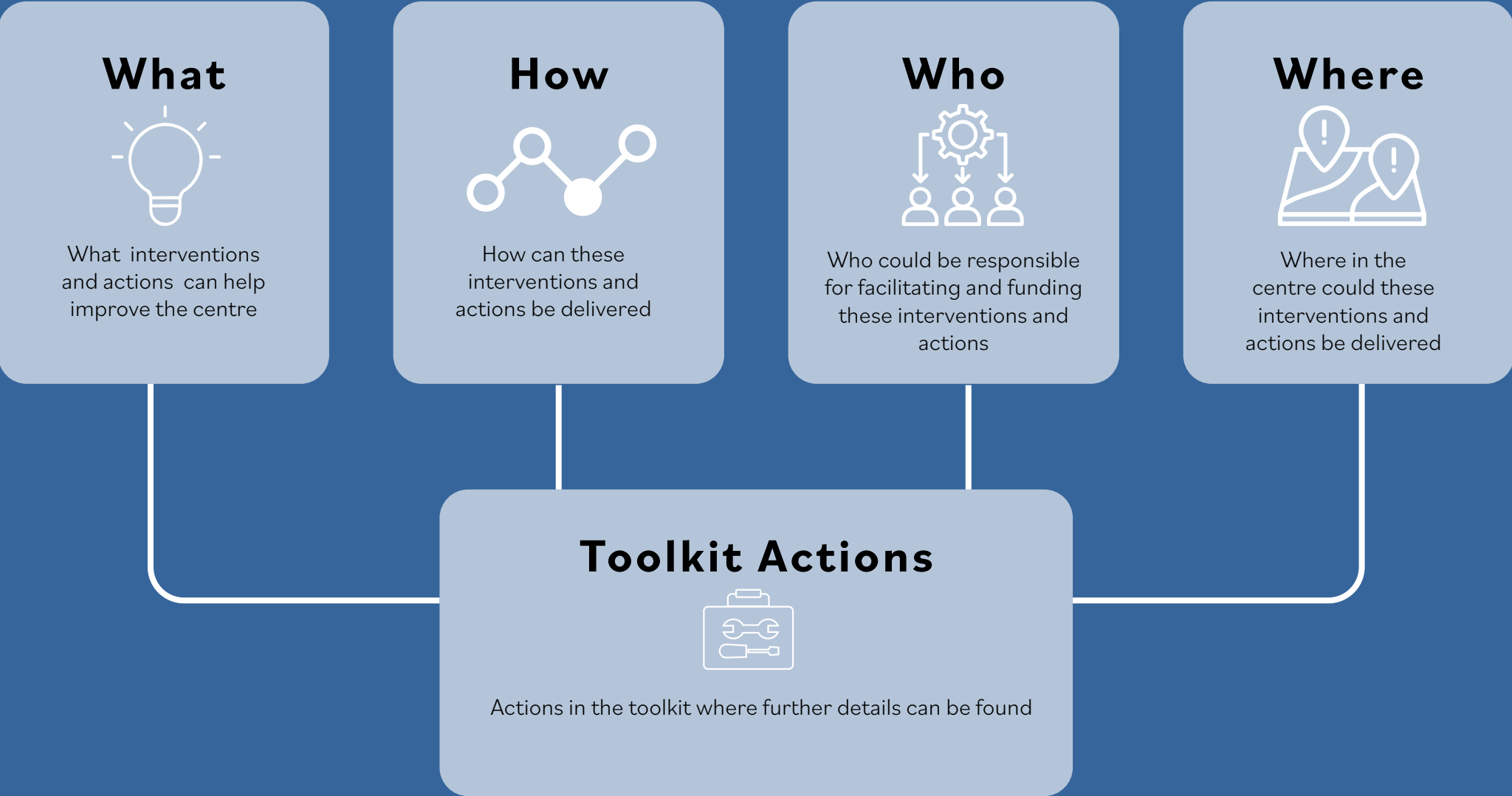
HANDFORTH ACTION PLAN

09 Priority Areas for Intervention

The Action Plan has been prepared in collaboration with the Town Council and its Partners and identifies actions which seek to support the established Vision and Objectives for Handforth responding to its challenges and opportunities. It sets out a series of actions, identifying a small number of priorities for intervention which will have the greatest impact on improving the vitality of the Centre.

For each of the actions further details are provided in terms of what, how, who and where (see Box for further details).

The Action Plan is supported by a Toolkit which provides a wide range of actions across 25 intervention areas (which align with the High Street Task Force recommendations) which can be undertaken by a range of stakeholders.



Vision and Objectives

Vision Statement

In 2030 Handforth will be a vibrant village, extending its strong community spirit to new housing developments both within the North Cheshire Growth Village and the parish of Styal. It will capitalise on its advantages of being located next to Greater Manchester and the Cheshire countryside. Handforth will have an improved district centre with attractive public spaces and a successful independent sector. Through the provision of new affordable housing, Handforth will reduce the degree of deprivation found in some areas, as well as providing high levels of employment, increased average incomes and good access to education. Handforth will have high quality open spaces through the retention of Green Belt areas.

Objectives

- **To protect and enhance Community and Well-Being**
- **To protect the Natural and Built Environment**
- **To support the Local Economy**
- **To improve active travel and manage traffic and parking**
- **To ensure the Garden Village at Handforth benefits the existing community**

Role of the Centre

Handforth plays a number of important roles:

- A local centre serving the needs of its local residents
- A community focus – offering a range of amenities including attractive parks and home to a number of active community groups
- Supporting a growing catchment with significant number of new homes proposed at Handforth Garden Village and Styal

The Vitality Plan seeks to support Handforth to respond to the opportunities that the proposed growth will offer whilst also supporting the needs of its existing local community.

Areas for Intervention

The following have been identified as areas for intervention. Priority interventions identified through the public consultation are highlighted with a white border.

Potential actions are identified in Section 10:



Spatial Action Plan

The Spatial Action Plan illustrates key features of the Centre and identifies where proposed actions could be delivered. It highlights the Centre’s significant green assets and how these could be better connected and gateways strengthened. It also highlights how the Boulevard could be enhanced to support visitors to dwell more in the Centre supporting vitality.

The three priority actions which have emerged from the public consultations are:

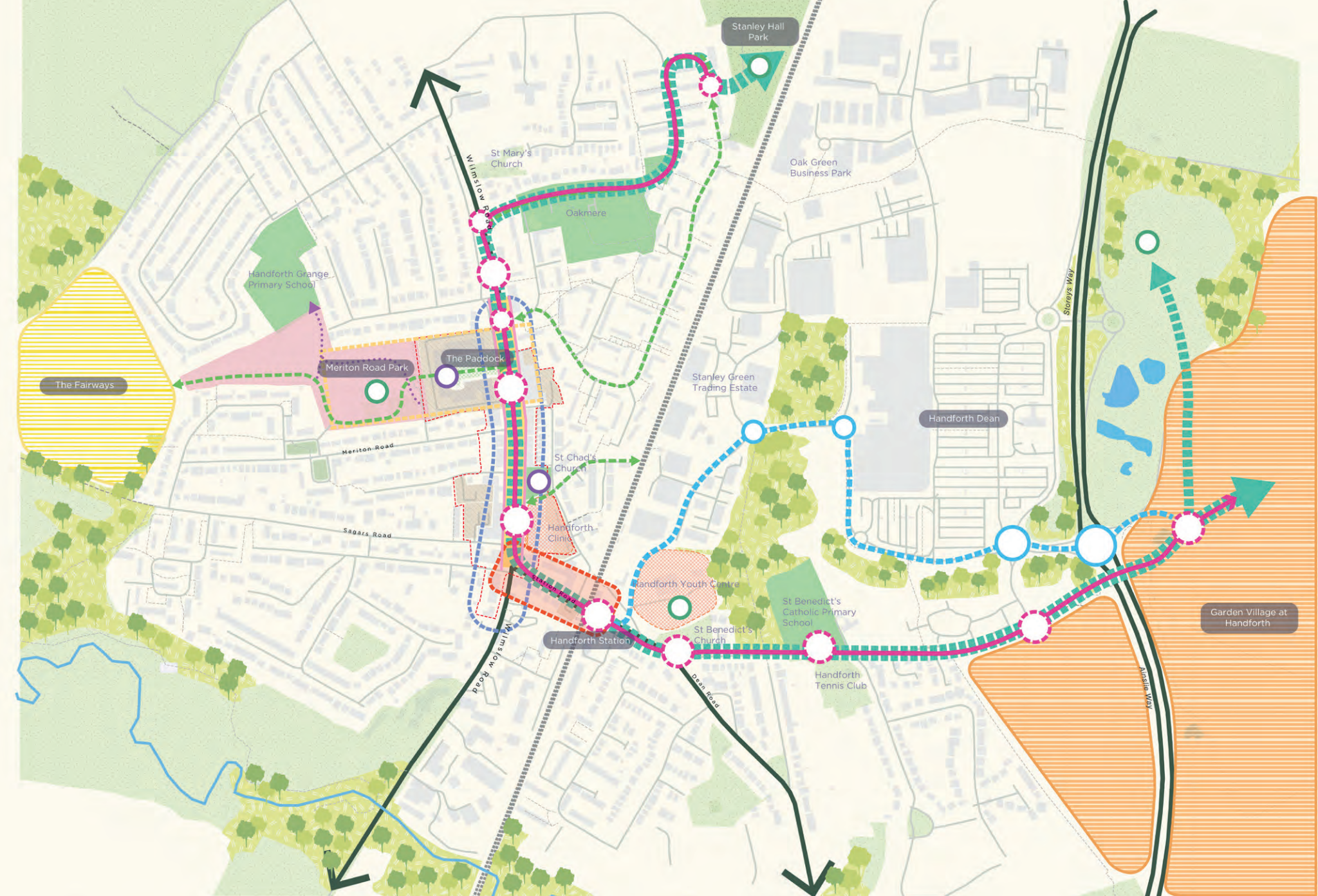
- **Action 2 : Enhance the street environment along Wilmslow Road**
- **Action 3 Making more of The Paddock and Meriton Park**
- **Action 7 Public Transport**

**Action 1**
Delivering strong cycle and walking connections between the Garden Village at Handforth, the Station and the Centre.

**Action 2**
Improving the experience of green spaces, public realm and links along Wilmslow Road

**Action 3**
Making more of The Paddock and Meriton Road Park

- Key
- Local centre boundary
 - Existing car parks
 - The Garden Village at Handforth
 - The fairways housing development
 - Meriton Road Park - masterplan in progress
 - Local centre main street
 - Primary routes through Handforth
 - Proposed multi nodal route from Garden Village to Handforth station
 - Council owned buildings for potential consolidation
 - Potential events space within green space
 - Existing woodland
 - Existing play / sports area
 - Existing open space
 - Key points along wayfinding strategy
 - Potential wayfinding strategy between the centre and Garden Village
 - Better connection and use of the centres public spaces for local events
 - Active travel routes
 - Ehnanced gateway at Wilmslow Road / Handforth Station



Movement Action Plan

Building on the transport schemes suggested in the LTDP, additional Town Centre transport schemes are suggested as likely to be beneficial in supporting Town Centre vitality and viability. These additional schemes, which place a strong emphasis on public realm and enhancing the street environment are set out in the table and plan opposite.

Town Centre Movement Schemes suggested in addition to LDTP potential Schemes

Type	Ref	Scheme	Description	Costing ¹
Active Travel	H_AT1	Improve wayfinding across town centre at key gateways	Improve signage and wayfinding across the town centre at key gateways and landmarks.	<£100k
	H_AT2	Improve pedestrian crossings along Wilmslow Road	Increase the quality and frequency of pedestrian crossings along Wilmslow Road and implement pedestrian courtesy crossing across key side roads.	<£1m
	H_AT3	Improve walking and cycling route on Church Rd towards Handforth Dean	Improve cycling and walking links along Church Rd – connecting to the planned improvements to the underpass (H34) which aim to enhance links to Handforth Dean.	<£1m
	H_AT4	Improve walking and cycling route to Meriton Road Park	Improve cycling and walking links to Meriton Road Park as current routes are narrow and dark, running across a carpark. There is an existing masterplan in place for the park – allowing the opportunity to improve its connection to Wilmslow Road.	<£1m
	H_AT5	Improve walking and cycling route on Delamere Road to Stanley Hall Park	Improve cycling and walking links on Delamere Road to Stanley Hall Park including improved wayfinding, lighting and footways surfaces.	<£1m
	H_AT6	Improve walking and cycling route on Spath Lane to Stanley Hall Park	Improve cycling and walking links on Spath Lane to Stanley Hall Park including improved wayfinding, lighting and footways surfaces.	<£1m
Public Realm	H_PR1	Greening the street along Wilmslow Road	Formalise existing temporary planters with permanent rain gardens and semi-mature street trees on Wilmslow Road. Introduce more street tree planting to reduce the visual and physical barrier of on-street parking.	<£1m
	H_PR2	Enhance gateway at Wilmslow Road / Station Road	Enhance Wilmslow Road / Station Road link as it strategically connects Handforth train station and the town centre – introducing pedestrian priority at Wilmslow Road junction and creating a high-quality gateway space	<£1m
Highway	H_H1	Traffic calming measures on Wilmslow Road	Consider interventions to slow through-traffic on Wilmslow Road e.g. removal or scaling down of the existing bus laybys and/or removal of centre line along Wilmslow Road.	<£100k

¹ The costs presented are indicative only at this stage. Costs will depend on type and level of interventions delivered – and should be revised at subsequent design stages.
cheshireeast.maps.arcgis.com/apps/MapSeries/index.html?appid=48d6af7045d2495c81a1850a2c8a72c1



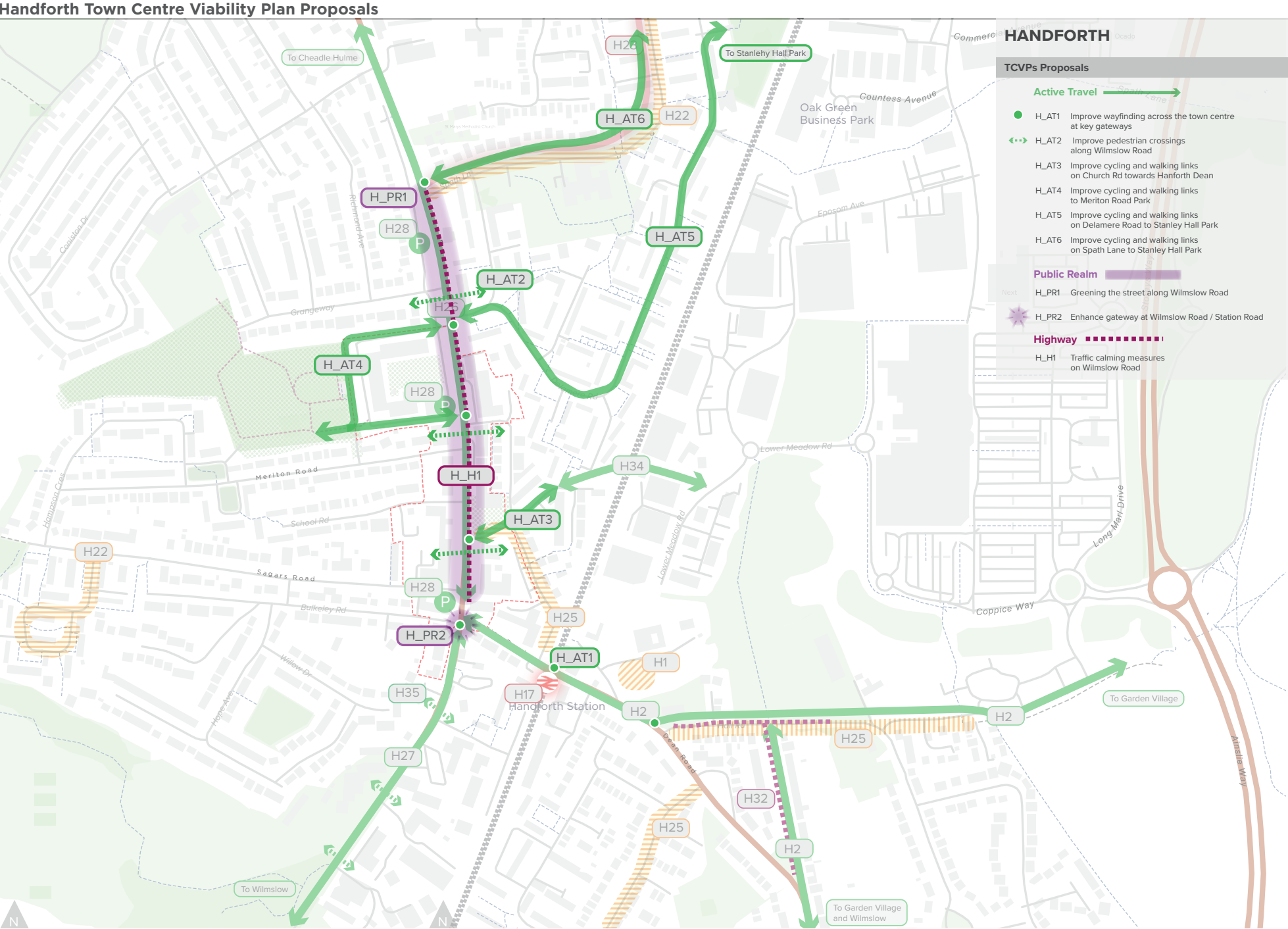
Newport Street, LB Lambeth
Street Greening – rain garden
Source: Urban Design London, Designing Rain Gardens: A Practical Guide (Photo sourced by: MottMacDonald)



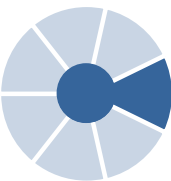
King Cross Arena
Side Streets - pedestrian crossing texture treatment
(Photo Credit: MottMacDonald)



Pedestrian Wayfinding
Example of gateways' wayfinding
Source: Fabrik Brands
(Photo sourced by: MottMacDonald)



10 Priority Areas for Intervention



Action 1: Deliver Strong Cycling and Walking Connections, Including from the Garden Village into the Centre of Handforth

What

Creation of a designated and well signposted cycling and walking network that sustainably links the planned Garden Village to both Handforth Station and into the centre of Handforth. This will create a sustainable, safe and direct link between local amenities and the new residential community, encouraging local residents to walk or cycle into the Town Centre or via the train station. This walking and cycling route could be supported by a wayfinding strategy to encourage more recreational journeys across the area and connecting this link to other surrounding walking and cycling routes. There are also potential links to be established between the Town Centre/ Station Area and the River Dean - via links adjacent to the Garden Centre and Stanneylands/ River Dean.

High-quality walking and cycling connections are essential to support thriving Town Centres and successful new places. The Local Transport Development Plan (LTDP) identifies several routes for specific focus:

- Development of a new greenway connection between the proposed Garden Village and Handforth Town Centre
- Delivery of improved cycle facilities on Wilmslow Road. A ‘pop-up’ scheme is intended to be implemented between Handforth and Wilmslow by Spring 2022
- Connections to Handforth Railway Station

How

A co-ordinated route designed to be integrated with the existing streets as well as the planned development structure of the Garden Village. An opportunity to ‘plan in’ the space required to accommodate a commuter and recreational walking and cycling route and to identify where development contributions can be focused along the existing street network to ensure a high quality, safe, cohesive and consistent link is delivered. This link could also include clearer signage, street lighting, street furniture, cycle storage and parking and consistent paving to visually distinguish the route to and from the Town Centre. Along walking and cycling routes, bicycle and scooter parking / storage could be provided to encourage use by all ages.

- Improved signage (physical and virtual via app/QR code) to encourage people to pause and discover.
- Develop design options for the proposed new and improved walking and cycling routes.
- Introduce secure, safe cycle parking within the Town Centre.
- Improve underpasses and pedestrian crossings.

Funding to deliver these improvements should be supported in part by planning contributions from new homes being developed.

Who

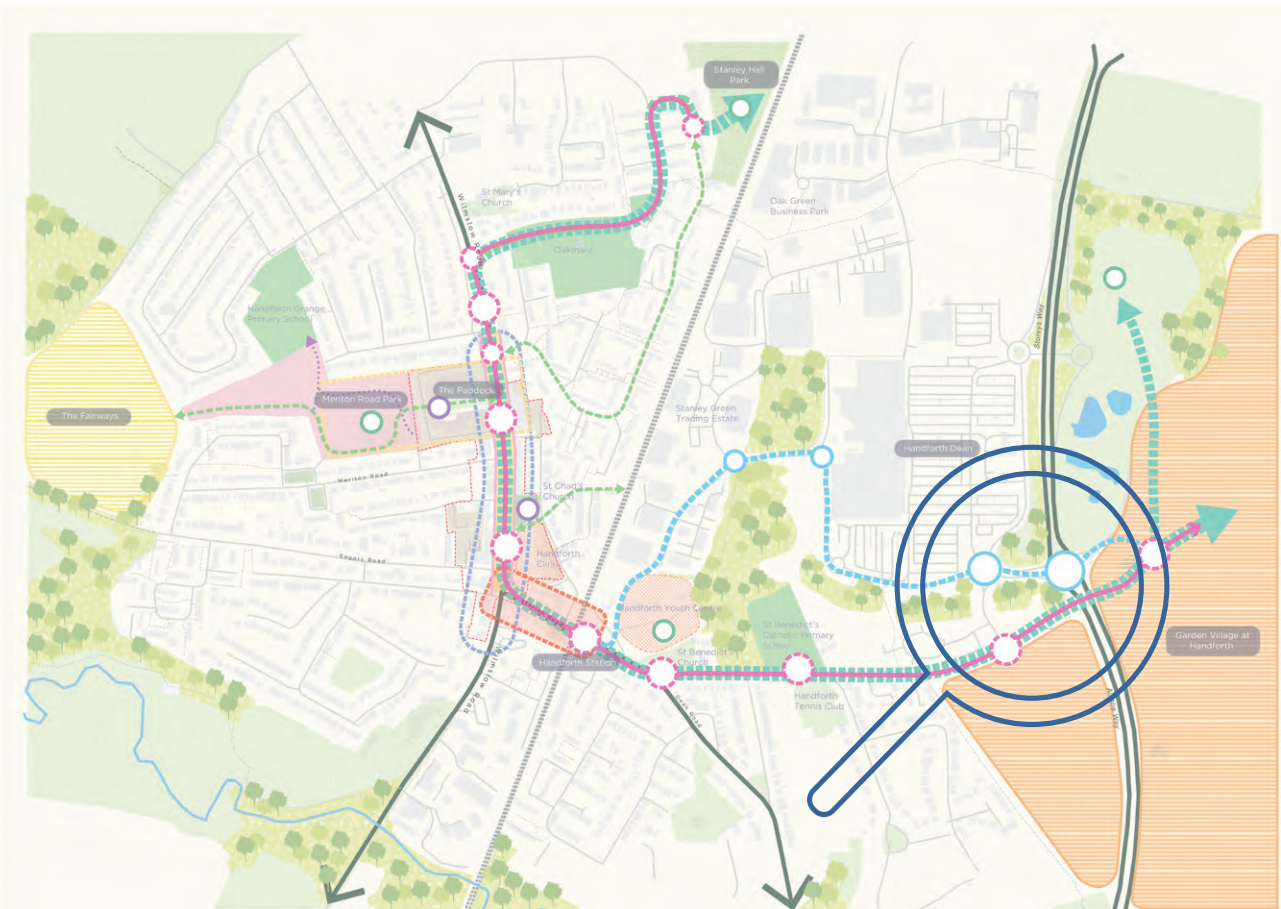
- Handforth Town Council
- CEC including Cycling Champions

Where

Initial focus should be on the following space and improving the connections between them:

- Garden Village
- Stanley Hall Park
- Wilmslow Road

Longer term other locations could be added.



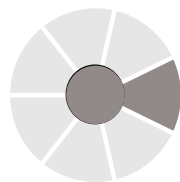
Action 1 supports the following objectives:

- To protect and enhance Community and Well-Being
- To protect the Natural and Built Environment
- To support the Local Economy
- To improve active travel and manage traffic and parking
- To ensure the Garden Village at Handforth benefits the existing community



Toolkit Actions

- 1a Improve the evening offer
- 4b Better signage
- 4e Enhance gateway sites
- 7e Bike and scooter parking
- 14c Enhanced crossings



Action 1: Deliver Strong Cycling and Walking Connections, Including from the Garden Village into the Centre of Handforth

Action 1 aims to create a designated and well signposted cycling and walking network that sustainably links the planned Garden Village to both Handforth Station and into the centre of Handforth.

The route will encourage more sustainable travel into the centre of Handforth, making local amenities and residential communities more accessible.

This walking and cycling route could be supported by a wayfinding strategy to support more recreational journeys across the area and connecting this link to other surrounding walking and cycling routes. This would be supported by various points of interest and playful signage to make the route more interactive.



Precedent Images

As Handforth aims to deliver strong cycling and walking connections through the Town Centre and towards Garden Village – Liverpool's Princes Avenue segregated cycle lane offers an example of cycle infrastructure integrated with public realm enhancements.



Princes Avenue, Liverpool – Green active travel corridor
(Photo sourced by: Mott MacDonald)



Action 2: Enhance the Street Environment Along Wilmslow Road (Priority from public consultation)

What

- Handforth benefits from a wide street profile (building to building) along Wilmslow Road, and much of this space is dedicated to pedestrians, as well as some on-street parking. There is clear potential to improve the quality of the street environment, primarily through:
- Formalising existing temporary planters with permanent rain gardens and semi-mature street trees. More planting (including wild flowers) will not only improve the appearance of the road but will also reduce pollution and increase biodiversity
 - Review current crossing arrangement to enhance the ability to cross the road without creating inappropriate congestion
 - Implement pedestrian courtesy crossing across key side roads
 - Consideration of the options to calm through-traffic e.g. removal or scaling down of the existing bus lay-bys, removal of centre line

How

Proposals for Wilmslow Road should be progressed to concept design, to understand the range of potential interventions and associated costs.

As noted above the importance of the Centre’s green assets are already recognised. In addition to Meriton Road Park, Spath Lane Residents Association and Friends of Stanley Hall Park have raised grant funding for around £400,000 over the past few year and £85,000 for a skatepark to Invest in Stanley Hall Park. There has also been a successful bid to Central Government which has just accessed £558,000 for cycle route from Handforth to Wilmslow.

- Other actions could include:
- Engage with local artists to install more public art in parks and on key routes linking them target local community funds such as Tesco and Big Local Lottery Fund
 - Consideration could be given to expanding the Friends of Stanley Hall Park model to support maintenance of parks and greenspaces
 - More street tree planting – greening can be introduced to reduce the visual and physical barrier of on-street parking
 - Expansion of existing crafts programme and extend stations “platform for art”.

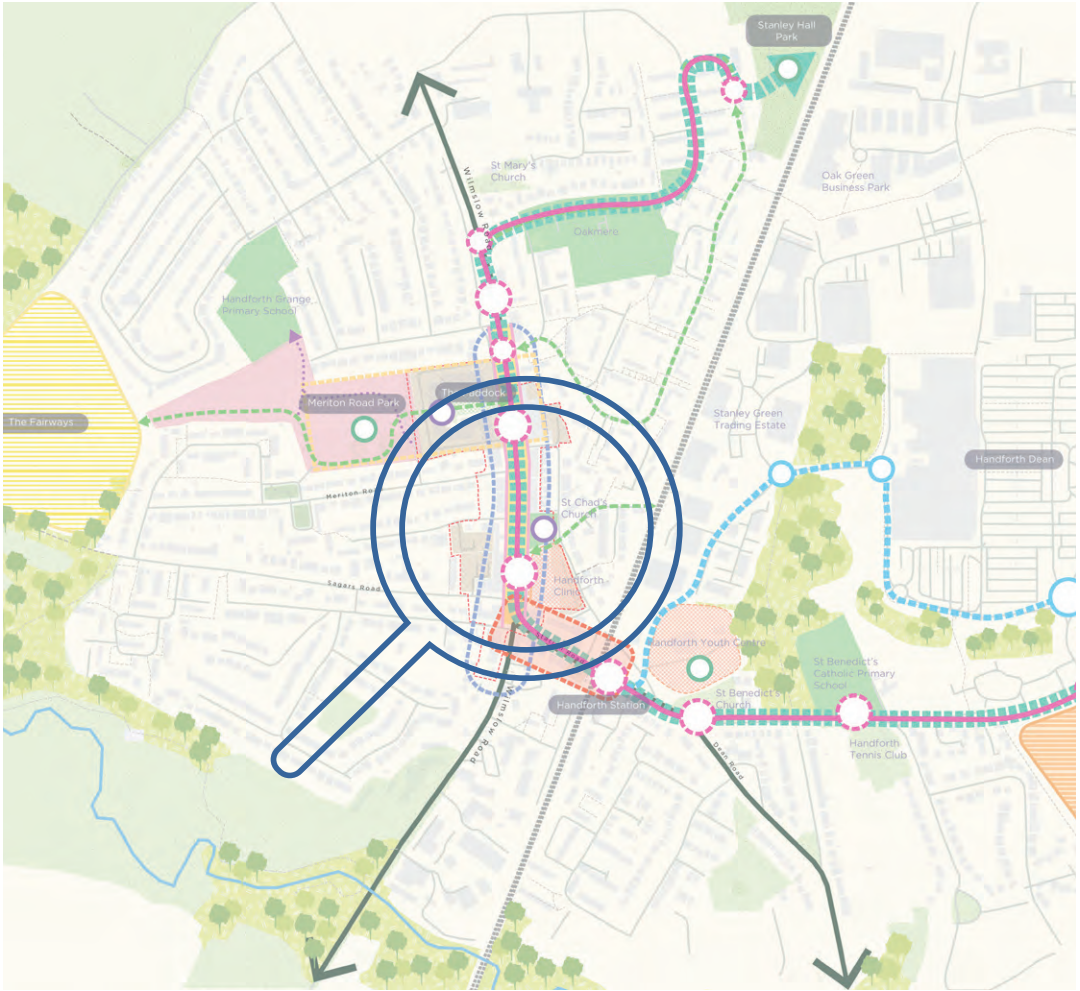
In parallel to improvements to the public realm, local businesses should be encouraged to invest in their premises. Working together to agree a more consistent palette of material or brand for the Centre.

Who

- Handforth Town Council
- CEC/ANSA
- Community Groups – investigate rolling similar model to “Friends of the Stanley Hall Park” to other green spaces
- Seek support from local businesses - materials, expertise and volunteers
- Engage with specialist groups such as City of Trees who seek to support tree planting across Greater Manchester and the wider area and Incredible Edible which supports greening projects by supporting communities to grow food
- Volunteers – Canal and River Trust can share their expertise of supporting the establishment of volunteer groups particularly expertise in encouraging active travel, biodiversity, health/wellbeing and heritage

Where

- Stanley Hall Park and Wilmslow Road corridor



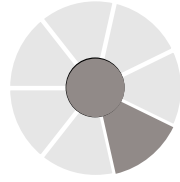
Action 2 supports the following objectives:

- To protect and enhance Community and Well-Being
- To protect the Natural and Built Environment
- To support the Local Economy
- To improve active travel and manage traffic and parking
- To ensure the Garden Village at Handforth benefits the existing community



Toolkit Actions

- 1b Introduce a programme of events which open-up and connect different parts of the centre for a limited time
- 1d Use lighting
- 4d Planting in pots to define space for certain uses
- 5a Upgrade the public realm with high quality materials
- 5d Instant greening
- 7a Parklets
- 7b Multi-generational play space
- 15c Community food growing
- 18d Provide allotments and concrete gardens on leftover space
- 25d Raise awareness in the public realm



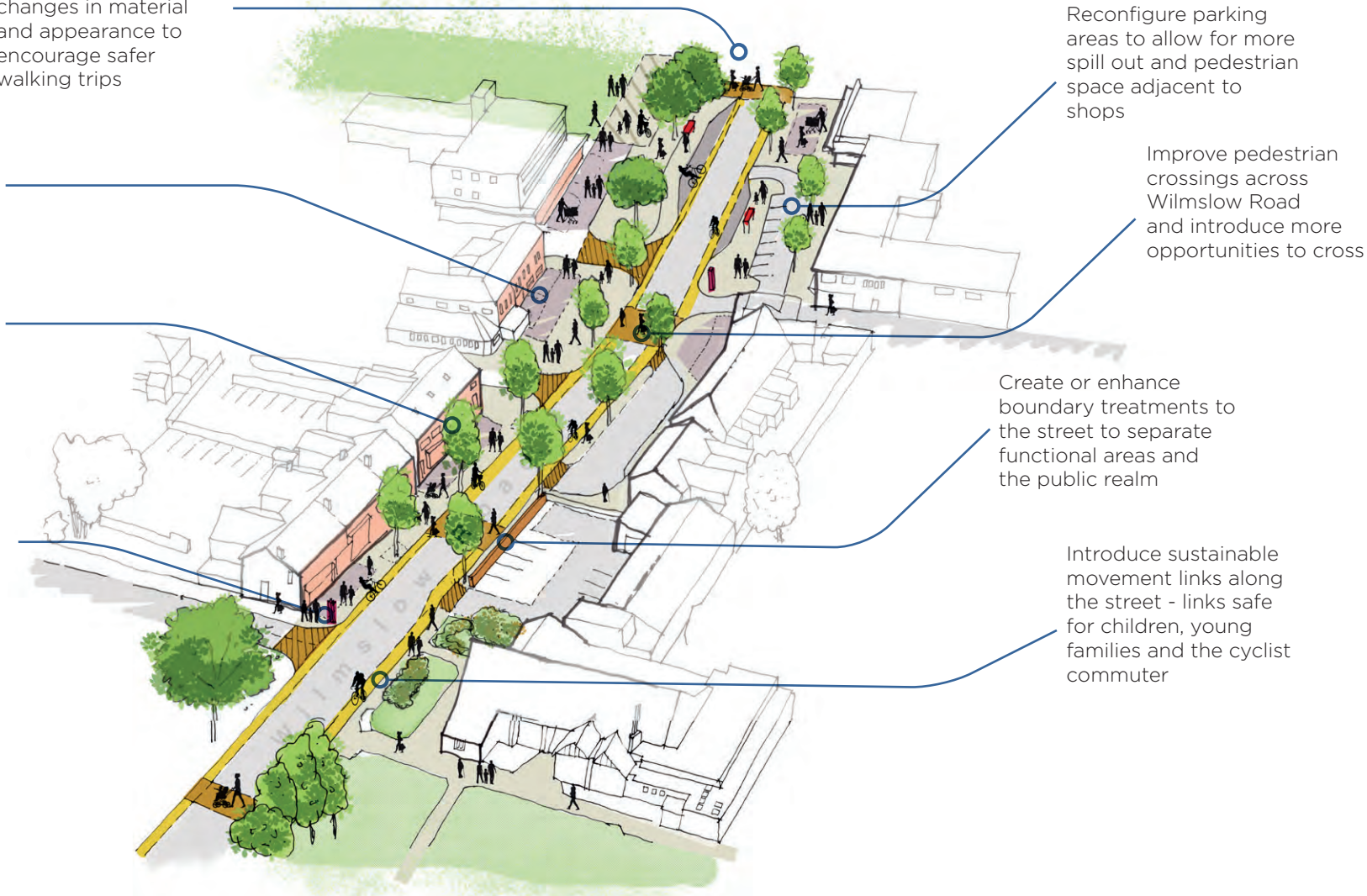
Priority Action 2: Enhance the Street Environment Along Wilmslow Road (Priority from public consultation)

Allow businesses to spill out onto the footway when weather permitting to help activate the street

Street greening through tree planting, moveable planters and seating helps to create a more inviting environment which encourages dwell time

Introduce directional signage and wayfinding, sharing what's on and where to find it

Reinforce pedestrian desire lines through changes in material and appearance to encourage safer walking trips



Reconfigure parking areas to allow for more spill out and pedestrian space adjacent to shops

Improve pedestrian crossings across Wilmslow Road and introduce more opportunities to cross

Create or enhance boundary treatments to the street to separate functional areas and the public realm

Introduce sustainable movement links along the street - links safe for children, young families and the cyclist commuter

Precedent Images

While Handforth's Wilmslow Road presents a wide profile, the street environment is generally grey and underwhelming for pedestrians. The Eastcote Town Centre refurbishment scheme presents a great example of how to improve the look and feel of the street introducing:

- SuDS to green the street space and mitigate water flooding;
- New quality paving surfaces;
- New street furniture and street trees;
- Improved street lighting.

All these elements provide aesthetical and practical benefits that could be applied on Wilmslow Road improving the quality of the street environment.

Other interventions to improve pedestrians' experience and reduce car dominance may include further planting infrastructure like the green bus shelters in Manchester (right) and the parklets installed on Bold Street, Liverpool.



Manchester, green bus shelter - Source: designweek.co.uk
(Photo sourced by: MottMacDonald)



Manchester, green bus shelter - Source: designweek.co.uk
(Photo sourced by: MottMacDonald)



Bold Street, Liverpool, Parklets - Source: placenorthwest.co.uk
(Photo sourced by: MottMacDonald)



Action 3: Making more of the Paddock and Meriton Park

(Priority from public consultation)

What

Encouraging visitors to stay longer in a local centre increases the potential of them to spend more money in the centre encourage them to visit the town more often, staying for longer. The Paddock and Meriton Park are important assets at the heart of Handforth Centre and should be harnessed to encourage visitors to dwell longer in the centre.

How

The Paddock:

- Making better use of the external space of the Paddock, by removing the fixed and dated furniture to allow for a more expansive and flexible space. This could be used more frequently to host local markets, provide performance space for community and youth groups or host local exhibitions and accommodate art installations before etc etc.
- The materiality of the space could be stronger and further enhanced to create an inviting and welcoming space that is accessible. Creating clearer areas of spill out space for ground floor businesses can help to improve the vitality to the edges of the Paddock, creating activity and sense of centre.
- Extend the square eastwards towards Wilmslow Road to improve its visual impact and to allow for more uses and functions to be incorporated Opportunity to enhance and reinforce some of the existing greenspaces within the square through a public realm and landscape strategy for the space - finding opportunities to make the space do more - for example creating local grow spaces, wild flower areas, a variety of planting to create structure and scale.

- Expansion of the existing events programme
- Add lighting and heaters to extend hours of operation
- Work with the landlord to investigate whether upper floors of the Paddock could be better utilised.

Meriton Park:

The proposed Park Masterplan looks to enhance the quality and walkability of the park. There is the opportunity to ensure this work is fully capitalised upon and supported. The wrap of car parking to the west of The Paddock creates a barrier to Meriton Road Park. A clearer and more direct route between these two important assets could be established, improving the visibility and connection to Meriton Park from The Paddock. Improved signage at existing entrance points as well as a new connection would support existing routes into the park as well as establishing a new clear desire line.

Who

- Emerson Group (owner of the Paddock)
- Handforth Town Council
- Local community groups – Friend of Stanley Hall Park and Friends of Meriton Road Park
- Local businesses in the vicinity of the area
- Other landlords

Where

- The Paddock and Meriton Park



Action 3 supports the following objectives:

- To manage future housing growth
- To protect and enhance Community and Well-Being
- To protect the Natural and Built Environment
- To support the Local Economy
- To ensure the Garden Village at Handforth benefits the existing community



Toolkit Actions

- 1b Introduce a programme of events which open-up and connect different parts of the centre for a limited time
- 1c Enable autumn and winter al-fresco dining
- 1d Use lighting
- 4a Provide pop-up seating
- 5b Redesign existing shop fronts to provide a fresh and consistent
- 7b Multi-generational play space
- 9a Repurposing of assets
- 9b Curated events focused on historic buildings, public spaces, gardens and parks
- 15a Annual/ regular events
- 19a Affordable start-up space to help new businesses establish themselves
- 20b Use space and activities to attract people to a forgotten part of Town Centre and create new place identity/ Reinvigorated alleyways
- 21a Managed activation of underutilised space
- 21b Flexible office space
- 21c Empty unit exhibitions
- 22b Brining vacant buildings back into residential use



Making more of the Paddock and Meriton Road Park with all year round events; Foodie markets, outdoor cinema, performances etc





Action 4: Raising Handforth’s Profile

What

Create a platform from which to promote the Centre’s assets to ensure that existing residents are aware of what is on offer in the Centre and that the offer is promoted to residents looking to move into the proposed new homes. This should support the Centre to be recognised as the heart of the community

How

Currently the Town Council provides basic information about Handforth and information about Council meetings on its website. Many centres now have their own websites to showcase what their centres have to offer. Wilmslow has just launched a new website and brand for the town Wilmslow’s Way Better (www.wilmslowswaybetter.co.uk). It showcases many exciting aspects of the town its wellbeing, F&B, cinema, businesses, shopping and how to explore the wider area. The website was created by local businesses who wanted to support Wilmslow.

As a first step a revamped website for Handforth should provide a single point for information relevant to:

- Existing and new residents
- Local businesses
- Community Groups
- Visitors

Providing information on:

- The existing offer in terms of shops, bars, restaurant etc
- Events programme - expand existing programme to offer a range of events including community events

- How local businesses can get together to identify collaboration opportunities
- How to get involved in local groups
- What’s on offer in the local and surrounding area including tourism attractions

Next steps could include making links to other partners’ websites such as CEC, Town Council and Marketing Cheshire to enhance “footfall” on the pages

Further actions that could be considered to raise awareness of the Centre include:

- Establish Town Ambassadors
- Link in with Marketing Cheshire to see if there are any opportunities to collaborative
- Link into the proposed Visitor Economy Strategy that is being prepared for Cheshire East
- Appointment of a part-time communication officer to support the Town Council as has been done by Wilmslow or see if local businesses can support

Who

- Town Council
- Local Businesses
- Engage with Wilmslow to hear about their experience of developing a brand and website

Where

- N/A



Action 4 supports the following objectives:

- To support the Local Economy
- To ensure the Garden Village at Handforth benefits the existing community



Toolkit Actions

- 2a Create a smarter High street
- 3b Appointment of Town Centre champions
- 3c Destination management plans
- 10a Independent shop guides
- 12a Create an App
- 12b Creation of Local Brand
- 12c Set-up an online platform
- 12d Introduce WIFI/ digital high street/ Town Centre app



Action 5: Mobilising the Business Community

What

Handforth has a number of local businesses within the centre and around its edges. Engaging with these businesses and encouraging them to collaborate more effectively will support the economic growth of the area. In addition many businesses are considering how they can add value to their local communities.

How

Groundwork have recently been appointed by the Wilmslow Town Council to support local business engagement and to test the appetite to establish a Business Improvement District (BID). However a lighter approach could be pursued in Handforth by supporting local businesses to network and understand how they could get involved in supporting the actions identified in the Vitality Plan. If actions can be identified around issues/ opportunities that relate to their core function, businesses may be able to provide the following to support the Town’s aspirations:

- Sponsorship
- Materials
- Technical support
- Volunteers

It is recognised that there was a business group a number of years ago but it stalled however many corporate businesses now set targets to support their local communities and therefore it would be

worth trying to re-establish.

Businesses networking should identify “themes” where businesses can drive opportunities forward for example clothes shop and F&B hosting a fashion show or beauty event.

Businesses could also come together to established loyalty schemes to support shoppers to stay local. This has worked well in Belper <https://lovebelper.co.uk/>

Local businesses could also collaborate to offer work experience and apprenticeships to encourage local people to work locally rather than believing they need to work elsewhere.

Who

- Town Council
- Groundwork
- Local businesses especially larger and dynamic/innovative/creative businesses although it is recognised that many retail occupiers are franchises so other businesses should be targeted

Where

- Across Handforth



Action 5 supports the following objectives:

- To protect and enhance Community and Well-Being
- To support the Local Economy
- To ensure the Garden Village at Handforth benefits the existing community



Toolkit Actions

- 10a Independent shop guides
- 13a Business profiles
- 13b Community wealth building
- 25f Tap into local talent





Action 6: Making more of Community Assets

What

There are a number of community assets in the Centre including buildings and parks. Consideration should be given as to how these assets would be better utilised to attract footfall into the Centre and serve the needs of the local community

How

- The Town Council is currently in talks with CEC about getting more involved in a number of local assets. Initially the focus is on whether the Youth Centre could be converted into a community centre
- In addition a number of community groups are actively seeking to harness local green assets and considerable progress is being made (see Action 3).
- There is strong local support for the Pavilion in Meriton Park to be brought back into active use to provide a range of your activities to support young people who currently live in Handforth as well as those who are likely to move into the Garden Village. This will ensure that there is a programme of activities to provide young people with more things to do locally.

Who

- Town Council
- CEC
- Community Groups

Where

- Youth Centre
- Pavilion
- Library
- Parks



Action 6 supports the following objectives:

- To protect and enhance Community and Well-Being
- To protect the Natural and Built Environment
- To ensure the Garden Village at Handforth benefits the existing community



Toolkit Actions

- 3a Managing Assets



Action 7: Public Transport (Priority from consultation)

What

Handforth is served by bus route 130 at hourly intervals with no Sunday or late night bus services – connecting to Wilmslow and Macclesfield. Contributions to supporting bus services have been made by local Parish Councils.

Enhancing the bus network remains an important issue locally as it was identified through feedback at the Local Transport Plan (LTP) consultation in 2018. It is proposed to provide passenger transport services between the town centre and Garden Village, and at the proposed Park & Ride site for Handforth Railway Station to provide better public transport interchange.

Before the Covid-19 pandemic, Office for Rail and Road statistics had seen the number of passengers using the Handforth Railways Station increase by 6.5% between 2016-2017 and 2017-2018 with a decrease of almost 4% in 2018-2019. The new P&R site will assist in strengthening this asset, as should improving accessibility to the station.

How

Deliver bus-only greenway connection to Garden Village.

- Improve accessibility to Handforth station - provide lifts to both platforms, as currently there is no step-free access.
- Widen the footway on Station Road.

Who

- CEC
- Town Council
- Network Rail
- Northern Rail

Where

- Handforth train station
- Garden Village



Action 7 supports the following objectives:

- To protect and enhance Community and Well-Being
- To support the Local Economy
- To improve active travel and manage traffic and parking
- To ensure the Garden Village at Handforth benefits the existing community



Toolkit Actions

- 14a Tactical urbanism to manage traffic speeds and create more pedestrian friendly spaces
- 14c Quick wins and temporary interventions to manage traffic speeds
- 14e Decker and multi-storey car parks
- 14f Better managed car parking
- 20a Remove clutter for key pedestrian routes and simplify crossing points
- 25c Facilitate modal shift

Centre Wide Actions

In addition to the specific actions identified for Handforth, a number of actions have been identified that are relevant to all of the nine centres. These are

1. Appointment of CEC Centre Champion - The identification of a nominated officer (go to person/ champion) within CEC management team for each of the Centres who would understand local priorities for each Centre and would support them to access appropriate officers within key departments and also would seek to unblock issues. It is understood that this is something CEC is currently considering. This would be supported by an providing each of the centres with a clear organogram (including contact details) of who within CEC is responsible for what to make engagement easier.

2. Creation of a Centres Forum - Establishment of forum where key representatives from each of the centres could come together on a regular basis to receive updates from CEC about common issues/ opportunities would be beneficial. It has been recognised that during the preparation of the Vitality Plans that a number of the centres are making great progress overcoming

specific issues. By coming together and sharing progress and discussing issues it is considered that the centres would be better able to share best practice and to identify actions where they could collaborate with other centres to drive economies of scale/value for money. Some meetings may just be held between the centres (within out representation from CEC officers) whilst others could include CEC and/or other partners such as C&W LEP, Groundwork etc.

3. Centre Focused Meetings in CEC - The process of preparing the Vitality Plans has involved internal workshops with relevant department leads within CEC to ensure that all departments are considering challenges and opportunities in the round rather than just in terms of their individual responsibility. It would be beneficial to continue to hold more regular Centre focused workshops. The best decisions for the centres will be taken when the implications of proposals are considered in the round taking into account both potential investment and long term maintenance.

4. Streamlining maintenance of public realm and greenspace - in light of the local desire for improved maintenance combined with recognition that CEC budgets are under severe pressure, to ensure maintenance of public realm can be optimised it is recommended that further engagement would be beneficial to agree how the resources of CEC, the Town Council and wider stakeholders could be targeted to support maintenance. Work to establish a more comprehensive schedule of local assets in each centre and who is responsible for their maintenance should be the starting point to drive improved maintenance. Going forward any future capital investment must be supported by appropriate consideration as to how assets will be maintained over their lifetime. It is also important to recognise that better maintenance does not necessarily just relate to grass being cut regularly. In recognition of the importance of biodiversity, going forward it is anticipated that consideration will be given to allocating parcels of land to the “wild” to support biodiversity.

5. Increasing importance of sustainability - sustainability is now a critical issue for many organisations and important for local residents both in terms of operational implications (for example energy costs) but also in terms of local impact on the local community and the planet. As such sustainability can no longer be positioned as another priority action but rather must be a concept that is considered in every aspect of proposed actions to minimise their carbon footprint and maximise their positive benefits for the local area and its community.

6. Improved platform for communicating activities - the preparation of the Vitality Plans has demonstrated that all of the Town Councils are proactively trying to improve their centres. However it is recognised that many stakeholders will not be aware of all these efforts. Consideration therefore needs to be given as to how to amplify what is going on to more local residents, shoppers, visitors and businesses. Recommendations are made under

Action 4 as to how Handforth’s website could be improved. This should include adding more content and sharing this through a variety of channels and to ensure that these are also linked to other key partners for example CEC and the other centres (so collectively they reinforcing each other’s profiles)

7. Enhanced engagement with local businesses - many of the centres benefit from having a range of national, and in some cases international businesses, many of which are innovating in their specialist areas. There is a significant benefit to the centres and their businesses to collaborating. Whilst restrictions on public sector revenue budgets is putting pressure on what CEC can support there is an increasing recognition by businesses, especially corporates, for the need to support their local communities (Corporate Social Responsibility). This can be in the form of grants, offering expertise or encouraging their employees to volunteer. Even smaller businesses often want to give back to the communities in which they operate. This can be in the form of materials and/or specialist expertise

(e.g. as has been achieved by Wilmslow in setting up the Wilmslow’s Way Better brand and website). All centres should seek to better engage with their local businesses to determine how they can collaborate to support each other’s objectives. This type of collaboration can give centres a significant boost particularly when it happens around public realm (investment and maintenance), marketing and branding.

8. Greater ownership of community assets - a number of local organisations in Handforth have or are keen to take responsibility for their community assets (both in terms of ownership and/or management). CEC is willing to engage with each of the Town and Parish Councils to discuss whether there could be benefits from greater local ownership of local assets. A process is in place to support this to happen. There is also scope for centres who are already doing this to share pros and cons with other centres (via the proposed Centres Forum)

Governance and Delivery

Handforth Town Council is responsible for driving the aspirations of the Handforth Neighbourhood Plan forward and good progress is being made. A number of stakeholders have been actively seeking funding and has been successful with accessing funding for a range of projects including new cycleways and investment in local parks.

Going forward the Town Council will continue to be a major driver in the delivery of the agreed actions emerging from the Vitality Plan. Having established a range of potential projects that will support Handforth to thrive, further work is now required to determine a detailed action plan setting out who will do what and by when.

It is recommended that dedicated working groups are set up to drive specific short term priority actions forward. The action focused working groups will be responsible for:

- Defining the details of the proposed action
- Considering how it could be funded
- Determining who needs to be involved in supporting its delivering and what their role will be

- Seeking funding - this might require support from other partners
- Determining the timetable for intervention
- Monitoring and evaluating progress against key performance indicators and refining actions if agreed outcomes are not being met.
- Reporting progress to relevant partners including the WIP and CEC
- Recommending that CEC, Town Council and any other key local stakeholder groups be invited to adopt the TCVP as a shared common plan. This would allow easy demonstration to potential funders that there is a consensus of approach and buy in from the local community

The makeup of the working groups will vary depending on the specific actions they are focused on. It is important to ensure that the same people are not tasked with getting involved in all the working groups as this will impact on progress. As such the number of working groups and pace of delivery will depend on the number of stakeholder partners that can be engaged with and encouraged to get involved.

Consideration should be given as to whether specific stakeholders need to be invited to be involved to provide technical support. For example CEC, national organisations like the Canal and River Trust or local businesses with specific expertise around specific actions already. CEC Connected Community officers may be able to provide development support.

Progress will be reported into the Town Councils who will in turn also report regularly to CEC. Where issues regarding progress/delivery are identified discussions will need to be taken to determine the required refinements to get progress back on track.

It is acknowledged that partners will need to determine their appetite and ability to deliver the proposed actions. Depending on resources it may be determined that additional staff may need to be recruited to support the pace of delivery of the Vitality Plan and supporting Action Plan. For example Wilmslow has recently appointed a part time communication officer.

Communication and Engagement

Given the potential growth of Handforth which will result from the delivery of the Garden Village and other housing schemes, it is essential that Handforth’s offer is clearly articulated to support new residents and businesses to move to the area and importantly to encourage them to use its local shops and services

A single platform which showcases the Centre should be established. There is a need to begin to share important messages with key stakeholders including:

- Recent and proposed investment in the centre
- Projects that are being worked up
- Funding that is being sought and accessed
- How to get involved

The key partners to be engaged with on a regular basis include:

- Local businesses
- Residents
- Local community and interest groups
- Other towns centres generally and specifically those who are focusing on common actions for example centres looking to strengthen their programme of sport related events to

support a stronger coordinated borough wide programme of events

Quality engagement should generate potential volunteers to get involved in the delivery of specific actions and potentially resources to support their delivery.

The following mechanisms should be used to engage with key partners:

- Enhanced website and strengthen profile on social media
- Public engagement consultations – the draft Vitality Plan will be consulted upon and this be used to continue the dialogue with local residents
- Piggybacking Events – for example a stall at markets showcasing what’s on and how to get involved
- Existing and enhanced business networking events – to share emerging ideas, test support and encourage ideas to refine and support their delivery
- Identification of a team of local ambassadors – ambassadors could be trained and then kept up to date about what it going on in the Centre and then they can showcase positive

messages to their contacts. Ambassadors can be proactive local independent businesses leaders and other individuals who come into contact with lots of local to people e.g. taxi drivers.

In addition, as set out in Section 10, it is important for enhanced communication and engagement between CEC and Handforth Town Council.

Funding

Whilst there is not a pot of money available to support the delivery of the Vitality Plan, given the scale of new development around Handforth contributions will be available and the Vitality Plans can support discussions with CEC and developers on where resources should be focused to ensure that the new homes and jobs are linked to the centre of Handforth and its existing social infrastructure.

In addition the Vitality Plan will be a useful tool with which the Town Council can use to:

- Articulate priorities for Handforth to CEC - the Vitality Plan will be used to articulate local priorities to CEC to guide them in their negotiations with developers in respect of contributions linked to planning applications (especially to support improvements in cycling, public realm, walking and public transport) and also in determining their own capital budgets. Formal adoption of the TCVP by key stakeholder organisations can help demonstrate common objectives and priorities for any party submitting funding bids.
- Support external funding bids – having a clear action plan which provides an evidence base and priorities that have been consulted upon is now essential for most funding bids. It is

important to recognise that often funding bids have specific funding leads. In some cases this may be CEC or Cheshire & Warrington LEP in others it might need to be a community group. Whoever may be responsible for leading and submitting a specific funding application, demonstration of collaboration between stakeholders and community support is essential.

- Engage with local businesses – to determine whether there are actions that they can get involved in which align with their priorities for supporting their local communities.

Another approach to generating more revenue to spend locally is for the Town Council to take responsibility for owning or managing assets with any surpluses generated being invested back into the local centre. You are currently in discussion with CEC about how you could take greater responsibility for local assets.

It is important to note that when determining potential interventions consideration must be given to both initial capital investment and longer term revenue implications such as maintenance. In proposing capital investment the whole life of a project must be considered to ensure that appropriate revenue is available for ongoing costs such as maintenance.

Phasing

The actions identified in Section 10 range from projects which are already being progressed to long term aspirations which will require feasibility and funding before they can be delivered.

The Vitality Plan identifies 7 actions which support the established vision and objectives for the Centre. The Town Council is proactive and a number of the identified actions are already being pursued. The public consultation identified the following as priority interventions:

- Making more of The Paddock and Meriton Park
- Public Transport
- Enhancing the environment along Wilmslow Road

Partners now need to determine a detailed action plan related to funding that they are able to access and the resources that they have available or can access to support delivery.

It is important to acknowledge that this indicative programme is not fixed and if specific sources of funding are identified the programme should be adapted to respond to the opportunity.




Covid has taught us important lessons about testing new approaches. For example temporary road closures to gauge whether reducing car access to encourage cycling or to provide outside

dining space would benefit local centres. This approach should be continued so that rather than a public realm project having to be worked up in huge detail and then significant resources found to deliver it, temporary solutions can be tested in terms of their impact and determine whether a more permanent solution is required or desirable. Changes are much more likely to be embraced by businesses and supported by local residents if they know that ideas are being tested and monitored and if they do not work can be reverted back to how they were.

A broad phasing plan for the identified actions is identified opposite where short term relates to 1-2 years, medium 3-5 and long 5+ years. The following should be noted:

- A number of interventions will require further feasibility and this can be ongoing but intervention on the ground is likely to be a few years off whilst planning permission and funding is sought
- A number of interventions are interrelated in particular strengthening green links and expanding the events programme

Phasing Key

-  Ongoing
-  Short Term
-  Medium Term



11 Delivery continued

Monitoring and Evaluation

As noted above the programme and the action plan will not be set in stone but must be capable of responding to new opportunities or challenges. As such it will be important to monitor impacts to determine whether the established vision and objectives are being met. Suggested key performance indicators (KPIs) and how they could be measured and how often are identified opposite.

KPI	How measured	Frequency
Footfall	External provider	Monthly
Number of vacancies	Town Clerk	Quarterly
New units opening	Town Clerk	Quarterly
New Businesses	Town Clerk to keep a list	Ongoing
Area of greenspace/ open space/cycleways and footpaths improved	CEC	Annually
Hits on website	Traffic on social media	Quarterly
Increase air quality	CEC	Quarterly

Note: CEC has recently commissioned monthly footfall data to end Sep 2026. Recommend all those involved regularly share useful monitoring data with other parties so that all can be aware of progress.

Technical Terms

Term	Explanation
Comparison Goods Sector	Retail that stocks higher value goods that are purchased infrequently, such as furniture
Convenience Sector	Retail that stocks everyday items such as groceries, newspapers, toiletries, confectionery
F&B	Food and Beverage
Green Belt	A designated area of countryside, protected from most forms of development to help stop urban sprawl but can be used for agriculture, forestry and outdoor leisure
Greenspace	Parks, public gardens etc
HS2 route	The UKs new high speed rail network
KSC	Key Service Centres
Linkages	The connections between two or more places/ sites within the Town Centres
Public Realm	Space between and within buildings that is publicly accessible for everyone
S106 monies	Money that developers can use towards the development of community and social infrastructure
TCVP	Town Centre Vitality Plans
Wayfinding	The ways in which people orient themselves in a physical space and navigate from place to place
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
Dwell time	The time a person may spend in a particle place or area. For example, the length of time spent sat on a public bench.



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and the GIS User Community

Knutsford



Cheshire East Town Centre Vitality Plans

December 2022



Prepared by Cushman and Wakefield,
Optimised Environments and Mott
Macdonald for Cheshire East Council

December 2022

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Context of the Study

Town Centres across the UK are facing unprecedented challenges. Changes in how we shop, in particular the growth in internet shopping, has significantly decreased footfall in Town Centres resulting in numerous store closures, leaving many centres struggling. Trends that have only been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Government has stated its commitment to helping high streets and Town Centres evolve and adapt to both the structural changes that are occurring in the retail market as well as to COVID-19. It has identified a number of measures to support Town Centres at this challenging time including the Future High Streets Fund, a High Streets Task Force, changes to the planning system and direct support to local authorities and local businesses. Alongside these national measures the government has stressed the need for strong local leadership in supporting Town Centres.

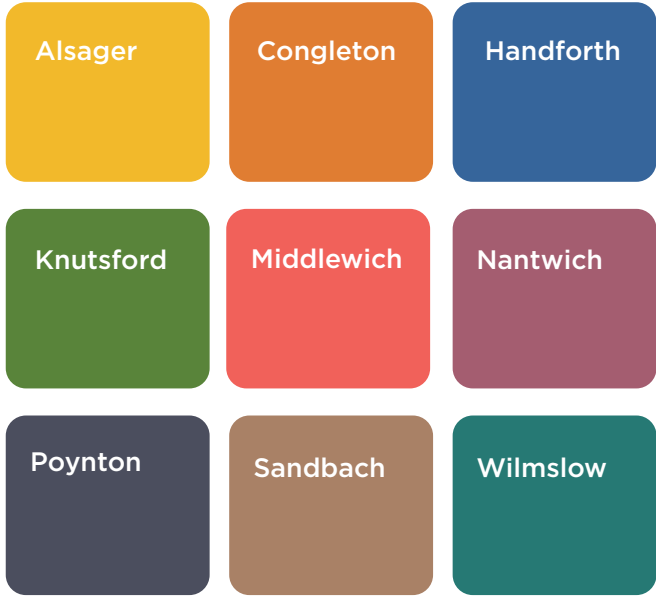
Town Centre Vitality Plans

Cheshire East Council (CEC) is committed to supporting the vitality and viability of all Town Centres within the borough. Whilst acknowledging that in areas of low deprivation, there may be limited opportunity to bid for centralised funding. When funding opportunities do become available, there is generally a need to have clear proposals already agreed before bids can be submitted.

It is also recognised that there are often initiatives which can be taken to support the vitality and viability of local centres which do not require significant capital funding, but rather require the support of local volunteers and/or businesses.

In addition, the reports could be used to support discussions regarding the allocation of S106 monies resulting from development within and in the vicinity of the local centres.

With an almost overwhelming array of options and opinions on what is the best way to support Town Centre vitality and viability, CEC has commissioned Cushman & Wakefield (regeneration and property advisors), supported by Optimised Environments (urban designers) and Mott Macdonald (transport planners), to work with the Town Council’s and their stakeholders to produce bespoke Town Centre Vitality Plans (TCVP) for the nine Key Service Centres (KSC):



The 9 Key Service Centres which form part of this study

Aims and Objectives

The TCVP provides a sense of direction and identify initiatives to support the nine key service centres to better fulfil their potential recognising that each centre is distinct, with its own unique opportunities and specific challenges and local groups/stakeholders. The unique characteristics of each centre is identified along with tailored solutions for each.

They

- **Are bespoke in nature, based on a thorough analysis of individual circumstances affecting the health of each Town Centre, local stakeholder views and any local specific policy considerations.**
- **Are cross functional and holistic, and recommend a practical, realistic set of priority actions for supporting the vitality and viability of each Town Centre.**
- **Are informed and tested by existing relevant national and local public policy and strategies, local stakeholder views, relevant research and a thorough understanding of commercial markets and spatial considerations.**
- **Identify a set of recommended clear priority physical and other (e.g. marketing) interventions/actions to support the vitality and viability of each Town Centre both in recovery from COVID-19 impacts and beyond to enhancement.**
- **Recommend deliverable actions including who should be involved in delivering of each action identified, to enable Town Councils, community groups, occupiers, property owners etc., to all work towards a common vision.**
- **Take account of proposals developed/being developed by Town Councils and develop such plans further.**

Responding to the Impacts of COVID

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic hit, high streets and Town Centres were having to respond to changing consumer demands driven in part by technological changes. Many recognised the increasing importance of the consumer experience - an attractive place to dwell, shop, see friends, to eat out and be entertained. COVID-19 has led to an acceleration of changes to the reasons people visit and use local centres.

COVID-19 has not and will not be universally negative for all local centres. The requirement to stay local has supported residents to use their local facilities and where the local offer aligns with the demands of residents, local businesses have benefited. The need to work from home has also resulted in an re-evaluation of where we work going forward and it is anticipated that there has been a fundamental shift, for some, in the balance between the amount of time we spend in an office and the amount of time we work from home.

It will be some time before a clear picture emerges of the impact of new forms of working (a hybrid between office and home) have on our high streets in the longer-term. The impact will be felt

differently from place to place depending on the local economy's dependency on particular sectors. It is likely that those centres that will perform best going forward will be those able to reconnect with their communities and use them to meet local needs including access to housing, culture, leisure, health etc.

The Town Centre Vitality Plans have been prepared post the outbreak of COVID-19. The impact of COVID-19 on each of the centres has been different. The bespoke Vitality Plans provide an action plan to support recovery and future success.

Vitality Plan and Toolkit

This report builds upon the Draft Baseline Report (which was a summary of the key stages undertaken in 2020 - see below) and incorporates potential actions which have been identified in consultation with local stakeholders during 2021 to form a bespoke Vitality Plan for Knutsford.

The Vitality Report comprises of two sections:

- Baseline - which was undertaken in 2020 and describes the Centre in terms of its offer and key characteristics. It brings together evidence and opinion in respect of the

buildings, green and open spaces, access and its residents and businesses.

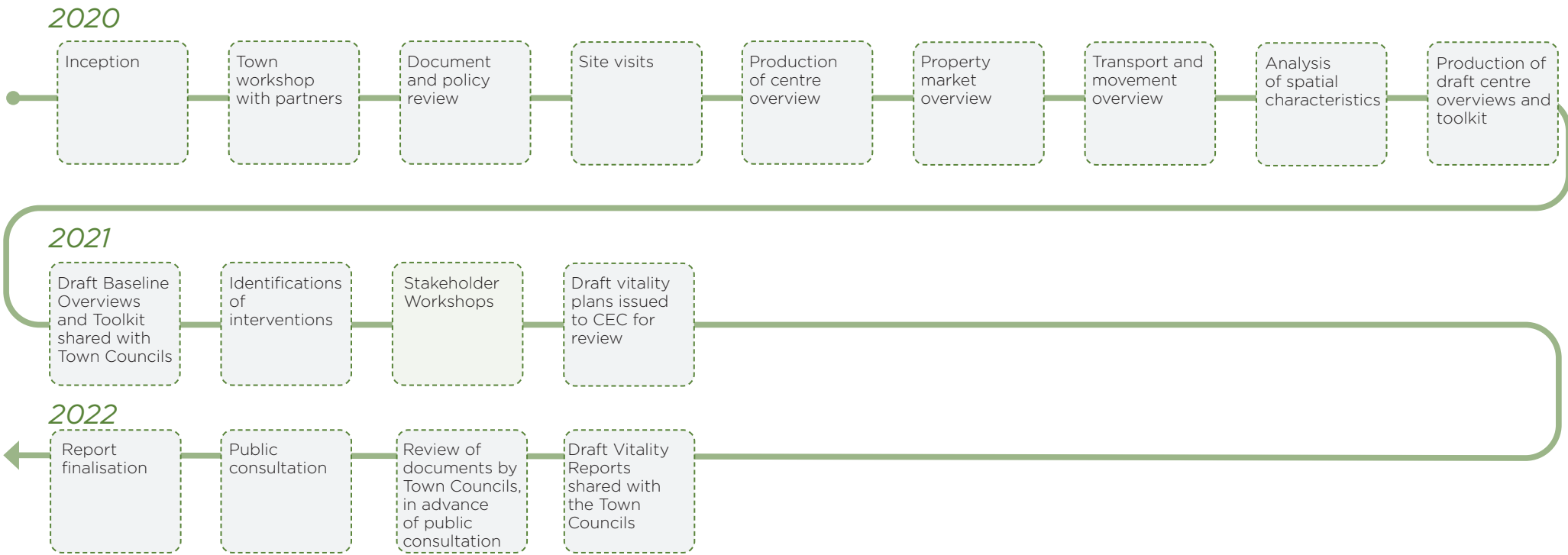
- Action Plan - has been prepared in collaboration with the Town Council and identifies actions which seek to support the established Vision and Objectives for the Centre responding to its challenges and opportunities. It sets out a series of actions, identifying a small number of priorities for intervention which will have the greatest impact on improving the vitality of the Centre.

The draft TCVPs went to public consultation for six weeks from September 2022. Feedback was reviewed and where appropriate amendments have been made to the final report. A summary of other key messages have been shared with key stakeholders.

The Action Plan should be read in conjunction with the Toolkit. The Toolkit presents exemplar projects from other centres (including from within Cheshire East) nationally and internationally to assist key stakeholders to determine a set of actions to support their centres to thrive. There is not a pot of money available to support the delivery of the Vitality Plan. Rather the Vitality Plan has been prepared as a resource to support accessing funding.

Approach

The preparation of the Vitality Plans has involved the following stages:



Baseline

Note:

The Baseline analysis was undertaken in 2020. The information in the Baseline was correct and the sources were the most update at that time. It is recognised that in some cases more up to date information is available. Whilst it is not possible to keep updating all the evidence where a significant change has happened, information has been updated. It should also be noted that Census 2011 data is provided for some indicators. Whilst the 2021 Census has just been completed, a release of this data will not be made available until March 2023 therefore the 2011 Census is the most recent consistent data source across the 9 centres for some key indicators.

02 Introduction to Knutsford

Knutsford’s Location within Cheshire East

Whilst set within attractive countryside, Knutsford is also strategically well located, connected by road (M6) and rail to the conurbations of Manchester and Liverpool, and close to Manchester Airport. Its historic streets and buildings, surrounded by green spaces, create an attractive location to live, work and visit. (see Strategic Context Plan)

Knutsford also lies in the Meres and Mosses natural area. This landscape is recognised as being of international importance for its wetland wildlife and contains several sites designated for nature conservation. Tatton Park is within walking distance and some of the green assets come right into the heart of the Centre including The Heath and The Moor. The River Lily and the Birkin Brook provide key wildlife corridors.

Knutsford is one of the larger centre’s within Cheshire East. It is a popular destination for both residents and tourists from further afield, offering an excellent range of comparison and convenience shops. The main shopping streets are Princess Street and King Street (or Top Street and Bottom Street to the locals) with more shops along Canute Place, Regent Street and Minshall Street. Whilst accommodating a number of national operators including Little Waitrose, Co-Op, Sainsbury’s, Boots, Waterstones and WH Smith,

the centre also accommodates a range of quality independents including an award winning butcher and bespoke interior designer. The Market Hall, which attracts a collection of independent traders, provides food and drink as well as art and crafts goods.

A strong leisure offer of national brand and independent bars and restaurants within the Town Centre supports a good evening economy, which adds to the vibrancy and attractiveness of the Town Centre. This is further enhanced by the Curzon Cinema, Little Theatre and Heritage Centre.

Whilst the towns historic streets and buildings create an attractive place to wander through, the ability to get around by car or foot is constrained in places by its historic character - particularly its narrow streets, alleyways and pavements - creating congestion. This does lead to conflict between users especially some cars trying to park close to the shops whilst some pedestrians want to shop in a less car dominated environment.

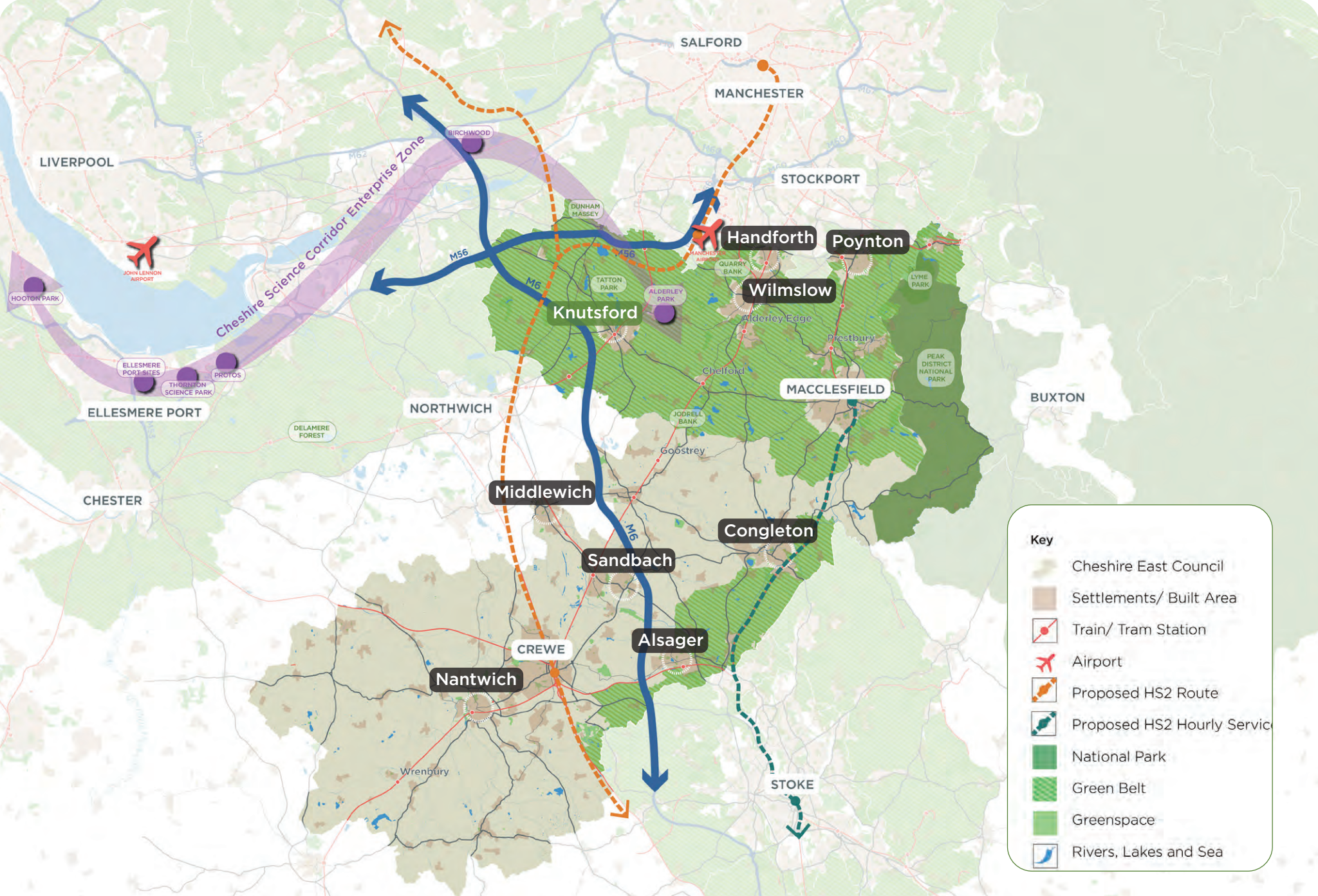
In addition to its retail and leisure offer, the town also accommodates a number of offices within the centre, many in attractive historic buildings mainly operating in property and financial sectors. Around its edges Knutsford also accommodates

a number of employment locations offering a range of office and industrial floorspace including Parkgate Industrial Estate, Knutsford Business Park and Booths Park. Whilst these do not necessarily accommodate global brands they do include a number of occupiers with strong regional reputations in key sectors including financial, ICT and property.

Knutsford provides an attractive residential offering, set within attractive countryside but well connected by rail and road (J19 of the M6 is 3 miles away and Manchester Airport is 5 miles) to employment opportunities. Its housing offer is dominated by larger houses. These attract affluent professionals making them some of the most expensive homes in Cheshire East, the North West and outside the South East – the average property value is just under £0.5m.

Knutsford enjoys a strong sense of community both in terms of residents and businesses. It has a range of active groups that work hard to protect and enhance all that the town has to offer. Members of the community have prepared a number of impressive reports to protect the towns assets and overcome some of its challenges.

Strategic Context Plan



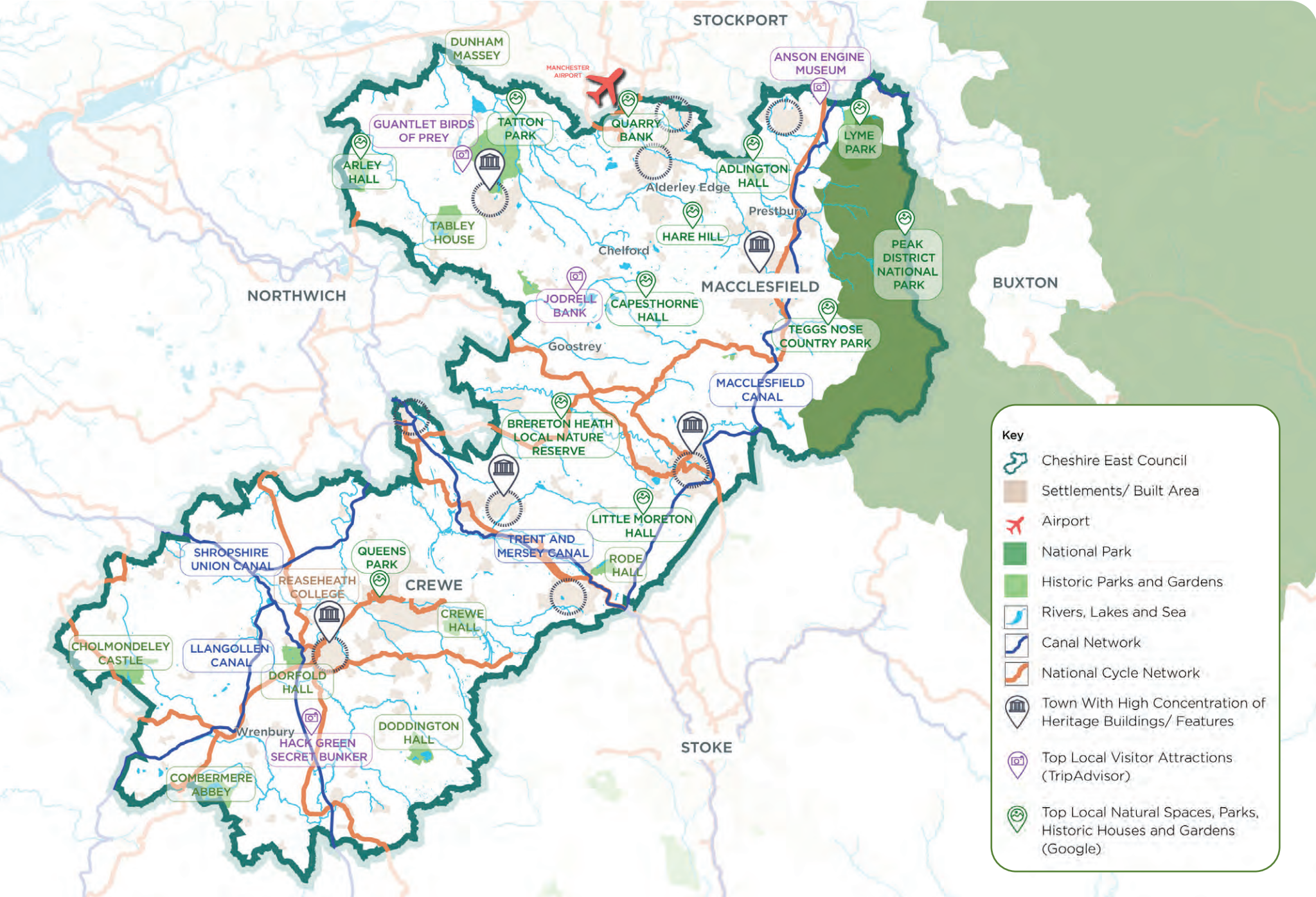
The Knutsford Town Council website and comprehensive Town Guide promotes buildings, organisations, events and surrounding attractions. The Council employs a Town Ranger – who maintains the centre's appearance – and a Town Centre Manager who regularly communicates with the businesses and promotes initiatives to encourage footfall and local spending.

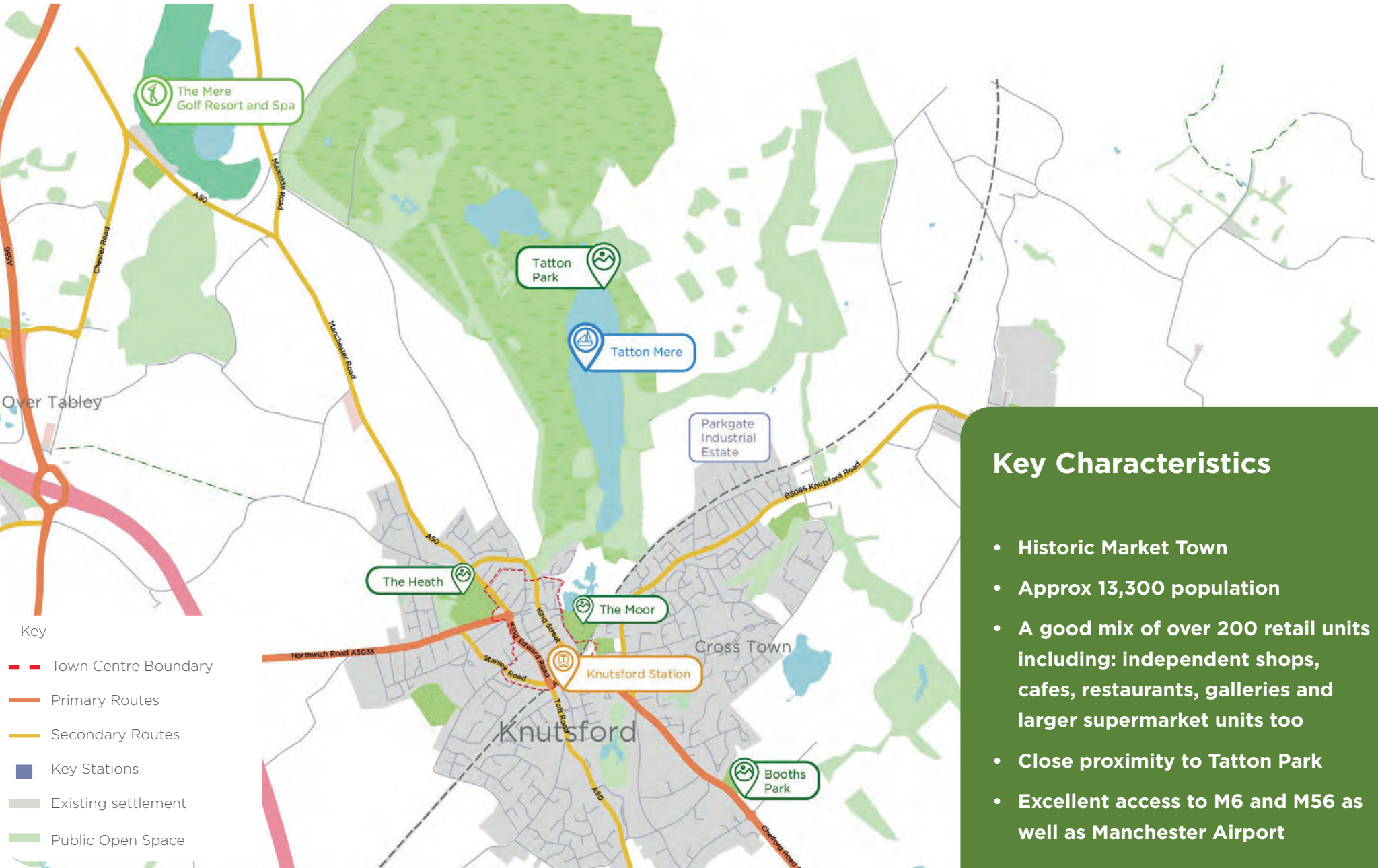
In addition to its physical attractions, the town provides an impressive programme of events to entice visitors including the annual Bunny Hop, Pumpkin Path, a range of Christmas events and a music festival. A number of these have been held for many years including the annual Royal May Day event which has been held since 1864 and attracts 1000s to parade through the town. Events held at Tatton Park, such as Tatton 10k, the RHS Flower Show and the Classic Car and Performance Show are just a number of events that are also of direct relevance to the town.

The Strategic Connections and Assets Plan sets Knutsford in the context of major visitors attractions and green and blue assets. Knutsford also enjoys excellent access to Manchester Airport.



Strategic Connections and Assets Plan





Key Characteristics

- Historic Market Town
- Approx 13,300 population
- A good mix of over 200 retail units including: independent shops, cafes, restaurants, galleries and larger supermarket units too
- Close proximity to Tatton Park
- Excellent access to M6 and M56 as well as Manchester Airport

Knutsford Neighbourhood Plan Vision and Objectives

Knutsford Town Council is proactive and initiated the preparation of the Knutsford Neighbourhood Plan. It sets out the Vision and Objectives for the Town.

Vision

“The Knutsford Neighbourhood Plan should:

- Ensure that the Town thrives economically and socially as a historic market town
- Protect and enhance the Town’s character, variety of buildings and natural environment
- Support the delivery of the facilities and infrastructure the Town needs
- Maintain Knutsford’s strong sense of community as it grows allowing it to remain an attractive, healthy and safe place to live, work and visit”



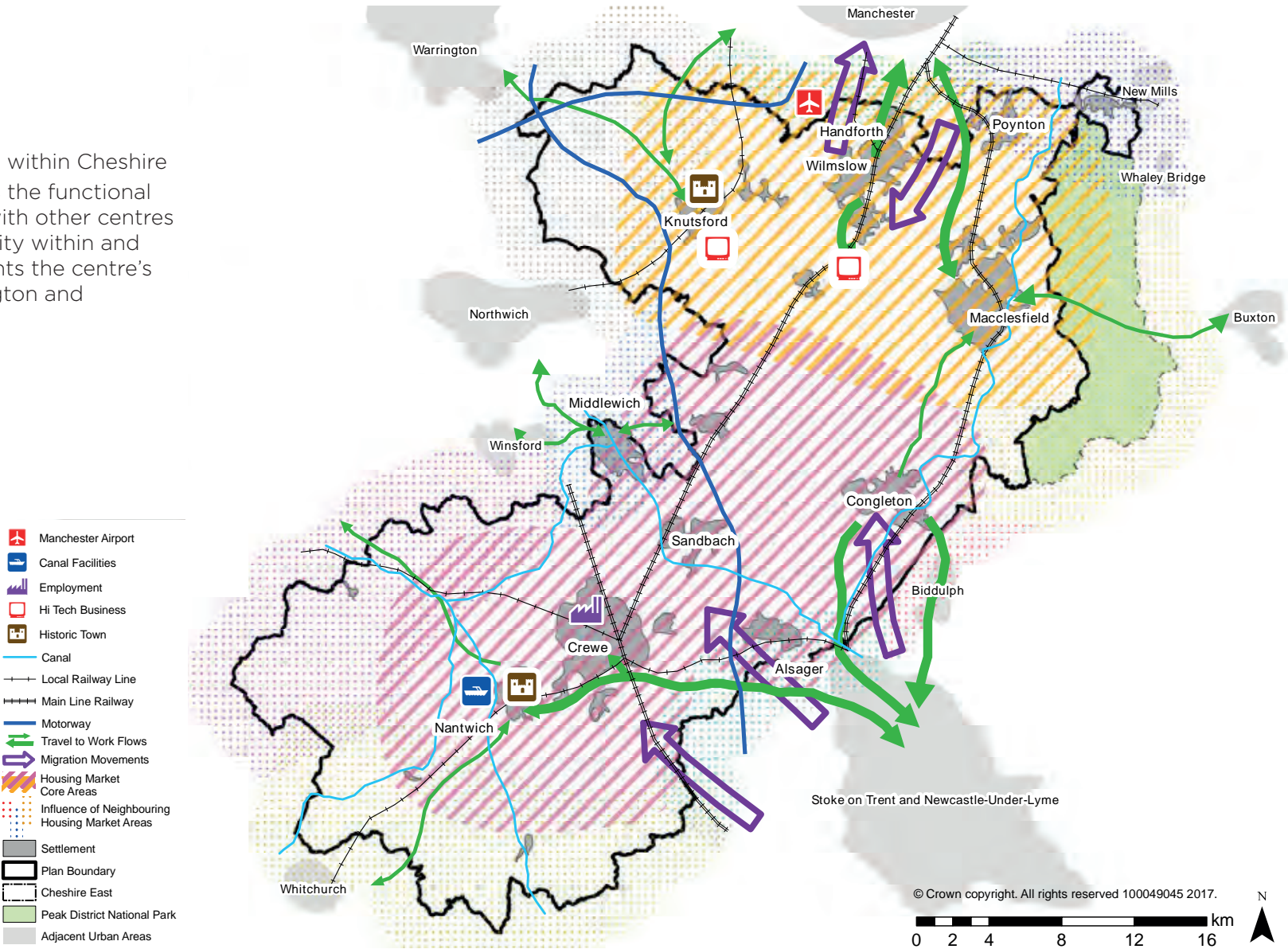
Objectives

1. **Community and Education Infrastructure**
To ensure that people of all ages and abilities within Knutsford and its wider catchment have excellent access to, and timely provision of, quality services and facilities, including schools and public meeting places.
2. **Healthy Living and Wellbeing** To achieve infrastructure supportive of the health needs of local residents and Knutsford's wider catchment, by securing an expansion of medical and social services and by promoting healthy living and general wellbeing through careful design.
3. **Sport and Leisure** To ensure provision of accessible sports and leisure facilities for all ages and abilities for Knutsford residents and those in the wider catchment area, so that various activities for improvements in individual health and wellbeing can be encouraged.
4. **Environment and Green Infrastructure**
To ensure Knutsford's green and open spaces and landscape setting are protected, retained, and enhanced by, but are not limited to, preserving views and vistas, safeguarding against pollution, and flooding, and protecting the Town's wildlife and biodiversity.
5. **Heritage** To retain Knutsford's distinctive historic character as an attractive rural market town by conserving the Town's many heritage assets and ensuring that any new development serves to makes a positive contribution to the existing historic environment, including contemporary, energy efficient designs.
6. **Housing** To provide a mix of housing which meets identified local housing needs, including affordable housing, is delivered in a location where it is needed reflecting the strategy outlined in the Local Plan, and to ensure that it is sustainable and well-designed, and that it complements the character of Knutsford.
7. **Future Prosperity and Employment**
To ensure the long-term viability and prosperity of the Town by extending the diversity of services and occupations, through supporting existing employment areas throughout the Town and identifying new and varied opportunities, including mixed-use, as well as encouraging home working and local knowledge-based industries.
8. **Traffic, Transport and Movement** To promote safe, healthy, and sustainable travel for all, in and around Knutsford, linking residential, employment and community facilities, by reducing congestion and traffic pollution, and making the Town more pedestrian- and cycling-friendly, so encouraging sustainable transport modes.
9. **Town Centre** To promote a range of retail opportunities and a variety of trades and services in the Town Centre to ensure its long-term viability and prosperity and improve pedestrian movement to effectively meet the needs of residents, visitors, and local workers.

03 Policy Context

Local Policy

Knutsford is a key service centre within Cheshire East. The plan opposite identifies the functional relationship that Knutsford has with other centres through connectivity and proximity within and out with Cheshire East. It highlights the centre's proximity to the M6 and Warrington and Manchester



Source: Cheshire East Local Plan: Strategy 2010-2030 2017, Functional Diagram, pg 22

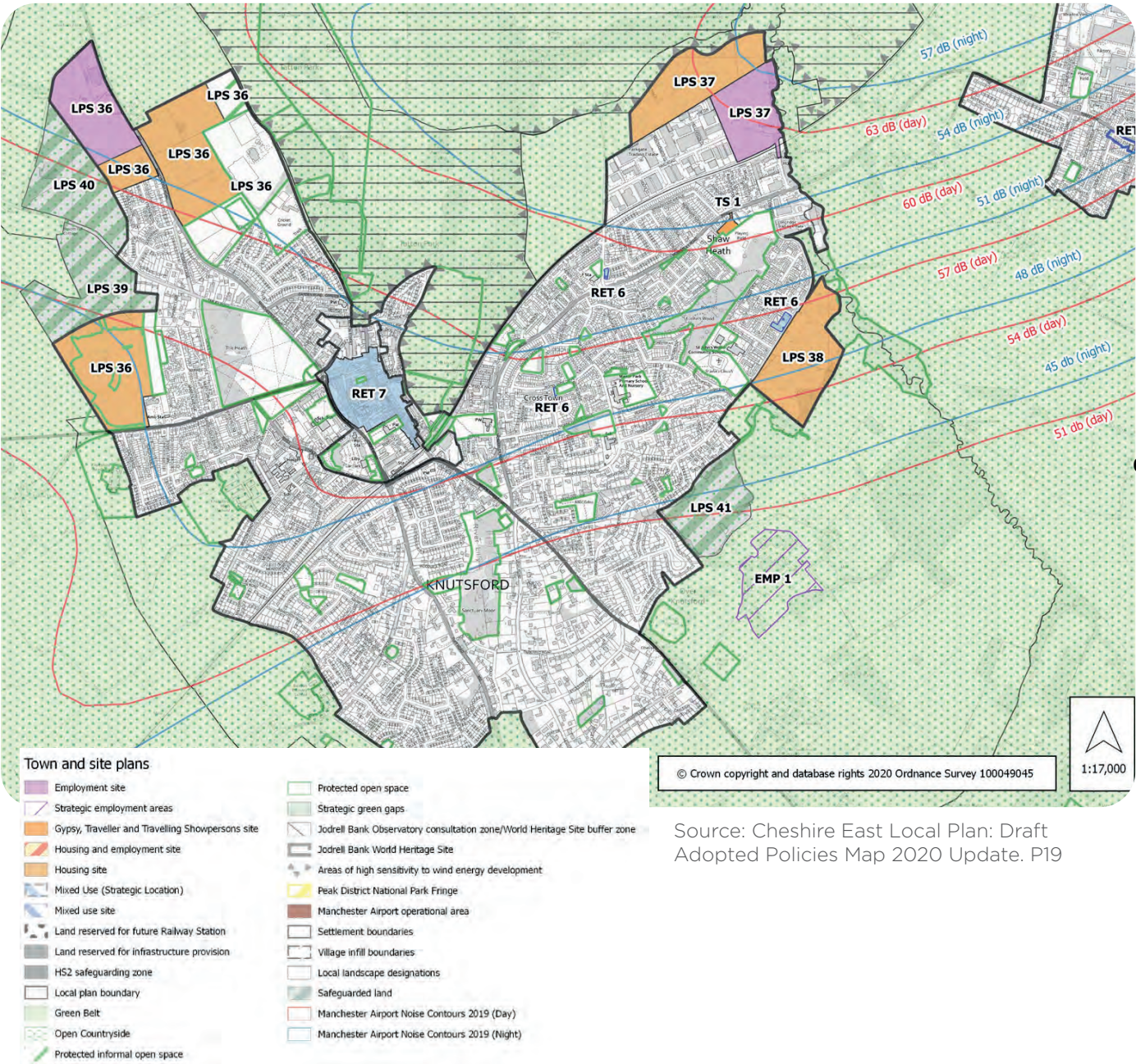
Local Plan Strategy 2017 (LPS) and Revised Publication Draft Site Allocations and Development Policies Document (SADPD) 2020

The Cheshire East Local Plan Strategy was adopted in 2017 setting strategic development sites around the borough.

SADPD will form the second part of the Local Plan, supporting the policies and proposals in the LPS by providing additional non-strategic policy detail and allocating additional sites to assist in meeting the overall development requirements set out in the LPS.

The plan opposite identifies Local Plan Strategy sites in and around Knutsford for growth in the future

- Knutsford is a key service centre. Key sites close to the Town Centre which have been allocated include:
- LPS 36 North West Knutsford Phased provision of around 500 new homes and 7.5 hectares of high quality Class B1 business park development within the following sites:
 - LPS 36(A) Land North of Northwich Road (175 dwellings);
 - LPS 36(B) Land West of Manchester Road (75 dwellings and the development of a new 7.5 hectare high quality Class B1 business park; and
 - LPS 36(C) Land East of Manchester Road 250 dwellings



Source: Cheshire East Local Plan: Draft Adopted Policies Map 2020 Update. P19

Knutsford Neighbourhood Plan
January 2019

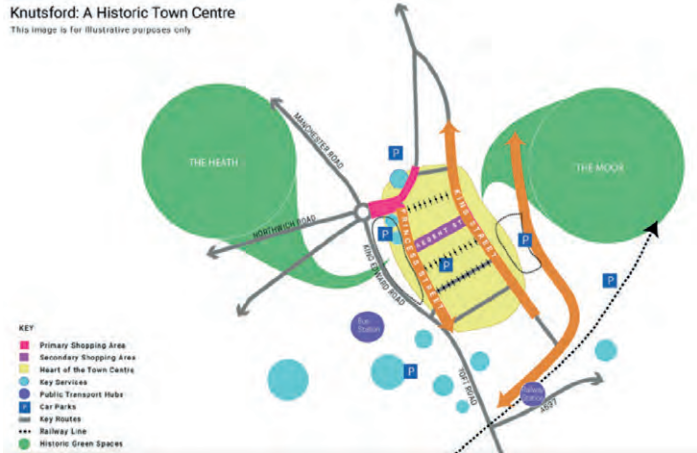
Knutsford Town Council commenced the preparation of the Neighbourhood Plan in 2014 which included large scale community consultation in 2016, 2017 and culminated in the final consultation on the draft plan in 2018. A referendum was held in March 2019 and the plan was made in May 2019.

Key ambitions identified in the of the Neighbourhood Plan include:

- Ensuring that the proposed housing and employment allocations integrate well with the existing community and the landscape setting and are well designed
- Ensuring that traffic congestion is addressed, and that new development does not make the situation worse, while encouraging walking and cycling as alternatives to the private car
- Ensuring that any new development reflects the local character of the Town, key landscape and wildlife features and protects existing open spaces
- Ensuring that new development outside the allocated sites is appropriate to the local area, preserves amenity and does not result in over-development

- Ensuring that the Town is provided with community infrastructure (such as schools, healthcare, sports, leisure) to accommodate the growth proposed, including taking account of wider catchments reflecting its designation as a Key Service Centre.
- Ensuring that smaller properties are built, and not just large executive homes, to meet the needs of the elderly, first time buyers and those wishing to downsize
- Ensuring that Knutsford provides an appropriate mix of employment types including high-tech, research and development, and those working from home
- Ensuring that the Town Centre remains vibrant and seeks to deliver a wider range of shops, facilities and sporting and leisure activities, and is more pedestrian friendly.

It should also be noted that the Town Council has confirmed strategic aims of ensuring Knutsford Town Centre remains a thriving independent destination for visitors and promoting active travel/public transport and reduce the need for use of cars.



Source: Knutsford Neighbourhood Plan 2020, pages 30 and 32.

Knutsford From Top to Bottom Street

The Neighbourhood Plan identified an aspiration to deliver a Masterplan which will seek to support Town Centre living, small scale independent retail and a new outdoor Town Centre meeting place or square. As the first stage of this masterplan and in recognition of the importance of the issues around access and movement, the Neighbourhood Plan Town Centre Working Group started to explore different options for a scheme for management of vehicle access and traffic flow within the Town Centre, with the aim of redressing the over-dominance of cars within the Town Centre and giving pedestrians greater priority. A series of reports entitled 'From Top to Bottom Street' were prepared analysing the issues.

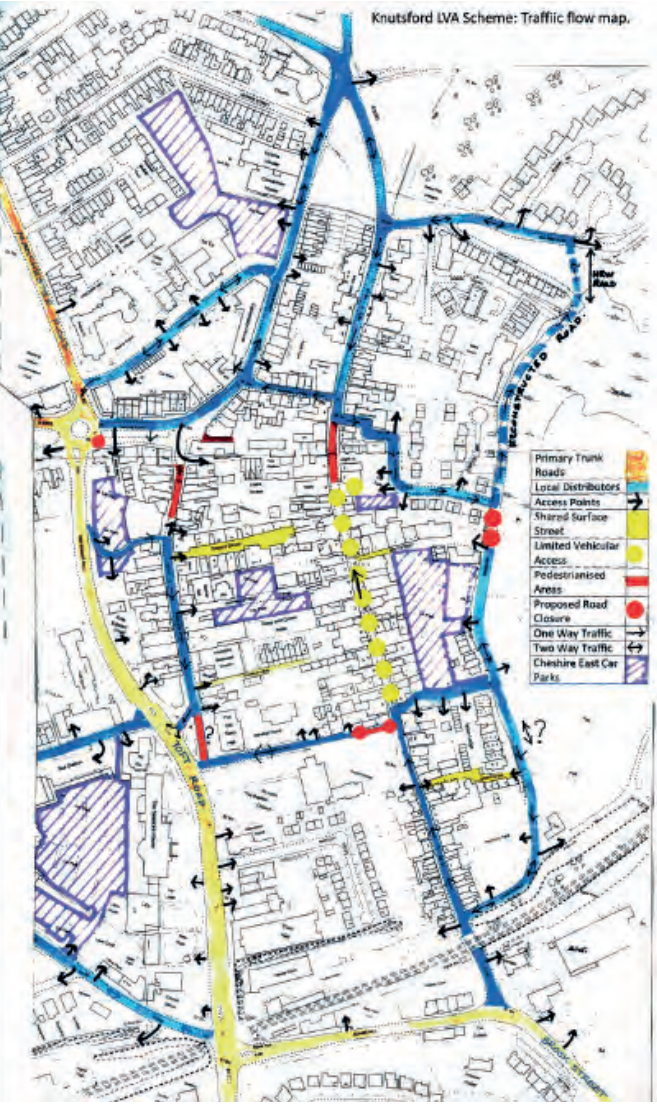
The Town Council issued a consultation report in May 2020 in respect of proposed changes to traffic flow and car parking in the Town Centre. This summarised the key findings from public consultation on proposals to change the flow of traffic in the Town Centre, and to change vehicle parking provision and regulations. The aim is to make Knutsford more friendly to pedestrians, as a first stage of a 'Masterplan' to ensure long term vitality, appeal and prosperity. The traffic and parking proposals have three inter-related parts:

- Changing Princess Street ('Top Street') and King Street ('Bottom Street') to access roads instead of through roads,

- Making better use of on- and off-road parking spaces, and encouraging the development of at least one CEC multi-storey car park,
- Reducing the number of parking bays on King and Princess Streets, reserving most for blue badge holders, and enforcing the no-parking regulations and double yellow lines.

The consultation ran for 6 weeks and 658 responses were received. The Town Council is now seeking to work with CEC to determine how to respond to the findings and to encourage recovery of the Town Centre post-Covid19, and therefore ensure that the results of the public consultation remain valid.

A series of other reports have also been prepared by local groups to protect and enhance the town including a series of urban design guides including Knutsford Design Guidance and Knutsford Character Assessment.

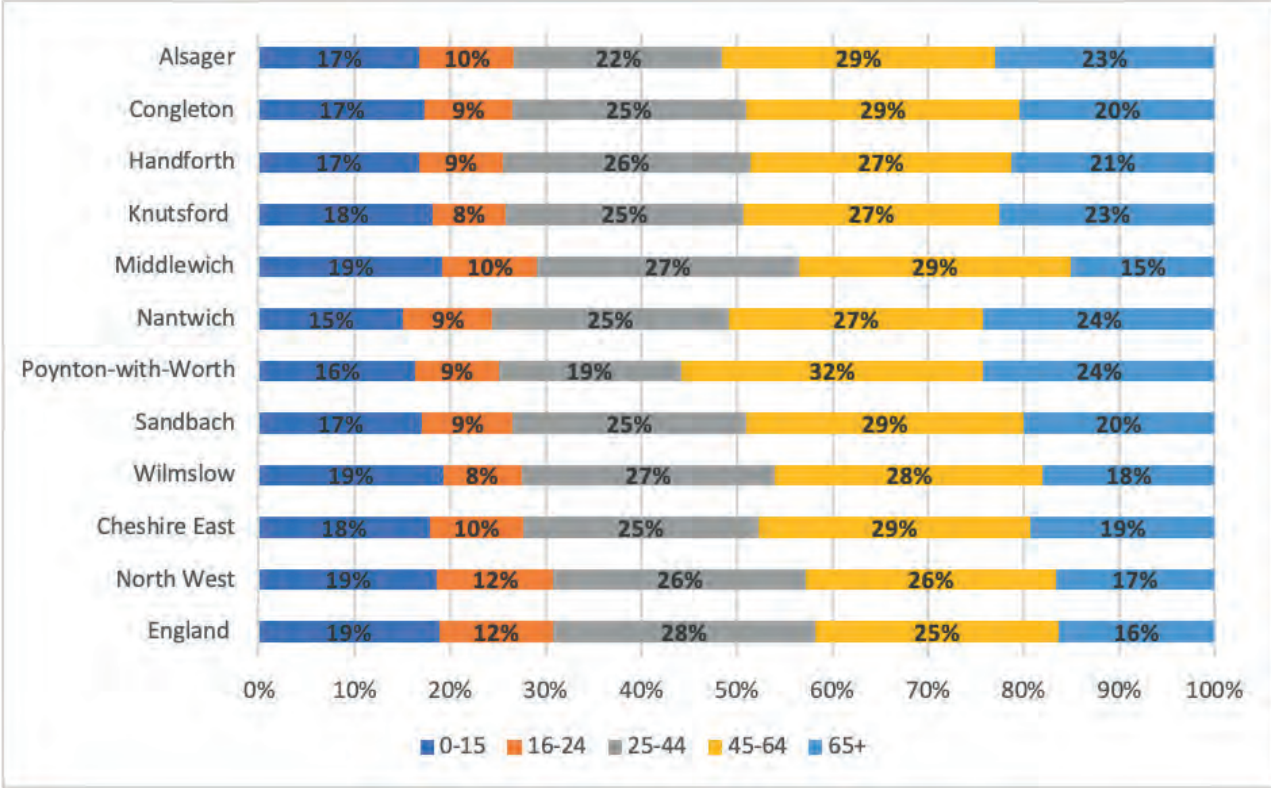


Source: From Top to Bottom Street, Knutsford Study 2020

Age

The 2011 Census data indicates that the Knutsford parish area had a population of 13,191 residents representing 3.6% of Cheshire East’s total population (370,127). Knutsford’s age profile is similar to that of Cheshire East. Knutsford sits in line with the other Key Service Centres in terms of the proportion of 25-44-year olds, the most economically active age group. Knutsford also has one of the highest average (mean) ages across the 9 KSC’s at 43 years old which is higher than the Cheshire East mean age (42) and the wider geographies of the North West (40) and England (39).

It is anticipated that when the 2021 Census data is available it should show an increase in younger residents given the number of family homes being delivered in the wider area.



Age Structure.
Source: Census 2011, Office for National Statistics (ONS)
Most recent consistent data available across the 9 centres

Ethnicity

Broken-down by ethnic group the Census 2011 (latest) shows the resident population across the Cheshire East is predominantly white at 96.7% which is a higher proportion than the wider geographies of the North West (90.2%) and England (85.4%).The majority of the population in Knutsford is also white (96.5%), however compared to other KSC’s Knutsford has the third highest proportion of Asian/Asian British residents (1.8%/ 233 people).

Area	White	Mixed/ multiple ethnic groups	Asian/ Asian British	Black/ African/ Caribbean/ Black British	Other ethnic group
Alsager	97.6%	1.1%	1.0%	0.2%	0.1%
Congleton	98.0%	0.6%	1.1%	0.2%	0.2%
Handforth	93.1%	1.5%	3.9%	0.9%	0.7%
Knutsford	96.5%	1.2%	1.8%	0.3%	0.3%
Middlewich	98.5%	0.8%	0.6%	0.1%	0.1%
Nantwich	98.1%	0.7%	0.7%	0.3%	0.1%
Poynton-with-Worth	98.0%	0.5%	1.1%	0.1%	0.2%
Sandbach	98.1%	0.7%	0.9%	0.2%	0.2%
Wilmslow	92.6%	1.7%	4.4%	0.5%	0.7%
Cheshire East	96.7%	1.0%	1.6%	0.4%	0.2%
North West	90.2%	1.6%	6.2%	1.4%	0.6%
England	85.4%	2.3%	7.8%	3.5%	1.0%

Population by Ethnic Group
Source: Census 2011, Office for National Statistics (ONS)
Most recent consistent data available across the 9 centres

Occupational Profile

At the time of the 2011 Census, a large proportion of Knutsford residents were employed in higher order occupations including ‘managers, directors and senior officials’ (17.2%) and ‘professional occupations’ (26.2%) - a much higher rate than the wider Borough, regional and national benchmarks. Conversely, just 12.0% were engaged in manual or elementary occupations. This is much lower than the North West (19.8%) and England rate (18.3%). The occupational structure of Knutsford suggests a highly skilled workforce, which will in turn attract businesses (who want to attract highly skilled employees) to locate in the area.

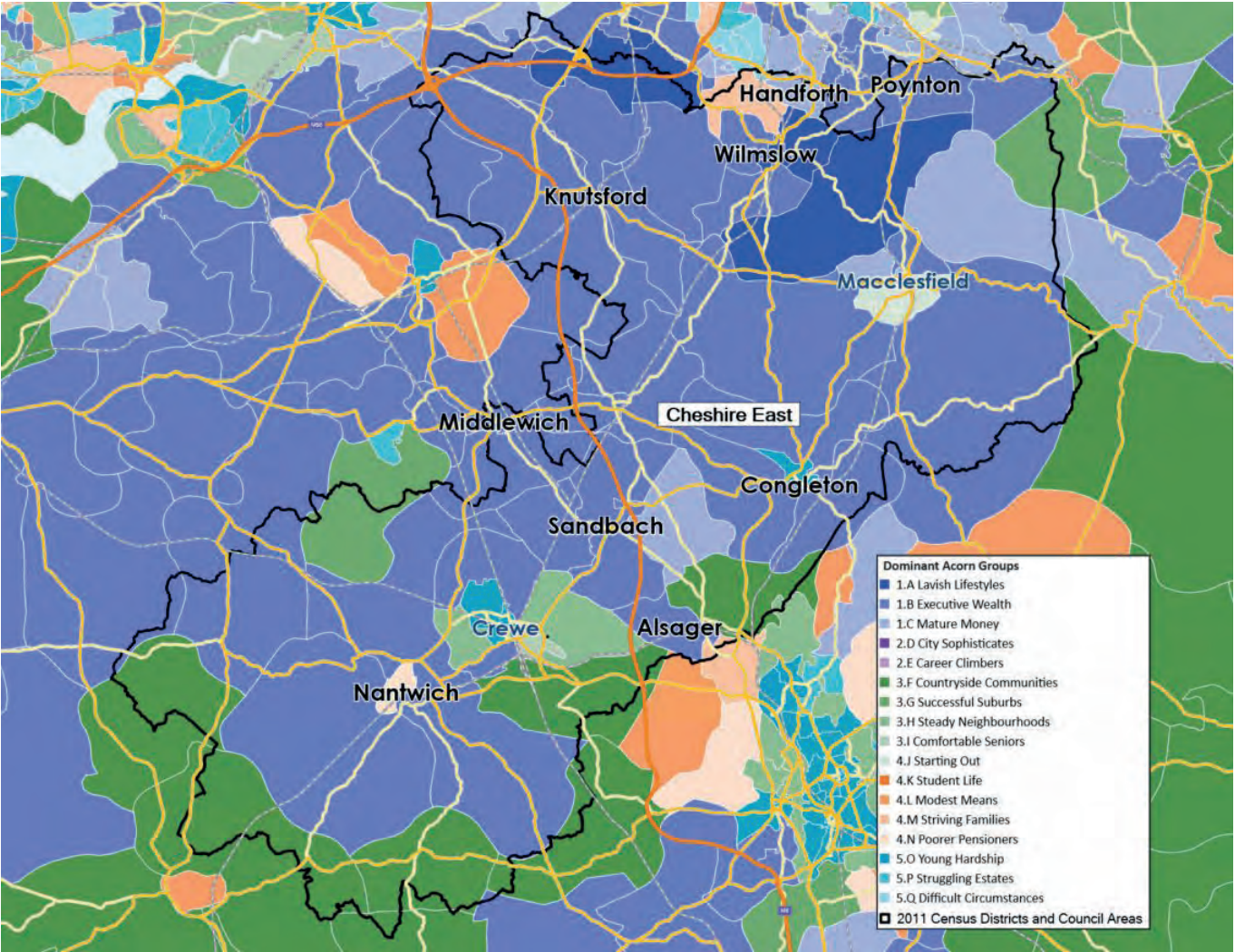
Built Up Area	Alsager	Congleton	Knutsford	Middlewich	Nantwich	Poynton	Sandbach	Wilmslow	Cheshire East	North West	England
Managers, directors and senior officials	12.8	11.7	17.2	11.9	14.3	14.9	12.6	18.3	13.6	9.9	10.9
Professional occupations	22.3	18.9	26.2	15.8	21.8	24.0	19.9	24.6	19.6	16.3	17.5
Associate professional and technical occupations	12.6	13.2	15.1	13.4	12.3	15.1	13.3	16.3	13.0	11.5	12.8
Administrative and secretarial occupations	11.4	10.3	9.4	11.8	10.0	12.2	11.0	9.9	10.4	11.7	11.5
Skilled trades occupations	10.1	11.6	6.4	11.0	9.8	8.6	10.2	6.6	10.4	11.3	11.4
Caring, leisure and other service occupations	8.7	9.5	8.0	9.9	8.2	7.7	9.2	7.8	8.9	10.1	9.3
Sales and customer service occupations	7.5	7.0	5.7	7.4	8.3	8.0	8.2	6.9	7.5	9.4	8.4
Process, plant and machine operatives	5.8	7.9	3.8	8.5	6.0	3.3	6.6	3.0	6.5	8.1	7.2
Elementary occupations	8.8	9.9	8.2	10.4	9.3	6.3	9.0	6.6	10.2	11.7	11.1

Occupational Profile
Source: Census 2011
Most recent consistent data available across the 9 centres

Demographic Characterisation

CACI Acorn classifications of local postcode geographies provide precise information and an in-depth understanding of different consumer types by analysing significant social factors and consumer behaviour. Demographic analysis of Cheshire East area demonstrates diverse segmentation groups across the area. The dominant Acorn group in Knutsford and its wider surrounding area is Executive Wealth, affluent professionals with families living in large homes.

- Dominant Age Groups
- 1. A Lavish Lifestyles
 - 1. B Executive Wealth
 - 1. C Mature Money
 - 2. D City Sophisticates
 - 2. E Career Climbers
 - 3. F Countryside Communities
 - 3. G Successful Suburbs
 - 3. H Steady Neighbourhoods
 - 3. I Comfortable Seniors
 - 4. J Starting Out
 - 4. K Student Life
 - 4. L Modest Means
 - 4. M Striving Families
 - 4. N Poorer Pensioners
 - 5. O Young Hardship
 - 5. P Struggling Estates
 - 5. Q Difficult Circumstances
- 2011 Census Districts and Council Areas

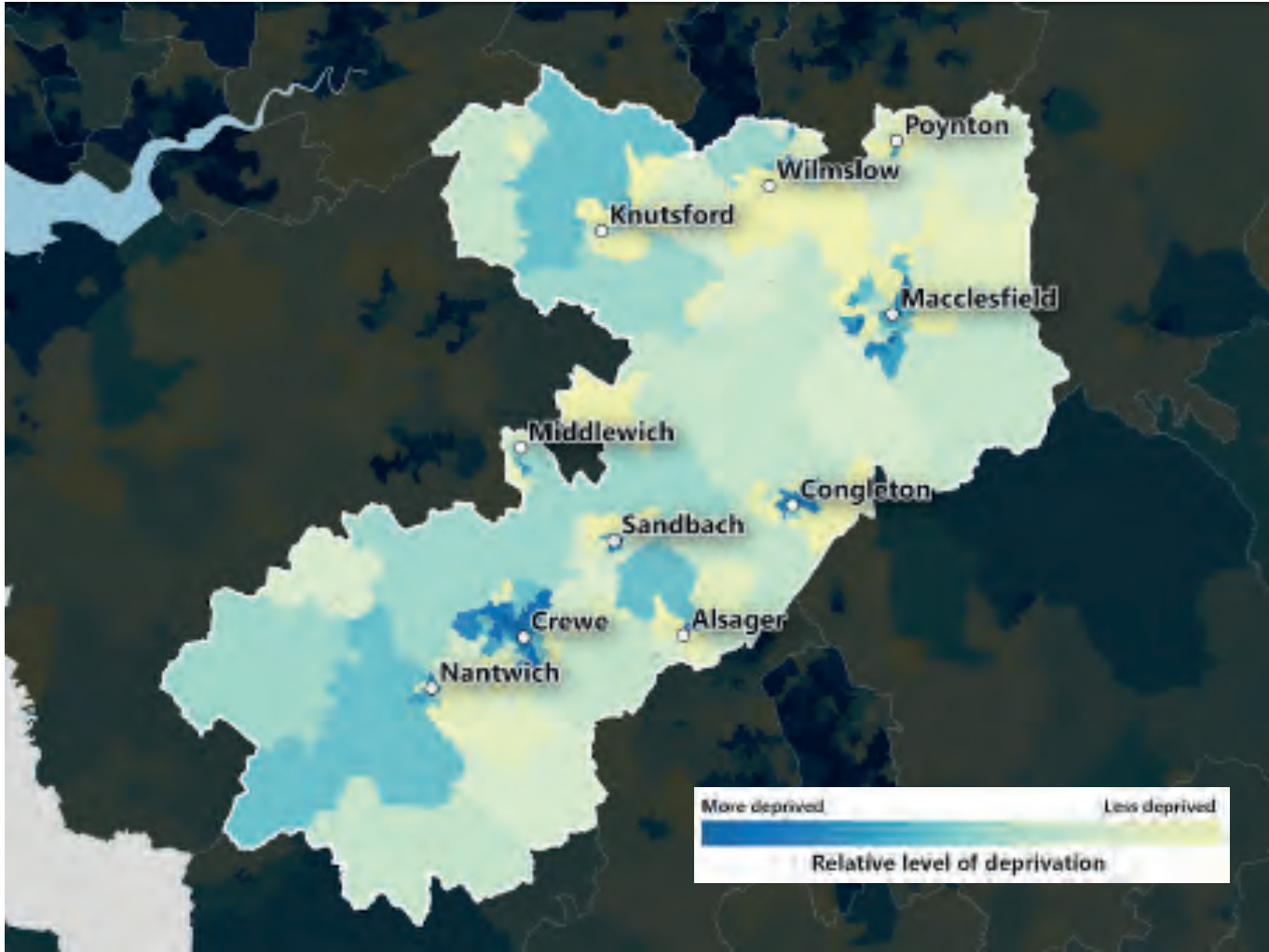


CACI Acorn Classifications
Source: CACI
Most recent consistent data available across the 9 centres

Index of Multiple Deprivation

The Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) 2019 illustrates the spatial distribution and pockets of deprivation relative to national averages. Cheshire East ranked 228th most deprived out of 317 local authorities in 2019 indicating relatively low levels of deprivation. Just 1.7% of the Borough is within the top 10% most deprived areas in England, with these most deprived areas being concentrated around Crewe and to a lesser extent, Macclesfield. Knutsford is within the 20% least areas of deprivation nationally. However it should be recognised that there is a pocket of local deprivation which is within the 30% most deprived neighbourhoods (dark blue)

It should be recognised that this could cause challenges for accessing centralised funding, as such funding is often prioritised to the most deprived areas.



Source: MHCLG, IMD 2019



Local Context

Knutsford continues to provide a vibrant Town Centre and remains a popular destination for both residents and visitors from further afield

The Town Centre is steeped in rich heritage which creates a unique market town character. This unique character provides an attractive environment and continues to benefit from a strong leisure offer which extends the centres' opening hours into the evening.

The Town Centre is surrounded by good quality green space such as The Heath, The Moor and Knutsford Golf Course, however Tatton Park, which is National Trust owned hosts the primary green space and recreational offer in Knutsford.

Knutsford has excellent links to the strategic transport network with its surrounding A roads providing direct access to the M56 motorway, Manchester City Centre and Manchester Airport. Manchester Airport is accessible from Knutsford within less than 20 minutes drive time.



Spatial Review

An analysis of the experiential quality of the Town Centre is provided over the next few pages. The review is based on information gathered from a number of site visits to the Town Centre during September / October 2020 and is assessed by the key vitality indicators listed below:

- Quality of the place
- People
- Sense of Community
- Accessibility
- Gateways
- Wayfinding
- Attractions
- Amenities
- Sense of a Centre
- Character
- Public realm
- Green space
- Derelict Sites/ Vacant units
- Housing
- Covid measures

Visit information

	Visit 1	Visit 2
Date of visit:	Sunday 6th September 2020	Monday 26th October 2020
Time of day:	12-3pm	3-4pm
Weather:	Sun, Light drizzle	Heavy rain and sun
Mode of transport:	Car	Car
COVID 19 Lockdown Status	Eased restrictions, rule of six indoors and outdoors	Tier Two - rule of six indoors and outdoors

Quality of the place

- Medium sized, well kept market town
- Rich in historical character
- Little residential offer within Town Centre
- Good range of shops and services



People

- Population on day of visit mostly included families, elderly couples or groups of teens
- Quite a heavy footfall for a Sunday and Monday when site visits were undertaken



Sense of Community

- Noticeboards seem up to date
- Lots of planters
- Local markets
- Cycling events



Accessibility

- 10 minute walk from train station at Toft Road
- On street parking and designated car parks to rear of building as well as larger surface parking
- No segregated cycle routes but a few people cycling
- Narrow paving along King Street
- Lots of alleys and through routes for pedestrians to cut through.



Gateways

- No clearly defined gateway that is suitable for vehicles, pedestrians and cyclists
- Canute Place
- Princess Street / Toft Road Junction
- King Street / Brook Street junction

Wayfinding

- Lots of signage which complements the historic nature of the town



Attractions

- Lots of cafes and restaurants, signs of outdoor seating
- Local makers market
- Tatton Park
- Cheshire cycling events
- Knutsford Heritage Centre
- Brook Street Heritage Site



Amenities

- Library, town council, community club, churches, health centre
- Independent Cinema
- Booths and Aldi supermarkets, Sainsburys Local, Coop, and local Waitrose



Sense of a Centre

- Disconnect between areas leads to no real sense of centre
- Opportunity to create a centre at Canute Place or Princess Street / Toft Street Junction
- Retail core perhaps acts as a larger central space



Character

- Town Centre steeped in historical character
- Lots of listed buildings
- Narrow streets create sense of enclosure
- Shop fronts maintain character and are well kept



Public Realm

- Pavement and road surfaces are tired and worn in places
- Some newer areas of hard landscaping, along Regent Street
- Narrow paving is not adequate for prams or wheelchairs or other mobility issues

Green space

- Tatton Park is less than 10 mins walk from the Town Centre
- Wallwood Park provides a nice pocket space to the north of the town
- Disconnect between green spaces - The Moor, Knutsford Heath and Tatton Park



Derelict Sites/ Vacant units

- Quite a few vacant units, which detract from the vibrancy of the Town Centre



Housing

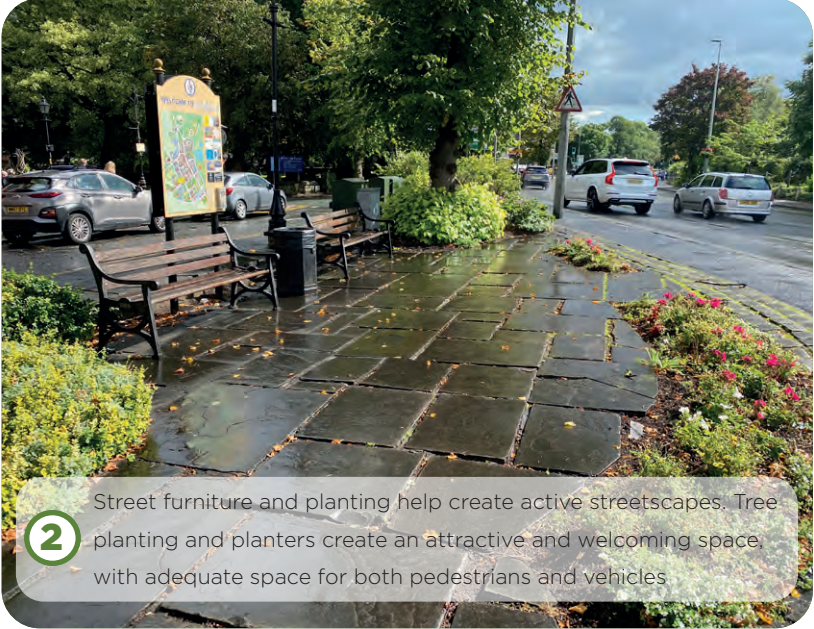
- Little to no local housing within the immediate Town Centre, however as we move out of the retail centre, houses are usually terraced, cottages or apartments



Positive Features

Positive spatial elements are identified on the plan:

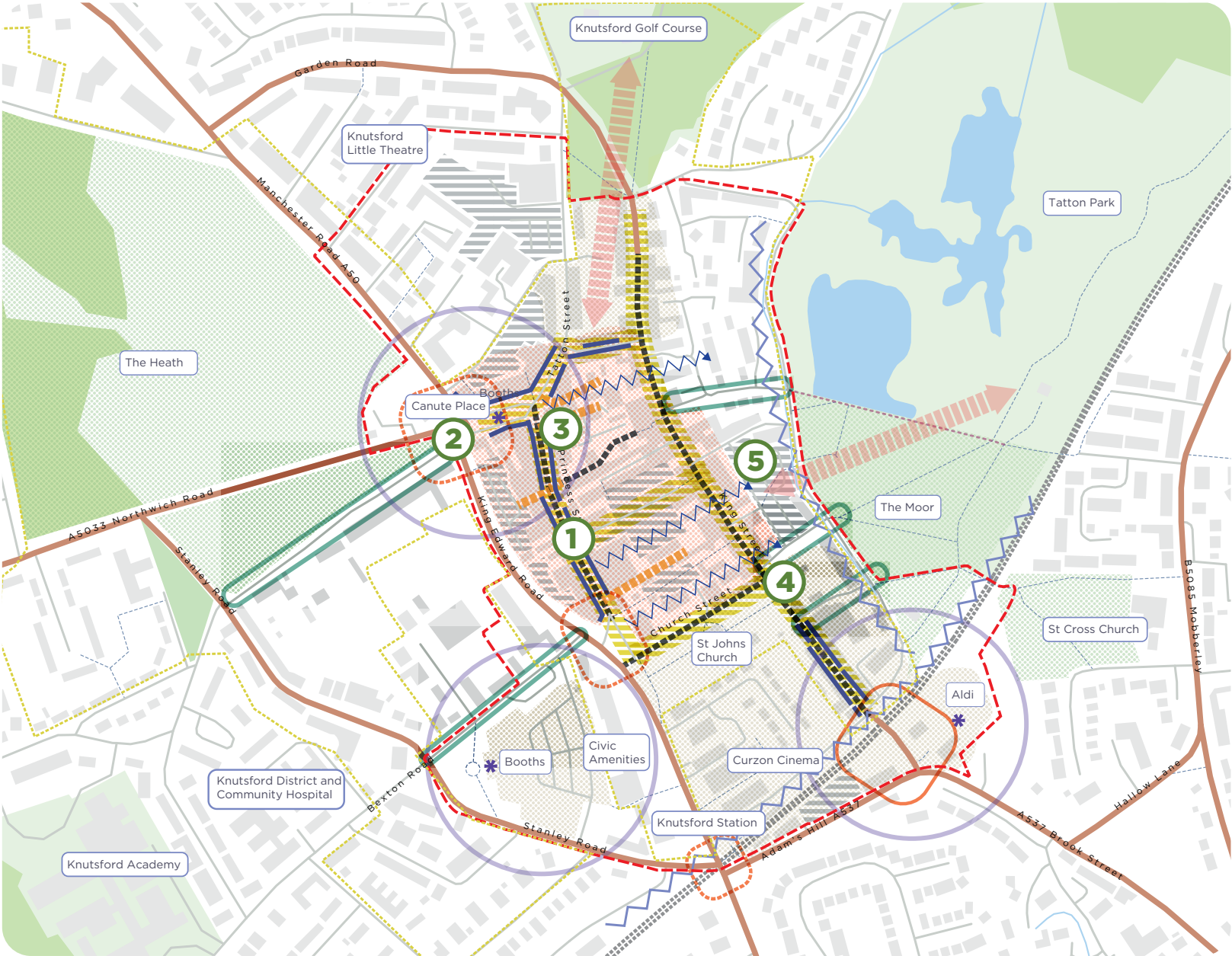
- Key
- Local Centre boundary
 - Conservation area boundary
 - Primary retail core
 - Positive space/arrival space
 - Potential to enhance community square
 - Historic Assets
 - Positive streetscape with active uses
 - Active ground floor uses (some reducing in number)
 - Anchor Retail
 - Primary active frontage onto streets
 - Secondary active frontage onto streets
 - Key sight lines
 - Publicly accessed green space
 - Potential Development sites for (Neighbourhood Plan in 2016)
 - Primary routes
 - Key connections
 - Key pedestrian connections
 - Potential key routes
 - Cycle paths
 - Pedestrian routes
 - Central Open Space
 - Knutsford Station



Negative Features

Negative spatial elements are identified on the plan:

- Key
- Local Centre boundary
 - Conservation Area boundary
 - Streets and spaces dominated by car parking
 - Streets with narrow footways / poor pedestrian provision
 - Arrival gateways with a low quality arrival experience
 - Arrival gateway constrained by railway over-bridge and narrow footways
 - Areas of poor quality public realm (primarily low grade / aged materials, lack of street furniture and tree planting)
 - Low quality frontages
 - Arrival destinations
 - Links with poor legibility to and from the town centre
 - Local streets leading to cul-de-sacs or unclear where they connect to
 - Extent of area which reads as part of the Town Centre
 - Areas which feel beyond the extent of the Town Centre
 - Key assets which feel disconnected from the Town Centre
 - Land slope
 - Areas of severance



Summary of Spatial Elements

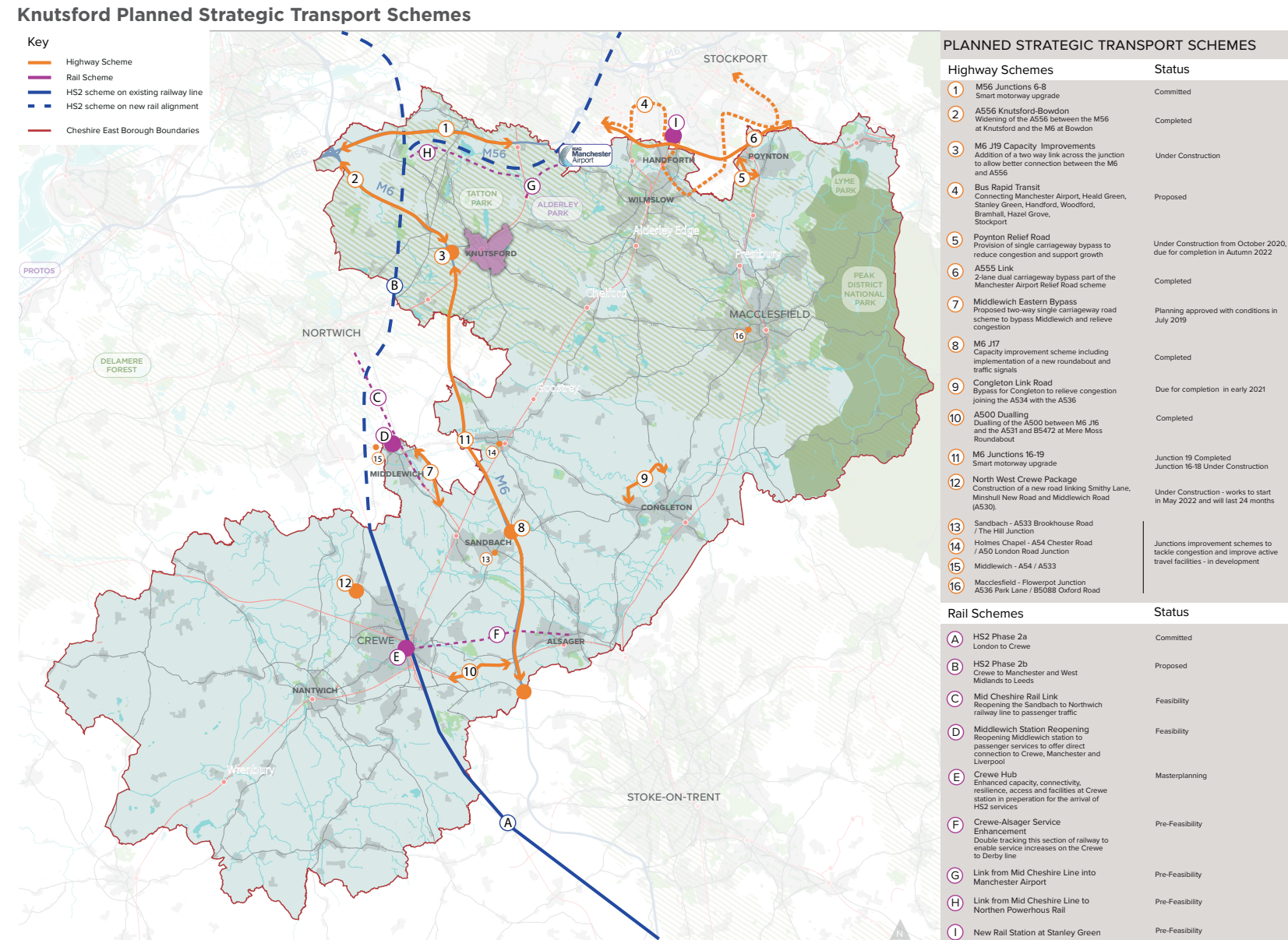
The table below and on the opposite page identifies the key positive and spatial attributes for the Town Centre:

Public Realm	Gateways	Open Space	Heritage	Townscape Quality	Legibility
Positives					
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Some newer areas of hard landscaping, along Regent StreetStreet furniture and tidy planters are well maintained throughout the Town Centre	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Walkable distance (c. 10 mins) from the train stationResidential housing within walking distance from the centrePotential for an enhanced gateway at Canute Place and to the south of the town at the train station	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Tatton Park is less than 10 mins walk from the Town CentreWallwood Park provides a nice pocket space to the north of the townOpportunity for better links between Tatton Park, The Heath and The Moorswell used 'Donkey routes'	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Knutsford has an attractive townscape along it's primary routes within the Town Centre, characterised by well kept period villas and terraces with many original features and which address the streetTatton Park also hosts a National Trust Property	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Mix of Victorian and newer shop fronts adds to varietyActive frontages along key retail areasBooths and Aldi supermarkets are located south of the Town Centre, with primarily independent retailers throughout the Town CentreShop fronts mostly well kept	<ul style="list-style-type: none">The fairly compact and linear nature of the main centre means it is easy to navigateLots of signage which complements the historic nature of the town

Public Realm	Gateways	Open Space	Heritage	Townscape Quality	Legibility
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Pavement and road surfaces are tired and worn in placesNarrow paving is not adequate for prams or wheelchairs or other mobility issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none">No clearly defined gateway that is suitable for vehicles, pedestrians and cyclists	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Disconnect between green spaces - The Moor, Knutsford Heath and Tatton Park	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Heritage could be better celebratedNo sense of proximity to Tatton Park within the Town Centre	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Disconnect between areas leads to no real sense of centreOpportunity to create a centre at Canute Place or Princess Street / Toft Street JunctionRetail core perhaps acts as a larger central space	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Town Centre heavily dominated by on street parking and designated car parks to rear of buildings as well as larger surface parking and doesn't read as a pedestrian friendly townNo segregated cycle routes

06 Connectivity and Accessibility

Knutsford has excellent links to the strategic transport network with its surrounding A roads providing direct access to the M56 motorway, Manchester City Centre and Manchester Airport. Manchester Airport is accessible from Knutsford within less than 20 minutes drive time making it an attractive place to live, work and invest. As well as Manchester, which is readily accessible by both road and rail, Knutsford is within a 1-hour drive away from other major cities such as Liverpool and Chester via the M56.



Town Centre Transport Baseline Analysis



Car Parking

Car parking within the centre of Knutsford is a mixture of dense on-street parking provisions within the main retail areas and off-street surface car parks. Off-street car parks are all pay and display with parking tariffs inconsistent between the various locations. The On-street parking provided is limited to a 1 hour stay between 8am and 6pm Monday to Saturday.

On-street parking along the pedestrian routes of King Street and Princess Street combined with the narrow highway widths and pavements often causes conflicts with pedestrians. Roads also often become blocked as a result of this lack of available space creating issues for emergency and service vehicles. A high level of car ownership amongst residents (only 17% of households do not have access to a car) and limited active travel infrastructure presents the need for car parking to be carefully considered. Opportunities to reduce car parking within these streets should therefore be considered in order to enhance the environments for pedestrians and improve access for service vehicles.

The TCVPs consider the role of car parking in relation to the vibrancy and vitality of each town centre. However, any proposals to review or modernise car parking provision and management will be considered on a town by town basis as part of the Council's approach to travel demand management. Therefore the delivery of any car parking proposals is outside the scope of the TCVPs.

Town Centre	Car Park ID	Parking Spaces	Duration	Pricing
Knutsford	Tatton St Car Park	144	Long Stay	Pay & Display
	Canute Place Car Park	27	Long and Short Stay	Pay & Display
	Old Market Place Car Park	11	Long Stay	Pay & Display
	King St Car Park	125	Short Stay	Pay & Display
	Princess St Car Park	54	Long Stay	Pay & Display
	Silk Mill Car Park	45	Short Stay	Pay & Display
	Knutsford Station Car Park	90	Long Stay	Pay & Display
	TOTAL	496		

In addition there are privately operated car parks on Green Street and Northwich Road

Public Realm

Public realm around Knutsford generally consists of aging infrastructure. A poor standard of footways can be seen within the main pedestrian areas of King Street and Princess Street presenting uneven surfaces with trip hazards and narrow footway widths creating significant conflict between pedestrians and vehicles.

As the main visible area from the surrounding highway network, the area around the Princess Street / Toft Road junction would benefit from public realm enhancements to increase the sense of arrival in the Town Centre and enhance sense of place.

Aside from surrounding parks and green spaces, the Town Centre itself lacks public spaces including shade and shelter, and spaces where people can stop and rest. Opportunities for new public spaces including meeting spaces and pocket parks, as well as general improvements to public realm should therefore be considered across the centre of Knutsford as a whole.

Road Safety

A number of junctions within the vicinity of Toft Road have been identified as collision hotspots which may indicate a potential road safety issue. The Town Centre may therefore benefit from improved crossing facilities along Toft Road to enable safer access to the Town Centre for pedestrians and cyclists from areas to the west.

Clusters of collisions can also be seen around the Princess Street/Church Street junction and around the Stanley Road/ King Edward Road junction in the vicinity of the station. As a key route for pedestrians accessing the station and facilities within the Town Centre, junction improvements at this location should be considered to enhance safety for all road users.

Active Travel

One of the key pedestrian routes between King Street and Princess Street along Church Hill comprises a steep cobbled street for vehicles. The removal of traffic from this small stretch of street would contribute towards prioritising pedestrians and cyclists in the Town Centre over vehicles enhancing sense of place and encouraging dwell time.

Knutsford Town Centres location in proximity to key attractions and green spaces such as Tatton Park provides a good opportunity to enhance levels of walking and cycling in the area. However, links to Tatton Park from the Town Centre could be strengthened.

Active travel infrastructure within the Town Centre is also limited with facilities for cyclists and a lack of secure cycle parking. Opportunities to enhance the provision of cycle parking should therefore be considered. This could include the rethink of the existing provision of on-street parking bays or a vacant shop unit to provide secure and sheltered cycle parking. In regard to the Knutsford Revolution Cycle route, the LTDP suggests improvements to it such as improved crossing points on the A50.

Public Transport

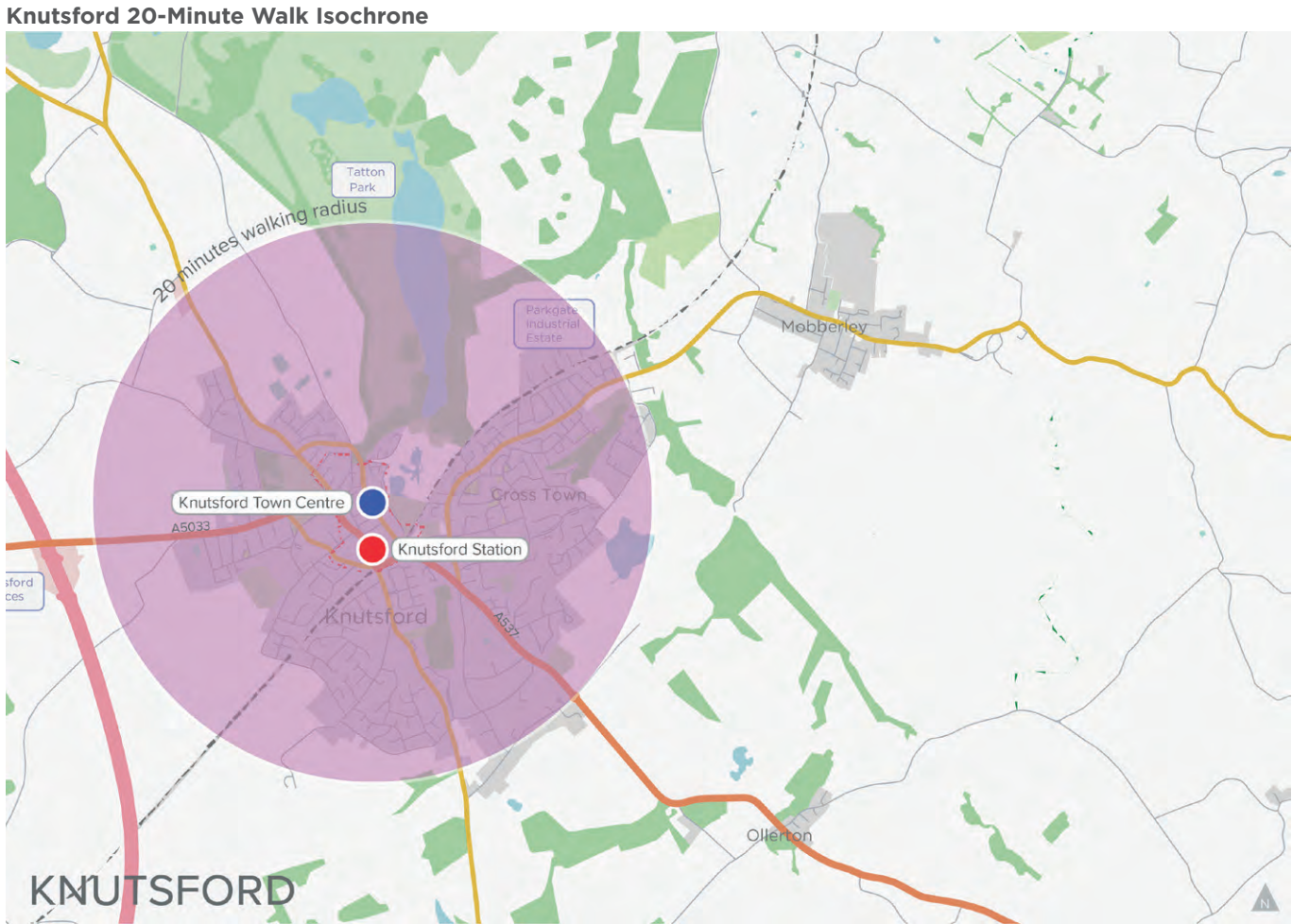
Knutsford is served by a rail station located within 8 minutes of the Town Centre which provides 1 train per hour in each direction, northbound towards Manchester and southbound towards Chester. However, the quality of services provided from Knutsford rail station is perceived as poor by local stakeholders. Particularly the frequency, reliability and crowding - which limits opportunities for rail commuting and discourages business growth within the Town Centre.

Bus connectivity to the area is also poor with low frequency services (1 bus per hour) offering connectivity to Altrincham and Macclesfield.

Movement Trends

The majority of residential areas, the rail station and Tatton Park are all accessible within a 20-minute walk of the centre. This presents significant opportunities to increase the levels of walking and cycling and mitigate parking issues evident within the Town Centre.

74% of people living in Knutsford travel to work outside of the town predominately to other towns across Cheshire East such as Macclesfield and Wilmslow and within areas towards Manchester.



Local Aspirations

An ambitious movement plan has been developed by the Town Council and is set out within the Town Council commissioned report 'From Top to Bottom Street'. The aim of the strategy is to make Knutsford more friendly to pedestrians, as a first stage of a masterplan to ensure long term vitality, appeal and prosperity.

The traffic and parking proposals include:

- Changing Princess Street and King Street to access roads instead of through roads.
- Making better use of on- and off-road parking spaces and encouraging the development of at least one Cheshire East Council multi-storey car park.
- Reducing the number of parking bays on King and Princess Streets prioritising blue badge holders – and enforcing the no-parking regulations and double yellow lines.



Only 7% of Knutsford residents work within the Town Centre



42% of residents travel more than 10km to work, the average distance travelled to work is 19km



Public transport accounts for 5% of commuter trips



Only 17% of households in Knutsford do not have access to a car, 35% have access to two or more vehicles



74% of residents in Knutsford in employment drive to work by car



5 minute walk between Town Centre and railway station



Active travel accounts for 15% of commuter trips

Source: Census 2011, Office for National Statistics (ONS)
Most recent consistent data available across the 9 centres

06 Connectivity and Accessibility cont.

Cheshire East Council has approved Local Transport Development Plans (LTDP) for its principal towns, key service centres and surrounding rural areas. The table opposite summarises the potential transport schemes included in the LTDP relating to the town centre at the point they went out to public consultation. Please note the majority of schemes are at concept stage, subject to feasibility work and must be viewed as potential schemes. Therefore the LTDP are live documents and this list of schemes is subject to change and will evolve as further work is undertaken.

In Knutsford, the LTDP focuses strongly on active travel interventions to improve conditions for those on foot and cycle. There are also several 'highways' schemes set out for exploration across the central area.

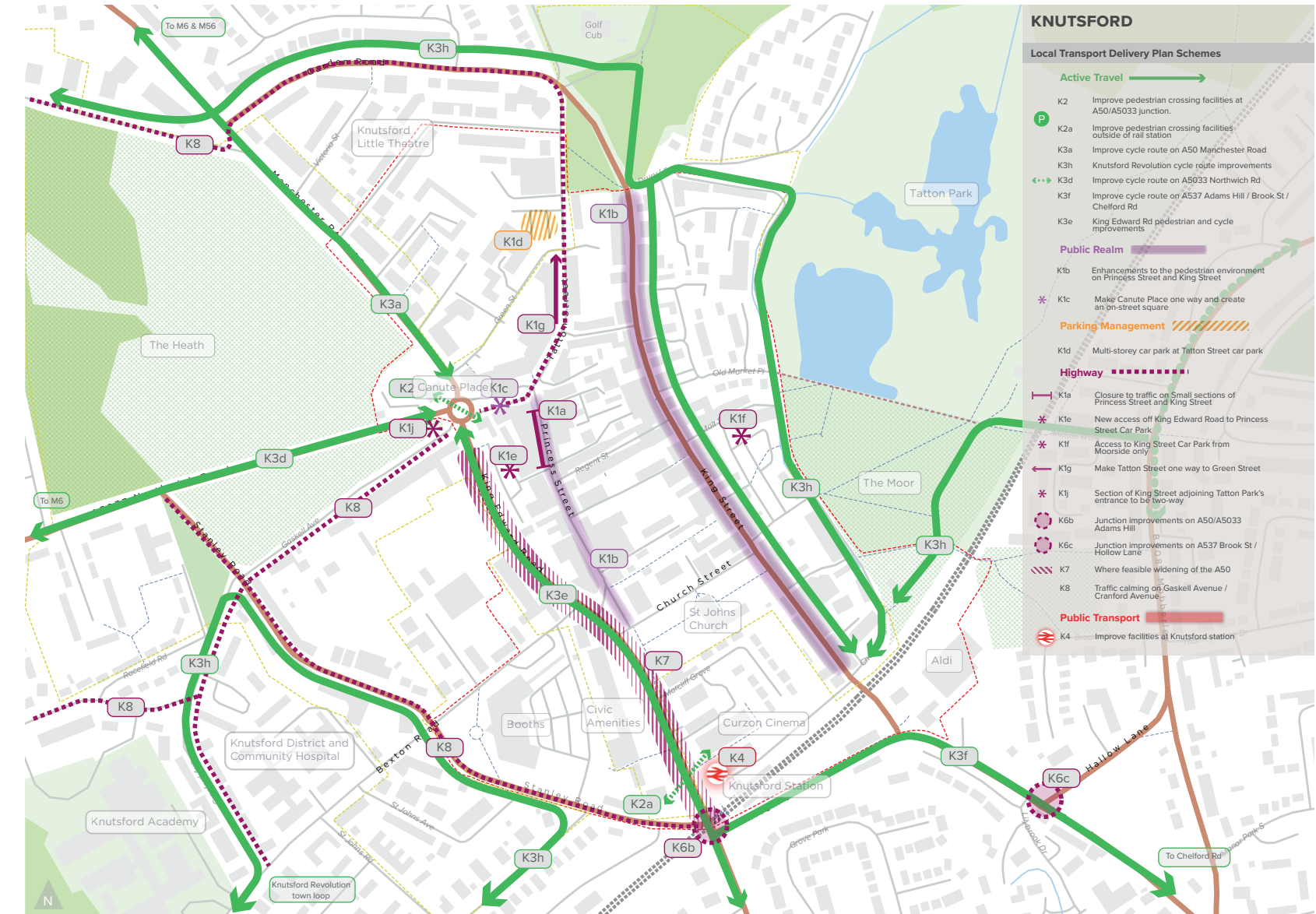
The table contains detail on the schemes set out in the LTDP.

For full information on LTDP and the latest version of the LTDP please refer to the Highway pages of the CEC website.

Knutsford LTP and LCWIP Schemes

Type	Ref	Scheme	Description	Costing¹
Active Travel	K2	Improve pedestrian crossings at A50/A5033 junction	Improve pedestrian crossing points at A50 / A5033 roundabout.	<£1m
	K2a	Improve pedestrian crossing facilities outside of rail station	Improve pedestrian crossing facilities on the A50 outside of the train station.	<£1m
	K3a	Improve cycling links on A50 Manchester Road	Improve cycling routes including schemes identified within the CycleKnutsford Infrastructure Delivery Plan: A50 Manchester Road / Toft Road / Holmes Chapel Road.	£1m-£5m
	K3d	Improve cycling links on A5033 Northwich Rd	Improve cycling routes including schemes identified within the CycleKnutsford Infrastructure Delivery Plan: A5033 Northwich Road.	£1m-£5m
	K3e	Improve walking and cycling route on King Edward Rd	Improve cycling routes including schemes identified within the CycleKnutsford Infrastructure Delivery Plan: A50 King Edward Road.	£1m-£5m
	K3f	Improve cycling links on A537 Adams Hill / Brook St / Chelford Rd	Improve cycling routes including schemes identified within the CycleKnutsford Infrastructure Delivery Plan: A537 Adams Hill / Brook Street / Chelford Road.	£1m-£5m
	K3h	Improve Knutsford Revolution cycling links	Improve cycling routes including schemes identified within the CycleKnutsford Infrastructure Delivery Plan: Knutsford Revolution.	£1m-£5m
Public Realm	K1b	Enhance the pedestrian environment on Princess Street and King Street	Enhance the pedestrian environment on Princess Street and King Street to limit vehicle accessibility, review current traffic management regulations, improve public spaces and redevelop existing car parks.	£1m-£5m
	K1c	Make Canute Place one way and create an on-street square	Enhance the pedestrian environment on Canute Place implementing a one-way scheme, creating an on-street square and adding on-street parking spaces.	£1m-£5m
Parking Management	K1d	Multi-storey car park at Tatton Street car park	Introduce a multi-storey car park at Tatton Street car park.	£5m-£10m
Highway	K1a	Close small sections of Princess Street and King Street to traffic	Close small sections of Princess Street and King Street to traffic to limit vehicular accessibility and improve pedestrian environment.	<£100k
	K1e	Open a new access off King Edward Road to Princess Street car park	Open a new access off King Edward Road to Princess Street Car Park and increase on-street parking spaces.	<£1m
	K1f	Set access to King Street car park from Moorside only	Set access to King Street car park from Moorside only.	<£100k
	K1g	Make Tatton Street one way to Green Street	Make Tatton Street one way to Green Street and increase on-street parking spaces.	<£1m
	K1j	Make sections of King Street adjoining Tatton Park's entrance two-way	Make sections of King Street adjoining Tatton Park's entrance two-way.	<£100k
	K6b	Junction improvements on A50/A5033 Adams Hill	Implement junction's enhancements to improve traffic flow at A50/A5033 Adams Hill roundabout.	£1m-£5m
	K6c	Junction Improvements on A537 Brook St /Hollow Lane	Implement junction's enhancements to improve traffic flow at A537 Brook Street / Hollow Lane.	£1m-£5m
	K7	Widening of the A50	Widening of the A50 - where feasible - between Adams Hill junction and Canute Place.	£1m-£5m
	K8	Traffic calming on Garden Road, Tatton Street, Gaskell Ave, Stanley Street, Westfields Drive	Implement traffic and speed calming measures on residential streets: Stanley Road, Gaskell Avenue/Cranford Avenue, Westfield Drive up to Tabley Grove, Ladies Mile/Tabley Road/Garden Road/Tatton Street and Mereheath Lane.	<£1m
Public Transport	K4	Improve facilities at Knutsford train station	Improving facilities at Knutsford Station including provision of street lighting within the car park, CCTV within the station and on platforms, cycle parking, and cycle hire.	<£1m

¹ The costs presented are indicative only at this stage. Costs will depend on type and level of interventions delivered – and should be revised at subsequent design stages.



Retail and Leisure

Cheshire East Council recognises the importance of monitoring key information to assess and respond to issues in its centres and commissions regular reviews of the retail and leisure market across the Borough. The latest partial update of the Retail Study Report generally paints a positive picture for Knutsford in terms of performance since the last Report (2016).

Knutsford is identified as one of the larger Key Service Centre's within Cheshire East that is a popular destination for both residents and tourists from further afield. Overall, the centre continues to have low vacancy levels and all the retail and service sectors continue to be well represented, including a significant number of comparison goods outlets. A strong leisure offer of bars and restaurants within the Town Centre enables a good evening economy, which adds to the vibrancy and attractiveness of the Town Centre.

Overall, the centre provides 203 units (Experian Goad Plan, January 2019) which are primarily located along Princess Street and King Street – known locally as Top and Bottom Street.

Whilst represented by some national operators, Knutsford convenience goods offering are all smaller scale operations including a Little

Waitrose, Co-Op and Sainsbury's Local. The convenience sector offering by number of units is slightly below the UK average (6% compared to 9% UK average), whilst the proportion of floorspace is almost half the UK average (8% compared to UK average of 15%). The provision in the town is also enhanced by the edge of centre Booths and Aldi stores, as well as The Market Hall which offers a collection of independent traders. The Market Hall provides food and drink as well as art and crafts goods.

The comparison goods offering in Knutsford is strong, with the proportion of units higher than the UK average (39% compared to UK average of 29%). The proportion of floorspace is in line with the national average (33% and UK average of 29%) and therefore lends to comparison goods offering in the Town Centre being in relatively small sized units. Knutsford has a significant number of national comparison stores including Boots, Waterstones, WH Smith and Carphone Warehouse as well as a range of quality independents including an award winning butchers and bespoke interior designers.

Leisure operators include a good range of national occupiers including Pizza Express, Costa Coffee

and Domino's, along with independent operators of take-aways, bars and restaurants. These contribute to the strong night-time economy of the town and it being seen as a popular eating and drinking destination. The leisure offer is supported by a number of cultural assets such as the Curzon Cinema, Little Theatre and Heritage Centre, a number of attractive green spaces and a strong events programme which attract visitors from a wide catchment.

Following the same pattern as 2016, whilst the proportion of leisure units remains just above the national average (25% to UK average of 21%), the floorspace is much higher owing to the leisure units being of a large size in the town. Retail provision has remained fairly stable compared to 2016 in regard to the number of units and floorspace, and both above the UK averages.

Vacant units are fairly dispersed around the Town Centre with the total reducing from 12 to 10 units since 2016. The proportion of units and floorspace are both below the UK averages. However, since the Goad survey was undertaken there have been some significant units become vacant including Topps Tiles and Tesla car showroom on Canute Place. Positively, Knutsford is home to

20 financial/ businesses service uses, and has retained its national operators including HSBC, Lloyds, Natwest and Nationwide, strengthening the Town Centre's offering.

At this stage, it is unclear what the impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic will be on Knutsford's operators, however with a strong mix of national occupiers, especially in the comparison goods sector, it is likely that Knutsford will still remain a key centre in Cheshire East. Additionally, the strong night-time offering, and relatively affluent catchment population should provide some buffer to the continued challenges facing many of the national high street brands. Whilst there may be some short-term impacts on Town Centre occupiers therefore, in the longer term, Knutsford should remain as an attractive location for both residents and visitors alike.

Diversity of Uses in Knutsford Town Centre in January 2019
Source: Experian GOAD Survey, January 2019. UK Average from the Experian GOAD Category Report (February 2020)
The finance and business space identified in the table only relates to ground floor offices floorspace within the Town Centre. The office market is considered further on p57



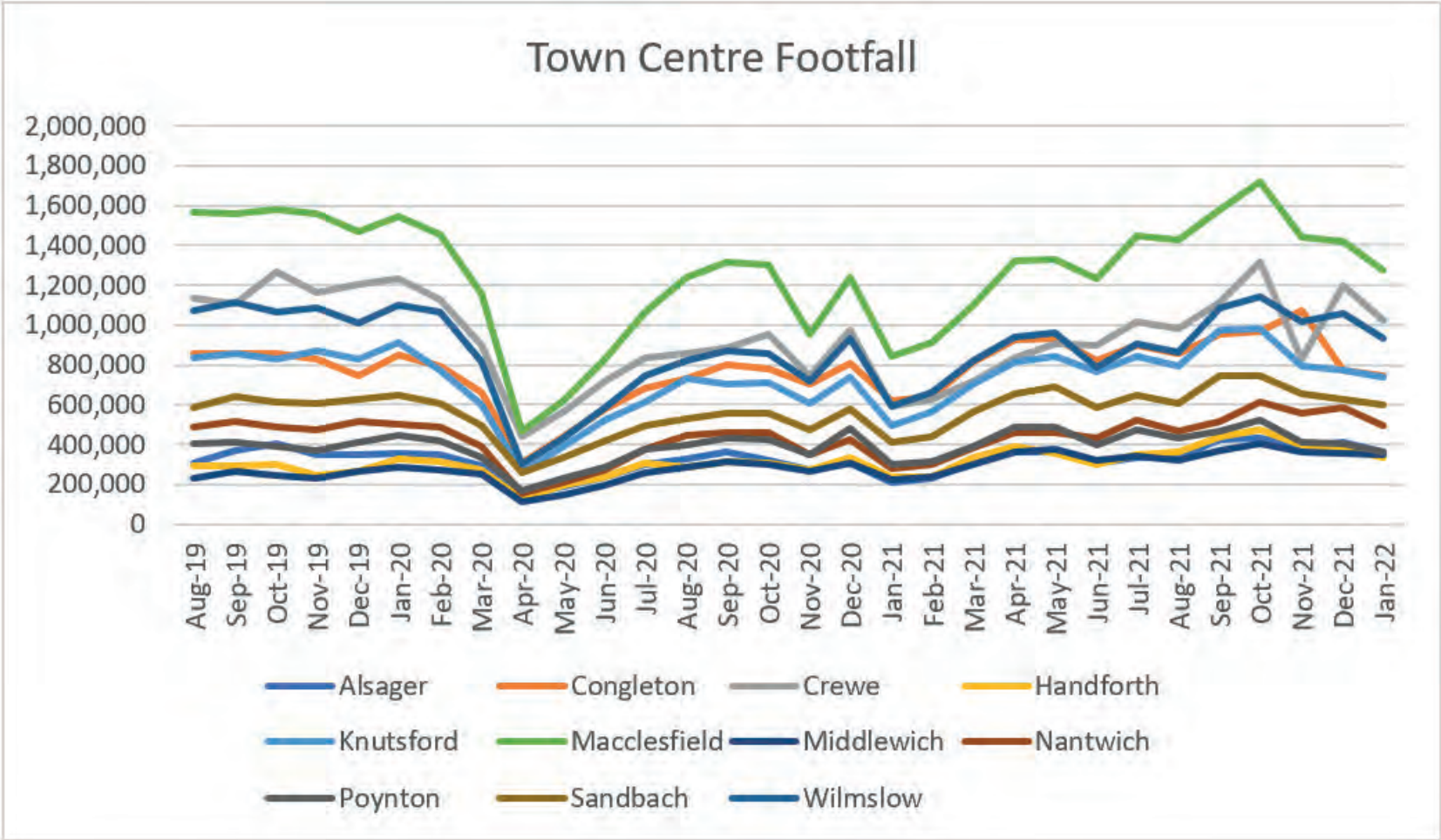
	Units				Floorspace		
	No.	%	UK Average (%)		Sq.m	%	UK Average (%)
Convenience	12	6	9		2,400	8	15
Comparison	80	39	29		9,240	33	34
Retail Service	39	19	15		3,620	13	7
Leisure Service	42	21	25		9,120	32	26
Financial and Business Service	20	10	10		2,980	11	7
Vacant	10	5	12		1,000	4	11
TOTAL	203	100	100		28,360	100	100

Footfall

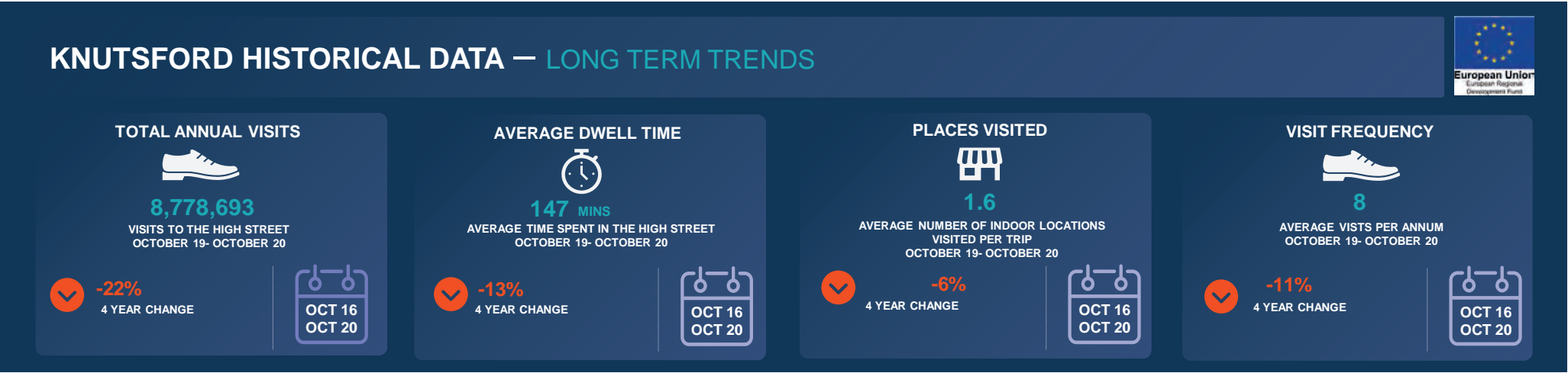
In recognition of the important relationship between footfall and vitality, CEC is now commissioning regular monitoring of footfall across the centres. The following graph shows the footfall in all the key centres between August 2019 and December 2020. It starkly shows the impact of Covid on footfall, across Cheshire East particularly in March and November last year (during national lockdowns) and some bounce back in December.

Knutsford was the fifth most visited centre in Cheshire East in August 2019 and retained this position alongside Congleton throughout the period to December 2020 – with in the region of 908,000 visitors per month at its peak. Positively, whilst the largest monthly footfall in Knutsford fell by 30% on the year previously to 603,000 in November 2020, this was below the national average benchmark rate of 40% suggesting many working from home were choosing to shop locally.

Covid has had a significant impact on footfall, both during enforced lockdowns but also in further accelerating online retail use. The ability of a centre to attract a wide range of visitors (rather than just relying on shoppers) will have a significant impact on how centres emerge from Covid.



Source: Visitor Insight Baseline Report: August 2019-January 2022



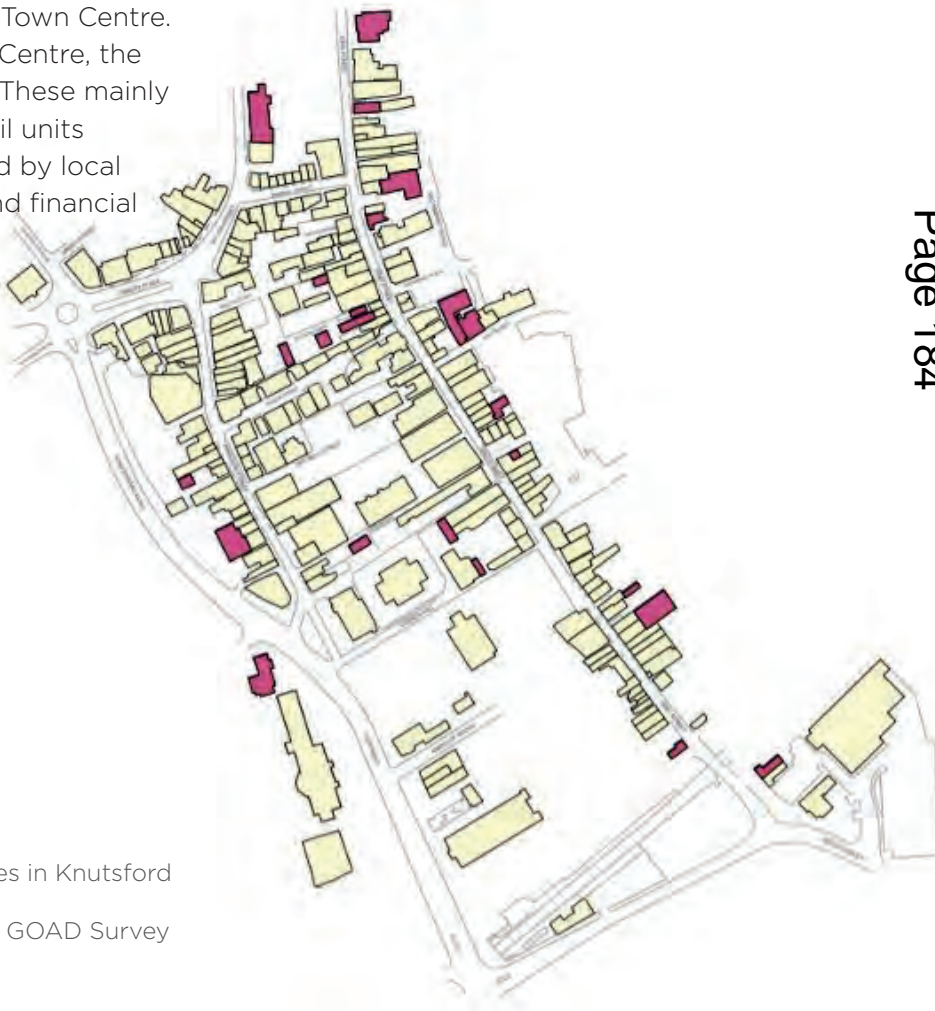
Source: Visitor Insight Baseline Report:
Knutsford Town Centre: October 2019-2020
Most recent consistent data available across the 9 centres

Employment

The main employment offering in Knutsford can be found on the northern edge of the town; Parkgate Industrial Estate which comprises both office and industrial units. The B2/ B8 industrial units are largely average quality and predominantly contain local occupiers within the manufacturing, transportation and wholesale sectors. The estate also contains some office buildings such as Egerton Court, occupied by a variety of local businesses. South of the estate is Knutsford Business Park containing five two-storey office buildings. These are occupied, again by local businesses within sectors such as ICT and property.

Another large office offering is Booths Park, south west of the town and based just off the A537. The site contains several large office buildings of average-good quality. No national occupiers are on site but local businesses within the financial, ICT and property sectors are found within the office premises. The site offers a range of serviced office space and leased office space of 200-17,000 sq ft, meeting rooms available for up to 200 people, as well as gym facilities and a restaurant/ café.

As of the latest data from 2019, there are 24 office use class premises within Knutsford Town Centre. Whilst spread throughout the Town Centre, the majority are located on King Street. These mainly comprise office premises above retail units and single-storey buildings, occupied by local businesses mainly in the property and financial sectors.



Location of offices in Knutsford Town Centre
Source: Experian GOAD Survey

Residential Market Context

Knutsford provides an attractive residential offering, with easy commuting to employment destinations via J19 of the M6 (3 miles) and Knutsford train station in the centre of the town.

At the time of the 2011 Census the dominant house type across the Cheshire East area was detached housing (35.6%) which is a much higher proportion than the North West (18%) and England (22.4%).The Knutsford parish area had a total of 5,671 households, representing 3.6% of Cheshire East’s total residential stock (159,441). Knutsford is strongly characterised by larger housing types of detached (38.8%) and semi-detached (34.2%). Together these two property types make up almost three quarters of the total housing stock in the town. This suits the dominant residential group of the town of affluent professionals with large families. However, there is always a need to rebalance the offering to provide more start homes, affordable housing and elderly accommodation to suit future changing demographics.

Over the last year Knutsford has achieved an average property value of £499,900. This is one of the highest average values within the towns of Cheshire East and the North West.

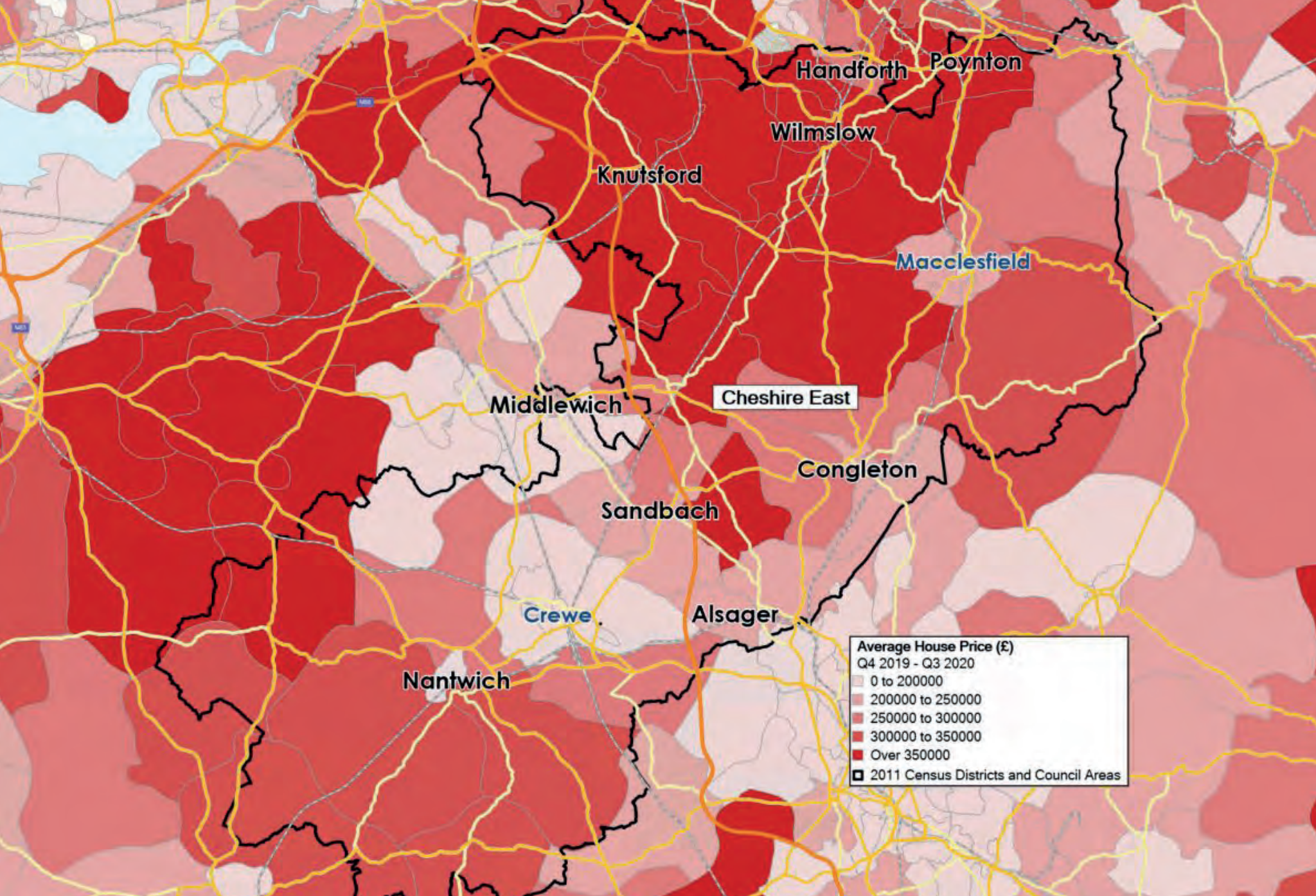
There are currently two major residential developments taking place to the North West and North East of Knutsford comprising 190 and 236 homes respectively. A further site for 60 houses in the North West of Knutsford has outline planning permission whilst applications for outline consent for two further developments, 250 at the North

West of Knutsford and 225 houses to the East of Knutsford, have been submitted.

McCarthy and Stone are also in the process of developing Centennial Place located on the northern edge of the town. This development will feature 46, 1 and 2-bed apartments and will aid in meeting the needs of the ageing population.

Dwelling Type/Area	Detached	Semi Detached	Terrace	Flat	Other	Total Households
Alsager	39.9%	40.4%	11.6%	8.1%	0%	5,183
Congleton	36.3%	35.4%	19.3%	8.9%	0.2%	11,561
Handforth	26.1%	23.1%	27.9%	22.8%	0.1%	2,936
Knutsford	38.8%	34.2%	19.7%	7.0%	0.4%	5,671
Middlewich	39.0%	26.0%	19.7%	15.3%	0%	5,910
Nantwich	20.8%	30.6%	26.8%	21.6%	0.2%	6,710
Poynton-with-Worth	42.7%	39.2%	10.5%	7.2%	0.3%	6,024
Sandbach	39.1%	36.1%	17.6%	6.8%	0.3%	7,840
Wilmslow	39.5%	26.6%	19.5%	14.3%	0%	10,615
Cheshire East	35.6%	32.6%	21.2%	10.2%	0.5%	159,441
North West	18.0%	36.3%	29.8%	15.4%	0.5%	3,009,549
England	22.4%	31.2%	24.5%	21.2%	0.7%	22,063,368

Housing Stock by Type.
Source: Census 2011, Office for National Statistics (ONS)



08 Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities & Threats

This SWOT is based on the analysis of the consultant team and discussions with the Town Council and other local partners including councillors.

Strengths

- Historic Market Town, buildings maintain a lot of character and the amenity offer appeals to a wide demographic - such as Elizabeth Gaskell Link and architecture of Richard Harding Watt
- The Heath, The Moor, Tatton Park and Golf Club mean the town is surrounded by green space - places of nature, rest and play that can accommodate a range of events
- At present it is relatively easy to access the Town Centre on foot or in a car
- Lots of open space and incidental spaces with benches etc that local community use
- Strong food and beverage offer within the town
- Mixed and attractive architecture
- Strong, resilient and active community
- Well maintained street planting and signage
- Well connected by infrastructure - Train
- Town Centre Ranger and dedicated Town Centre Manager
- Cultural assets such Heritage Centre, Curzon Cinema and Little Theatre and strong regular events programme draws from a wide catchment
- Town Council website and others promote offer
- Differs from the surrounding service centres as it is more of a country market town
- Tatton Hall and other tourist activities in close proximity
- Golden triangle association - good and bad
- Despite the current COVID -19 pandemic, community events still continue such as Makers Market, Tatton 10k and cycling events

Weaknesses

- Narrow streets make it difficult to cater for cyclists, pedestrians and vehicles comfortably - difficult pedestrian movement. Especially when distancing measures are necessary
- Tension between different users of the Town Centre - pedestrians vs. car. Car dominant Town Centre
- On street parking and parking charges within the centre
- Traffic flow through the Town Centre and narrower streets such as Princess Street and King Street
- Public transport links could be stronger - currently difficult to reach the Town Centre via bus or train and therefore travel by car prevails. Holds back business investment compared to places like Altrincham
- Cobbled streets remain as a historic link however could be improved to enhance public realm
- Poor links between Knutsford Town Centre and Tatton Park
- Lack of congregation space or town square
- Disconnect/weakness in communication between Knutsford Town Council, Cheshire East and the community. Need more joined up thinking
- No clearly defined gateways
- Temporary COVID barriers have had negative feedback from local businesses and residents. 90% of shops do not want them. Although acknowledged that the presence of barriers may be making visitors, especially older ones, comfortable visiting the centre
- Few public toilets available? Some feel these are sufficient (2 blocks with 3 toilets in each). More signs to create awareness of what is already available

Opportunities

- Potential opportunities to create a ‘town square’ space to build upon the social elements of the town allowing small groups to gather - Heritage Centre, Red Cow Yard, Lost and Found - potential areas for this. Better understanding of ownership and responsibility required. Could allow for more alfresco commerce opportunities which are limited due to narrow streets
- Greater connection between The Moor and The Heath and the Town Centre which currently feels disconnected - part of the Masterplan
- Review of parking fees while COVID measures are in place to help boost local business and footfall into the Town Centre
- Improved links to Tatton Park - at present it seems the public visit either the park or the Town Centre and not both together. Potential for a hop on hop off bus connection with Tatton Park - similar to Chester and Chester Zoo. Small land train or E-Bike hire and trail between the two?
- Regular Market showcasing local produce
- Make more of the Market Hall
- Make more of attractions in the local area to draw more people into the centre
- Better discussions between Cheshire East, Knutsford Town Council and local community groups to identify the needs of the Town
- Strong cycle lobby. CE to introduce the necessary actions to increase the cycling infrastructure in line with the Knutsford Cycle Plan. Need more TC cycle parking
- Use existing on-street bays?
- Empty shop units as cycle hub?
- COVID measures to reduce the traffic within the Town Centre have shown the potential of what could be achieved especially for monthly market
- Large number of small “pocket” car parks which are privately owned for business and residential could offer an opportunity for infill development however need to be retained for the buildings they serve
- Improved transport links with Tatton Park should be Town Centre based and should provide linkage to/from railway station

Threats

- Current move away from shopping in shops to shopping online
- Surrounding service centres implementing the same improvements potentially might detract from the offer within Knutsford - Altrincham improvements already pull visitors away from Knutsford
- Target market of some shops does not meet the local demographic profile needs - threat to local residents and those local businesses
- Recognition that car ownership in town and district is very high. Perhaps fighting losing battle on public transport
- Wider Cheshire East proposed road schemes in the pipeline may prevent some Town Centre improvements being made
- Long term impacts of COVID-19 restrictions – will this deter footfall within the Town Centre and have longer impacts for local business?



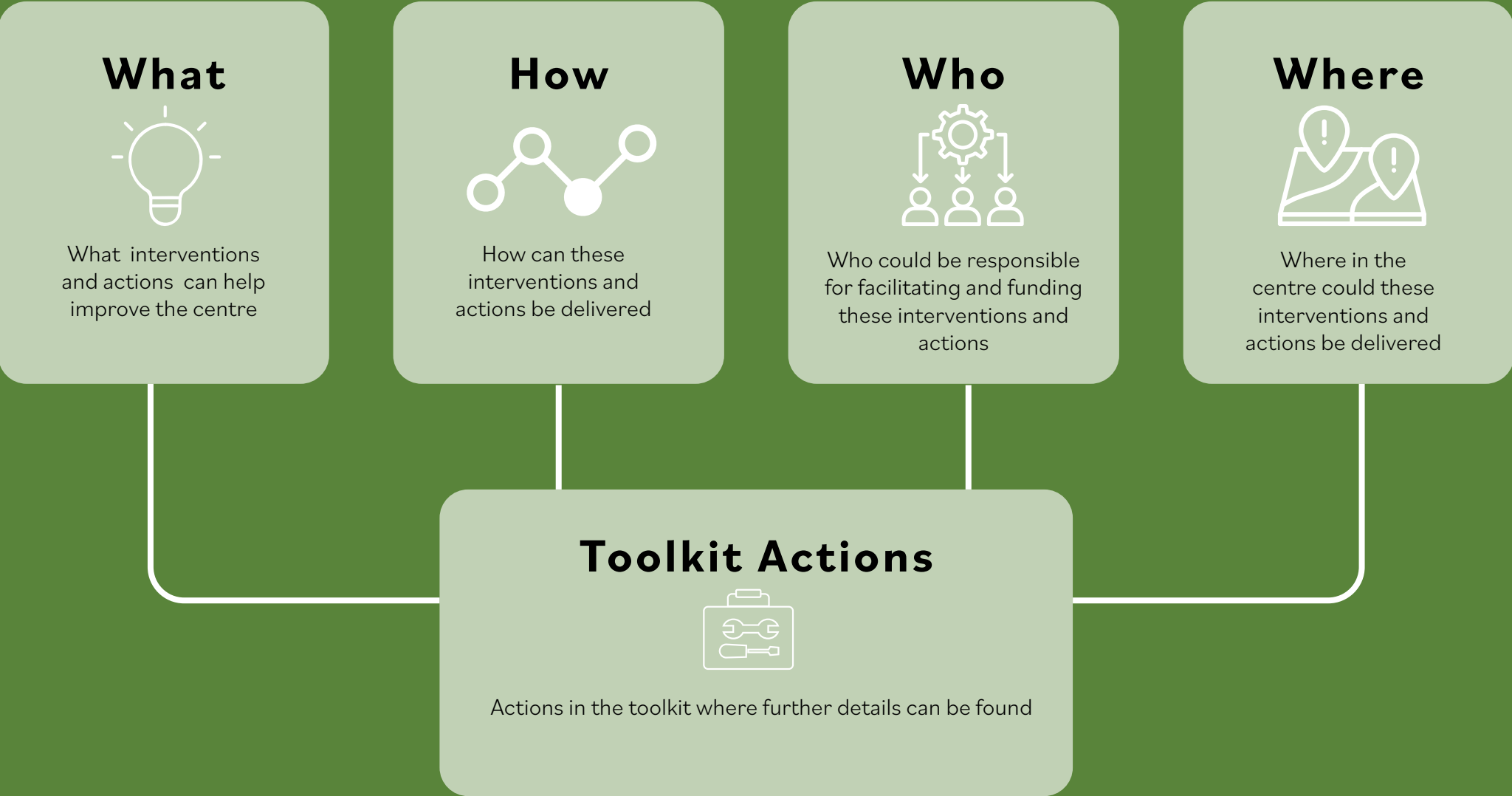
KNUTSFORD ACTION PLAN

09 Priority Areas for Intervention

The Action Plan has been prepared in collaboration with the Town Council and its Partners and identifies actions which seek to support the established Vision and Objectives for Knutsford responding to its challenges and opportunities. It sets out a series of actions, identifying a small number of priorities for intervention which will have the greatest impact on improving the vitality of the Centre.

For each of the actions further details are provided in terms of what, how, who and where (see Box for further details).

The Action Plan is supported by a Toolkit which provides a wide range of actions across 25 intervention areas (which align with the High Street Task Force recommendations) which can be undertaken by a range of stakeholders.



Vision and Objectives

Vision Statement

To ensure that Knutsford thrives economically and socially as a historic market town, whilst protecting and enhancing the town’s character, variety of buildings and natural environment. The delivery of the facilities and infrastructure that the town needs will be supported whilst also maintaining Knutsford’s strong sense of community to remain as an attractive, healthy and safe place to live work and visit.

Objectives

- **To improve access to community and education infrastructure**
- **To support healthy living and well-being**
- **To support provision of sport and leisure opportunities**
- **To protect, retain and enhance environment and green infrastructure**
- **To protect heritage**
- **To provide a mix of housing that meets local needs**
- **To ensure long-term viability and prosperity**
- **To promote safe, healthy and sustainable travel for all**
- **To ensure long term prosperity of the Town Centre**

Role of the Centre

Knutsford plays a number of important roles:

- A local centre serving the needs of its local residents
- An employment hub offering a range of job opportunities
- A visitor destination offering a range of heritage assets, visitor attractions (including access to Tatton Park) and other leisure amenities

The Vitality Plan seeks to support Knutsford to fulfil its potential across these important roles.

Areas for Intervention

The following have been identified as areas for intervention. Priority interventions identified through the public consultation are highlighted with a white border. Potential actions are identified in Section 10. These actions align with the Town Council’s objective of ensuring Knutsford Town Centre remains a thriving independent destination for visitors and residents alike and the need to promote active travel/ public transport and reduce the need for use of cars.



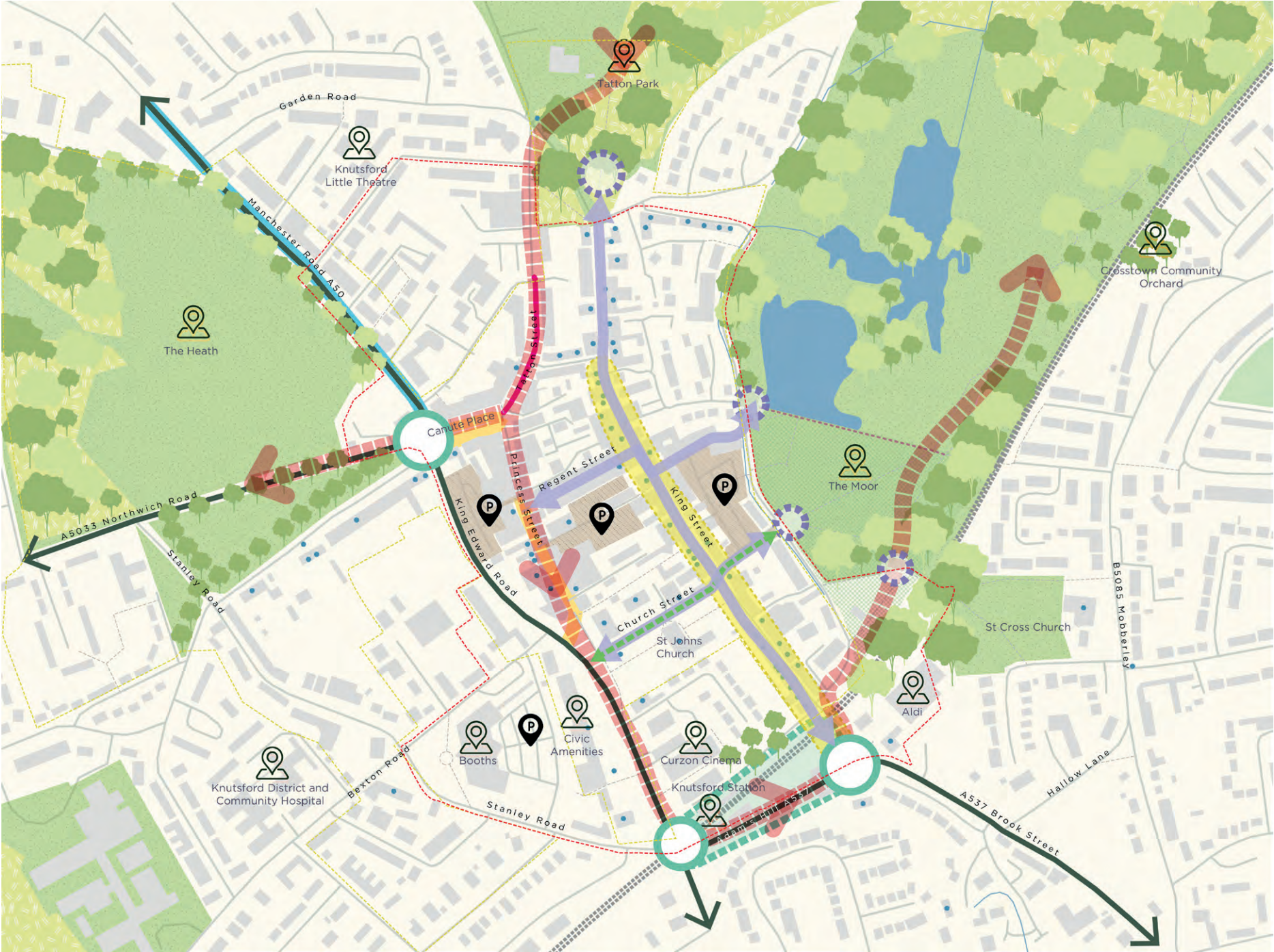
Spatial Action Plan

The Spatial Action Plan illustrates key features of the Centre and identifies where proposed actions could be delivered. It highlights the significant green and blue assets (including Tatton Park, the Moor and the Heath) around the Town Centre. It also highlights key local assets including the Station, Cinema and Hospital and the strong grid of streets.

- The top priority actions which have emerged from the public consultations are:
- Action 3: Prioritising more cycling and walking**
 - Action 5 Showcasing Knutsford’s Tourism and Heritage Assets**
 - Action 7 - Better Management of Car Movement**
 - Action 8 - Public Transport Strategy**



Knutsford Strategy Plan



Movement Action Plan

Building on the transport schemes suggested in the LTDP, additional Town Centre transport schemes are suggested as likely to be beneficial in supporting Town Centre vitality and viability. These additional schemes, which place a strong emphasis on public realm and enhancing the street environment are set out in the table and plan opposite.

Town Centre Movement Schemes suggested in addition to LDTP potential Schemes

Type	Ref	Scheme	Description	Costing ¹
Active Travel	K_AT1	Improve wayfinding across the town centre at key gateways	Improve signage and wayfinding across the town centre at key gateways and landmarks	<£100k
	K_AT2	Introduce safe, secure cycle parking	Consider the location of cycle hubs linked to improved green routes and provide safe secure cycle parking throughout the town centre and at the railway station.	<£100k
	K_AT3	Improve walking and cycling route on Church St to The Moor	Improve pedestrian and cycling connections between Knutsford town centre and The Moor.	<£1m
Public Realm	K_PR1	Enhance the pedestrian environment on Tatton Street	Extend the public realm scheme for King Street and Tatton Street (K1b) to Tatton Street to upgrade the current underwhelming pedestrian environment and tired materials.	£1m-£5m
Parking Management	K_PM1	Parking management measures to reclaim highway space and improve access for all on Canute Pl, Princess St and King St	Introduce parking management measures on Canute Pl, Princess Street and King Street to reduce supply of on-street parking and length of stay, in order to reclaim highway space, utilise space more productively and enhance access for all (i.e. increased footway widths to improve access for the mobility impaired or those with pushchairs).	<£100k
Public Transport	K_PT1	Undertake viability study for a shuttle short service to Tatton Park	Consider the viability of a free park and ride shuttle short service between the town centre and Tatton Park.	Revenue funding

¹ The costs presented are indicative only at this stage. Costs will depend on type and level of interventions delivered – and should be revised at subsequent design stages.
cheshireeast.maps.arcgis.com/apps/MapSeries/index.html?appid=48d6af7045d2495c81a1850a2c8a72c1



Bath – Parklets could be trialled on King Street
(Photo Credit: MottMacDonald)

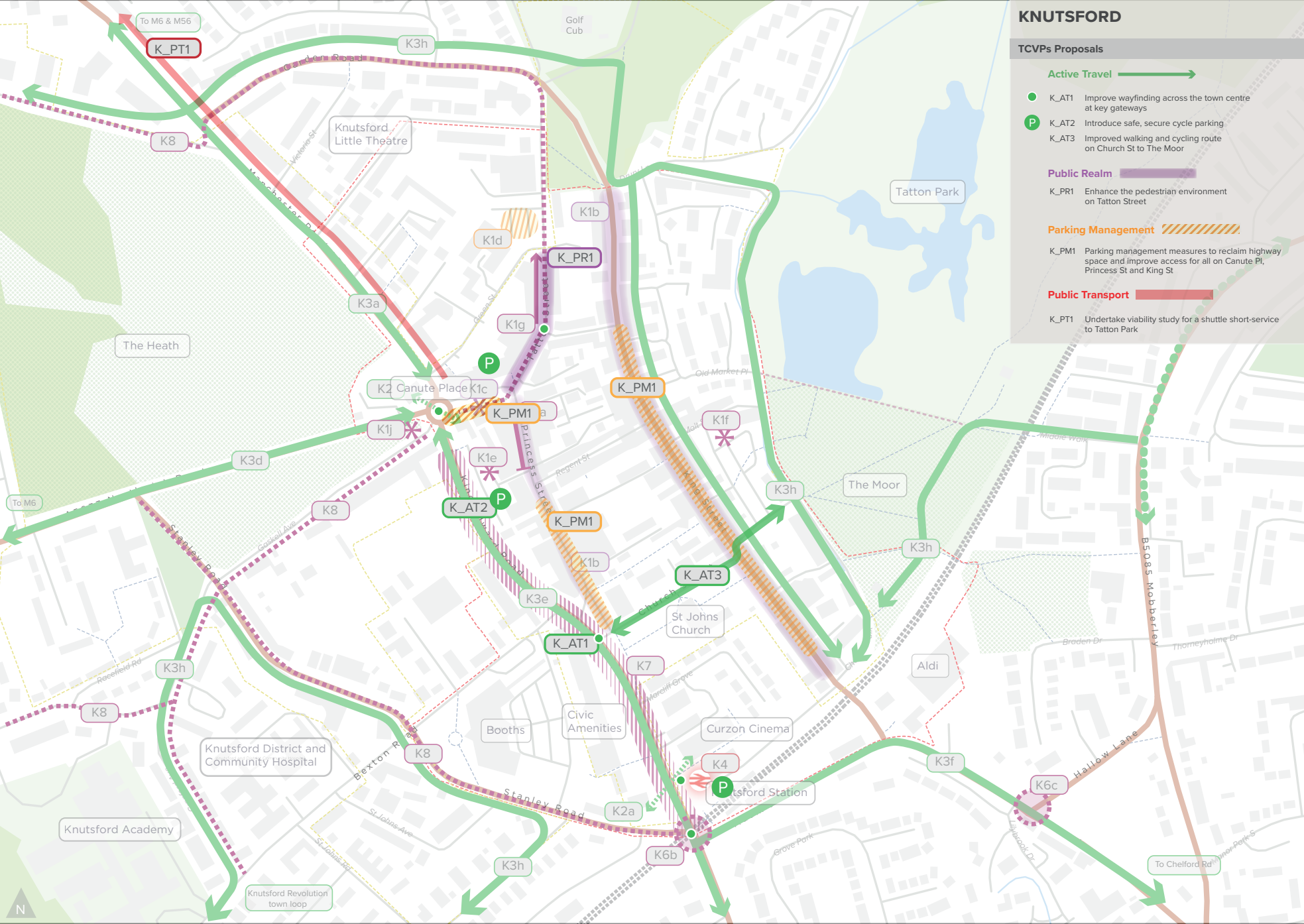


Frodsham Street, Chester Better managing the space dedicated to vehicles and pedestrians, with narrow historic street environments. (Photo Credit: MottMacDonald)



Paradou, France Streets across the Town Centre should be designed with good quality materials and to create low speed environments. They should be well lit during hours of darkness. (Photo Credit: MottMacDonald)

Town Centre Vitality Plan Highways Proposals



10 Potential Actions



Action 1: Reducing the Dominance of Cars Along King Street

What

Reducing the dominance of cars on King Street to better showcase its historic buildings and encourage visitors to be able to dwell in the heart of the town creating a safer and more pleasant place to shop and relax. If some parking is removed, shoppers will be able to browse more comfortably without worrying about cars passing by. Other businesses are in turn likely to benefit from the increased footfall and dwell time in a more pleasant street environment. Shop fronts are also more visible when not hidden behind a large vehicle. Equality of access is also important – many of the footways are currently too narrow to be used by those with mobility impairments or pushing children in buggies. This means that people have to use the carriageway at times and should be able to do so comfortably.

This action supports the findings of The From Top to Bottom Street report. The report proposes to reduce the dominance of cars across the town centre, not solely from King Street. Whilst the TCVP suggests that the initial focus should be on King Street but reconsiders the need to consider other areas such as Princess Street, Canute Place and Minshull Street

How

Reducing the amount of car parking spaces outside some of the shops and using it as a spill out areas for cafes and restaurants. This does not need to involve significant investment and can be done on a temporary basis over a small area to test the impact. Whilst it is acknowledged that the red and white barriers used during COVID to manage traffic and pedestrian movement were not well liked, the use of planters to create al fresco seating areas outside of some of the cafes and restaurants on King Street would provide a number of benefits. It would animate the street and allow visitors to browse more safely and appreciate the street’s heritage. Whilst some car parking would be removed, there are plenty of car parking spaces within a very short walk. Space can be used more productively, for instance one parking space outside a restaurant can comfortably seat three tables of two.

Introduce temporary planters to bring greenery to the street and to separate car parking from seating areas. This does not need to be really expensive. A scheme has just been implemented in Macclesfield. CEC covered £1000 for licences etc and local businesses paid for furniture/planters. Animating the street, with businesses expanding out into the street, offering places to dwell and explore what the shops have to offer.

Consideration would need to be given to temporary measures to show they would not impact on businesses and some could remain as just temporary such as the space outside Lost and Found which is used for some events. Provide some examples from towns with affluence of how such interventions have supported transformation.

Consideration should also be given to how servicing could be done out of core hours. A Concept Design Study should be progressed, working with businesses to develop a phased and costed strategy for improvements to King Street. Consideration should be given to create attractive outside space linked to cafes, bars and restaurants.

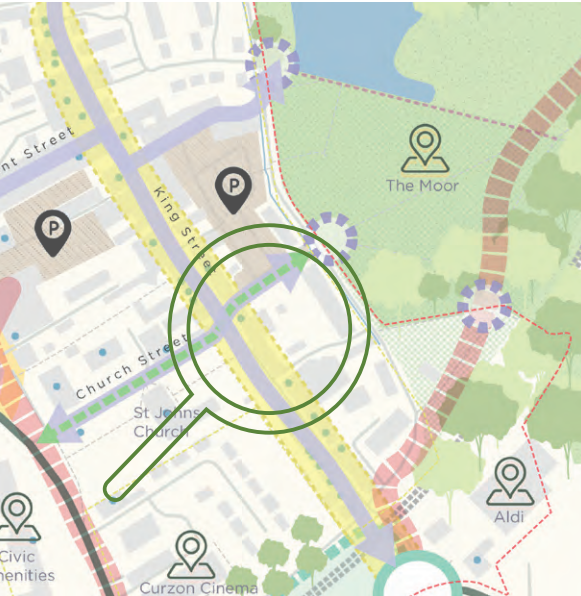
A review of the car parking strategy/ parking management for the town should be recommended, which includes stakeholders, businesses and the general public.

Who

- Town Council
- Businesses on King Street
- CEC

Where

- Part of King Street (priority)
- Wider town including Princes Street, Canute Place and Minshull Street



Location of Priority Action 1



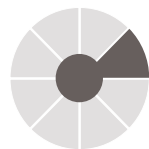
Action 1 supports the following objectives:

- To support healthy living and well-being
- To protect heritage
- To ensure long-term viability and prosperity
- To ensure long term prosperity of the Town Centre
- To promote safe, healthy and sustainable travel for all



Toolkit Actions

- 1a Improve evening economy 1b Programme of events
- 1c Enable autumn and winter al-fresco dining
- 1d Use lighting
- 4a Provide pop up seating
- 4d Planting in pots to define space for certain uses
- 5a Upgrade public realm
- 5b Redesign existing shop fronts
- 5d Instant greening
- 9a Repurposing assets
- 9c Enable a café culture
- 14a Quick-wins and temporary interventions to manage traffic speeds and create more pedestrian friendly spaces – e.g. planters, parklets and street furniture
- 18c Implement road closure
- 18b Provide new places to sit
- 18e Prioritise environmental considerations in the design of new public spaces



Action 1: Reducing the Dominance of Cars Along King Street

Priority Action 1: Reducing the dominance of cars along King Street



Before image (copyright of Google Street View 2022)

Refreshed and consistent shop signage will create an identity for the street

Subtle variation of paving will enhance the experience of pedestrians and cyclists

Plant boxes and hanging boxes will improve the aesthetic of the street

Temporary and flexible planters allow for expansion of the footway

Reduced number of parking bays will allow for expansion of public realm

A wider footway will allow for flexible and spill out space for cafes and restaurants

Addition of awning to shop fronts helps to frame and activate the streetscape



Avignon, France Planters to trial pedestrian priority and road closure interventions. (Photo credit: MottMacdonald)



Frodsham Street, Chester Better managing the space dedicated to vehicles and pedestrians, with narrow historic street environments. (Photo Credit: MottMacDonald)



Action 2: Connecting Green Assets

What

Knutsford has a unique characteristic in that it is surrounded by a number of rich, high quality green spaces, such as Tatton Park, the Moor and the Heath. All three present a great opportunity for recreation, allowing locals and visitors to walk, play, sail, learn and explore all that the parks have to offer. However, there is a slight disconnect between the Town Centre and these green assets in terms of wayfinding and signage. Knutsford has an opportunity to create well signposted cycling and walking connections that sustainably link the surrounding green assets into the Town Centre. This will create a sustainable, safe and direct links that encourage local residents and visitors to walk or cycle between the Town Centre and the neighbouring parks. These routes could be supported by a wayfinding strategy to support these recreational journeys across the area and connecting into other surrounding walking and cycling routes.

How

As noted above the importance of the Centre’s green assets are already recognised. Actions could be focused on both the connections from Tatton Park to the Town Centre as well as from the Moor and the Heath. These routes could be enhanced by clearer signage, street lighting, street furniture, cycle storage and parking and consistent paving to visually distinguish the route to and from the Town Centre. Along walking and cycling routes, bicycle and scooter parking / storage could be provided to encourage use by all ages. Improved green routes should also be connected to other community spaces such as sports and leisure centres and cinemas and school.

Other actions could include:

- Engage with local artists to install more public art in parks and on key routes linking them to target local community funds
- Further support to local groups to assist with maintenance and delivery of events multiple parks and greenspaces- prioritise the worst connections initially particularly those that are unusable in the winter months.
- Create more attractive and comfortable dwell spaces at the Moor and the Heath
- Princess Street could be better orientated towards pedestrians and cyclists with consistent paving, improved lighting and signage and hints of greenery.
- The junction of Princess Street and Toft Road could be enhanced with street lighting, street furniture,to create a dwell space along this active route.

- Knutsford Station could include better signage and information points that direct towards the green assets of the town and additional cycle /scooter storage.
- Exploring the potential for cycle and e scooter hire at Tatton Park with parking facility in the town centre/at gates of Tatton Park (on private land off the highway) adjacent to Town Centres to enable linked trips.
- Creation of a cycle path from the Moor to the Dog Wood entrance to Tatton Park. This would create a cycle/pedestrian loop and is an ambition in the Knutsford Cycle Plan.

Who

- Town Council
- National Trust / Tatton Park
- Groundwork
- Friends of the Heath
- Friends of the Moor
- Tatton Estates
- CEC/ANSA

Where

- Connecting The Heath, The Moor and Tatton Park into the Town Centre.

Priority Action 2: Connecting Knutsford with its Green Assets



Action 2 supports the following objectives:

- To improve access to community and education infrastructure
- To support healthy living and well-being
- To protect, retain and enhance environment and green infrastructure
- To promote safe, healthy and sustainable travel for all
- To ensure long term prosperity of the Town Centre



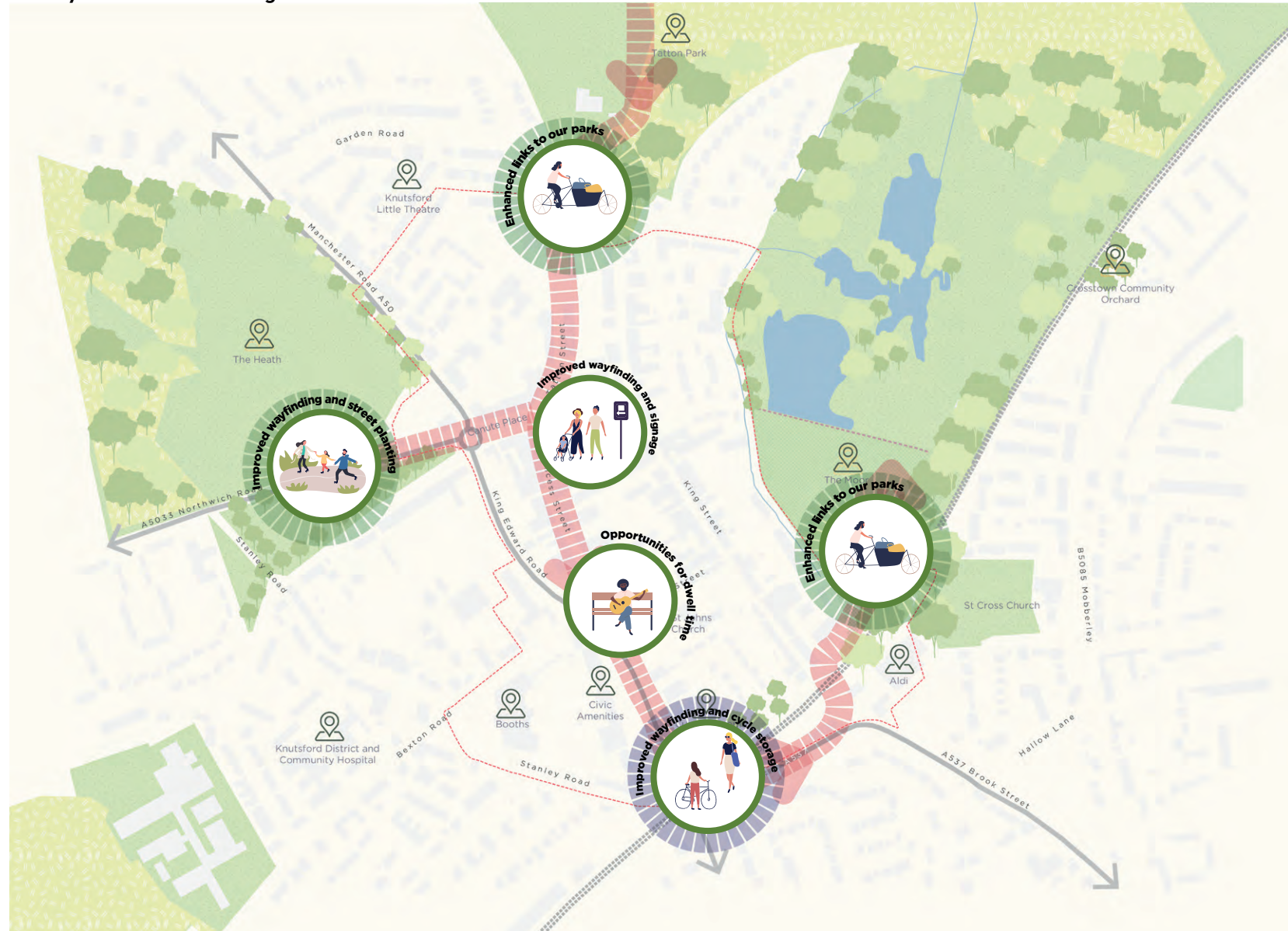
Toolkit Actions

- 4a Provide pop up seating 4b Better signage
- 4d Planting in pots to define space for certain uses
- 4e Enhance gateway sites
- 7a Parklets
- 7e Bike and Scooter Parking
- 20b Use space and activities to attract people to a forgotten part of Town Centre and create new place identity/ Reinvigorated alleyways
- 25a Meanwhile uses



Priority Action 2: Connecting Green Assets

Priority Action 2: Connecting Knutsford with its Green Assets



Priority Action 2: Connecting Knutsford with its Green Assets



Cycle path (Source: Getty Images)



Street planting (Source: Getty Images)



Pathfinding (Source: Getty Images)



Chatty benches (Source: Getty Images)



Frodsham Street, Coventry. Interactive wayfinding (Photo Credit: Richard Wolfestrome)



Action 3: Prioritising more Cycling and Walking (PRIORITY)

What

Knutsford is a small town in terms of its size and population – though it’s Town Centre punches well above its weight. The small footprint of the town, its narrow historic streets, and proximity to Tatton Park, make it more attractive to walking and cycling for short trips than many others. However, with an affluent population and large retail/leisure catchment, car use remains high for trips to the town centre – and severance from the A50 can discourage choosing active travel modes to access to town centre. This will also support wider objectives to improve the health and wellbeing of the community.

Several proposals are set out in the Local Transport Deliver Plan (LTDP) and neighbourhood Plan (NP) for improving conditions for journeys on foot and cycle within the town centre and along key corridors such as King Edward Rd and Toft Rd. These proposals should be supported and progressed, helping build confidence for those who presently feel less comfortable on foot or cycle than in their car. Knutsford Town Council has recently signed off a cycling infrastructure strategy. This will also support wider objectives to improve the health and wellbeing of the community.

How

- Consider the location of cycle hubs to improve green links and provide safe secure cycle parking throughout the Town Centre and at the railway station.
- Explore design options for routes identified as key active travel connections in the Local Transport Development Plan (LTDP). This includes Manchester Road, Northwich Road and Brook St.
- Prioritise upgrades of Knutsford Revolution, which could be an even greater asset to the town through quiet street treatments, surfacing upgrades and removal of barriers not compliant with EA2010.
- Improve signage and wayfinding across town especially at key gateways and along corridors linking green assets. Different colours for different routes works well to aid navigation.
- Implementation of measures identified in the Knutsford Cycle Infrastructure Plan to promote cycling across the whole town to enable residents to be able to cycle to the town centre.

Who

- CEC
- Town Council
- CycleKnutsford

Where

- Knutsford Town Centre
- Knutsford Revolution

Priority Action 3: Encouraging cycling and walking

The design of streets across Knutsford is generally significantly weighted towards the movement of vehicles, often to the detriment of other modes. To create a more walkable, cycle-friendly and attractive Knutsford, we need to rethink the balance of streets at all scales.

On narrow historic streets with significant existing activity, streets should prioritise people on foot and offer places to dwell and enjoy – as per the example from Seville. This includes King St and Princess St. Access and servicing can be maintained, whilst street texture treatments reduce the carriageway dominance prioritising the public space.

Other streets will require different approaches, low traffic streets would benefit from simple changes to footways, levels and materials (such as the example from Paradou, France). Busier main roads, and sometimes residential streets, will require wider footways and segregated cycle tracks to create more comfortable conditions for people on foot or cycle.



Seville, Spain Reducing the dominance of cars will allow existing businesses to use the street for outdoor dining in locations like King St. (Photo Credit: MottMacDonald)



Opportunities for bicycle and scooter rentals would encourage visitors and residents to cycle to different destinations within the town (Photo Credit: Getty)



Paradou, France Many smaller streets within Knutsford could be improved to create a better walking environment. (Photo Credit: MottMacDonald)



Park Lane, Liverpool Streets with higher flows of traffic will require segregated cycle tracks if they are to attract use by people of all ages and abilities (Photo Credit: MottMacDonald)



Action 3 supports the following objectives:

- To support healthy living and well-being
- To support provision of sport and leisure opportunities
- To protect, retain and enhance environment and green infrastructure
- To ensure long-term viability and prosperity
- To promote safe, healthy and sustainable travel for all
- To ensure long term prosperity of the Town Centre



Toolkit Actions

- 1a Improve the evening offer
- 4b Better signage
- 4e Enhance gateway sites
- 7e Bike and scooter parking
- 11a Design holistic public realm scheme
- 25d Raise awareness of public realm



Action 4: Mobilising Knutsford's Business Community

What

Knutsford Town Centre and its surrounding employment areas including Parkgate Industrial Estate, Booths Park and Knutsford Business Park accommodate a range of businesses critical to the prosperity of Knutsford and its community. Supporting these businesses to thrive will support the prosperity of the centre as well as encouraging them to directly support the actions identified for the Town.

How

External support to engage with businesses - Wilmslow have worked with Groundwork

The Knutsford website could have business profiles introducing individual workers to make it more personal.

Businesses could also come together to established loyalty schemes to support shoppers to stay local. This has worked well in Belper <https://lovebelper.co.uk/>

Engage with local businesses in and around the Town Centre and those based in surrounding area (and business partners) to give back to Knutsford. Many, particularly larger ones, are being encouraged to support their local communities. If engaged around issues/opportunities that relate to their core function, businesses could be encouraged to provide the following to support the Town's aspirations:

- Sponsorship
- Materials
- Technical support
- Volunteers

In Wilmslow Groundwork has been appointed by the Town Council to supporting local business engagement and to test the appetite to establish a Business Improvement District (BID).

The Town Council employs a Town Centre Manager to lead on business engagement and communication and through this we already undertake a number of initiatives such as our Taste Knutsford food tours, operating a local gift voucher scheme and some targeted events to promote local business.

Who

- Town Council
- Local businesses especially larger and dynamic/innovative/creative businesses including Bruntwood and Tatton Estate Management
- Further work to engage with businesses - Wilmslow is working with Groundwork

Where

Across Knutsford including Parkgate, Booths Hall and Knutsford Business Park



Action 4 supports the following objectives:

- To ensure long-term viability and prosperity
- To ensure long term prosperity of the Town Centre



Toolkit Actions

- 3b Appoint Town Centre Champions
- 6a Establishment of a Business Improvement District (BID)
- 13a Business profiles
- 13b Community wealth building
- 19a Affordable Start ups
- 25e Prioritise more sustainable businesses



Action 5: Showcasing Knutsford's Heritage and Tourism Assets (PRIORITY)

What

Knutsford boasts a number of high quality heritage buildings along its main shopping streets. The Heritage Centre already promotes the town's heritage but there is scope to expand upon this and to link better to wider tourism, arts and culture attractions and opportunities

How

Whilst the Heritage Centre showcases the town's heritage assets and organised tours, the potential to embrace technology to broaden the appeal of the town should be considered. The use of QR codes or apps means more insight can be offered to more visitors. Trails could also be themed such as pub trails. Consideration should be given as to how to use these to encourage visitors to venture into other parts of the town including Tatton Park, Brook Street Heritage Site the grave of Mrs Gaskell and other areas of interest.

Other actions proposed should enhance the setting of the heritage buildings and encourage people to be able to dwell more around those in King Street and appreciate them. (see Action 1)

Better signage could also help direct visitors to these assets. Make more of other assets in the centre such as the cinema to host local exhibitions.

A number of the other local centres are also looking to make more of their heritage assets and it would be worth engaging with them to share best practice and also to consider whether there is scope to collaborate

with them and other organisations to encourage linked trips for visitors. More events focused around heritage should also be considered with scope to link to showcasing the towns other assets

Considerable potential exists for Tatton Park to encourage more of its visitors to go on to visit Knutsford Town Centre. Improvements to their physical connections would support this.

Looking at a number of the actions in the round (Actions 1, 2, 3, 5 and 6) and engaging with the team at CEC preparing the Visitor Economy Strategy should provide a new impetus to enhance Knutsford's profile as a visitor destination.

Explore options for improving visitor coach parking.

Who

- Knutsford Heritage Centre and associated support groups/volunteers
- Town Council
- CEC
- Local businesses
- Other towns with heritage and tourism assets
- Volunteers
- Tatton Park

Where

- Across Knutsford and link to Tatton Park



Action 5 supports the following objectives:

- To protect heritage
- To ensure long-term viability and prosperity
- To ensure long term prosperity of the Town Centre



Toolkit Actions

- 1a Improve the evening offer
- 1b Introduce a programme of events which open-up and connect different parts of the centre for a limited time
- 1c Enable autumn and winter al-fresco dining
- 1d Use lighting
- 3a Managing assets
- 4f Open up heritage buildings as venues or for visitors/ events
- 9b Curated events focused on historic buildings, public spaces, gardens and parks
- 15a Annual/ regular events
- 16a Self guided heritage tours



Action 6: Raising Knutsford’s Profile

What

Knutsford has a number of websites – Town Council, Business and Community – showcasing the town and whilst this is a great start there are lots of ways in which the town’s offer could be promoted to attract more local residents, workers, visitors and tourists.

How

Consideration should be given as to whether these existing websites could be combined into a single platform providing information for local residential, businesses and visitors. The website could also be linked to other partner websites including CEC and Visit Chester and Cheshire. Content could be added to really showcase the town including profiles of local businesses (including individuals to make it more personal), local walks, cycle routes etc.

Knutsford has considerable scope to further enhance its profile as a tourist destination linking into marketing campaigns and social media in respect of Tatton Park and other local visitor attractions. Tatton Park should work with CEC and the Town Council to support this

Physical improvements in particular enhancements to walking and cycling connections should encourage better linked trips attracting more visitors from the Park into the Centre and also visitors from other heritage centres such as Nantwich and Chester. Consideration should be given to the introduction of more seating at key locations in the town to encourage people to dwell for longer.

To support increased footfall on the website it would be worth considering which other websites it could be linked up with. Such as other centres in the area or with centres that are linked by cycling or walking and local visitor attractions.

Wilmslow has just launched a new website and brand for the town Wilmslow’s Way Better (www.wilmslowswaybetter.co.uk). It showcases many exciting aspects of the town its wellbeing, F&B, cinema, businesses, shopping and how to explore the wider area.

The website was created by local businesses who wanted to support Wilmslow.

Other mechanisms to raise the profile of the centre could include:

- Improved signage (physical and virtual via app/ QR code) to stop people just passing through
- Establish Town Ambassadors
- Expand the already impressive programme of events to attract as wide an audience as possible and use this to raise awareness of businesses. Hitchin held special events to showcase individual streets to encourage people to explore other parts of the town not just where they usually visit
- Turning the heritage leaflet into an interactive trail around the town showcasing buildings of historic value or interesting people or historic events. This can be real or virtual embracing technology (Apps or QR codes)
- Ensure that key messages from the Vitality Plan is fed into the Visitor Economy Strategy that is being prepared for Cheshire East
- Start a Parkrun in Tatton Park near the Knutsford entrance to raise the profile of both destinations

Who

- Town Council
- Marketing Cheshire
- Local Businesses
- Knutsford Hosts

Where

- N/A



Action 6 supports the following objectives:

- To ensure long-term viability and prosperity
- To ensure long term prosperity of the Town Centre



Toolkit Actions

- 1b Use events to open up new areas
- 2a Create a smarter High street
- 3b Appointment of Town Centre champions
- 3c Destination management plans
- 4b Better signage
- 10a Independent shop guides
- 12a Create an App
- 12b Creation of Local Brand
- 12c Set-up an online platform
- 12d Introduce WIFI/ digital high street/ Town Centre app
- 15a Annual/ regular events



Action 7: Better Management of Car Movement (PRIORITY)

What

Knutsford would benefit from a targeted car parking strategy which means better balancing between short-stay high turnover parking (which supports retail/leisure) and longer-stay worker parking.

Better management will also help facilitate aspirations for change in other parts of the Town Centre, including Top and Bottom Streets.

On-street parking should be clearly limited to loading or very short stay only (30min max providing those needing to pop into the Centre with a short option close to the shops with a higher turnover). Higher turnover of on-street bays can offset any reductions in overall numbers. The bulk of car parking should be provided off-street with a timescaled pricing structure.

The LTDP sets out the potential for a MSCP at Tatton Street, which requires further assessment of viability and delivery models alongside traffic, air quality and noise implications.

How

- Consider recommendations made by CEC Parking Strategy determine an appropriate car parking pricing and timing strategy
- To be considered in parallel with Action 1
- Reduce on-street parking supply and length of stay
- Explore viability of MSCP at Tatton Street
- Explore options for improving visitor coach parking
- Aligned to wider proposals to respond to the climate crisis consider scope for introducing more electric charging points across the centre

Who

- CEC
- Town Council

Where

- Town Centre



Action 7 supports the following objectives:

- To promote safe, healthy and sustainable travel for all
- To ensure long term prosperity of the Town Centre



Toolkit Actions

- 14a Quick-wins and temporary interventions to manage traffic speeds and create more pedestrian friendly spaces – e.g. planters, parklets and street furniture.
- 14e Decked and multi-storey car parks
- 14f Better managed car parking
- 20a Remove clutter from key pedestrian routes and simplify crossing points
- 25c Facilitate modal shift



Action 8: Public Transport Strategy (PRIORITY)

What

As a small town Knutsford struggles to support a fully integrated and high frequency public transport network. However the railway station is a major asset. There is scope to improve its connections to the Town Centre and overall accessibility and lobby for improved services.

The CEC Bus Service Improvement Plan seeks to build on previous collaborative working between CEC, bus operators, public transport user groups and rail stakeholders.

How

The public transport offer of Knutsford could be strengthened in several ways:

- Improve facilities at Knutsford Station including provision of street lighting within the car park, CCTV within the station and on platforms, cycle parking, and cycle hire.
- Improve pedestrian connections to Knutsford Station, including improved crossings at the Adam’s Hill junction.
- Consider the viability of a free park and ride shuttle between the Town Centre and Tatton Park in peak periods. This could be trialled to test the impact and determine whether it was good value for money.
- Explore options for improving visitor coach parking.

- CEC to continue to lobby with other local authorities for improvements to the rail service across in the North.
- Investigate the potential of improving local provision through local community transport schemes such as Rivington example.

Who

- CEC
- Northern Rail
- Bus Operators
- Mid Cheshire Community Rail Partnership

Where

- Railway Station



Action 8 supports the following objectives:

- To promote safe, healthy and sustainable travel for all
- To ensure long term prosperity of the Town Centre



Toolkit Actions

- 4c better bus stops
- 7e bike and scooter parking
- 14a –Quick-wins and temporary interventions to manage traffic speeds and create more pedestrian friendly spaces – e.g. planters, parklets and street furniture
- 14c Enhanced crossings
- 14d Digital timetable signage for public transport

Centre Wide Actions

In addition to the specific actions identified for Knutsford, a number of actions have been identified that are relevant to all of the nine centres. These are:

- 1. Appointment of CEC Centre Champion** - The identification of a nominated officer (go to person/ champion) within CEC management team for each of the Centres who would understand local priorities for the Centre and would support them to access appropriate officers within key departments and also would seek to unblock issues. It is understood that this is something CEC is currently considering. This would be supported by an providing each of the centres with a clear organogram (including contact details) of who within CEC is responsible for what to make engagement easier.
- 2. Creation of a Centres Forum** - Establishment of forum where key representatives from each of the centres could come together on a regular basis to receive updates from CEC about common issues/opportunities would be beneficial. It is also recognised that during the preparation of the Vitality Plans that a number of the centres are making great progress overcoming specific issues. By coming together and sharing progress and discussing issues it is considered that the centres would be better able to share best practice and to identify actions where they could collaborate with other centres to drive economies of scale/value for money. Some meetings may just be held between the centres (without representation from CEC officers) whilst others could include CEC and/or other partners such as C&W LEP, Groundwork etc.

- 3. Centre Focused Meetings in CEC** - The process of preparing the Vitality Plans has involved internal workshops with relevant department leads within CEC to ensure that all departments are considering challenges and opportunities in the round rather than just in terms of their individual responsibility. It would be beneficial to continue to hold more regular Centre focused workshops. The best decisions for the centres will be taken when the implications of proposals are considered in the round taking into account both potential investment and long term maintenance.

Centre Wide Actions

4. Streamlining maintenance of public realm and greenspace – in light of the local desire for improved maintenance combined with recognition that CEC budgets are under severe pressure, to ensure maintenance of public realm can be optimised, it is recommended that further engagement would be beneficial to agree how the resources of CEC, the Town Council and wider stakeholders could be targeted to support maintenance. Work to establish a more comprehensive schedule of local assets in each centre and who is responsible for their maintenance should be the starting point of drive for improved maintenance. Going forward any future capital investment must be supported by appropriate consideration as to how assets will be maintained over their lifetime. It is also important to recognise that better maintenance does not necessarily just relate to grass being cut regularly. In recognition of the importance of biodiversity, going forward it is anticipated that consideration will be given to allocating parcels of land to the “wild” to support biodiversity.

5. Increasing importance of sustainability - sustainability is now a critical issue for many organisations and important for local residents both in terms of operational implications (for example energy costs) but also in terms of local impact on the local community and the planet. As such sustainability can no longer be positioned as another priority action but rather must be a concept that is considered in every aspect of proposed actions to minimise their carbon footprint and maximise their positive benefits for the local area and its community.

6. Improved platform for communicating activities – the preparation of the Vitality Plans has demonstrated that all of the Town Councils are proactively trying to improve their centres. However it is recognised that many stakeholders will not be aware of all these efforts. Consideration therefore needs to be given as to how to amplify to more local residents, shoppers, visitors and businesses what is going on. Recommendations are made under Action 6 as to how Knutsford websites could be improved. This should include adding more content and sharing this through a variety of channels and to ensure that these are also linked to other key partners for example CEC and the other centres (so collectively they reinforcing each other’s profiles)

7. Enhanced engagement with local businesses – many of the centres benefit from having a range of national, and in some cases international businesses, many of which are innovating in their specialist areas. There is a significant benefit to the centres and their businesses to collaborating. Whilst restrictions on public sector revenue budgets is putting pressure on what CEC can support there is an increasing recognition by businesses, especially corporates, for the need to support their local communities (Corporate Social Responsibility). This can be in the form of grants, offering expertise or encouraging their employees to volunteer. Even smaller businesses often want to give back to the communities in which they operate. This can be in the form of materials and/or specialist expertise (e.g. as has been achieved by Wilmslow in setting up the Wilmslow’s Way Better brand and website). All centres should seek to better engage with their local businesses to determine how they can collaborate to support each other’s objectives. This type of collaboration can give centres a significant boost particularly when it happens around public realm (investment and maintenance), marketing and branding.

8. Greater ownership of community assets – a couple of Town Councils have taken responsibility for their community assets (both in terms of ownership and/or management). CEC is willing to engage with each of the Town and Parish Councils to discuss whether there could be benefits from greater local ownership of local assets. A process is in place to support this to happen. There is also scope for centres who are already doing this to share pro and cons with other centres (via the proposed Centres Forum)

Governance and Delivery

Knutsford Town Council is responsible for supporting Knutsford to fulfil its potential. Going forward the Town Council will continue to be a major driver in the delivery of the agreed actions emerging from the Vitality Plan.

Having established a range of potential projects that will support Knutsford to thrive, further detailed work is now required to determine a detailed action plan setting out who will do what and by when.

It is recommended that dedicated working groups are set up to drive specific short term priority actions forward. The action focused working groups will be responsible for:

- Defining the details of the proposed action
- Considering how it could be funded
- Determining who needs to be involved in supporting its delivering and what their role will be
- Seeking funding - this might require support from other partners
- Determining the timetable for intervention
- Monitoring and evaluating progress against key performance indicators and refining actions if agreed outcomes are not being met.
- Reporting progress to relevant partners

- including the Town Council and CEC
- Recommending that CEC, Town Council and any other key local stakeholder groups be invited to adopt the TCVP as a shared common plan. This would allow easy demonstration to potential funders that there is a consensus of approach and buy in from the local community

The makeup of the working groups will vary depending on the specific actions they are focused on. It is important to ensure that the same people are not tasked with getting involved in all the working groups as this will impact on progress. As such the number of working groups and pace of delivery will depend on the number of stakeholder partners that can be engaged with and encouraged to get involved.

Consideration should be given as to whether specific stakeholders need to be invited to be involved to provide technical support. For example CEC, national organisations like the Canal and River Trust or local businesses with specific expertise around specific actions. CEC Connected Community officers may be able to provide development support.

Progress will be reported into the Town Council who will in turn also report regularly to CEC. Where issues regarding progress/delivery are identified discussions will need to be taken to

determine the required refinements to get progress back on track.

It is acknowledged that partners will need to determine their appetite and ability to deliver the proposed actions. Depending on resources it may be determined that additional staff may need to be recruited to support the pace of delivery of the Vitality Plan and supporting Action Plans.

Communication and Engagement

There is scope to expand on the current website to use it to engage more effectively with a wider range of residents, visitors, workers and businesses. There is a need to begin to share important messages with key stakeholders including:

- Recent and proposed investment in the centre
- Projects that are being worked up
- Funding that is being sought and accessed
- How to get involved

The key partners to be engaged with on a regular basis include:

- Local businesses
- Residents
- Local community and interest groups
- Other towns centres generally and specifically

those who are focusing on common actions for example centres looking to better promote the heritage of their Centre.

Quality engagement should generate potential volunteers to get involved in the delivery of specific actions and potentially resources to support their delivery.

The following mechanisms should be used to engage with key partners:

- Further enhancement of the website and strengthen profile on social media
- Public engagement consultations – the draft Vitality Plan will be consulted upon and this be used to continue the dialogue with local residents
- Piggybacking Events – for example a stall at markets showcasing what’s on and how to get involved
- Existing and enhanced business networking events – to share emerging ideas, test support and encourage ideas to refine and support their delivery
- Identification of a team of local ambassadors – ambassadors could be trained and then kept up to date about what it going on in the Centre and then they can showcase positive messages to their contacts. Ambassadors can be proactive local independent businesses

leaders and other individuals who come into contact with lots of local people e.g. taxi drivers.

Consideration could be given to the appointment of a part time marketing officer for the centre as Wilmslow has just done.

In addition, as set out in Section 10, it is important for enhanced communication and engagement between CEC and Knutsford Town Council.

Funding

There is not a pot of money available to support the delivery of the Vitality Plan. Rather the Vitality Plan has been prepared as a resource to support discussions with potential funders. As such it provides a useful tool with which can be used to:

- Articulate priorities for Knutsford to CEC - the Vitality Plan will be used to articulate local priorities to CEC to guide them in their negotiations with developers in respect of contributions linked to planning applications (especially to support improvements in cycling, public realm and public transport) and also in determining their own capital budgets. Formal adoption of the TCVP by key stakeholder organisations can help demonstrate common objectives and priorities for any party submitting funding bids.

- Support external funding bids – having a clear action plan which provides an evidence base and priorities that have been consulted upon is now essential for most funding bids. It is important to recognise that often funding bids have specific funding leads. In some cases this may be CEC or Cheshire & Warrington LEP in others it might need to be a community group. Whoever may be responsible for leading and submitting a specific funding application, demonstration of collaboration between stakeholders and community support is essential.
- Engage with local businesses – to determine whether there are actions that they can get involved in which align with their priorities for supporting their local communities.

Another approach to generating more revenue to spend locally is for the Town Council to take responsibility for owning or managing assets with any surpluses being generated being invested back into the local centre.

It is important to note that when determining potential interventions consideration must be given to both initial capital investment and longer term revenue implications such as maintenance. In proposing capital investment the whole life of a project must be considered to ensure that appropriate revenue is available for ongoing costs such as maintenance.

11 Delivery continued

Phasing

The actions identified in Section 10 range from projects which are already being progressed to long term aspirations which will require feasibility and funding before they can be delivered. The Vitality Plan identifies 8 actions which support the established vision and objectives for the Centre. The Town Council is proactive and a number of the identified actions are already being pursued. The public consultation identified the following as priority interventions:

- Improving public transport
- Better management of car movement
- Prioritising cycling and walking
- Making more of the heritage and tourism assets

Partners now need to determine a detailed action plan related to funding that they are able to access and the resources that they have available or can access to support delivery.

It is important to acknowledge that this indicative programme is not fixed and if specific sources of funding are identified the programme should be adapted to respond to the opportunity.

Covid has taught us important lessons about testing new approaches. For example temporary road closures to gauge whether reducing car access to encourage cycling or to provide



outside dining space would benefit local centres. This approach should be continued so that rather than a public realm project having to be worked up in huge detail and then significant resources found to deliver it, more temporary solutions can be tested in terms of their impact and determine whether a more permanent solution is required or desirable. Changes are much more likely to be embraced by businesses and supported by local residents if they know that ideas are being tested and monitored and if they do not work can be reverted back to how they were.

A broad phasing plan for the identified actions is identified opposite where short term relates to 1-2 years and medium 3-5. The following should be noted:

- A number of interventions will require further feasibility and this can be ongoing but intervention on the ground is likely to be a few years off whist planning permission and funding is sought
- A number of interventions are interrelated in particular strengthening green links and expanding the events programme

Monitoring and Evaluation

As noted above the programme and the action plan will not be set in stone but must be capable of responding to new opportunities or challenges. As such it will be important to monitor impact to determine whether the established vision and objectives are being met. Suggested key performance indicators (KPIs) and how they could be measured and how often are identified opposite.

KPI	How measured	Frequency
Footfall	External provider	Monthly
Number of vacancies	Town Council	Quarterly
New units opening	Town Council	Quarterly
New businesses	Town Council to keep a list	Ongoing
Area of greenspace/open space/ cycleways and footpaths improved	CEC	Annually
Hits on website	Traffic on social media	Quarterly
Improve air quality	CEC	Quarterly

Note: CEC has recently commissioned monthly footfall data to end Sep 2026. Recommend all those involved regularly share useful monitoring data with other parties so that all can be aware of progress.

Glossary

Term	Explanation
Comparison Goods Sector	Retail that stocks higher value goods that are purchased infrequently e.g. furniture
Convenience Sector	Retail that stocks everyday items such as groceries, newspapers, toiletries, confectionery
F&B	Food and Beverage
Green Belt	A designated area of countryside, protected from most forms of development to help stop urban sprawl but can be used for agriculture, forestry and outdoor leisure
Greenspace	Parks, public gardens etc
HS2 route	The UK's new high speed rail network
KSC	Key Service Centres
Linkages	The connections between two or more places/ sites within the Town Centres
Public Realm	Space between and within buildings that is publicly accessible for everyone
S106 monies	Money that developers can use towards the development of community and social infrastructure
TCVP	Town Centre Vitality Plans
Wayfinding	The ways in which people orient themselves in a physical space and navigate from place to place
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
Dwell time	The time a person may spend in a particular place or area. For example, the length of time spent sat on a public bench.



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