

Alsager



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:

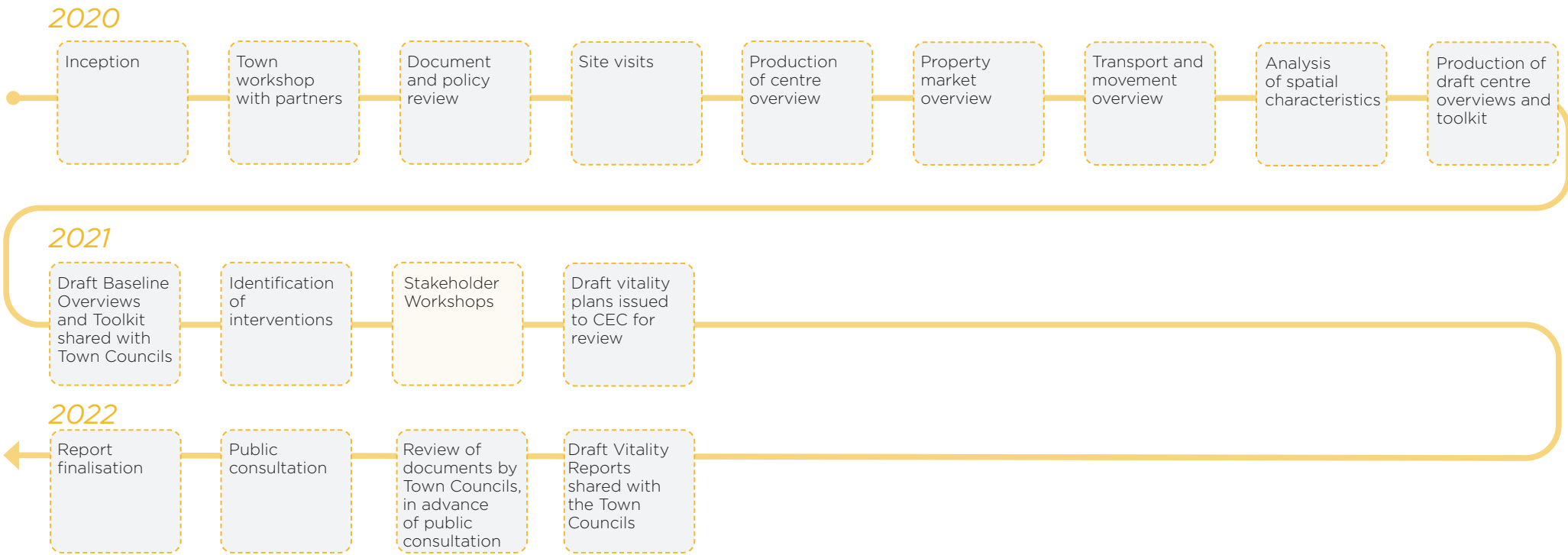
- Baseline – which was undertaken in 2020 and describes the Centre in terms of its offer and key characteristics. It brings together evidence and opinion in respect of the buildings, green and open spaces, access and its residents and businesses
- Action Plan – has been prepared in collaboration with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

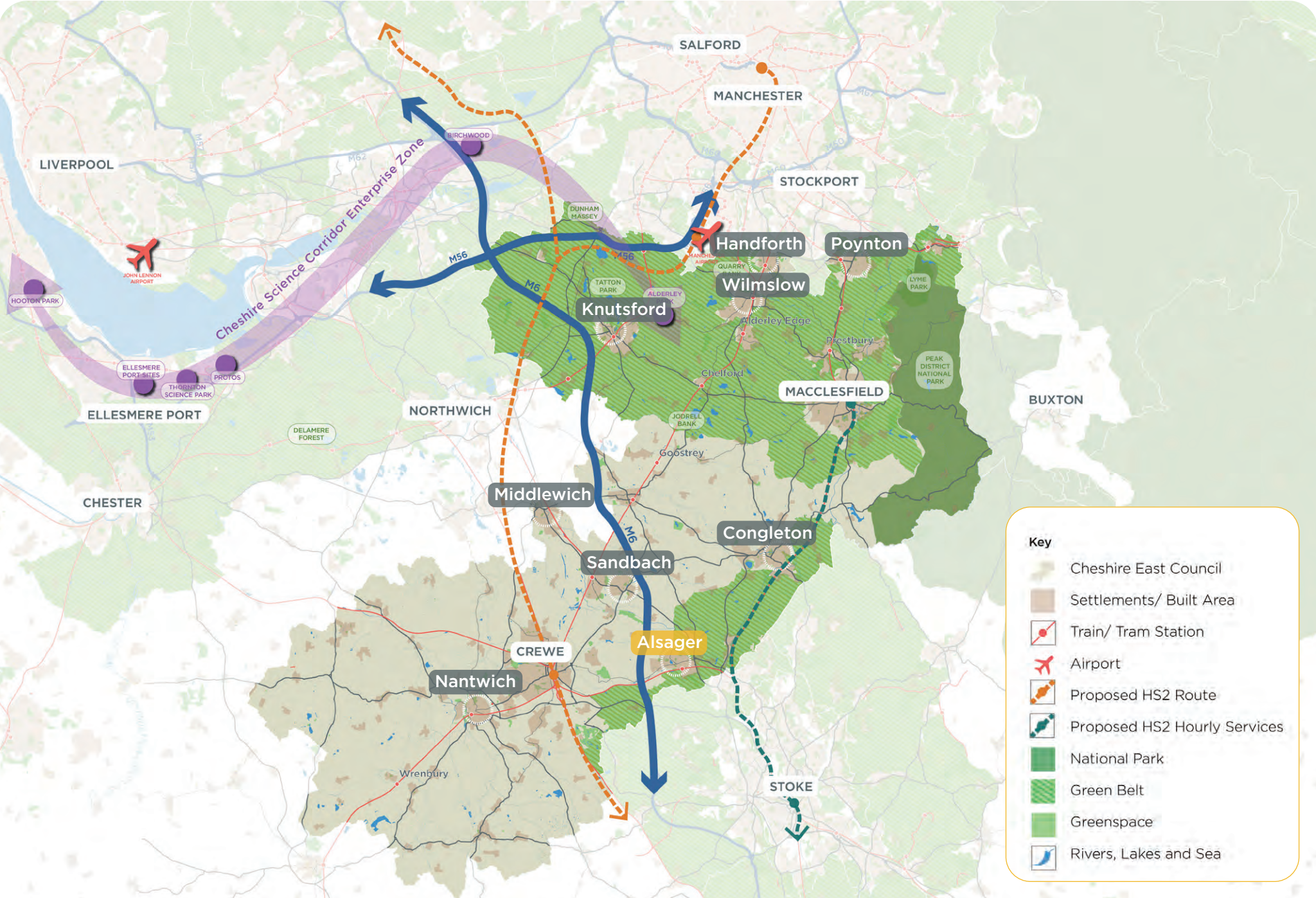
There is a need for more affordable housing in Alsager and smaller terraced and flatted homes to meet the needs of starter families and an aging demographic.

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.

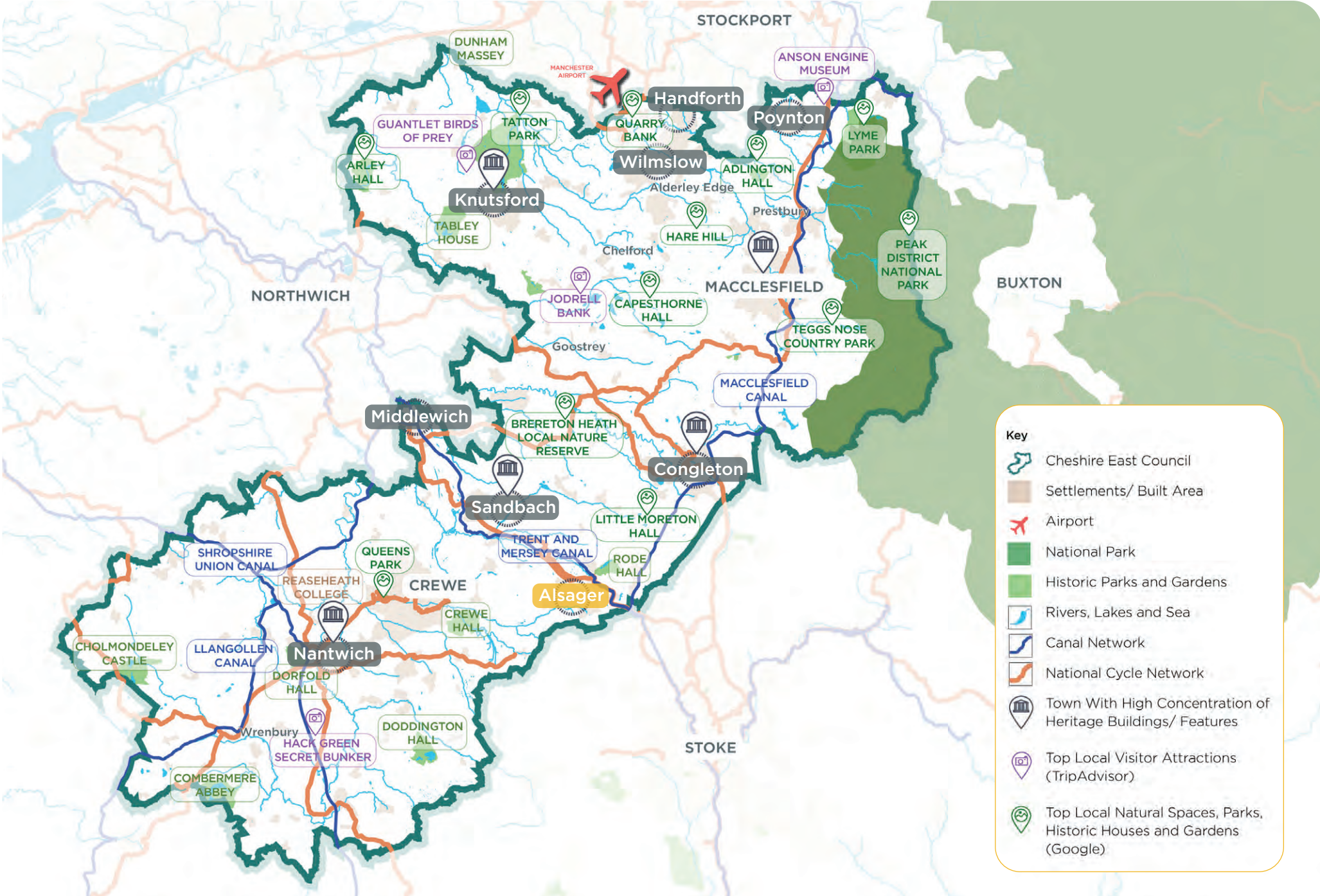
The town regularly achieves awards from Britain in Bloom and the Best Kept Railway Station but there is a recognition that improvements to the public realm are required to enhance the physical environment of the Town Centre to create a clearly identified sense of place.

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.



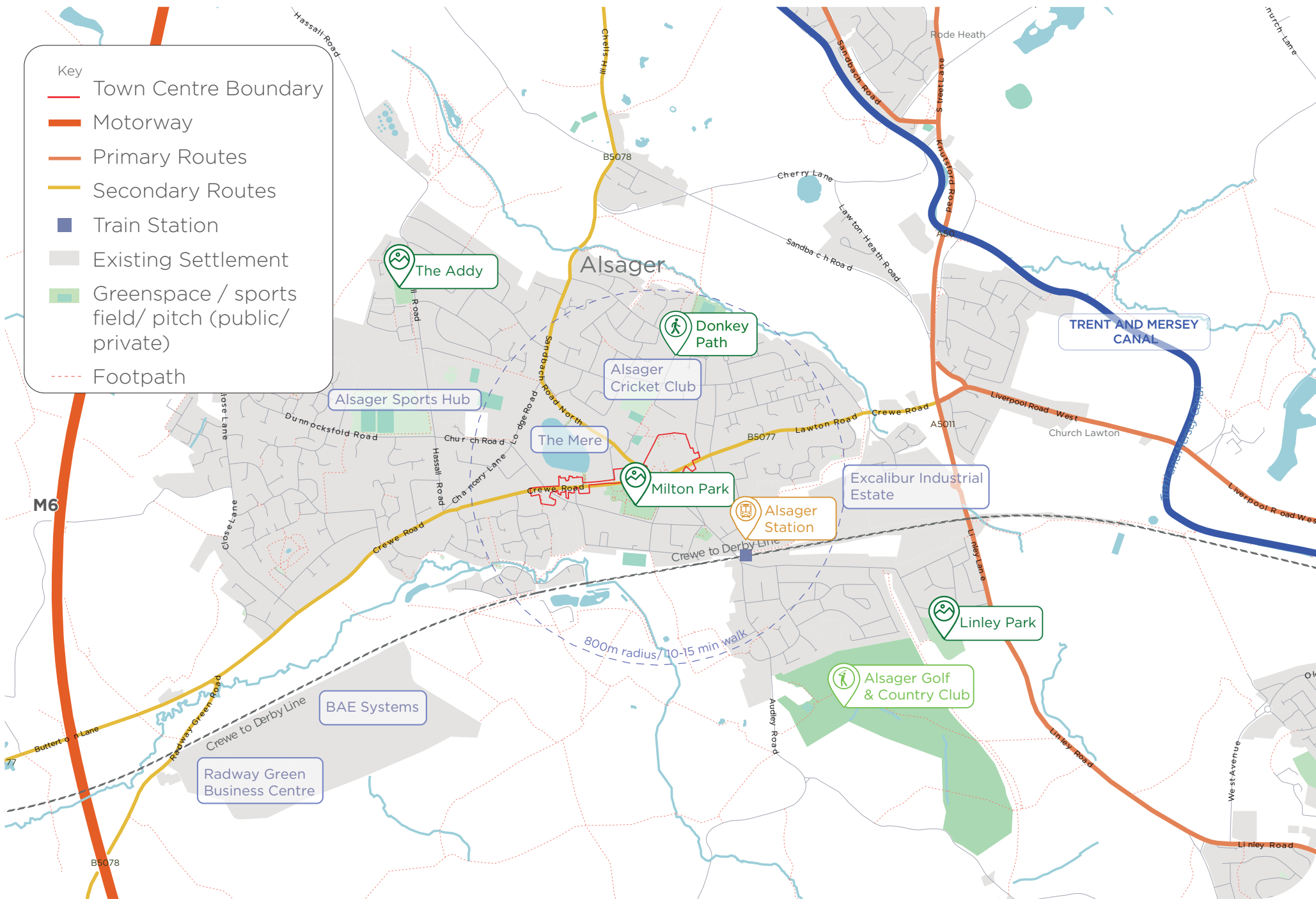
Strategic Connections and Assets Plan





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

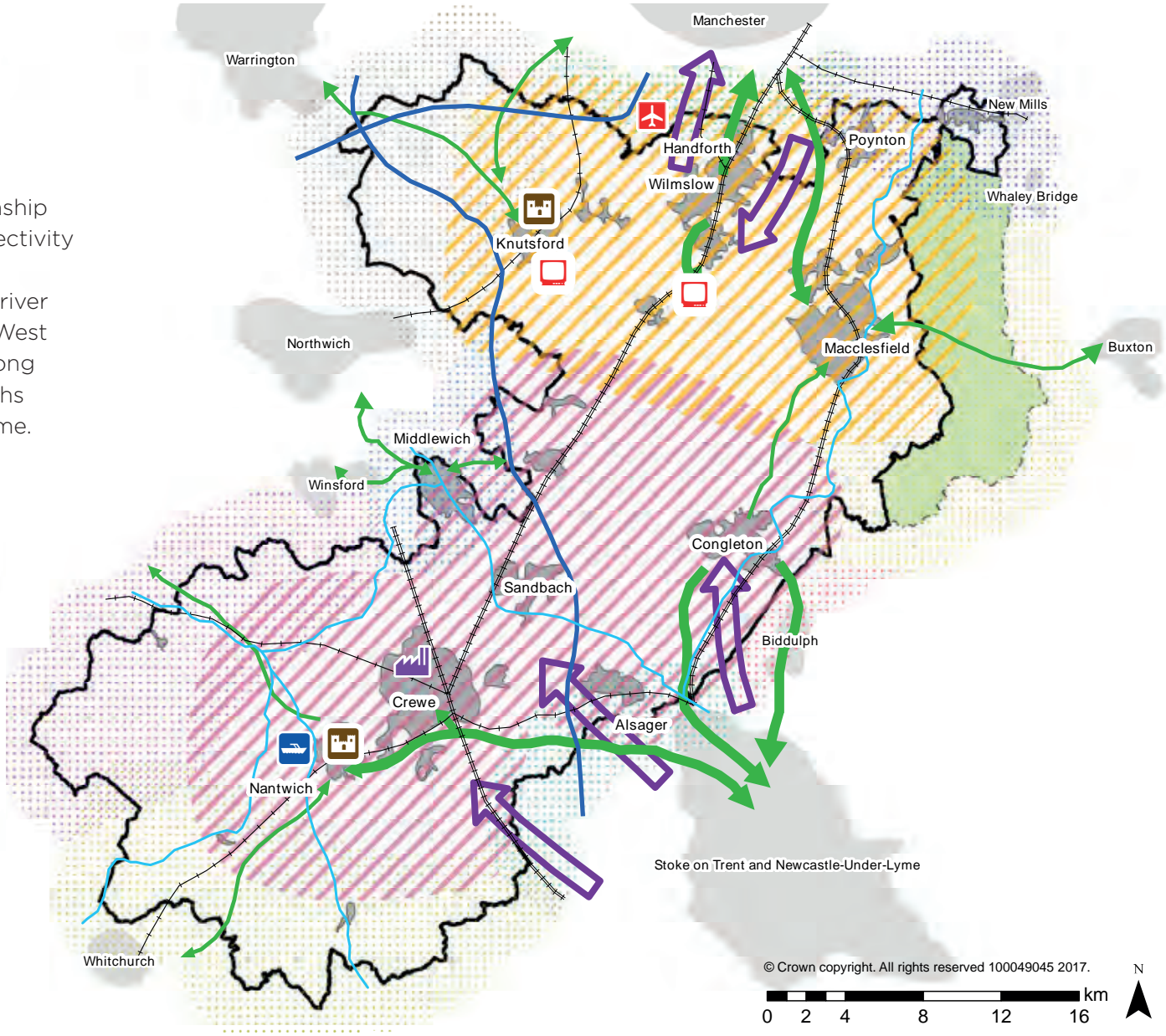
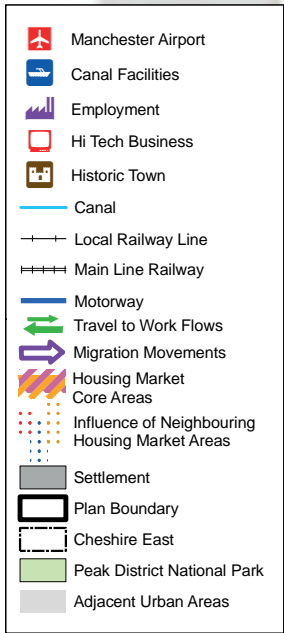
Objectives

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

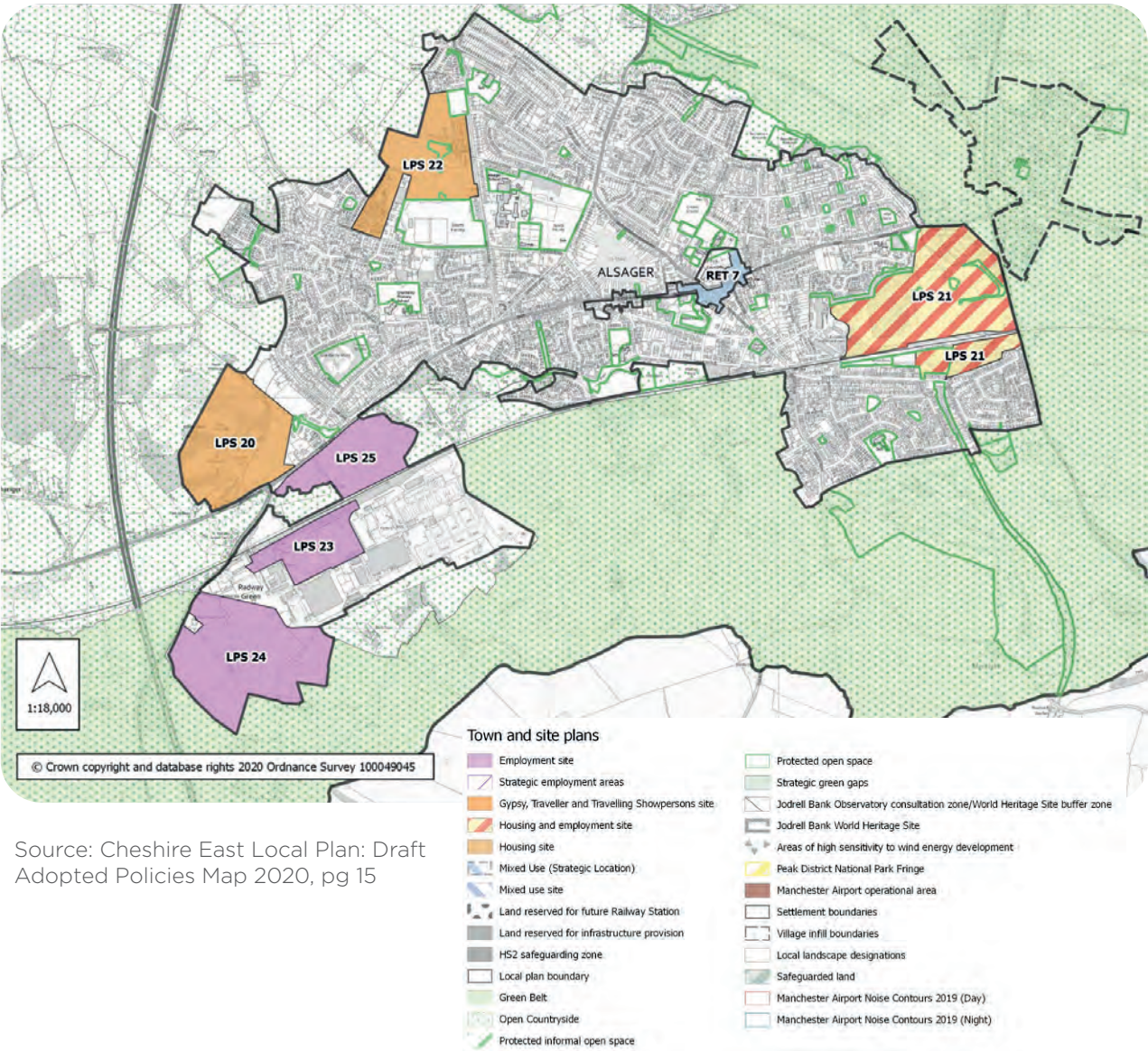
Local Plan Strategy 2017 (LPS) and Revised Publication Draft Site Allocations and Development Policies Document (SADPD) 2020

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
- Twyfords 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>

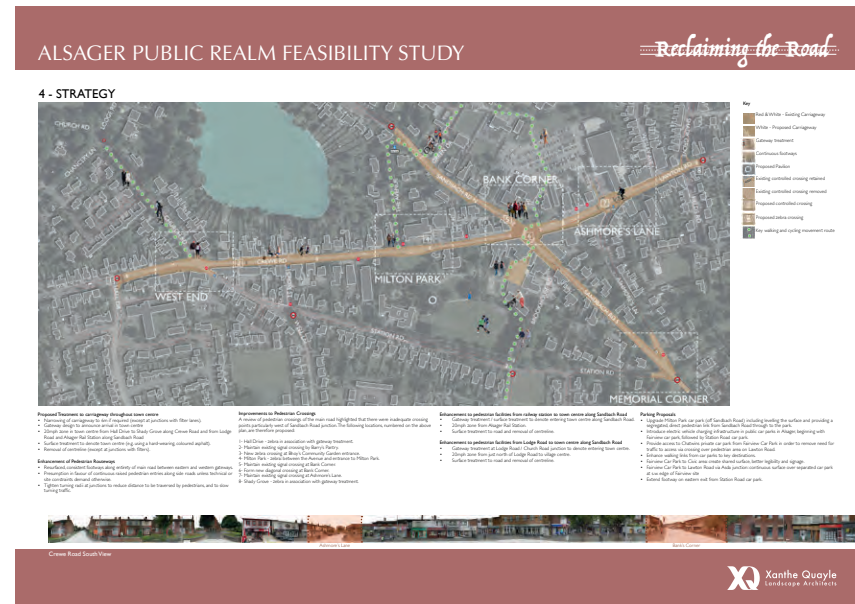
The Neighbourhood Plan forms an important document in informing and encouraging positive development within Alsager and will be used to influence individual planning decisions as they come forward.

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

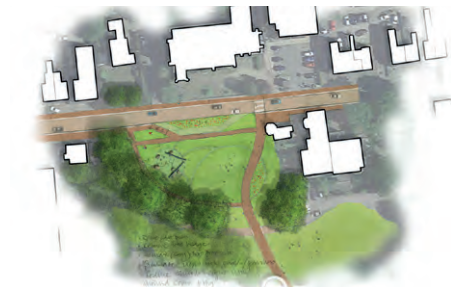
Reclaiming the Road

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

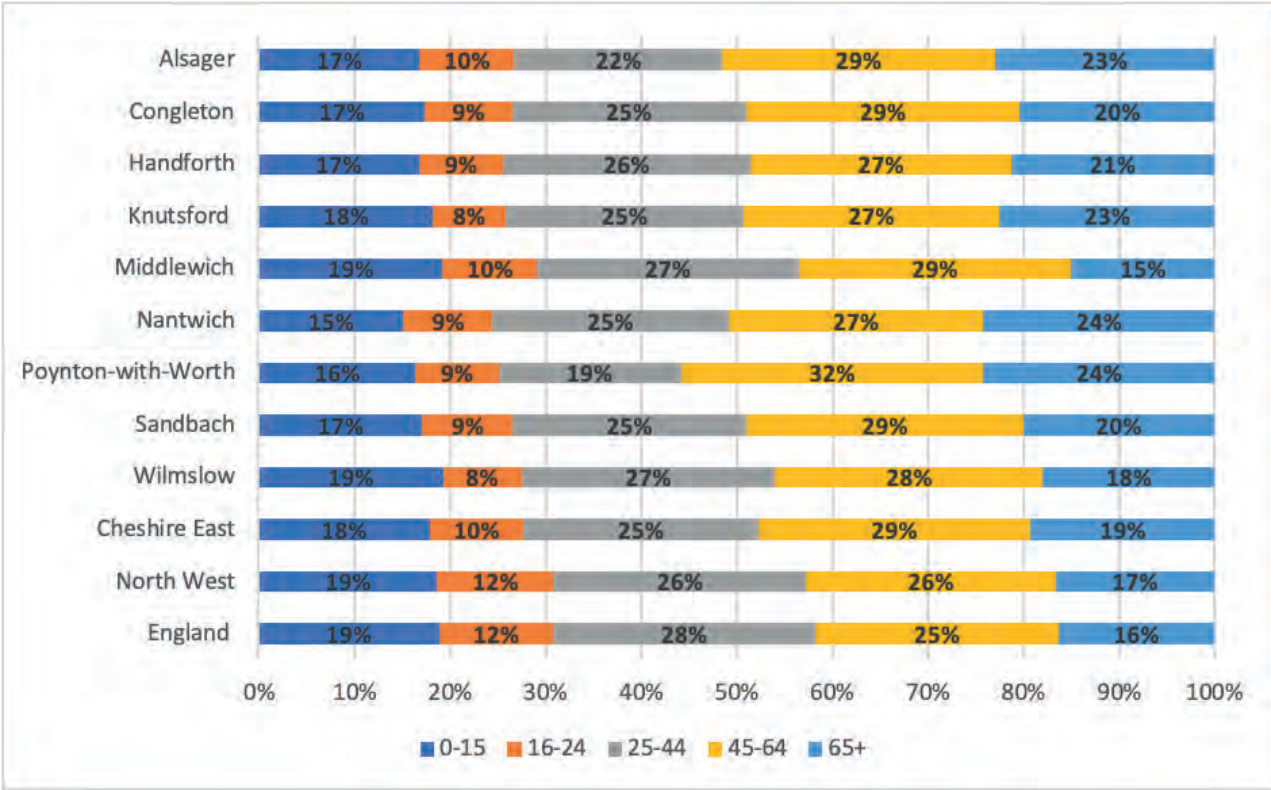


Milton Park

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

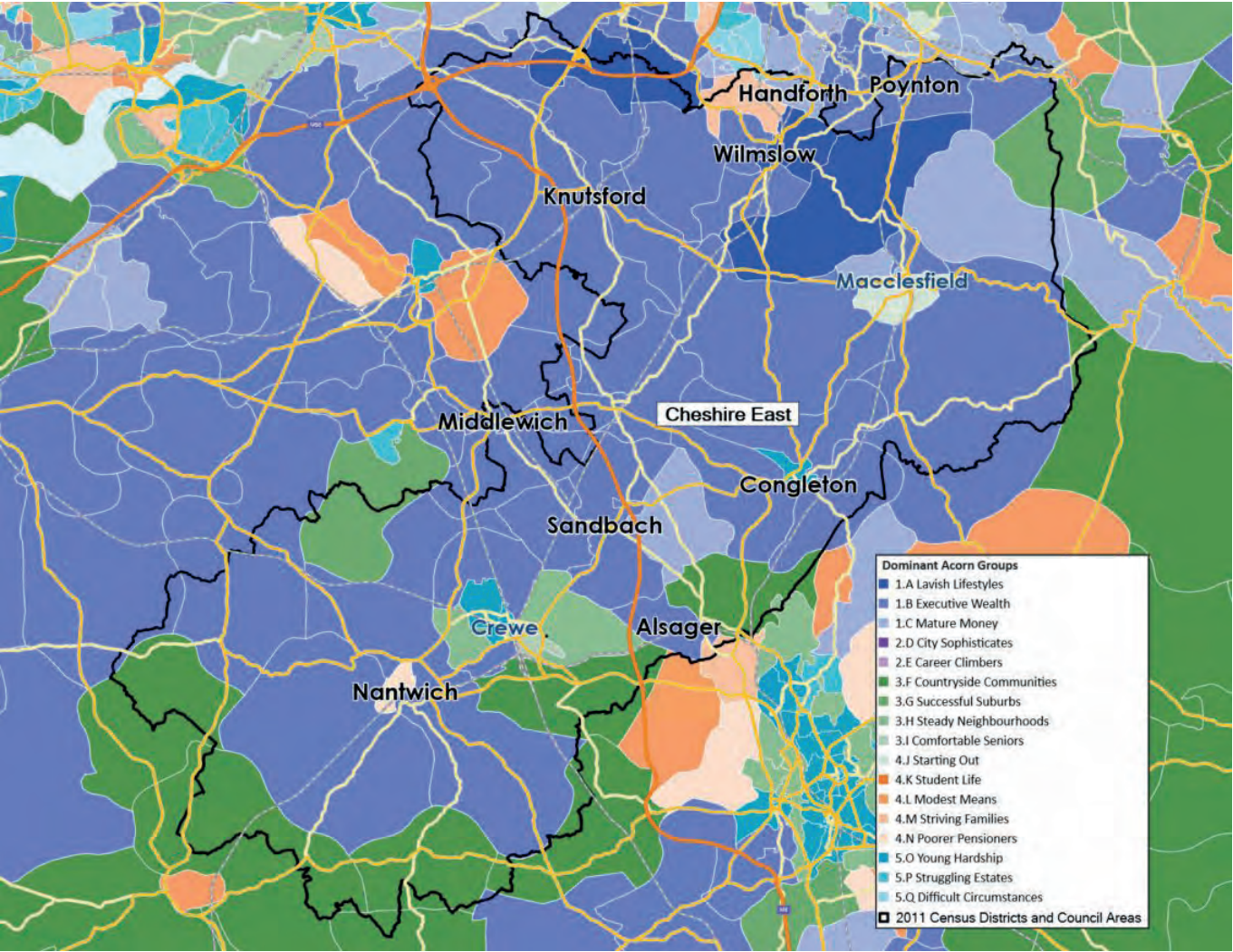
Occupational Profile
Source: Census 2011
*Wilmslow BUA includes Alderly Edge and Handforth
Most recent consistent data available across the 9 centres

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

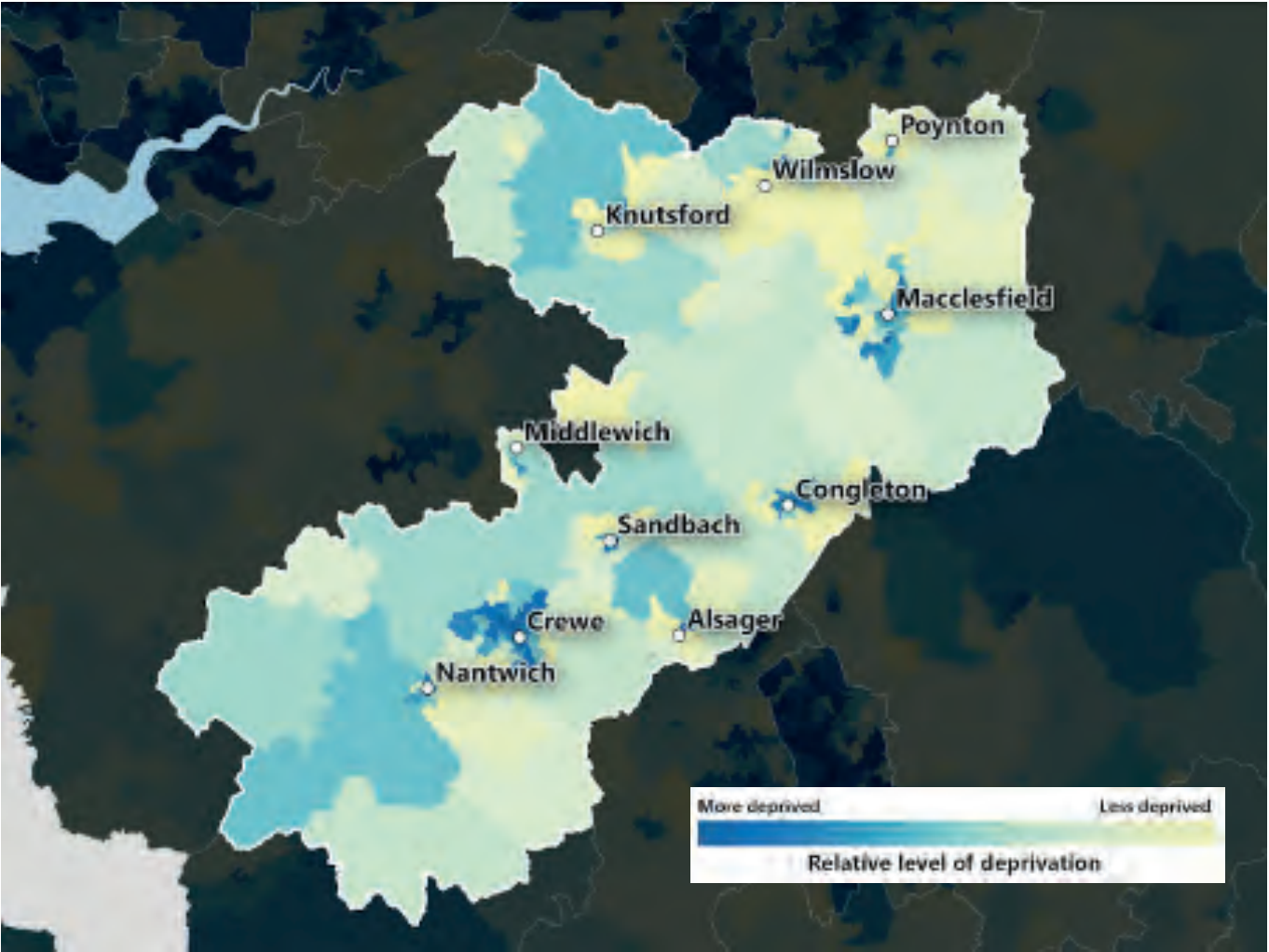
- 1. A Lavish Lifestyles
- 1. B Executive Wealth
- 1. C Mature Money
- 2. D City Sophisticates
- 2. E Career Climbers
- 3. F Countryside Communities
- 3. G Successful Suburbs
- 3. H Steady Neighbourhoods
- 3. I Comfortable Seniors
- 4. J Starting Out
- 4. K Student Life
- 4. L Modest Means
- 4. M Striving 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

Listed building

Primary vehicular routes

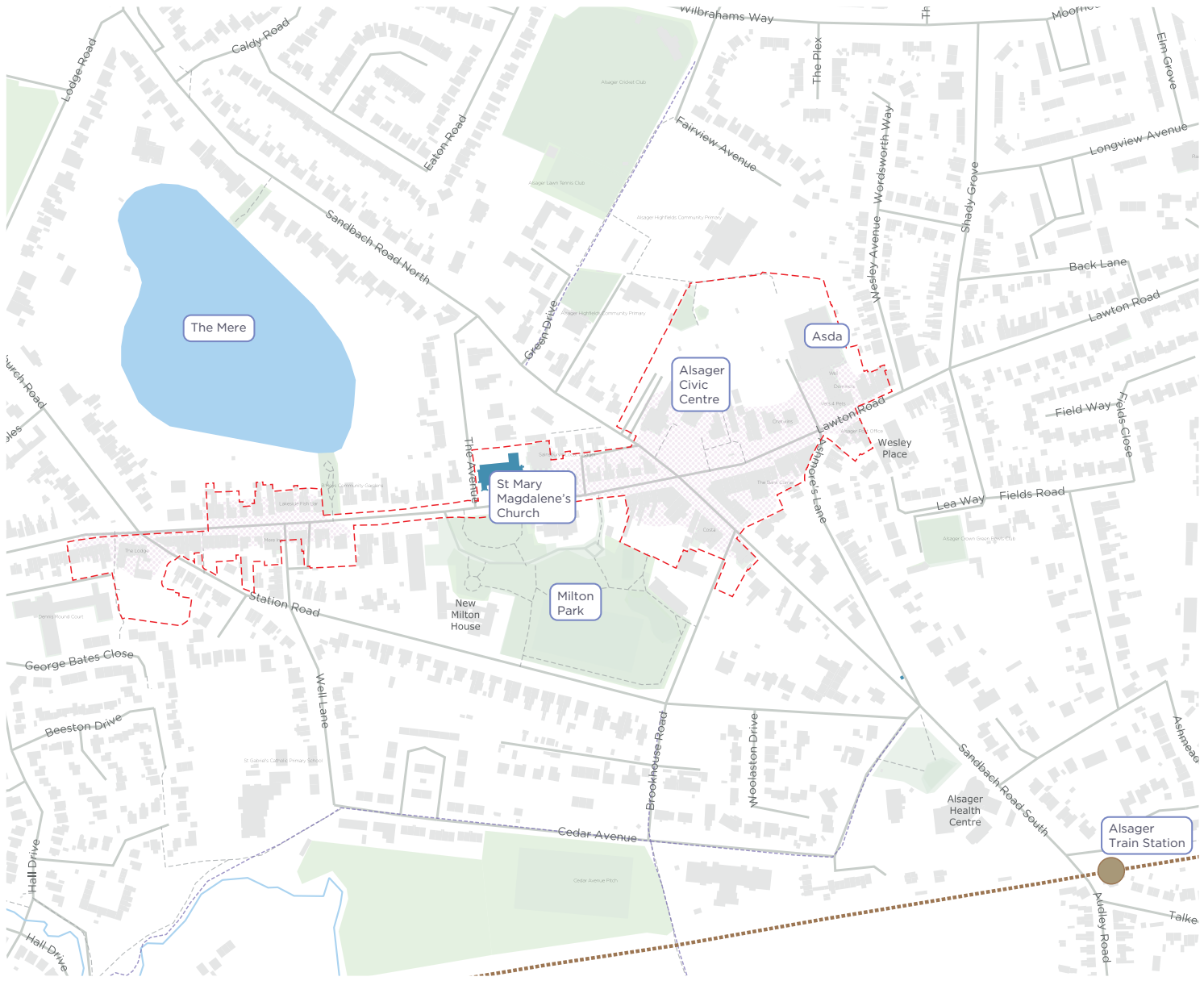
Cycle paths

Walking paths

Public right of way

Central green space

Train station



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

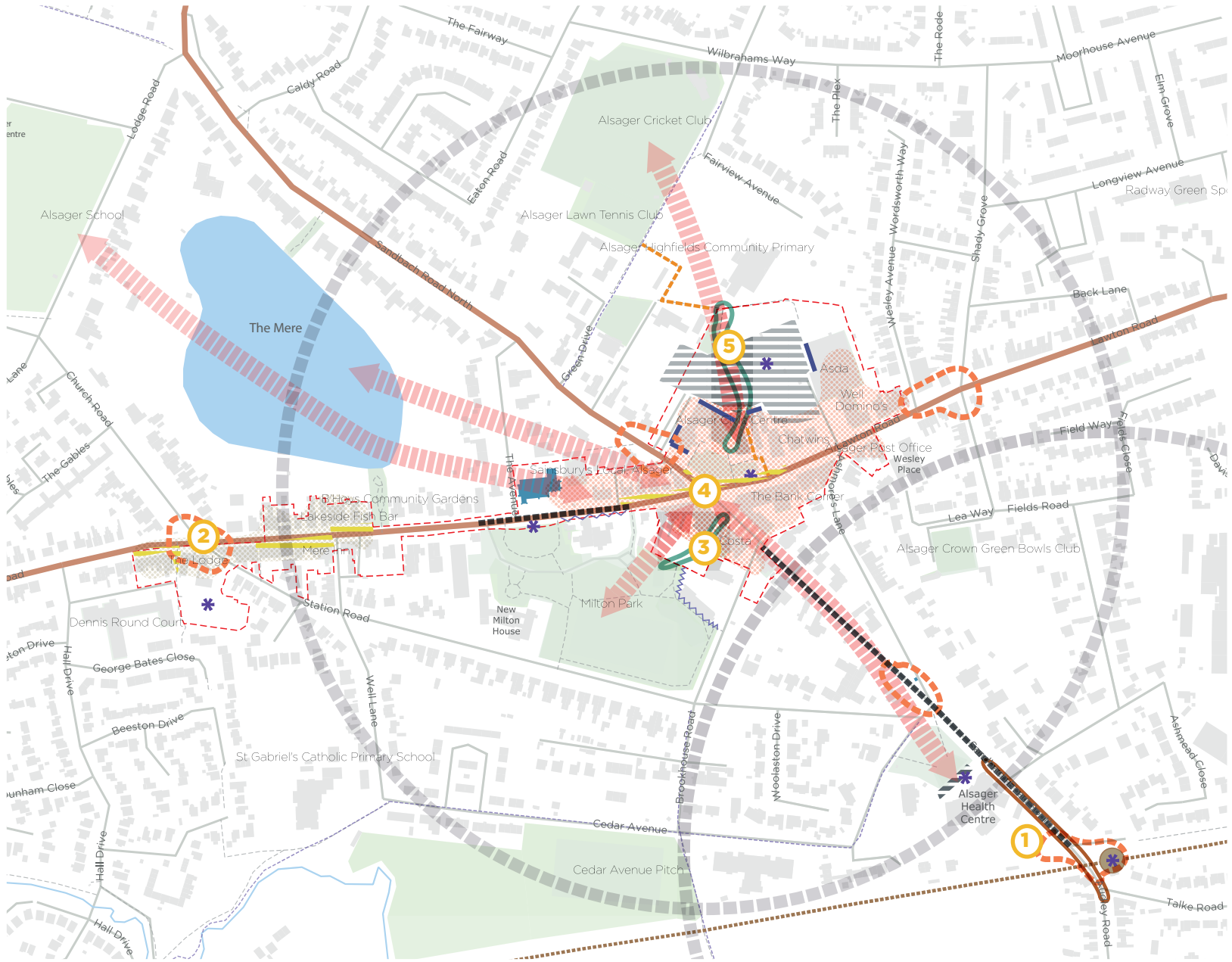


4 Civic hub (Town Council, church, community centre and library) at the centre of the town adds to the physical sense of centre and supports more varied uses within the Town Centre. It is also within walking distance of other services (ASDA, train station)

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:

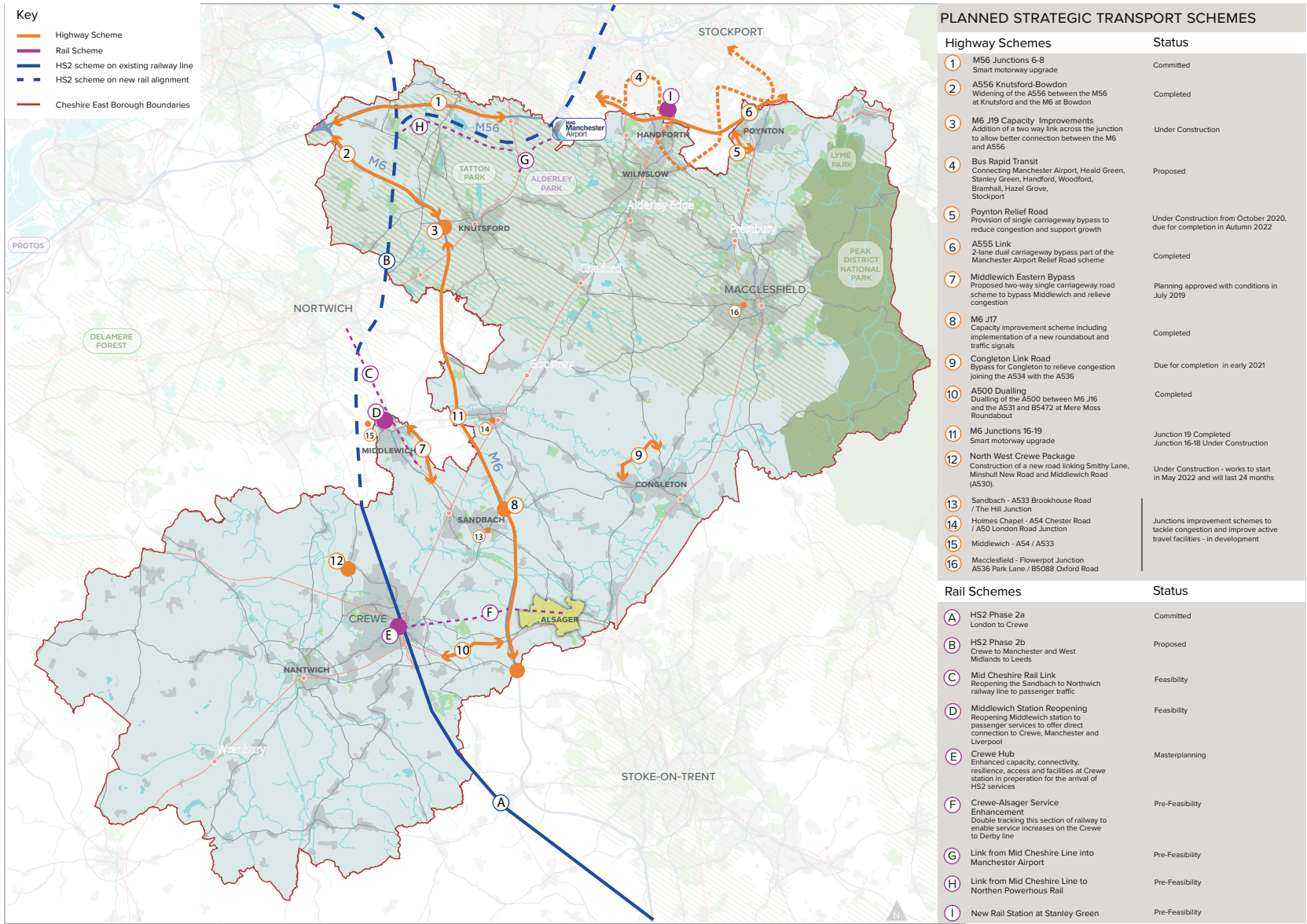
Public Realm	Gateways	Open Space	Heritage	Townscape Quality	Legibility
Positives					
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Wide pavements in some areas along the high street, providing outdoor seating and spill out opportunities, e.g. outside The Chinese Garden Restaurant, The Bank Corner and CostaNumber 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

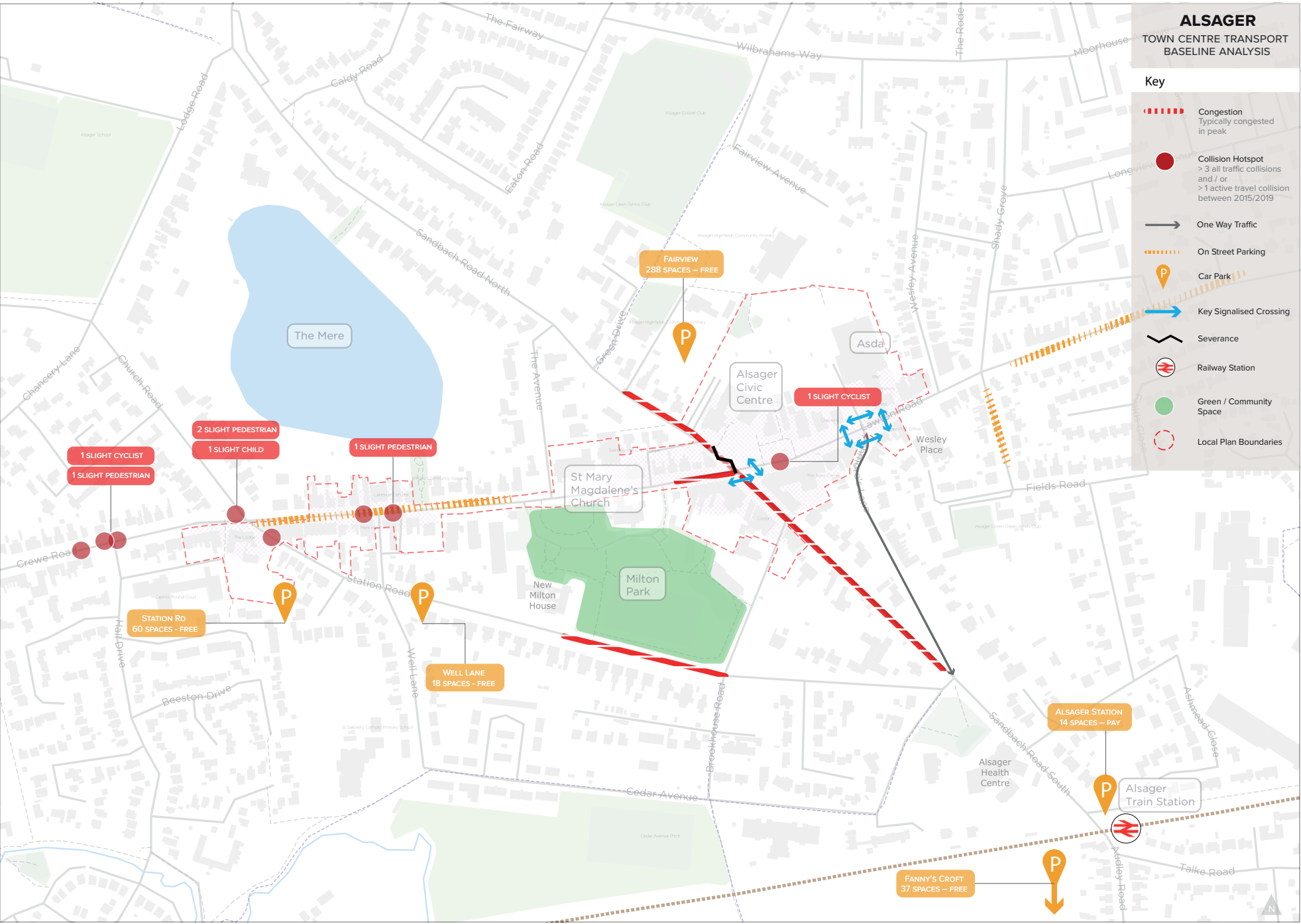
06 Connectivity and Accessibility

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.

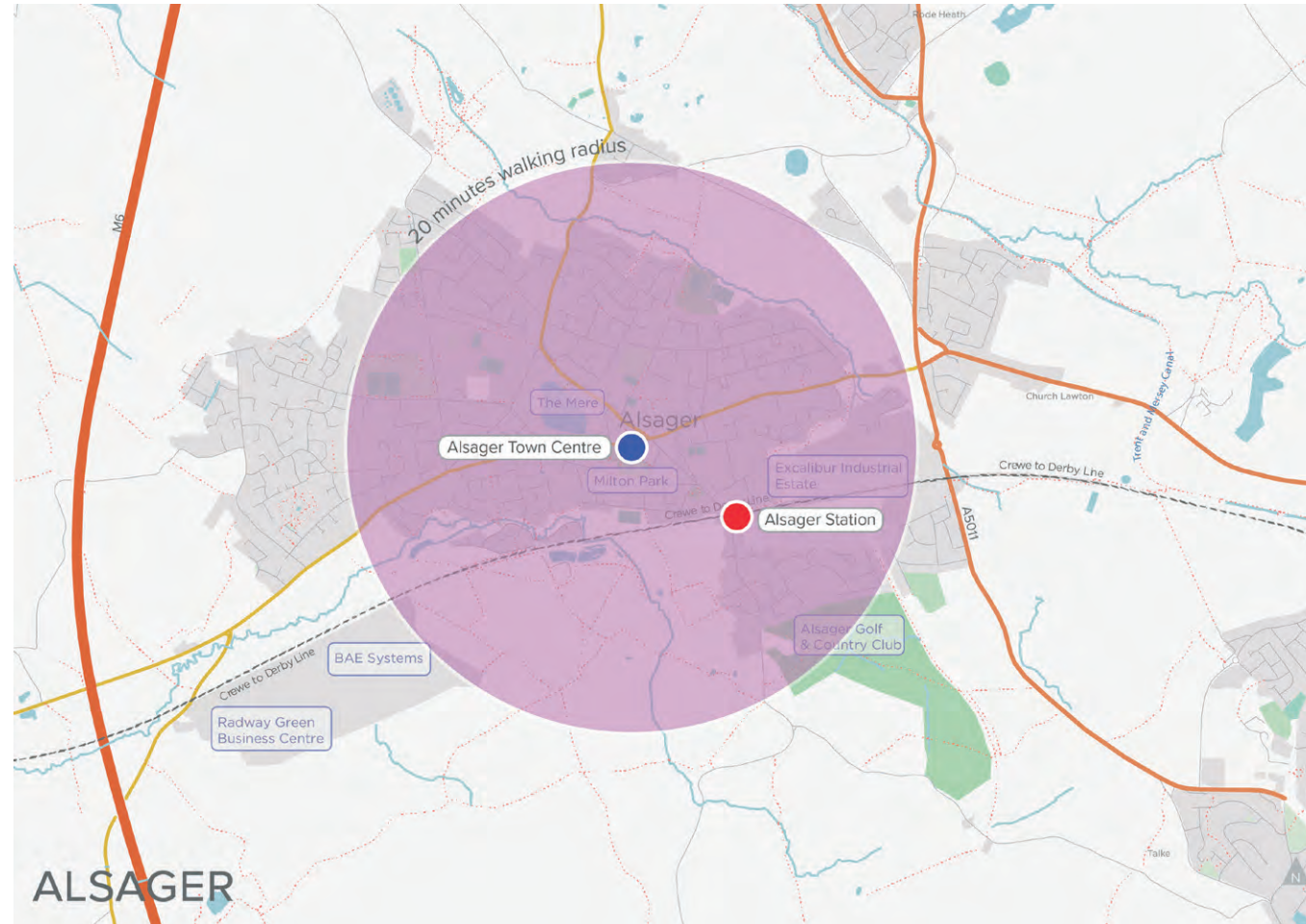
A number of issues with existing crossings have also been identified within previous studies such as the Alsager Public Realm Feasibility Study (2019). These include short phasings on controlled crossings giving pedestrians very limited time to cross (resulting in people moving diagonally across junctions), 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.

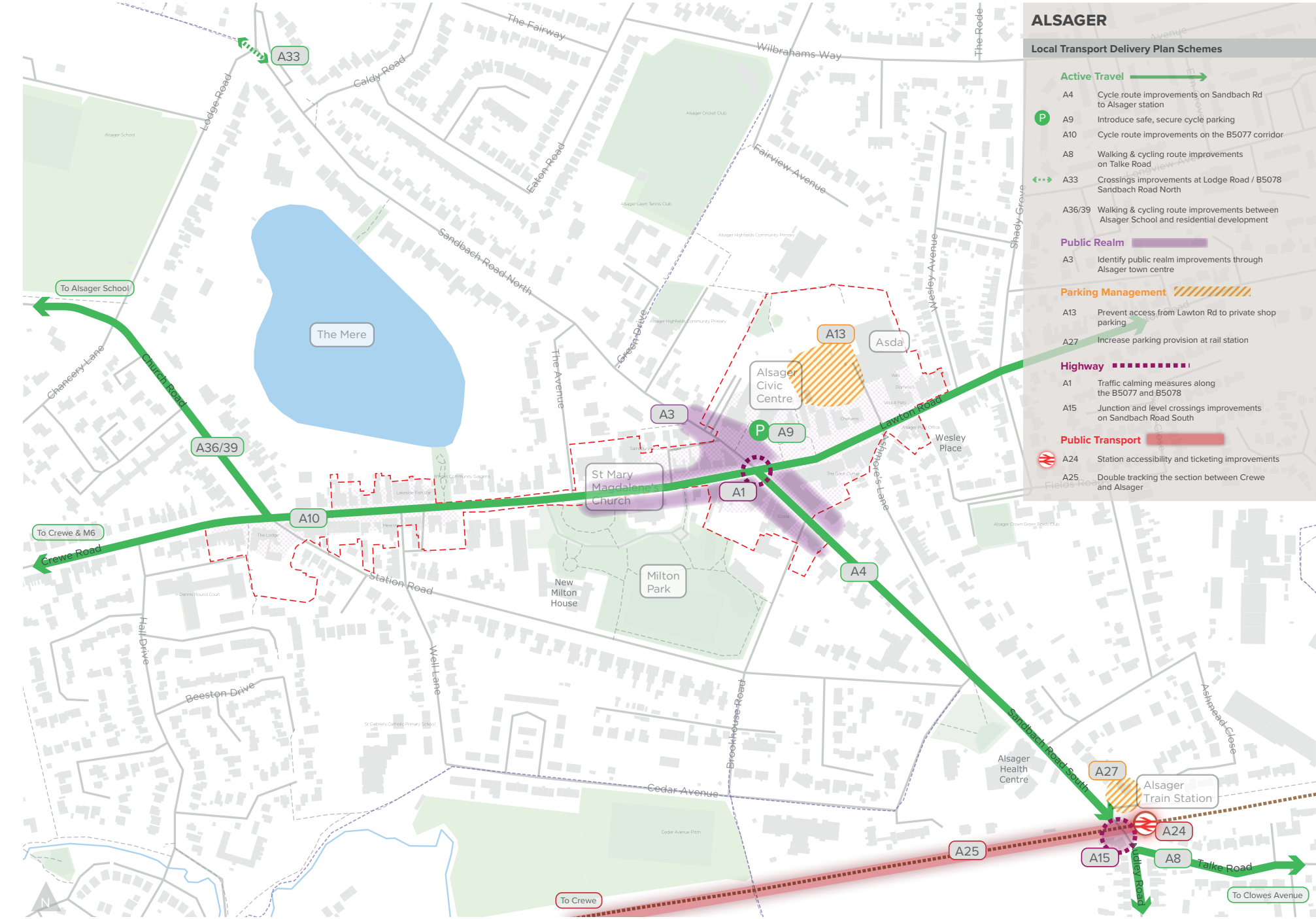
For full information on LTDP and the latest version of the LTDP please refer to the Highway pages of the CEC website.

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)

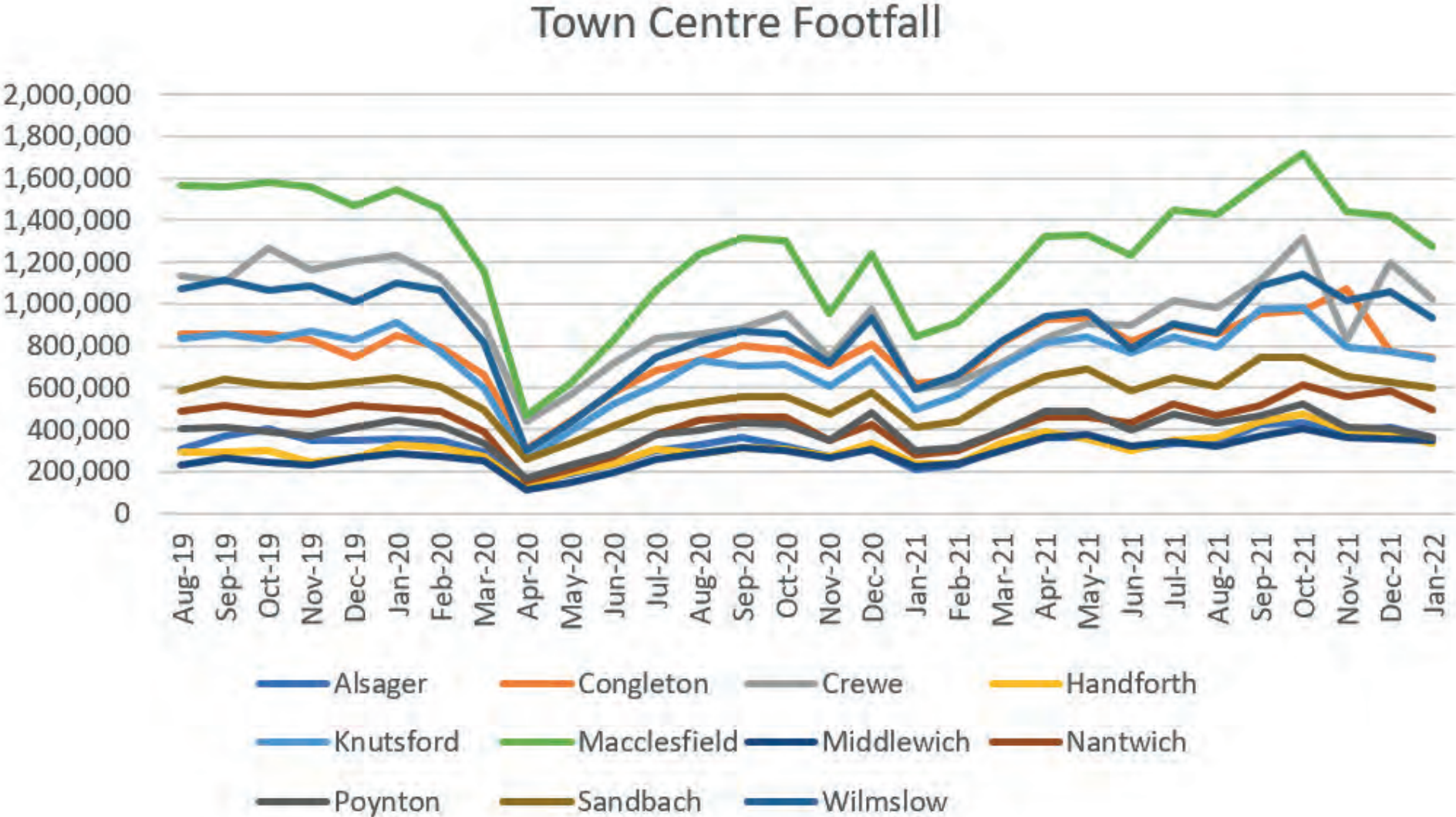
The finance and business space identified in the table (derived from the GOAD survey) only relates to ground floor office floorspace within the Town Centre. Alsager’s office market is considered further on p 59

Footfall

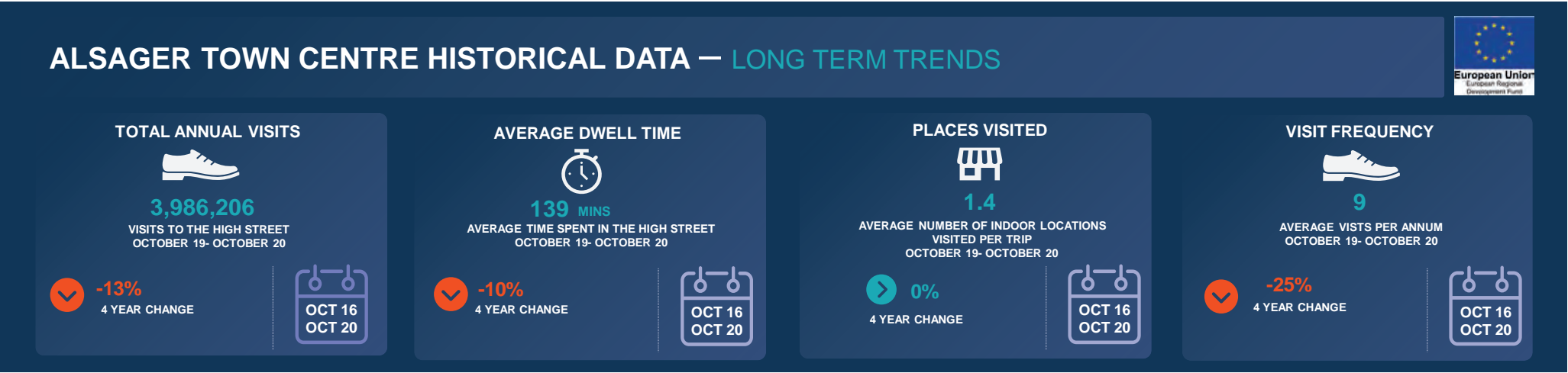
In recognition of the important relationship between footfall and vitality, Cheshire East Council is now commissioning regular monitoring of footfall across the centres. The following graph shows the footfall in all the key centres between August 2019 and December 2020. It starkly shows the impact of 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

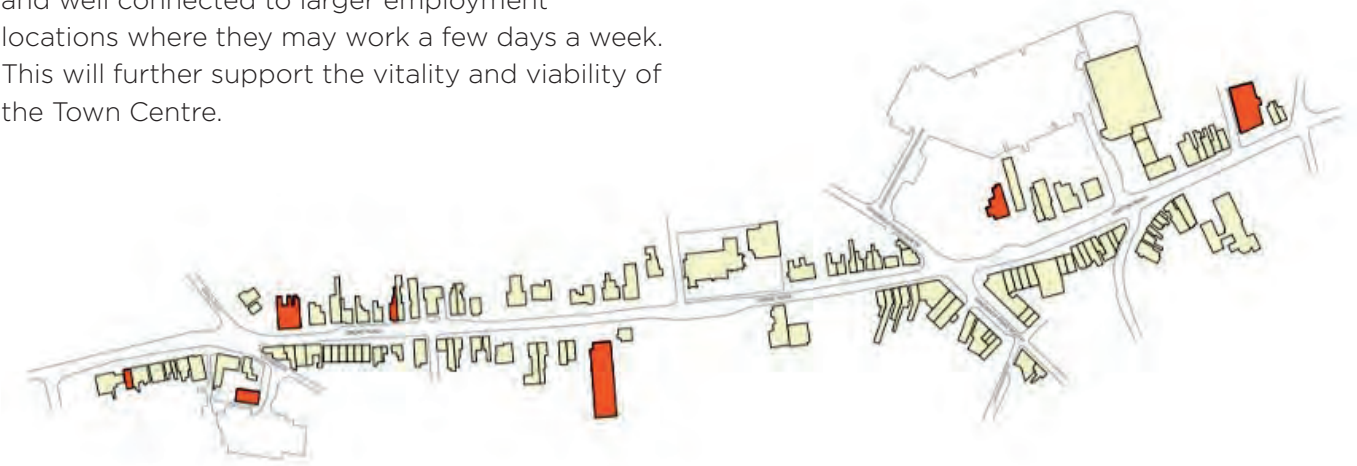
Employment

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.

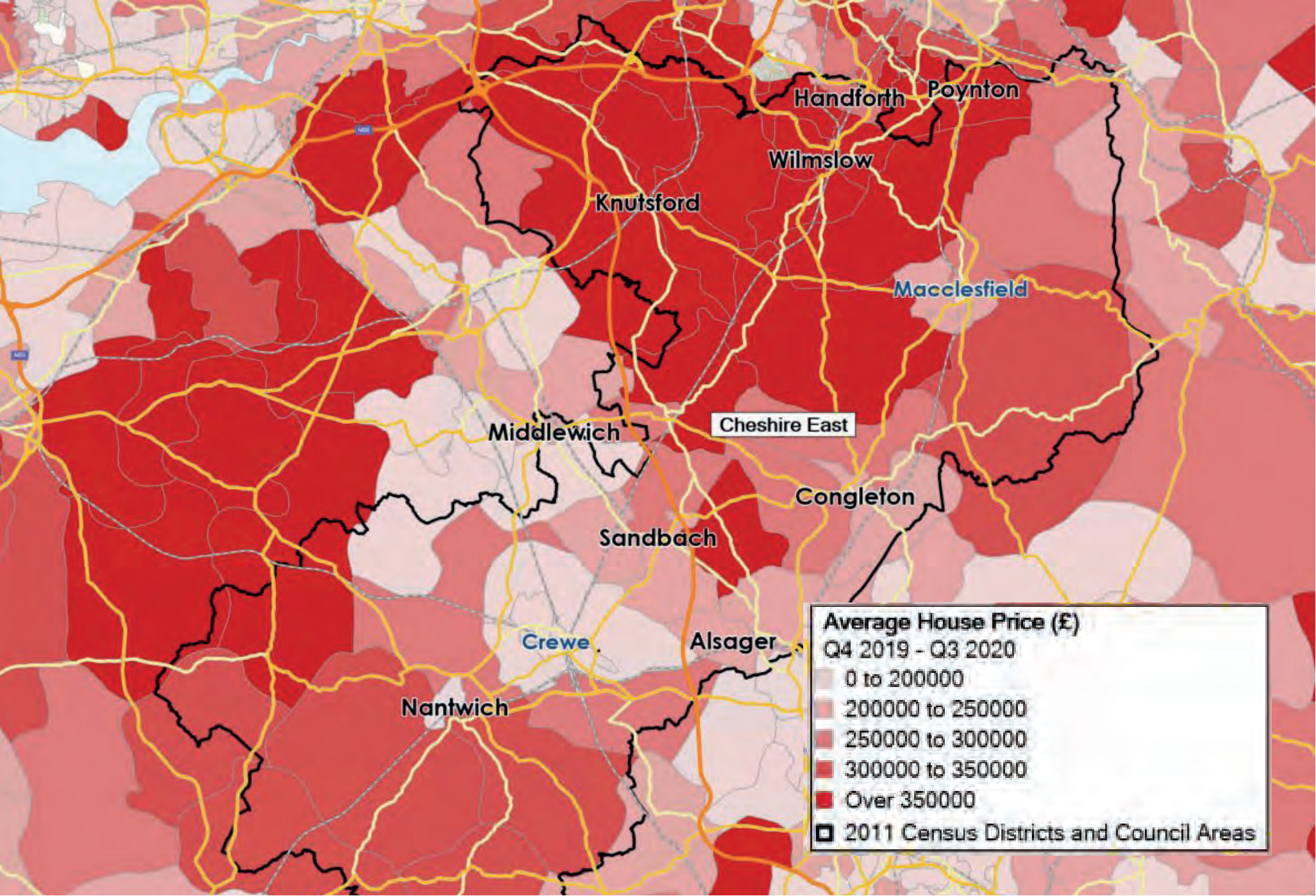
New housing developments by David Wilson Homes at Scholars Place on Hassall Road and The Stables on Close Lane by Stuart Milne Homes are currently offering a wide range of new homes from a 1 bed mews

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

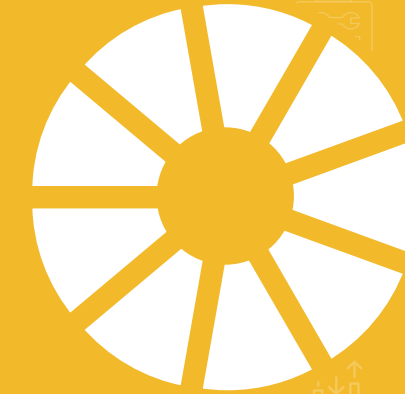
- Traffic and congestion negatively impacts upon the Town Centre environment
- A tired public realm is detracting from the Town Centre offer and presents issues such as poor quality footpaths, impacting upon mobility for the elderly and disabled (e.g. mobility scooters). A mix of ownerships also makes 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

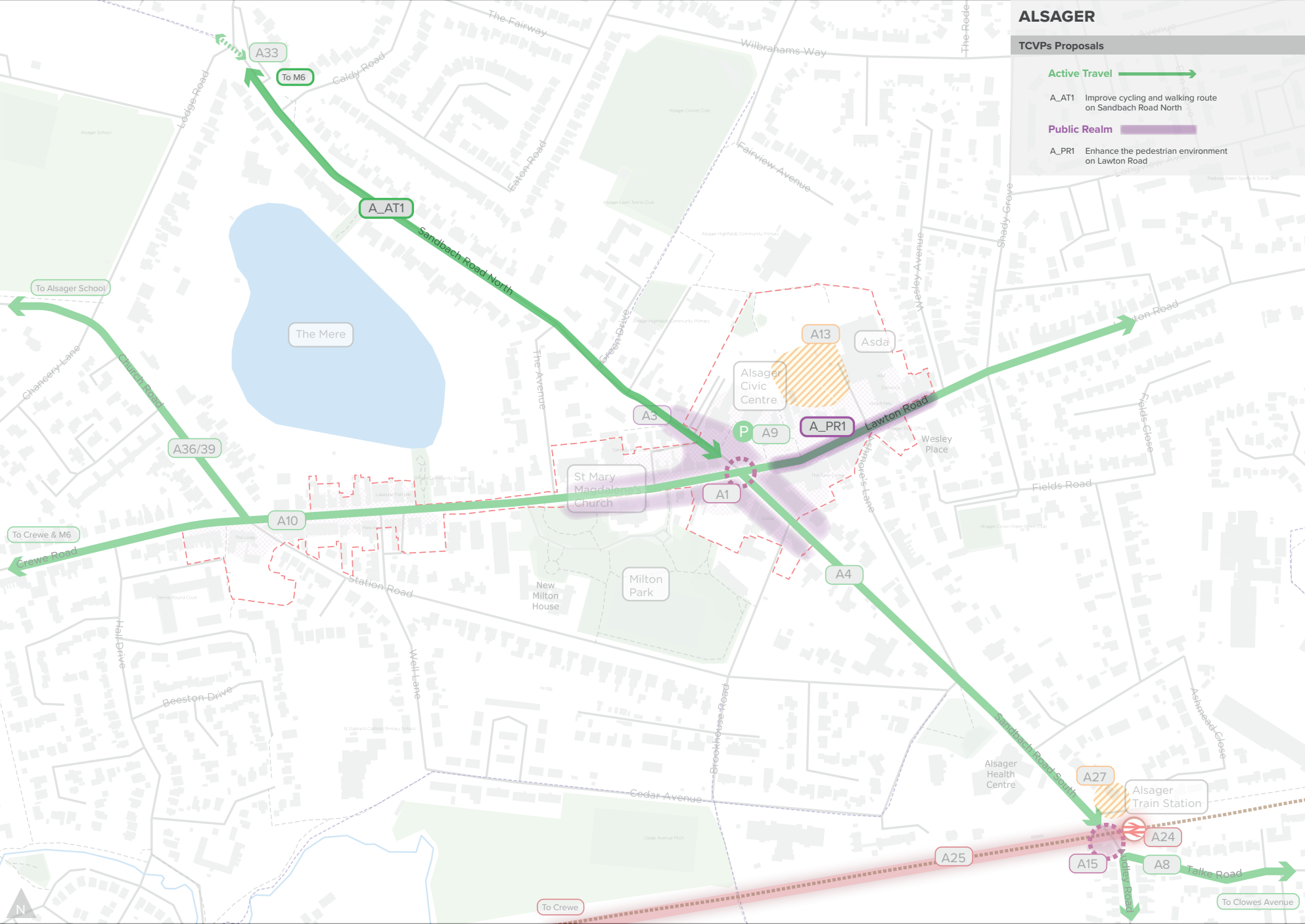


Peschiera, Italy : Shared walking & cycling route with landscape buffer
(Photo credit: MottMacdonald)



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

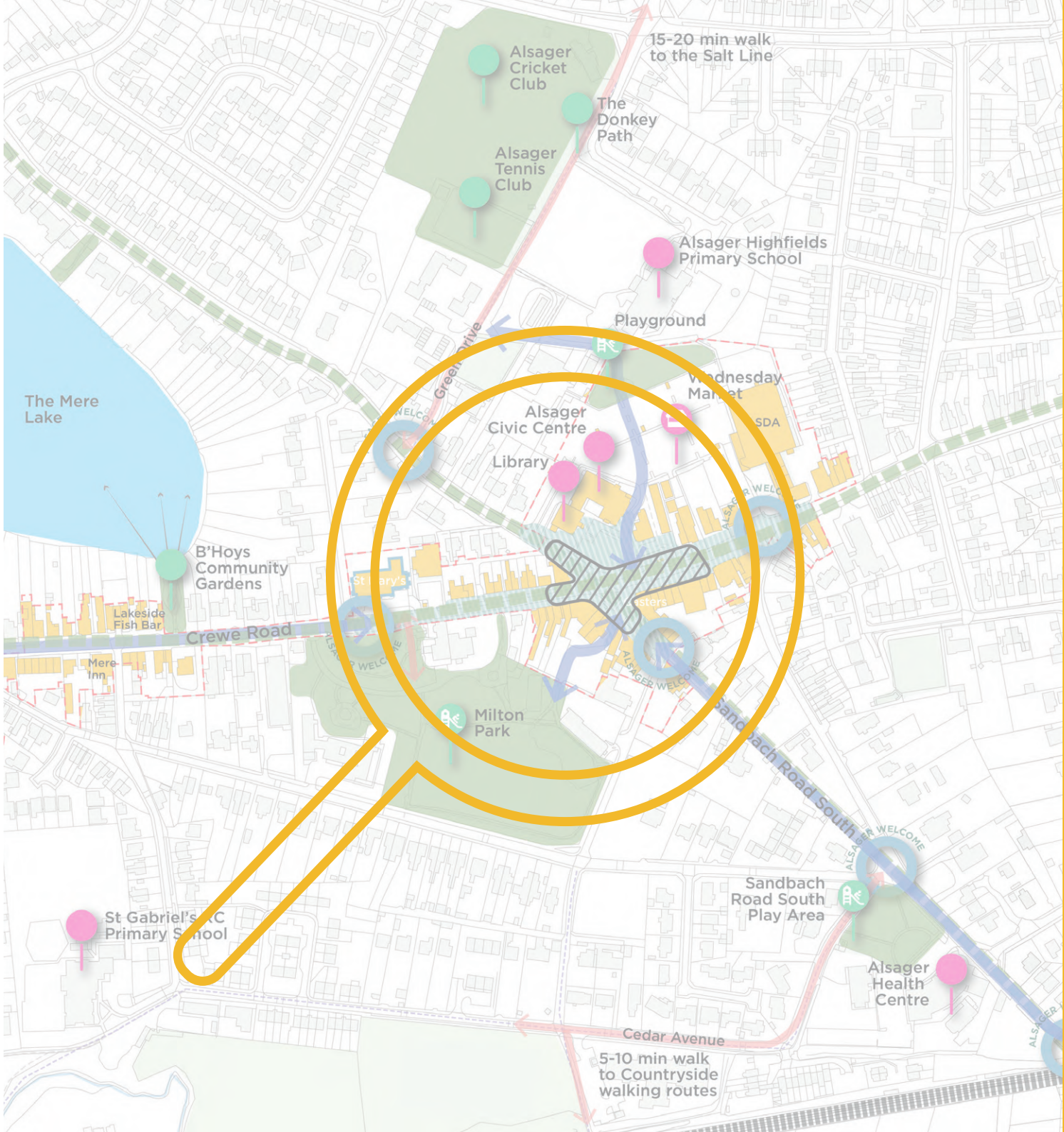


10 Potential Actions



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

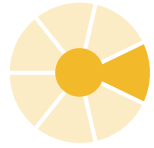
New Diagonal Crossing

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>



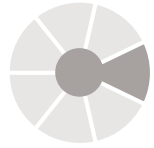
Action 2 supports the following objectives:

- 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

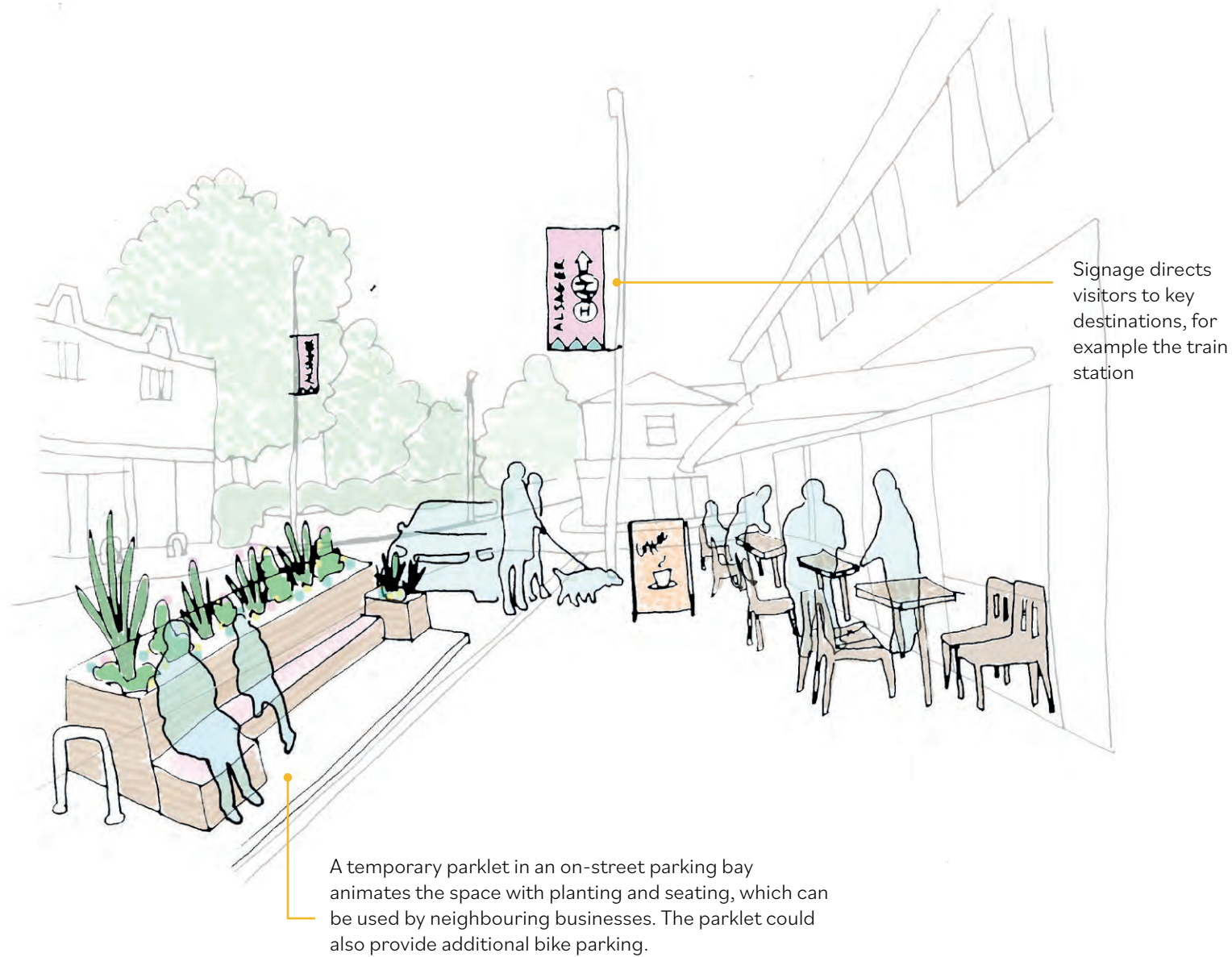
- 4b – Better signage
- 4e – Enhance gateway sites
- 14c – Enhanced crossings
- 20b – Use space and activities to attract people to a forgotten part of Town Centre and create new place identity/ Reinvigorated alleyways



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.

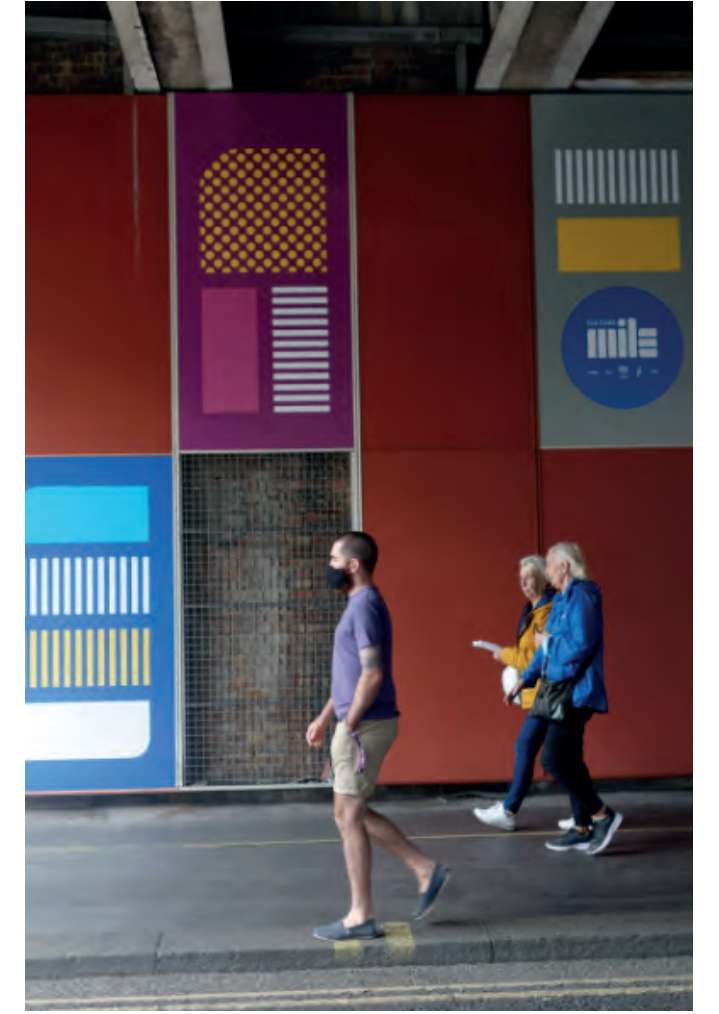


Precedent projects

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

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).

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. 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 particle place or area. For example, the length of time spent sat on a public bench.



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