

Middlewich

Cheshire East Town Centre Vitality Plans

December 2022



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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 draw out the specific challenges and opportunities as a result of COVID-19 and provide an action plan to support recovery and future success.

Vitality Plan and Toolkit

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

The Vitality Report comprises of two sections:

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

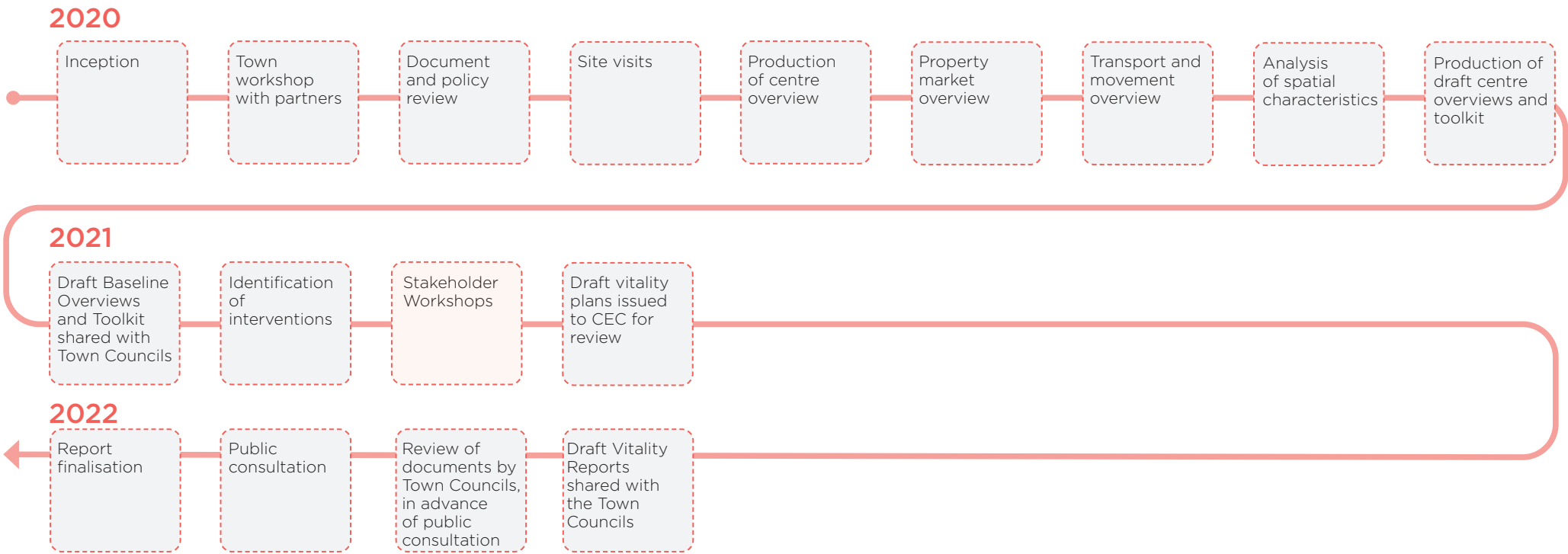
buildings, green and open spaces, access and its residents and businesses.

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

The draft TCVPs went to public consultation for six weeks from September 2022. Feedback was reviewed and where appropriate amendments have been made to the final report. A summary of other key messages have been shared 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 should also be noted that Census 2011 data is provided for some indicators. Whilst the 2021 Census has just been completed, a release of this data will not be made available until March 2023 therefore making the 2011 Census the most recent consistent data source across the 9 centres for some key indicators.

02 Introduction to Middlewich

Middlewich’s Location within Cheshire East

Middlewich is centrally located on the northern boundary of the Cheshire East borough, 8 miles north of Crewe and 17 miles west of Macclesfield. The town’s proximity to the M6 provides excellent strategic road connectivity to Manchester, Manchester Airport, Birmingham and beyond.

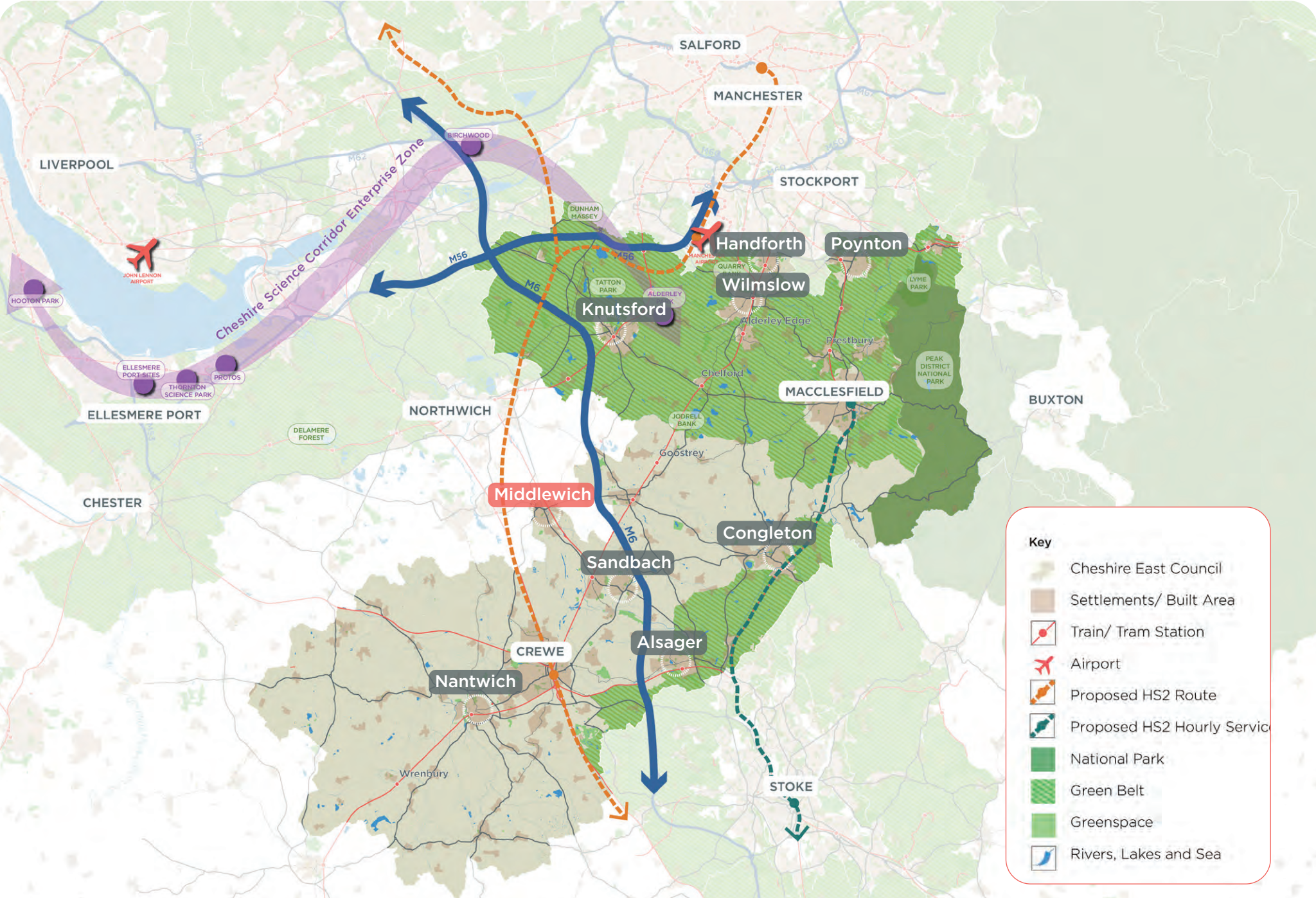
The town also enjoys close linkages to the towns of Winsford and Northwich in the adjoining Cheshire West and Chester Borough through its local road and canal network. As such, Middlewich benefits from good local and regional connectivity.

Middlewich Town Centre is focused around Wheelock Street, the Hightown (around the Bullring) and to a lesser extent Lewin Street. It is a market town characterised by attractive buildings and a deep rooted industrial heritage set within attractive countryside surroundings. There is a strong aspiration to take advantage of these assets and promote the town to a growing visitor and tourism economy including through its inland waterway network and a comprehensive programme of events and festivals including the FAB (Folk and Boat) Festival.

As a Key Service Centre it benefits from a well-represented convenience retail offer including a Morrisons and Lidl, together with a range of independent retailers, food and beverage operators; and a relatively low vacancy rate as some voids have been re-purposed for residential. The town also plays host to a series of annual events and festivals.

The town provides an attractive residential location offering easy commuting to employment destinations, set within open countryside surroundings and providing an attractive historic town centre. As a result, Middlewich has witnessed significant housing growth around the Brooks Lane area on the eastern edge of the town centre. Housing growth presents an opportunity to support and expand town centre services and businesses provided the right mix and quality of homes are delivered.

Strategic Context Plan



02 Introduction to Middlewich

Many of the homes in Middlewich are detached or semi-detached family homes and there is a need to rebalance the housing offer to provide more starter homes, affordable housing and homes for older people in order to meet future local needs and changing demographics.

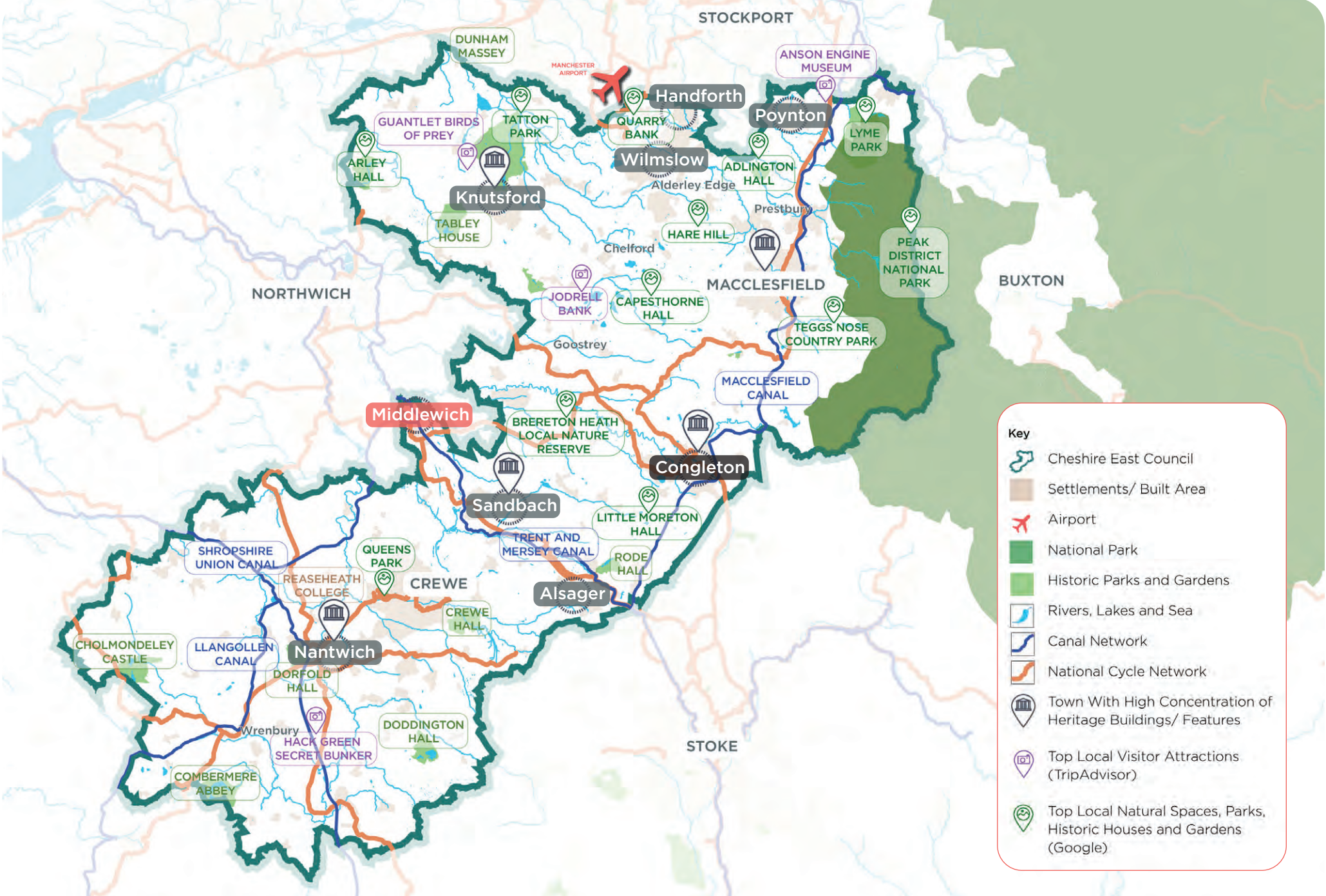
The main employment function is currently found on the eastern edge of the town at Brooks Lane Industrial Estate and Midpoint 18 which benefit from their proximity to the M6 motorway. Further expansion and industrial development at Midpoint 18 has been proposed. Whilst the town centre office offer is limited, the importance of retail, leisure and tourism as an employer and economic driver in Middlewich is well recognised and will be encouraged.

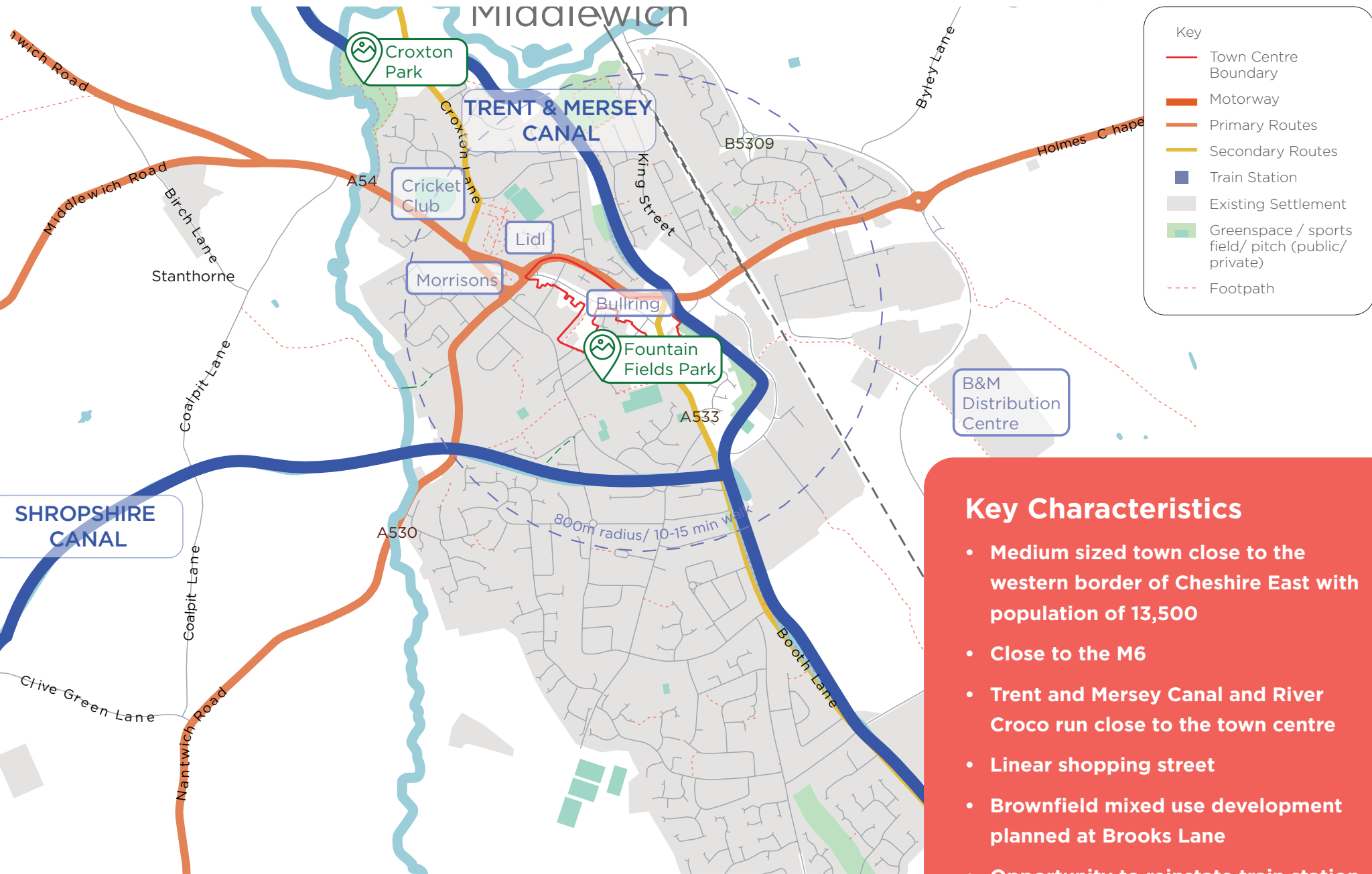
Middlewich has a range of leisure, sports and social facilities and clubs. The Leisure Centre hosts an indoor sports hall, gym, fitness classes and 3G floodlit pitches. The town also has a Football Club and Cricket Club.

Whilst Middlewich lacks a large urban park, it benefits from numerous blue and green routes including footpaths and waterways around the River Dane, River Croco, River Wheelock and the canals that connect residents to the town centre, its facilities and open countryside beyond.



Strategic Connections and Assets Plan





Key Characteristics

- Medium sized town close to the western border of Cheshire East with population of 13,500
- Close to the M6
- Trent and Mersey Canal and River Croco run close to the town centre
- Linear shopping street
- Brownfield mixed use development planned at Brooks Lane
- Opportunity to reinstate train station

Middlewich Neighbourhood Plan Vision and Objectives

Middlewich Town Council pro-actively initiated the preparation of a Neighbourhood Plan in 2018. The Neighbourhood Plan was rejected at referendum in 2019 but identified the following vision and objectives which are still useful for the purpose of this study :

Vision

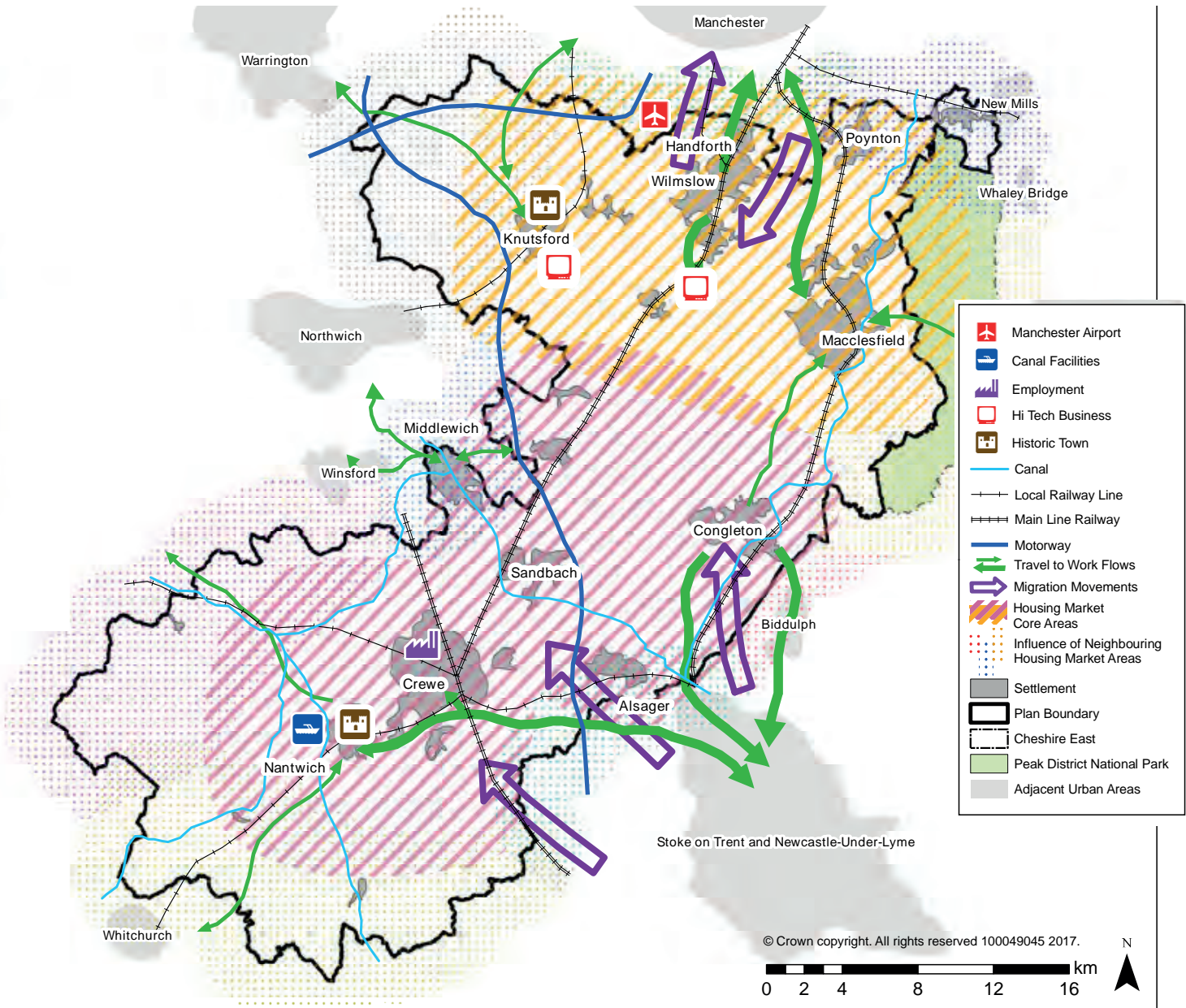
“By 2030, Middlewich will be a sustainable, vibrant and prosperous town in which people can enjoy living, working and following leisure pursuits. Community spirit will continue to flourish; heritage and canal network will be enhanced, and the profile and image of the town will be improved.”

Objectives

- **Middlewich Town Centre** - To deliver a busy, people-focused place, with plenty to offer for both residents and visitors
- **Opportunity Sites** - To maximise the delivery of a bespoke housing strategy, including mixed uses and incorporating excellent design to support the successful operation and vitality of the town centre
- **Heritage** - To ensure the story of Middlewich is embedded in the built environment of our town as it changes and make Middlewich a destination venue for industrial tourism, leisure and heritage
- **Design** - To promote high quality design in new development which is of appropriate character, works for the town and makes the experience of being here much better
- **Housing** - To create excellent places for people to live, which meet their needs
- **Transport** - To create an efficient, safe and pleasant experience for residents and visitors as they move around and through Middlewich; to improve transport infrastructure; reduce congestion; and improve connectivity both within Middlewich and to other towns
- **Employment** - To promote and maintain a thriving local economy to ensure that jobs and enterprise opportunities are available for local people of all ages and to encourage inward investment to improve the town's economy
- **Education** - To deliver excellent services and facilities through great design in the right locations which connect to the town centre and provide outstanding opportunities for our young people
- **Health and Wellbeing** - To make excellent provision for the health needs of Middlewich ensuring healthcare is in the right place so everyone in the town can access the service they need

Cheshire East Local Plan

The plan opposite identifies the functional relationship that Middlewich has with other centres through connectivity and proximity within and beyond Cheshire East. It highlights Middlewich’s central border positioning within the borough creating close connections to the towns of Winsford and Northwich in adjoining Cheshire West and Chester, and Sandbach within Cheshire East. Middlewich has good connectivity to both the M6 corridor and Crewe, a key driver of housing and employment growth in the North West which will be driven by the arrival of HS2.



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

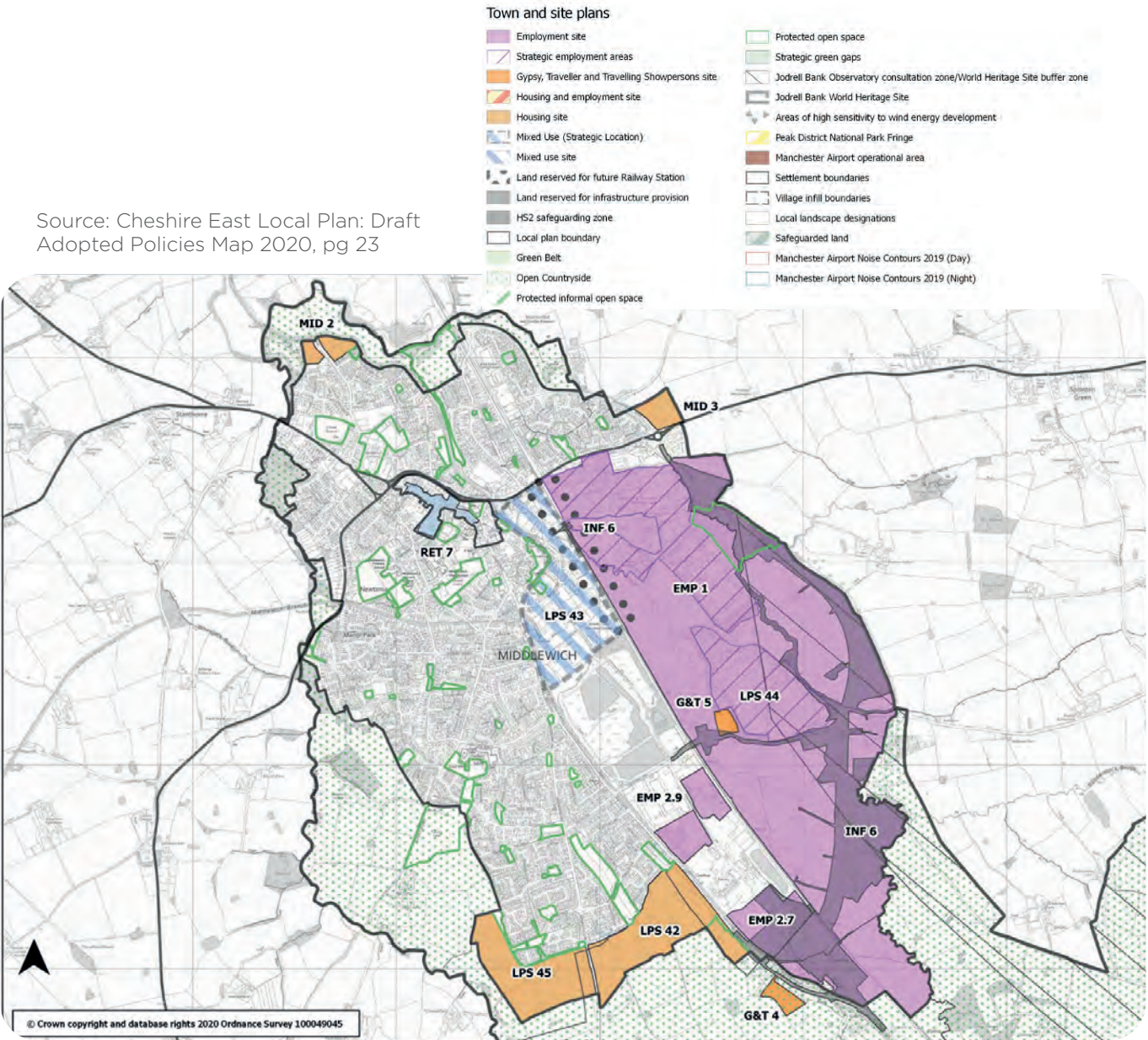
Local Plan Strategy 2017 (LPS) and Revised Publication Draft Site Allocations and Development Policies Document (SADPD) 2020

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 Middlewich and draft allocations in the SADPD.

Middlewich is a key service centre. Key sites allocated within Middlewich include:

- LPS 43 ‘Brooks Lane’ can accommodate around 200 new homes, a community and leisure facility and appropriate retail, with potential for a marina also
- LPS 44 ‘Midpoint 18’ can accommodate 70 hectares of employment land and contribute towards completion of the Middlewich Eastern Bypass. It also sets aside land to enable future construction of a new station
- 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 23



03 Policy Context cont.

Middlewich Neighbourhood Plan 2018-2030, Steering Group for Middlewich, August 2018

The Middlewich Neighbourhood Development Plan was prepared by a Steering Group of local residents and town councillors led by Middlewich Town Council who sought views of residents and businesses through a series of consultations.

The Final Submission Draft was completed in October 2018 and the local referendum for the Middlewich Neighbourhood Plan was held on the 14 March 2019. The referendum returned a ‘no vote’ of 51% meaning that the plan was rejected. The withdrawn plan can be accessed at: <https://www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/pdf/planning/neighbourhood-plan/middlewich/mndp-referendum-plan-feb-19.pdf>

Whilst rejected, the Neighbourhood Plan has been used as a form of baseline research for this report including the vision and objectives. There is some overlap however, this report is more about specific town centre projects rather than town wide planning policy.

‘Make it Middlewich’ Report: Middlewich Town Council, June 2020

Provides a brief overview of the previous support/scheme ideas which have or have not been implemented but which could aid recovery and rejuvenation of the town centre.

Analysis of previous schemes suggest effort and time has been spent on a number of occasions but there has been a lack of take up, either by businesses or the public.

Ideas include:

- Shop Front Scheme 2014 - campaign launched to encourage shop owners and landlords to re-decorate in more traditional colours. The town council contributed towards some of the painting, but take up was limited due to funding.
- Town Centre Markets - many of which have declined due to management issues or poor attendance
- Annual Events - successful events include FAB Festival, Middlewich SCRIBE Literary event, Classic Car & Bike Show, Middlewich Boat Pull, Tour of Britain, Town Cryer Competition etc.

- Tourism/ Marketing - The Town Trails Book, Market to Town Leaflet, Ancient Middlewich Leaflet and map and numerous other successful publications have been used to increase local participation and visitor levels in and around the town. There is a strong positive association with the town’s Roman heritage, the waterways network and market heritage and this has been used in an advantageous way in previous years.
- In 2018/19 attempts were made to re-brand Middlewich Town with the help of a local marketing company. The designs/imagery that arose from this project were not well received and eventually the ideas that had been suggested were dismissed.

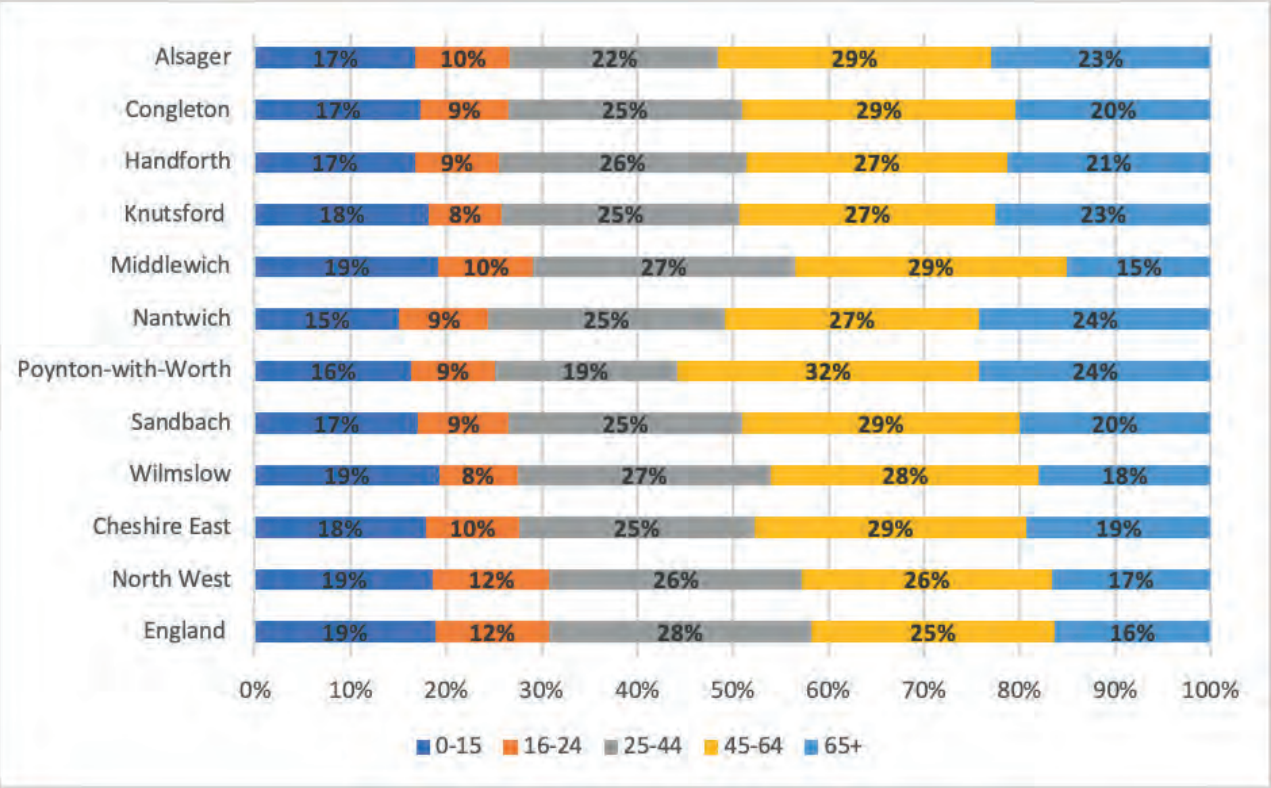


04 Our People

Age

The 2011 Census data indicates that the Middlewich parish area had a population of 13,595 residents representing 3.7% of Cheshire East's total population (370,127). Middlewich's age profile is similar to that of Cheshire East. Compared to the other Key Service Centres Middlewich has the highest proportion of 25-44 year olds which is the most economically active age group, and conversely the lowest proportion of residents aged 65+. This therefore attributes to Middlewich having the lowest average (mean) age across the 9 KSC's at 40 years old. This is also lower than the Cheshire East mean age, equal to the wider geography of the North West (40) and just higher than England (39).

It is anticipated that when the 2021 Census data is available it should show an increase in younger residents given the number of family homes 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 available) 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 majority of the population in Middlewich is also white (98.5%), the highest proportion when compared to the other KSC's, whilst having the lowest proportion of Asian/Asian British residents (0.6%/87 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, Middlewich had the one of the lowest proportion of residents employed in the highest order occupation of ‘managers, directors and senior officials’ (11.9%) when compared to the other KC’s and overall Borough. However, a large proportion of residents were employed in occupations including ‘professional occupations’ (15.8%) and ‘associate professional and technical occupations’ (13.4%) – with the latter being a higher rate than the regional and national benchmarks.

Conversely, 18.8% were engaged in manual or elementary occupations. This is in line with the North West (19.8%) and England rate (18.3%). The occupational structure of Middlewich reflects the younger working age population and suggests a strongly mixed occupation, highly skilled workforce, which will in turn attract businesses (who want to attract highly skilled employees) to locate in the area.



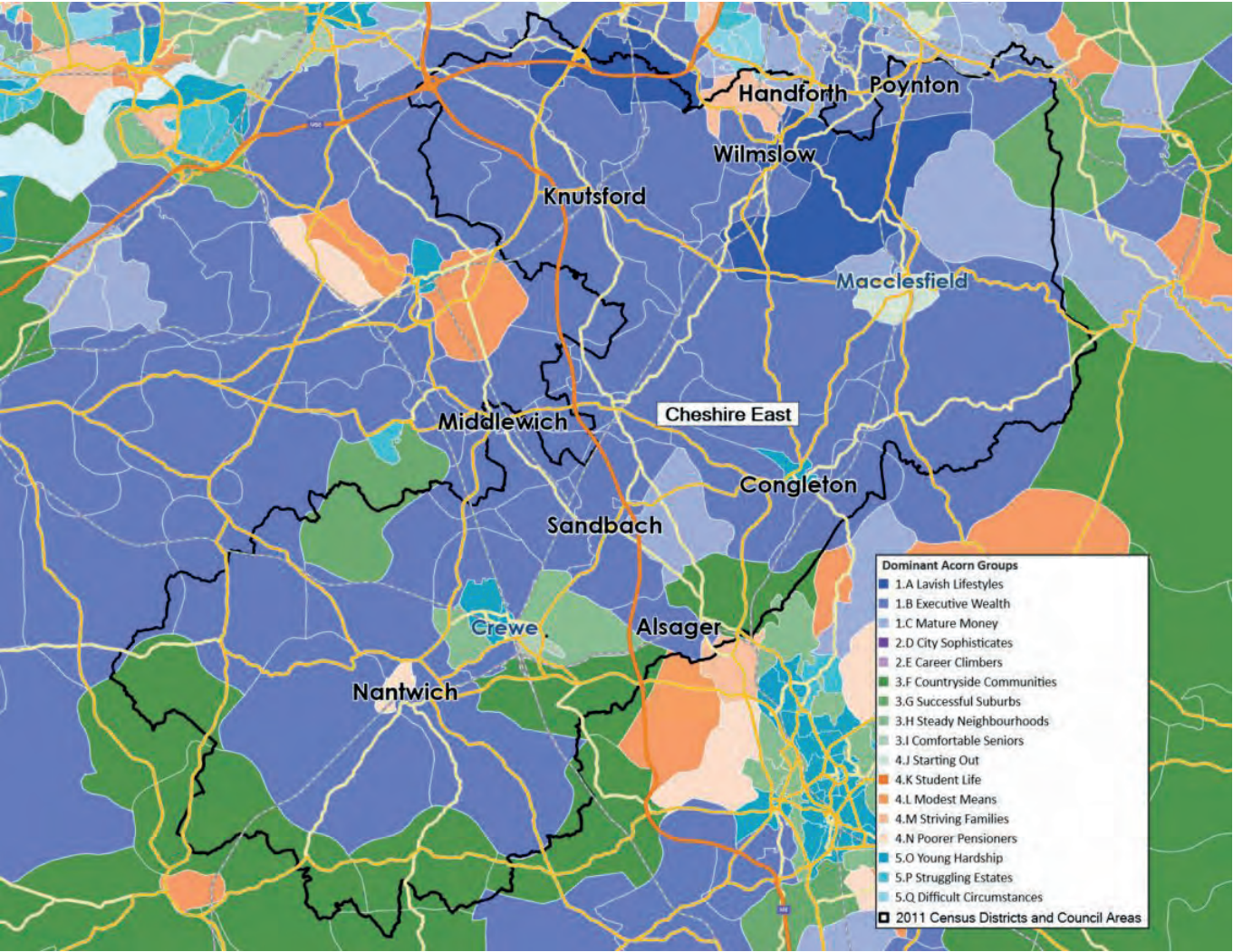
Built Up Area	Alsager	Congleton	Knutsford	Middlewich	Nantwich	Poynton	Sandbach	Wilmslow	Cheshire East	North West	England
Managers, directors and senior officials	12.8	11.7	17.2	11.9	14.3	14.9	12.6	18.3	13.6	9.9	10.9
Professional occupations	22.3	18.9	26.2	15.8	21.8	24.0	19.9	24.6	19.6	16.3	17.5
Associate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

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

Demographic Characterisation

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

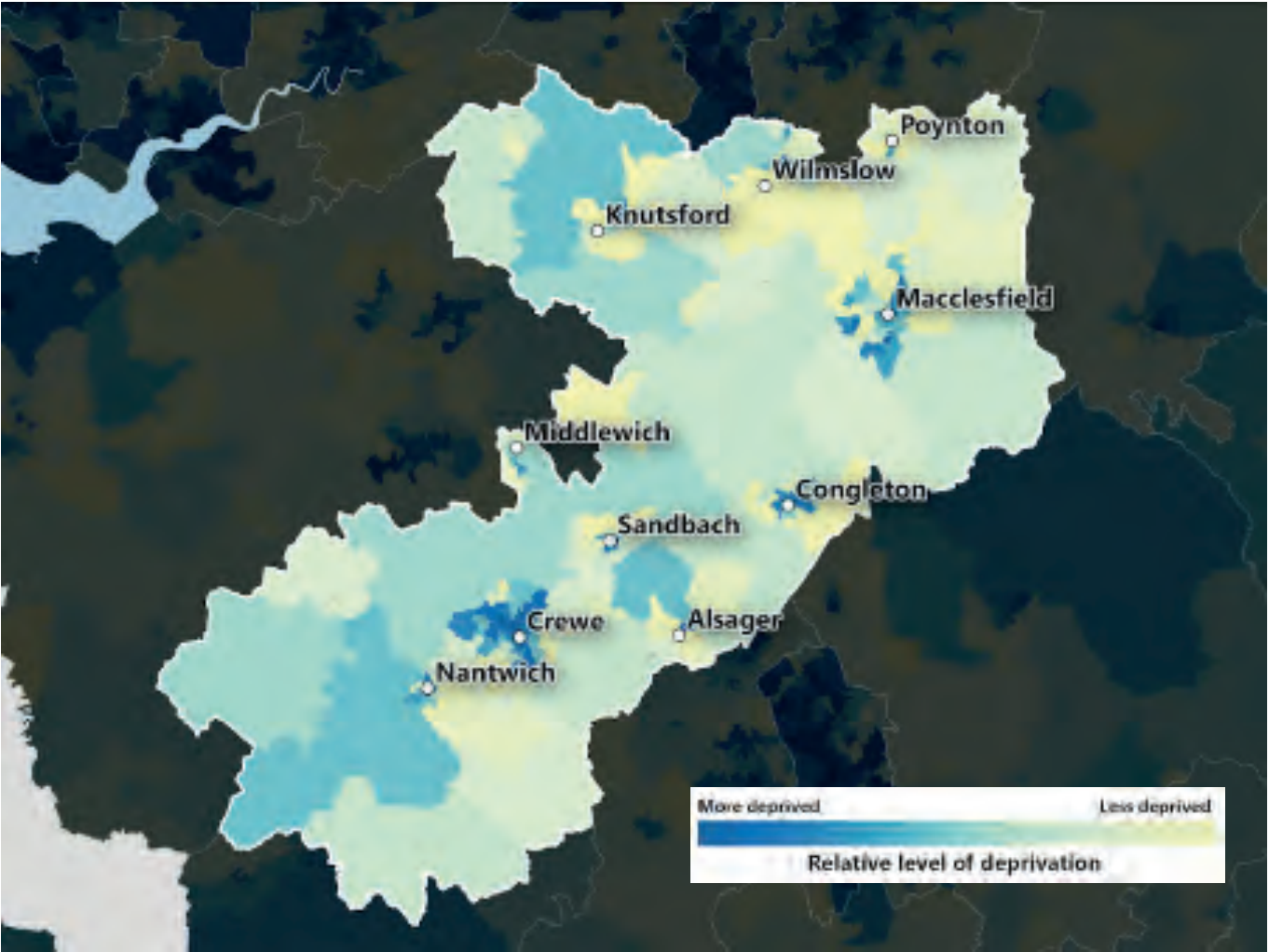
- Dominant Age Groups
- 1. A Lavish Lifestyles
 - 1. B Executive Wealth
 - 1. C Mature Money
 - 2. D City Sophisticates
 - 2. E Career Climbers
 - 3. F Countryside Communities
 - 3. G Successful Suburbs
 - 3. H Steady Neighbourhoods
 - 3. I Comfortable Seniors
 - 4. J Starting Out
 - 4. K Student Life
 - 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 Middlewich is within the 20% least deprived areas of deprivation nationally.



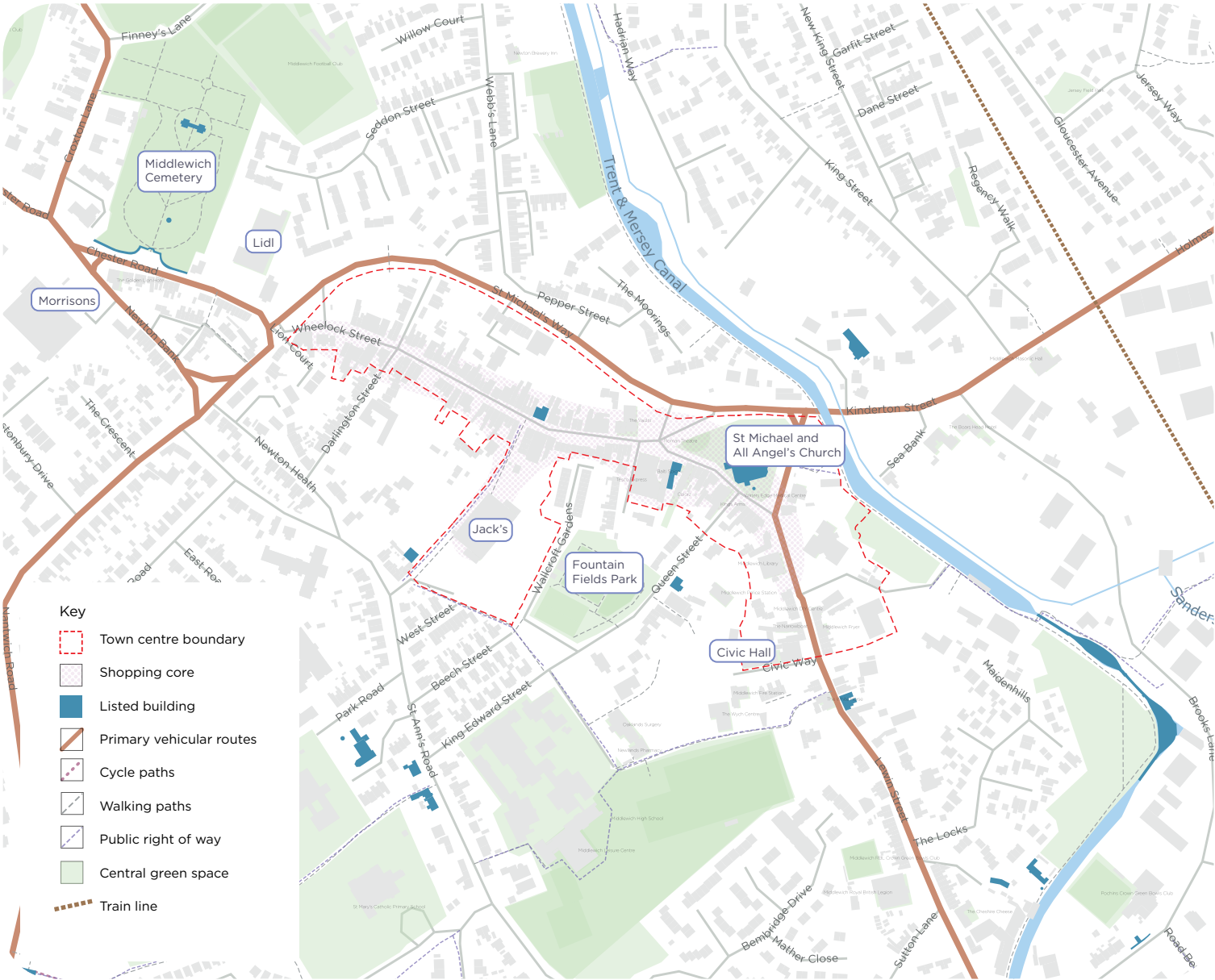
Source: MHCLG, IMD 2019

Local Context

The town centre is bounded by the busy A54 (St Michael’s Way) and consists of a pleasant linear shopping street with some heritage buildings along Wheelock Street, and further shops and civic uses along Lewin Street. St Michael’s Church holds a prominent position and landmark at the eastern end of the town.

The Trent and Mersey Canal runs in close proximity to the town centre and Andersen Boats provides a starting point for canal boat cruises from Middlewich.

The Middlewich Branch Railway Line, which connects Sandbach to Northwich runs east of the town centre, but the station was closed in the 1960s.



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:	Saturday 12th September 2020	Wednesday 4th November 2020
Time of day:	11-12pm	1-2pm
Weather:	Dry, cloudy	Dry, sunny
Mode of transport:	Car	Car
Covid lockdown status:	Eased Lockdown Restrictions	Three Tier Restrictions in Place (day before second national lockdown)

Quality of the place

- Smaller town centre with a range of shops and restaurants
- Characterful local high street with independent retail
- High street feels quite dominated by on street parking
- Some interesting historic buildings
- Disconnect between town centre and canal/ river network



People

- People out and about on both days
- No one using the amphitheatre/bullring or open spaces around the church
- Some people using the canal for exercise / dog walking



Sense of Community

- Well maintained planting beds and floral displays
- Couldn't see a community noticeboard (may be towards the Civic Hall)
- Number 28 drop-in cafe/ shop and food bank run by St Michael's Church looked active



Accessibility

- No train station
- No cyclists on the first site visit. Some cyclists passing through on Leedsmithy Street
- The circular ring road network dominates the centre
- Compact and walkable centre
- Main bus stop located within the centre to the north of Wheelock Street
- Free parking close to centre at Seabank and Southway



Gateways

- Main gateway into town by St Michael's Church is dominated by roads and vehicle movements over pedestrians
- Bullring/ Amphitheatre at gateway, but faces onto a highway and didn't appear to be a space used on a daily basis
- Lack of connection to canal and river network. Wouldn't know it was there, and from the canal vice versa



Housing

- Range of small houses and apartments around the centre
- Larger housing adjacent to centre and beyond
- Retirement apartments (McCarthy and Stone) under construction on main shopping street
- Residential areas located to the north of St. Michael's Way which feel segregated by foot and bike in respect of the town centre



Wayfinding

- Lack of signage/ heritage boards
- Some canalside signage directing to the town centre but legibility is poor



Attractions

- Canal network - open space, quiet walking routes and opportunities to observe nature
- Andersen Boats river cruise company has a number of vessels for hire
- A few restaurants and pubs
- Mostly independent shops
- Temptations gift shop has good on-street display



Amenities

- Library and Town Hall/ Civic Hall located away from shopping street
- Large Jacks, Morrisons and Lidl stores
- Church at centre
- Community services and play parks are a located to the south - south east of the centre - limited opportunities for clear pedestrian routes to these locations



Sense of a Centre

- Area around the Church feels like the centre, especially around amphitheatre - 360 view disappointing due to road infrastructure where 'stage' would be
- Wheelock Street winds round to St Michael's Church and through to Lewin Street creating interesting townscape character and enhancing sense of centre around the Church
- The Church spire is visible along high street section of Wheelock Street which helps to emphasise the sense of centre around the Wheelock / St Michael's Way junction



Character

- Number of historic and interesting buildings - the Alhambra building's facade stands out as an interesting focal building along the high street
- Legible high street with strong building line and enclosure ratios
- Majority of the main street is in traditional red brick with some white rendering and Tudor facade details (The White Bear and Cancer Research) which add some variety to the townscape character
- Industrial area on the eastern edge of town dominates some areas and limits access to the canal



Public Realm

- Bullring/ amphitheatre space is finished to a high quality and provides an attractive setting for both the church and the cenotaph. However, it doesn't integrate with Wheelock Street and is heavily impacted by the noise and exposure to St. Michaels Way
- Pavement is poor quality in areas, different materials are used



Green space

- Fountain Fields Park - high quality play spaces and urban gym, but not very overlooked, which leads to issues around anti-social behaviour
- Canal and river network well used by walkers on the site visit



05 Our Place cont.

Derelict Sites

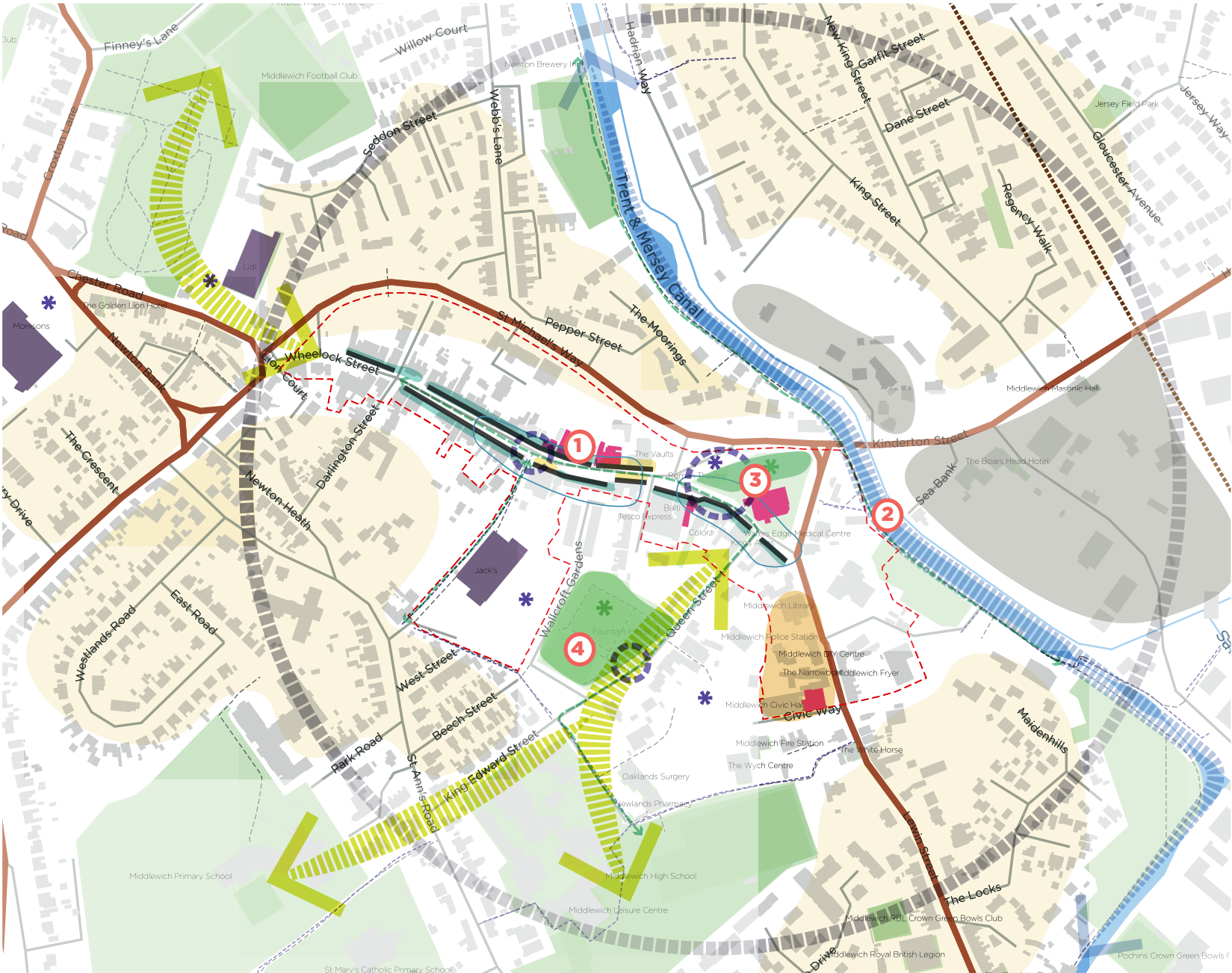
- Town Wharf has potential for development - could form part of a linking development from the canalside to the high street
- Number of vacant shops along Wheelock Street
- The Vaults car park at main intersection into the town underwhelms arrival



Positive Features

Positive spatial elements are identified on the plan:

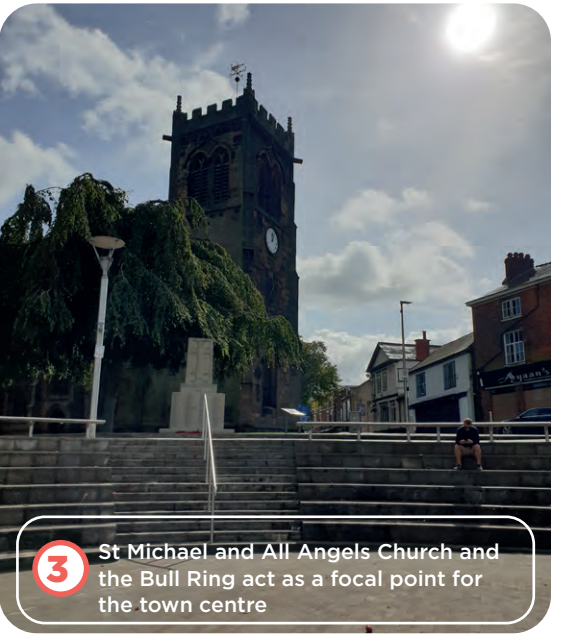
- Key
- Local centre boundary
 - Local street network
 - Primary vehicular route
 - Arrival destinations (car parks/ train stations/ bus stops)
 - Key pedestrian links
 - Surrounding social infrastructure within close proximity to town centre
 - Positive arrival experience
 - Anchor retail locations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



1 Number of attractive historic buildings along Wheelock Street high street including the White Bear Pub and Balti Spice Takeaway



2 Proximity to the canal and river network and attractions such as canal boat cruises



3 St Michael and All Angels Church and the Bull Ring act as a focal point for the town centre

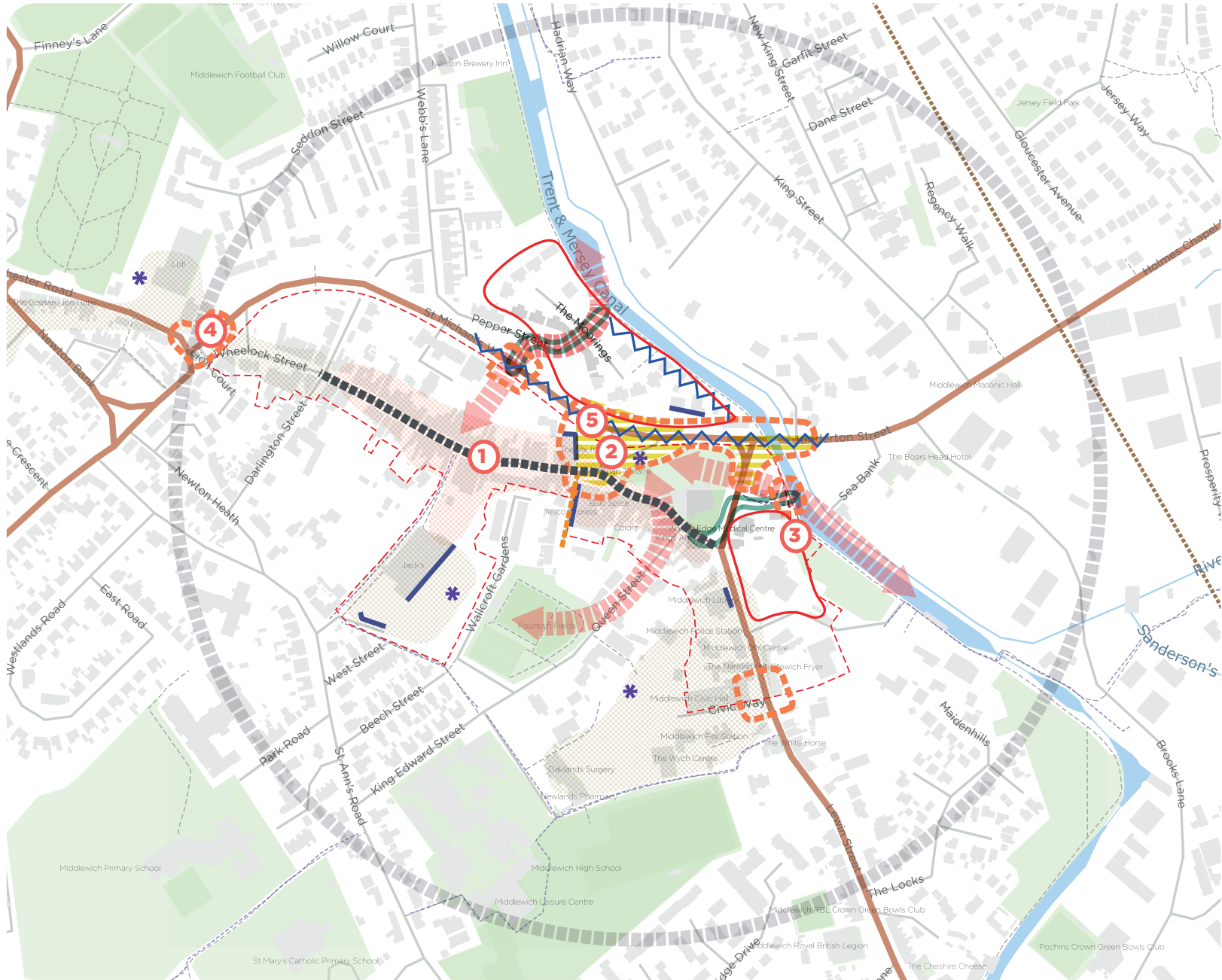


4 Fountain Fields Park offers a high quality play space close to the town centre

Negative Features

Negative spatial elements are identified on the plan:

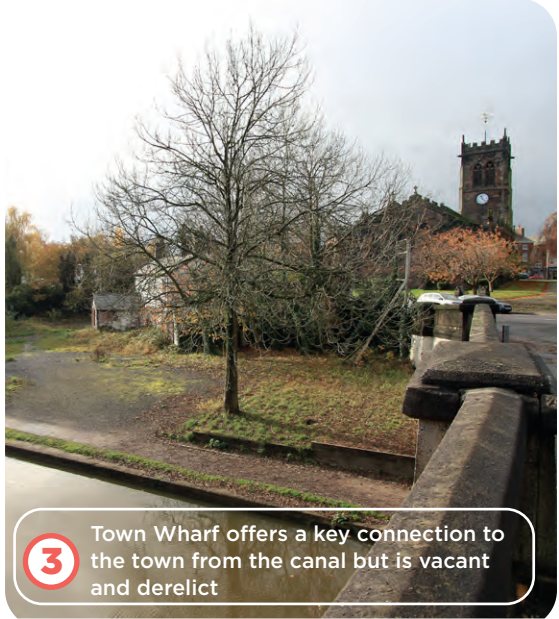
- Key
- Local centre boundary
 - Local street network
 - Primary vehicular route
 - Arrival destinations (car parks/ train stations/ bus stops)
 - Streets and spaces dominated by car parking
 - Streets with narrow footways / poor pedestrian provision
 - Arrival gateways with a low quality arrival experience
 - Areas of poor quality public realm (primarily low grade / aged materials, lack of street furniture and tree planting)
 - 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
 - 400m from centre of Middleswich (5 minute walk)
 - Areas of severance caused by infrastructure
 - Area which has seen erosion of historic grain



1 The pavement along Wheelock Street is narrow and the street is dominated by parking



2 St Michael's Way road infrastructure dominates the space to the north of the town centre and acts as a barrier to the river and canal network



3 Town Wharf offers a key connection to the town from the canal but is vacant and derelict



4 Pedestrian desire lines into the town centre from the west are fractured by roads and highway infrastructure



5 Car parking and road infrastructure dominates the key gateway into Wheelock Street high street

Summary of Spatial Elements

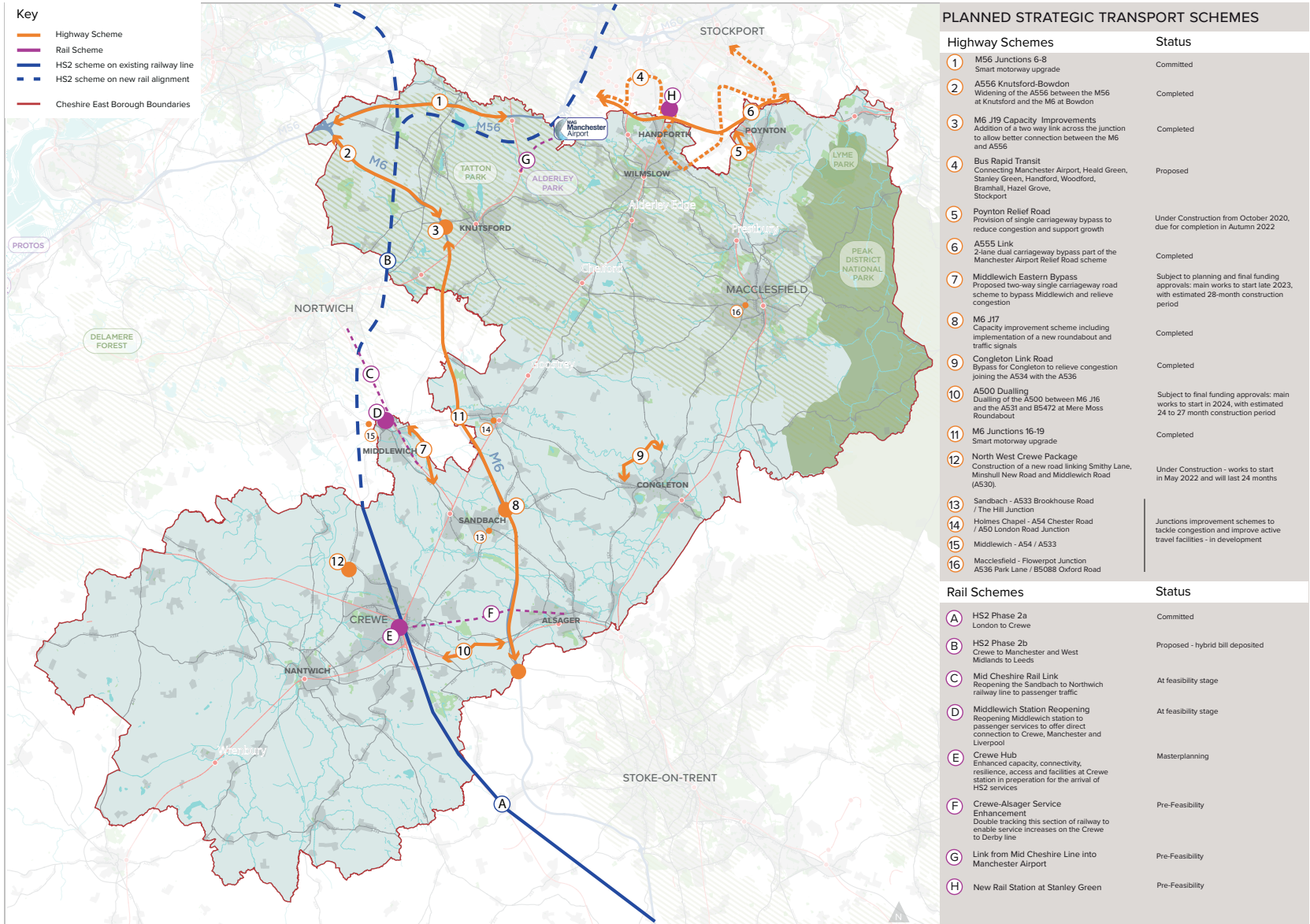
The tables below and on the following page identify the key positive and negative spatial attributes for the town centre:

Public Realm	Gateways	Open Space	Heritage	Townscape Quality	Legibility
Positives					
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Unique amphitheatre space - use of some high quality paving materialsSome consistency in paving along main shopping street (Wheelock Street)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">St Michael's Church holds prominent raised position at eastern edge of town, emphasising sense of arrival into town centre	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Trent and Mersey Canal and River Croco pass close to the town centreGood quality play spaces at Fountain Fields Park with activities for all ages (playground, urban gym, courts)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">A number of heritage buildings including St Michael's Church, Middlewich Town Hall, the White Bear Pub and Alhambra	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Wheelock Street mostly maintains historic grain as it winds round St Michael's ChurchSome interesting 19th/early 20th Century buildings along Wheelock Street add to historic townscape	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Small, walkable town centreChurch spire aids navigation

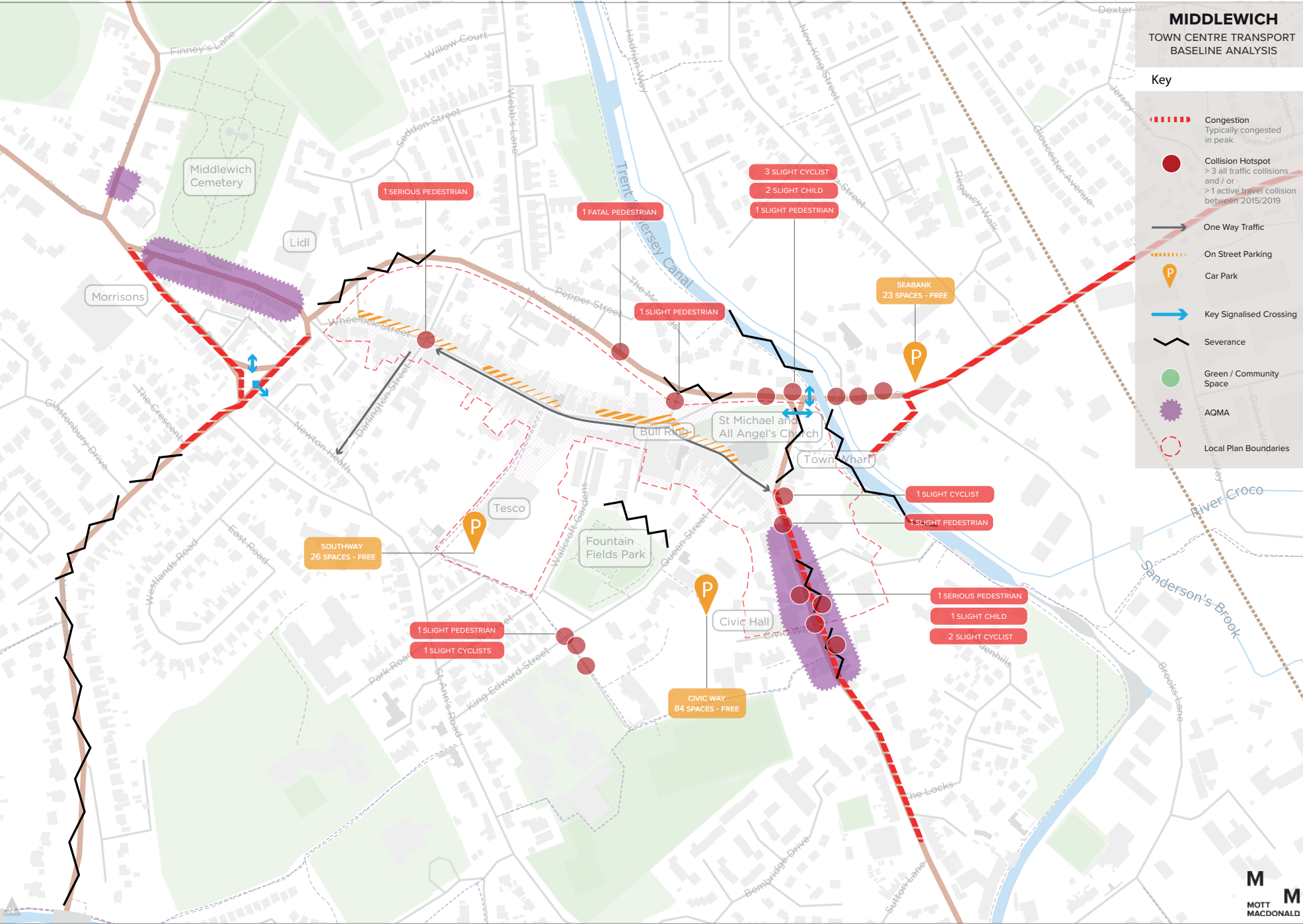
Public Realm	Gateways	Open Space	Heritage	Townscape Quality	Legibility
Negatives					
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Public realm is dated along Wheelock Street, and showing signs of wear and tear around AmphitheatreThe Amphitheatre space is positioned towards a busy road, creating a disappointing stage	<ul style="list-style-type: none">St Michael's Way - a large road - dominates gateways into the centre at both the eastern and western ends of Wheelock StreetGateways to the canal are poor, have limited visibility and are confusing to navigate	<ul style="list-style-type: none">The canal and river network lies in close proximity to the town but can easily be missedFountain Fields Park lacks active frontage on most sides, which makes it feel remote and disconnected from the town and reduces the safety and security associated with overlooking	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Some shop fronts are tired and dated and detract from the quality of heritage townscapeHeritage buildings at the Wharf are interesting but are falling into disrepair	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Erosion of historic grain around St Michael's Way reduces the quality of the arrival onto Wheelock Street and is dominated by roadspace and car parking for The Vaults pub	<ul style="list-style-type: none">St Michael's Way acts as a barrier, limiting crossing pointsOrientation of newer housing development on 'The Moorings' street created confusing access to the canalShops and services around the Town Hall on Lewin Street feel disconnected from the centre, with road traffic and tight pavements making walking routes unpleasant

06 Connectivity and Accessibility

Middlewich Town Centre is bound by the A54 which provides a direct connection to the M6 at Junction 18. Strategic journeys to and from Middlewich are however limited to private car use as the lack of a rail station within the town limits opportunities for mid-long distance journeys by public transport. For example, car journey times between Middlewich and Manchester are around 45-50-minutes whilst public transport journey times are around 90-minutes due to the requirement to travel by bus to Sandbach to access the rail network.



Middlewich Transport Baseline Analysis



Car Parking

Car parking across Middlewich town centre comprises three off-street car parks offering a maximum stay of 2 hours free of charge. On-street parking is also provided across a number of streets including the main high street where duration of stay is limited to 1 hour.

On-street parking within the main retail areas takes up the majority of space alongside narrow pavements leaving little room for pedestrian movement. This on-street parking will be important to retain in some areas to support retail and ensure appropriate provision of disabled parking, however the quality and design of parking should be reconsidered in order to enhance sense of place.

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
Middlewich	Seabank Car Park	23	/	Free
	Southway Car Park	26	/	Free
	Civic Way Car Park	84	/	Free
	TOTAL	133		

Public Realm

Public realm across the centre of Middlewich is generally sub-standard with outdated infrastructure and cracked pavements present within the main retail areas and high street. The town centre is also poorly visible from the surrounding highway network (St Michael's Way) where the main gateway to the town centre comprises a busy complex junction.

Several green spaces and community spaces are present within Middlewich however these remain poorly connected to the town centre with a lack of crossings, lack of visibility from the surrounding areas and no clear pedestrian links. Due to its unique position along the canal there are significant opportunities to create a new public space at Town Wharf.

The main public realm feature at the Bull Ring Amphitheatre overlooks a large junction and busy highway network which present unattractive environments for people to spend due to the noise and air pollution created by traffic.

Road Safety

Although there are few junctions and routes across Middlewich town centre that present major concerns in terms of road safety, there are a number of places where the safety of pedestrians and cyclists could be improved. Middlewich town centre is bound by St Michael's Way to the north, a busy A Road with large and complex junctions providing access to the town centre at Leadsmithy Street and The Bull Ring. No pedestrian crossings are provided at the junction between St Michael's Way and The Bull Ring presenting a risk to pedestrians wishing to access the town centre who are required to cross three lanes of heavy traffic from multiple different directions.

The Middlewich Eastern Bypass is a great opportunity for reshaping parts of the existing network. However, the scheme does not seem to significantly relieve congestion on St Michael's Way. The main opportunity for complementing the Eastern Bypass is reshaping Lewin Street, currently characterized by a poor environment for pedestrians with particularly narrow footways in places. This could also represent an opportunity to better link the canal basin to the town centre.

Work is being conducted between Cheshire East and Cheshire West to develop a proposal to extend the Eastern Bypass around the south of Middlewich - linking into and upgrading Clive Green Lane. This would then bring into play complementary measures on St Michael's Way.

Active Travel

As noted above, St Michael's way currently creates a major severance in some areas between the town centre and residential areas to the north. This restricts pedestrian access as limited suitable crossing facilities are provided. The town centre also presents limited provision for cyclists with few cycle parking facilities and safe crossing points.

Key pedestrian routes between town centre car parks and the high street are unclear in several places such as Civic Way where pedestrian routes would benefit from public realm, lighting and wayfinding enhancements.

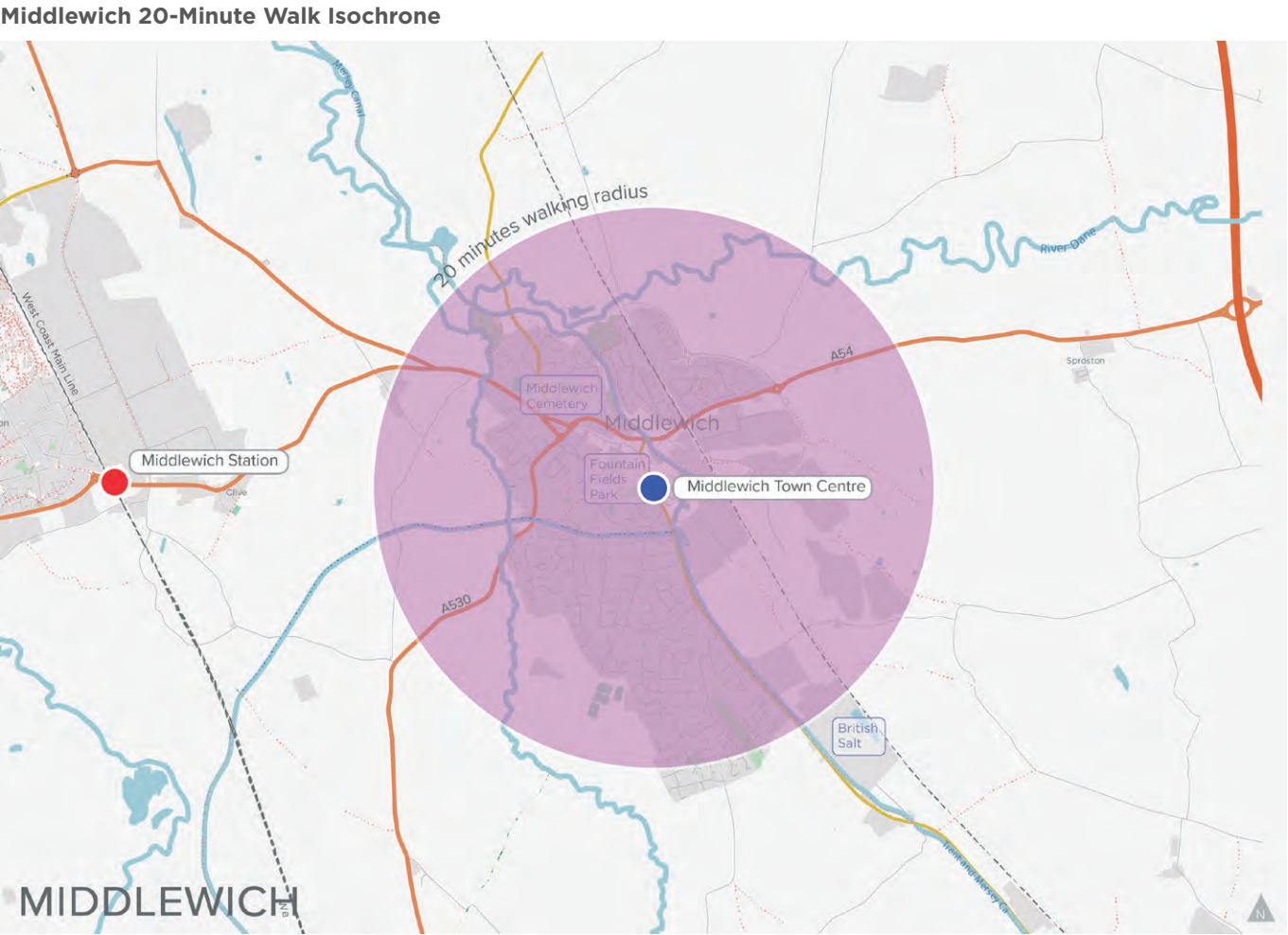
The location of Middlewich in proximity to the canal presents significant opportunities for walking and cycling, particularly in terms of leisure, providing a place for walkers or cyclists to stop and spend time along long distance strategic routes. The towpath surfacing itself could be improved, particularly south of Town Wharf where conditions are poor towards existing residential areas.

The location of Middlewich town centre within 20 minutes walking time from all surrounding residential development presents significant opportunities to encourage modal shift towards walking and cycling for access to the town centre. However, this will only be achieved if existing barriers to movement and issues associated with the quality of the environment are addressed.

Public Transport

Middlewich is the largest town in Cheshire without a centrally located rail station¹. With more than 80% of people travelling to work outside of Middlewich, there is a heavy reliance on car travel in and out of the area for commuting purposes contributing towards lower levels of air quality. This can be seen by the presence of multiple AQMAs around the centre of Middlewich.

Bus stop facilities are provided at the Bull Ring and which offer 1 hourly service to Northwich, 2 buses per hour to Crewe and 1 hourly service to Winsford. This demonstrates a low level of bus connectivity to the area.



¹ [https://www.mcrua.org.uk/the-sandbach-middlewich-northwich-railway-line/#:-:text=Middlewich%20\(population%2013%2C600\)%20is%20the,these%20work%20in%20Greater%20Manchester.](https://www.mcrua.org.uk/the-sandbach-middlewich-northwich-railway-line/#:-:text=Middlewich%20(population%2013%2C600)%20is%20the,these%20work%20in%20Greater%20Manchester.)

Movement Trends

Census 2011 travel to work data suggests that most residents in Middlewich (82%) travel to work outside of the town predominately to other towns across Cheshire East, towns within Cheshire West and areas within Grater Manchester. Car travel accounts for 77% of travel to work trips.

The lack of a direct access to the rail network, poor provision of bus services in the area, high car mode share for travel to work between Middlewich residents, and the majority of people travelling between 5 and 30km (52%) therefore supports the rationale for a station within the town centre.

- 5% of people living in Middlewich work within the town centre
- 52% of residents travel between 5 and 30km to work
- Public transport accounts for 3% of commuter trips
- Only 13% of households in Middlewich do not have access to a car, 36% have access to 2 or more vehicles
- 77% of residents in Middlewich in employment drive to work by car
- 50 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

Local Aspirations

Cheshire East Council has been working since 2015 to develop options for a bypass which aims to reduce traffic congestion in the town centre whilst supporting employment and housing growth in the area as a whole. The proposed Middlewich Eastern Bypass would be a 50mph, 2.7 km single carriageway running from Holmes Chapel Road (A54) at the Salt-Cellar Roundabout, to Booth Lane south of Middlewich. The scheme received planning approval in July 2019. Proposals for the Middlewich bypass currently underway may present opportunities to transform St Michael's Way by reducing traffic travelling through the area and providing enhanced spaces for pedestrians and cyclists, improved public realm, and green infrastructure.

06 Connectivity and Accessibility cont.

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.

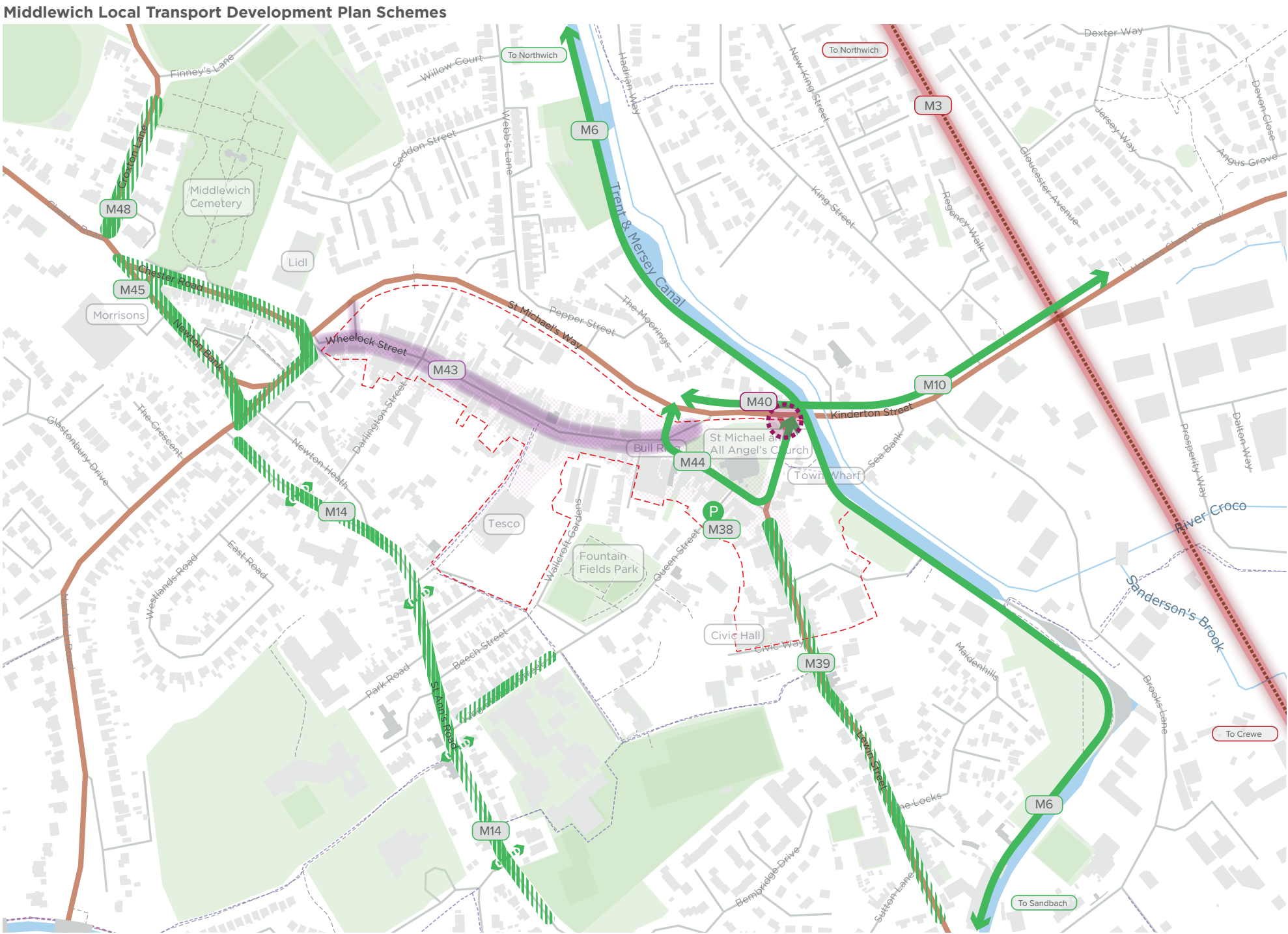
The LTDP sets out a wide range of actions that CEC are exploring. In Middlewich, the LTDP focuses strongly on active travel interventions to improve conditions for those on foot and cycle – emphasising the links along the canal and the pedestrian facilities on St Ann’s Rd and Lewin St corridors. The are also other strategic actions focused around implementing traffic calming measures and improving pedestrian and cycling links at Townbridge Junction.

The table opposite contains further detail on the schemes set out in the plan illustrated on p53.

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

Middlewich Local Transport Development Plan - Schemes				
Type	Ref	Scheme	Description	Costing ¹
Active Travel	M6	Canal footway improvements along canal towpaths	Introduce improvements to the Canal footway: walking and cycle routes along canal towpaths from Middlewich to Sandbach and Northwich, and towards Winsford, Church Minshull and Nantwich.	<£1m
	M10	Introduce Holmes Chapel- Middlewich cycle route	Introduce a cycle route from Middlewich and Holmes Chapel to Knutsford.	£1m-£5m
	M14	Widen footways and improve crossings on St Ann’s Road and King Edward Street	Widen footpaths and improve crossing points on St Ann’s Road and King Edward Street – to improve the walking routes to schools within the area.	<£1m
	M38	Safe, secure cycle parking within the town centre.	Introduce safe, secure cycle parking within the town centre.	<£100k
	M39	Local highway and pedestrian improvements along Lewin Street	Local highway and pedestrian facilities improvements along Lewin Street, following reduced traffic flows due to Middlewich Eastern Bypass.	£1m-£5m
	M44	Improve walking and cycling route from Town Wharf via the Church and Wheelock Street	Improve walking and cycling route from Town Wharf (Trent and Mersey Canal) to the town centre via the Church and Wheelock Street.	£1m-£5m
	M45	Widen footways and improve pedestrian crossings on A530 Gyratory	Widen footways on the A530 gyratory were space allows and improve pedestrian crossings to facilitate movements from the housing developments across the A530.	£1m-£5m
Public Realm	M48	Improve footpath on Croxton Lane	Implement footpath improvements on Croxton Lane between Meadow View and Finneys Lane area.	<£1m
	M43	Traffic calming and pedestrian improvements on Wheelock Street	Introduce traffic calming measures on Wheelock Street and enhance pedestrian environment – currently limited to narrow, tired pavements.	<£1m
	M40	Review Townbridge junction layout to improve pedestrian and cycle links	Review Townbridge junction layout to assess opportunities to reduce congestion and improve pedestrian and cycle links.	<£1m
Highway	M3	Reopen Mid Cheshire Line with new station at Middlewich	Continue to work alongside partners to reopen the mid-Cheshire rail line to passenger services including a new station in Middlewich, connecting Crewe – Sandbach – Middlewich – Northwich.	>£10m
Public Transport				

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



Retail and Leisure

Cheshire East Council recognises the importance of monitoring key information to assess and respond to issues in its centres and 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 Middlewich in terms of performance since the last Report (2016).

Middlewich serves as a town centre, catering for the day to day needs of the local residential community. The centre is less than 3 miles from J18 of the M6, meaning good accessibility by road, but faces strong competition from nearby larger towns such as Winsford and Sandbach, particularly for national occupiers. Positively, despite the challenging retail climate over the past couple of years, Middlewich has seen a reduction in vacant units, with a strong convenience goods offering and retail and leisure provision.

Overall, the centre provides 88 units (Experian Goad Plan, September 2018) which are primarily located on Wheelock Street, the Hightown (around the Bullring) and to a lesser extent Lewin Street.

The convenience goods sector is strong in Middlewich, with the proportion of units in the centre equivalent to the UK average of 9%, whilst the proportion of floorspace being more than double the UK average (31% compared to UK average of 15%). The centre is anchored by national operators Morrisons and Lidl, on the edge of the town centre. These stores are supported by Tesco Express, Jack’s and other local independent convenience offerings.

The comparison goods offering in Middlewich is not as strong as the convenience offer. The proportion of comparison goods units is below the national average (22% compared to UK average of 29%), whilst the proportion of floorspace is less than half the UK average (13% compared to 34%). This would suggest comparison stores with a small floorspace occupied mainly by independent retailers, however, there are a small number of national brands including Rowlands Pharmacy and Cancer Research.

The retail and leisure provisions in Middlewich are considered to be reasonable, with the proportion of units and floorspace significantly above the UK averages, even with the number of units decreasing by 3 to 20 since 2016.

Most leisure units are occupied by independent food and beverage operators, pubs, bars, and take-aways, with no national brands. Leisure services occupy the highest amount of floorspace in the town centre at 25%, equal to the UK average.

The vacancy rate in Middlewich town centre has increased from 9 to 10 units between 2016 and 2018, with vacant floorspace increasing to 1,300 sqm. A number of these units have now been occupied or converted to residential, meaning a reduction in vacancy rates for both units and floorspace, now significantly below the UK average. However, following the closure of Barclays Bank in 2017, Nationwide is the only remaining building society/ bank in the centre, weakening the town centre service offer.

At this stage, it is unclear what the impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic will be on Middlewich’s occupiers. Town centre spend will have been, in part, compensated for by more people working from home and using local facilities. However, the pedestrian activity is quite low in the town centre due to the close proximity of other, larger towns. Whilst the comparison offer is fairly small, the convenience, retail and leisure services are strong within the town serving the local residential community.



Location of voids in the Town Centre, 2019 .
Source: GOAD

	Units			Floorspace		
	No.	%	UK Average (%)	Sq.m	%	UK Average (%)
Convenience	8	9	9	3,660	31	15
Comparison	19	22	29	1,580	13	34
Retail Service	20	23	15	1,510	13	7
Leisure Service	22	25	25	2,650	22	26
Financial and Business Service	9	10	10	1,120	9	7
Vacant	10	11	12	1,300	11	11
Total	88	100	100	11,820	100	100

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

Most recent consistent data available across the 9 centres
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. Middlewich’s office market in considered further on p 57

Footfall

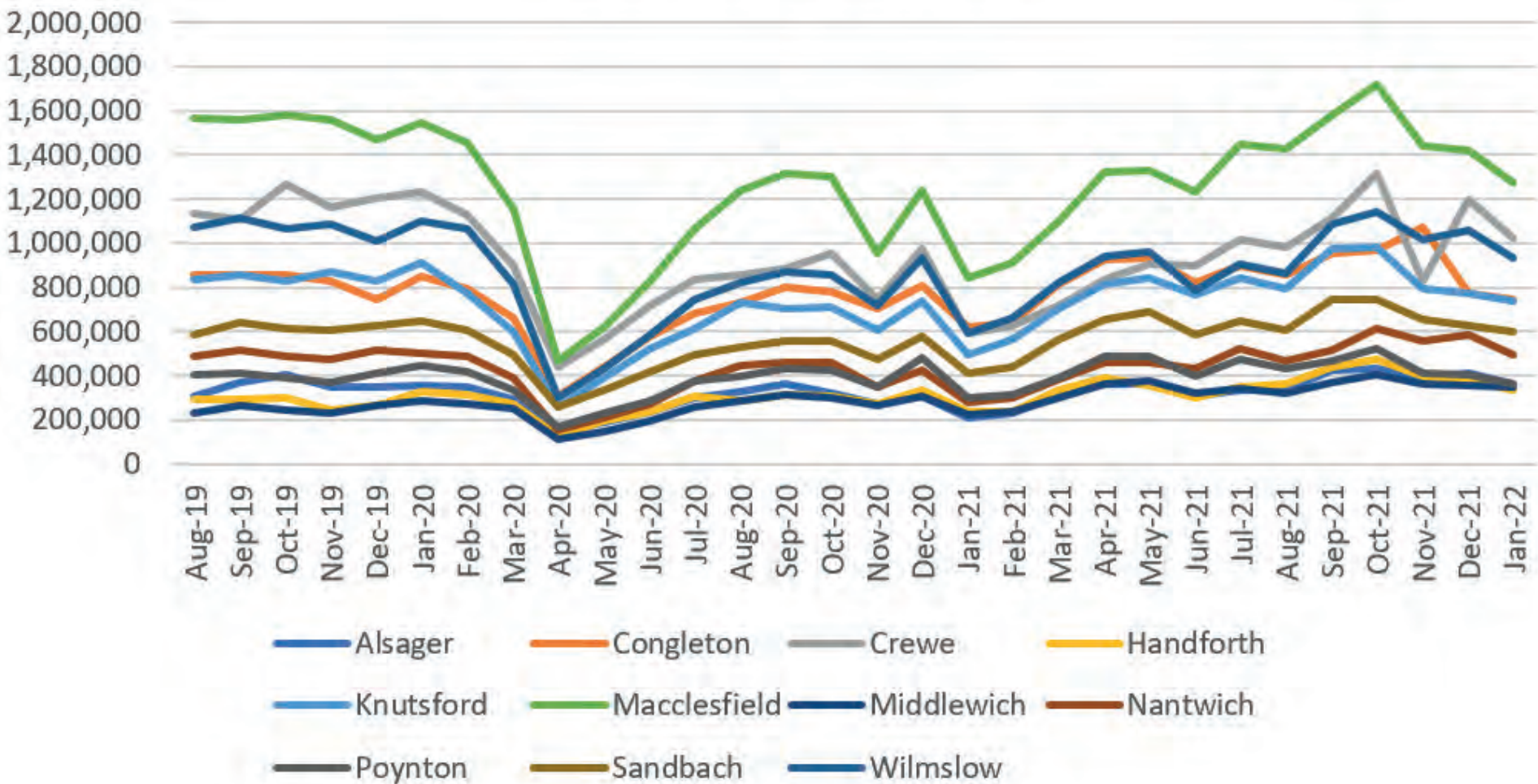
In recognition of the important relationship between footfall and vitality, Cheshire East Council is now commissioning regular monitoring of footfall across the centres. The following graph shows the footfall in all the key centres between August 2019 and December 2020. It starkly shows the impact of COVID-19 on footfall across Cheshire East, particularly in March and November last year (during national lockdowns) and some bounce back in December.

Middlewich was the least visited centre in Cheshire East in August 2019 and whilst slightly overtaking Alsager, remained in this position throughout the period to December 2020 – with in the region of 312,000 visitors per month at its peak. Positively, Middlewich is the only KSC which saw monthly footfall figures increase on the year previously from August–December 2020, with a peak growth of 26.6% in August 2020. With the national average benchmark rate of a 40% fall in footfall figures, this suggests a strong trend of residents choosing to shop locally in Middlewich.

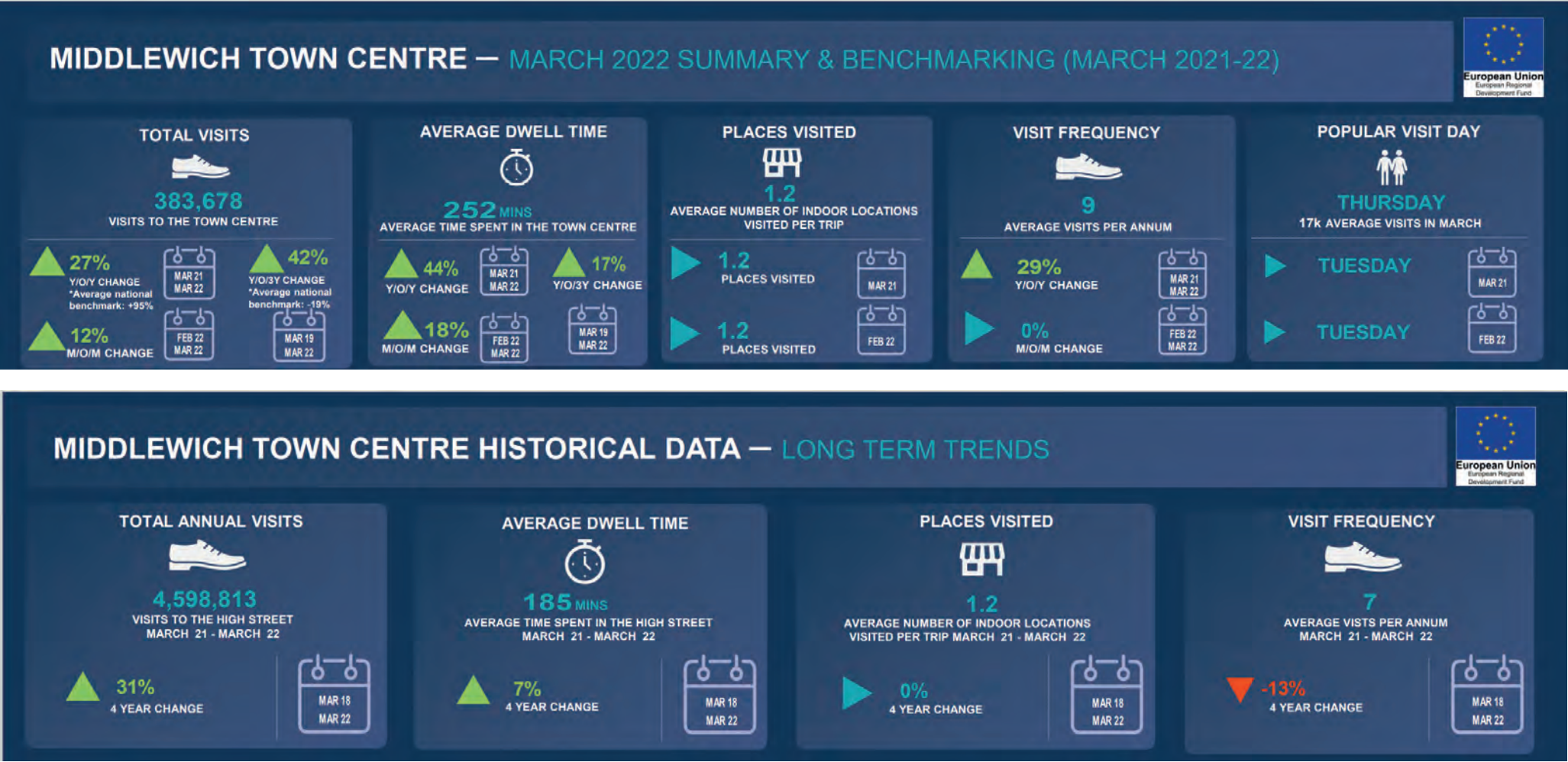
COVID-19 has had a significant impact on footfall, both during enforced lockdowns but also in further accelerating online retail use. The ability of a centre to attract a wide range of visitors (rather than just relying on shoppers) will have a significant impact on how centres emerge from the pandemic.



Town Centre Footfall



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



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

Employment

The main employment offering in Middlewich is situated along the eastern side of the A553 at two main industrial and warehousing sites – Brooks Lane Industrial Estate and Midpoint 18. King Street Trading Estate to the north of the town also provides a mix of employment uses. Occupancy levels remain strong and varied despite competition from Winsford Industrial Estate, located 3 miles away.

Brooks Lane Industrial Estate contains poor-average quality B2/B8 warehousing and industrial units with significant storage land for businesses predominantly in the manufacturing and transportation sectors. No national branded occupiers are present on site. To the east of the estate are the three largest B8 units in Middlewich, accessed off Pochin Way. The largest of these units is a distribution centre for national occupier B&M. This location provides excellent road connectivity for the logistics sector by being 2 miles from J18, M6.

Midpoint 18, Aston Way is located directly off the A54 and contains a mixed size of average-good quality industrial and warehousing units, with some ancillary office uses. In contrast to Brooks Lane, these units are more compact with limited storage space available. Businesses on the estate again are predominantly local companies within

sectors typically found within the manufacturing, engineering and wholesale sectors. The largest unit is occupied by Optima Logistics Ltd. There are proposals to further expand Midpoint 18 through further industrial development.

The town centre benefits from employees using the town centre for amenities, particularly as industrial/warehousing occupiers are typically unable to work from home and so have continued to operate during the COVID-19 pandemic.

As of the latest data from 2019, there can be found just 7 office premises spread throughout the town centre above retail units on Wheelock Street, with larger premises found on Lewin street. The largest of these is Middlewich Victoria Hall off Lewin street which is occupied by Middlewich Town Council. Whilst the scale of office use within the town centre is limited, the importance of retail, leisure and tourism as an employer and economic driver in Middlewich is well recognised and will be encouraged.



Location of Offices in Middlewich Town Centre
Source: Experian GOAD Survey, September 2019

Residential Market Context

Middlewich’s residential offering is predominantly located to the west and north of the town centre and is surrounded by open countryside beyond.

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%).

Middlewich had a total of 5,910 households, 3.7% of Cheshire East’s total residential stock (159,441). Similar to that of Cheshire East, Middlewich’s housing stock is dominated by larger family housing, almost a third of all stock, made up of 39.0% detached housing and 26.0% semi-detached homes.

The dominant residential group within Middlewich is affluent professionals with large families, reflecting the proportion of detached/ semi-detached within Middlewich’s housing stock. However, there is a need to rebalance the housing offer to provide more starter homes, affordable housing and homes for older people in order to meet future local needs and changing demographics.

Average achieved house prices in the last year

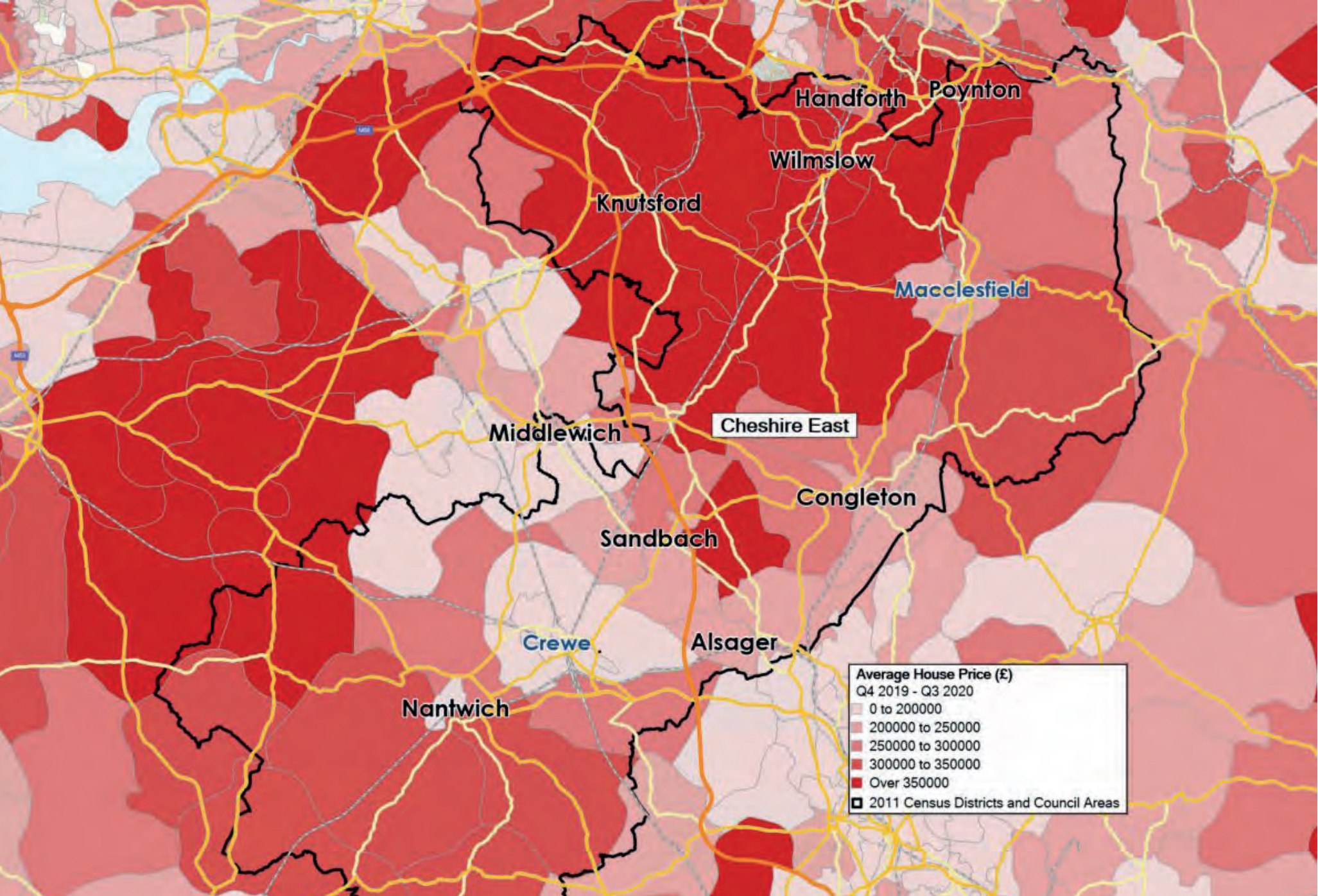
in Middlewich (according to Rightmove) were just below £200,000, with an average for semi-detached properties of £160,000 and detached of £250,000. Middlewich offers residential properties at affordable prices compared to many parts of Cheshire East, largely targeted towards families.

Currently there are only two new housing

developments within Middlewich. Silver Birches on Croxton Lane by DTB Residential is a development of 11 x 3 and 4 bed semi-detached and detached properties with prices starting from £230,000. Roman Court is a new retirement living development of 1 and 2 bed apartments by McCarthy and Stone right in the heart of the town centre on Wheelock Street.

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 with good road accessibility to the M6 corridor
- Attractive and well used green and blue linkages through the local canal and river network providing connections and a USP for leisure and tourism. Fountain Fields - good park with Green Flag status
- Market town characterized by attractive high street heritage buildings
- Successful programme of events including the annual FAB Festival drawing 30,000 people to Middlewich across the weekend
- Heritage and history - Only brine Pump in England being refurbished
- Range of nice cafes, restaurants and pubs
- Affordable and attractive housing market location

Weaknesses

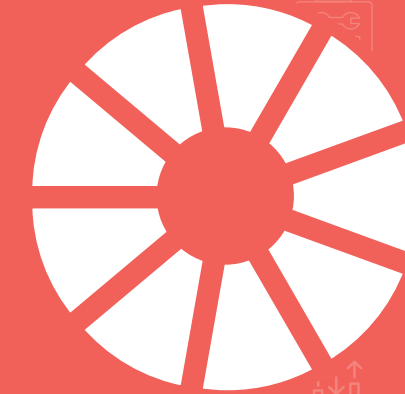
- Struggling town centre - current retail offer is weak with a lack of retail variety or national occupiers resulting in low footfall
- No major leisure draw (cinema etc.) meaning trade is lost to Northwich, Crewe and Warrington
- Quarterly market failed. Now a market town with no market other than 1 fish van on Tesco car park (Council ran Tuesday Market)
- Town Wharf - derelict privately owned site in key strategic location between town centre and canal
- People are unaware of the presence of the canal or of Middlewich’s roman history
- Lack of gateway or navigational signage to announce arrival or direct to town centre or car parks
- Accessibility and movement challenging for disabled visitors
- Commuter town - little draw from wider area, users tend to be older local residents
- Poor visibility of the town centre from St Michael’s Way
- Anti-social behaviour issues - Nothing for youth to do, particularly in the evening. Installed CCTV on Fountain Fields but need youth facility
- A54/ St Michael’s Way builds up with traffic and dominates arrival into town centre, as well as severing connections to the River and Canal network

Opportunities

- Town Wharf - Major linchpin opportunity for a new mixed use area including public space, mooring, canal boat user facilities, public toilets, residential, small independent retail, F&B. Council bid for site but private owner wants residential
- Staycations and boating holidays have seen a 40% uplift in last year - opportunity to encourage users of the canal network to come into the town centre through better connections and public realm
- Opportunity to improve quality of canal towpath and environs, particular to the south - could extend?
- Floating Market - could work well post covid with one way systems. Discussions with Mid Cheshire Development Board to link together with Winsford and Northwich
- Middlewich bypass - opportunity to divert A54 eastern traffic to Crewe but needs parallel scheme to rethink (downgrade?) St Michael’s Way which currently acts as a barrier and push traffic out
- Brooks Lane masterplan - includes a marina (approved), residential, railway station and other major development at this employment site on the eastern edge of town
- Opportunity for railway station off Brooks Lane - Area earmarked in CECs local plan. A Government-funded feasibility study “Mid Cheshire and Middlewich Rail Study Strategic Case Report” undertaken (March 2019)
- Victoria Hall - Can hold 250 people but underutilised. Need to raise awareness
- Bull Ring/ Amphitheatre - more could be made of the events space in front on the church
- Would like to reinstate market but resistance from traders and retailers for Wheelock Street
- Families have started to get involved in themed events e.g. Halloween scarecrow competition
- Appointed a marketing provider to produce a website for the Make it Middlewich project. Aims to unite and engage businesses and retailers during lock down. Currently obtaining data

Threats

- Linkages via the canal are made more complex due to the canal bridges being listed
- Struggled to engage local businesses through previous initiatives
- Discussions to potentially pedestrianize town centre in previous years have been met with fierce opposition from traders
- Lots of change within Town Council - death of previous clerk after 34 years in post but new clerk provides fresh eyes. In May 2019 Middlewich First was wiped out - now labour and 2 independents
- HS2 route proposed to pass close to the western edge of the town centre crossing the A54/A533. Concern around impact on town centre, proposed marina development and attractiveness to visitors
- Neighbourhood plan was rejected at referendum, possibly over the amount of housing proposed in the Brooks Lane masterplan, which has since been approved



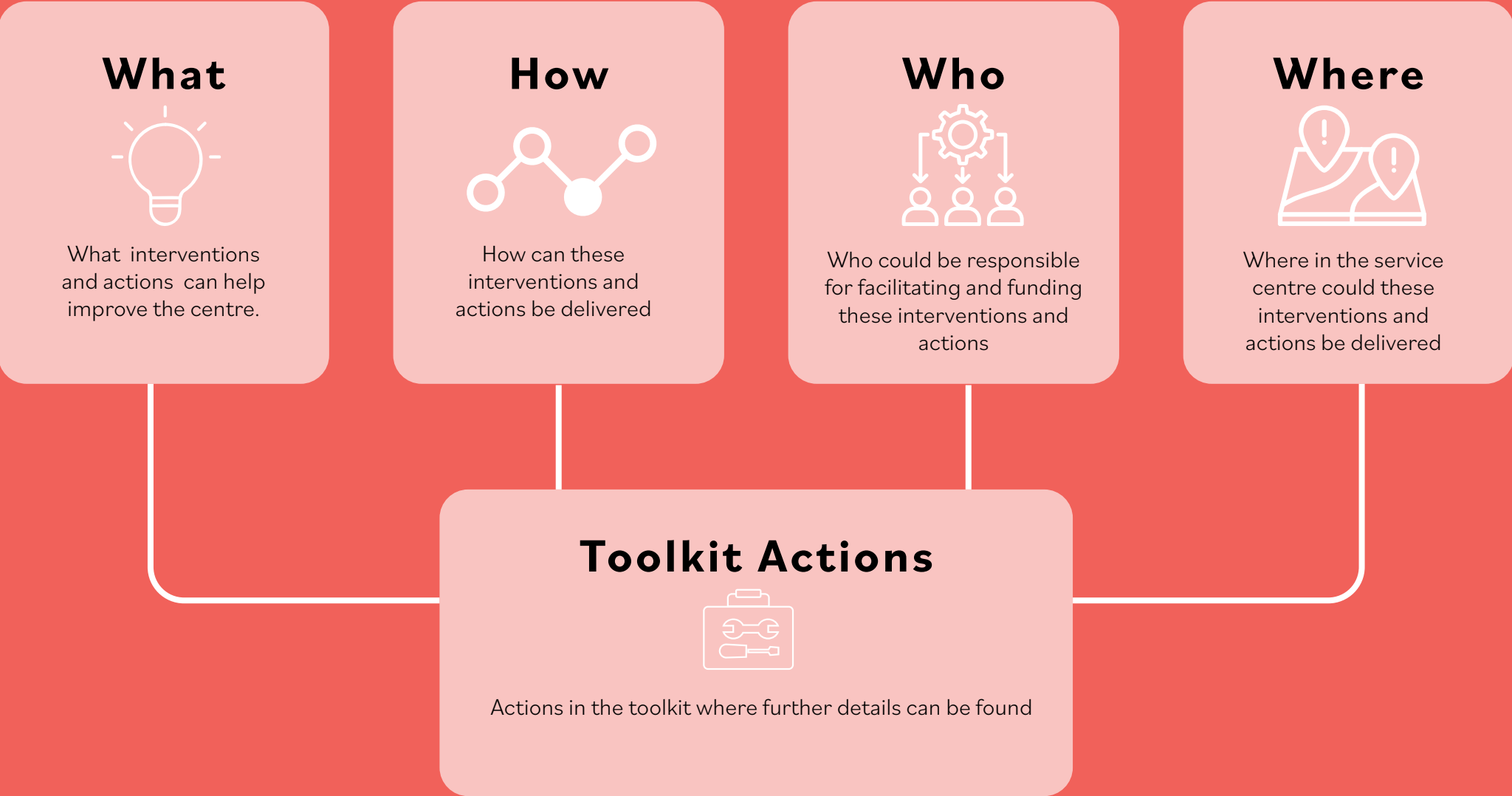
MIDDLEWICH ACTION PLAN

09 Priority Areas for Intervention

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

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

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



Vision and objectives

Vision Statement

By 2030, Middleswich will be a sustainable, vibrant and prosperous town in which people can enjoy living, working and following leisure pursuits. Community spirit will continue to flourish; heritage and canal network will be enhanced, and the profile and image of the town will be improved.

Objectives

- To deliver a busy, people focused town centre
- To maximise the delivery of opportunity sites
- To ensure heritage is embedded in the built environment and Middleswich is a destination for industrial tourism and leisure
- To promote high quality design in new development
- To create excellent places for people to live which meet their housing needs
- To create an efficient, safe and pleasant transport experience, with improved infrastructure, reduced congestion and improved connectivity
- To promote and maintain a thriving local economy
- To deliver excellent education services and facilities
- To make excellent provision for the health and well-being needs of Middleswich

Role of the Centre

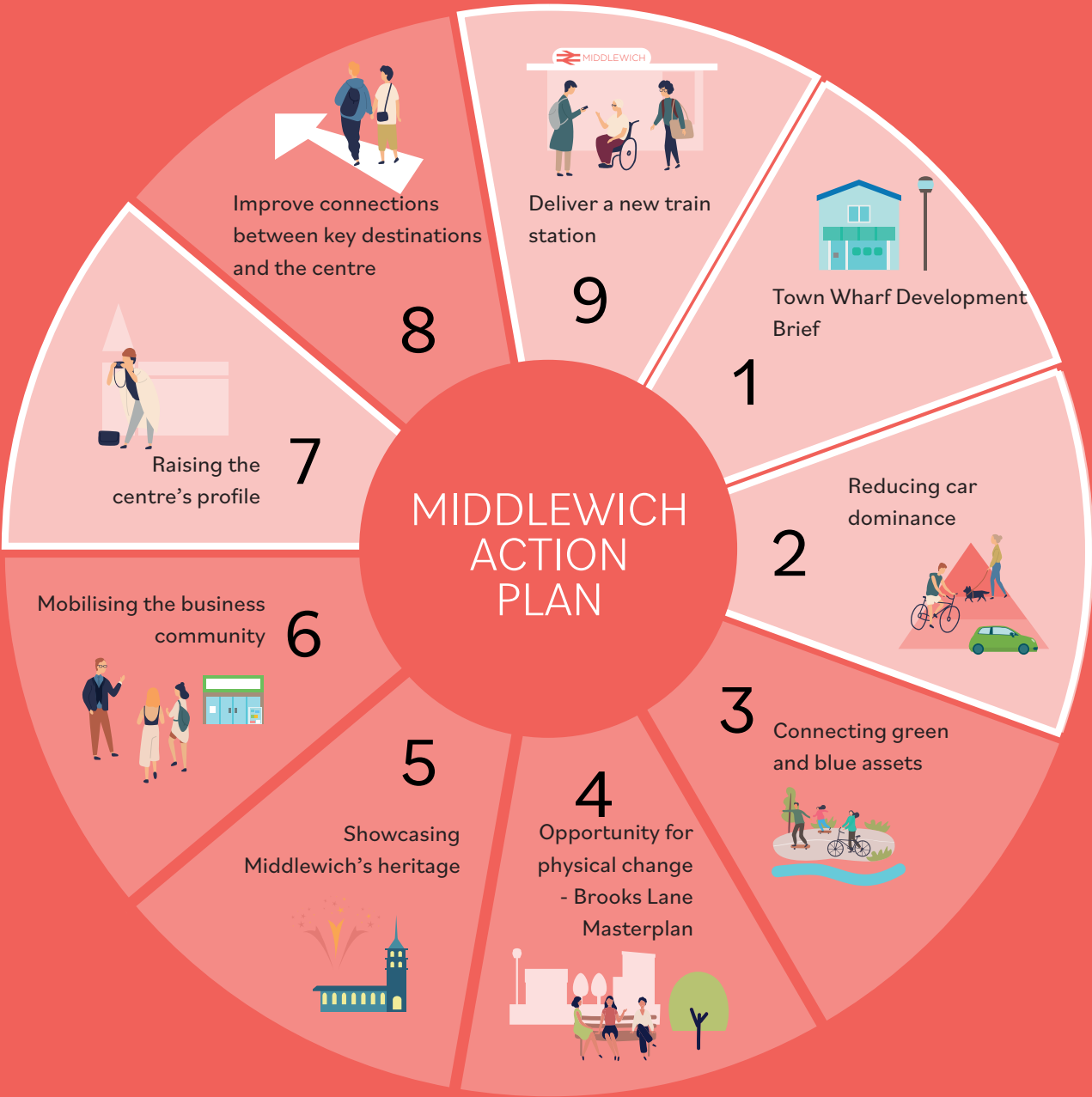
Middleswich plays a number of important roles:

- A local centre serving the needs of its local residents
- An employment hub offering a range of job opportunities
- A visitor destination offering a range of heritage assets and interests
- A community focus – offering a range of amenities including an attractive park and accommodating a number of sporting, leisure and community groups

The Vitality Plan seeks to support Middleswich 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 River could be improved as well as ensuring proposed new development is well connecting into the Centre. It also highlights the Centre’s extensive green and heritage assets.

Three priority actions have been identified in Middlewich:

- 1. *Action 1: Town Wharf development brief*
- 2. *Action 2 : Reducing car dominance*
- 3. *Action 7: Mobilising the business community*
- 4. *Action 9 Deliver a new train station*

Action 1: Town Wharf Development Brief

Town Wharf development area

Action 2: Reduce car dominance

Reducing the dominance of St Michael's Way through traffic measures and improved crossings

Enhance experience of centre using tactile urbanism and meanwhile uses to repurpose parking bays and underutilised spaces

Enhance setting of Bull Ring space

Action 3: Connecting green and blue assets

Improved pedestrian and cycle route along the canal

Link of enhanced existing greenspaces along the canal network

Action 4: Brooks Lane Masterplan

Brooks Lane Masterplan Area

Midpoint 18 Employment Area

Action 8: improve connections between the key destinations and the centre

Enhanced walking routes to town centre/ key assets/ canal corridor/ greenspaces

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

Action 9: Deliver a new train station

Safeguarded area for new train station



Movement action plan

A series of schemes have been identified through the TCVP process, building upon those set out in the LTDP.

They are intended to strengthen and expand the existing LTDP proposals – with a stronger emphasis on active travel and public realm to enhance the street environment.

Town Centre movement schemes suggested in addition to LTDP potential schemes

Type	Ref	Scheme	Description	Costing ¹
Active Travel	M_AT1	Improve wayfinding across the town centre at key gateways	Improve signage and wayfinding across the town centre at key gateways and landmarks.	<£100k
	M_AT2	Improve walking and cycling route on King Edward Street and Queen Street	Improve walking and cycling on key streets such as on King Edward Street and Queen Street connecting the wider residential area with the town centre. This could be achieved through use of modal filters.	<£100k
	M_AT3	Improve pedestrian crossings on Lewin Street	Increase the quality and frequency of pedestrian crossings along Lewin Street.	<£1m
Public Realm	M_PR_1	Enhance gateway and public space at St Michael Church	Improve space layout and public realm within the frontage of St Michael Church to create a space for people to dwell and spend time.	£1m-£5m
Parking Management	M_PM1	Introduce temporary parking suspensions for trial pop-up uses on Wheelock Street	Introduce trial pop-up uses for service roads through localised changes such as parklets - and provisional suspension of parking on market and event days.	<£100k
Highway	M_H1	Enhance Saint Michael Way / Wheelock Street junction	Reduce severance and Saint Michael Way/Wheelock Street junction and provide safer, better facilities for pedestrians and cyclists.	£1m-£5m

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

cheshireeast.maps.arcgis.com/apps/MapSeries/index.html?appid=48d6af7045d2495c81a1850a2c8a72c1

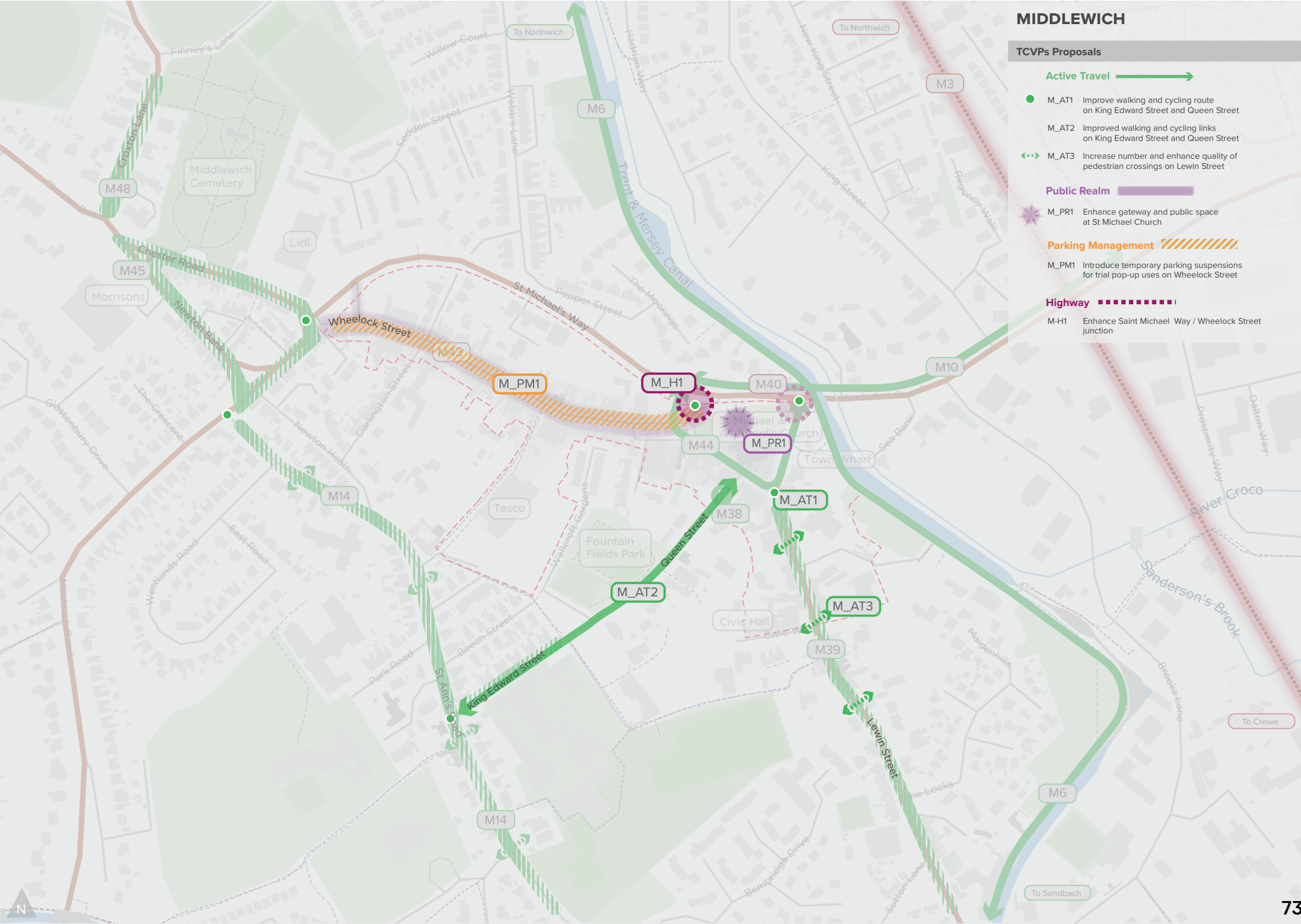


Paradou, France Streets across the town centre, like Wheelock St and Queen St, should be designed with good quality materials, with a focus on informality and pedestrian space. They should be well lit during hours of darkness, particularly along green areas like Fountain Fields Park. (Photo credit: MottMacdonald)



Bath Parklets could be trialled on Wheelock Street to break on-street parking bays and reclaim street space for more productive uses. (Photo credit: MottMacdonald)

Middlewich Town Centre Viability Plan Proposals



10 Potential actions



Action 1: Town Wharf Development Brief (Priority from public consultation)

What

The area around Town Wharf is an underutilised but important and prominent gateway asset linking the town centre to the attractive waterways that surround Middlewich. The future potential of this area should be harnessed and its heritage preserved to encourage visitors, increase footfall and extend dwell time in Middlewich whilst aiding legibility and enhancing perceptions at this key gateway location.

How

The Town Wharf site is in private ownership presenting challenges to engagement for both its temporary ‘meantime’ use and longer term future development potential.

As would be anticipated, the landowner will be seeking to attain maximum value from their land holding. However, values in Middlewich are relatively low rendering most development unviable, and potentially encouraging uses and/or dense development to be sought that does not generate the wider regenerative and economic development value to the town centre aspired to for this important site. This would represent a missed opportunity for the town.

The preparation of a Development Brief for Town Wharf would establish the development expectations and parameters for the site. It would seek to identify a scheme that maximises the benefits to the town and balances local stakeholder aspirations, including that of the landowner. The document will also be used to inform discussions and decision making through the planning process, thus providing an element of control over the future of the site. It’s preparation would consider the actions required to implement development and could include options for intervention by CEC and other partners.

Stakeholder engagement will be key to the preparation of a deliverable and effective development brief. However, it is anticipated that challenges are likely to be encountered with the existing landowner who is understood to be unwilling to engage. The appointment of specialist advisors who understand the land and property market together with the planning and development process, and are adept at engaging with multiple stakeholders can support this process, helping to deliver a better value development that maximises benefits to the town in the medium to long term.

In terms of creating a positive impact on town centre vitality, the development brief could explore and look to safeguard:

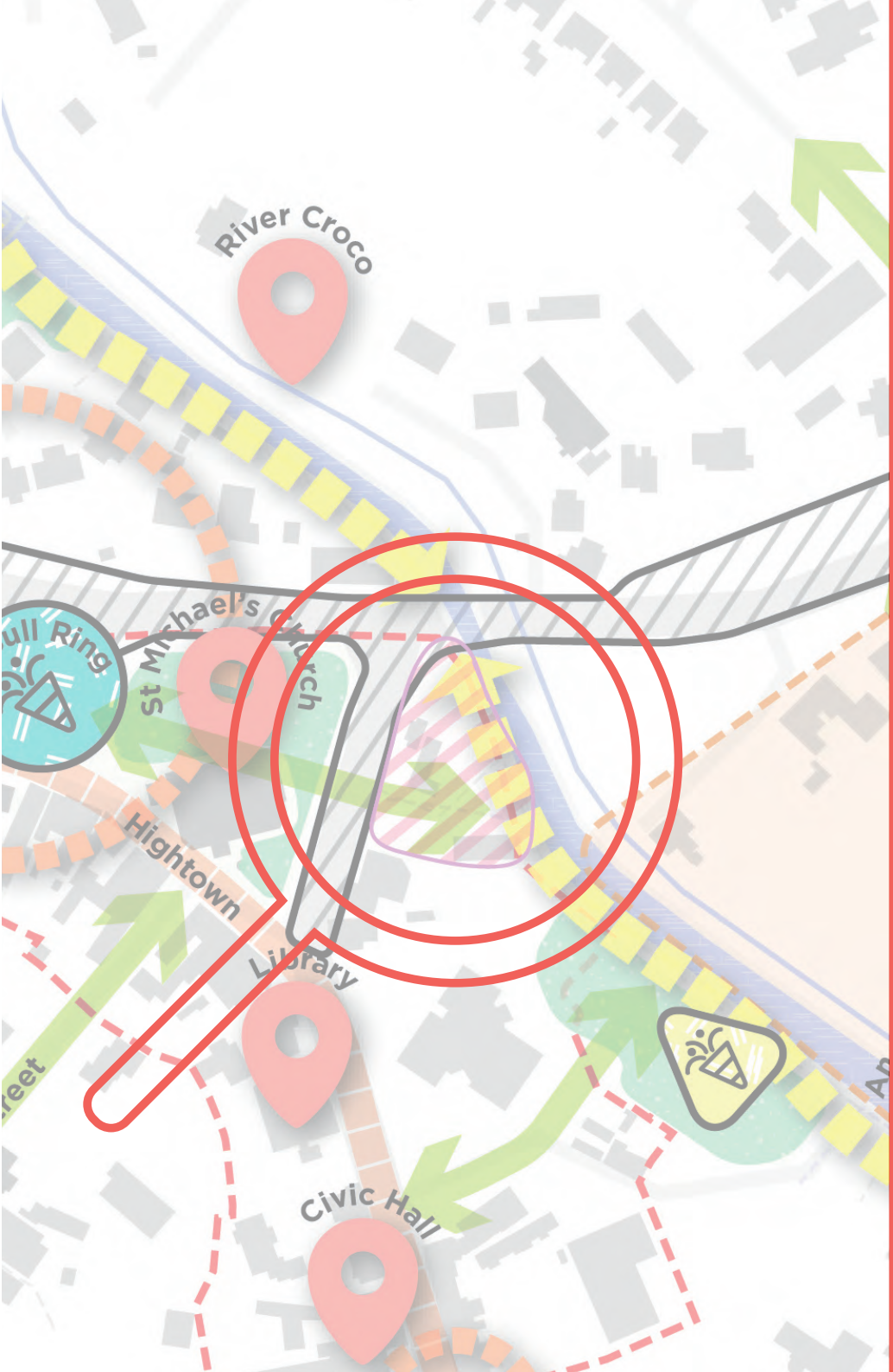
- Enhanced pedestrian/ cyclist routes through the site and connecting the town centre onto the canal, following the existing public right of way through the site
- Refurbishment of the existing wharf buildings on the site, which are of local heritage value and could provide space for a cafe/bar/restaurant with artisan workshops or museum/exhibition space above, bringing activity and art led culture to the canal side.
- Flexible outdoor space - providing space for seating or small events and making the most of views over the canal

Who

- Town Wharf landowner
- Middlewich Town Council
- Cheshire East Council
- Specialist advisors

Where

- Town Wharf area



Action 1 supports the following objectives:

- To deliver a busy, people focused town centre
- To maximise the delivery of opportunity sites
- To ensure heritage is embedded in the built environment and Middlewich is a destination for industrial tourism and leisure
- To promote high quality design in new development
- To create excellent places for people to live which meet their housing needs



Toolkit Actions

- 4e – Enhance gateway sites
- 4f – Open up heritage buildings as venues for visitors/events
- 5c – Dressing vacant sites
- 9b – Curated events focused on historic buildings, public spaces, gardens and parks
- 9c – Enable a café culture
- 18b – Provide new spaces to sit
- 18e – Prioritise environmental considerations in the design of new public spaces
- 20b – Use space and activities to attract people to forgotten part of town and create new place identity
- 21a – Managed activation of under-utilised space
- 22a – Creating exciting new spaces
- 22b – Bringing vacant buildings back into residential use
- 25a – Meanwhile uses



Action 1: Town Wharf Development Brief (Priority from public consultation)

Town Wharf Development Framework

A development framework could help steer development on the Town Wharf site. Potential ideas for enhancing the space are set out in the diagram opposite. There may be opportunities to bring activity to this part of the town, and provide a destination along the canal which links to the town centre.



Existing view towards Town Wharf from the eastern side of the canal

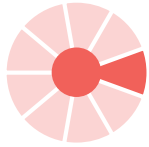


Evening activity along the canal, Castlefield, Manchester



Pathway and jetties, Bibury, Cotswolds





Action 2: Reduce car dominance (Priority from public consultation)

What

Reducing the dominance of cars will create a safer and healthier environment, encouraging visitors to be able to dwell, and enhance the experience of and arrival into the centre, creating a more pleasant place to shop and relax.

The Middlewich Eastern Bypass will connect the Holmes Chapel Road/ Centurion Way roundabout in the north, to A533 Booth Lane in the south, and will significantly reduce pressure on central areas of the town as north-south trips are routed away from the constrained King St and Leadsmithy St junctions. This provides an opportunity to fulfil aspirations for reducing car dominance in parts of the Town Centre.

How

Short term:

- Low cost uses and tactical urbanism measures could be considered in the short term to introduce planters, parklets and other temporary measures which use one or two on-street parking bays. These spaces could provide temporary activities such as seating areas, outdoor dining areas or cycle parking to create activity and reduce the dominance of cars. The local community could be consulted on effectiveness of installations to see if a more permanent solution would be popular, especially along Wheelock Street, where there has been previous reservations around reducing the number of on-street parking bays. Weekend closures to traffic in this location could also be a good way to test the effectiveness of these measures.
- Temporary art installations or movable planters could be introduced in the Bull Ring space, to better manage views to St Michael’s Way

Medium/ long term:

- Support the Middlewich Eastern Bypass through changes to the existing network to ensure that the full benefits of the bypass are realised. This could include a weight limit on Booth Lane, and closure of King St to through-traffic to protect this residential street from rat-running traffic.

- The space around the Bull Ring and bus stop could be redesigned to create a more central feature to the town, which isn’t dominated by roadscape.
- More safe crossings could be added in to assist connections into the town from key assets such as the canal and river network via Lewin Street and new development at Brooks Lane and Midpoint 18.
- Town Bridge junction – aim to provide safer and better facilities for pedestrians, including safer crossing facility, re-prioritising the capacity released by the Eastern Bypass
- Make the most of reduced vehicle numbers on Lewin Street by buildings out footways, improving crossing points.
- Consider tree planting along major routes to screen roads, buffer noise and combat traffic pollution but taking care not to endanger safety in terms of visibility.

Who

- Town Council
- CEC
- Local businesses

Where

- St Michael’s Way
- Wheelock Street and the Bull Ring/ Amphitheatre

Precedent Images

Wheelock St is Middlewich’s main high street – with busy active frontages, numerous shops and services. The current street layout though, is dominated by the carriageway and on-street parking. It could be a much more successful street with relatively modest investment in public realm.

The street design should be simplified to be cleared of clutter and barriers to pedestrian movement. A similar approach to Frodsham Street in Chester could be taken, where public realm has been transformed to support activity on the street.

Middlewich Eastern Bypass offers a major opportunity to significantly reduce the volume of traffic through the town. Changes to St Michael’s Way/ Leadsmithy St junction should improve active travel connections to the town centre from the north. This could be furthered by consideration of ‘no through traffic’ restrictions on King Street, ensuring Centurion Way and MEB are established as the principle routes for through traffic.

Elsewhere, connections to the town centre can be enhanced through a focus on simple interventions, such as improving the quality and frequency of crossings on Lewin Street and St Ann’s Road.



Prince Street, Liverpool
Zebra Crossing
(Photo credit: MottMacdonald)



Frodsham Street, Chester
Pedestrian priority design
(Photo credit: MottMacdonald)



Action 2 supports the following objectives:

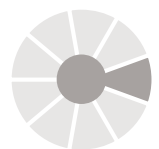
- To deliver a busy, people focused town centre
- To create an efficient, safe and pleasant transport experience, with improved infrastructure, reduced congestion and improved connectivity
- To promote and maintain a thriving local economy
- To make excellent provision for the health and well-being needs of Middlewich



Toolkit Actions

- 4c – Better bus stops
- 4d – Planting in pots to define space for certain uses
- 9c – Enable a café culture
- 14a – Tactical urbanism 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 2: Reduce car dominance (Priority from public consultation)

Better Framing Public Space onto St Michael's Way

There are opportunities to enhance the existing setting of the church and amphitheatre/ Bullring at the gateway to the eastern gateway to the high street along Wheelock Street.

This might involve the installation of artwork which could act to screen views to the busy road, or reconfiguration of the bus stops further down St Michael's Way to provide space for tree planting.

The historic character of St. Michaels Church and Hightown could be celebrated by providing more space for pedestrians, by creating more flexible event space, celebration space, dwell space and a civic space which is not dominated by highway infrastructure. This improved space could be a key focal point for the town, as you make your way from the canalside to the town centre.



Create visual and noise separation from St Michael's way with artistic screening - this helps to better enclose the space and create clear separation from highway functions and people spaces.

Reconfiguration of the existing bus stop to become more flexible - can it be used as a spill out space for events with services adjusted during events. Introduction of better materials, tightened radii and minimised highway space so the space reads as one.

Reduce car dominance along Hightown and look for ways of reconfiguring or re-arranging on-street car parking.

Directional signage, tree planting, street furniture and uplifting the quality of the public realm will encourage more to occupy and use the space.

Look for opportunities to claim back over-scaled highway space for temporary seating / pop up outdoor lounges / places for food stalls and create areas for people to dwell away from busy roads.





Action 3: Connecting green and blue assets

What

Middlewich is well located on the Trent and Mersey Canal, which is a great asset for local short trips. However, it could be substantially improved – particularly in terms of surface quality, extents of surfacing, and connections to the surrounding area.

In addition to the existing assets of the canal and river network, there are a number of greenspaces in close proximity to the town centre which could ‘work harder’ to attract visitors and provide a connected ‘green trail’ between the town centre and canal and river network.

How

- Explore design options for improving links from Town Wharf via the Church and Wheelock Street
- Provision of new/enhanced pedestrian and cycle routes along the Trent & Mersey Canal, ensuring compliance of connections with the Equalities Act 2010.
- Enhance existing green areas along the canal corridor to create more destination open spaces with places to dwell through new seating and picnic benches, playspaces, urban gyms and enhanced planting.
- Improve linkages between the town centre, canal and river with Fountain Fields Park
- Ensure paths are safe, well lit and maintained including removing overgrown trees and hedges, ensuring even surfaces, widening where possible and providing bins
- Provide better co-ordinated directional signage between the canal, town centre and other key locations and surrounding assets to ensure locals and visitors can easily navigate between destinations. This could extend beyond Middlewich to other canal connected towns including Sandbach and Winsford.
- Engage with the Canal and River Trust to support implementation of enhancements along the canal.

Who

- Town Council
- CEC
- Canal & River Trust
- Groundwork

Where

- Trent and Mersey Canal
- River Croco
- River Dane
- River Wheelock
- Fountain Fields Park

Precedent Images

Enhanced crossings between the town centre, canal and green assets for both pedestrians and cyclists can improve the user experience and entice more visitors into the town centre, who may be passing through. New development at Town Wharf and Brooks Lane can increase activity along the canal corridor, creating further spaces which visitors can go between and improving the setting of the canal.



Enhanced crossing, Nottingham



Kings Cross, London



Action 3 supports the following objectives:

- To deliver a busy, people focused town centre
- To ensure heritage is embedded in the built environment and Middlewich is a destination for industrial tourism and leisure
- To create an efficient, safe and pleasant transport experience, with improved infrastructure, reduced congestion and improved connectivity
- To promote and maintain a thriving local economy
- To make excellent provision for the health and well-being needs of Middlewich



Toolkit Actions

- 1d - Use lighting
- 4b - Better signage
- 4d - Planting in pots to define space for certain uses
- 4e - Enhance gateway sites
- 7a - Parklets
- 7b - Multi-generational play spaces
- 18a - Provide quality play areas
- 18b - Provide new places to sit
- 20b - Use space and activities to attract people to a forgotten part of town centre and create new place identity/ Reinvigorated alleyways
- 25c - Facilitate modal shift



Action 4: Opportunity for physical change - Brooks Lane Masterplan

What

The Brooks Lane Masterplan SPD sets out a framework for development in close proximity to the town centre, which could provide around 200 new homes, new green infrastructure and a new marina. Adjacent to the site is Midpoint 18, which is a 220 hectare site designated in the Local Plan for employment. Part of the plans safeguard land for a new train station.

Together these sites, if properly connected to the town centre along existing road networks and through new connections over the canal, could greatly enhance both accessibility and footfall to the shopping core and in turn improve access to key destinations along the canal, new employment and residential areas and potentially a new train station.

How

- Enhanced walking routes along Kinderton Street
- Enhanced walking routes from town centre to the Trent and Mersey Canal via Lewin Street and Wych-House Lane.
- Support the on-going refinement and engagement of the future of the Brooks Lane Masterplan area

Who

- CEC
- Town Council
- Landowners

Where

- Brooks Lane SPD Area
- Kinderton Street
- Lewin Street
- Wych-House Lane



Action 4 supports the following objectives:

- To deliver a busy, people focused town centre
- To maximise the delivery of opportunity sites
- To ensure heritage is embedded in the built environment and Middlewich is a destination for industrial tourism and leisure
- To promote high quality design in new development
- To create excellent places for people to live which meet their housing needs
- To create an efficient, safe and pleasant transport experience, with improved infrastructure, reduced congestion and improved connectivity
- To promote and maintain a thriving local economy



Toolkit Actions

- 4e - Enhance gateway sites
- 5a - Upgrade the public realm with high quality materials
- 7f - Hyper localism
- 14c - Enhanced crossings
- 20a - Remove clutter from key pedestrian routes
- 20b - Use space and activities to attract people to a forgotten part of town
- 23 - Redevelopment plans



Action 5: Showcasing Middlewich's heritage

What

Middlewich boasts a rich industrial heritage including a number of high quality buildings, it's historical waterways and the UK's only intact brine pump (a scheduled ancient monument). There is considerable scope to expand upon these assets, and link with wider attractions, to increase visitor and tourism opportunities that would benefit the town centre as a whole.

How

Advancements in technology has opened up lots of new opportunities to showcase heritage assets in new and exciting ways. The use of QR codes or apps means more insight can be offered to more visitors. Interactive walking and/or heritage trails could be prepared and tailored to themes such as the town's waterways, industrial heritage or local pubs. Consideration should be given as to how to use these to encourage visitors to venture into other parts of the town and surrounding green/attractive areas. There could be scope to engage with local businesses who may be willing to provide expertise to support the Town to develop a local app or QR codes.

Other actions proposed should enhance the setting of the Town's heritage assets and encourage people to dwell more around those at the Bull Ring, Wheelock Street, Harbutts Field and the canal and appreciate them. Creation of a heritage trail and better, more characterful signage could also help direct visitors to these assets and inform them of their significance.

Encourage greater utilisation of heritage buildings and assets e.g. Harbutts Field and Victoria Hall for events e.g. cinema days/evenings, exhibitions etc.

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

More events focused around heritage such as the Folk&Boat Festival should also be considered with scope to link to showcasing the towns other assets. Such events and initiatives should be well advertised. You have already suggested working with other local towns such as Winsford and Northwich around a series of heritage linked events such as floating markets based upon your linked waterways.

Who

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

Where

- Across the town centre and its waterways



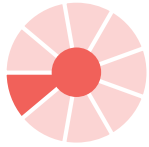
Action 5 supports the following objectives:

- To deliver a busy, people focused town centre
- To ensure heritage is embedded in the built environment and Middlewich is a destination for industrial tourism and leisure
- To promote and maintain a thriving local economy



Toolkit Actions

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



Action 6: Mobilising the business community

What

Middlewich has a number of local businesses within the centre and around its edges at employment centres including Brooks Lane Industrial Estate and Midpoint 18. Engaging with these businesses and encouraging them to collaborate more effectively will support the economic growth of the area. In addition, many businesses are considering how they can add value to their local communities through corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives.

How

Encouraging local stakeholders and businesses to collaborate can generate new opportunities to share customers, cross sell etc. as well as creating loyalty and stronger connections to the town centre itself, thus supporting footfall and spend. Northwich is a good local example of how a collaborative business community is supporting a more attractive town centre.

Whilst some previous attempts to engage the business community in Middlewich have been met with a limited response, many corporate businesses now set targets to support their local communities and therefore it would be worth trying to re-establish links, recognising that this may be a longer term process that requires some time to generate momentum. One such scheme to involve local communities could be to invite local schools to visit businesses, see what they do and support local employment opportunities in the future.

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 Middlewich 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 in the surrounding employment areas. An example of this was the former business carnival where organisations had a float. It could also generate opportunities for B2B referrals.

Other ways to engage local retailers and businesses could be through bringing their involvement into events and initiatives such as extended opening hours for key events or window display competitions. In Middlewich, there

could be benefits to engaging with the landlords of vacant retail units to discuss opportunities of ‘meantime’ uses or attractive window displays/ hoardings. Other ways to engage local retailers and businesses could be through bringing their involvement into events and initiatives such as extended opening hours for key events or themed window display competitions such as local school children did for Church display or window treasure trails.

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 Middlewich including Brooks Lane Industrial Estate and Midpoint 18



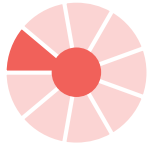
Action 6 supports the following objectives:

- To deliver a busy, people focused town centre
- To promote and maintain a thriving local economy



Toolkit Actions

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



Action 7: Raise the town’s profile (Priority from public consultation)

What	How
Create a platform from which to promote Middlewich’s great assets and events to ensure that residents, visitors and local businesses are aware of what is on offer in the centre. This should support the centre to be recognised as the heart of the community.	<p>Currently the Town Council provides basic information about Middlewich, key policy documents and meetings, local services and events/things to do on its website. However, many centres now have their own websites to showcase what their centres have to offer.</p> <p>As a first step a revamped or new website for Middlewich, that is kept up to date, 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:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The existing offer in terms of shops, bars, restaurant etc.• Events programme• 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 <p>Consideration could be given, as has just be done in Wilmslow, to work with a local marketing company to develop a brand linked to their website and other media channels - www.wilmlowswaybetter.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.</p> <p>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 Middlewich pages. The Cheshire Vibe business directory is already starting to do this for Middlewich.</p> <p>Further, whilst Middlewich 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 relevant websites could also be provided.</p>

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

- Wider promotion of the Town’s established programme of popular events – a wider promotion of your “what’s on” in Middlewich page. A “What’s On” display in the library could also promote events for those less digitally connected
- Improved signage (physical and virtual via app/QR code) to stop people just passing through
- Establish Town Ambassadors and encourage brand loyalty
- Promotion of Middlewich via dedicated social media channels e.g. Facebook
- Promotion through positive PR and good news stories and the free monthly ‘Go Local’ magazine
- 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 and/or events to broaden the appeal of the town to attract new visitors e.g. Leek, Buxton etc.

Who
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Town Council• Marketing Cheshire• Local Businesses

Where
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• N/A



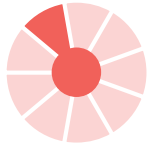
Action 7 supports the following objectives:

- To deliver a busy, people focused town centre
- To ensure heritage is embedded in the built environment and Middlewich is a destination for industrial tourism and leisure
- To promote and maintain a thriving local economy



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 8: Improve connections between key destinations and the centre

What

Middlewich offers a walkable town centre. There are both employment and residential areas within walking/cycling distance. Walking and cycling routes between these areas and the town centre should be enhanced to encourage trips on foot or cycle into the centre.

How

- Explore design options to create improved walking and cycling linkages on key streets connecting the wider residential area with the town centre, as identified by the LTDP. This includes Lewin St, St Ann’s Road, King Edward St, A530 gyratory, and Croxton Lane.
- Explore feasibility of a Middlewich to Holmes Chapel and Sandbach cycle route.
- Support the introduction of high-quality designated safe cycling routes throughout the town, as identified by the Local Transport Development Plan (LTDP).
- Consider the location of cycle hubs linked to improve green links and introduce secure, safe cycle parking.
- Support the introduction of high-quality safe cycling routes throughout the town, as identified by the Local Transport Development Plan (LTDP).
- Provide better co-ordinated directional signage at key gateways and between town centre locations and surrounding assets to allow easy navigation to/from the town centre
- Promote trails and linked activities across wider outdoor recreational destinations to encourage families to undertake cycle trips and outdoor activities
- Ensure roads, foot and cycle paths are safe and well maintained including smooth surfaces and widening where possible, in particular around Cow Lane Estate and Holmes Chapel Road, and Kings Lock
- Consideration could also be given to establishing a Middlewich Car Share Community

Who

- Town Council
- CEC
- Sustrans

Where

- Connecting employment and housing areas, and the schools to the town centre.



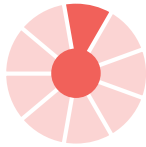
Action 8 supports the following objectives:

- To deliver a busy, people focused town centre
- To create an efficient, safe and pleasant transport experience, with improved infrastructure, reduced congestion and improved connectivity
- To promote and maintain a thriving local economy



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 9: Deliver a new train station (Priority from public consultation)

What

Middlewich does not have a direct connection to the rail network, with the nearest station located at Winsford, around 3km away. This limits both growth and regeneration of Middlewich, and the opportunities for both footfall through visitors to the town and for residents who do not drive (including young people) to access to employment, education and leisure attractions elsewhere.

How

CEC should continue to work alongside partners to explore the reopening of the Line to passenger services, including a new station in Middlewich. This would connect locally to Crewe, Sandbach and Northwich, with wider connections to Manchester and Liverpool beyond via changes at Crewe.

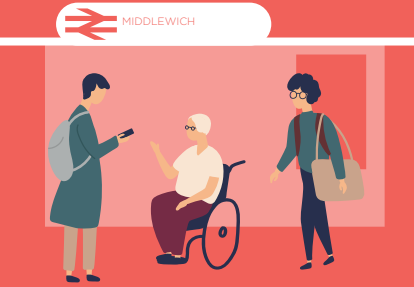
The station would likely be located in the Brooks Lane / Prosperity Way area. Connections to the wider town, including the town centre, will be important and detailed consideration should be given to the directness and quality of routes for pedestrians and cyclists as a priority.

Who

- CEC
- Network Rail
- DfT

Where

- Brooks Lane / Prosperity Way



Action 9 supports the following objectives:

- To deliver a busy, people focused town centre
- To maximise the delivery of opportunity sites
- To promote high quality design in new development
- To create an efficient, safe and pleasant transport experience, with improved infrastructure, reduced congestion and improved connectivity
- To promote and maintain a thriving local economy



Toolkit Actions

- 23 - Redevelopment plans
- 25c – Facilitate modal shift

Centre wide actions

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

<p>1. Appointment of CEC Centre Champion</p> <p>The identification of a nominated officer (go to person/champion) within CEC management team for each of the Centres who would understand local priorities for the Centre and would support them to access appropriate officers within key departments and also would seek to unblock issues. It is understood that this is something CEC is currently considering. This would be supported by an providing each of the centres with a clear organogram of who within CEC is responsible for what to make engagement easier.</p> <p>2. Creation of a Centres Forum</p> <p>Establishment of forum where key representatives from each of the centres could come together on a regular basis to receive updates from CEC about common issues/ opportunities would be beneficial. It is also recognised that during the preparation of the Vitality Plans that a number of the centres are making a great progress overcoming specific issues. By coming together and</p>	<p>sharing progress and discussing issues it is considered that the centres would be better able to share best practice and to identify actions where they could collaborate with other centres to drive economies of scale/value for money. Some meetings may just be held between the centres (within out representation from CEC officers) whilst others could include CEC and/or other partners such as C&W LEP, Groundwork etc.</p> <p>3. Centre Focused Meetings in CEC</p> <p>The process of preparing the Vitality Plans has involved internal workshops with relevant department leads within CEC to ensure that all departments are considering challenges and opportunities in the round rather than just in terms of their individual responsibility. It would be beneficial to continue to hold more regular Centre focused workshops. The best decisions for the centres will be taken when the implications of proposals are considered in the round taking into account both potential investment and long term maintenance.</p>	<p>4. Streamlining maintenance of public realm and greenspace</p> <p>In light of the local desire for improved maintenance combined with recognition that CEC budgets are under severe pressure, it is recommended to ensure maintenance of public realm can be optimised that further engagement would be beneficial to agree how the resources of CEC, the Town Council and wider stakeholders could be targeted to support maintenance. Work to establish a more comprehensive schedule of local assets in each centre and who is responsible for their maintenance should be the starting point of drive for improved maintenance. Going forward any future capital investment must be supported by appropriate consideration as to how assets will be maintained over their lifetime. It is also important to recognise that better maintenance does not necessarily just relate to grass being cut regularly. In recognition of the importance of biodiversity, going forward it is anticipated that consideration will be given to allocating parcels of land to the “wild” to support biodiversity.</p>	<p>5. Increasing importance of sustainability</p> <p>Sustainability is now a critical issue for many organisations and important for local residents both in terms of operational implications (for example energy costs) but also in terms of local impact on the local community and the planet. As such sustainability can no longer be positioned as another priority action but rather must be a concept that is considered in every aspect of proposed actions to minimise their carbon footprint and maximise their positive benefits for the local area and its community.</p> <p>6. Improved platform for communicating activities</p> <p>The preparation of the Vitality Plans has demonstrated that all of the centres 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</p>	<p>is going on. Consideration should be given as to how to enhance the current websites for example adding more content and sharing this through a variety of channels and to ensure that these are also linked to other key partners for example CEC and the other centres (so collectively they reinforcing each other’s profiles)</p> <p>7. Enhanced engagement with local businesses</p> <p>Many of the centres benefit from having a range of national, and in some cases international businesses, many of which are innovating in their specialist areas. There is a significant benefit to the centres and their businesses to collaborating. Whilst restrictions on public sector revenue budgets is putting pressure on what CEC can support there is an increasing recognition by businesses, especially corporates, for the need to support their local communities (Corporate Social Responsibility). This can be in the form of grants, offering expertise or encouraging 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</p>	<p>specialist expertise (e.g. marketing which has been harnesses by Wilmslow in setting up the Wilmslow’s Way Better brand and website). All centres should seek to better engage with their local businesses to determine how they can collaborate to support each other’s objectives. This type of collaboration can give centres a significant boost particularly when it happens around public realm (investment and maintenance), marketing and branding.</p> <p>8. Greater ownership of community assets</p> <p>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.</p>
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Governance and Delivery

Middlewich Town Council is responsible for supporting Middlewich 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 Middlewich 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 before, 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 may need to be recruited to support the pace of delivery of the Vitality Plan and supporting Action Plans.

Communication and Engagement

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

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

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

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

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 Middlewich 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 re-appointment of a part time events manager for Middlewich as has been done in previous years, but with an extended role to include wider partner engagement.

In addition, as set out in Section 10, it is important for enhanced communication and engagement between CEC and Middlewich 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 which can be used to:

- Engage with CEC as budgets are being determined for capital funding. Specifically, it will showcase your priorities and the relative need for intervention around improvements to the public realm. 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 such as maintenance.

Some centres have raised the need for some support in both the identification of funding sources and writing of business cases to secure funding for their aspirations for their towns, for example in respect of delivering an 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 Vitality Plan identifies 9 actions which support the established vision and objectives for the Centre. The Town Council is proactive, and a number of the identified actions are already being pursued. The public consultation identified the following as priority interventions:

- Tower Wharf Development Brief
- Reducing car dominance
- Mobilising the business community
- Deliver a new train station

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.

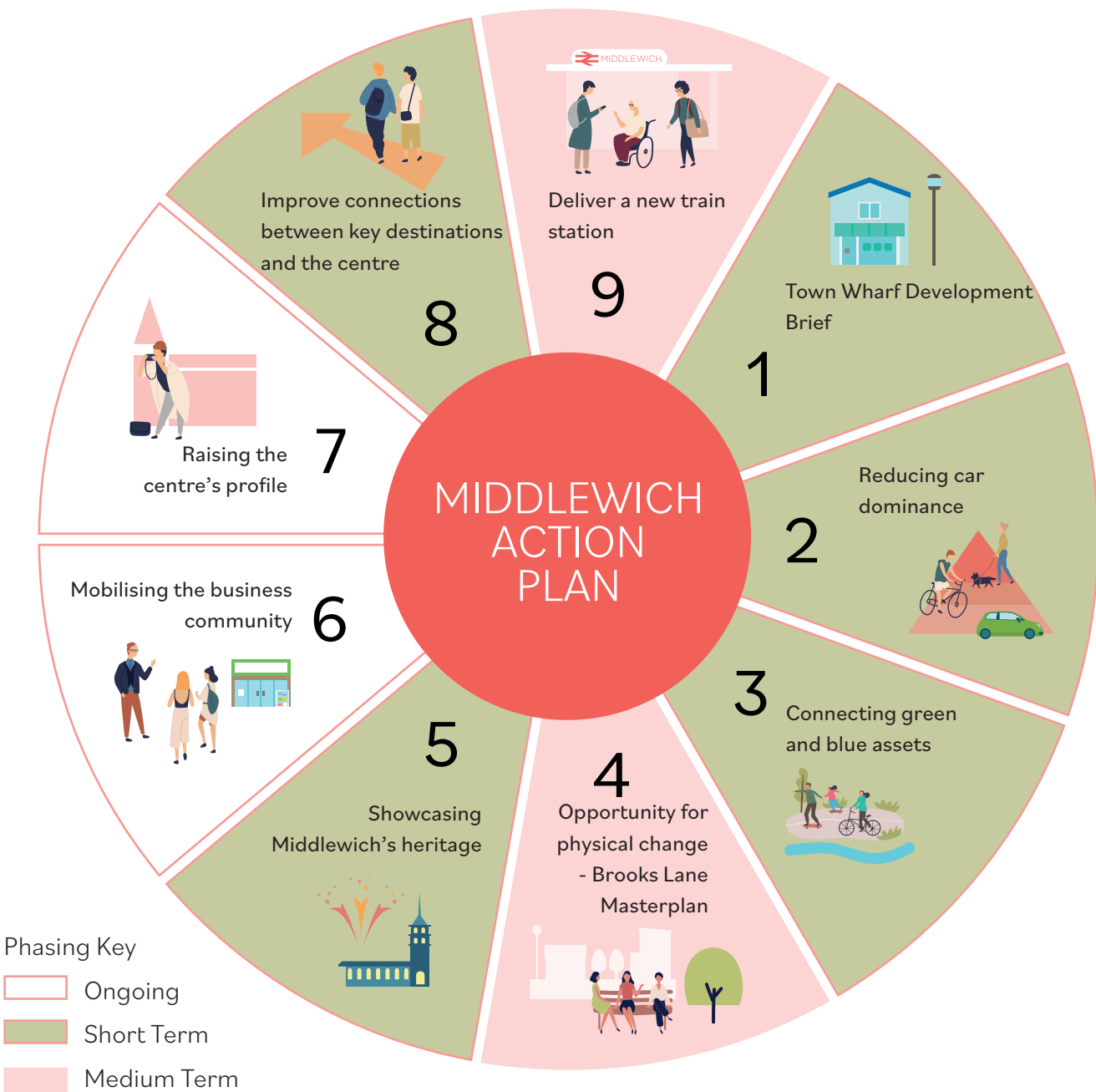
It is important to acknowledge that this indicative programme is not fixed and if specific sources of funding are identified the programme should be adapted to respond to the opportunity.

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 below 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 improving connections and connecting green and blue assets together with delivering the Brooks Lane Masterplan and a new train station.



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 below:

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

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

Technical Terms

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



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