



Chester-le-Street
District Council

Report to:	Council
Date of Meeting:	15 January 2009
Report from:	Regeneration & Strategic Planning Manager
Title of Report:	Town Centre Master Plan
Agenda Item Number:	9

1. Purpose and Summary

- 1.1 To seek Members agreement to adopt the final report of the Town Centre Master Plan.

2. Consultation

- 2.1 There has been extensive consultation with both key stakeholders and the wider public during the master planning process, as outlined in paragraphs 5.4 to 5.8 of this report.

3. Transition Plan and People and Place Priority

- 3.1 Investment in the town centre.

4. Implications

4.1 Financial Implications and Value for Money Statement

The consultants fees for the entire master planning process was £65,000.

4.2 Local Government Reorganisation Issues

The new Unitary Council will need to decide whether or not to assist with the implementation of the master plan proposals.

4.3 Legal

No direct legal implications.

4.4 Personnel

Regeneration Service.

4.5 Other Services

Some implications for buildings and land managed by Leisure Services.

- 4.6 Diversity
Access and disability considerations will be a statutory requirement for detailed proposal which emerge from the master plan.
- 4.7 Risk
The new Unitary Council do not support and implement the master plan proposals that require public intervention, or the private sector are not interested in implementing those schemes which require commercial investment.
- 4.8 Crime and Disorder
The master plan is proposing more residential development in the town centre which is generally considered to assist with the reduction of crime and disorder. All detailed proposals will need to be in general conformity with Government guidance entitled; "Safer Places; the planning system and crime reduction".
- 4.9 Data Quality
Every care has been taken in the development of this report to ensure that the information and data used in its preparation and the appendices attached are accurate, timely, consistent and comprehensive. The council's Data Quality Policy has been complied with in producing this report.
- 4.10 Other Implications
None

5. Background

- 5.1 The Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) defines Chester-Le-Street as a 'regeneration town' where regeneration and development should be supported, provided that it is at a scale that is appropriate for its size, and would not have an adverse impact on other regeneration initiatives within the Tyne and Wear Conurbation.
- 5.2 Priority 2 of the Sustainable Community Strategy for Chester-Le-Street is to "develop Chester-Le-Street as a thriving commercial centre". Objective 2 of the Chester-Le-Street Regeneration Strategy is "to fulfil the potential of the Town Centre" and action point 10 was "to commission a masterplanning exercise for the town centre by May 2007".
- 5.3 In June 2007 the Council appointed the following team of consultants to undertake the master plan;
- Taylor Young – architects and urban design consultants
 - BE Group – economic development and regeneration consultants
 - Faber Maunsell – transport consultants

The Consultants produced a baseline report in August 2007 undertook four public consultation exercises and submitted the final version of their report in June 2008.

Position Statement and Option Appraisal – Master Plan Process & Report

Consultation & Engagement

5.4 A Stakeholder Workshop was held on August 30th 2007 to engage with the key stakeholders, organisations, Council officers and the business and residential community, attended by 20 people. The following is a summary of the key issues raised:

- Location of taxi ranks in relation to the town centre leisure i.e. nightclubs and venues.
- Improvement of access to the town centre from railway station.
- Front Street has poor signage for transport provision.
- Provision of Hackney licensed taxi rank at the railway station.
- Traffic congestion at North Burns with significant junction improvements.
- Concerns have been raised about the attractiveness of the entry to the town centre.
- Attractiveness and safety of the environment at the railway station.
- Dangerous bottlenecks at the Methodist Chapel Crossing.
- A want for an evening economy at South End of Chester-le-Street.
- The Town's history should be exploited for tourism – Roman Heritage, Lumley Castle, Beamish Museum, Lindisfarne Gospel connections
- Market Square is not seen locally as the heart, Middle Chapel is the heart.
- Former Kwiksave site is vital – Enterprise quarter
- Riverside totally separate, create linkage

5.5 A business survey was carried out to gather empirical evidence about the retail and commercial markets in Chester-le-Street, as well as to gain local traders' views of the town centre. 230 town centre businesses were

- interviewed face-to-face. Those unable to participate, were left with a questionnaire and pre-paid return envelope, to complete and return when convenient. A 46 percent response rate was achieved, with 107 completed questionnaires.
- 5.6 Staffed public drop-in days were held on 14 and 15th September 2007 to consider issues and options. The focus of the exhibition was the initial opportunity sites, land use proposals and supporting transport and environmental improvement projects. Following the drop-in days the display in the Library and Civic Centre was left for 2 weeks, with further opportunity to return questionnaires. The exhibition (and questionnaire) was also available on the Council's website. Approximately 100 questionnaires were returned (with far more people visiting the exhibition). Responses generally provided significant positive feedback. The highest priorities for projects were:
- Station Approach
 - Front Street West
 - Market Place
 - Improved bus routing
 - Upgraded rail station.
- 5.7 A second staffed exhibition was held on 29-30 November. 2007 The purpose of this exhibition was to share the ideas contained within the four transformational projects; namely Chester Burn (East), Leisure Centre / Youth Centre, Station Approach and Front Street (West). The exhibition was also left on display for a further 2 weeks at the Civic Centre. The response was a generally positive consensus for the proposals, although the number of completed questionnaires was less than the 1st exhibition.
- 5.8 The proposals outlined in the consultants final report were presented to a meeting of Chester-le-Street Business Association in September 2008. Their response to the four transformational projects can be summarised as follows:
- The proposed leisure corridor would be an exciting development that would in time give a new much needed impetus to business in the North Burns area of the town.
 - Any regeneration of Front Street would be wholeheartedly appreciated.
 - The area around the town's Railway Station is one where relocation of existing business and innovative use of land could add an exciting change to the dynamics of this part of the town.
 - More reservations were felt regarding the proposals for the South end of Front Street, since this looks as though it would have more impact

on existing business requiring relocation, but once again members felt that anything that led to regeneration of the town as a whole was to be welcome. A full copy of the Business Association comments are attached as appendix 1.

Vision and Principles

- 5.9 The Master Plan contains the following vision for the town centre:

“Chester-le-Street Town Centre will become the primary destination to serve the needs of the town’s residents. People will be able to reach the Town Centre easily, either via attractive pedestrian routes, improved public transport access, or well located and co-ordinated car parking spaces.

The Town Centre will provide a comprehensive range of shops, services and leisure uses, with a strong independent sector and distinctive local identity. A series of distinct functional quarters will emerge in the Town Centre, each providing a different role and different character. The longstanding historical importance of the town will be realized by a series of heritage attractions to provide recreation opportunities for residents and attract new visitors to the town.

Linkages to the recreation facilities at Riverside, including the Cricket Ground, from the Town Centre will be enhanced, becoming attractive and convenient. As will links to the rail station, residential areas west of the viaduct and to an enhanced open space corridor around Chester Burn.”

- 5.10 The master plan also contains an imagined visitor’s experience of the town centre in 2020 which seeks to convey and illustrate the above broad vision in a more detailed and tangible way (attached as appendix 2).

Master Plan Proposals

- 5.11 The master plan divides the town centre into 50 “policy areas” (see the map attached as appendix 3). There is broad assessment of each of these areas as set out in the matrix attached as appendix 4. Some areas are suggested to be retained as existing, and other areas are proposed for intervention and enhancement (see the map attached as appendix 5 illustrating the location of these interventions).
- 5.12 The main focus of proposed intervention are the four transformation projects, which can be summarized as follows:

Chester Burn (East) - Chester Burn is an important east-west corridor, following the watercourse, relating to the heart and history of the town. The town developed from the crossing point of Front Street over the Burn.

The intention is to introduce activity and new buildings along the corridor in order to achieve a strong and attractive east-west pedestrian route, linking Market Place to the Riverside. The project comprises a mixed use development, including quality bars / restaurants, offices and residential uses which are sensitively integrated into the existing townscape buildings. This will provide vitality and overlooking to a new adjacent pedestrian route following the alignment of the Burn. The proposals allow for bus and coach drop-off. Displaced parking spaces will be provided elsewhere in the town centre. Delivery of this project will depend on landowners' wishes, financial viability and planning permission.

Leisure Centre/ Youth Centre: The existing Leisure Centre and Youth Centre buildings sit in an attractive green environment. A review of leisure services is currently underway. It may be that these uses could be provided elsewhere in new, higher quality buildings. Proposals for this site include a new Sports Centre and Arts Centre. The intention is to create high quality landmark buildings that maximise the green setting and historic importance of this site. A new Heritage Interpretation Centre is proposed as a major visitor attraction. This will be an iconic building which will be visible from the A167 and signpost the town centre to passers by. An archaeological dig is recommended in this area before development. This may result in the finding of historic relics that could be displayed in the Heritage Interpretation Centre. A key objective is to provide an attractive and safe pedestrian route from the town centre to the Riverside. This will form a green link which will pass these buildings and extend over a new landmark footbridge across the A167

Station Approach: The intention is to enhance the station approach, which forms a major gateway to the town centre, therefore creating a first impression to all visitors to the town. The proposals are to enhance the station forecourt and Station Road and upgrade public transport, with a new shuttle bus drop-off and taxi rank at the station. High quality new buildings are also envisaged to the north of Station Road. These buildings will raise the quality of the environment and provide activity to a new public square. The former Kwik Save site would be developed for a range of uses, making full use of the change of levels. A new retail unit and bus drop-off would be incorporated at the lower level, with new deck car parking provision at mid level for commuters, visitors and workers. At the upper level, adjacent to the station, will be high quality new offices and public space and a new taxi rank. The existing employment units south of Station Road could be replaced by new employment units.

Front Street (West): The aim of Front Street West site is to provide sites for high quality retail, leisure and hotel users in order to provide a

strong southern anchor to Front Street, to complement Market Place to the north. The proposals extend the retail circuit to include West Lane, where new buildings will accommodate new retail and bar/restaurant uses. Office space is proposed on the upper floors of these buildings. A new high quality public space will be formed on Front Street, at the junction of West Lane, opposite an attractive Victorian building. The taxi ranks are also relocated to West Lane to provide improved access. At the southern end of the site space is provided for new leisure uses, these could include a town centre cinema or a new hotel. A new plaza is also formed on the southern end of the site that would form a strong setting for the War Memorial.

5.13 Illustrative layouts of the four projects are attached as appendix 6. Collectively these illustrative layouts are proposing the following amounts and types of new development:

- 7,425 sqm of new retail space
- 7,100 sqm of B1 office space
- 6,150 sqm of flexible leisure/hotel/retail space
- 4,000 sqm of sports/leisure space
- 4,200 sqm of heritage/arts/community space
- 3,900 sqm of A2 office space
- 2,700 sqm of A3 café/bar/restaurant space
- 2,450 sqm of residential space
- 1,075 of employment incubator units
- **39,000 sqm total**

However, all four projects involve the demolition of existing buildings, therefore, the net increase is substantially less than the gross total above.

5.14 A transportation strategy is a key part of the master plan proposals, particularly in terms of being an integral element of the four transformational projects, together with proposals for further traffic management/enhancement of Front Street, and a coach parking area off North Burn. The transportation proposals are best illustrated by the plans attached as appendix 7.

Making It Happen

5.15 There are two main requirements to enable the Masterplan to be implemented:

- Ensure that the Masterplan is given sufficient weight and prominence in the LDF planning policy process
- Excite the market to attract appropriate developers interest, and establish an appropriate delivery mechanism based on some form of public/private sector partnership.

- 5.16 The Masterplan is essentially a regeneration rather than a formal planning policy document. When considering planning applications relating to the town centre, the Masterplan when adopted by the District Council would be a material planning consideration, but it would not have as much weight as the Local plan or the new LDF.
- 5.17 The emerging project plan for the Unitary Council LDF is indicating that the Chester-le-Street Town Centre Masterplan will be referred to in the Core Strategy, and that the if Core Strategy is not able to give sufficient detail and clarity, than a separate Chester-le-Street Town Centre Area Action Plan (APP)document would also be published. To help ensure that this happens it is important that the District Council formally adopts the Masterplan
- 5.18 Once the current recession is over it is anticipated that the location and character of the Chester-le-Street area will make it potentially attractive to town centre developers and retail/leisure providers. However, the Masterplan report considers the challenges involved in implementing the four transformational projects. The following is a risk analysis of each of the four transformational projects:

Chester Burn East Risk	Means of addressing the risks
Acquisition of Bridge End Motors land	Continuing discussion to agree terms for the release of land, and relocation of the business
New residential flats incompatible with the profile of town centre residents	Discussions with developers to identify areas of demand and desirable property sizes/designs
Possible lack of demand for new office space	Discussions with developers to identify areas of demand and desirable property sizes/designs
Possible lack of demand for new leisure space	Discussions with developers to identify areas of demand and desirable property sizes/designs

Leisure Centre/Youth Centre Risk	Means of addressing the risks
Lack of demand for Interpretation Centre, inability to compete with surrounding attractions	Work with Beamish and other County Durham attractions to develop a common plan for marketing development, avoiding competition where possible
Pedestrian links to Riverside not well used	Traffic and pedestrian flow surveys, improved signage of enhanced route
Possible lack of demand for new leisure space	Discussions with developers to identify areas of demand and desirable

	property sizes/designs
Acquisition of Durham County Council land	Continuing discussion to agree terms for the release of land after local government reorganisation

Station Approach Risk	Means of addressing the risks
Possible lack of demand for new office space	Discussions with developers to identify areas of demand and desirable property sizes/designs
Difficulty of negotiation with multiple landowners	Continuing discussion to agree terms for the release of land, and (where necessary) relocation of businesses
Station not an attraction for businesses owing to infrequent services	Negotiations with train providers regarding the possible expansion of services to Chester-le-Street

Front Street West Risk	Means of addressing the risks
Acquisition of large numbers of shops may make the project financially unviable	Working to maximise the value obtained from retail developments while minimising interventions in existing retail provision where possible
Difficulties in relocating several national retailers in the town centre	Phasing of development to ensure that sufficient new space is available before major retailers are relocated
Adjacent businesses not buying into the public square concept	Promotion of the overall benefits of footfall and greater patronage
Possible lack of demand for new leisure space	Discussions with developers to identify areas of demand and desirable property sizes/designs
Objections from adjacent residential neighbours.	Sensitive design, understanding the local context
Possible contamination from petrol station	Surveys and on-site investigations

5.19 The Masterplan report considers various types of “potential delivery vehicles” i.e. formal partnerships which could be created to implement the Masterplan proposals. The options outlined are:

- Charity, Company Limited by Guarantee
- Community Development Trust, Company Limited by Guarantee
- Community Interest Company

- Local Asset Backed Vehicle (LABV)
- Joint Venture between the Council and a single developer
- Site specific Joint Venture.

The report concludes that the most likely structure will be a joint venture with the private sector. Although it would be ideal for the Council to work with a single developer, the complexity of the projects makes it likely that several developers will be required.

Next Steps

5.20 In order to make it happen the Masterplan report recommends the following 12 next steps should be undertaken to ensure that the projects identified in the Masterplan are implemented:

1. A special partnership body should be formed to implement the Town Centre Masterplan. This should be comprised of private sector partners, business and residential community and key landowners and stakeholders. This group could be formed from the existing Strategic Partnership – their role is to drive the delivery strategy and ensure that the design principles and quality are upheld.
2. The proposals to be incorporated into the council's Local Development Framework (LDF) to ensure the effective implementation of the Masterplan. The general development principles should be reflected in the Core Strategy, Proposals Plan and any relevant Supplementary Planning Documents to ensure that the town centre is developed to the highest design quality and sustainability.
3. Review and potentially expand the shopfront design guidance included in Chester-le-Street Local Plan.
4. The aim for the Leisure Centre / Youth Centre Site is to encourage a high quality iconic development to the site. It is recommended that the development of the site is subject to a design competition, to ensure a landmark development. A strong design brief is required for these purposes.
5. Produce a clear and co-ordinated strategy and programme of works compiled by the key partners to ensure delivery. This should include phasing, responsibilities and budgets.
6. A phasing programme will highlight property market implications, potential disruption to the town centre businesses, access implications and continuity of ample parking provision.

7. Specific development briefs are required for the key development sites of Chester Burn East, Leisure Centre/ Youth Centre site, Station Approach and Front Street (West) providing greater detail on design principles and aspirations. These should be capable for use as a tool for seeking developer partner and marketing key sites.
8. Detailed design work is required for a public realm strategy that delivers the range of public realm schemes outlined in the Masterplan. This will generate a comprehensive set of proposals and realistic assessment of costs. This should be co-ordinated with the transport strategy and development of adjoining sites. The extent of work to be delivered by the council and the private sector needs to be carefully considered, and it is recommended that completed public realm works should be adopted by the highways authority and an effective management and maintenance programme be prepared.
9. The transport strategy will require a more detailed analysis and testing through traffic modelling, detailed design of roads and junctions and accurate costings. The phasing needs to be approved by the County Council and driven forward with the District Council. The parking strategy needs to be phased and implemented.
10. There are a number of sites in private ownership proposed for redevelopment or refurbishment. Landowners should be engaged early on in the process. The District Council should work with the partner for site assembly. CPO powers are available as a last resort.
11. An effective marketing and communication strategy should be developed to promote and communicate the Masterplan. This should include the marketing of sites, opportunities for potential developers, and communication with residents, and businesses and the wider community. This process should be managed carefully by a PR Consultant or consultation company.
12. The Masterplan is an important development control tool to ensure that new development meets the design principles and vision as set out in this document. This role will be strengthened if the Masterplan is adopted as a Supplementary Planning Document within the LDF. The appropriate section 106 funding should be clearly outlined in the Masterplan for its projects from relevant planning applications.

6. Recommendations

6.1 Most of 12 next steps can only be implemented by the new Unitary Council; e.g. promoting the Masterplan as part of the LDF or developing the transportation strategy. However, there is no guarantee that the Unitary Council will decide to do this. The District Council should consider whether it is feasible to start to initiate any of the 12 steps between now and April; e.g.

- Set up a partnership body as part of the existing Local Strategic Partnership which could then be transferred to the Unitary Area Action Partnership for Chester-Le-Street (step 1)
- Clarify our preference for future Leisure Centre provision (step 4)
- Commence work on development briefs or feasibility studies (step 7)
- set up a marketing and communication strategy (step 11).

Or if more of a steer should be given to the Unitary Council on any of the 12 next steps in the 'handing over the baton' report

6.2 **It is recommended that Members;**

1. **Agree to adopt the Master Plan Report, June 2008.**
2. **Consider whether any of the 12 next steps outlined in the Master Plan Report should be emphasised or clarified in more detail in the 'handing over the baton' report.**

7. Background Papers/ Documents referred to

7.1 Chester-le-Street Town Centre Final Masterplan Report, June 2008.

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