

Chester-le-Street Town Centre Masterplan 2019



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Durham County Council is committed to improving Chester-le-Street Town Centre.

This Masterplan contains a vision, series of objectives and an actions framework to shape the future development of Chester-le-Street Town Centre. Chester-le-Street is a key town in County Durham, being of strategic importance to the County as well as being home to many of our residents. Chester-le-Street hosts key historical assets such as St Mary and St Cuthbert's Church, is home to visitor attractions including Lumley Castle and the Emirates Durham International Cricket Ground and benefits from excellent linkages to the strategic transport network including the A1(M) and the East Coast Mainline. This Masterplan focuses on the Town Centre, but seeks to capitalise on the wider strengths of the Town and to promote a positive and unique Town Centre experience to support private sector investment opportunities.

Councillor Carl Marshall

Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Economic Regeneration

Chester-le-Street Masterplan Vision and Objectives

The Vision

'By 2025 Chester-le-Street town centre will offer residents and visitors a unique town centre experience, through independent retailers and traders being at the heart of the retail offer and a complementary leisure offer. The town centre will be recognised as a vibrant and well designed market town. It will have distinctive open spaces, excellent access routes and will be a vibrant location for people to visit and to attract investment.

1.1 The following **Objectives** underpin the **Proposed Actions** that will help to achieve the **Vision**. The Vision will be achieved by:

- Improving the economic viability of the town through increased footfall and ensuring more linked trips through widening the range of existing services and facilities;
- Maximising the potential economic benefits from the de-culvert project in the market place area;
- Improving links between the town centre and the surrounding local residential areas, visitor attractions, open space amenity areas, heritage sites and wider countryside;
- Encouraging viable development opportunities and new uses for development sites to support a more vibrant centre; and
- Ensuring initiatives promote ease of access around the town, including promoting sustainable travel and routes of travel throughout the town.

Putting the Masterplan into Action

1.2 A range of interests are reflected in the objectives of the Masterplan and a similarly diverse range of parties will be required to help deliver the vision and objectives. It is anticipated that the council along with partners, agencies and other stakeholders will continue to provide the links with local communities throughout the delivery of actions.

1.3 Whilst the Vision and Objectives are clear, yet challenging aspirations for the town centre. Many of the proposals rely on partnership working and specifically upon private sector investment. Whilst economic circumstances can sometimes be challenging due to the changing nature of the retail environment, the Masterplan seeks to facilitate and secure private sector investment wherever possible.

1.4 A number of additional challenges that affect many similarly sized town centres also need to be taken into account in the Masterplan. These challenges are not unique to Chester-le-Street and can be associated with many town centres. They include;

- Seeking to improve opportunities and the environment for private sector investment in the town centre;
- Create a unique selling point for the town in terms of retail and visitors;
- Identifying the priorities and phasing of projects to support the town centre; and

- Working to secure cooperation and investment from private landlords and property owners.

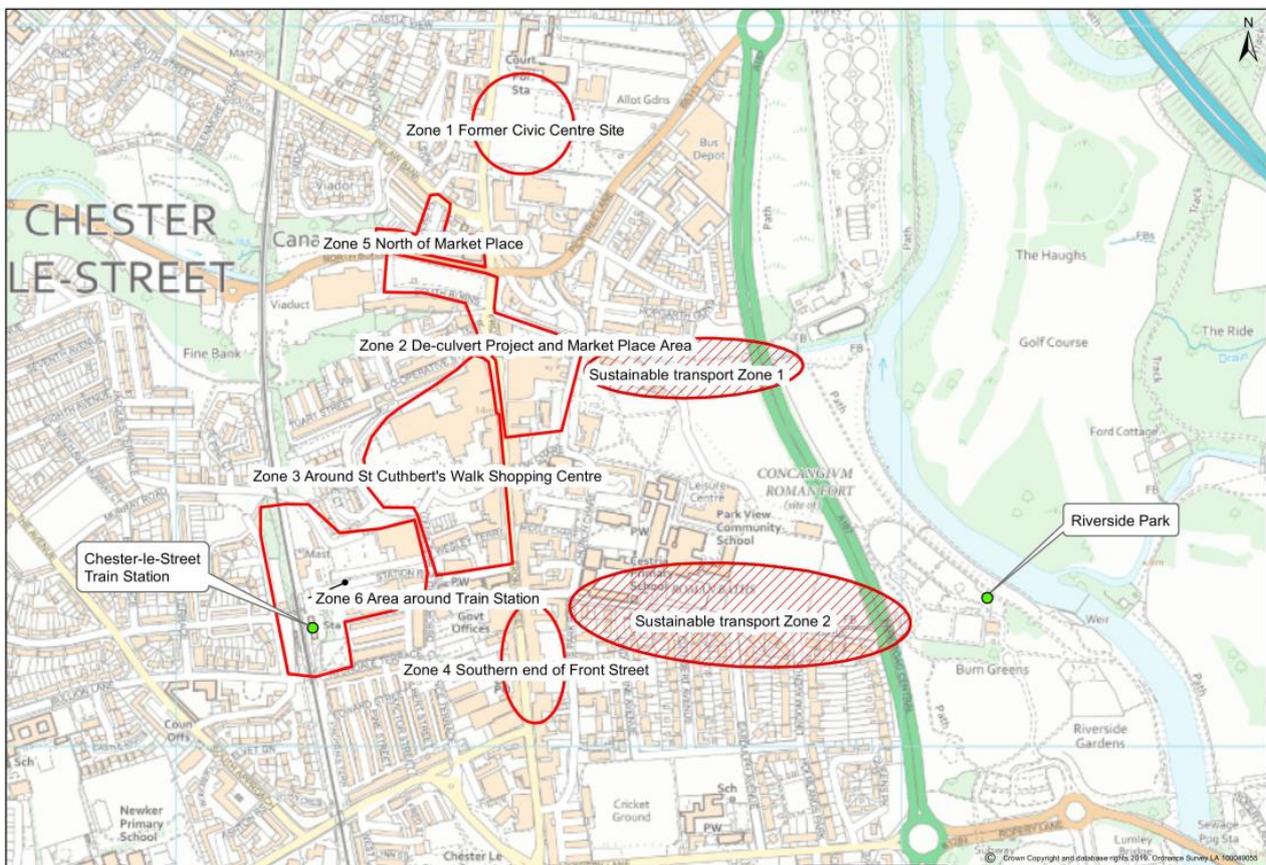
1.5 Notwithstanding these challenges however, it is important to set out clear aims for the future of the town centre to capitalise upon developments that are taking place now and to make the most of opportunities in the future. A Delivery Plan is included within the Masterplan which identifies development priorities, potential funding and partners to help deliver the Proposed Actions.

The Areas for Improvement

2.1 The town centre covers quite a large area which is bounded by the A167 to the east and mainly residential areas to the west. The centre is less well defined at either end but can be taken to include the former Civic Centre site to the north and the Ropery Lane roundabout to the south.

2.2 Given the scale of this area, the Masterplan considers the town centre to be comprised of a series of separate zones, which have discrete characters, roles and potential opportunities. It is important that the Masterplan responds to these differences so that it can help to consolidate and strengthen the facilities and roles that are specific to particular parts of the centre. The sections below set out these zones of the town centre and the opportunities for improvement. This helps to frame the way the proposed actions are set out in the plan to ensure that they complement one another and to maximise the benefits of individual interventions.

2.3 Whilst the focus of the Masterplan is the town centre area, it is recognised that the town centre can be supported by developing linkages to other localised destinations. The sustainable transport zones recognise this opportunity and the importance of Durham County Cricket Club Emirates Riverside Stadium, which provides first class and international cricket during the summer along with high profile music events and concerts.



Zone 1: Former Civic Centre Site

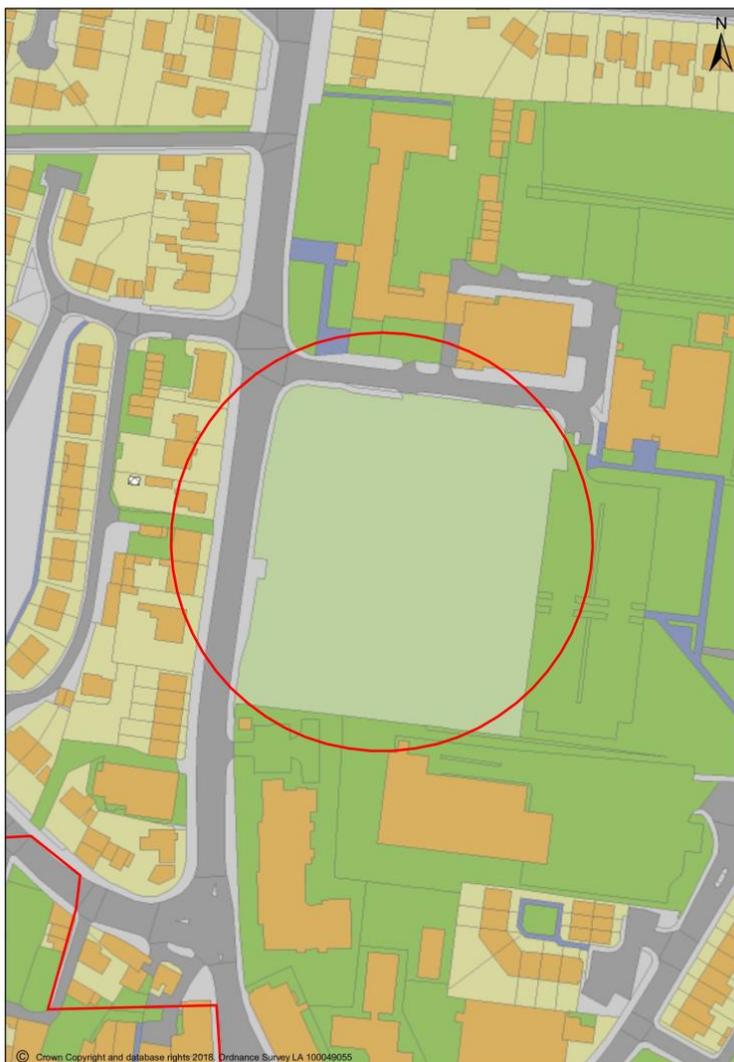
2.4 The former Civic Centre site is located to the north of town and is currently a vacant site in the ownership of the County Council. The future use of the site is being considered and at the current time it is anticipated that this could be for residential uses.

Role

- Prime development opportunity.

Opportunities

- Redevelopment of vacant sites.
- If residential, improved housing choice, including possible affordable housing opportunities.
- Improving environmental quality.



THEME	PROJECT ACTIVITY	TIMESCALE	OUTCOMES	PROJECT LEAD AND PARTNERS	BUDGET DETAILS
Creating development and inward investment opportunities	Facilitate the redevelopment on the former Civic Centre Site - Utilise the full potential of the site and attract developers	Medium to Long Term	High quality development of locally or otherwise distinctive design	DCC / Private Sector	To be confirmed once project details are finalised

Zone 2: De-culvert Project and Market Place Area

2.5 There were two individual flood events in the area during 2012; one driven by flood peaks on the Wear and the other from the Chester Burn. During the June flood event which was caused by the Chester Burn, properties were initially affected by surface water flooding following a severe storm, locally known as the ‘Toon Monsoon’. The culvert became surcharged; the wall which ran along the river was not overtopped but was rather bypassed at the upstream extent meaning flood water was conveyed eastwards along North Burns into the town centre. The flooding was then exacerbated by fluvial flows which were seen to be prevented from escape by the downstream flood defences. 106 properties were affected in total during this event and access through the town centre was cut off by the standing water.

2.6 In addition to the requirement to alleviate the flooding issues, de-culverting the Burn and creation of a hard and soft landscape in its place, will provide an environment that will maximise the impact of the market place and create a blue-green heart for the town. This investment will strengthen the northern gateway to the town and act as a catalyst to generate wealth in the local economy through increased footfall, creation of employment opportunities, and by continuing to build on the previous accessibility and riverside improvements, increase the profile of Chester-le-Street and its surrounding area as a place of interest to national and international visitors. The plan includes the introduction of a sustainable market place within this space to encourage a more diverse range of events and markets that can attract a more expansive footfall, to rejuvenate the local economy and integrate the community in the regeneration of the town. Regeneration of the market place is pivotal to the future economic wellbeing of the town centre.

2.7 It should be noted that visuals below are for illustrative purposes and that they may not reflect the style of the street furniture that will be included in the scheme. In addition, as the design of the project has evolved more walls maybe required around the de-culverted area to retain flood water than portrayed on the images.



Role

- Flood mitigation.
- Market venue.
- Community spaces venue.
- Transport hub.

Opportunities

- New market and community space.
- Improve environmental quality.
- Increased community use.
- Increased visitor numbers.
- Improved vacancy rates of premises within the zone.
- Explore the opportunity to improve the quality of car parking provision.
- Creation of an environment conducive to attract businesses.



THEME	PROJECT ACTIVITY	TIMESCALE	OUTCOMES	PROJECT LEAD AND PARTNERS	BUDGET DETAILS
Creating development and inward investment opportunities	<p>Delivery of the Chester-le-Street De-Culvert Project</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Delivery of improved flood mitigation along the Cong Burn - Delivery of linked economic, social and sustainable benefits <p>Phase 1</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Working in the market place underway, including paving, street lighting, specialist street furniture <p>Phase 2</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - De-culverting works to commence Summer 2019 including civil, structural and landscaping works scheduled for completion March 2020 	Short to Long Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reduction of the impact from flooding - Improved public realm and blue/green space - Improved linkages between Riverside Park and the town - New market and community venue space - Increased visitors to the town - Attraction of businesses to the town 	DCC	- £6.2m (ERDF, DCC and Environment Agency)
Specialised Local Events / Initiatives / Projects Programme	<p>Thriving Chester-le-Street and Villages Theme of the APP seeks to develop and deliver a range of activities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Develop and deliver a package of themed events 	Ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Delivery of dedicated events - Increased visitors to the town - Raise the profile of the town 	AAP	- To be confirmed once programme of activities finalised
Improving the Quality of the Market and Community Space	<p>Developing and implementing a management strategy for DCC street markets and community spaces</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Delivery of market offer within the town - Realignment of highway at Front Street / South Burns - Working with partners and residents to make sustainable improvements to the local environment 	Medium to Long Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Supporting current Market traders - Attracting new market traders - Improved quality of market - Improved and more attractive local environment 	DCC	- To be confirmed once the future management arrangements for the delivery of markets is finalised
Improving the Visitor Experience	<p>Installation of town centre free Wi-Fi</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provision of free Wi-Fi services for all visitors and users of the town centre - Ability to measure footfall activity within the town centre 	Short to Medium Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provision of free Wi-Fi across the town centre - Delivery of training opportunities in digital marketing - Increased digital activity in town centre by visitors and businesses 	DCC	- Funding bid required

THEME	PROJECT ACTIVITY	TIMESCALE	OUTCOMES	PROJECT LEAD AND PARTNERS	BUDGET DETAILS
Sustainable Transport	<p>Delivery of range of transport related initiatives across the town</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Signage Audit - Removal of obsolete signage and installation of new signage - Car park Pay & Display machine upgrades - Exploration of possible parking incentives - Free cycle parking offered to all businesses, organisations and community groups who have staff or visitors who cycle to their property through social enterprise ParkThatBike. 	Short to Medium Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Improve signage information for town centre users - Increased permeability across the town centre, transport hub, leisure and community facilities Improved accessibility to the town centre - Increased visitor numbers to the town centre 	DCC	- Funding bid required
Improve the physical infrastructure of the built environment	<p>Delivery of a package of targeted business support to tackle vacant and poor quality premises</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Identification of potential premises to be physically improved - Work with businesses to provide wider business support activities to develop their businesses 	Short to Medium Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Physical improvements to vacant premises - Reduced vacancy rates - New business start ups - Delivery of business support - Increased visitors to town centre - Increased retail offer and choice 	DCC	- Funding bid required

Zone 3: Area Around the St Cuthbert's Walk Shopping Centre

2.8 The St Cuthbert's Walk Shopping Centre is located towards the middle of the front street and is within private ownership. The centre provides a range of retail units and acts a key linkage between Morrisons and car parks to the front street. There are currently a number of vacant units within the centre that account for 17% of the overall vacancies for the town.



Role

- Retail function for small independents and national traders.
- Key access link to Front Street from key car parks.

Opportunities

- Find uses for vacant units.
- Improve shopping offer.
- Strengthen the links between car parks and retail core.
- Explore the opportunity to improve the quality of car parking provision.
- Strengthen relationship with management agents and facilitate the opportunities for business.
- Grade II Listed Queens Head Hotel (any improvements in this area should not negatively impact on the setting of the designated heritage asset).



THEME	PROJECT ACTIVITY	TIMESCALE	OUTCOMES	PROJECT LEAD AND PARTNERS	BUDGET DETAILS
Creating development and inward investment opportunities	<p>Strengthen the relationship with the management agent and work with them to facilitate opportunities to attract new businesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Strength the link between the car park and retail core and use this as a potential marketing message to potential new tenants - Ensure potential new tenants receive the necessary support during the setting-up phase 	Ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reduction in vacant units - Improved retail offer - Business creation 	DCC / Private Sector	-To be confirmed
Improving the Visitor Experience	Installation of town centre free Wi-Fi	Short to Medium Term	- Provision of free Wi-Fi across the town centre	DCC	-Funding bid required

THEME	PROJECT ACTIVITY	TIMESCALE	OUTCOMES	PROJECT LEAD AND PARTNERS	BUDGET DETAILS
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provision of free Wi-Fi services for all visitors and users of the town centre - Ability to measure footfall activity within the town centre 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Delivery of training opportunities in digital marketing - Increased digital activity in town centre by visitors and businesses 		
Sustainable Transport	<p>Delivery of range of transport related initiatives across the town</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Signage Audit - Removal of obsolete signage and installation of new signage - Free cycle parking offered to all businesses, organisations and community groups who have staff or visitors who cycle to their property through social enterprise ParkThatBike. 	Short to Medium Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Improve signage information for town centre users - Increased permeability across the town centre, transport hub, leisure and community facilities - Improved accessibility to the town centre - Increased visitors numbers to the town centre 	DCC / Private Sector	-Funding bid required once scope of project is agreed
Improve the physical infrastructure of the built environment	<p>Delivery of a package of targeted business support to tackle vacant and poor quality premises</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Identification of potential premises to be physically improved - Work with businesses to provide wider business support activities to develop their businesses 	Short to Medium Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Physical improvements to vacant premises - Reduced vacancy rates - New business start ups - Delivery of business support - Increased visitor to town centre -Increased retail offer and choice 	DCC	-Funding bid required once scope of project is agreed

Zone 4: Southern End of Font Street

2.9 This area is located South of Front street made up of three blocks of buildings and car parking to the rear. One of the larger premises is an indoor market hall. The site is currently in private ownership.

Role

- Retail function.
- Entrance to town centre.

- Car parking.
- Indoor market hall.

Opportunities

- Potential for development opportunity for town centre uses, specialist accommodation and/or other services.
- Find uses for empty buildings.
- Vehicular entry and parking access could be improved.
- Improve the pedestrian and vehicle environments and access.
- Explore the opportunity to improve the quality of car parking provision.
- Improve environmental quality in terms of shop fronts, buildings and public realm.



THEME	PROJECT ACTIVITY	TIMESCALE	OUTCOMES	PROJECT LEAD AND PARTNERS	BUDGET DETAILS
Creating development and inward investment opportunities	<p>Facilitate development and redevelopment of premises</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Bring back into use redundant buildings - Improved vehicular access and car parking - Improved pedestrian access - Explore the possibility of specialist accommodation - Facilitate the redevelopment on the former Inshops areas of Front Street - Support the developer to deliver the approved outline planning permission for a class 4 (drinking establishment) at Ashfield Terrace 	Short to Long Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reduction of vacant units - New business opportunities - Increased pedestrian activity - Improved car parking provision - high quality built environment - Improved retail and leisure options - Provision of dedicated specialist accommodation for disabled, medical needs or older persons 	DCC / Private sector	-Funding bid required once scope of project is agreed
Improving the Visitor Experience	<p>Installation of town centre free Wi-Fi</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provision of free Wi-Fi services for all visitors and users of the town centre - Ability to measure footfall activity within the town centre 	Short to Medium Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provision of free Wi-Fi across the town centre - Delivery of training opportunities in digital marketing - Increased digital activity in town centre by visitors and businesses 	DCC	-Funding bid required
Sustainable Transport	<p>Delivery of range of transport related initiatives across the town</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Signage and accessibility audit - Removal of obsolete signage and installation of new signage - Car park Pay & Display machine upgrades - Exploration of possible parking incentives - Free cycle parking offered to all businesses, organisations and community groups who have staff or visitors who cycle to their property through social enterprise ParkThatBike. 	Short to Medium Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Improve signage information for town centre users - Increased permeability across the town centre, transport hub, leisure and community facilities - Improved accessibility to the town centre - Increased visitors numbers to the town centre 	DCC	-Funding bid required once scope of project is agreed

THEME	PROJECT ACTIVITY	TIMESCALE	OUTCOMES	PROJECT LEAD AND PARTNERS	BUDGET DETAILS
<p>Improve the physical infrastructure of the built environment</p>	<p>Delivery of a package of targeted business support to tackle vacant and poor quality premises</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Identification of potential premises to be physically improved - Work with businesses to provide wider business support activities to develop their businesses 	<p>Short to Medium Term</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Physical improvements to vacant premises - Reduced vacancy rates - New business start ups - Delivery of business support - Increased visitors to town centre -Increased retail offer and choice 	<p>DCC</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Funding bid required once scope of project is agreed

Zone 5: North of the Market Place (including Lucy Street Car Park)

2.10 Sitting north of the market place, this site is in multiple ownership with a high percentage of service sector operators.



Role

- Car parking.
- Retail and service use.

Opportunities

- Potential development opportunity for town centre uses.

- Holistic approach to improve the quality of the offer for leisure and quality eateries.
- Explore the opportunity to improve the quality of car parking provision.
- Improve environmental quality.





THEME	PROJECT ACTIVITY	TIMESCALE	OUTCOMES	PROJECT LEAD AND PARTNERS	BUDGET DETAILS
<p>Creating development and inward investment opportunities</p>	<p>Facilitate the development and redevelopment of Lucy Street / North Burns</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Support developers to explore the development potential to improve the quality of offer - Explore the possibility of developing the area as a location for leisure and quality eateries - Link to the de-culvert project and any potential business opportunities that may arise - Improve the quality of car parking offer 	<p>Long Term</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increased visitors to the town - Attraction of businesses to the town - Increased car parking - high quality appearance - Improved choice and offer to visitors 	<p>DCC / Private Sector</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Funding to be secured once scope of project is agreed

THEME	PROJECT ACTIVITY	TIMESCALE	OUTCOMES	PROJECT LEAD AND PARTNERS	BUDGET DETAILS
Improving the Visitor Experience	<p>Installation of town centre free Wi-Fi</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provision of free Wi-Fi services for all visitors and users of the town centre - Ability to measure footfall activity within the town centre 	Short to Medium Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provision of free Wi-Fi across the town centre - Delivery of training opportunities in digital marketing - Increased digital activity in town centre by visitors and businesses 	DCC	-Funding bid required
Sustainable Transport	<p>Delivery of range of transport related initiatives across the town</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Signage Audit - Removal of obsolete signage and installation of new signage - Car park Pay & Display machine upgrades - Exploration of possible parking incentives - Free cycle parking offered to all businesses, organisations and community groups who have staff or visitors who cycle to their property through social enterprise ParkThatBike. 	Short to Medium Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Improve signage information for town centre users - Increased permeability across the town centre, transport hub, leisure and community facilities - Improved accessibility to the town centre - Increased visitors numbers to the town centre 	DCC	-Funding bid required once scope of project is agreed
Improve the physical infrastructure of the built environment	<p>Delivery of a package of targeted business support to tackle vacant and poor quality premises</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Identification of potential premises to be physically improved - Work with businesses to provide wider business support activities to develop their businesses 	Short to Medium Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Physical improvements to vacant premises - Reduced vacancy rates - New business start ups - Delivery of business support - Increased visitors to town centre - Increased retail offer and choice 	DCC	-Funding bid required once scope of project is agreed

Zone 6: Area Around the Train Station

2.11 Chester-le-Street station is one of only two stations in County Durham situated on the East Coast Mainline. It is the closest station to the conurbation of Tyne and Wear which is a major centre of employment for residents in Chester-le-Street and the North of the County. It plays an important

role when major events are hosted in the town, including international cricket matches. The council and North East Combined Authority are actively engaged with franchise holders and Transport for the North to increase the frequency of services.

Role

- Key entrance point into the town centre by public transport.

Opportunities

- Improve pedestrian accessibility into the town centre.
- Produce marketing literature to improve access to and around the town centre.
- Attract a management organisation to upgrade and improve the rail station offer.
- Continue working with franchise holder to promote and improve services to and from Chester-le-Street.
- Improve environmental quality.



THEME	PROJECT ACTIVITY	TIMESCALE	OUTCOMES	PROJECT LEAD AND PARTNERS	BUDGET DETAILS
Improving the Visitor Experience	<p>Continue to support a key entrance point to the town centre by public transport</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Work with partners to lobby national franchise holders of rail services for an hourly service -Improve pedestrian accessibility into the town centre 	Short to Medium Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increased visitor numbers - Improved service provision and connectivity for residents and visitors 	DCC	-Funding bid required once scope of project is agreed
Sustainable Transport	<p>Delivery of range of transport related initiatives across the town</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Signage Audit - Removal of obsolete signage and installation of new signage 	Short to Medium Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Improve signage information for town centre users - Increased permeability across the town centre, transport hub, leisure and community facilities 	DCC / Private Sector	-Funding bid required once scope of project is agreed

THEME	PROJECT ACTIVITY	TIMESCALE	OUTCOMES	PROJECT LEAD AND PARTNERS	BUDGET DETAILS
	- Free cycle parking offered to all businesses, organisations and community groups who have staff or visitors who cycle to their property through social enterprise ParkThatBike.		- Improved accessibility to the town centre Increased visitor numbers to the town centre		

Sustainable Transport Zones 1 and 2

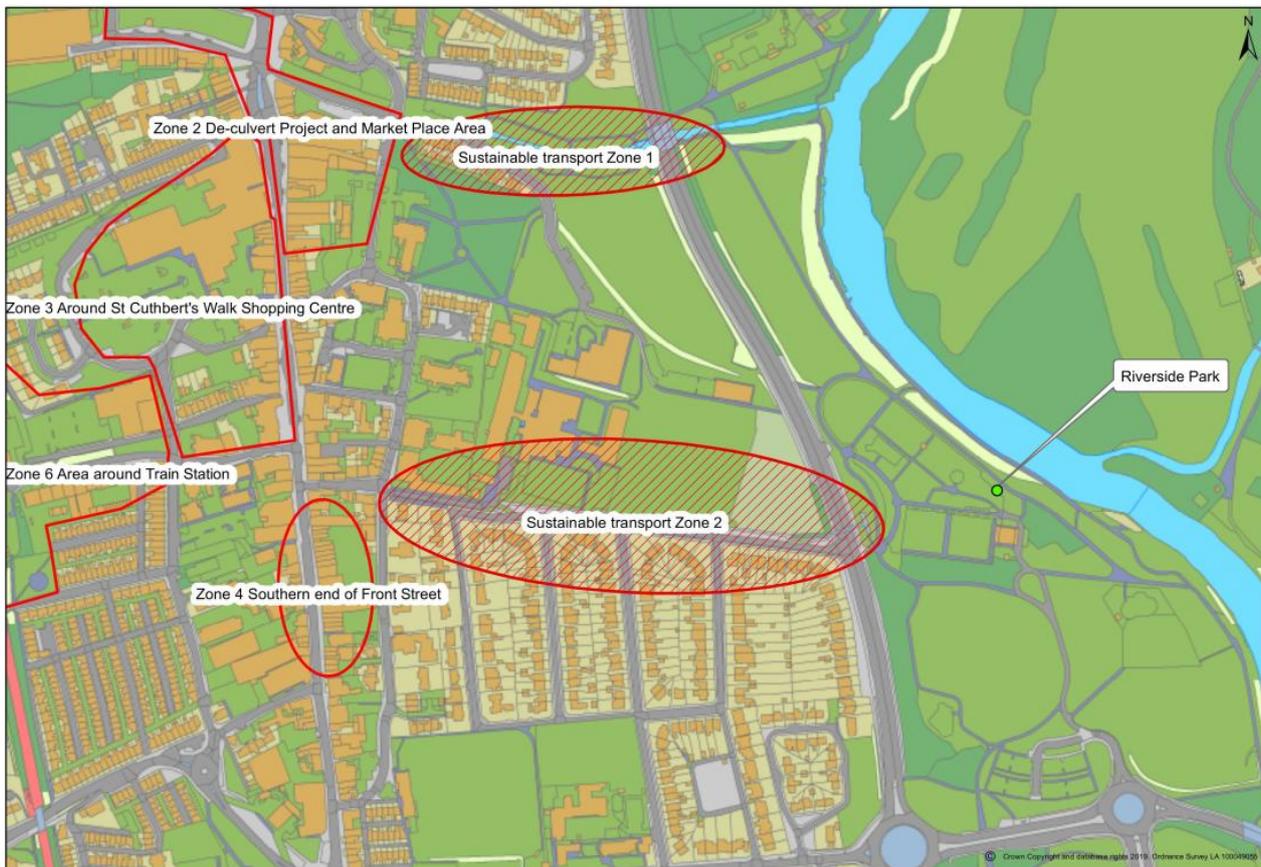
2.12 The Riverside Park area of the town, including the Emirates Cricket Stadium are important visitor areas, attracting significant numbers of visitors to the town. The Riverside Park area provides amenity open space which can support play and recreation opportunities. The Masterplan seeks to develop these linkages further and to improve the accessibility between the town and Riverside Park for pedestrian and cyclists. There are currently two locations, one being a bridge crossing and the other being an underpass. It is hoped that through improving these access routes and quality of environment to entrance points to the town that footfall can be improved through linked visits.

Role

- Access point from Riverside Park to the town centre.

Opportunities

- Improve pedestrian and cycling accessibility.
- Improve the appearance and quality of arrival into the town centre.
- Increase footfall from leisure and recreation related activities to town centre.
- Improve environmental quality.

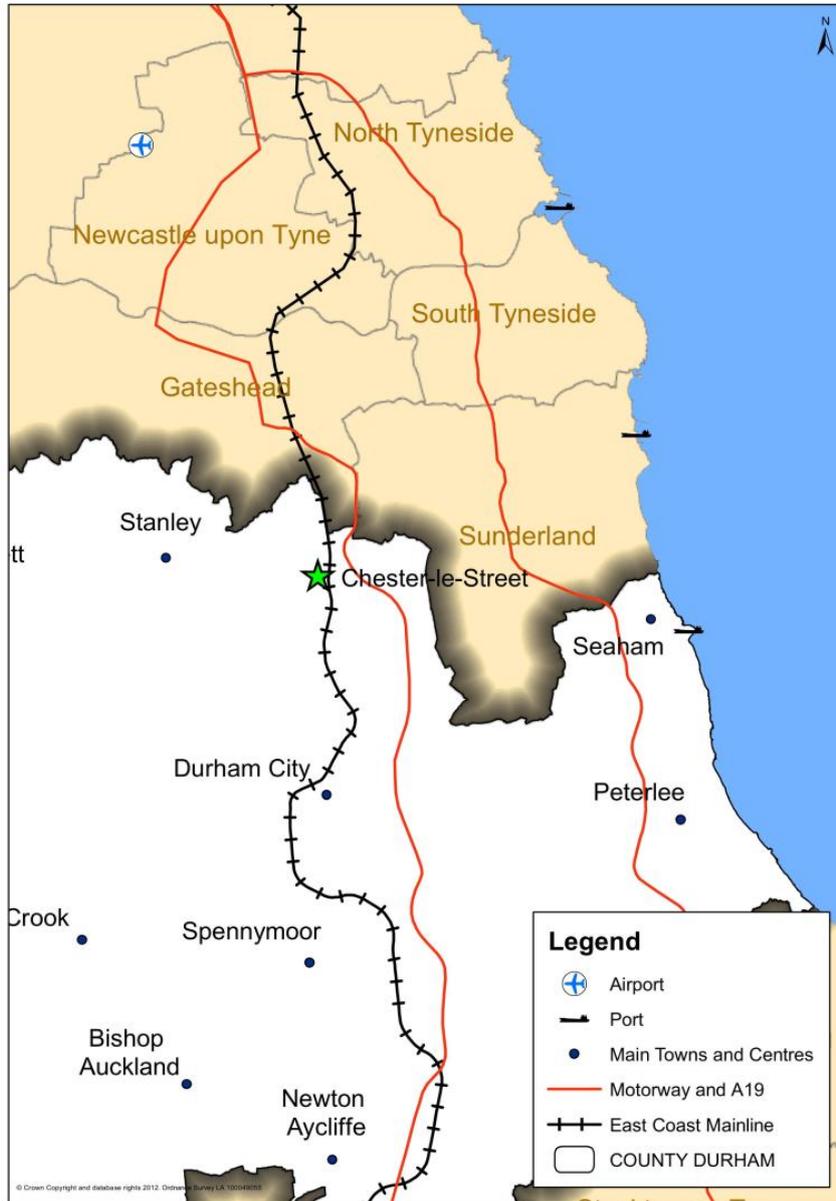


THEME	PROJECT ACTIVITY	TIMESCALE	OUTCOMES	PROJECT LEAD AND PARTNERS	BUDGET DETAILS
Improving the Visitor Experience	<p>Improve linkages between Riverside Park and the Town Centre for pedestrians and cyclists</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Explore the possibility of providing dedicate shared transport space for cyclist and pedestrians - Provide links between Riverside Park and the benefits delivered to the market place from the de-culvert project - Improve guidance information from/to Riverside Park and the Town Centre to promote both areas to residents and visitors 	Short to Medium Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increased visitor numbers to the town - Improved connectivity between Riverside Park and the town 	DCC	-Funding bid required once scope of project is agreed
Sustainable Transport	<p>Delivery of range of transport related initiatives across the town</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Signage Audit - Removal of obsolete signage and installation of new signage - Town Network Improvements - Small schemes to improve the walking and cycling network will be undertaken in the next three years (signage, crossing, minor improvements and surfacing works) - Free cycle parking offered to all businesses, organisations and community groups who have staff or visitors who cycle to their property through social enterprise ParkThatBike. 	Short to Medium Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Improved signage information for town centre users - Increased permeability across the town centre, transport hub, leisure and community facilities - Improved accessibility to the town centre - Increased visitors numbers to the town centre 	DCC / Private Sector	-Funding bid required once scope of project is agreed

Context

3.1 Chester-le-Street has a long history as a settlement. It is thought to have originated as a small Iron Age settlement adjacent to the River Wear. The Roman Fort, Concangis, was built around 12AD, this subsequently grew into a town, and was occupied until around 410AD. Under Roman occupation, Cade’s Road was built and later replaced by the Great North Road (now Front Street) and was the main route between London and Edinburgh. The body of St. Cuthbert was moved from Lindisfarne to St. Mary and St. Cuthbert Church in 883AD and remained for 100 years, the seat of the Bishop of Lindisfarne also moved to Chester-le-Street until 995AD. The wooden Cathedral was eventually replaced with existing stone church in the 13th century. During the middle ages the church became the centre of the diocese, with Lumley Castle being built in 1389 and becoming the residence of the Bishop of Durham in the 19th century.

3.2 The town is located in the north of County Durham with convenient access to Durham, Newcastle, Washington, Gateshead and Sunderland. Chester-le-Street has excellent access to the A1(M), which has recently been improved following significant investment at junction 63. The proximity to the A1(M) along with the rail station providing access to the East Coast Main Line, gives good regional and national connectivity. The town is also linked to the A167, which is one of the key main local routes through County Durham providing good access to Tyne and Wear and Darlington.



3.3 The town centre and front street offer a wide range of retail options, along with the weekly market offerings. In recent years, there has been an impact upon the retail offer town centre as a result of wider changes in shopping patterns which have seen some larger national retailers cease trading or significantly review their business operations due to the impact of out of town and online shopping options. This structural change has been evident in centres across the country. However, a significant strength of Chester-le-Street is the high levels of independent retailers who have been able to adapt to changing local market conditions. In this context, it is recognised that the town centre predominantly caters for a local market.

3.4 The leisure offer within the town has recently been improved through significant investment at the leisure centre and a new and improved programme of activities. In addition the town is also home to Durham County Cricket Club providing first class and international cricket during the summer, along with high profile music events and concerts. The town also provides easy access to Beamish Museum, which welcomed almost 750,000 visitors in 2017 and tells the story of life in the North East during the 1820s, 1900s and 1940s. The visitor offer is further enhanced through Lumley Castle, Riverside Park and the town's Christian heritage trail.

3.5 Durham County Council is committed to supporting the County's towns and villages by ensuring the delivery of new houses, infrastructure, employment opportunities, training, health and education improvements within more sustainable towns and neighbourhoods. This Masterplan reflects this approach as it seeks to provide the framework to deliver and to coordinate current, planned and future investments. This Masterplan supports and forms part of this approach for Chester-le-Street Town Centre.

Statistical Profile

4.1 Chester-le-Street has a population of approximately 25,500 and serves a wider area around Sacriston, Great Lumley and the Peltons of another 14,000 residents. The Chester-le-Street and District Area Action Partnership is home to nearly 54,500 residents. In recent years the population in the area has increased by just under 1%. However, when looking at changes in age profiles, there has been a reduction of 7.3% in residents aged 0-4 and 3.2% in residents aged 5-15. The working age population accounts for around 62% of the population and similarly in recent years this has declined by 1.9%. The biggest change to the age profile are generally associated with an ageing population where numbers of residents who are retired have increased by 15.2%, which is higher than county, regional and national averages. However, the number of residents aged 85 or over have increased by 19.2% which is significantly higher the county, regional or national averages. In light of these characteristics it is likely that there will continue to be reliance on key public and voluntary services in the area such as health facilities, schools and service related facilities.

4.2 Education levels are broadly consistent with County Durham and North East averages – with around 30% of workers having a degree-level qualification, although there are slightly fewer residents with no qualifications (8%) compared to the national average (9%) – which is also below the County (13%) and North East (10%) averages. Chester-le-Street has a strong economy; with an employment rate of around 78% in 2015 – significantly higher than the averages for County Durham, the North East of England and also higher than the average for Great Britain (73.9%). Similarly, unemployment is lower than the County and North East averages but above the national average (5.3%). The occupational profile of residents correlates with the town's skills profile. Chester-le-Street has many more people employed in administrative and secretarial positions (18%) compared to the County, regional, and national averages (a range of 8% to 11%). In contrast there are comparatively few residents working in managerial and director positions, caring and leisure, and elementary (e.g. routine and unskilled) occupations. A key challenge for the town is retaining and attracting more employers and jobs to the area. Whilst there are approximately 27,000 residents in employment, there are only 10,500 jobs in the area. Commuting patterns show that large numbers of workers travel to Durham City as well as surrounding areas of Tyneside and Wearside. However, data suggests that more than 5,000 jobs have been lost from Chester-le-Street since 2006.

4.3 There are around 1,175 businesses that are registered in Chester-le-Street and around 1,500 workplaces. Business premises are generally of good quality, with the majority concentrated in Drum Business Park, Stella Gill Industrial Estate, as well as Bowes Business Park within the Lambton Estate, and the town centre. Alongside the connectivity of the town, the availability, reliability and speed of broadband in Chester-le-Street means it a good location for home workers and home-based businesses. At 8.7%, self-employment levels are higher in Chester-le-Street than the County Durham and North East averages but below the national average (10.4%). Self-employed people tend to work

close to (or increasingly within) their homes so there are opportunities to promote and support more self-employment and small businesses as a means of increasing employment within the town. However, with the loss of employers such as Chester-le-Street District Council the town needs more medium-sized or large employers and the jobs they would provide to stem the out-flow of workers. Having more jobs in and around the town centre is highly likely to lead to more footfall, higher levels of spending, and more investment in the town centre.

Chester-le-Street Conservation Area

4.4 The majority of the areas identified for improvement fall within Chester-le-Street Conservation Area. The conservation area was designated in 2003 and the boundary was amended in 2013. Chester-le-Street was designated as a conservation area due to it being an area of special or historic interest, the character and appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance. It is not the purpose of a conservation area to prevent development, but to manage change in a positive and proactive way that benefits current and future generations. Specific guidance relating to development in conservation areas can be found in the National Planning Policy Framework. It recognises the positive contribution that the conservation of heritage assets can make to sustainable communities including their economic vitality.

Important Buildings

4.5 The Conservation Area Appraisal identifies five of the most important structures which are listed for their architectural or historic interest. This includes the Church of St Mary and St Cuthbert, Church Chare (Grade I), the United Reform Church, Low Chare (Grade II), Brewery House, South Burns (Grade II), Railway Viaduct over Chester Burn, South Burns (Grade II) and the Queens Head Hotel, 67 Front Street (Grade II). In addition to the listed buildings, many other buildings combine to give the town its unique heritage.

Management Proposals

4.6 The following management proposals have been identified within the Conservation Area Appraisal to ensure that the future changes are directed in a proactive way:

- Protect important views out of, into and across the conservation area.
- Identify buildings and structures at risk and devise and implement proposals to secure their wellbeing.
- Promote good practice in the repair and maintenance of historic buildings.
- Promote the introduction of better quality shopfronts and signage which reflect the character of the area.
- Monitor loss of historic shopfronts, and consider whether an area of special advertisement control is needed to prevent further harm to the character and appearance of the conservation area.
- Support the retention and maintenance of the heritage trail boards by the Chester le Street Heritage Group.

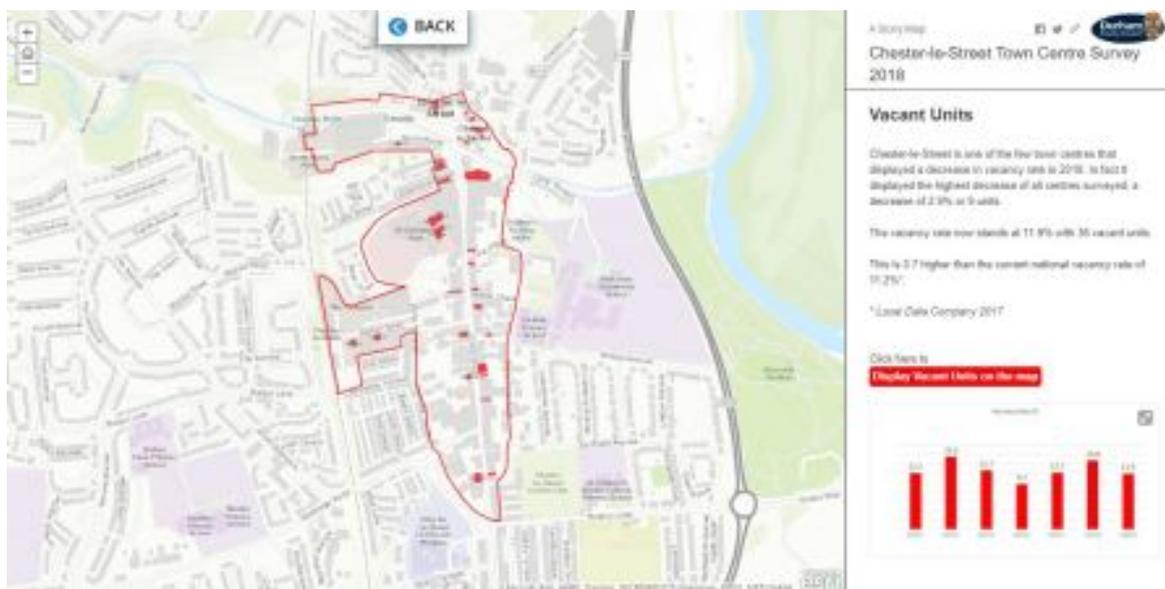
New Development in the Conservation Area

4.7 The special characteristics of the conservation area are identified in the Conservation Area Appraisal. New development should respond positively to those characteristics, conserving and enhancing the character and appearance of the conservation area.

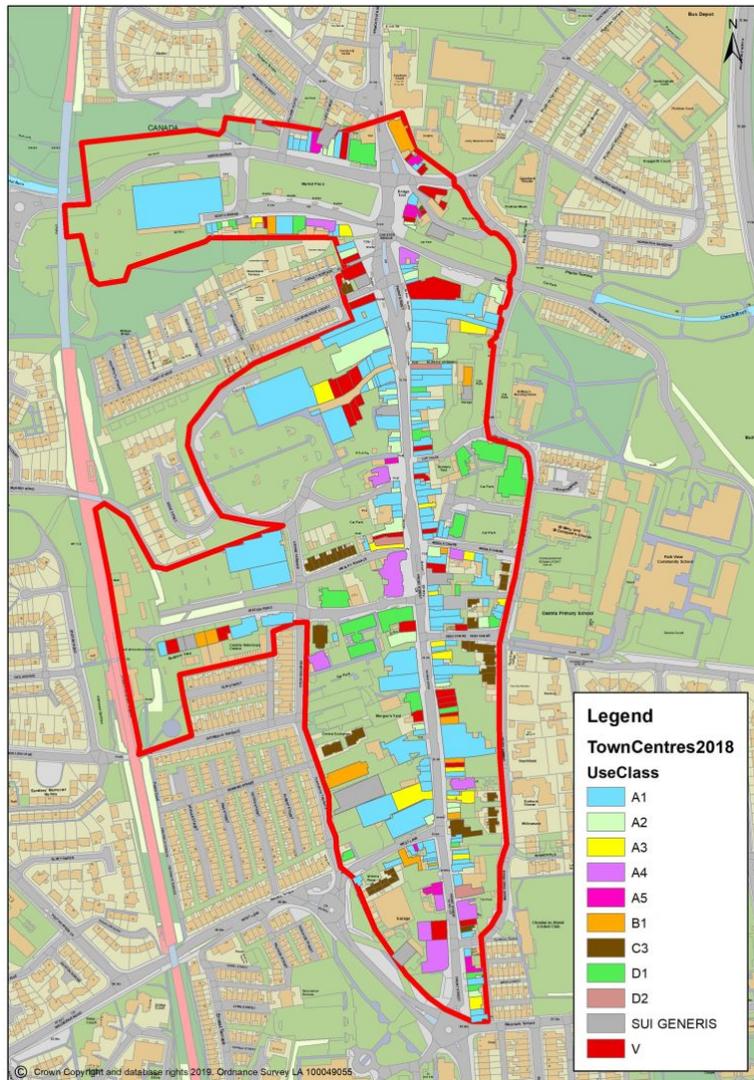


Current Position of the Town Centre

4.8 The town currently has a vacancy rate of 11.9% (as at the latest town centre survey undertaken September 2018) which is 0.7% above the national retail vacancy rate average of 11.2%. This accounts for 36 vacant units across the town, with almost 20% of these being within the St. Cuthbert's Walk Shopping Centre. When considering vacancy rates from a floorspace perspective, approximately 10% of the floorspace within the town is currently vacant. The town centre is home to 2 of the top 10 national retailers, these being Morrison's and Tesco. In addition the town also has some of the national fastest growing retailers that includes Aldi, Costa, Greggs and Domino's Pizza.



4.9 Average household income in Chester-le-Street is above the County Durham and North East averages. In terms of residents shopping habits, Durham County Council’s 2013 Retail and Town Centre Use study noted that only 43% of resident spend on food shopping was within the town. The retention of spend for other good such as clothing, books, and electrical appliances is even lower, with the Metro Centre, Newcastle, Team Valley and Washington being the main destinations.



The Town's Role and Links

4.10 Chester-le-Street is a well-connected town and offers a range of transport options for residents, workers and visitors. However, due to its location adjacent to the A1, there are heavy flows of traffic around the town – particularly on the A167 and A693. There have been several road improvement schemes around Chester-le-Street in recent years including two National Pinch Point Fund projects at Junction 63 on the A1(M) and A167. Two further improvements were brought forward under the County Durham Local Transport Plan at A693 Drum Industrial Estate roundabout, and A167 / A693 Northlands Roundabout. All schemes were designed to improve the flows of traffic at these junctions and reduce congestion – with the added benefit of reducing air pollution from static vehicles.

4.11 It is recognised that there is congestion to the north of the town centre at Picktree Lane. This has been created by a combination of demand flows through the traffic signals at Front Street and interaction with the adjacent mini roundabout which provides a junction onto an unnamed link road adjacent to River Terrace. This unnamed link road, along with Low Chare, Church Chare and Mains

Park Road runs along the eastern periphery of the town centre. The council's Highway Authority have considered demand and constraints in this location and have assessed various options using micro-simulation traffic modelling. A scheme has been developed which includes the signalisation of the Picktree Lane / unnamed link road adjacent to River Terrace junction and the coordination of these signals with those on Front Street. This will allow better traffic management control in that part of the town to reduce queues and delay on Picktree Lane. The expectation is that this scheme will be funded by developer funding based on a section 278 agreement. This allows developers to enter into a legal agreement with the council to make alterations or improvements to a public highway, as part of a planning application. In the context of such an agreement, a date for the implementation of the scheme cannot be confirmed.

4.12 Chester-le-Street station is relatively well used with approximately 200,000 customers each year. The station is on the East Coast Main Line which operates regular services between Edinburgh and London and has Trans Pennine services to Newcastle and Liverpool. These services broadly operate on a two-hourly basis, although they are more frequent during rush-hour. There are also very limited Cross Country services to Southampton and limited Northern services to Tees Valley. Durham and Newcastle stations offer more frequent services and are both less than 15 minutes from Chester-le-Street by train. However, there is a desire from local residents in Chester-le-Street to increase the number of services to these stations in particular, because they are key service centres and employment destinations for local residents.



4.13 Chester-le-Street is well served by bus services - particularly those running north-to-south and between Newcastle and Durham and those serving the town. As part of the Transit 15 project, Durham County Council is working with Arriva and Go North East to ensure buses run at 15 minute intervals between the town and Durham and includes some of the junction improvements outlined above.

4.14 Chester-le-Street sits on the line of the Great North Cycleway (GNC) which runs along the A167. Recent works have provided a better route which now links Chester-le-Street - Pity Me – Durham. The route will be signed as NCN 725 subject to agreement from Sustrans. Chester-le-Street is one of three priority towns for Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans (LCWIPs) to be undertaken. The contract for the LCWIPs for the three priority towns is due to go out to procurement soon and the LCWIP for Chester-le-Street should be complete by August 2020. The LCWIPs will

result in Network Plans being produced and priority schemes for investment will be identified. In addition, the Cycling in Chester-le-Street leaflet has recently been updated and reprinted and is being distributed to relevant outlets and free cycle parking will continue to be offered by the council to all businesses, organisations and community groups who have staff or visitors who cycle to their property through social enterprise ParkThatBike.

4.15 Since Autumn 2017 DCC have agreed to allow tickets to be transferable between car parks with the same tariff. For example, a ticket purchased in a short stay car park will be valid in all DCC controlled short stay car parks within Chester-le-Street until the ticket expires. However, not all car parks have the same tariff so it is important to check the tariff board carefully before parking. This does not include Riverside Car Parks, which are subject to different tariffs than those in the town centre and those that are privately operated car parks.

4.16 The town has a retail catchment of around 54,500 people which takes in Sacriston, Great Lumley and the Peltons, with around 43% of residents spending in the town on food shopping. The town fares less well in terms of expenditure on comparison goods (clothes, electrical goods, etc.) which is partly due to the close proximity of larger shopping centres including the Metro Centre and Team Valley Retail World in Gateshead. As a result of this competition and given the growth in alternative methods of shopping (via the Internet, for example) - coupled with the continuing decline of many high streets - national retailers are reluctant to locate in Chester-le-Street.

4.17 This Masterplan recognises that realistically Chester-le-Street will not be able to compete with these larger shopping destinations given their greater draw and range of key facilities. As such the **Vision** focuses on ensuring the development of the town centre is aimed more at day-to-day shopping and supporting the efforts of independent businesses and seeking to develop the town centre experience which in the future may need to adapt towards more of a mixed economy.

Housing Growth within the Town

4.18 The town has a strong housing market and linked to the excellent transport connections makes it very appealing to home owners and as such the town benefits from a wide range of house types including executive homes, traditional terraced, family homes, retirement homes, and social housing. Recent housing approvals have include 400 executive homes at Lambton Estate and the council continues to work with developers and investors to ensure an appropriate supply of housing is in the pipeline which meets the needs of the town.

The Town's Key 'Attractors'

4.19 Chester-le-Street contains key employment sites such as Drum Industrial Estates. The County Durham Plan supports the need to ensure quality modern business accommodation is provided to enable modern businesses locate here. Key visitor attractions nearby include Riverside Park, Beamish Open Air Museum, Durham County Cricket Club Emirates Stadium, Lumley Castle and the Coast to Coast Cycle Route. It is of critical importance that the town continues to be connected and where possible improvements made to these 'attractors' to ensure that the town centre and businesses do not miss out on any potential linked opportunities and increased visitor numbers to the town.



Community Involvement

4.20 Over the years Chester-le-Street has benefited from the work of a variety of stakeholders in partnership with both the council and the local resident and business communities. The council will continue to make use of the Chester-Le-Street Area and District Area Action Partnership (AAP) as a key interface with the local community. The AAP will help support the local delivery and understanding of the policies contained within the Masterplan, through partnerships that consist of members of the public, representatives for Durham County Council, town and parish councils, police, fire, health, housing, business, university and voluntary organisations. Together AAPs:

- work with communities and organisations to meet the needs of the community, through identifying local priorities and actions required to tackle them;
- allocate funding to local organisations and support their development;
- monitor the difference that funding and support is making to communities; and
- ensure that you can get involved with consultation activities, and are aware of what's going on in your community

4.21 The AAP has a Task Group which considers a range of town centre issues. The group called 'Thriving Chester-le-Street' meets on a monthly basis and will be able to look at developing some appropriate local project responses for some of the themes contained in the Masterplan.

4.22 For more information on the work of this task group or to attend one of its meetings please contact Chester-le-streetaap@durham.gov.uk or through 03000 266147

Healthy Places

4.23 Public health have worked closely with regeneration and spatial planning colleagues around the concept of a healthy place checklist. This will allow health and wellbeing considerations to become more focused in the delivery of regeneration programmes. The development of the Chester-le-Street Masterplan has piloted an approach based around the Healthy Place Standard. Scoping has occurred with Public Health England and other local authorities who are regarded as adopting good practice in this field. The local approach has been pragmatic, utilising the key assets of place as well as the local health needs, which then provide a mechanism to prioritise areas that impact upon health of our residents.

The Challenges

5.1 The plan aims to address a range of issues which fall within the following themes:

- **Revitalising** the town centre
- Improving the **Attractiveness** of the town centre
- Increasing **Accessibility** to and within the town centre

5.2 The context to these issues and challenges is considered in this section.

Revitalising the Town Centre

5.3 Chester-le-Street is one of County Durham's largest towns and an important local centre. It contains key services and facilities including national chain supermarkets and a range of smaller independent stores as well as some excellent leisure facilities. Leisure opportunities exist in the Riverside Park, private facilities, cycle routes etc.

5.4 The vitality and viability of the main shopping streets in the town (Front Street and Market Place area) is affected by a lack of national retailers and a number of vacant premises which impacts upon the number of shoppers using the street. Whilst 43% of the food spend is captured in the town centre, the majority of spending on comparison shopping and bulky goods tends to go to the competing retail destinations elsewhere. Through the consultation and engagement work undertaken to date with the AAP it is clear that there is a need to improve the shopping experience in the town to encourage more people to do their shopping locally and to ensure more spend is retained within the town. In order to achieve this, the council and partners are working with a range of developers, investors and landlords to promote the town and vacant unit, however, it should be acknowledged that due to market forces and the changes in shopping patterns this can be difficult and takes time to bring proposals forward.

5.5 The proposed de-culverting project linked to a wider flood mitigation scheme in the market place area of the town provides a significant opportunity to act as a catalyst for wider regeneration and improvements within the town. The culvert in the market place will be opened up and could become a major attracter to the town with a possible focus upon leisure related activities and economy. It is important that where possible the culvert project links up with the other key assets in the town such as Riverside Park and the Emirates Stadium, therefore, consideration needs to be given to transport routes throughout the town. The project also provides an opportunity to look at the future of the towns weekly markets within agreed contractual and procurement arrangements to ensure that the offer meets the needs of traders, residents and visitors.



Improving the *Attractiveness* of the Town Centre

5.6 There are many buildings of architectural and historic merit and interest. However, there are a range of development opportunities which can help to enhance and transform the town centre. The opportunities include the market place which will be supported by the de-culvert project, the future redevelopment of the former Civic Centre site and numerous opportunities throughout the town centre.

5.7 A range of support for business and property owners is offered from a wide range of agencies and the council. In this context, there is an opportunity for the council and partners to work with owners to improve the physical infrastructure of the premises across the town.

5.8 In places, the paving and street furniture does not create a very welcoming environment for shoppers and wayfinding signage from the Train Station and Riverside Park areas could be improved to provide better linkages. The de-culvert project will seek to introduce design elements for new street furniture and it is anticipated that this could act as a blue print for further roll-out in other areas of the town centre when opportunities arise.



Increasing Accessibility to and within the Town Centre

5.9 Chester-le-Street has good accessibility and has good links to the A1(M) national road network, the East Coast Mainline and to several higher order retail and employment destinations such as Newcastle, Gateshead (MetroCentre) and Durham City. Bus services from the town are good and provide access connections to the network for travel across County Durham and the wider area.

5.10 The de-culvert project presents an opportunity to undertake some road and pedestrian improvement within the town centre. A potential scheme could see the realignment of the road on front street around the market place area to provide interlinked spaces and to add the distinctiveness of Chester-le-Street town centre.

5.11 There is a requirement to ensure the amount of car parking available in the town centre is sufficient to meet the needs of visitors and does not impact on its vitality and viability. Recent changes to council controlled car parks in the town have introduced the ability for users to transfer parking tickets between car parks providing they are not of a higher value. The de-culvert project will see the loss of some car parking within the town, as will the redevelopment of the former Civic Centre site. A key aspect of the successful functioning of car parking in the centre will be better management of existing provision.

5.12 There is a clear opportunity to ensure that the car parks are made more attractive and have clear signage to direct people to the facilities they want to access. Options are being considered to introduce improved car parking provision through development opportunities, working with landlords, developers and other partners.

5.13 Pedestrian and cycling links from the Riverside Park and Train Station areas into the town centre are poorly defined and advertised. These links could be improved through a range of activities including improved wayfinding that gives examples of walking times to the town centre to encourage more people to use the main shopping areas which is one of the key aims of the plan.





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