



Chester-le-Street Development Masterplan

November 2012



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1. Introduction and Background

- 1.1 This development masterplan provides a summary of the detailed programme of regeneration and investment activity that is taking place or is planned in Chester-le-Street. It provides the strategic context which underlies delivery and seeks to establish key principles to co-ordinate and focus investment in the town for housing, retail, leisure and tourism.
- 1.2 Chester-le-Street is a thriving major town in the North of County Durham located about 6 miles from Durham City, with a population of over 24,000, and situated within a ten mile radius of Newcastle, Sunderland, Gateshead, Washington, Consett and Stanley. The strategic road and rail networks link these cities and towns to each other and to the rest of the region through the A1(M), A167, and the East Coast Mainline that meet in Chester-le-Street, along with the A19 to the east, A68 to the west, and A693, A691, A690, A692, A1231, as main arteries of traffic flow around the County. Chester-le-Street sits within the North East LEP area and in the South of the former NewcastleGateshead City Region.
- 1.3 Good public transport, road and rail links to and from Chester-le-Street make this town an excellent regionally central location from which to travel to work. It is an attractive locality offering good quality housing in the 'mid and above' range of prices, catering for families and couples. Over the centuries housing has grown organically around the town centre along with other people based services. Local education provision is strong. The town's location midway between Durham City and the Tyne & Wear conurbation has advantages but also disadvantages.
- 1.4 A Chester-le-Street Masterplan¹, completed in June 2008, has been used as a guide to development throughout the town over the last four years. There has been action on mid range projects such as the YMCA infill building on Market Place and the Urban and Rural Renaissance Initiative street scene improvements throughout Front Street.
- 1.5 The Chester-le-Street Destination Development Plan produced in July 2010 identifies the need to link more closely to increase visitor numbers to the town through strengthening Chester-le-Street's identity as a destination for heritage, sport and recreation, and as an attractive and convenient base from which to explore Durham and Newcastle. The Chester-le-Street Area Action Partnership has taken a leading role in the development of this programme, integrating the local community with other communities of interest i.e. businesses, tourism and leisure.
- 1.6 This development masterplan will assess the suitability of continuing to support projects already identified, as well as considering new projects that should be undertaken to improve the town's vitality and viability and links to other local attractions. This document will provide the masterplan for regeneration activity in the Town.
- 1.7 Chester-le-Street has a long history with evidence suggesting a small Iron Age development near the River Wear. The Roman Fort, Concangis, was built around 122CE, grew into a town and was occupied until around 410CE. Lindisfarne monks were driven out of their monastery on that island and settled at Chester-le-Street in 883CE; moving to the seat of the Bishop here until 995CE following raids by the Danes. The wooden Cathedral was eventually replaced with stone in the 13th century

¹ **Chester-le-Street Masterplan**, June 2008, undertaken by Taylor Young. Available on request to Regeneration and Development 03000 262052.

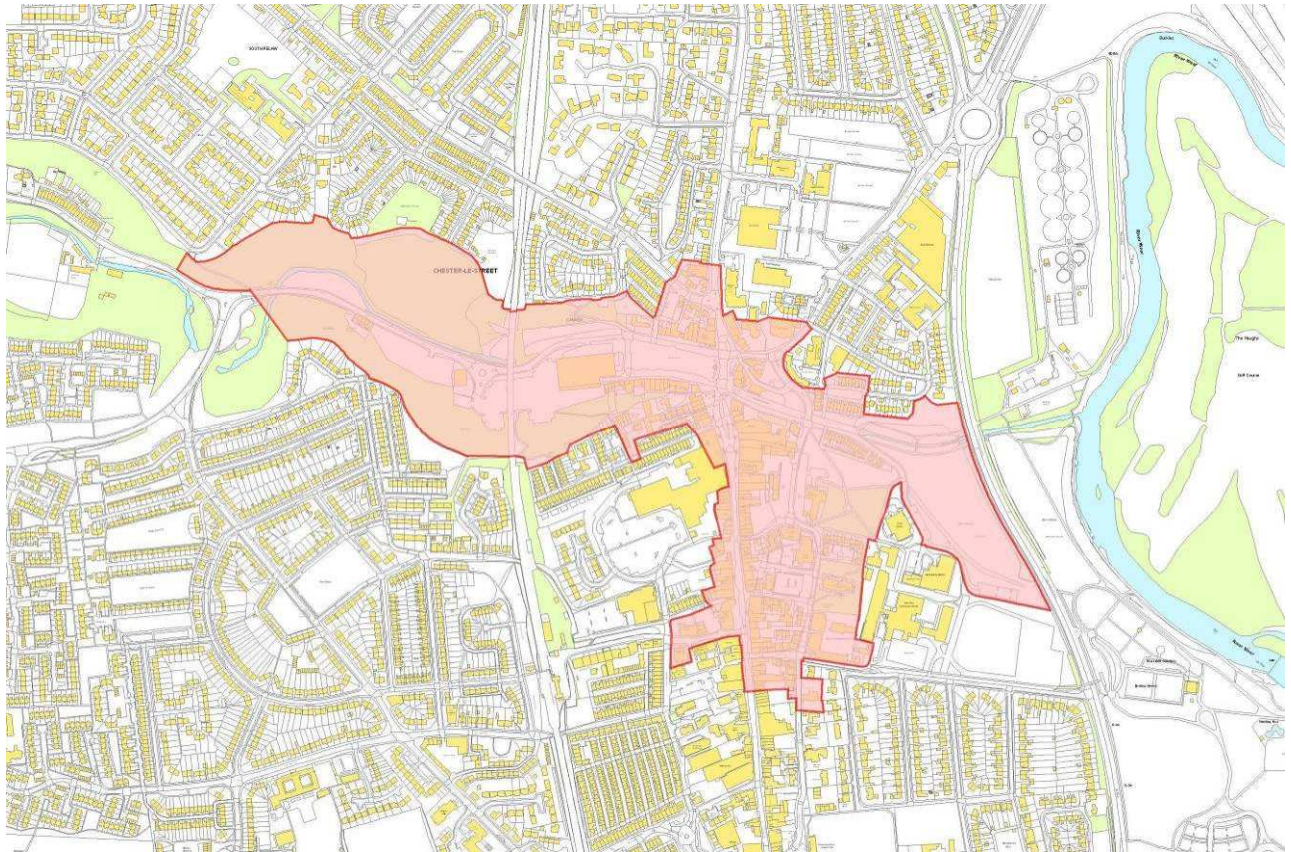
with additions following e.g. the spire in 1409. During the middle ages the church became the centre of diocese government but the fortunes of Chester in the Street declined following that period until the early 18th century when coal mining began developing. The Murray family developed and exported standing engines from this area prior to 1900.

- 1.8 Through the new County Durham Plan, there is significant opportunity for the town to increase housing development and the Local Plan preferred options are under consultation. These identify a housing allocation of 1300 homes along with 10Ha employment land allocation for the next 20 years². This is thought to be an achievable figure for both homes and businesses and will improve the economic standing of Chester-le-Street as these developments progress.
- 1.9 Cestria Community Housing are keen to be the main provider of affordable and social housing within and around the town and are already partnering with Durham County Council on embryonic housing schemes. Cestria is aware of the need for increased provision of elderly persons accommodation. They have made a significant investment in their housing stock to ensure that they meet the Decent Homes standard by 2013.
- 1.10 Chester-le-Street is very well placed to improve its position as a service centre in the North of the County particularly around events and improving the current retail offer. The shopper and visitor experience in the town is largely the same. Effort is needed to ensure an improved visitor experience is created that is different to an improved shopper experience.
- 1.11 Chester-le-Street has excellent leisure facilities and these can act as marketing attractions for the Town:
 - The Emirates Durham International Cricket Ground,
 - Chester-le-Street Golf Club,
 - Chester-le-Street Leisure Centre and
 - Riverside Park - the Park is a great family visitor attraction, 300,000+ visitors per year³, with a children's play area including a water play area, overlooked by Lumley castle.
 - The world famous Beamish Open Air Museum is located 4 miles to the North West of the town.
- 1.12 A significant part of the Town Centre and surrounding area has been designated as a Conservation Area. There are five Listed Buildings within the Conservation Area, scheduled monument Roman remains, and the Conservation Area Appraisal has identified a further 16 that have potential for listing⁴. The map below identifies the boundary of the Conservation Area.

² **County Durham Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment 2012**, to be published in the near future.

³ Figures provided by Riverside Park Manager, Julie Lewcock

⁴, **Chester-le-Street Conservation Area Appraisal** and Management Plan, Appendix 2 and 4, England and Lyle, 2007.



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Chester-le-Street Town Centre Conservation Area

- 1.13 The town has strong links with southern Tyne and Wear and northern parts of County Durham which provide a range of business and employment opportunities at a short distance from the town. The employment profile is indicated by the low percentage (just under 30%) of people working and living in the Chester-le Street area, this is up to 30% lower than other former local authority districts⁵. The town has strengths as a convenient and well serviced base for commuters and families.
- 1.14 Whilst Chester-le-Street has a smaller number of employment locations compared to surrounding areas there are major employers in Chester-le-Street town. The nearby Drum and Stella Gill Industrial Estates employ people in warehousing, distribution, office space and uPVC doors, windows, conservatories, etc. Drum is identified in the County Durham Plan as a Strategic Employment Site and land has been allocated to expand employment opportunities. Tesco, local supermarkets and local shops combine with the evening economy in the town to also play a significant role in the employment of unskilled workers. The Emirates cricket ground is a strong local employer. There is also the public sector - schools, County Council, Police and Courts Service and NHS. Chester-le-Street has high employment rates and has one of the lowest rates of workless people in Chester-le-Street in the County, at 11.9% (June 2012), and indeed the North East (13.4%).
- 1.15 There are strengths in local service provision but the daily outflow of commuters and close proximity of the major retail centres lead to Chester-le-Street leaking 80.9% retail comparison expenditure and 53.9% convenience shopping spend from its immediate catchment to the higher order provision in Gateshead (Metro Centre

⁵ EDAAW/AECOM, **County Durham Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report** May 2009

32.9%) and Newcastle City Centre (19.2%)⁶. This appears to be due to the ease of accessing these locations in nearby centres along with the limited comparison retail offer on the High Street with few high street multiples present. The proximity of the town to Metro Centre, Retail World, Newcastle City Centre, and Durham City reduces the likelihood of attracting more multiples to the town.

- 1.16 The bulky goods market is of a similar nature attracting a low market share (12.3%) from its immediate catchment. There is scope for the town to improve on its bulky goods offer, but there are limited development site opportunities in the town.
- 1.17 The retail provision is vulnerable to further adverse change due to combinations of retailer sales density, multiple retail provision, predicted shifts in consumer spending, strong tourist market, strong daytime population, venue dominance within catchment, and strong leisure offer⁷. As a district centre it is identified as being one of those most at risk. We need to try and resolve these issues in the town centre.

The core aims of the masterplan are to:

- Focus and co-ordinate the regeneration activities in Chester-le-Street and assist the enabling of a delivery mechanism for the various regeneration projects;
- To input into the delivery of the emerging Local Plan and Community Infrastructure Plan and draw together the strategic and policy drivers for development and regeneration within Chester-le-Street
- Assist in the consultation process with partners, stakeholders and the community;
- Assist in taking proposals forward with investors, developers and landowners; and,
- Raise Chester-le-Street's profile in order to stimulate further investment activity.

⁶ CDEA Town Centre Snapshot, Chester-le-Street, 2011.

⁷ Battlefield Britain survivors and casualties in the fight for the high street, Javelin Group (2012) Chester-le-Street is identified as one of the "most at risk" as a district centre, scoring very poorly in the "VENUESCORE"

2. Objectives of the Chester-le-Street Masterplan

- 2.1 Chester-le Street has strengths as convenient place to live with strong local services and offers ease of commuting to employment centres. It is well placed to benefit from housing development, major change at the Emirates cricket ground and potentially on the Lambton Estate. It needs strengthening to ensure that its retail centre benefits from local development and that current adverse economic impact is minimised.
- 2.2 This masterplan updates and develops the principles in the 2008 Chester-le-Street Masterplan to work towards ensuring that the town achieves its potential as a major centre in the North of the County. It provides guidance on the potential for redevelopment and the economic benefit that can be derived. These include maximising the footfall into town from Riverside Park and the Emirates Durham ICG, and future potential actions to improve the viability of the town, including the anticipated executive housing development at Lambton Park and improvements to Castle for use in the film industry⁸.



⁸ Planning application number: 2/11/00332/COU approved Feb 2012

- 2.3 The masterplan also draws upon previous work undertaken by the County Council, Chester-le-Street Area Partnership and the Business Association. The masterplan demonstrates how development can be brought forward in a phased manner to benefit the town's economy whilst enhancing the town's built environment.

The key drivers which underlie the masterplan include:

- Establishing a clear set of priority projects together with a realistic delivery plan which reflects both market demand, investor appetite and availability of sources of finance;
- Promoting the diversification of the local economy and employment growth, led by the private sector;
- Providing a sustainable and vibrant town centre with a focus on deliverability, creating key opportunities for change by securing definitive proposals for redevelopment, development or refurbishment of land and premises;

- Consolidating the population and expenditure base and improving the balance and mix of the housing offer to include market for sale, intermediate tenure and rented, which would in turn help to underpin a sustainable local economy, retaining young people whilst providing for an increasing proportion of elderly residents;
- Improving the patronage and frequency of stopping trains at the railway station;
- Developing the tourism and leisure offer and asset base, most notably in relation to the town centre, the Roman and Christian heritage, the Emirates Durham ICG, Riverside Park and riverside walks;
- Ensuring that key stakeholders, in particular those using the town centre, are positively engaged in the process and that the final outcomes are ones which local residents and businesses have confidence and pride in;
- Maximise the benefits of the new market place and civic space through regular business led planned events; and,
- Optimising the environmental, social and economic sustainability of Chester-le-Street through the design and phasing of the developments and the implementation process.

3.0 Strategic Context

- 3.1 In March 2012, the Government issued the National Planning Policy Framework. This new guidance requires the County Council to prepare a Local Plan and local councils have the option to prepare Neighbourhood Plans, which reflect the needs and priorities of their communities. Durham County Council is currently in the process of developing the Local Plan. The development of the Local Plan is based on an extensive and comprehensive evidence base which is available to view on the Council's website at <http://www.durham.gov.uk/ldf> . The evidence that underpins the preparation of the Local Plan also supports this regeneration masterplan.
- 3.2 This Masterplan is being produced to help support the emerging Local Plan which is the key policy document which will set out the strategic vision and objectives for the County over the next 15 to 20 years.
- 3.3 The strategic importance of Chester-le-Street is recognised by Durham County Council (within the County Durham Regeneration Strategy) and aims to embed a "Whole Town" approach to regeneration and use place-shaping activity to unlock the town's full potential.

*"Vibrant towns are good for business: they create jobs, attract investment and generate income - they are engines for economic growth. At their best, they create a discernable local buzz and define the wider area, attracting people from near and far. Our 'Whole-Town' investment approach will focus on tailored solutions to market failure, shaping the places people live, work and socialise and capitalising on our strong and vibrant asset base. We are taking into account investment in education, business, housing, public realm and the wider built environment, investing sufficiently to improve quality of place with a strong commitment to excellence."*⁹

- 3.4 Following the Chester-le-Street Masterplan in 2008, there has been a significant progress on projects with successful completions. These and projects completed shortly before the Masterplan was issued, include the physical improvements to the Market Place and Civic Heart, renovation of Mile House, public realm improvements throughout the town centre, and encouraging the redevelopment of an infill site adjacent to the Market Place. These projects have been very successful giving a modern feel to the north end of town and encouraging more use of the Civic Heart area for events and other entertainment.

Chester-le-Street Area Action Partnership

- 3.5 The local Area Action Partnership has five task and finish groups, from volunteers from the AAP Forum, to match their 2012/13 priorities of:
- Local regeneration Employment and Jobs
 - Opportunities for Young People
 - Supporting Community Groups and Buildings
 - Improved Local Environment
 - Health and Supporting Older People
- 3.6 The AAP is very keen to promote the town, businesses, leisure activities, and community involvement, and is proving very successful. There have been large and small events throughout the summer months and in the lead up to Christmas since the set up of the AAP in 2009. This include: weeks of action on environmental issues

⁹ Quote from **Regeneration and Economic Development Service Plan 2012-2016**, p5.

and the Market, GO Summer, Urban Games as part of the StartSport Project, Xarxa Theatre, Chester-le-Live and skatepark development with young people.

- 3.7 The AAP is also successful in leveraging in significant match funding from other sources to match its own Area Budget including the local Councillor's Members Initiative Fund, Neighbourhood and Highways budgets, significant charitable funding sources. Together these substantially improve the outcome and impact of projects for the benefit of all communities of interest.
- The Chester-le-Street AAP Budget - £120,000 per annum.
 - Councillor Neighbourhood Budget - £25,000 pa currently (being reduced to £20,000 from next April)
 - Members Initiative Fund - £2,000 per Councillor.

The Local Plan

- 3.8 The County Durham Local Plan¹⁰ is currently under consultation. The County Durham Regeneration Statement¹¹ underpins the Altogether Wealthier strand of the Sustainable Communities Strategy¹². This focuses on shaping a County Durham where people achieve their potential and want to live, work and invest. Our 'Whole-Town' approach to create "Vibrant and Successful Towns" is creating attractive places with good amenities and transport. It offers tailored solutions for each settlement that shape where people live and work. Education and skills, business, housing and their setting are all included.
- 3.9 Chester-le-Street town centre has a strong range of public and community services, business and retail provision but it has been significantly affected by the recent economic downturn. Durham County Council has a long-term commitment to regenerating town centres that lies at the heart of the County's economic, social and environmental infrastructure. As noted, the town centre is vulnerable to further change and needs to be carefully monitored¹³. A balance is needed which safeguards the town's success and unique strengths whilst supporting sustainable regeneration and attraction to visitors.
- 3.10 The Council intends to support business and investment through projects (listed below) identifying appropriate development, encouraging new and expanding businesses, improving the leisure offer, increasing housing sites for a range of needs and engaging with the Department of Transport to improve rail access to and from the town.

¹⁰ http://durhamcc-consult.limehouse.co.uk/portal/planning/lp/lp_po?pointId=1344511102913#section-1344511102913

¹¹ http://content.durham.gov.uk/PDFRepository/Regeneration_Statement.pdf

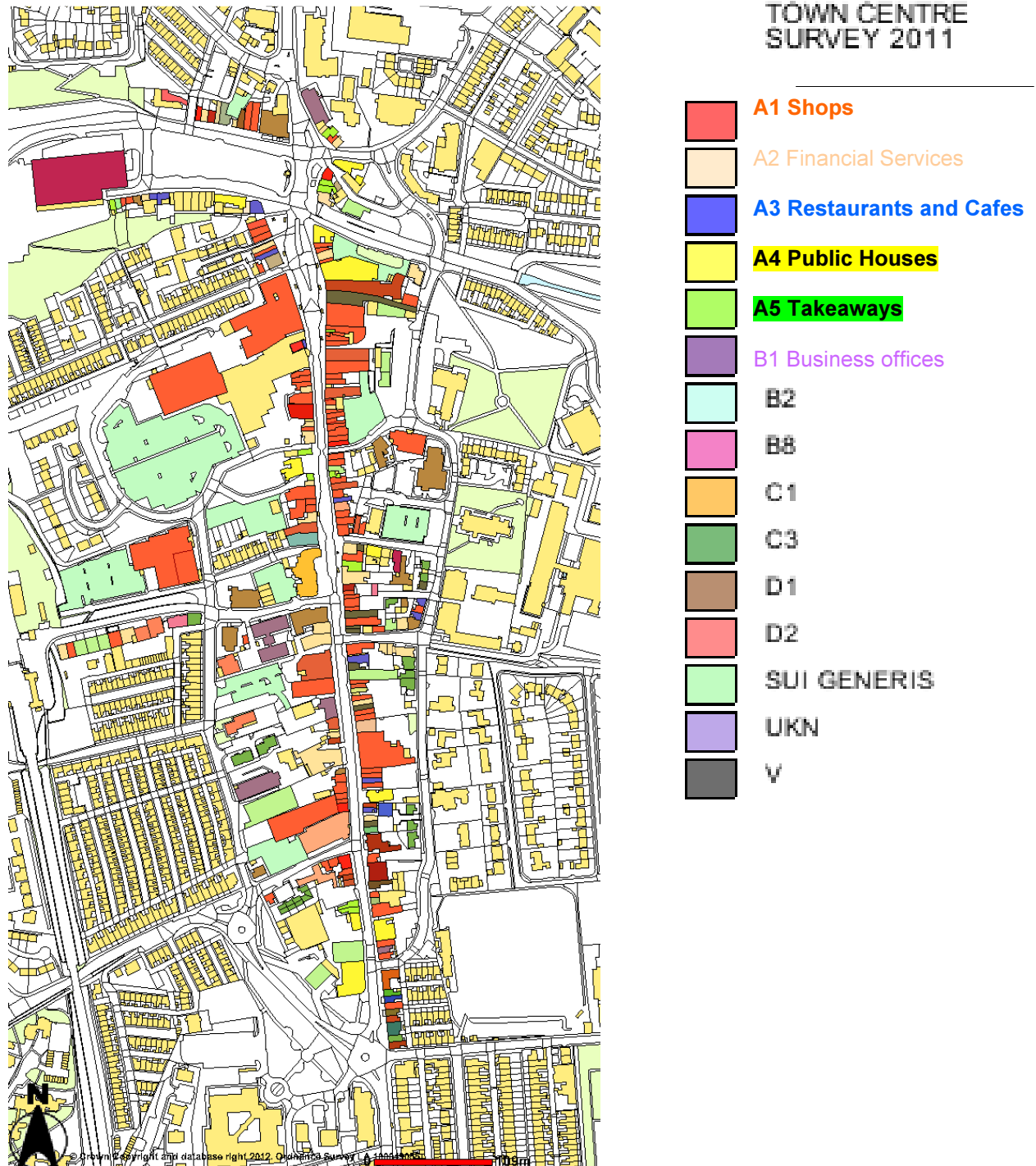
¹² <http://www.countydurhampartnership.co.uk/Pages/CDP-SustainableCommunityStrategy.aspx>

¹³ **Javelin Group** (2012) Op.cit.

4.0 Key Issues and Challenges

- 4.1 Chester-le-Street is in a better condition than its neighbours, with the exception of Durham City, for most of the indices marking successful localities.
- Demography – Chester-le-Street has an aging population and without new family homes or appropriate older persons accommodation this percentage will inevitably rise, as the demand outstrips supply.
 - Education – the town has two academies, the Hermitage Academy graded outstanding by Ofsted with 66% obtaining 5 good GCSEs and Park View School whose achievements include 72% of pupils obtaining 5 good GCSEs and 95% of those pupils who stay on into sixth form obtaining 3 A levels.
 - Housing – this is a commuter town with people travelling to work from this regionally central location allowing the town and locality to become more attractive as a place to live, rather than work. Housing sites have been identified through the local plan that will increase supply by 1300 over the next 20 years.
 - Employment – worklessness is one of the lowest in the County at 11.9% of the working age population. This area is relatively affluent, with an average household income of £34,391, significantly above the Durham average at 85%, and 95% of the UK average of £36,005
 - Higher order retail centres are within a 10 mile radius (Metro Centre, Durham City, Newcastle, Washington Galleries and Team Valley Retail Park among others) and that the town finds it very difficult to compete with. Finding a niche as a local service centre with high quality independent retailers and service provision is a possible way forward.
- 4.2 An analysis of the baseline studies undertaken to date, has assessed Chester-le-Street's potential to respond to the wider agenda for growth across County Durham. Chester-le-Street has excellent transport links, a high quality natural environment, built environment heritage, a relatively affluent population, a strong housing market and potential for growth in terms of housing and business space.
- 4.3 The town centre is linear in nature, with a number of Chares extending town centre activity beyond the main street. The town centre has a number of national retailers that act as anchors (such as Argos in the northern end & Tesco/Morrisons in the south). However, the recent demise of some national retailers has affected Chester-le-Street in a similar manner to a lot of town centres across the County and has left vacant units in prominent locations on the high street.
- 4.4 The few larger units falling vacant at the southern end do have a combined impact and individually reduce quality on their immediate section of street. The combination of previous development and the more recent change due to Market Place/Front Street improvements and the creation of the supermarkets give the northern section some distinction set against the remainder of Front Street.
- 4.5 Unfortunately for the town, there is little that can be done to change the key challenge presented by the proximity of higher order retail centres to Chester-le-Street and the competition this provides. Competition is of course good for the consumer in reducing prices, but Chester-le-Street does not provide competition to the higher order retail centres for bulky goods and provides very little competition in the form of comparison goods. Mitigation therefore could be in the form of increased provision of comparison and bulky goods from Chester-le-Street; however, there is then the issue of requiring retail developers to provide buildings with a more appropriate floorplate to encourage this type of retailer into town.

4.6 We have undertaken town centre surveys in each of the County Towns. The following map shows that A1 retail units are largely concentrated to the south of the town centre with a more diversified mix of properties to the north of the town centre. Vacancy levels in the centre are currently around 10%¹⁴. Although this is comparable with other centres nationally, we need to try and ensure that this does not worsen. If it does, there could be damaging effects for the performance of the town centre.



Durham County Council; GIS 2012

¹⁴ Ground floor individual unit survey, September 2012, DCC Regeneration and Development

- 4.7 The town has an almost complete circular access route round the periphery of the town. This circular route offers parking and access by car and links through from adjacent housing, although these are not very obvious to the new visitor and demands a review of signage for the town.
- 4.8 A public transport hub is to be found at the North of the town around Market Place and the northern end of Front Street. There are a number of possible development sites within the town that could be based around the acquisition and demolition of flat roofed buildings with little architectural significance. These could deal with the issue of smaller floorplates to produce a more desirable modern floorplate size. DCC evidence suggests that at least one car park could be lost without impacting on the accessibility of the town¹⁵, giving developers an opportunity to have both the right floorplate and good car parking facilities for their unit. If this type of opportunity is identified by a developer, the Council Development Management team may wish to consider how this development fits sensitively within the conservation area to avoid any deterioration of the environment.
- 4.9 A key area of improvement for this part of town is to increase family participation in the evening economy and improve the feeling of community safety at night. The early evening period between the retail units closing and the pubs/leisure/restaurants opening is under-utilised and more activity should be promoted during this period.
- 4.10 The 'dumbbell' pattern of activity encourages shoppers through the town during the daytime, and encourages revellers through the town on an evening and night, particularly at weekends. As mentioned previously, there is a good mix of retailers and services (health, education, housing one stop shop) and pubs and restaurants throughout the town which has ensured the towns longevity> It has given it the means to weather economic storms like the current one and previously in the 1980s.
- 4.11 The Riverside Park and Emirates Durham ICG visitors should be encouraged to use the town throughout the day. The Riverside Park has 200,000 visitors over the year and the ICG 100,000. This is a largely untapped resource at the moment. Marketing to visitors and local people could significantly increase the footfall of these visitors and help sustain the economy of the town.

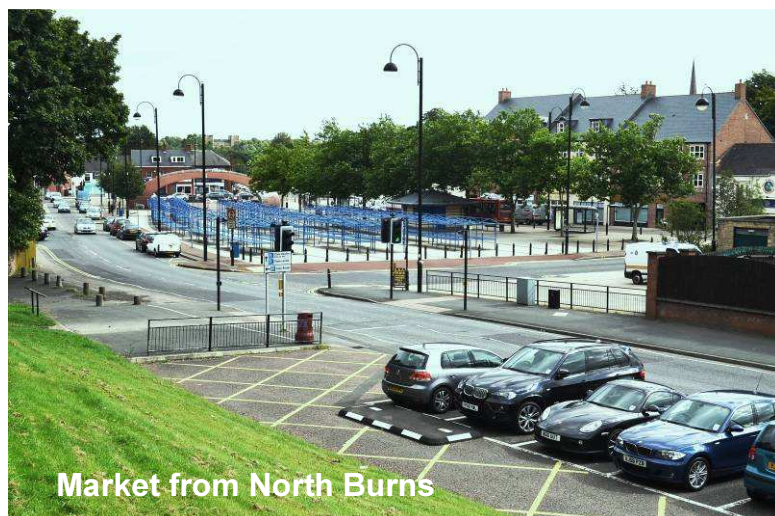


¹⁵ Chester-le-Street Off Street Parking Survey 2010, Appendix 2

- 4.12 The emerging Town Team supported by the Area Action Partnership hopes to be able to bring the local visitor attractions together (Beamish, Lumley Castle, Riverside Park and the Emirates Durham ICG,) and integrate their activities with the town to facilitate increased footfall.



- 4.13 There are three markets held within the town on Tuesday, Friday and Saturday each week. The Tuesday market is the least attractive to shoppers (10% average occupancy) unlike the remaining two that are well attended and on Saturday this market is the only one in the County that is at capacity¹⁶ (100 stalls). The markets have significant potential and are a key issue for local shoppers. The AAP and emerging Town Team have been keen to improve the offer and increase stall take up on Tuesday and Friday through publicity, reduced rent offers on stalls and local marketing. It is hoped that the Markets Review will provide a vibrant future for the Chester-le-Street markets.



¹⁶ <http://democracy.durham.gov.uk/documents/s19935/Markets%20Report.pdf>

- 4.14 It is possible to improve the benefits to the town of the refurbished market place by increasing the numbers of seasonal events, festivals and markets on site, as well as the smaller promotional activities on a weekly to monthly basis to increase footfall in the town. It is therefore important to link this activity to any promotional/ marketing strategy that may be undertaken in future.
- 4.15 **The Local Plan Retail and Town Centre Uses Study** (Nov 2009) key issues and recommendations include:
- **Convenience** shopping floorspace is double the regional average at 21.4% and **Comparison** shopping at 34.6% is more than the Goad (retail use mapping) regional average of 30.6% requiring intervention to encourage bulky goods shopping availability in town.
 - **Vacant units** are at less than average floor plate size requiring opportunistic interventions when neighbouring units become available to increase floor plate.
 - **Retailer interest** has remained reasonably constant with a dip in 2009 but a retail analysis¹⁷ is suggested to maintain this interest by identifying need in the town.
 - The town's proximity to **higher order centres** restricts potential commercial interest in Chester-le-Street; however, encouragement should be given to independent traders who could compete with these centres.
 - **Rent levels** should reflect more closely the current economic conditions, Chester-le-Street compares well to other towns.
 - **Commercial yields** are fluctuating because of investor confidence and the economic conditions but had remained static from 2000 to 2006; retail analysis could assist in improving confidence for specific investors.
 - Chester-le-Street is identified as one of the "most at risk" district centres, scoring very poorly.
 - **Upper floors** should be brought back unto use possibly as office space to increase footfall in the town, as well as
 - Encouraging more **frequent activities**, markets and events to be held in town that increase footfall substantially and often.
 - The town is **easily accessible** by foot, public transport and car which are assets that could be built upon.
- 4.16 The train station is vital to the future success of the town and requires improvement in frequency and number of services stopping at Chester-le-Street. The train is a sustainable mode of travel for workers and visitors to ICG/Riverside Park/Town Centre to use train station. There is evidence to suggest that events suffer because rail services stopping at Chester-le-Street finish prior to events finishing at Emirates Durham ICG. The Council needs to engage with the Department of Transport to address this issue.
- 4.17 Weak links from the station to the town and from the town to the Riverside and Cricket Ground can be improved through the physical improvement of the Ropery Lane, Roman Avenue and Cone Terrace access routes, along with improvements to Station Road. This programme of work could be achieved relatively quickly and with community backing may bring external funding sources to the table.

¹⁷ Retail analysis usually includes: Retail Use Goad Plan, Catchment Area Map and Analysis including Residential Demographics, Daytime Demographics, Benchmark Analysis, Floorspace/plate provision and need, Benchmark Analysis, Retail Category, Benchmark Analysis; assisting to identify consumer demand, retail supply and future sustainability.



- 4.18 The gateways into the town have been acknowledged as weak with little sense of arrival to the visitor¹⁸. There are two schemes underway but there remains scope for further improvements. There is a poor setting for car parks and some supermarkets that helps to undermine the overall character of the town centre. Quality street frontages and public realm can reinforce arrival into the town centre. Landmark buildings would increase legibility for visitors (their ability to find their way around the town centre). The town is fringed, except to the north, by attractive countryside including local nature reserves and historic parkland. Views and links should be exploited and the green setting acknowledged.
- 4.19 The heritage of the town is largely unknown by most residents and visitors and marketing could improve the towns identity and economy through linked trips to Beamish, Lumley Castle, Riverside Park and the Emirates Durham ICG. A focus on the Christian heritage, dating back to 122CE, could ensure its integration within the region. The region has significant Roman and Christian heritage and scope for substantial related tourism based on Durham, Auckland Castle, Binchester, York and Lindisfarne. Chester-le-Street can support this through marketing of its own sites to draw on the regional multi centre visitor attractions.

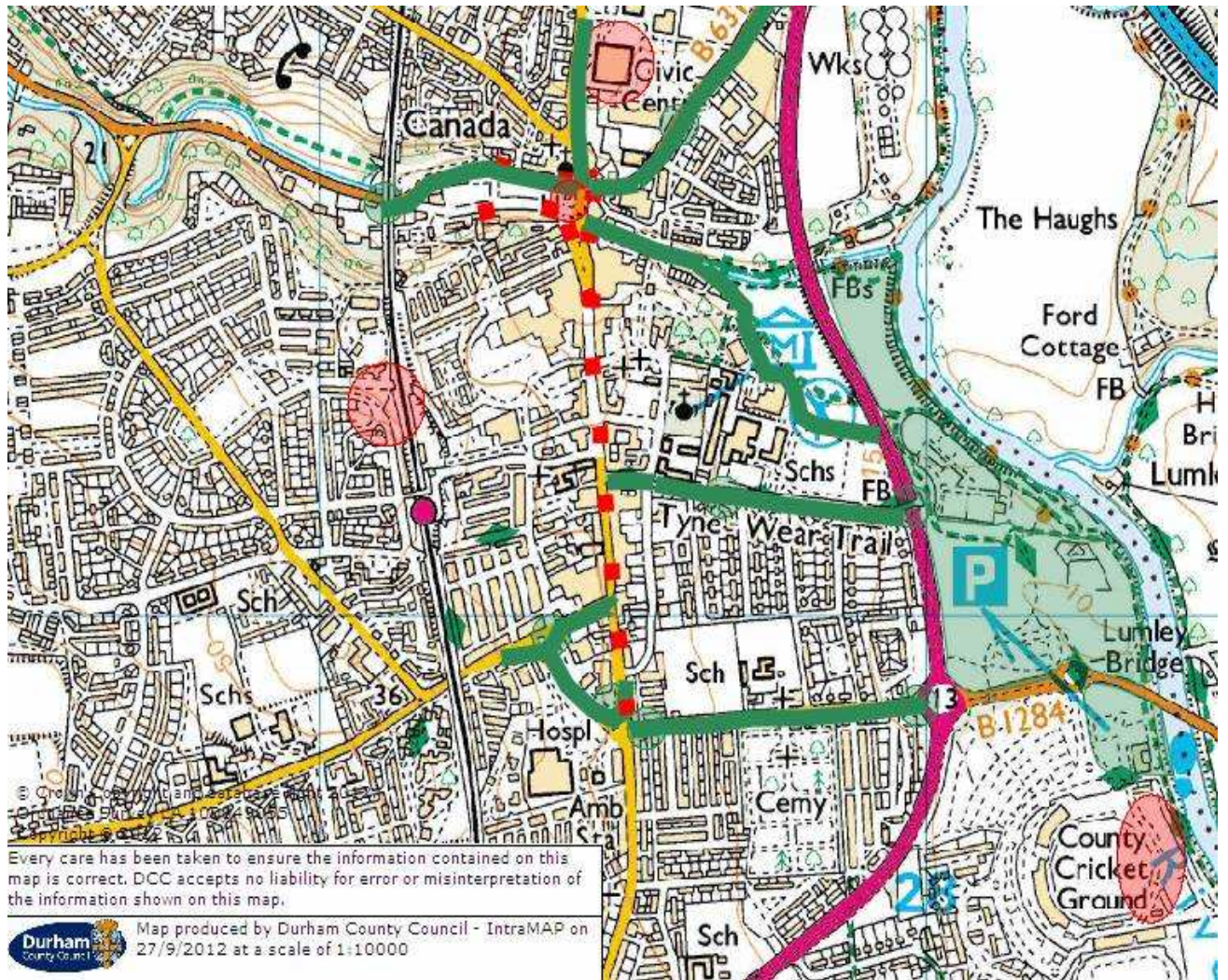
Key outcomes




- 4.20 To create a truly vibrant and sustainable town centre will require the assembly of the necessary “building blocks”, infrastructure and appropriate investment to attract shoppers, business and leisure visitors and their expenditure. In addition, the town centre is and will be home to numerous residents who live in and around the centre to take advantage of the services and facilities available to them. There is a range of development opportunities to be promoted in Chester-le-Street and provide the necessary conditions for a sustainable and competitive town centre. These are as follows:
- The Council will work with regeneration partnerships and private sector partners to continue to **deliver a vibrant town centre**;

¹⁸ **Chester-le-Street Masterplan**, June 2008, Op.cit. Pg. 14

- Chester-le-Street has been successful in attracting and retaining numerous small and medium-sized businesses both within the town centre and at Drum. Additional development land for business users can be brought forward with the introduction of infrastructure at an extension site at Drum. **The Council will endeavour to work with existing businesses, potential funders, developers and prospective inward investment companies to ensure that Chester-le-Street enhances its supply of business properties in order to provide for wealth and job creation.**
- There are a number of sites that could provide residential development for sale, intermediate tenure and rent. **Additional housing close to the centre will help the vitality and viability of the town and the Council will continue to work with the development industry, RPs and other interested parties to deliver the new homes that Chester-le-Street requires.**
- Encourage patronage of train station and **work with Department of Transport to improve the occurrence of services**
- **Increasing the numbers of visitors to Riverside Park, the Cricket ground,** and other leisure activities that also visit the town centre
- The Chester-le-Street Destination Development Plan produced in July 2010 identifies the need to link more closely to increase the visitor numbers to the town through **strengthening Chester-le-Street's identity as a destination for heritage, sport and recreation**, and as an attractive and convenient base from which to explore Durham and Newcastle
- **Improve the access routes** between the riverside and town centre
- Work with the private sector and community groups to increase the number of events in the Civic Heart, which would increase the footfall in the town centre help sustain the local market

Project Areas



Legend:	
	<p>Economic opportunity sites Major Projects - Housing & Development</p>
	<p>Economic opportunity sites Targeted Business Improvements</p>
	<p>Access routes and environmental improvement opportunities</p>

5. Our Approach to Delivery

5.1 There has been substantial public investment in projects within Chester-le-Street totalling over £5m since 2003. The major projects were:

- £1.2m – Mile House refurbishment works
- £2m Market Place and Civic Heart renewal
- £1m public realm improvements to Front Street
- Masterplan development
- £1.4m Drum roundabout improvements

There is also current investment in DCC premises:

- Refurbishment of the Library following flood damage (Min £50K)
- Refurbishment of the Leisure Pool (£40k)
- Renewal of the block paving bus bays on Front St.

5.2 These investments were supported through

- Single Programme Funding
- Council capital programme
- Local Transport Plan

5.3 The Council is engaging with a range of private sector developers, housing providers, and the Department of Transport to influence the pace and scale of development in Chester-le-Street, and to maximise leverage from the private sector.

Emerging Town Team

5.4 The emerging Town Team is supported by Chester-le-Street AAP working group that focuses on the town centre within the Local Regeneration, Employment and Jobs priority theme which includes local businesses, elected members, agencies like the Police, and voluntary and community representatives. The aim is to improve the town centre viability and vitality through measures including:

- Working with local businesses to share ideas and advice;
- Working with visitor attractions (Beamish, Lumley Castle, Emirates Durham ICG, rowing club) to increase footfall into the town;
- Assisting local businesses in working with the local authority to increase resources going into the town e.g. encouraging the introduction and use of targeted business improvement grants;
- Supporting property owners and retailers to invest in their properties;
- Supporting retailers with apprenticeships;
- Improving the markets in town;
- Increasing the use of the market place and civic heart with events to increase footfall;
- Improving marketing of the town to encourage more use by local people;
- Supporting and encouraging inward investment into the town; and,
- Working with partners, both internal and external, to market the towns heritage and its status as a visitor attraction.

Chester-le-Street Civic Centre

5.5 The current Civic Centre is located to the north of the Town Centre. The building is not very efficient, both in terms of how the building can be used as office accommodation and its energy use. There are substantial and increasing repairs

requirements and difficulties in upgrading office accommodation to current standards. The Council is considering how it will deliver services to its residents and this site has potential for alternative uses. There is a need to prepare an options appraisal to consider the future use of the building and this is anticipated as being completed in November 2012. The site is identified as having housing potential in the DCC Strategic Housing Land availability Assessment (SHLAA). If the building is to be demolished there is a need to ensure appropriate local retention of the Dainty Dinah exhibit celebrating the former Horners toffee works.

Provision of Customer Access Point (CAP) and DCC Staff Accommodation

- 5.6 As part of the overall County customer access provision, access point locations are being considered and the site for Chester-le-Street's CAP will be confirmed during 2012/13. The final proposal and any further staff relocation, should the Civic Centre be approved as surplus to requirements, are under review.

Targeted Business Improvement

- 5.7 To increase numbers of local people shopping in the town attempts should be made to improve how shops look e.g. window dressing in some shops is poor at best. Partnering with larger retailers and further education providers could give smaller retailers and independents the skills to improve their displays and attract shoppers. There could be an improvement in the way charity shops are viewed e.g. as Vintage clothing/ antique object d'art, etc., rather than a sign of a declining centre as some residents see it. An empty shops initiative with community backing has the potential to work if partners in further education are included in the project.
- 5.8 The current targeted business scheme, through continuation, will contribute to the overall environmental quality of the town centre by improving the design and appearance of the business premises. Focusing activity on shops which are vacant, shabby, neglected or part of a building that has architectural significance would boost the local economy. The objectives are to bring disused business premises back into use and generate investment in the town centre. This will improve the commercial vitality and viability of the town centre and create and sustain a sense of pride amongst the local population in their town centre.
- 5.9 There is also the need to look at entrepreneurship in local people and how assistance could encourage young people, unemployed and others in starting new businesses in the town.

Lambton Estate

- 5.10 The Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) is to be considered for approval following consultation. Subject to approval this will open up the potential of the Estate for business, housing and heritage development. This could impact substantially on Chester-le Street in the longer term. An increase in people living in the locality will help to support the town's retail and services provision. Within the envisaged timetable for action of the masterplan, addressing issues for the retail sector is a key project objective to ensure future attractiveness.

Supporting Projects

Use of Rail Station

- 5.11 The bus and rail network are easily accessible as there is a train station within the central area of town and a bus station to the north of the town. Buses from Newcastle, Gateshead, and Sunderland run through the centre of Chester-le-Street, on a frequent and regular basis. However, not all trains stop at Chester-le-Street, despite increasing passenger numbers and the times that they stop at do not relate well to town or cricket events or the evening economy. The provision of a rail station is a positive for the town's future. There is a need to work with the Department of Transport to ensure that regular trains (at least one per hour) do stop at the Rail Station to encourage patronage by rail, such as by office workers going to Durham or Newcastle and visitors to the Emirates Durham ICG.



Provision of hotel and B&B accommodation

- 5.12 There is little hotel provision within the town but includes B&B provision above the Lambton Arms (eight rooms available) in town, Hollycroft (three rooms available) just outside the town centre, and the four star Lumley Castle Hotel outside the town. There is active planning permission for a 149 room mid range hotel and conferencing facilities adjacent to the Cricket Ground that is to be constructed in the near future. The Council is working with consultants to understand the supply and demand for overnight accommodation across the County. Should the need arise we will cooperate with the private sector on filling any gaps in anticipated provision.

Emirates Cricket Ground, Sports and Leisure

- 5.13 The Emirates cricket ground continues to pursue its improvements to the stands and the new hotel and conference centre developments. The Council will continue to be supportive of this process. The hosting of the Ashes provides both the stadium and the town with opportunities to benefit from a raised profile. Other factors potentially impacting on the site in the masterplan period are the need for intensifying the site use and its community role, capitalising on its riverside setting, the relationship with

the DCC parking provision and links to ownerships and the riverside park. Access into the town is referenced elsewhere.

Heritage

- 5.14 The importance of Chester-le-Street's Roman and Christian heritage is recognised in this masterplan, previous reports and by the local community. With the potential to access the Lambton Estate (County Durham Plan¹⁹ & ²⁰), the combination of major heritage, tourism, leisure and sport provision along the river Wear becomes increasingly significant. This combination should be considered when looking at heritage initiatives in the Masterplan period.

Station Approach

- 5.15 The intention remains to enhance the approach to the station which forms a major gateway to the town centre to create a positive first impression to all visitors to the town. The 2008 masterplan proposals include enhancing the station forecourt and Station Road, upgrading the public transport link with a new shuttle bus drop-off and taxi rank at the station, encouraging the development of high quality new buildings²¹. A project of this scale would will raise the quality of the environment and provide activity to a new public square.
- 5.16 Station Approach and Roman Avenue are the most direct routes between the rail station, the town centre and the Riverside Park and EDI Cricket Ground, making this an important route. A recent signage project has made the route more legible for visitors. The intention is to encourage rail-arriving visitors to the Riverside to walk through the town centre en route. Linked to this is the need to create a good first impression for visitors arriving at the town for shopping, leisure or sporting events by enhancing the town's station approach. Chester-le-Street also has many local residents commuting out of the town. The major 2008 masterplan project would re-introduce office and employment uses.
- 5.17 An ex-supermarket building was vacant when a 2008 Masterplan proposal made for new development. The building is now occupied by a smaller supermarket and car sales business. It is suggested that these current uses should not be prejudiced by actively pursuing the proposal that is based solely on private ownerships. If a successful proposal that offers strong business/retail improvement should emerge in line with the masterplan, then it should be encouraged. Otherwise improvement of Station Approach itself remains a medium term objective.



¹⁹ C. Durham Plan Preferred Options Op.cit., p24

²⁰ Durham County Council, Lambton Estate Draft Supplementary Planning Document, July 2012

²¹ Chester-le-Street Masterplan, June 2008, Op.cit. Pgs. 87-92

Burns Green Leisure/Youth Centre

- 5.18 The recent development of a DCC/NHS One Point Hub for children and young people has meant that the existing youth centre site is now vacant. Its condition is structurally poor and there is currently no viable DCC reuse. This has created a development opportunity but the current economic climate will not support the masterplan objectives of a new leisure/cultural use with its substantial public sector requirements. Part of the masterplan site has already been used for the ONE Point Hub supporting the original development intentions for the area.
- 5.19 The site is not included as a residential site in the SHLAA being under the relevant size limit and is not zoned for specific use in the former Chester-le-Street Local plan or it's saved policies. The site is well situated with a high quality open space setting next to an existing attractive housing development within the conservation area. Development will require private sector input.
- 5.20. The private sector is welcomed and encouraged to invest in the town with local people being very keen to see improvements for Chester-le-Street. The Council would consider any appropriate application and would be willing to discuss the best way to progress an application with developers. The council recognises that without the partnering with or intervention of developers to the town there would be little change and the economic benefits needed would not be realised.



Delivery of New Homes

5.21. The new Local Plan is being prepared. The consultation document identifies that Chester-le-Street requires a minimum of 1300 dwellings over the lifetime of the Plan (2030). It is likely that these dwellings will be constructed on sites identified within the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment and will be provided by the private sector and Registered Providers, such as Cestria.

Current potential site opportunities include:

- Civic Centre (subject to approval and confirmation as surplus to use)
- Burns Green Youth Centre (subject to disposal)
- Bullion Lane Depot Site (subject to agreement between DCC and Cestria as joint owners)



5.22 It is important that the new housing that is provided caters for the needs of the local population including starter homes, family housing and older persons' accommodation. This provision will help support a balanced local community which would benefit education, health and leisure provision.

Resources

5.23 The national and pan European economy is in recession and the response of Government is to currently concentrate on public spending reductions. This means there is a reduction in resources that the Council can allocate to have a significant impact on the proposals within this development masterplan. However, in partnership with developers and other stakeholders there is opportunity for substantial improvement to the town allowing long term sustainability and longevity.

5.24 The Council's own capital programme and land could be used to draw developers or other stakeholders into discussion on how to progress with schemes that have planning permission as well as those to be submitted for consideration. New ways of partnering may need to be developed as well as using best practice from other authorities or public organisations.

- 5.25 Some examples of these are: public/private partnerships, public/public partnerships, joint venture agreements, development agreements and overage agreements. These approaches allow investment, risk, and profit to be shared between the partners in agreed amounts, making development more attractive to all parties.
- 5.26 We will work with the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) on bringing grant and/or land to the partnership and a flexible attitude to making a proposal workable through e.g. front loading a project and sharing risk at the outset and then taking an agreed contribution/share out at the end. The North East Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP), if tackling larger scale projects with a sub-regional or regional impact, can work with a private sector partner to assist in accessing Regional Growth Fund. Working in partnership with local developers and other stakeholders like the EDI Cricket Ground and business community are also obvious choices.
- 5.27 There is a strong need to access more financial resources than can be provided by the Council's own capital programme therefore resources from developers, section 106, CIL and TIF must be regarded as essential contributions to new developments in the town.

Future Key Projects

Theme / Strategy	Project activity	Timescale	Outputs / Outcomes	Project Lead and Partners	Budget details / proposals
Altogether Wealthier Vibrant and Successful Towns	Reduce comparison and convenience leakage from the town by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Working with the business sector to promote the town, market, Riverside Park, monthly/ quarterly events, to local people on a monthly basis Ensuring events are held in the town on a regular basis by working with partners Support the revision of the town centre retail study by Planning Services Encouraging involvement of community and voluntary sector assisting in the improvement of town e.g. using charitable funding sources for events and “meantime” use of shops. 	High Short term	“Exploit opportunities to stimulate investment and generate wealth within the County making Durham a better place to live, work, invest and visit.” Local people spending more in their local town centre through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved knowledge of offer through regular marketing. More visitors to the Cricket Ground and Riverside Park using the town centre More promotional activities in the town to create repeat visits on a regular basis 	DCC AAP Local Businesses Agents	DCC: RED and AAP, Neighbourhood Budget , Member Initiative Fund, Highways Budget, Local businesses, Emirates Durham ICG
	Lambton Estate development Special Planning Document and onward development	High Short term – SPD report Medium- long term	Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) Approval Support initiatives to develop subject to approval of the SPD	DCC Private sector	DCC- SPD Private sector
	Potential housing development (Civic Centre) site on Newcastle Road. (This is Green SHLAA site.)	High Medium - long term	Subject to Civic Centre being agreed as surplus to need. Creation of attractive, sustainable, well designed, well connected housing development close to the town centre.	DCC Private sector	Private sector
	Former Burns Green Youth Centre redevelopment	High Medium-Long term	Subject to disposal approvals , disposal to private sector for beneficial redevelopment	DCC Private sector	Private sector
	Continue and refocus targeted building improvement scheme to encourage investment from owners and tenants.	Medium Short – medium term	Create new job opportunities Crete new businesses Bring land or premises back into use	Businesses DCC	DCC Local businesses
	Review balance of uses in Front Street and consider introduction of residential use	Medium Medium - long term	Addressing longer term vacant units, refining use clusters to reflect long term retail environment	DCC Private Sector	DCC Private sector
	Emirates Durham ICG, stands, hotel and conference centre development – support, appropriate facilitation by DCC	High Short –long term	Increased attendance, increased nos of events, increase in nos of visitors to Chester-le-Street	Emirates Durham ICG	Emirates Durham ICG/Private sector
	Enhance the attractiveness of the riverside and increase access to the riverbanks and water, increase attractiveness of connections to the town.	Medium Short - medium - long term	Increasing visitor numbers to the Riverside Park, Cricket Ground and subsequently the town Improved viability of local shops Improved evening economy Town is well used and well connected	DCC AAP Local Businesses Local Community Elected Members	DCC private sector
	Strengthen the presentation of the town’s heritage offer: widely market Roman/Christian Heritage bringing in more people and school trips – possibly linked trips to Beamish Museum.	Medium - Long Long – medium term	Heritage leaflet kept up to date Information on town sent out with other literature eg Cricket Ground tickets Publicity and marketing of the town undertaken by	DCC TIS AAP Business forum	DCC

Theme / Strategy	Project activity	Timescale	Outputs / Outcomes	Project Lead and Partners	Budget details / proposals
			professional Tourist Information Service to accept information on Chester-le-Street heritage and, link to other Roman and Christian sites to encourage linked trips.		
<i>Competitive and Successful People</i>	Encourage local businesses to take advantage of the evening events (post 5pm) to improve their turnover and the local evening economy.	High Short-Medium	“Exploit opportunities to stimulate investment and generate wealth within the County making Durham a better place to live, work, invest and visit.” <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Businesses improve their turnover thereby improving their chance of longevity, • Town's economy stabilises, • Local people given opportunity to visit town for leisure purposes, • Better offer to shoppers provided. 	DCC Local businesses and Business Forum AAP	Private sector
	Railway Station - Promote the increase frequency of trans stopping and use generally	High Short term	Greater availability of trains at appropriate times for Chester-le –Street users.	DCC Chester-le-Track	Railway operators
	Continue to work in partnership with the local community, the AAP, and the business association to ensure opportunities for improvement are recognised.	Medium Short – medium term	Close relationships built Sharing of information and ideas Opportunities exploited	Traders DCC Businesses AAP Local Community Elected Members	Private sector
	Assess car park pricing trials to encourage town centre late afternoon and short stay shopping visits	Medium Short – medium term	Confirm scope for business uplift and centre attractiveness	DCC AAP	DCC
	Identify lead and work on Portas Town Team for Chester-le-Street with the aim of enhancing the town and its offer.	High Short term	Secure resources for improvements to town centre: e.g. pop-up shops, events etc	AAP Businesses Local college Traders Community Elected members	Government AAP Local Businesses
<i>A Top Location for Business</i>	Work with agents to reduce void retail units through an initiative including : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of shop graphics “jackets” on void stores to promote gaps in the market • Roller shutter graphics schemes • Market vacant units to third sector/ community e.g. low rent trials, “pop-up” uses, local colleges for use by young entrepreneurs and artists as studios and galleries etc a “Meantime Use” (Portas Report) • Improve floor plate offer to attract larger retailers e.g. bulky goods stores missing from town • Marketing of neighbouring units to allow for increased floorplate. • Market possible development sites 	Medium Short – Ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduction in void units • Improved visual aspect of town • Use of Retail analysis to demonstrate types of shop available to the town. • Local college giving students “real life” experience e.g. of sales and gallery use. • Larger retailers/ businesses investing the town. 	DCC Local Business Forum AAP FE Colleges	Private sector Poss. AAP
	Use DCC’s completed Markets Strategy to address the markets issue in town and improve the offer.	High Short-Medium	Market appearance and offer improved and more shoppers coming into town to shop.	Traders DCC	DCC strategy Private sector

Theme / Strategy	Project activity	Timescale	Outputs / Outcomes	Project Lead and Partners	Budget details / proposals
	Address repair issues			AAP	
	Re-location of CAP into town centre to reduce loss of jobs from the Civic Centre site.	High Short to medium	Reduces loss to town centre of potential closure of Civic Centre Staffing in centre of town and likely to shop	DCC	DCC
	Improve sense of arrival with improved Gateways in the form of features or landscaping or other appropriate items.	Medium Short and medium - long term	Build on current work to create attractive entrances to the town Gives sense of arrival and good first impression of attractive market town with significant Roman/Christian heritage.	DCC	DCC
	Increase footfall into town through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensuring visitors move into town from Riverside Park and Cricket Ground Events each month Promotion of the town and businesses Improved market (and promotion if it remains as Council managed) 	High Short – medium term	Increased footfall into town on regular basis Increased spend in town improved viability of town	DCC AAP Elected Members Local businesses Local community	DCC Private sector
	Work with partners to increase the number of events held at the Cricket Ground, Riverside Park, town centre and elsewhere around the town	Medium Short – medium term	Maintain good productive relationship with the Riverside Park, Cricket Ground and any other appropriate local organisation to improve visitor numbers to the town.	DCC	DCC
<i>Sustainable Neighbourhoods and Rural Communities</i>	Partner with Cestria housing and other local housing providers to ensure appropriate affordable and social housing is supplied to the Chester-le-Street market. E.g. elderly and family accommodation	Medium Medium and long term	Older people and families have affordable, sustainable, energy efficient, safe homes to rent of buy.	Cestria/ other housing providers	Cestria HCA DCC Housing Providers