Congleton

Cheshire East Town Centre Vitality Plans

Town Centre Vitality Plan Draft Report

July 2022

CUSHMAN & WAKEFIELD

open optimised environments PART OF SLR

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Cheshire East Council

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01 Introduction

Context of the Study

Town Centres across the UK are facing unprecedented challenges. Changes in how we shop, in particular the growth in internet shopping, has significantly decreased footfall in Town Centres resulting in numerous store closures, leaving many centres struggling. Trends that have only been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Government has stated its commitment to helping high streets and Town Centres evolve and adapt to both the structural changes that are occurring in the retail market as well as to COVID-19. It has identified a number of measures to support Town Centres at this challenging time including the Future High Streets Fund, a High Streets Task Force, changes to the planning system and direct support to local authorities and local businesses. Alongside these national measures the government has stressed the need for strong local leadership in supporting Town Centres.

Town Centre Vitality Plans

Cheshire East Council (CEC) is committed to supporting the vitality and viability of all Town Centres within the borough. Whilst acknowledging that in areas of low deprivation, there may be limited opportunity to bid for centralised funding, when funding opportunities do become available, there is generally a need to have clear proposals already agreed before bids can be submitted.

It is also recognised that there are often initiatives which can be taken to support the vitality and viability of local centres which do not require significant capital funding, but rather require the support of local volunteers and/or businesses.

In addition, the reports could be used to support discussions regarding the allocation of S106 monies resulting from development within and in the vicinity of the local centres.

With an almost overwhelming array of options and opinions on what is the best way to support Town Centre vitality and viability, CEC has commissioned Cushman & Wakefield (regeneration and property advisors), supported by Optimised Environments (urban designers) and Mott Macdonald (transport planners), to work with the Town Council's and their stakeholders to produce bespoke Town Centre Vitality Plans (TCVP) for the nine Key Service Centres (KSC):

The 9 Key Service Centres which form part of this study

Aims and Objectives

The TCVP provides a sense of direction and identify initiatives to support the nine key service centres to better fulfil their potential recognising that each centre is distinct, with its own unique opportunities and specific challenges and local groups/stakeholders. The unique characteristics of each centre will be identified along with tailored solutions for each.

They

- **Are bespoke in nature, based on a thorough analysis of individual circumstances affecting the health of each Town Centre, local stakeholder views and any local specific policy considerations.**
- **Are cross functional and holistic, and recommend a practical, realistic set of priority actions for supporting the vitality and viability of each Town Centre.**
- **Are informed and tested by existing relevant national and local public policy and strategies, local stakeholder views, relevant research and a thorough understanding of commercial markets and spatial considerations.**
- **Identify a set of recommended clear priority physical and other (e.g. marketing) interventions/actions to support the vitality and viability of each Town Centre both in recovery from COVID-19 impacts and beyond to enhancement.**
- **Recommend deliverable actions including who should be involved in delivering of each action identified, to enable Town Councils, community groups, occupiers, property owners etc., to all work towards a common vision.**
- **Take account of proposals developed/being developed by Town Councils and develop such plans further.**

Responding to the Impacts of COVID

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic hit, high streets and Town Centres were having to respond to changing consumer demands driven in part by technological changes. Many recognised the increasing importance of the consumer experience - an attractive place to dwell, shop, see friends, to eat out and be entertained. COVID-19 has led to an acceleration of changes to the reasons people visit and use local centres.

COVID-19 has not and will not be universally negative for all local centres. The requirement to stay local has supported residents to use their local facilities and where the local offer aligns with the demands of residents, local businesses have benefited. The need to work from home has also resulted in an re-evaluation of where we work going forward and it is anticipated that there has been a fundamental shift, for some, in the balance between the amount of time we spend in an office and the amount of time we work from home.

It will be some time before a clear picture emerges of the impact of new forms of working (a hybrid between office and home) have on our high streets in the longer-term. The impact will be felt differently from place to place depending on the local economy's dependency on particular sectors. It is likely that those centres that perform best going forward will be those able to reconnect with their communities and use them to meet local needs including access to housing, culture, leisure, health etc.

The Town Centre Vitality Plans have been prepared post the outbreak of COVID-19. The impact of COVID-19 on each of the centres has been different and will vary as we emerge from it. The bespoke Vitality Plans draw out the specific challenges and opportunities as a result of COVID-19 and provide an action plan to support recovery and future success.

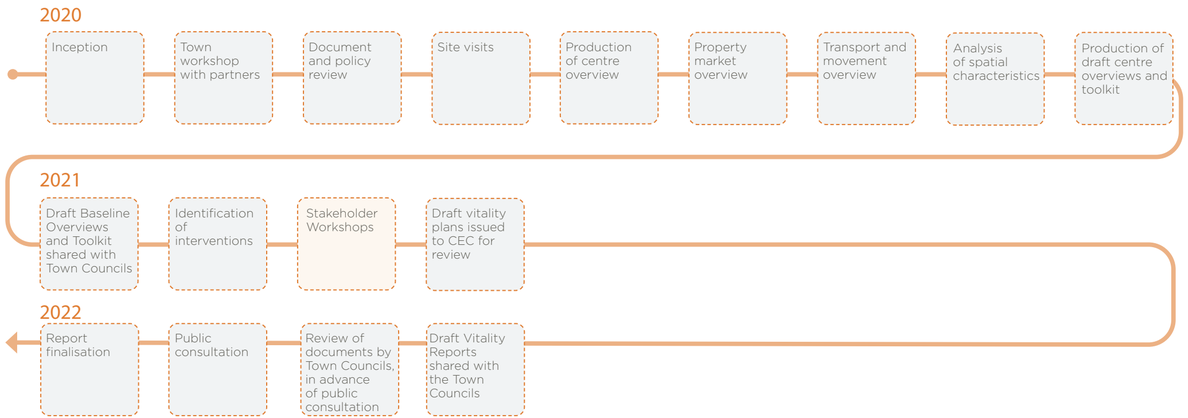
Vitality Plan and Toolkit

The Vitality Report comprises of two sections:

- Baseline – which was undertaken in 2020 and describes the Centre in terms of its offer and key characteristics. It brings together evidence and opinion in respect of the buildings, green and open spaces, access and its residents and businesses
- Action Plan – has been prepared in collaboration with the Town Council and its Partners and identifies actions which seek to support the established Vision and Objectives for the Centre responding to its challenges and opportunities. It sets out a series of actions, identifying a small number of priorities for intervention which will have the greatest impact on improving the vitality of the Centre

The Action Plan should be read in conjunction with the Toolkit. The Toolkit presents exemplar projects from other centres (including from within Cheshire East) nationally and internationally to assist key stakeholders to determine a set of actions to support their centres to thrive.

The preparation of the Vitality Plans has involved the following stages:



Baseline

Note:
The Baseline analysis was undertaken in 2020. The information in the Baseline was correct and the sources were the most update at that time. It is recognised that in some cases more up to date information is available. Whilst it is not possible to keep updating all the evidence where a significant change has happened, it has been noted. It should also be noted that Census 2011 data is provided for some indicators. Whilst the 2021 Census has just been completed, a release of this data will not be made available until March 2023 therefore making the 2011 Census the most recent consistent data source across the 9 centres for some key indicators.

02 Introduction to Congleton

Congleton's Location within Cheshire East

Congleton is located in south east Cheshire at the foothills of the Pennines. The town is surrounded by spectacular countryside, yet is just ten minutes' drive from the M6 motorway. It sits roughly in the middle of Crewe, Stoke and Macclesfield, each are within 10 miles from the Town Centre. Congleton Railway Station is located around a 20-minute walk east of the Town Centre and provides an hourly service to Manchester and Stoke-on-Trent.

The centre has a rich history which can be seen in a number of its attractive building including the Town Hall, a number of historic pubs and Little Street. These add to the experience of visiting the town. It is affectionately known as Beartown.

With over 200 units Congleton is one of the larger towns in Cheshire East. The Town Centre extends over half a mile from Mill Street to Lawton Street. It accommodates a good mix of independents and some national brands including Morrisons, Gregg's, Boots and Holland & Barrett. This retail provision is supplemented by a retail market on Princess Street and 'The Makers Market'. The latter is a monthly food and craft market on Bridge Street which attracts a wide catchment of visitors.

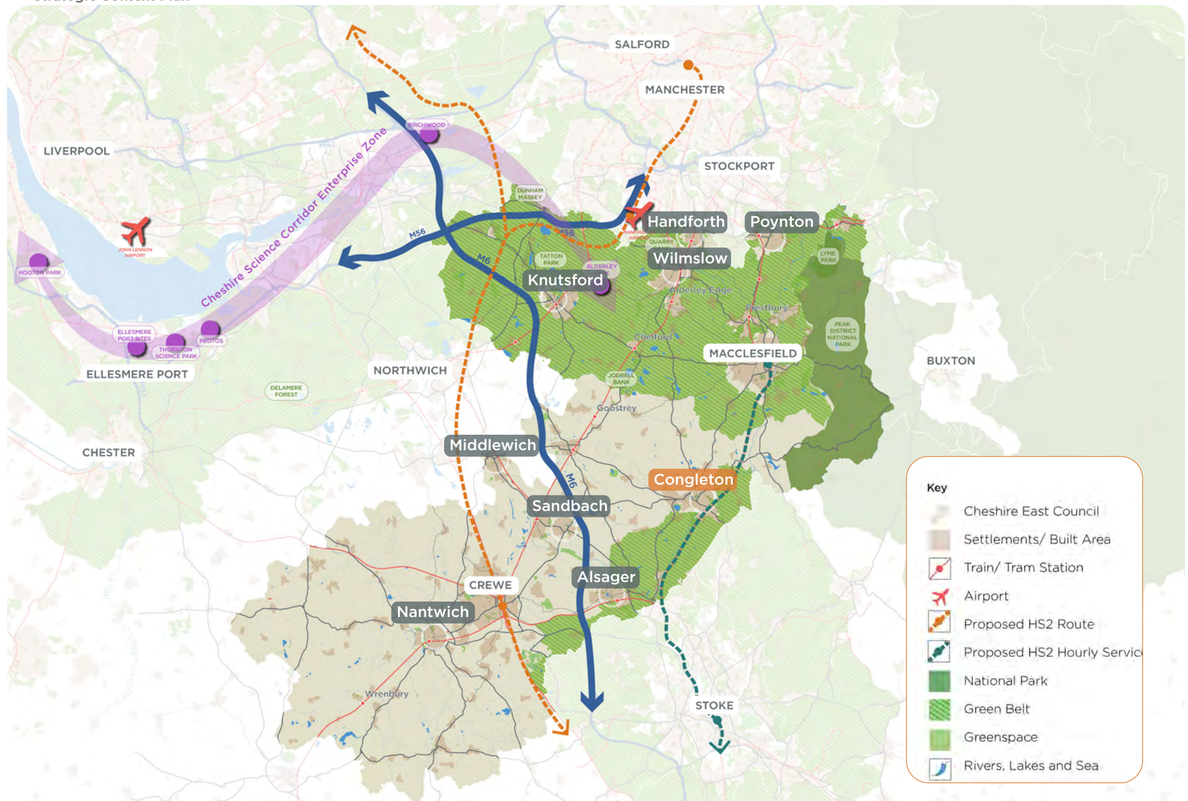
Congleton has reasonable evening/night-time economy, with a number of bars, restaurants and pubs concentrated on Swan Bank, High Street/ Lawton Street and West Street. It also offers a range of local facilities and amenities including the Town Hall, Library Complex, Community Centre, Advice Centre, Council Office, as well as health facilities and places of worship. The town also provides a range of sporting, leisure and cultural opportunities including the Daneside Theatre and Congleton Museum.

The towns historic buildings and street create an attractive character encouraging visitors to explore the centre. Recent investment (£1m) in the centre's public realm has enhanced the experience along Swan Bank, Duke Street, Market Street, Victoria Street and Bridge Street. However, environmental quality in other parts of the town detract from the visitor experience in particular Market Street and the bus station. The vacancies on Mill Street contribute poorly to the environmental quality of the Town Centre. Mountbatten Way also acts as a barrier for movement into the Town Centre by foot from the north.

The centre also accommodates a range of offices including the Congleton Business Centre housed in a converted mill offering serviced offices space and supporting services. Wider employment opportunities are offered in Congleton Business Park, Eaton Bank Industrial Estate and John Bradshaw Court.

These assets, along with good schools, means that Congleton is a desirable place to live. Its current population is just over 25,000. The existing residential stock is dominated by detached and semi-detached home (over 70%) which means that access to smaller homes is limited. It is however, a relatively affordable location compared to many parts of Cheshire East. National house-builders are active on a number of sites which will support the future vitality of the centre.

Strategic Context Plan



02 Introduction to Congleton cont.

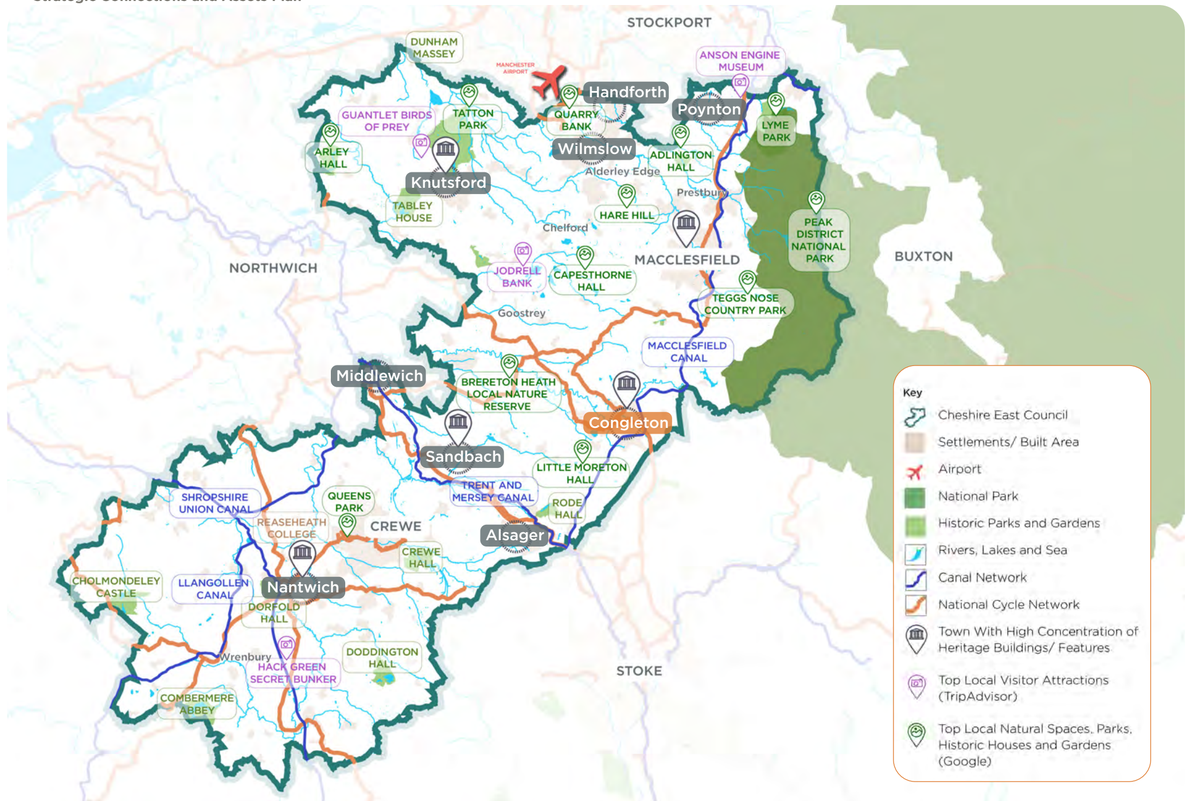
As identified in the Strategic Connections and Assets Plan, in addition to local green and blue assets, the town is surrounded by attractive countryside and a number of visitor attractions including: Little Moreton Hall, Jodrell Bank, Astbury Mere, Glebe Farm.

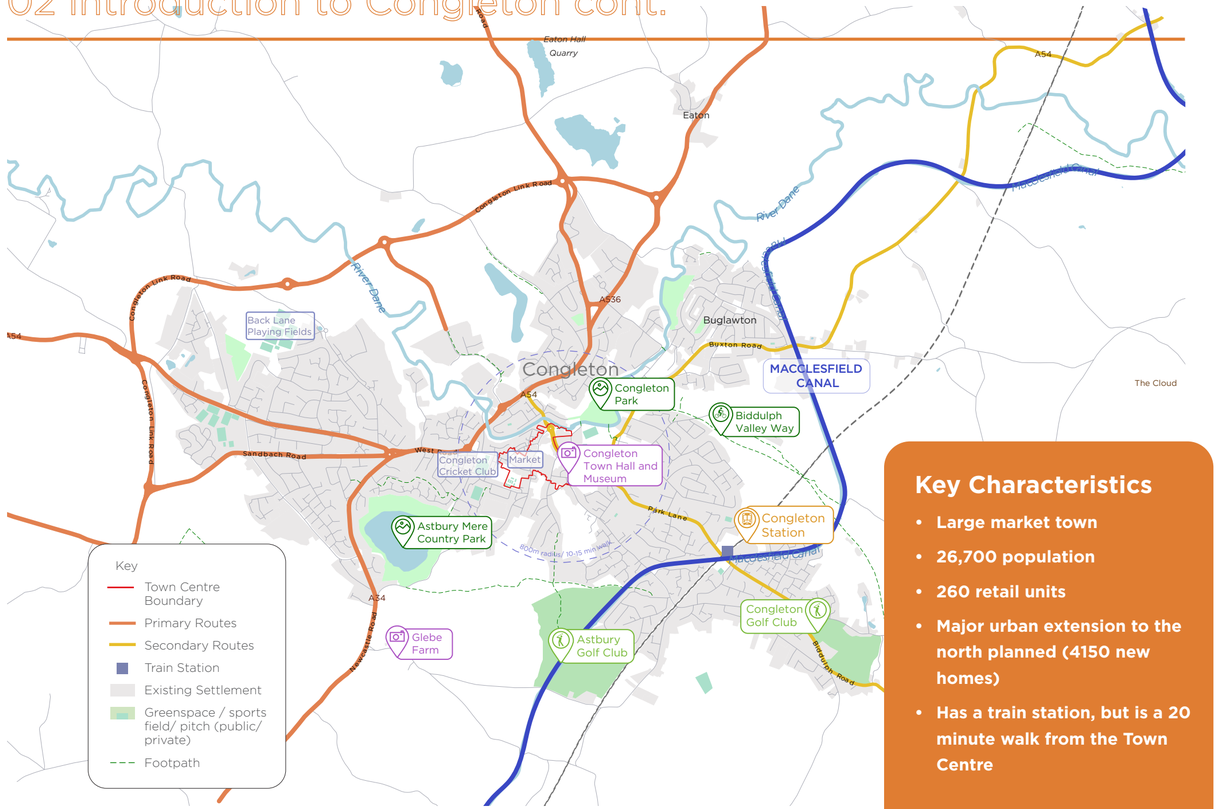
The River Dane runs to the north of the Town and through the attractive Congleton Park, a major asset for the town which accommodates a wide range of events throughout the year including concerts. Its paddling pool has entertained generations of children since the 1930s. Macclesfield Canal also offers further waterside opportunities.

Congleton also benefits from a wealth of voluntary organisations and groups (over 150) who are active in shaping the town, keeping it attractive and supporting it and its residents and businesses to thrive. The Congleton Town Council website offers an excellent platform for residents and visitors to find out more about the town and what is on offer including the extensive programme of events and festivals.

Congleton has been identified by CEC as having the potential to make a significant contribution towards the economic growth of Cheshire East and its future prosperity. It is proposed that land to the north of the Town Centre will accommodate over 4,000 new homes and 24 ha of employment land. Proposals for how this will be accommodated are set out in the North Congleton Masterplan. The ability to deliver this employment and residential development requires the delivery of the Congleton Link Road (connecting A534 to A536) which opened in April 2021.

Strategic Connections and Assets Plan





Key Characteristics

- **Large market town**
- **26,700 population**
- **260 retail units**
- **Major urban extension to the north planned (4150 new homes)**
- **Has a train station, but is a 20 minute walk from the Town Centre**

Congleton Neighbourhood Plan Vision and Objectives

The draft Neighbourhood Plan identified the following vision for the Town:

Vision

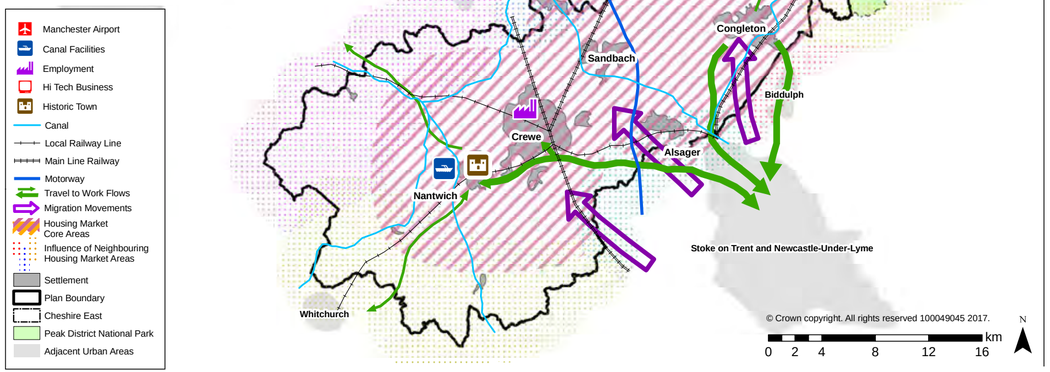
"My Congleton will thrive as a distinctive town that offers a comprehensive range of homes, shops, jobs, services and facilities supported by the required infrastructure to cater for the needs of all our residents. The special and unique character of Congleton, including its heritage assets and the surrounding countryside, will be protected, enhanced and promoted to make the town an attractive place in which to live, work and visit."

Objectives

- To meet the objectively assessed local **housing** needs of Congleton especially the needs of the existing and future residents of the town, particularly the aging population, to create a vibrant and inclusive local community
- To **improve** the attractiveness and vibrancy of the **Town Centre**
- To secure the future prosperity of Congleton it is important to retain and attract a variety of **new employment opportunities** within the town to meet local needs and to support the local economy
- To develop an integrated **sustainable transport** framework within the town improving walking and cycling routes between everyday facilities such as shops, services, open spaces and the surrounding countryside
- The long-term objective for Congleton is to have a range of **good quality community, leisure, health and social facilities** available and accessible to everyone who lives in the town
- The object of the Environmental and Sustainability policies is to **preserve our green spaces**, enhance our environment and implement where practical renewable energy
- To deliver **high quality, distinct and safe places** which respect the Town's heritage and character

Cheshire East Local Plan

The plan opposite identifies the functional relationship that Congleton has with other centres through connectivity and proximity within and out with Cheshire East. It highlights the centre's location in the central southern part of the Borough close to the border with Staffordshire east of the M6.

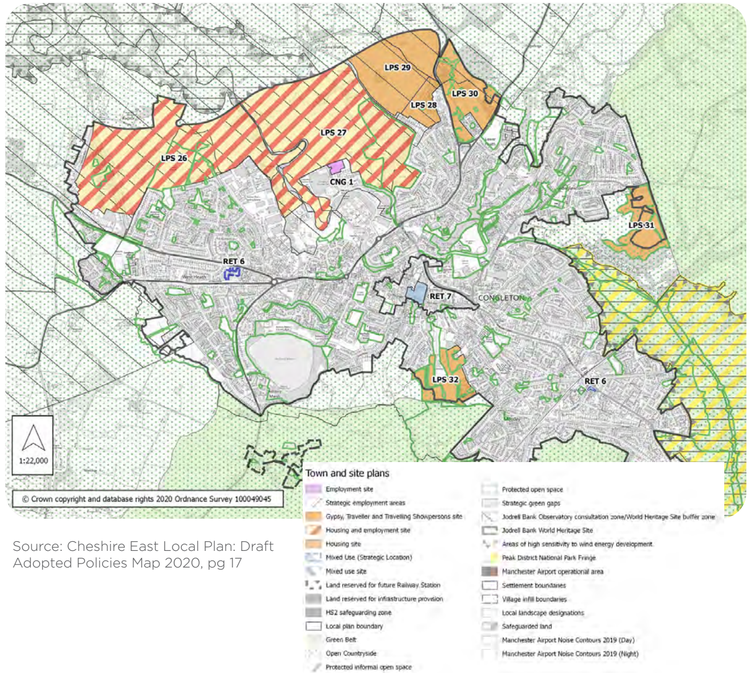


Source: Cheshire East Local Plan: Strategy 2010-2030 2017, Functional Diagram, pg 22

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

The Cheshire East Local Plan Strategy was adopted in 2017 setting strategic development sites around the borough. The SADPD will form the second part of the Local Plan, supporting the policies and proposals in the LPS by providing additional non-strategic policy detail and allocating additional sites to assist in meeting the overall development requirements set out in the LPS. The plan opposite identifies both Local Plan Strategy sites in and around Congleton and draft allocations in the SADPD.

- LPS 32 'North of Lamberts Lane' will see the delivery of around 225 new homes with a pedestrian and cycle link to the Town Centre.
- LPS 26 'Back Lane, Radnor Park' will provide around 750 new homes and 7 hectares of employment land and 1 hectare of commercial or employment development
- LPS 27 ' Congleton Business Park Extension' is allocated for delivery of around 625 new homes and 13 hectares of land for commercial and employment uses. It needs to be developed in line with the North Congleton Masterplan and provide pedestrian and cycle links set in green infrastructure to the Town Centre



Source: Cheshire East Local Plan: Draft Adopted Policies Map 2020, pg 17

- RET 7 'Supporting the vitality of town and retail centres' which identifies Town Centre locations for main Town Centre uses to support their long term vitality and viability, in line with LPS Policy EG 5 'Promoting a Town Centre first approach to retail and commerce'
- Aligned to the M6 Growth Corridor Strategy the LPS plans for substantial expansion in employment and housing, much of which will be developed adjacent to the new Congleton Link Road connecting the A534 Sandbach Road to A536 Macclesfield Road and providing a new strategic link to support development and connectivity. The LPs sets out that Congleton is expected to accommodate 24 hectares of employment land and 4,150 new homes during the period covered by the LPS.

Congleton is identified in the LPS as a key service centre.

Revised Publication Draft Site Allocations and Development Policies Document 2020 (SADPD)

The SADPD will form the second part of the Local Plan, supporting the policies and proposals in the LPS by providing additional non-strategic policy detail and allocating additional sites to assist in meeting the overall development requirements set out in the LPS.

The revised publication draft SADPD identifies a boundary for the Town Centre and the extent of the Primary Shopping Area as set out in the Draft Adopted Policies Map, setting out planning policies which seek to protect the vitality and viability of the Town Centre through the appropriate management of new development.

West Heath Shopping Centre is also defined in the SADPD as a Local urban centre.

Congleton Plans & Strategies

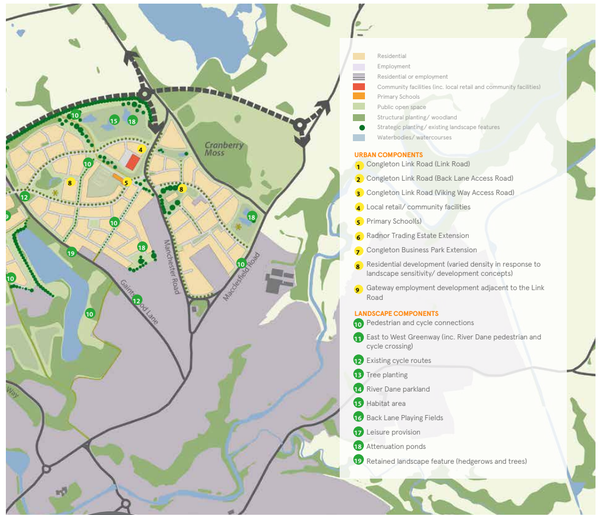
Congleton Town Centre Plan (TCP), March 2008

In March 2008 the Congleton Partnership - a group comprising of representatives from Congleton Town Council, Congleton Borough Council, South East Cheshire Enterprise (SECE), businesses and community groups prepared the Congleton Town Centre Plan (TCP) to outline a vision, objectives and conceptual proposals for the Town Centre.

It was adopted by Congleton Borough Council as informal planning guidance in July 2008 and it was anticipated that the TCP would be taken forward by Congleton Borough Council as a statutory Area Action Plan (AAP).

However, as a consequence of Local Government Re-organisation and changes to regulations for the preparation of Local Development Documents it did not progress as an AAP. The TCP Delivery Strategy was therefore prepared to set out a programme for the delivery of the TCP.

Source: North Congleton Masterplan 2015, Illustrative Masterplan, pg 59-60



Town Centre

03 Policy Context cont.

Congleton Draft Neighbourhood Plan, 2017

Like a number of other areas in Cheshire East, Congleton set out to prepare a Neighbourhood Plan in 2014, consultation was undertaken in 2017. The Neighbourhood Plan was submitted to the examiner. A series of queries were raised by the independent examiner, the plan was withdrawn from examination and was not taken to a Referendum vote.

Key Themes identified in the draft Neighbourhood Plan (2017) included the following:

Stimulating Employment:

- Supporting existing businesses and provide opportunities for new employment to securing a sustainable future for Congleton
- Working with local schools and businesses to improve an appropriate skill base in the town

Providing For An Ageing Population:

- Encourage the provision of specialised accommodation, health care and leisure facilities for the ageing population of Congleton

Improving Traffic Flow:

- Improving movement around and through the town, including walking and cycling
- Improving the air quality of specific areas of the town

Regenerating The Town Centre:

- To develop an attractive, welcoming, prosperous and dynamic Town Centre with a broad retail offer of quality shops and businesses
- To create a place where people will wish to visit, work, live and shop and experience our heritage and be entertained during daytime and evening
- Develop and expand the Key Service Centre role of the town

Ensuring The Right Housing Supply:

- To make sure that housing development satisfies the need of both existing and future generations
- Ensure that development provides high quality buildings, streets and spaces that reflects the established character of the town and its surrounding countryside

Protecting And Enhancing The Environment:

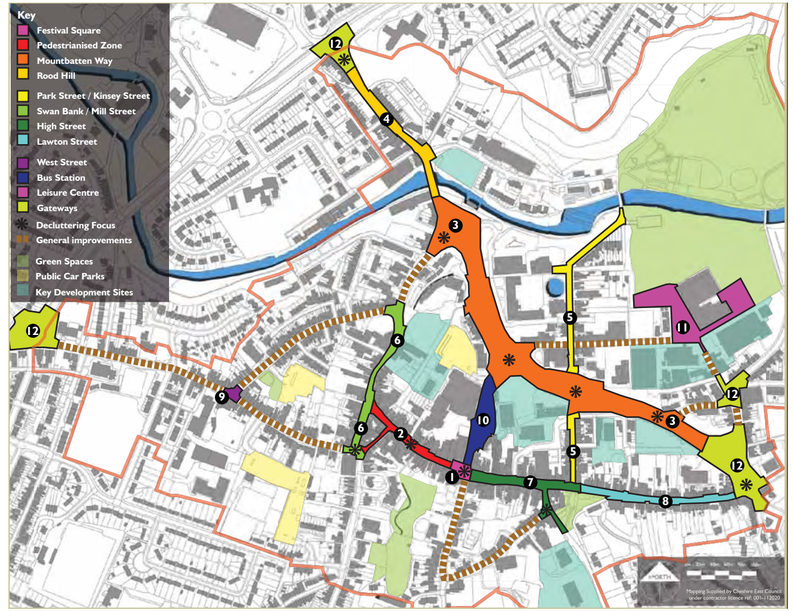
- Residents recognise Congleton as a special place regarding its green spaces and green infrastructure. All new developments should add or enhance significantly to the current stock
- Provide linked paths and cycleways to enable easy and safe access to the key facilities within the town
- Encourage the use of renewable energy technology and innovations

Health, Education And Wellbeing:

- Ensure that Congleton has health and leisure facilities that are suitable, appropriate, affordable and accessible for everyone in the community
- To ensure the educational facilities are state of the art and able to support the growing population of the town and the surrounding area
- The draft Plan also identified an series of policies to improve the attractiveness and vibrancy of the Town Centre. These covered location of retail, leisure and service development, car parking and design

A number of studies have been undertaken in the area to support investment in the Town Centre. These include:

- **Congleton Development Appraisal and Delivery Strategy** – was commissioned by CEC in 2011 to review the development potential of Congleton's publicly-owned assets and present a delivery strategy to guide the use of these assets to further the comprehensive regeneration of the Town Centre. The sites considered included CEC car parks, Congleton Leisure Centre, Congleton Library, Police Station, Market Square Office, Congleton Fire Station and GP Surgeries
- **Congleton Public Realm Strategy** – in 2011 CEC, Congleton Partnership and Congleton Town Council commissioned the preparation of a public realm strategy to provide guidance to ensure that an integrated strategy was in place to improve the quality of the environment.
- **North Congleton Masterplan** – in 2016 CEC commissioned the preparation of the North Congleton masterplan to set out the design objectives for the future development of land to the north of Congleton.
- **Cycling Masterplan for Congleton** - in 2019 the Town Council and other partners prepared a strategy to support improvements in cycling infrastructure inspired by the Tour of Britain in Cheshire in 2016 to make Congleton to the heart of cycling in Cheshire



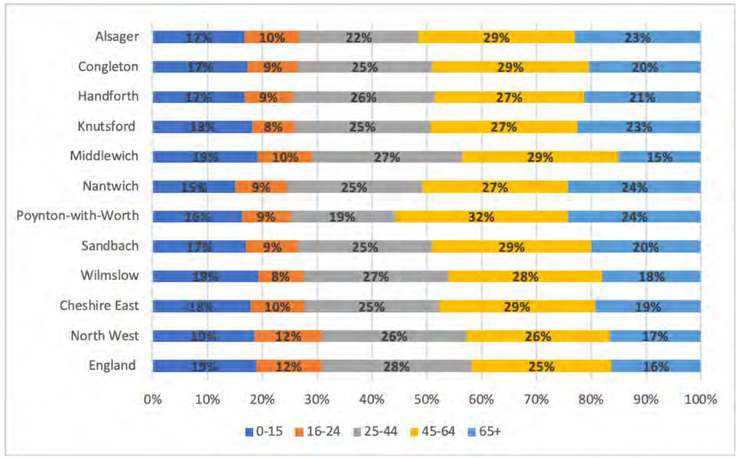
Source: Congleton Public Realm Strategy 2011, pg 74

04 Our People

Age

The 2011 Census data indicates that the Congleton parish area had a population of 26,482 residents representing 7.2% of Cheshire East's total population (370,127). Congleton's age profile is similar to that of Cheshire East. Congleton sits in line with the other Key Service Centres in terms of proportion of 25-44-year olds, the most economically active age group. Congleton also has one of the lowest average (mean) ages across the 9 KSC's at 43 years old however higher than the Cheshire East mean age and the wider geographies of the North West (40) and England (39).

It is anticipated that when the 2021 Census data is available it should show an increase in younger residents given the number of family homes being delivered in the wider area.



Age Structure.
Source: Census 2011, Office for National Statistics (ONS)
Note: Most recent consistent data available across the 9 centres

Ethnicity

Broken-down by ethnic group the Census 2011 (latest available) shows the resident population across the Cheshire East is predominantly white at 96.7% which is a higher proportion than the wider geographies of the North West (90.2%) and England (85.4%).The majority of the population in Congleton is also white (98.0%), and when compared to other KSC's Congleton has the second lowest proportion of Mixed/ Multiple Ethnic groups residents (0.6%/156 people), after Poynton.

Area	White	Mixed/ multiple ethnic groups	Asian/ Asian British	Black/ African/ Caribbean/ Black British	Other ethnic group
Alsager	97.6%	1.1%	1.0%	0.2%	0.1%
Congleton	**98.0%**	**0.6%**	**1.1%**	**0.2%**	**0.2%**
Handforth	93.1%	1.5%	3.9%	0.9%	0.7%
Knutsford	96.5%	1.2%	1.8%	0.3%	0.3%
Middlewich	98.5%	0.8%	0.6%	0.1%	0.1%
Nantwich	98.1%	0.7%	0.7%	0.3%	0.1%
Poynton-with-Worth	98.0%	0.5%	1.1%	0.1%	0.2%
Sandbach	98.1%	0.7%	0.9%	0.2%	0.2%
Wilmslow	92.6%	1.7%	4.4%	0.5%	0.7%
Cheshire East	96.7%	1.0%	1.6%	0.4%	0.2%
North West	90.2%	1.6%	6.2%	1.4%	0.6%
England	85.4%	2.3%	7.8%	3.5%	1.0%

Population by Ethnic Group
Source: Census 2011, Office for National Statistics (ONS)
Note: Most recent consistent data available across the 9 centres

Occupational Profile

At the time of the 2011 Census, Congleton had the lowest proportion of residents employed in the highest order occupation of 'managers, directors and senior officials' (11.7%) when compared to the other KSC's and overall Borough. However, a large proportion of Congleton residents were employed in occupations including 'professional occupations' (18.9%) and 'associate professional and technical occupations' (13.2%) – a higher rate than the regional and national benchmarks.

Conversely, 17.7% were engaged in manual or elementary occupations. This is higher than in all other KSC's besides Middlewich and Cheshire East (16.7 %). It is just below the North West (19.8%) and England rate (18.3%). The occupational structure of Congleton suggests a varied skilled workforce, which will in turn attract a variety of businesses (who want to attract highly skilled employees) to locate in the area.

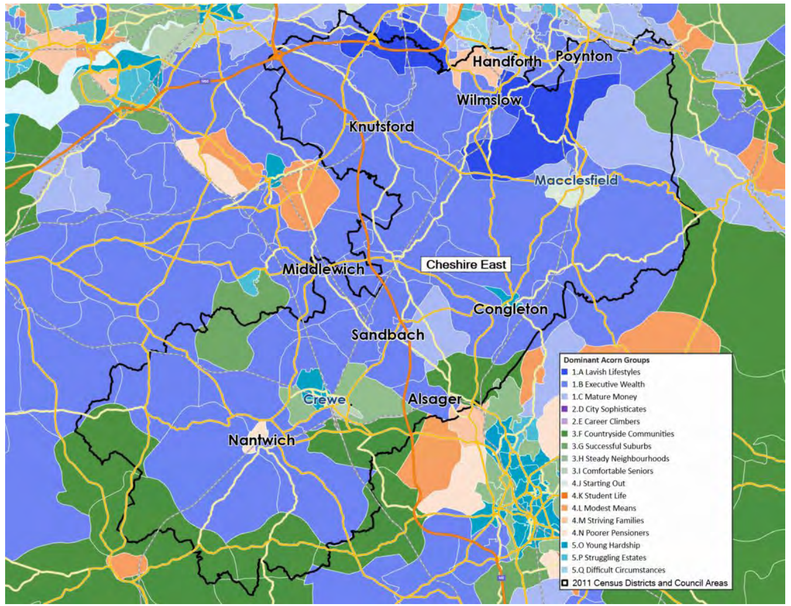
Built Up Area	Alsager	Congleton	Knutsford	Middlewich	Nantwich	Poynton	Sandbach	Wilmslow	Cheshire East	North West	England
Managers, directors and senior officials	12.8	11.7	17.2	11.9	14.3	14.9	12.6	18.3	13.6	9.9	10.9
Professional occupations	22.3	18.9	26.2	15.8	21.8	24.0	19.9	24.6	19.6	16.3	17.5
Associate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

Occupational Profile
Source: Census 2011
*Wilmslow BUA includes Alderly Edge and Handforth

Note: Most recent consistent data available across the 9 centres

Demographic Characterisation

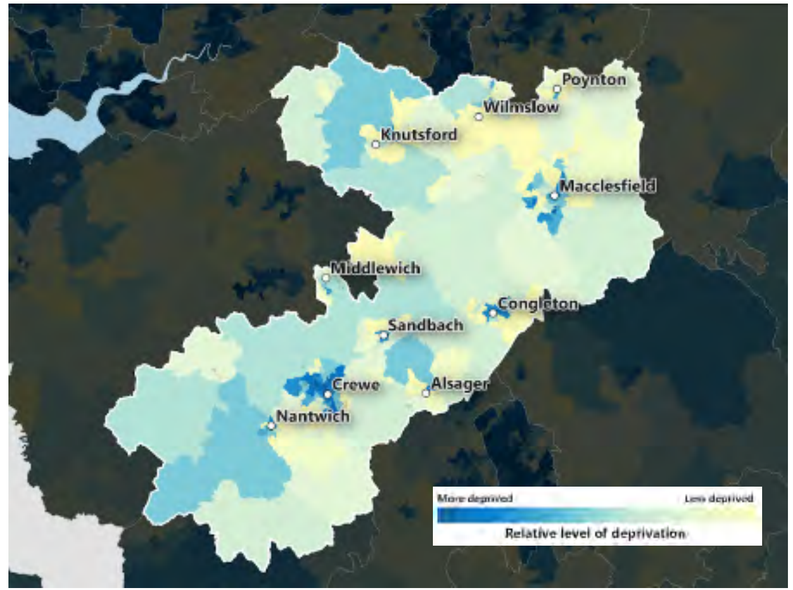
CACI Acorn classifications of local postcode geographies provide precise information and an in-depth understanding of different consumer types by analysing significant social factors and consumer behaviour. Demographic analysis of Cheshire East area demonstrates diverse segmentation groups across the area. The dominant Acorn groups in Congleton are Young Hardship (Young people, often single parents, with low levels of education/employment living in terraced properties) and Executive Wealth (Affluent professionals with families living in large homes).



CACI Acorn Classifications
Source: CACI

Index of Multiple Deprivation

The Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) 2019 illustrates the spatial distribution and pockets of deprivation relative to national averages. Cheshire East ranked 228th most deprived out of 317 local authorities in 2019 indicating relatively low levels of deprivation. Just 1.7% of the Borough is within the top 10% most deprived areas in England, with these most deprived areas being concentrated around Crewe and to a lesser extent, Macclesfield and Congleton. More than half of Congleton is within the 20% least deprived areas of deprivation nationally.



Source: MHCLG, IMD 2019

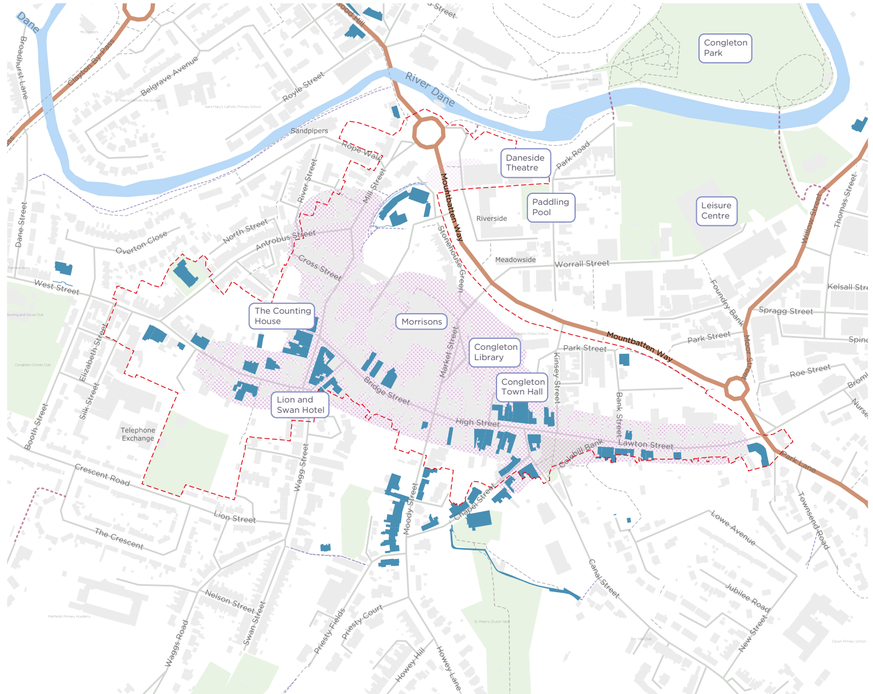
05 Our Place

Local Context

Congleton is one of the larger towns in the study, located close to the central southern boundary of Cheshire East.

It sits roughly in the middle of Crewe, Stoke and Macclesfield, each are within 10-15 miles from the Town Centre. Congleton train station is located 1 mile east of the Town Centre (which is approximately a 20 minute walk).

The Town Centre extends over half a mile from Mill Street to Lawton Street. Congleton Park lies to the north of the centre, reached within a 5 minute walk, but requires crossing over the Mountbatten Way dual carriageway.



Spatial Review

An analysis of the experiencial quality of the Town Centre is provided over the next few pages. The review is based on information gathered from a number of site visits to the Town Centre during October and September 2020 and is assessed by the key vitality indicators listed below:

- Quality of the place
- People
- Sense of Community
- Accessibility
- Gateways
- Wayfinding
- Attractions
- Amenities
- Sense of a Centre
- Character
- Public realm
- Green space
- Derelict Sites/ Vacant units
- Housing
- Covid measures

05 Our Place cont.

Visit information

	Visit 1	Visit 2
Date of visit:	Tuesday 15th September 2020	Wednesday 4th November 2020
Time of day:	12-1pm	4-5pm
Weather:	Sun	Sun
Mode of transport:	Car	Car
Covid Lockdown Status	Eased Lockdown Restrictions	Three Tier Restrictions in Place

Quality of the place

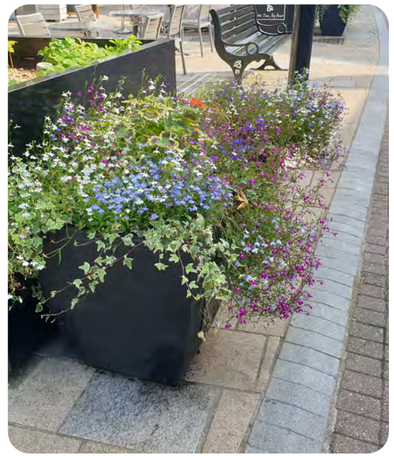
- Pleasant Town Centre with a variety of shops
- Historic buildings define the Town Centre character and are focused primarily along Lawton Street, Bridge Street and High Street
- Tight streets competing with traffic
- Grade II* Listed Town Hall
- Recent public realm works, focused along western extent of the Town Centre create uniformity, and enhance the shopping experience
- Number of sites in need of regeneration measures
- More recent development, particularly north of Bridge Street, has a lower quality character than that of the historic core

People

- Lots of people shopping and milling around
- Al fresco eating along Bridge Street which adds to sense of vitality
- People taking advantage of sun traps along Bridge Street with front of unit seating

Sense of Community

- Abundance of flowers and planters along the main shopping parade
- Noticeboards with information and events
- Congleton in Bloom flower boxes
- Sense of community pride and positive community spirit

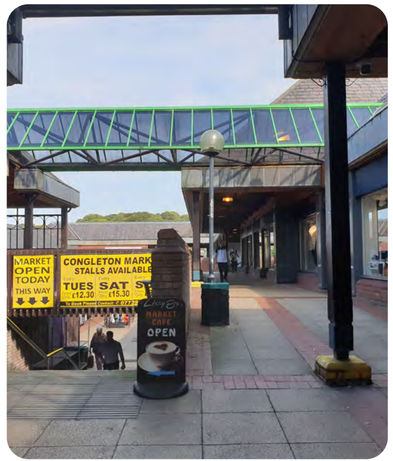


Accessibility

- Train station 20 minute walk from Town Centre
- Bus stops outside library well used, but gateway dominated by road infrastructure
- Mountbatten Way - wide road with high traffic speeds, which bypasses the centre and creates a significant barrier to pedestrian links from the Town Centre to Congleton Park and surrounding residential neighbourhoods
- Lots of parking available, some of which is proximate to the retail core of the town
- Uninviting/ dark routes through the Bridestone Shopping Centre down to the car park

Gateways

- Heavily car dominated along Mountbatten Way, reducing arrival experience into the Town Centre for pedestrians and cyclists
- Gateways along linear shopping street are good, with recent public realm works and upgrades helping to further define areas of interest/ gateways
- Tighter streets along Bridge St/ High St/ Lawton St create good street enclosure and shopping experience
- Change in levels and layout of market is uninviting, with dated appearance and difficult to navigate arrangement
- Arrival along Market Street is dominated by road infrastructure and poor quality/ blank building façades (Morrisons and former B&M Bargains)



05 Our Place cont.

Housing

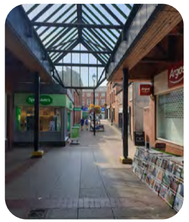
- Converted apartments and new build apartments
- Smaller housing at edge of the high street
- Signs of stalled regeneration sites
- Signs of new housing development on edge of centre

Wayfinding

- Good, clear signage
- New public realm works help unify centre
- Sign posts and totems styled to complement historic townscape areas. Consistent signage colouring (Black) across the town helps with legibility and reducing sense of obtrusive wayfinding clutter

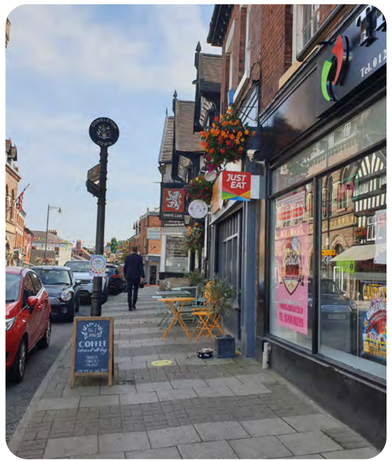
Attractions

- Grand Grade II* Listed Town Hall which is open for events. (Note that during the vaccination roll out programme, the Town Hall was used as a vaccination centre for Congleton).
- Congleton Museum - small museum with exhibitions on local history
- Exceptional park and gardens along river
- Covered Market - but dated, limited offer during visit
- Popular monthly market along Bridge Street (Makers Market) with an upmarket, bespoke and boutique offer
- Various pubs, restaurants, cafes and bars
- Popular paddling pool on the edge of Congleton Park
- Daneside Theatre
- Entrance to the Biddulph Valley Way long distance walk to the east of centre (20 minutes walk)



Amenities

- Morrisons supermarkets in Town Centre
- Converted mill/ business centre
- Variety of shops and amenities
- Library complex
- Police station



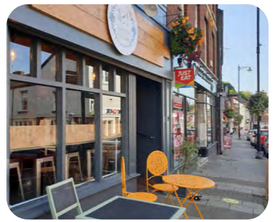
Sense of a Centre

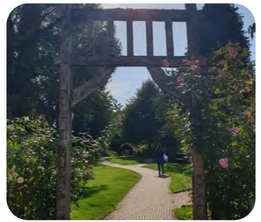
- Linear nature of the shopping parade, opens out slightly by the Town Hall and pedestrianised section along Bridge St, which creates a sense of centre
- Well kept and inviting side streets
- On approach from Market Street, Mill Street and Albert Place the sense of being in or arriving into the Town Centre is clear
- Further east along Lawton Street towards Mountbatten Way, the sense of Town Centre begins to erode, with streets becoming quieter and less activity on the ground floor
- The rising topography of High Street towards the Town Hall creates a sense of separation and detachment of Lawton Street shops and uses from the centre, High Street heading west

05 Our Place cont.

Character

- A lot of well kept, attractive historic buildings e.g. the timber framed Lion and Swan Inn (17th Century), Counting House (Late 19th Century) and Gothic style Town Hall (19th Century)
- Linear shopping parade, inviting to shoppers to continue along the street with good variety and character in the buildings that define the street
- Levels of topography create intrigue and enhance views
- Continuous shop frontage and detailing on buildings creates a well defined street and sequence of public spaces



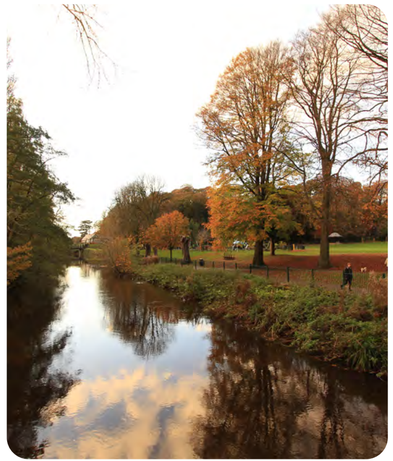


Public Realm

- Public realm scheme along Bridge Street picks up the red and orange hues of the buildings
- Real effort in planting and 'dressing' the centre

Green space

- River Dane a real asset - sizeable river bounded by greenery
- Congleton Park immaculate, holds Green Flag status and includes ornamental gardens, town wood, playground and bowling park
- Congleton community garden and memorial (works being carried out at time of visit), offer a pleasant place to dwell or walk through, off the main shopping parade



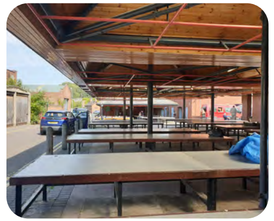
05 Our Place cont.

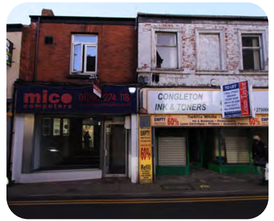
Derelict Sites

- Vacant shops seem more prolific than other centres, with sites at key gateways and along main shopping street highlighting voids - prominent site at Mill Street gateway, units in Capitol Walk Shopping Centre and vacant units dotted along Bridge Street and High Street
- Large car parks which were underutilised at time of visit
- Evidence of stalled schemes

Update 2022 - Since the site visit in 2020 a number of the units identified in these photos have been occupied including all of Capital Walk and a number of others including the former B&M and Aldi sites have been purchased

The unit circled below has now been occupied, as have some units in Capitol Walk.



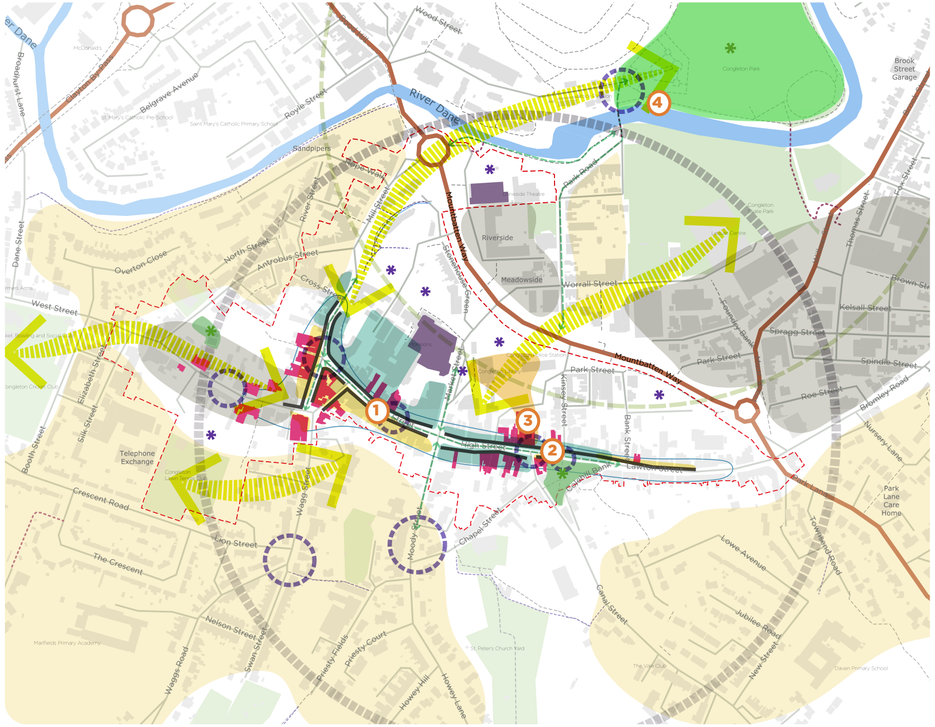


Positive Features

Positive spatial elements are identified on the plan:

Key

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



1 High quality public realm improvements have been carried out in the centre which provides an enhanced experience, particularly along the pedestrianised Bridge Street

2 Opportunities for spill out spaces as part of an attractive pedestrian environment that supports active ground floor uses

3 Large number of heritage buildings and tight urban grain create a high quality streetscape

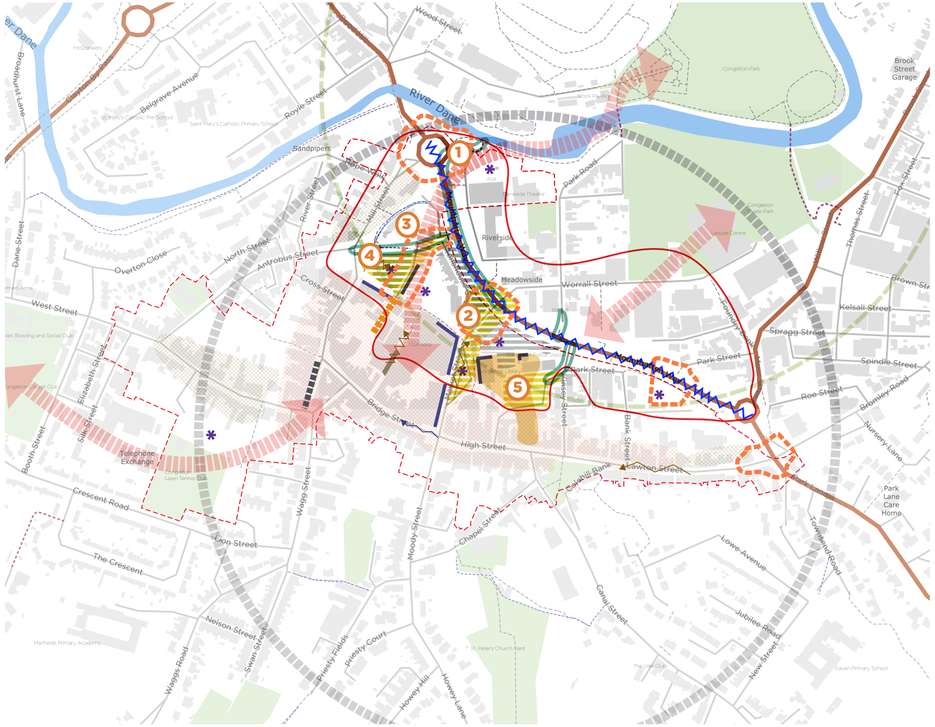
4 Congleton Park and River Dane in close proximity to the centre, provide a great asset for recreation

Negative Features

Negative spatial elements are identified on the plan:

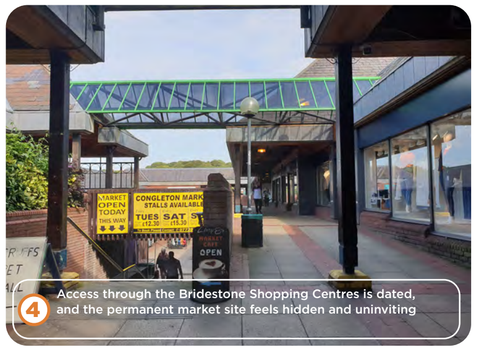
Key

- Local centre boundary
- Local street network
- Primary vehicular route
- Arrival destinations (car parks/ train stations/ bus stops)
- Streets and spaces dominated by car parking
- Streets with narrow footways / poor pedestrian provision
- Arrival gateways with a low quality arrival experience
- Areas of poor quality public realm (primarily low grade / aged materials, lack of street furniture and tree planting)
- Pedestrianised high street with dated public realm and aesthetic
- Low quality frontages
- Links with poor legibility to and from the town centre
- Local streets leading to cul-de-sacs or unclear where they connect to
- Extent of area which reads as part of the Town Centre
- Areas which feel beyond the extent of the Town Centre
- Key assets which feel disconnected from the Town Centre
- Congleton town hall 400m (5 minute walk)
- Congleton park 400m (5 minute walk)
- Land slope/ change in levels
- Areas of severance
- Area which has seen erosion of historic grain

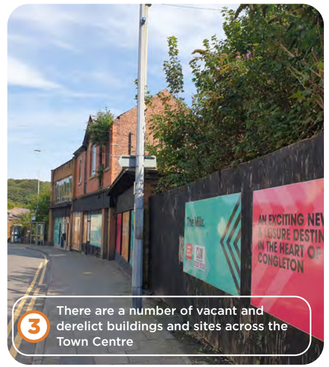


1 Mountbatten Way dual carriageway acts as a significant barrier to pedestrian movement into the Town Centre from the north and Congleton Park

2 Low quality frontages along Market Street promote a negative arrival into the centre. The bus stop and taxi rank dominate the space



4 Access through the Bridestone Shopping Centres is dated, and the permanent market site feels hidden and uninviting



3 There are a number of vacant and derelict buildings and sites across the Town Centre

5 Connections between the area behind town hall/ museum and Congleton library are a missed opportunity

Summary of Spatial Elements

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

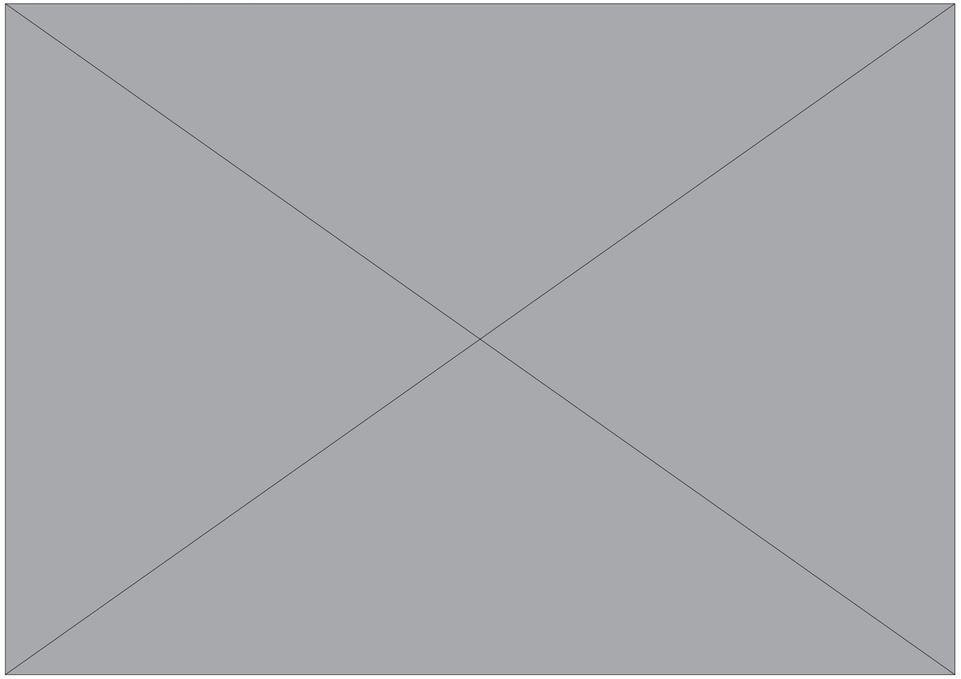
Public Realm	Gateways	Open Space	Heritage	Townscape Quality	Legibility
Positives					
• New public realm works at top of Bridge Street create a welcoming environment and enhance shopping offer, celebrate historic townscape and promote alfresco eating opportunities	• New public realm works greatly enhance east-west gateway into the Town Centre at Market Street/ Bridge Street/ High Street junction, and Mill Street/ Bridge Street junction • Approaches from the south and west also have some attractive qualities, namely the enclosed street character and attractive, formal buildings which define the routes into the centre	• Congleton Park is a large well kept park and gardens, located along the River Dane, 5 minutes walk of the Town Centre • Congleton Community Garden and memorial provides a pleasant area to the east of the shopping street	• Number of high quality heritage buildings and prestigious listed buildings. The centrepiece Grade II* listed Town Hall sits at the centre of the historic street • The Counting House Hotel and the Lion & Swan Hotel (recently refurbished) are both heritage buildings which sit at key gateways into the centre • Heritage buildings are well kept, including the Black and White timber Ye Old White Lion Pub, Ye Old King's Arms Pub and 28 Lawton Street (17th Century shophouse)	• Very prominent building line along shopping street (Bridge Street, High Street and Lawton Street), creates high quality space • Width of the shopping street which narrows and widens around the town hall enhances Cheshire town 'feel' • Variety of attractive, period historic buildings which are in use adds to the quality of the townscape along High Street and Bridge Street	• Linear nature of the main shopping steet itself makes it easy to navigate • Local topography helps draw you into and along local streets towards the Town Centre

Public Realm	Gateways	Open Space	Heritage	Townscape Quality	Legibility
Negatives					
• Pavements are mostly well kept and consistent, however new public realm works emphasises quality difference between the new and old public realm	• Mountbatten Way, which runs to the north of the main shopping street, severs the town from the residential neighbourhoods to the north and is an obstacle to pedestrian and cyclists travelling to and from Congleton Park. It also negatively impacts upon gateways from here into the Town Centre - spaces are car dominated • Blank Morrisons facade and then blank former B&M facade along Market Street also reduce quality of gateway here for those arriving from the bus stop, or the other across Mountbatten Way.	• Access from the Town Centre to Congleton Park is poor, with limited crossing points and a car dominated approach • There is a lack of functional open or civic space within the Town Centre, perhaps constrained by the historic street arrangement or cleared areas given over to car parking or large format building design	• Some heritage buildings vacant or at risk of vacancy, which could result in little or no maintenance • Moody Hall in poor condition • Bosson's Mill (which was a Grade II listed building) lost due to neglect	• Erosion of street frontage towards Mountbatten Way, add to car dominated feel along here • The townscape quality around the covered market is poor • The historic grain has been eroded between Mountbatten Way towards Bridge Street and High Street causing a shatter zone and areas of poor townscape quality	• Routes along Market Street, north of the Town Hall and around the covered market lack legibility and purpose • Wayfinding and ability to navigate towards the Town Centre from the north and east are governed by highway infrastructure meaning local streets do not form part of the approach to the centre

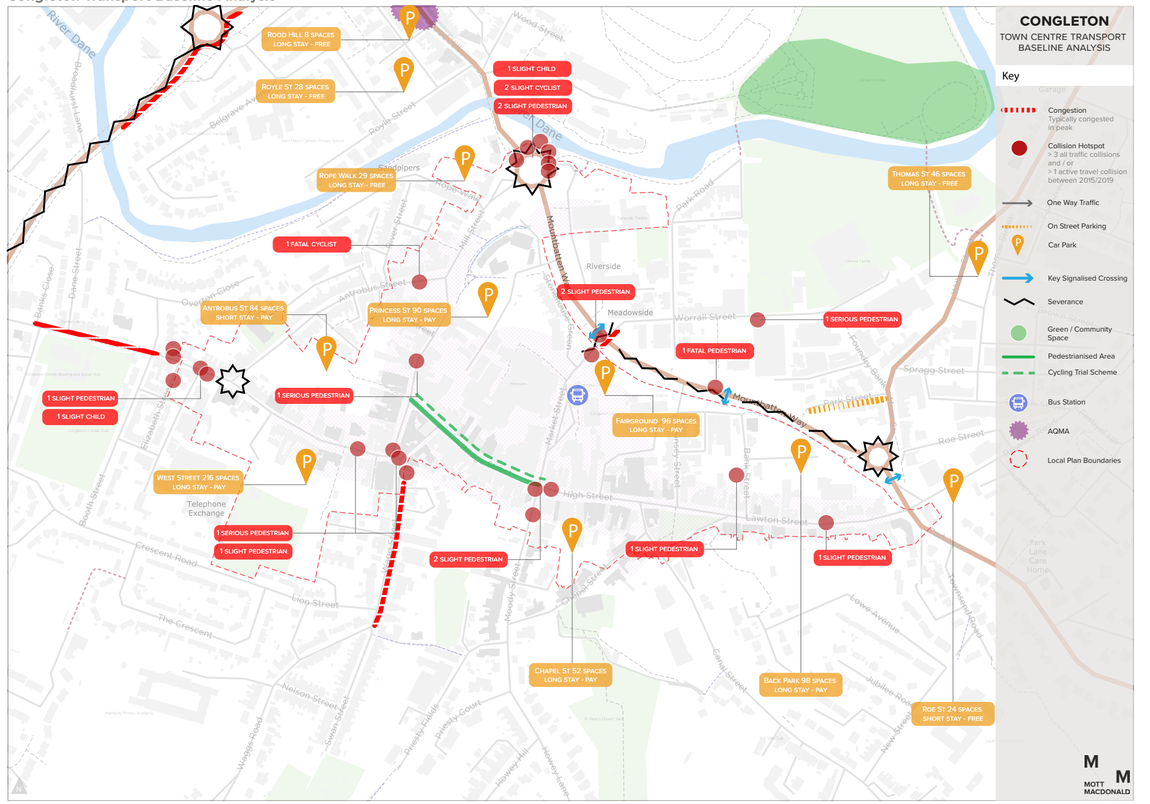
06 Connectivity and Accessibility

Congleton is bound by a number of key A-roads, including the A536, A534, A54 and A34 which offer a direct route to the nearby towns such as Macclesfield, Sandbach, Holmes Chapel, Stoke-on-Trent and towards the M6 motorway. Congleton Railway Station is located around a 20-minute walk from the Town Centre and provides an hourly service to Manchester and Stoke-on-Trent.

Congleton Planned Strategic Transport Schemes



Congleton Transport Baseline Analysis



Car Parking

Car parking within the centre of Congleton comprises of a mix of free and paid, long stay and short stay off-street car parks. Although there is a wide variety of parking in the Town Centre to suit different needs and lengths of stay, routes between car parks and the key areas of the Town Centre lack legibility. In particular, a lack of signage, poor wayfinding and the requirement for pedestrians to use narrow footways and cross roads freely using no formal crossing facilities.

The TCVPs consider the role of car parking in relation to the vibrancy and vitality of each town centre. However, any proposals to review or modernise car parking provision and management will be considered on a town by town basis as part of the Council's approach to travel demand management. Therefore the delivery of any car parking proposals is outside the scope of the TCVPs.

Town Centre	Car Park ID	Parking Spaces	Duration	Pricing
Congleton	Rood Hill Car Park	8	Long Stay	Free
	Royle St Car Park	28	Long Stay	Free
	Princess St Car Park	90	Long Stay	Pay
	Antrobus Car Park	84	Short Stay	Pay
	Fairground Car Park	96	Short Stay	Pay
	West St Car Park	216	Long Stay	Pay
	Chapel St Car Park	52	Long Stay	Pay
	Back Park Car Park	98	Long Stay	Pay
	Thomas St Car Park	46	Long Stay	Free
	Roe St Car Park	24	Short Stay	Free
	TOTAL	742		

Note: Information relates to CEC car parks. In addition Morrison's car park is free and short stay

Public Realm

The quality of public realm varies across the centre of Congleton with high-quality and well-maintained public realm provided within the pedestrian areas at Bridge Street and Mill Street. However, the quality of public realm in areas around West Street and Market Street is significantly lower.

Mountbatten Way is one of the key A roads providing access to the Town Centre. This route currently comprises a dual carriageway subject to high vehicle speeds. This road also currently cuts through the town and reduces the visibility of facilities and services from the surrounding highway network. There are significant opportunities to reconsider the role of this route and make better use of available space to significantly enhance the quality of public realm, provide better infrastructure for pedestrians and cyclists, enhance the visibility of the town and create a sense of arrival into the Town Centre. Gateway treatments can also be considered at key junctions such as the A54/ Mill Street junction creating more space and priority for pedestrians and cyclists and enhancing the safety of crossings into the Town Centre.

Road Safety

A number of junctions around the Town Centre of Congleton have been identified as collision hotspots reducing the safety of pedestrians and cyclists accessing retail and leisure facilities.

In some locations, such as the A54/ Mill Street junction, this creates a major barrier for pedestrian movements between the main area of the Town Centre and its residents to the north. Within the last 5 years, 5 collisions have occurred at this junction involving pedestrians, cyclists and a child - all resulting in slight injury(p49). Improved pedestrian crossing facilities should therefore be considered at this junction.

To further enhance the safety of road users, particularly vulnerable road users such as pedestrians and cyclists, improvements to existing or new crossing facilities should also be considered along High Street, Mountbatten Way and West Street.

Designed with the aim of reducing Town Centre congestion, the Congleton Link Road is now open, joining the A534 Sandbach Road with the A536 Macclesfield Road. This offers a major opportunity to reshape routes in the Town Centre. However, this scheme may present a less positive impact on Mountbatten Way from reduced traffic flows, and does not seem to significantly relieve traffic from the A34 route coming up from the south.

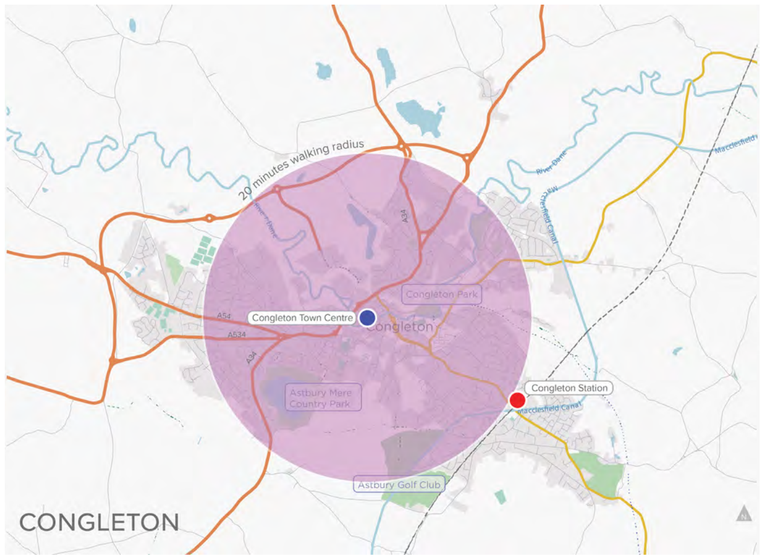
Active Travel

The main area of pedestrian movement within the Town Centre is along the pedestrianised area of Bridge Street. However, surrounding streets such as High Street, Lawton Street, Mill Street and Swan Bank are dominated by vehicles with narrow footway widths reducing the quality and safety of the environment. These streets may therefore benefit from a reduction or removal of through-traffic to allow repurposing of space.

Congleton Town Centres location in proximity to key attractions and green spaces such as Congleton Park provides a good opportunity to enhance levels of walking and cycling in the area. However, links to the park from the Town Centre are unclear particularly for visitors who may be unfamiliar with the area.

The AQMA's present across the centre of Congleton demonstrate the need to consider reducing the impact of vehicular travel in the area in order to improve air quality. Enhancing the provision of walking and cycling infrastructure across the town, giving more space and priority to pedestrians and cyclists over vehicles and increasing the ease and attractiveness of active modes should be central to proposals outlined within Congleton. This would help encourage access to, from and around the Town Centre by more sustainable modes.

Congleton 20-Minute Walk Isochrone



Public Transport

Congleton rail station is located around a 20-minute walk from the Town Centre and offers connectivity to Manchester Piccadilly and Stoke-on-Trent via one hourly service in each direction. On Sundays, services are reduced to six trains in each direction throughout the day. Bus services provided in the vicinity of the rail station on Park Lane offer 1 bus per hour between Congleton and Newcastle-Under-Lyme. This service provides a connection between the rail station and Town Centre however is extremely limited in terms of frequency and is therefore unlikely to offer a viable or attractive option.

Additional bus services are provided from Congleton Bus Station on Market Street offering connectivity to Macclesfield, Crewe, Mossley, Newcastle-Under-Lyme and Alsager however the frequency of the majority of these services is also limited to a maximum of 3 buses per hour. The bus station itself appears tired and has an oversized marshalling space.

Movement Trends

Unlike a number of other towns in the Cheshire East region, a large proportion of residents in Congleton (32%) travel less than 5km to work and active modes accounts for 13% of travel to work trips.

- **11% of people living in Congleton work within the Town Centre**
- **4% of residents travel 40km+ to work**
- **Public transport accounts for 3% of commuter trips**
- **One train per hour to Manchester and Stoke on Trent**
- **17% of households do not have access to a car, 31% have access to 2 or more vehicles**
- **72% of residents in Congleton in employment drive to work by car**
- **24 minute walk between Town Centre and railway station**
- **Active travel accounts for 13% of commuter trips**

Source: Census 2011, Office for National Statistics (ONS)
Most recent consistent data available across the 9 centres

06 Connectivity and Accessibility cont.

Cheshire East Council has approved Local Transport Development Plans (LTDP) for its principal towns, keys service centres and surrounding rural areas. The table opposite summarises the potential transport schemes included in the LTDP relating to the town centre at the point they went out to public consultation. Please note the majority of schemes are at concept stage, subject to feasibility work and must be viewed as potential schemes. Therefore the LTDP are live documents and this list of schemes is subject to change and will evolve as further work is undertaken.

In Congleton, the LTP focuses strongly on active travel interventions to improve conditions for those on foot and cycle – creating a joined-up active travel network through the town. The are also other strategic actions focused around implementing traffic calming measures to reduce through traffic on Waggs Road and Canal Road.

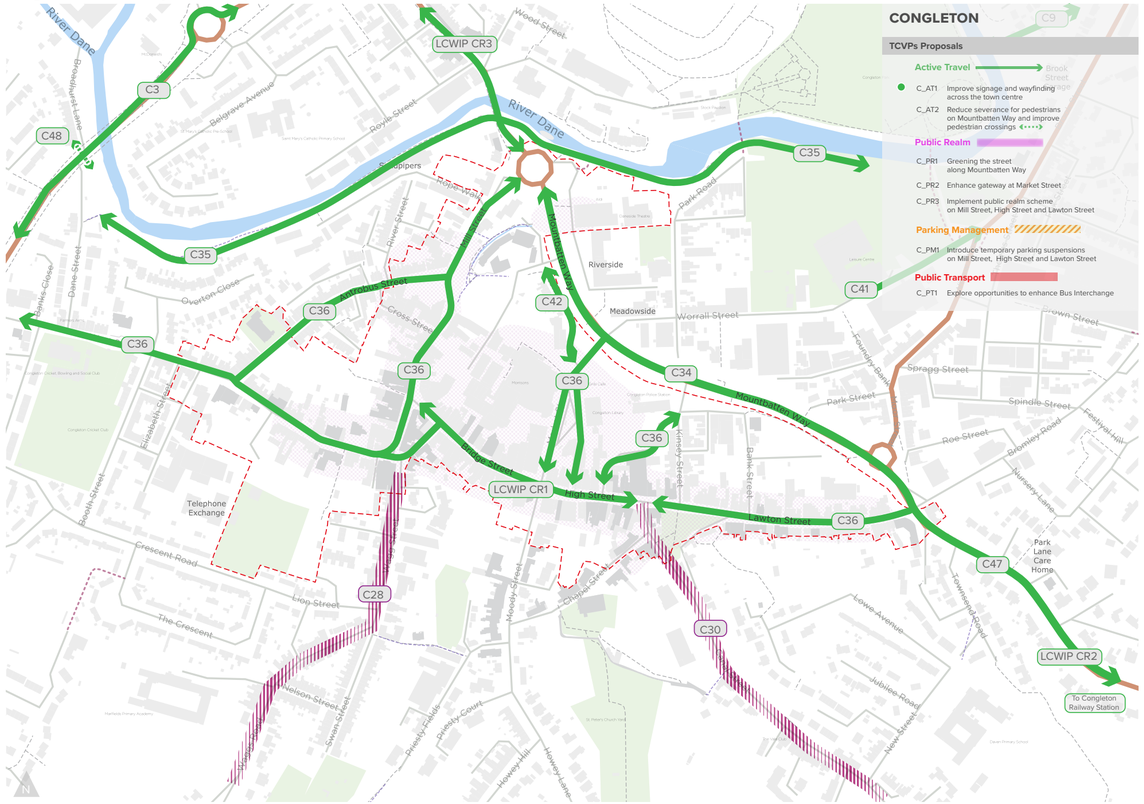
The table contains detail on the schemes set out in the LTDP.

Congleton LTP and LCWIP Schemes

Type	Ref	Scheme	Description	Costing[1]
Active Travel	C3	Improve walking and cycling route on the A54/A34	Introduce complementary measures on the A53/A34 Congleton Link Road to improve walking and cycling.	<£1m
	C9	Deliver a pedestrian and cycle bridge over the River Dane	Deliver a pedestrian and cycling bridge over the River Dane as part of the Astbury Place development connecting to Congleton Park.	£5m-£10m
	C34	Provide a cycle route along Mountbatten Way	Provision of a cycle route between Townsend Road and the Mill Street roundabout along Mountbatten Way	£1m-£5m
	C35	Provide a walking and cycling route alongside the River Dane	Introduce a walking and cycling route alongside the River Dane between Dane Street and Congleton Park.	£1m-£5m
	C36	Provide a joined-up walking and cycling network though the town centre	Create a joined up walking and cycling network through the town centre including improvements to Market Street, West Street, Antrobus Street, Mill Street, Lawton Street, Bridge Street, Little Street and Market Square.	£1m-£5m
	C41	Provide a walking and cycling route on Worrall Street alongside St Stephens Church	Introduce a walking and cycling route from Worrall Street to the footway / cycleway alongside St Stephens Church to improve access for pedestrians.	<£1m
	C42	Provide a cycle route on Stonehouse Green	Create a cycle route on Stonehouse Green, parallel to Mountbatten Way.	<£1m
	C47	Improve walking and cycling route to Congleton train station	Improve walking and cycling access to Congleton Railway Station via Park Lane, links to Sefton Avenue and improve cycling facilities at the station itself.	<£1m
	C48	Introduce pedestrian crossing on the A34 Clayton Bypass	Introduce pedestrian crossings at the A34 Clayton Bypass near the fire station roundabout and near Dane Street.	<£1m
	LCWIP-CR1	LCWIP West Heath to Congleton Town Centre	LCWIP route West Heath to Congleton Town Centre identified in Congleton LCWIP	£1m-£5m
	LCWIP-CR2	LCWIP Congleton Rail Station to Town Hall	LCWIP route Congleton Rail Station to Town Hall identified in Congleton LCWIP	£1m-£5m
	LCWIP-CR3	LCWIP Lower Heath to Congleton Town Centre	LCWIP route Lower Heath to Congleton Town Centre identified in Congleton LCWIP	£1m-£5m
Highway	C28	Traffic calming measures on Waggs Road	Implement traffic calming or traffic management measures on Waggs Road to reduce through traffic.	<£100k
	C30	Traffic calming measures on Canal Street and Canal Road	Canal Street and Canal Road traffic calming to reduce through traffic.	<£100k

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

Congleton Local Transport Development Plan Schemes



Retail and Leisure

Cheshire East Council recognises the importance of monitoring key information to assess and respond to issues in its centres and commission regular reviews of the retail and leisure market across the Borough. The latest partial update of the Retail Study Report (2020) generally paints a positive picture for Congleton in terms of performance since the last Report (2016).

Congleton is identified as one of the Key Service Centre's within Cheshire East, with its vitality and viability continuing to be varied. The general retail and service provision of the town has remained stable following a previous decline in the financial and business sector, with a strong occupation of independent retailers providing important services and facilities to the catchment population. The enhanced pedestrianised areas of the town also appear to be in good condition. However, with high vacancy rates and poor environmental quality, in particular on High Street and Mill Street, Congleton's Town Centre is showing some signs of decline and that the Town Centre is vulnerable.

Overall, the centre provides 242 units (Experian Goad Plan, September 2019) which are primarily located around High Street, Bridge Street and Lawton Street.

The convenience sector in Congleton is anchored by a Morrisons food store, and supported by other nationals such as Holland and Barrett, Gregg's Bakery and Boots along with a number of independent operators. The proportion of units in the centre sits just below the UK average (7% compared to UK average of 9%), as does the floorspace proportions (13% to UK average of 15%). The food store offering within the Town Centre also faces competition from out of centre retailing of Tesco and M&S on Barn Road.

The comparison goods offering in Congleton is strong with 69 units, representing 29% of all units in the Town Centre, exactly the same as the UK average. Floorspace proportions are slightly below the UK average (31% compared to UK average of 34%). Whilst 80% of units in the Town Centre are occupied by independent retailers, there remains a small number of national comparison retailers including Boots and WH Smith. Some national occupiers can also be found in out of centre locations such as Halfords.

Leisure provision in the Town Centre has remained fairly consistent during the period between the retail updates with a minor increase in the number of units to 46 from 43. The proportion of leisure service units and floorspace however still remains below the UK average. Whilst national operators Costa Coffee is found within the Town Centre, most leisure units are occupied by independent food and beverage operators located primarily on High Street/ Lawton Street and Swan Bank. A reasonable number of public houses can also be found in the Town Centre.

The retail provision within Congleton Town Centre is supplemented by a retail market on Princess Street and 'The Makers Market'. The latter is a monthly food and craft market on Bridge Street which can attract a wider catchment of visitors outside of just local residents to visit the town.

In 2019 the Retail Study recorded 39 vacant units in Congleton's Town Centre, a decrease from 42 in 2016. This proportion is 4% more than the national average of 12%, whilst a vacant floorspace amount of 4,370 sqm is again also above the UK average of 11%, but by just 1%. The Capitol Walk Shopping Centre located in prime location on High Street has recently changed hands and efforts are being made to support reoccupation.

At this stage, as with all other locations it is unclear what the impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic will be on Congleton's retail and leisure occupiers. Although it would be expected that spend will have been, in part, compensated for by more people working from home and using local facilities.

Whilst containing 80% independent occupiers, Congleton also has a good national brand presence with a strength of two major food stores located in the Town Centre. This offering can appeal to the young hardship and affluent catchment population of Congleton. The volume of vacant units, and specifically within Capital Walk Shopping Centre, may suggest a lack of interest or an opportunity for new businesses/ mixed uses to be located in the Town Centre.

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

	Units				Floorspace		
	No.	%	UK Average (%)		Sq.m	%	UK Average (%)
Convenience	16	7	9		4,690	13	15
Comparison	69	29	29		10,960	31	34
Retail Service	49	20	15		4,320	12	7
Leisure Service	46	19	25		7,710	22	26
Financial and Business Service	23	10	10		2,920	8	7
Vacant	39	16	12		4,370	12	11
Total	**242**	**100**	**100**		**34,970**	**100**	**100**

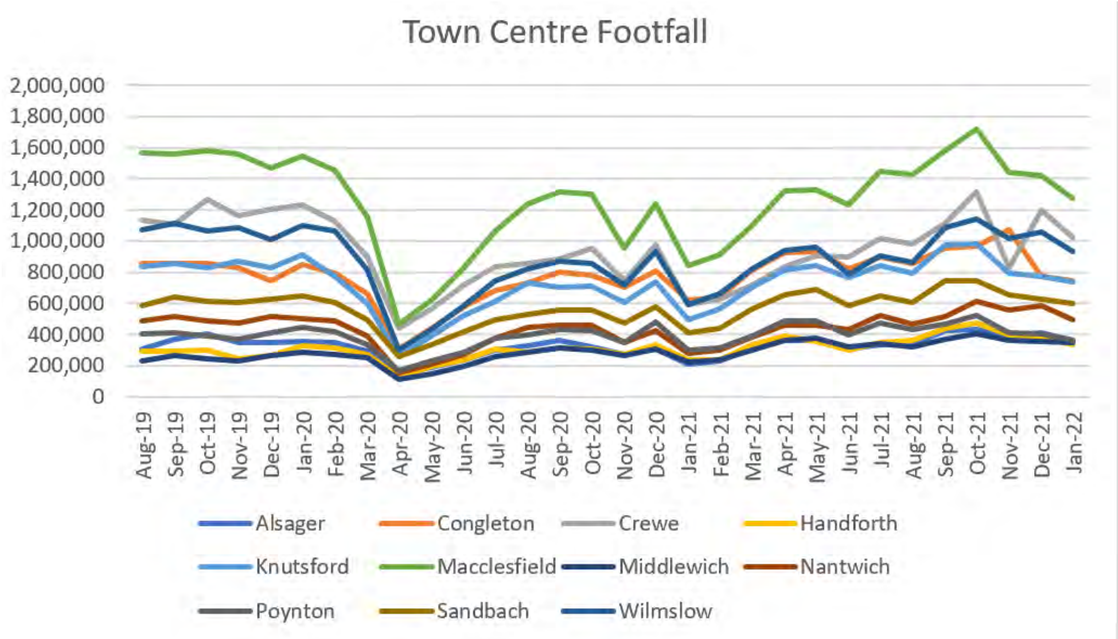
Diversity of Uses in Congleton Town Centre in September 2019
Source: Experian GOAD Survey, September 2019. UK Average from the Experian GOAD Category Report (February 2020)
Note financial and business space only relates to space on the ground floor in the retail core. Further details are provided on employment on p59.

Footfall

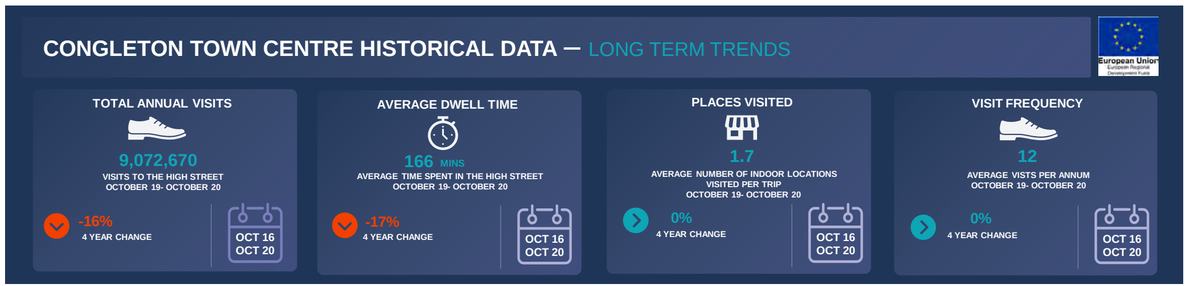
In recognition of the important relationship between footfall and vitality, CEC is now commissioning regular monitoring of footfall across the centres. The following graph shows the footfall in all the key centres between August 2019 and December 2020. It starkly shows the impact of Covid on footfall,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

Congleton was the fourth most visited centre in Cheshire East in August 2019 and retained this position alongside Knutsford throughout the period to December 2020 – with in the region of 850,000 visitors per month at its peak. Positively, whilst the national average benchmark saw monthly footfall figures fall by 40% on the year previous, Congleton only experienced a 15% fall from its largest monthly footfall figure, to 730,000 in August 2020. This would suggest many working from home were choosing to shop locally. Additionally, monthly footfall in Congleton grew by 8.4% on the year previously to 804,000 in December 2020, with only three other KC's experiencing growth over this same period.

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



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



Source: Visitor Insight Baseline Report: Congleton Town Centre: October 2019-2020

Note: Most recent consistent data available across the 9 centres

07 Our Offer cont.

Employment

The Local Plan Strategy for Congleton identified a need for 24 ha of additional employment land. As of March 2018, with commitments, completions, take-up and losses calculated, Congleton had almost reached their target, leaving a requirement of only 1.32 ha over the remaining plan period. The Town Council consider that there is scope for further employment land within the area.

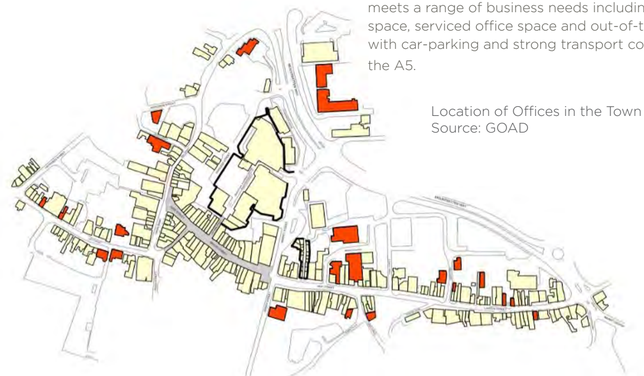
The main employment offering in Congleton can be found on the western edge of the town at Congleton Business Park. This largely comprises average quality B2/B8 warehousing and industrial units and some ancillary single-storey office buildings. The site is well occupied by a mix of local businesses from sectors such as engineering, transportation and manufacturing, with no national occupiers present. Eaton Bank Industrial Estate, located north of the town, includes national occupier Siemens along with a range of manufacturing and engineering businesses and wholesalers.

John Bradshaw Court, a modern business park, is located on Alexandria Way and was developed by Gladman Developments. The business park comprises 2-3 storey high quality office buildings with substantial car-parking on site. The buildings comprise single or multiple occupancy in sectors such as marketing, property, financial and ICT. These businesses are all local occupiers as opposed to national brands. Airbags International occupies one of the largest industrial units.

As of the latest data from 2019, there can be found 23 office use class premises within Congleton Town Centre. These are spread throughout the Town Centre, with more than half found on High Street. These mainly comprise of office suites above retail units and are occupied by local businesses in the financial sector, charities and some public sector offices. One of the significant employment spaces within the Town Centre is Riverside and Meadowside - 2 and 3 storey converted cigar factories offering modern serviced offices to rent from 15-465 sqm. This offering will be a key feature for improving the vitality and viability of the Town Centre by bringing in businesses looking for modern space who's workers will in turn use the local amenities of the Town Centre.

On the southern edge of the Town Centre is Congleton Business Centre, located on Chapel Street, offering serviced and virtual office space as well as meeting rooms and services for start-up companies and website development. Serviced office space is available from £299/ month, with meeting rooms available from £46/ day.

Congleton's provision of industrial and office premises meets a range of business needs including modern space, serviced office space and out-of-town locations with car-parking and strong transport connections to the A5.



Location of Offices in the Town Centre. Source: GOAD

Residential Market Context

Congleton provides an attractive residential location offering easy commuting to employment destinations, being located 5 miles off J17 of the M6 yet set within open countryside and providing a vibrant historic Town Centre.

The Congleton parish area had a total of 11,561 households, representing 7.3% of Cheshire East's total residential stock (159,441). In terms of housing mix, Congleton is strongly characterised by detached homes (36.3% of housing stock) and semi-detached homes (35.4% of housing stock). Together these two housing types make up almost three quarters of housing stock in Congleton. There is therefore a need to rebalance the housing offer away from additional family housing to provide more starter homes, affordable housing and homes for older people in order to meet local needs and changing demographics.

In the last year, to January 2021, an average house price achieved in Congleton was £240,000, an increase of 25% on the previous year. This is relatively affordable compared to many parts of Cheshire East. This increase will have been driven by the delivery of new homes in the area.

Congleton has several currently active new housing developments including:

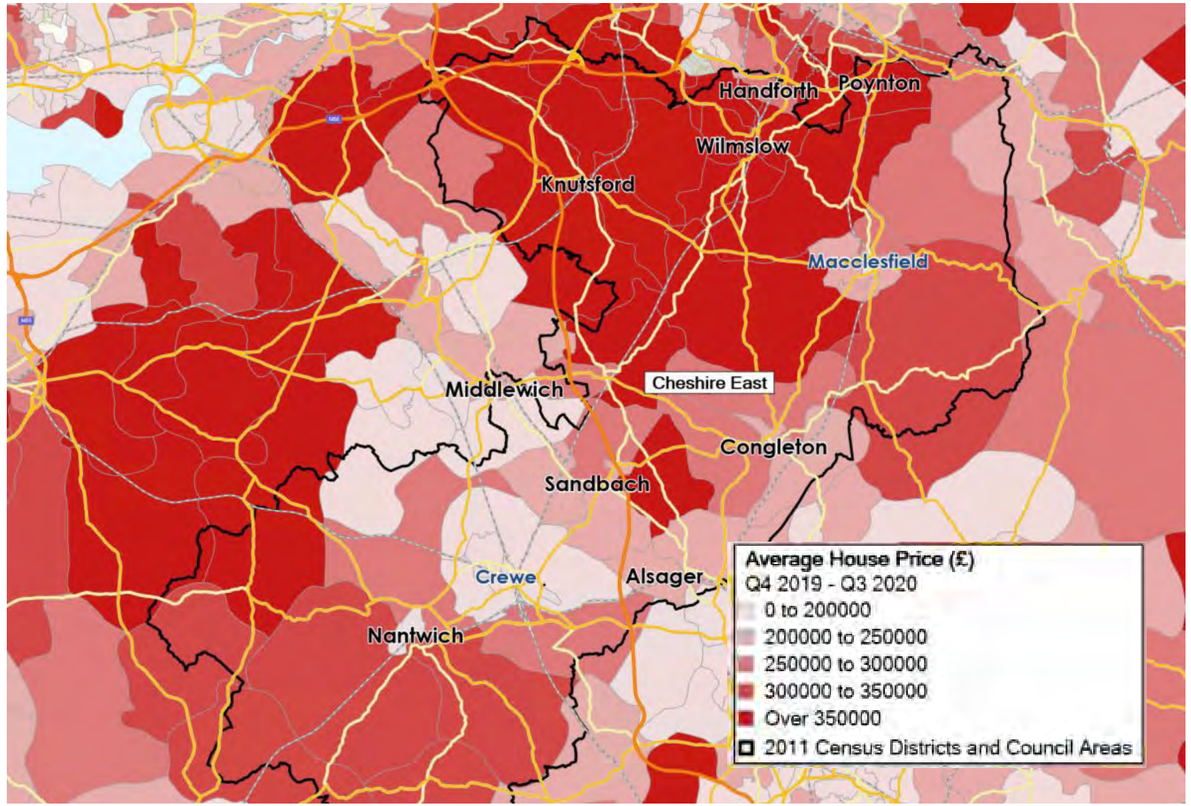
- Falcon Rise by Seddon Homes
- Cranberry Gardens, Macclesfield Road by Redrow
- Elmwood, Padgbury Lane by Seddon Homes
- Giantswood Grove, Manchester Road by Laurus Homes
- Hudson Meadows, Buxton Road by Bloor Homes.

Located in the north and south of the town, these new housing developments all predominantly have detached homes available with prices ranging from £267,000 for a 3-bed to £550,000 for a 5-bed. Giantswood Grove is offering shared ownership on 3-bed detached homes from £257,500.

Hudson Rise, Falcon Rise and Elmwood developments are all containing 2-5-bed semi-detached and detached homes. This strong residential development and housing growth in Congleton presents an opportunity to support and expand Town Centre services and businesses. However, it also presents challenges in respect of the ability for the town's infrastructure including health, schools and highways to accommodate the increased demand generated from new housing.

Dwelling Type/Area	Detached	Semi Detached	Terrace	Flat	Other	Total Households
Alsager	39.9%	40.4%	11.6%	8.1%	0%	5,183
Congleton	**36.3%**	**35.4%**	**19.3%**	**8.9%**	**0.2%**	**11,561**
Handforth	26.1%	23.1%	27.9%	22.8%	0.1%	2,936
Knutsford	38.8%	34.2%	19.7%	7.0%	0.4%	5,671
Middlewich	39.0%	26.0%	19.7%	15.3%	0%	5,910
Nantwich	20.8%	30.6%	26.8%	21.6%	0.2%	6,710
Poynton-with-Worth	42.7%	39.2%	10.5%	7.2%	0.3%	6,024
Sandbach	39.1%	36.1%	17.6%	6.8%	0.3%	7,840
Wilmslow	39.5%	26.6%	19.5%	14.3%	0%	10,615
Cheshire East	35.6%	32.6%	21.2%	10.2%	0.5%	159,441
North West	18.0%	36.3%	29.8%	15.4%	0.5%	3,009,549
England	22.4%	31.2%	24.5%	21.2%	0.7%	22,063,368

Housing Stock by Type.
Source: Census 2011, Office for National Statistics (ONS)



08 Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities & Threats

This SWOT is based on the analysis of the consultant team and discussions with the Town Council and other local partners including councillors.

Strengths

- Historic market town (market town charter since 1272), distinguished notable people linked to town, historical buildings including the grand Town Hall
- Congleton Inclosure Trust - set up in the 17thC and a life-blood to enable things to happen and to protect those most in need in the town.
- Growing town - 4,000 new houses, 10,000 new people in Congleton's catchment - how to ensure that new residents use the centre?
- Long standing, deeply rooted local business - set up here and stay here - creating stability and trust in local shops
- Supportive and engaged community. 150 local groups and organisations. One of the biggest U3As in the Country. Massive support for events and activities. The Makers Market takes place on the last Saturday of the month, along Bridge St pedestrianised section. Jazz and Blues festival very popular
- Attractive, recently renovated pedestrian area
- Congleton Park and a number of pocket parks including Congleton Community Garden and Memorial Park, In Bloom finalist 4 times in past decade, promotes community pride
- Proximity to main attractions such as Little Morton Hall. Own attractions include Astbury Mere, Congleton Park, Paddling Pool, Daneside Theatre, Victoria Mill Antiques Centre, Glebe Farm
- Home of some award winning micro-breweries - Beartown Brewery, Cheshire Brewhouse.
- Very prominent building line along shopping street (Bridge Street, High Street and Lawton Street)
- Public realm works at top of Bridge Street create a welcoming environment and enhance shopping offer and alfresco eating here
- Wild and Wild is a Vegan cafe that offers additional services such as yoga and holistic events. They have won an award; people travel to visit the cafe
- Proximity to Peak District and Jodrell Bank and access to the Dane Valley

Weaknesses

- Town Centre is hidden from the bypass - town park, mere, Town Centre, pocket parks, paddling pool - you wouldn't know there were there unless told. Mountbatten Way is an issue - cuts through the town and hides offer. Need better gateways/sign posting
- Vacant buildings/sites detract from the general attractiveness of the centre
- Diversity of activity/leisure facilities is lacking - not enough for young people to do
- Historic Lack of good quality places to eat/evening economy offers in the Town Centre (but this position is changing with several recent additions to the hospitality/evening economy offer)
- Limited open space in the town. Medieval street pattern means lack of public space or square for events. This impacts/limits capacity at large events
- Constrained medieval street pattern limits movement - disconnect between pedestrian area and beyond B&M. Lots of the town is 'hidden'
- Dormant regeneration sites which need to be brought forward
- Traffic congestion issues around Congleton - bad reputation for time taken to get into town
- Public Transport is poor and infrequent
- No coach parking anywhere in the town.
- Loss of 'anchor' shops - which are a draw into town
- Perception of a lack of hotels - anecdotally Siemens delegates each year stay at airport hotels due to lack of offer in the Town Centre
- Legibility through the Bridestones shopping centre is poor, the space is very dark (precinct style shopping centre, covering 2 levels and integrated with the Morrisons and a large car park)
- Covered market is in a forgotten area of the town, the space is dark

Opportunities

- 4,000 new houses, 10,000 new people in the in the North Congleton Masterplan area - need to entice new residents into Congleton Town Centre which will attract new investment/businesses
- Less people commuting out to Manchester, Stoke, Leeds - more people working at home earning good salaries - encourage residents to re-engage with their hometown.
- New link road provides opportunity to re-imagine traffic flow and improve accessibility to Congleton
- Infrastructure connectivity and cycle path improvements will encourage more people to cycle and walk to town. People that walk and cycle to town spend more than those who drive. As part of the Congleton business plan and Neighbourhood Plan there is desire for a modal shift from vehicles to walking and cycling more
- No through traffic in the High Street, Lawton Street, Mill Street and Swan Bank would encourage more people to town - will make Congleton more enjoyable to visit
- Turn Mountbatten Way into a green boulevard - removal of the metal barriers on Mountbatten Way may help to reduce speeding traffic
- Determine strategy to bring underutilised and vacant buildings back into productive use
- Greenspaces - upgrading to add environmental value and could link with sustainability
- Opportunity for better connection to Bidulph Valley Way walking route
- Ensure that the North facing side of the Town Centre, adjacent to Mountbatten Way, is redeveloped in an architecturally attractive manner in order to encourage visitors into the Town Centre
- Promote the town as a Niche Market Town - i.e. Ludlow, Leek
- Provide a retail/leisure experience to rival online shopping
- Heritage curation – make more of existing heritage trails and uncovering the town's heritage. Opportunity for more events such as ghost tours/pub trails - these have been successful in the past, could be resourced by town council
- Town Hall is under-utilised - opportunity for a market, Community Hub, Post office, event space
- Market Place or square needed for a Market Town - potential to repurpose the lawned area behind the town hall, opposite the police station, for the market - was the original location for the market
- Improved marketing - QR Codes and virtual presence to entice more people into the town - had previously explored a "Congleton App" but this was put on hold due to costs
- Encourage hotel to locate in the town
- Opportunity to continue public realm works along whole stretch of shopping street
- Opportunity to establish a new 'quarter' in area around Mill Street, street pattern and buildings have an interesting character which could suit a variety of uses (co working spaces, cafes, cycle hubs, workshops)
- Opportunity to rethink area around Bidstone shopping centre - better augment links here and challenge amount of parking required

Threats

- Signs of increasing vacancy in the centre and stalled development likely to deter potential investors - e.g. The Mills shopping centre on Mill Street
- Lack of outward facing initiatives in terms of marketing the towns boutique shopping experiences
- Loss of anchor stores
- Surrounded by 5 areas where parking is free - Barn Road, West Heath, Talke Outlet, Lyme Green, Sandbach - other areas become and easier/cheaper option for locals and visitors
- Further rise in car parking charges further disincentivises visits from locals and visitors especially when the perceived offer of the town is poor
- Many buildings owned by long distance trusts - no interest in the town, hard to contact
- Shops coming to end of leases - will they renew / shops facing financial difficulties following COVID
- Increase in homeless people in the Town Centre
- More HMOs in the Town Centre changing the nature of the town

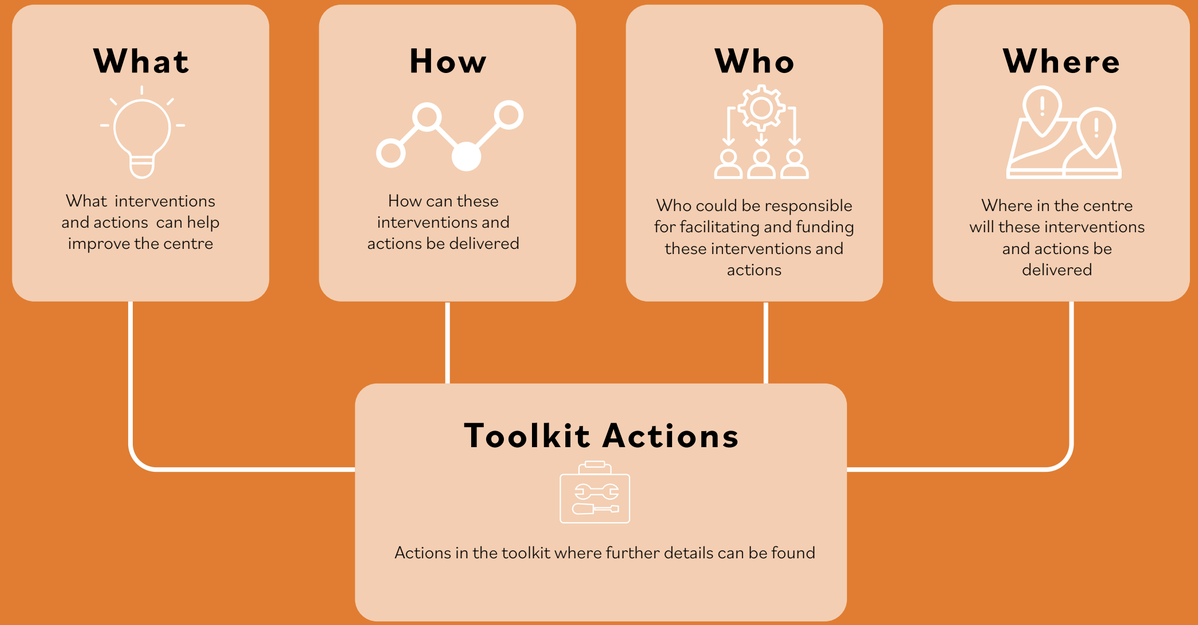
CONGLETON ACTION PLAN

09 Priority Areas for Intervention

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

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

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



Vision and Objectives

Vision Statement

Congleton will offer a comprehensive range of homes, shops, jobs, services and facilities to cater for the needs of all residents. The unique character of Congleton, including its heritage assets and countryside, will be protected, enhanced and promoted to make the town an attractive place to live, work and visit.

Objectives

- **Improve the attractiveness of the Town Centre**
- **Retain and attract new employment opportunities**
- **Develop an integrated sustainable transport strategy**
- **Offer a good range of facilities**
- **Preserve our green spaces**
- **Deliver a high quality places**

Role of the Centre

Congleton plays a number of important roles:

- A local centre serving the needs of its local residents
- An employment hub offering a range of job opportunities
- A community focus – providing amenities including attractive parks and accommodating a number of active community groups
- A visitor destination offering a range of heritage assets and other leisure amenities
- Supporting a growing catchment with a significant number of new homes proposed through the North Congleton Masterplan

The Vitality Plan seeks to support Congleton to respond to the opportunities that the proposed growth will offer whilst also supporting the needs of its existing local community.

Areas for Intervention

The following have been identified as areas for intervention. Potential actions are identified in Section 10:

Spatial Action Plan

The Spatial Action Plan illustrates key features of the Centre and identifies where proposed actions could be delivered.

It highlights the opportunities to better connect the Town Centre with the river and park corridor to the north of Mountbatten Way and the potential for change around the Market and Morrisons.

Three priority actions have been identified in Congleton:

Action 1: Opportunities for change - around the Museum & Police Station

Action 2 : Repairing the severance and impact of Mountbatten Way

Action 3: Enhancing walking and cycling

Actions

Action 1: Opportunities for Change: Around Congleton Museum

Re purposing of open space to the north of Congleton Museum

Action 2: Repairing severance and impact of Mountbatten Way

Highways re-design

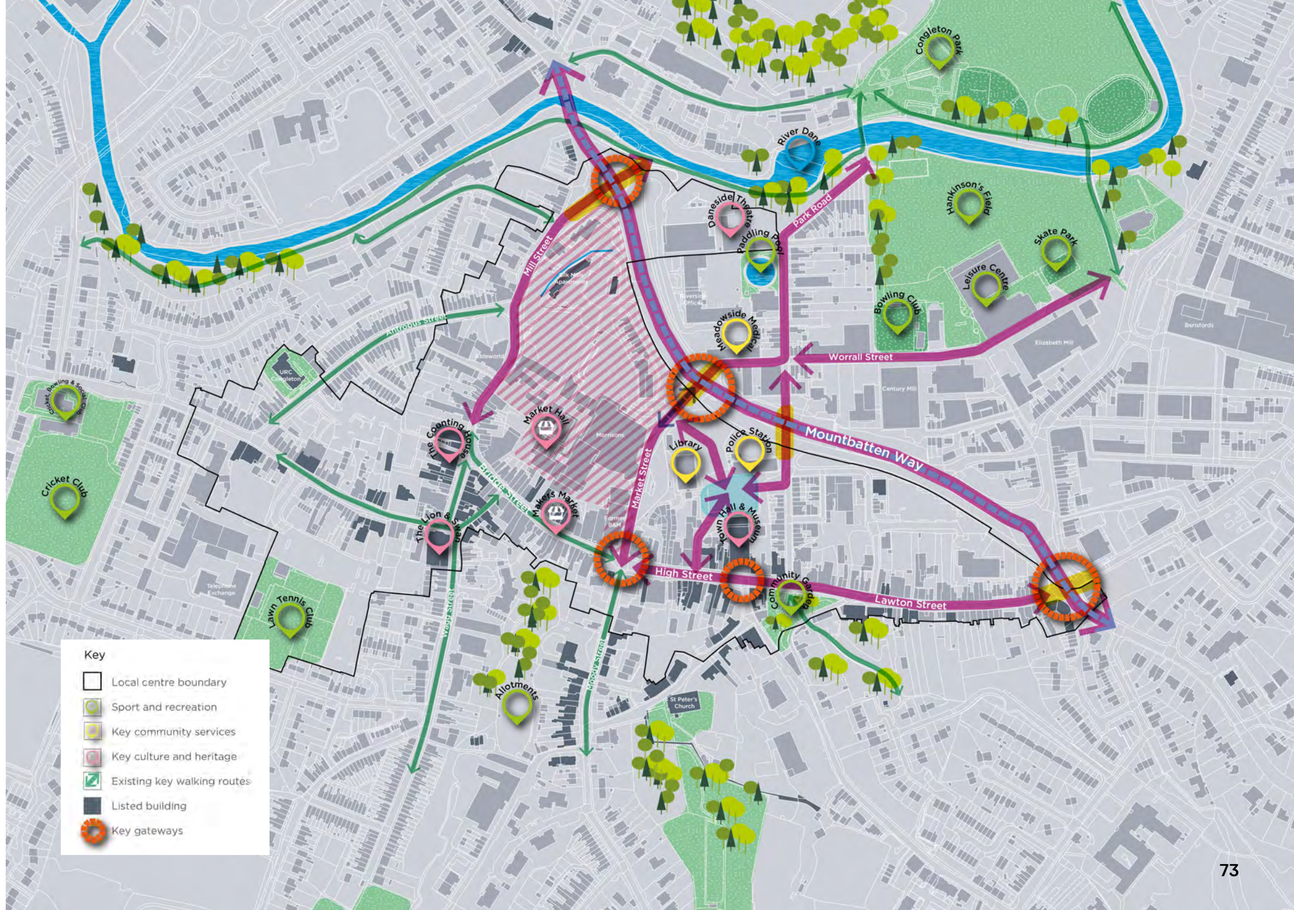
Improved/ new crossings

Action 3: Enhancing walking and cycling routes

Key routes for enhanced walking and/or cycling

Action 4: Opportunities for Change: Around Market Hall

Proposed masterplan area



Movement Action Plan

‘Building on the transport schemes suggested in the LTDP, additional Town Centre transport schemes are suggested as likely to be beneficial in supporting Town Centre vitality and viability. These additional schemes, which place a strong emphasis on public realm and enhancing the street environment are set out in the table and plan opposite

Town Centre Movement Schemes suggested in addition to LDTP potential Schemes

Type	Ref	Scheme	Description	Costing[1]
Active Travel	C_AT1	Improve signage and wayfinding across the town centre	Improve signage and wayfinding across the town centre to enhance proposed walking and cycling links across the town centre and towards the Rive Dane.	<£100k
	C_AT2	Improve pedestrian crossings on Mountbatten Way	Introduce new pedestrian crossings in suitable locations along Mountbatten Way to reduce severance – for example to enhance Park Road connection towards the River Dane.	<£1m
Public Realm	C_PR1	Greening the street along Mountbatten Way	Improve Mountbatten Way street environment introducing green features such as street trees, planters and SUDS – to improve pedestrian experience and support better air quality.	<£1m
	C_PR2	Enhance gateway at Market Street	Enhance the gateway point at Market St as opening welcome to the town centre, which currently turns its back to Mountbatten Way.	<£1m
	C_PR3	Implement public realm scheme on Mill Street, High Street and Lawton Street	Expand the public realm palette implemented on Bridge St to other key town centre streets such as Mill Street, High Street and Lawton Street.	£5m-£10m
Parking Management	C_PM1	Introduce temporary parking suspensions on Mill Street, High Street and Lawton Street	Introduce temporary parking suspensions on Mill Street, High Street and Lawton Street for trial pop-up uses for the service roads.	<£100k
Public Transport	C_PT1	Explore opportunities to enhance Bus Interchange	Explore opportunities to enhance Bus Interchange through an assessment study including improved access, quality of waiting facilities and public realm.	<£100k (study only)

[1] The costs presented are indicative only at this stage. Costs will depend on type and level of interventions delivered – and should be revised at subsequent design stages.
cheshireeast.maps.arcgis.com/apps/MapSeries/index.html?appid=48d6af7045d2495c81a1850a2c8a72c1

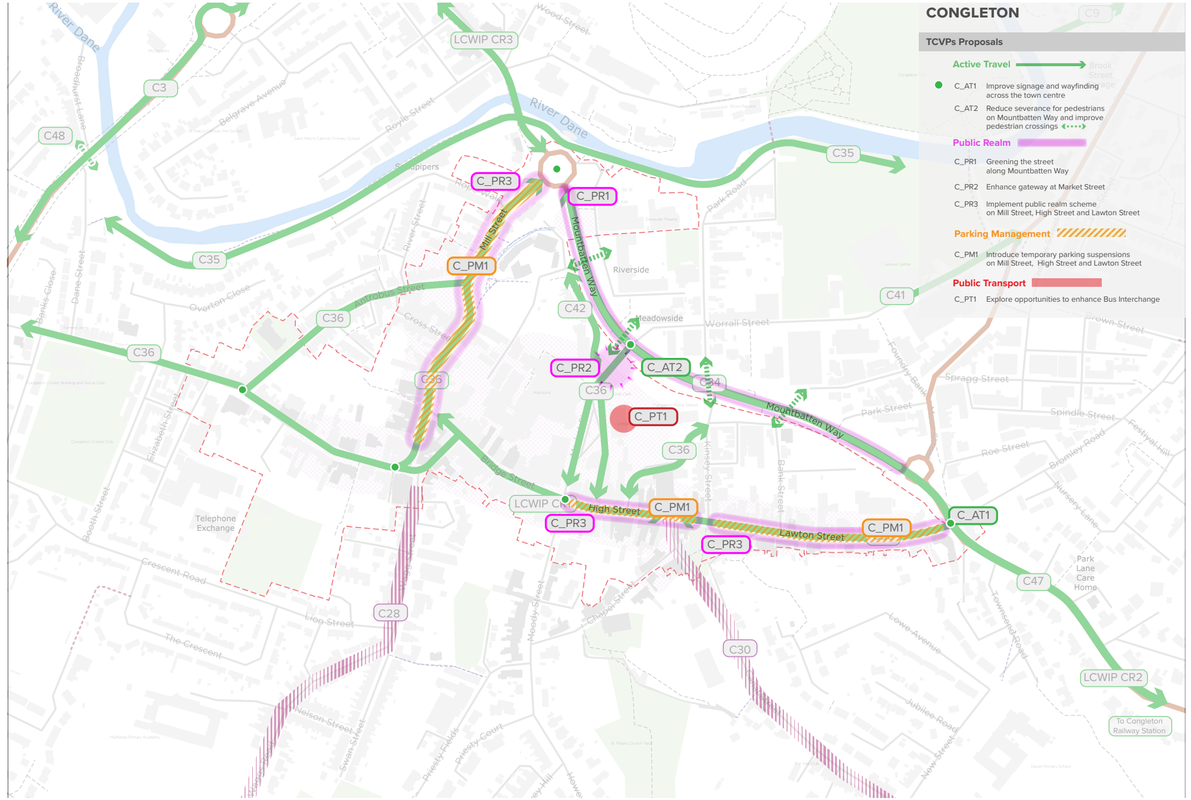
Frodsham Street, Chester
Quality public realm and enhanced frontages
(Photo credit: MottMacdonald)

Passeig de Sant Joan, Barcelona

Linear green space introduced along busy main road, to provide opportunities to stop and rest. (Photo credit: MottMacdonald)

Maid Marian Way, Nottingham
Supercrossing – direct, wide crossing and integrated green features (Photo credit: MottMacdonald)

Congleton Town Centre Viability Plan Proposals



10 Potential actions

Action 1: Opportunities for Change Around Congleton Museum & Police Station (PRIORITY)

What

The space to the north of the Museum and Town Hall (currently a grass square surrounded by highway on two sides) is underutilised and has a poor relationship with the Museum and Town Hall. The space was historically the towns Market Square and there is an opportunity to reinstate a function to the space that supports uses and functions within the Museum and Town Hall as well as a space that could accommodate town wide events/fairs for example a Makers Market space or outdoor events space.

Creating this type of space could be central to supporting the expansion of Congleton's evening economy. Scope exists on the back of people staying more local during lockdown and increased residential development in the area. Recent footfall data is showing an increase in early evening activity. A programme of early evening events linked to encouraging local F&B operators to stay open later should give a boost to the Centre and support this trend to grow. This would also support the planned reopening of Capital Walk in 2022 as a world food and beverage cluster.

How

Whilst it is recognised that there may be a long term aspirations by CEC for the area to be developed it has been vacant for a number of years and there is scope for it be better used as a communal area to host gathering and events.

Short term:

- Temporary lighting
- Coordination with landowners and licensing
- Closure to car parking on event days
- Removal of post and rail fencing
- Introduce seating and shelter for dwell space on non-event days

Longer term:

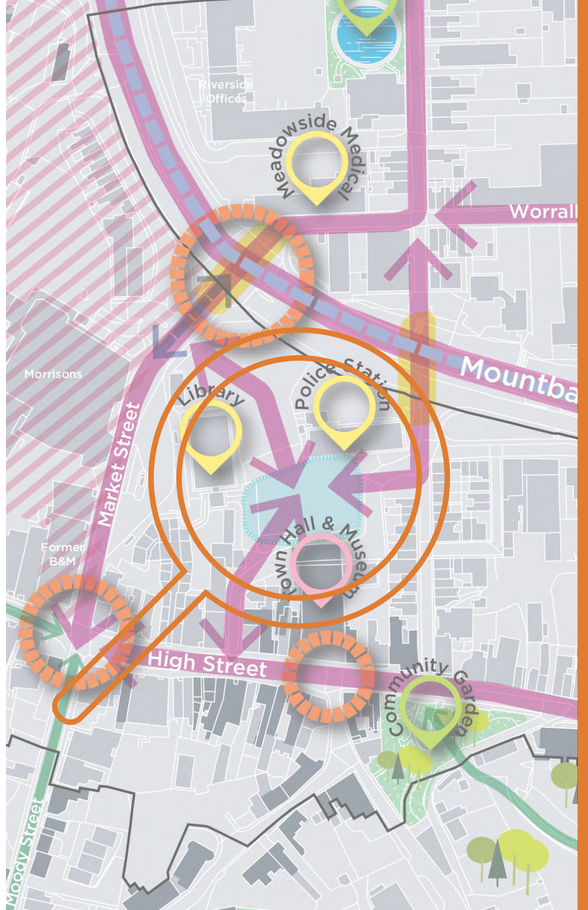
- Public realm design strategy for the square to determine optimum design to support future uses – consider materials, lighting, movable features i.e. seating, planters
- Enhance the surrounding streets that enclose the square – manage the on-street car parking. Potential to close through route or remove all through traffic. Create spill out space for the Museum to use and link to the Market Square
- Introduce more robust materials to support a greater range of uses
- Introduce infrastructure to support a wider variety of events i.e outdoor power plugs, canopies, stage and storage
- Site investigation to understand development potential and required site remediation/ groundworks

Who

- Town Council
- CEC
- Congleton Museum

Where

- Market Square located to the north of Congleton Town Hall



Action 1 supports the following objectives:

- Improve the attractiveness of the Town Centre
- Offer a good range of facilities
- Preserve our green spaces
- Deliver a high quality places

Toolkit Actions

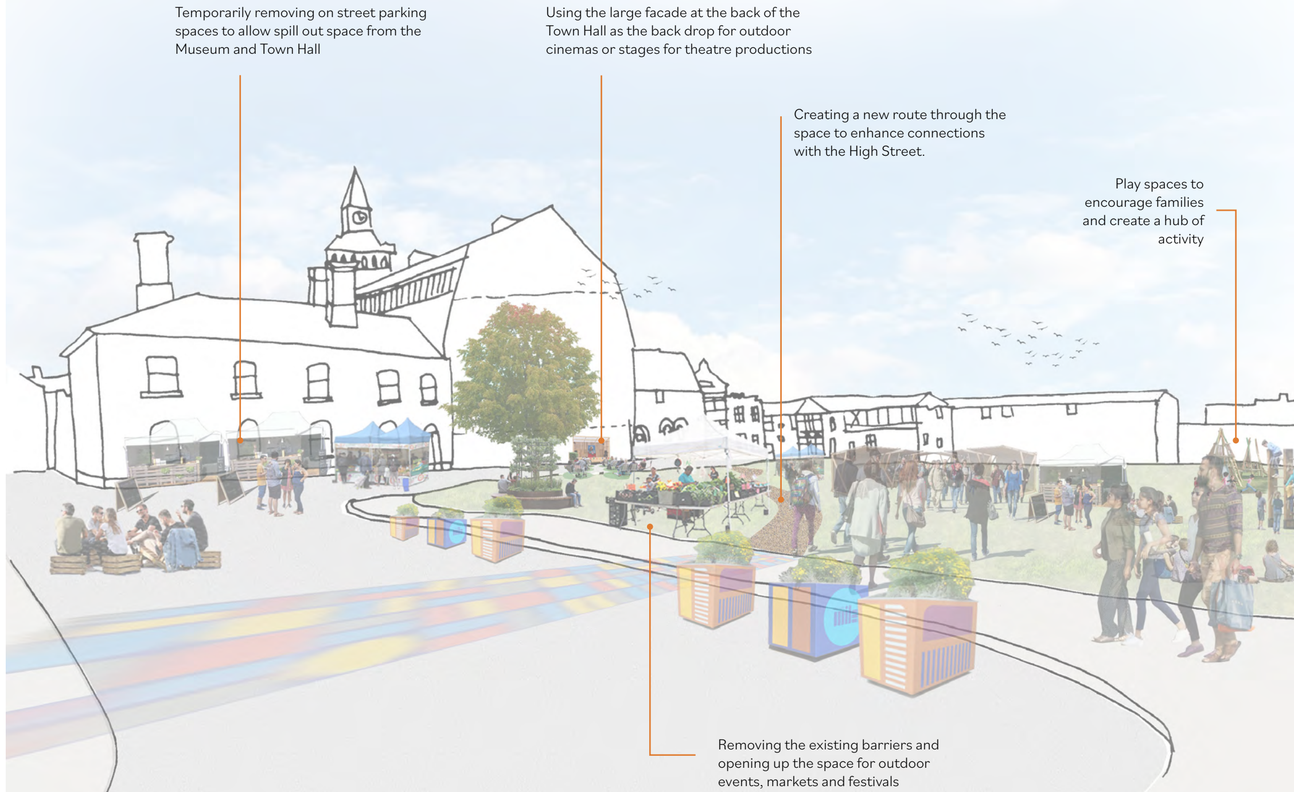
- 1b - Introduce a programme of events which open-up and connect different parts of the centre for a limited time
- 3a - Managing assets
- 4a - Pop-up seating
- 4d - Planting in pots to define space for certain uses
- 5d - Instant greening
- 9b - Curated events focused on historic buildings, public spaces, gardens and parks
- 18b - Provide new places to sit
- 20b - Use space and activities to attract people to a forgotten part of town
- 21a - Managed activation of underutilised space

Action 1: Opportunities for Change Around Congleton Museum & Police Station (PRIORITY)

Short term meanwhile uses

Quick wins could include removing the barriers and opening up greenspace for events such as markets, outdoor cinemas (with projections onto the back of the town hall), small festivals and moveable playspaces.

Victoria Road play space, London, Duncan & Grove



Action 2: Repairing the Severance and Impact of Mountbatten Way (PRIORITY)

What

Mountbatten Way is an imposing feature of Congleton's urban fabric. This highway infrastructure is vehicle dominated and creates severance between the historic Town Centre and it's northern extents. As a result, an urban shatter zone exists between Mountbatten Way and High Street and between Congleton Park and Mountbatten Way, and it effectively forms a concrete collar to the Town Centre, significantly limiting its ability to grow to the north.

Mountbatten Way is also a major severance to pedestrian movement in Congleton, effectively cutting off connections between the Town Centre and Congleton Park (a high quality Green Flag Awarded Park). The roundabouts present at the north and south end also create major barriers to pedestrian and cycle movement.

There is potential to reconfigure the alignment of the corridor to improve pedestrian crossings and the quality of the environment both across and along Mountbatten Way. By addressing this issue of pedestrian severance, poor quality public realm and vehicle dominated roads, the Congleton Action Plan supports improved integration and accessibility between the park and the Town Centre.

These ideas will need to be modelled in order to test feasibility and the impacts they will have on traffic movement and air quality.

How

Addressing the severance of Mountbatten Way can be achieved in several ways, each creating their own benefits to the Town Centre. A primary driver for any future interventions around Mountbatten Way should be to create a street based environment, with a more balanced arrangement of pedestrian and vehicle spaces, more pedestrian activity and an improved relationship to surrounding or adjacent development;

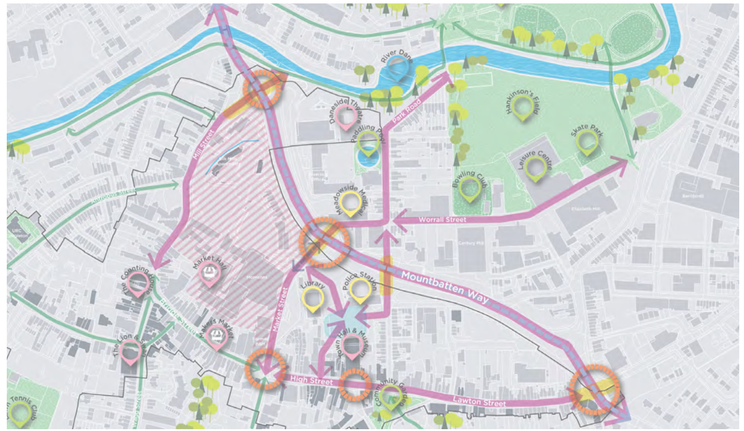
- Reducing the width of the vehicle carriageways, including potentially reducing the number of vehicle lanes to create a shorter distance for pedestrians to cross
- Traffic calming along Mountbatten Way to slow traffic speeds and allow for more opportunities to incorporate pedestrian crossings. Reinstating historic Park Road across Mount Batten Way to connect the Park with the Town's historic Town Hall
- As a result, creating redevelopment opportunities to the south, with scope for active ground floor uses to front onto and address Mountbatten Way – a combination of spill out space and residential front doors
- Introduce more soft landscape features to visually enhance the corridor as well as provide opportunities for carbon and particulates management
- Introduce cycle lanes and bus routes to promote more sustainable development
- Expand the public realm palette implemented on Bridge St to other key Town Centre streets. This should include High St, Lawton St, Mill St, Swan Bank and West St
- Progress a concept design study for Mountbatten Way to consider the potential options for significantly reducing this severance. This should include a phased and costed programme of works
- Enhance the gateway node at Market St to reveal the Town Centre, which currently turns its back to Mountbatten Way
- Enhance the connection with the riverside particularly via Park Road

Who

- CEC/Ansa
- Town Council

Where

Mountbatten Way, High St, Lawton St, Park Rd, Market St



Action 2 supports the following objectives:

- Improve the attractiveness of the Town Centre
- Develop an integrated sustainable transport strategy

Toolkit Actions

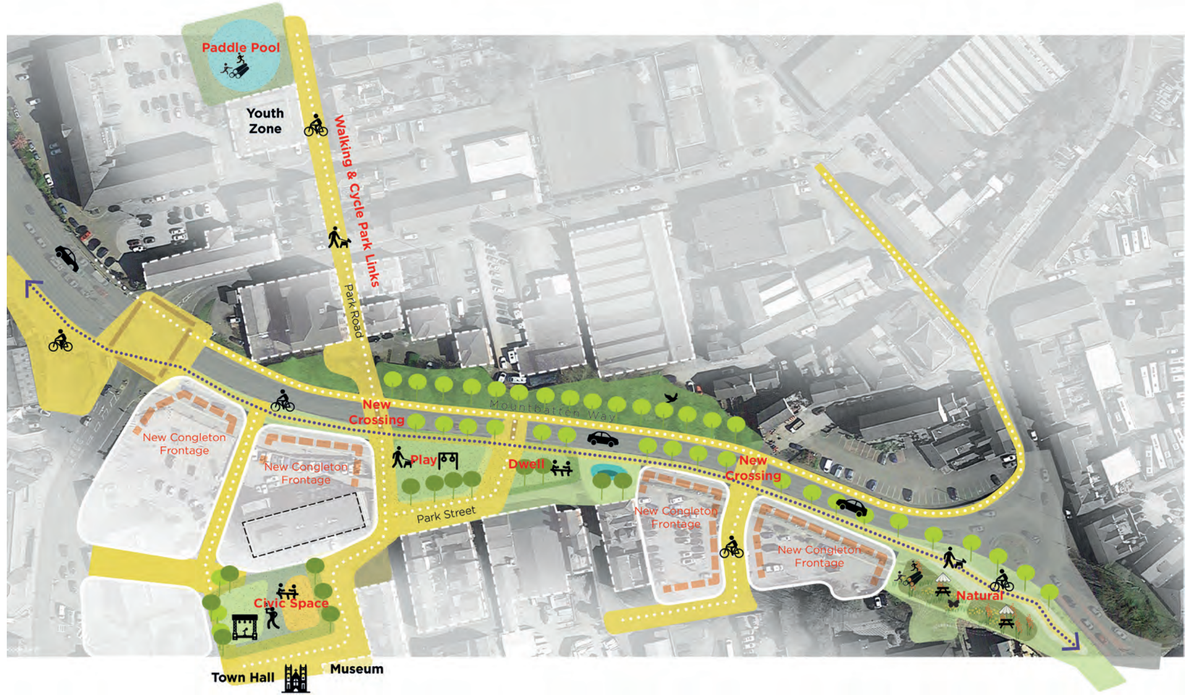
- 1a - Design a holistic public realm scheme that improves pedestrian provision
- 4e - Enhance gateway sites
- 5a - Upgrade the public realm with high quality materials
- 5d - Instant greening
- 7a - Parklets
- 14c - Enhanced crossings
- 18d - Provide allotments and concrete gardens on leftover space

Action 2: Repairing the Severance and Impact of Mountbatten Way (PRIORITY)

Taming Mountbatten Way

There is an opportunity to improve movement across Mountbatten Way for pedestrians to better connect the Town Centre with local assets to the north, such as the river, Congleton Park, Daneside theatre and the swimming pool. Consideration could also be given to the development of some of the existing car parks to create development frontages onto Mountbatten Way.

Enhanced crossing with planting, Nottingham



Action 3: Enhancing Walking and Cycling (PRIORITY)

What

Congleton is connected to National Cycle Network Route 55 which links to Biddulph and Stoke-on-Trent and also north to Macclesfield. However, there is potential to improve the walking and cycle network in Congleton and encourage more trips to be made to the Town Centre by active modes.

Support the introduction of high-quality safe cycling routes throughout the Town, as identified by the Local Cycling & Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) and Local Transport Development Plan (LTDP).

Consider the location of cycle hubs linked to improve green links and introduce secure, safe cycle parking.

How

- Explore design options to create a joined-up walking and cycling network through the Town Centre, as identified by the LTDP. Careful consideration should be given to balancing the requirements of each street in terms of its surrounding context and use
- Explore design options for West Heath to Congleton Town Centre, as identified in the LCWIP
- Explore design options for the connection between Congleton Railway Station and Town Hall, as identified in the LCWIP
- Provision of new/enhanced cycle routes along the River Dane, ensuring compliance of connections with the Equalities Act 2010

Who

- Town Council
- CEC Cycling Champion
- Congleton Cycling Club

Where

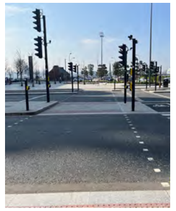
- Congleton Town Centre
- Mountbatten Way
- Congleton train station

Precedent Images

Mountbatten Way is a key corridor connecting north towards the Clayton Bypass and south with Park Lane towards Congleton train station. But the current road design is hard engineered and the wide carriageway creates severance for people on foot and cycle – particularly at junctions with considerably large footprints like at Mountbatten Way / Worrall St node.

The carriageway space could be better distributed between different road users while still maintaining capacity – like on The Strand in Liverpool. Here the new segregated two-way cycle lane allows to safely integrate active travel along the busy road and the buffer space between the cycle and traffic lane – offers an opportunity to plant trees and/or SUDS.

While dedicated walking and cycling spaces would encourage active travel trips along Mountbatten Way corridor, severance towards the Town Centre also needs to be addressed. Here the value of introducing direct, wide crossings allowing safe pedestrian and cyclists movement.



Precedent Images

To create a more walkable, cycle-friendly and attractive Congleton, better balance of the street space is required, particularly in the Town Centre.

A good starting point is the existing public realm treatment of Bridge St, where the choice of stone textures and placement of street furniture prioritise pedestrians across the space – and this approach can be extended on the nearby Mill St, High St and Lawton St.

A similar tactic has been implemented along Cannon St in Preston - where the pedestrian priority design of the street makes drivers feel like guests enhancing freedom of movement for pedestrians.

The street has been transformed into a public space where people can safely dwell, shop and rest.

Cannon St, Preston
Pedestrian priority design: stone pavements, and space for businesses' spill-out. Signage has been located along the building line to avoid clutter.

Action 3 supports the following objectives:

- Improve the attractiveness of the Town Centre
- Develop an integrated sustainable transport strategy
- Preserve our green spaces

Toolkit Actions

- 1a - improve the evening offer
- 4b 4b - Better signage
- 4e - Enhance gateway sites
- 7e - Bike and scooter parking
- 20a - Remove clutter from key pedestrian routes

Action 4: Opportunities for Change Around Market Hall (PRIORITY)

What

The areas north of the existing Market Hall are in a key location within the Town Centre, with direct access and visibility from Bridge Street and Mountbatten Way. A number of barriers to development in this area currently exist including topography, notably a change in levels, smaller sites in multiple land ownerships and existing buildings of historic value falling into structural disrepair (the Grade II Listed building - Bossons Mill had to be demolished in 2016 due to safety concerns).

The sites collectively have huge potential for a new development which can -

- Provide a mix of uses such as retail, leisure and residential, based on further demand assessment
- Better address frontage onto Mountbatten Way, Mill Street and Market Street
- Improve links from shopping areas along Bridge Street through to Market Street and Mountbatten Way and onto the river and park
- Provide more efficient parking solutions, to allow land to be used for Town Centre uses

How

There is an opportunity to look at different sites within this area collectively, either informally with different landowners coming together or using a masterplanning or development framework approach. This would provide a more holistic view of potential for change, combining several sites together to ensure the right mix of uses and open space can be provided, any buildings of value can be sensitively incorporated into the scheme and space can be used most efficiently for car parking. A phased approach may be appropriate within the parameters of an overarching vision for the area. A list of key stakeholders can be created to include landowners, members of Town Council and CEC, to ensure key decisions are consulted on and a robust brief is set at the start of the exercise.

Who

- Town Council
- CEC Planning department
- Key landowners

Where

The area of land bounded by Mill Street, Mountbatten Way, Market Street and up to the back of properties along Bridge Street.

Action 4 supports the following objectives:

- Improve the attractiveness of the Town Centre
- Offer a good range of facilities
- Deliver a high quality places

Toolkit Actions

- 5a Upgrade the public realm with high quality materials
- 9a Repurposing of assets
- 14e Decked and multi-storey car parks
- 22b Bringing vacant buildings back into residential use
- 23 Redevelopment Plans

Action 5: Showcasing Congleton's Heritage

What

Congleton boasts a number of high quality heritage buildings including the Grade II* Town Hall which sits at the centre of a historic street. A heritage trail is available providing details of a number of buildings of heritage value. Considerable scope exists to make more of the Town's heritage assets.

How

Advancements in technology has opened up lots of new opportunities to showcase heritage assets in new and exciting ways. The use of QR codes or apps mean that the current trail on the Town Council's website could be translated into an interactive walking tour. This could also be linked to other trails - ghost trail or pub trail. Consideration should be given as to how to use these to encourage visitors to venture into other parts of the town. Whilst it is recognised that this was something that has been looked at it in the past it would be worth revisiting this to see whether there is scope to engage with a local business who may be willing to provide expertise to support the Centre to develop a local app or QR codes.

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

More events focused on heritage should also be considered with scope to link to showcasing the Centre's other assets including the River.

Who

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

Where

- Visitor Centre
- Across centre

Action 5 supports the following objectives:

- Improve the attractiveness of the Town Centre
- Deliver a high quality places

Toolkit Actions

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

Action 6: Making more of Community Assets

What

There are a number of community assets in the Centre including buildings and parks. Consideration should be given as to how these assets would be better utilised to attract footfall into the Centre and serve the needs of the local community

How

There are a number of public/community assets which sit within areas which have the potential to be brought back into more active use.

The Town Council is also active and may be willing to take a proactive role in managing some of these assets. How assets could be used in the short term to activate areas or provide revenue whilst longer term development plans are worked up should be considered. E.g. could the land in front of the museum be used for events or activities (boules/pop up food festivals/specialist markets etc).

The use of (low energy) lighting to animate areas should be considered.

A major £10m refurbishment of the Leisure Centre will boost local assets with the delivery of two new pools, a thermal suite, modern gym, café and play area.

Who

- Town Council
- CEC
- Community Groups

Where

Various.

Action 6 supports the following objectives:

- Improve the attractiveness of the Town Centre
- Offer a good range of facilities
- Preserve our green spaces

Toolkit Actions

- 1b – Introduce a programme of events which open-up and connect different parts of the centre for a limited time
- 1c – Enable autumn and winter al-fresco dining
- 1d – Use lighting
- 3a – Managing assets
- 4a – Provide pop-up seating
- 9c – Enable a café culture
- 15a – Annual/ regular events
- Markets

Action 7: Raising Congleton's Profile

What

Congleton has a comprehensive website showcasing the Centre and whilst this is a great start there are lots of ways in which the Centre's offer could be promoted to attract local residents, workers, visitors, and tourists.

How

Consider what other information could be included on the website – local walks, cycle routes etc

Like Congleton, Wilmslow has a comprehensive website but they have worked with a local marketing company to support them to develop a brand as well which they are then using in a variety of media channels - https://wilmslowswaybetter.co.uk/

To support footfall on the website it would be worth considering which other websites it could be linked up with, for example other centres with heritage assets such as Sandbach and Nantwich, CEC website, local visitor attractions.

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

- Improved signage (physical and virtual via app/ QR code) to stop people just passing through
- Establish Town Ambassadors
- Enhanced programme of events
- Ensure that key messages from the Vitality Plan is fed into the Visitor Economy Strategy that is being prepared for Cheshire East
- Engage with other similar market towns and see if there is scope to showcase each other's assets to broaden the appeal of the town to attract new visitors e.g. Leek, Buxton etc

Town Council's new role taking in responsibility for the Tourist Centre will support this.

Who

- Town Council
- Groundwork
- Local Businesses

Where

- N/A

Action 7 supports the following objectives:

- Improve the attractiveness of the Town Centre
- Retain and attract new employment opportunities

Toolkit Actions

- 2a – Create a smarter High street
- 3b – Appointment of Town Centre champions
- 3c – Destination management plans
- 10a – Independent shop guides
- 12a – Create an App
- 12b – Creation of Local Brand
- 12c – Set-up an online platform
- 12d – Introduce WIFI/ digital high street/ Town Centre app

Action 8: Mobilising the Business Community

What

Congleton already has an impressive network of local community groups who support the town and its amenities. It is recommended that this energy is extended more to the business community (those in the centre and in employment locations around its edges). Engaging with these businesses and encouraging them to collaborate more effectively will support the economic growth of the area. In addition many businesses are considering how they can add value to their local communities.

How

Groundwork have recently been appointed by the Wilmslow Town Council to support local business engagement and to test the appetite to establish a Business Improvement District (BID). However a lighter approach could be pursued in Congleton by supporting local businesses to network and understand how they could get involved in supporting the actions identified in the Vitality Plan. If actions can be identified around issues/opportunities that relate to their core function, businesses may be able to provide the following to support the Town's aspirations:

- Sponsorship
- Materials
- Technical support
- Volunteers

Businesses networking could also identify "themes" where businesses can drive opportunities forward for example retailer and F&B hosting a fashion show or beauty event.

Businesses could also come together to established loyalty schemes to support shoppers to stay local. This has worked well in Belper https://lovebelper.co.uk/

Who

- Town Council
- Local businesses especially larger and dynamic/innovative/creative businesses. It is recognised that some retailers may be struggling but other local businesses may be keen to get involved and support their community
- Groundwork
- Business Community via East Cheshire Chamber of Commerce

Where

Across Congleton

Action 8 supports the following objectives:

- Improve the attractiveness of the Town Centre
- Offer a good range of facilities

Toolkit Actions

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

Action 9: Tackling Void Properties

What

The attractiveness of parts of Congleton is undermined by vacancies and the closure of a number of large stores. There is a need to focus on long-term empty units in town, however a number of smaller units have been occupied over the same period.

How

It is acknowledged that the ability to identify new retail occupiers for the large vacant units is likely to be difficult particularly as a result of Covid which has compounded structural change in the retail sector. Instead of focusing on new retail occupiers it is worth trying to target leisure operators. For example could a cinema operator be attracted to the B&M store? Flexible workspace is being looked at in some vacant departments stores but usually in those with some character.

Residential is also another option to be considered for smaller units on the edges of the town or above shops. The key is to work with local developers and to complement the wider new homes being developed on the edge of the town.

Meanwhile uses (until development can happen) and pop up stores or activities can support footfall and allow potential occupiers to test the local area.

Other short term solutions which brighter up vacant shopfronts include "wrappers" promoting the town and its businesses or exiting shops to showcase their products.

Who

- Town Council and CEC working with landlords and local developers

Where

- Vacant units

Action 9 supports the following objectives:

- Improve the attractiveness of the Town Centre
- Retain and attract new employment opportunities

Toolkit Actions

- 5c – Dressing vacant sites
- 9a – Repurposing of assets
- 15b – Community organised artwork
- 19a – Affordable start-up space to help new businesses establish themselves
- 21a – Managed activation of underutilised space
- 25a – Meanwhile uses

Action 10: Enhancing Public Transport

What

Within Congleton there are a number of bus services that provide useful connections to key locations including Crewe, Macclesfield, Sandbach, Middlewich, Holmes Chapel, Alsager and Biddulph. Alongside these inter-town services, Congleton also benefits from the Beartown bus network, which is provided on behalf of Cheshire East Council, and serves Buglawton, Hightown and Congleton Railway Station with three circular routes.

Despite this, the public transport network within Congleton is neither fully integrated or high frequency at present. There are longstanding issues here relative to declining bus provision, coverage and utilisation that have been encountered across many years. To rectify this, the recently published CEC Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) sets long-term objectives and targets for the borough of Cheshire East to deliver transformational change across the bus network.

The railway station is a clear asset to the town, with hourly connections to Manchester, but connections between the town centre and railway station should be improved.

How

- The BSIP seeks to achieve these ambitions by facilitating collaborative working between CEC, bus operators, public transport users (and user groups), rail stakeholders and local communities.
- Deliver bus service improvements through collaborative working with CEC, bus operators, public transport users (and user groups), rail stakeholders and local communities.
- Look to strengthen bus services around Congleton to locations including the Congleton Rail Station and areas such as West Heath, Buglawton and Mossley.
- Explore design options for the connection between Congleton Railway Station and Town Hall, as identified in the LCWIP.
- Explore options for delivering an enhanced Bus Interchange area/structure for Congleton.

Who

- CEC
- Town Council
- Bus Operators

Where

- Congleton Town Centre
- Congleton train station

Action 10 supports the following objectives:

- Improve the attractiveness of the Town Centre
- Retain and attract new employment opportunities
- Develop an integrated sustainable transport strategy

Toolkit Actions

- 4c – Better bus stops
- 7e – Bike and scooter parking
- 14a – Tactical urbanism to manage traffic speeds and create more pedestrian friendly spaces
- 14c – Enhanced crossings
- 14d – Digital timetable signage for public transport

Centre Wide Actions

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

1. ***Appointment of CEC Centre Champion***

   The identification of a nominated officer (go to person/champion) within CEC management team for each of the Centres who would understand local priorities for the Centre and would support them to access appropriate officers within key departments and also would seek to unblock issues. It is understood that this is something CEC is currently considering. This would be supported by an providing each of the Centres with a clear organogram (including contact details) of who within CEC is responsible for what to make engagement easier.

2. ***Creation of a Centres Forum***

   Establishment of forum where key representatives from each of the centres could come together on a regular basis to receive updates from CEC about common issues/ opportunities would be beneficial. It is also recognised that during the preparation of the Vitality Plans that a number of the centres are making great progress overcoming specific issues. By coming together and sharing progress and discussing issues it is considered that the centres would be better able to share best practice and to identify actions where they could collaborate with other centres to drive economies of scale/value for money. Some meetings may just be held between the centres (without representation from CEC officers) whilst others could include CEC and/or other partners such as C&W LEP, Groundwork etc.

3. ***Centre Focused Meetings in CEC***

   The process of preparing the Vitality Plans has involved internal workshops with relevant department leads within CEC to ensure that all departments are considering challenges and opportunities in the round rather than just in terms of their individual responsibility. It would be beneficial to continue to hold more regular Centre focused workshops. The best decisions for the centres will be taken when the implications of proposals are considered in the round taking into account both potential investment and long term maintenance.

4. ***Streamlining maintenance of public realm and greenspace***

   In light of the local desire for improved maintenance combined with recognition that CEC budgets are under severe pressure, to ensure maintenance of public realm can be optimised, it is recommended that further engagement would be beneficial to agree how the resources of CEC, the Town Council and wider stakeholders could be targeted to support maintenance. Work to establish a more comprehensive schedule of local assets in each centre and who is responsible for their maintenance should be the starting point of drive for improved maintenance. Going forward any future capital investment must be supported by appropriate consideration as to how assets will be maintained over their lifetime. It is also important to recognise that better maintenance does not necessarily just relate to grass being cut regularly. In recognition of the importance of biodiversity, going forward it is anticipated that consideration will be given to allocating parcels of land to the "wild" to support biodiversity.

5. ***Increasing importance of sustainability***

   Sustainability is now a critical issue for many organisations and important for local residents both in terms of operational implications (for example energy costs) but also in terms of local impact on the local community and the planet. As such sustainability can no longer be positioned as another priority action but rather must be a concept that is considered in every aspect of proposed actions to minimise their carbon footprint and maximise their positive benefits for the local area and its community.

6. ***Improved platform for communicating activities***

   The preparation of the Vitality Plans has demonstrated that all of the Town Councils are proactively trying to improve their centres. However it is recognised that many stakeholders will not be aware of all these efforts. Consideration therefore needs to be given as to how to amplify to more local residents, shoppers, visitors and businesses what is going on. Consideration should be given as to how to enhance the current websites for example adding more content and sharing this through a variety of channels and to ensure that these are also linked to other key partners for example CEC and the other centres (so collectively they reinforcing each other's profiles)

7. ***Enhanced engagement with local businesses***

   Many of the centres benefit from having a range of national, and in some cases international businesses, many of which are innovating in their specialist areas. There is a significant benefit to the centres and their businesses to collaborating. Whilst restrictions on public sector revenue budgets is putting pressure on what CEC can support there is an increasing recognition by businesses, especially corporates, for the need to support their local communities (Corporate Social Responsibility). This can be in the form of grants, offering expertise or encouraging their employees to volunteer. Even smaller businesses often want to give back to the communities in which they operate. This can be in the form of materials and/or specialist expertise (e.g. marketing which has been harnesses by Wilmslow in setting up the Wilmslow's Way Better brand and website). All centres should seek to better engage with their local businesses to determine how they can collaborate to support each other's objectives. This type of collaboration can give centres a significant boost particularly when it happens around public realm (investment and maintenance), marketing and branding.

8. ***Greater ownership of community assets***

   Congleton Town Council has just taken over responsibility for the Tourist Information Centre and are keen to look at the potential of taking further responsibility for their community assets. This is an area where collaboration between centres who be beneficial to share best practice.

11 Delivery

Governance and Delivery

Congleton Town Council is responsible for supporting Congleton to fulfil its potential and good progress is being made. Going forward the Town Council will continue to be a major driver in the delivery of the agreed actions emerging from the Vitality Plan.

Having established a range of potential projects that will support Congleton to thrive, further work is now required to determine a detailed action plan setting out who will do what and by when.

As has been done, it is recommended that dedicated working groups are set up to drive specific short term priority actions forward. The action focused working groups will be responsible for:

- Defining the details of the proposed action
- Considering how it could be funded
- Determining who needs to be involved in supporting its delivering and what their role will be
- Seeking funding - this might require support from other partners
- Determining the timetable for intervention
- Monitoring and evaluating progress against key performance indicators and refining actions if agreed outcomes are not being met
- Reporting progress to relevant partners including the WIP and CEC
- Recommending that CEC, NTC and any other key local stakeholder groups be invited to adopt the TCVP as a shared common plan. This would allow easy demonstration to potential funders that there is a consensus of approach and buy in from the local community

The makeup of the working groups will vary depending on the specific actions they are focused on. It is important to ensure that the same people are not tasked with getting involved in all the working groups as this will impact on progress. As such the number of working groups and pace of delivery will depend on the number of stakeholder partners that can be engaged with and encouraged to get involved.

Consideration should be given as to whether specific stakeholders need to be invited to be involved to provide technical support. For example CEC, national organisations like the Canal and River Trust or local businesses with specific expertise around specific actions already. CEC Connected Community officers may be able to provide development support.

Progress will be reported into the Town Councils who will in turn also report regularly to CEC. Where issues regarding progress/delivery are identified discussions will need to be taken to determine the required refinements to get progress back on track.

It is acknowledged that partners will need to determine their appetite and ability to deliver the proposed actions. Depending on resources it may be determined that additional staff may need to be recruited to support the pace of delivery of the Vitality Plan and supporting Action Plans.

Communication and Engagement

Given the potential growth of Congleton which will result from the delivery of the North Congleton Masterplan, it is essential that Congleton's offer is clearly articulated to support new residents and businesses to move to the area and importantly to encourage them to use its local shops and services.

Having articulated priorities for intervention within the Vitality Plan there is a need to begin to share important messages with key stakeholders including:

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

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

- Local businesses
- Residents
- Local community and interest groups
- Other towns centres generally and specifically those who are focusing on common actions for example centres looking to strengthen their programme of sport related events to support a stronger coordinated borough wide programme of events

Quality engagement should generate potential volunteers to get involved in the delivery of specific actions and potentially resources to support their delivery.

The following mechanisms should be used to engage with key partners:

- Further enhancement of the website and strengthen profile on social media
- Public engagement consultations – the draft Vitality Plan will be consulted upon and this be used to continue the dialogue with local residents
- Piggybacking Events – for example a stall at markets showcasing what's on and how to get involved
- Existing and enhanced business networking events – to share emerging ideas, test support and encourage ideas to refine and support their delivery
- Identification of a team of local ambassadors – ambassadors could be trained and then kept up to date about what it going on in the Centre and then they can showcase positive messages to their contacts. Ambassadors can be proactive local independent businesses leaders and other individuals who come into contact with lots of local people e.g. taxi drivers

In addition, as set out in Section 10, it is important for enhanced communication and engagement between CEC and Congleton Town Council.

11 Delivery

Funding

Whilst there is not a pot of money available to support the delivery of the Vitality Plan, given the scale of new development around Congleton contributions will be available and the Vitality Plans can support discussions with CEC and developers on where resources should be focused to ensure that the new homes and jobs are linked to the centre of Congleton and its existing social infrastructure.

In addition the Vitality Plan will be a useful tool with which can be used to:

- Articulate priorities for Congleton to CEC - the Vitality Plan will be used to articulate local priorities to CEC to guide them in their negotiations with developers in respect of contribution linked to planning applications (especially to support improvements in cycling and public transport) and also in determining their own capital budgets. Formal adoption of the TCVP by key stakeholder organisations can help demonstrate common objectives and priorities for any party submitting funding bids.
- Support external funding bids – having a clear action plan which provides an evidence base and priorities that have been consulted upon is now essential for most funding bids. It is important to recognise that often funding bids have specific funding leads. In some cases this may be CEC or Cheshire & Warrington LEP in others it might need to be a community group. Whoever may be responsible for leading and submitting a specific funding application, demonstration of collaboration between stakeholders and community support is essential
- Engage with local businesses – to determine whether there are actions that they can get involved in which align with their priorities for supporting their local communities

Another approach to generating more revenue to spend locally is for the Town Council to take responsibility for owning or managing assets with any surpluses being generated being invested back into the local centre. The Town Council is currently in discussion with CEC about how you could take greater responsibility for local assets.

It is important to note that when determining potential interventions consideration must be given to both initial capital investment and longer term revenue implications such as maintenance. In proposing capital investment the whole life of a project must be considered to ensure that appropriate revenue is available for ongoing costs such as maintenance.

Phasing

The actions identified in Section 10 range from projects which are already being progressed to long term aspirations which will require feasibility and funding before they can be delivered.

The Vitality Plan identifies 10 actions which support the established vision and objectives for the Centre. The Town Council is proactive and a number of the identified actions are already being pursued. The Vitality Plan has identified the following as priority interventions which will have the greatest impact:

- Opportunities for change around Congleton Museum
- Repairing the severance and impact of Mountbatten Way
- Enhancing cycling and walking

Partners now need to determine a detailed action plan related to funding that they are able to access and the resources that they have available or can access to support delivery.

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

Covid has taught us important lessons about testing new approaches. For example temporary road closures to gauge whether reducing car access to encourage cycling or to provide outside dining space would benefit local centres. This approach should be continued so that rather than a public realm project having to be worked up in huge detail and then significant resources found to deliver it, temporary solutions can be tested in terms of their impact and determine whether a more permanent solution is required or desirable. Changes are much more likely to be embraced by businesses and supported by local residents if they know that ideas are being tested and monitored and if they do not work can be reverted back to how they were.

A broad phasing plan for the identified actions is identified opposite where short term relates to 1-2 years and medium 3-5. The following should be noted:

- A number of interventions will require further feasibility and this can be ongoing but intervention on the ground is likely to be a few years off whist planning permission and funding is sought
- A number of interventions are interrelated in particular strengthening green links and expanding the events programme

Monitoring and Evaluation

As noted above the programme and the action plan will not be set in stone but must be capable of responding to new opportunities or challenges. As such it will be important to monitor impact to determine whether the established vision and objectives are being met. Suggested key performance indicators (KPIs) and how they could be measured and how often are identified below:

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

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

Technical Terms

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

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