



Newcastle Under Lyme Town Centre: Eastern Approaches Urban Design Study

Final Report

for
Newcastle Under Lyme Borough Council
and Renew

June 2005
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Prepared by
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On behalf of
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Borough Council

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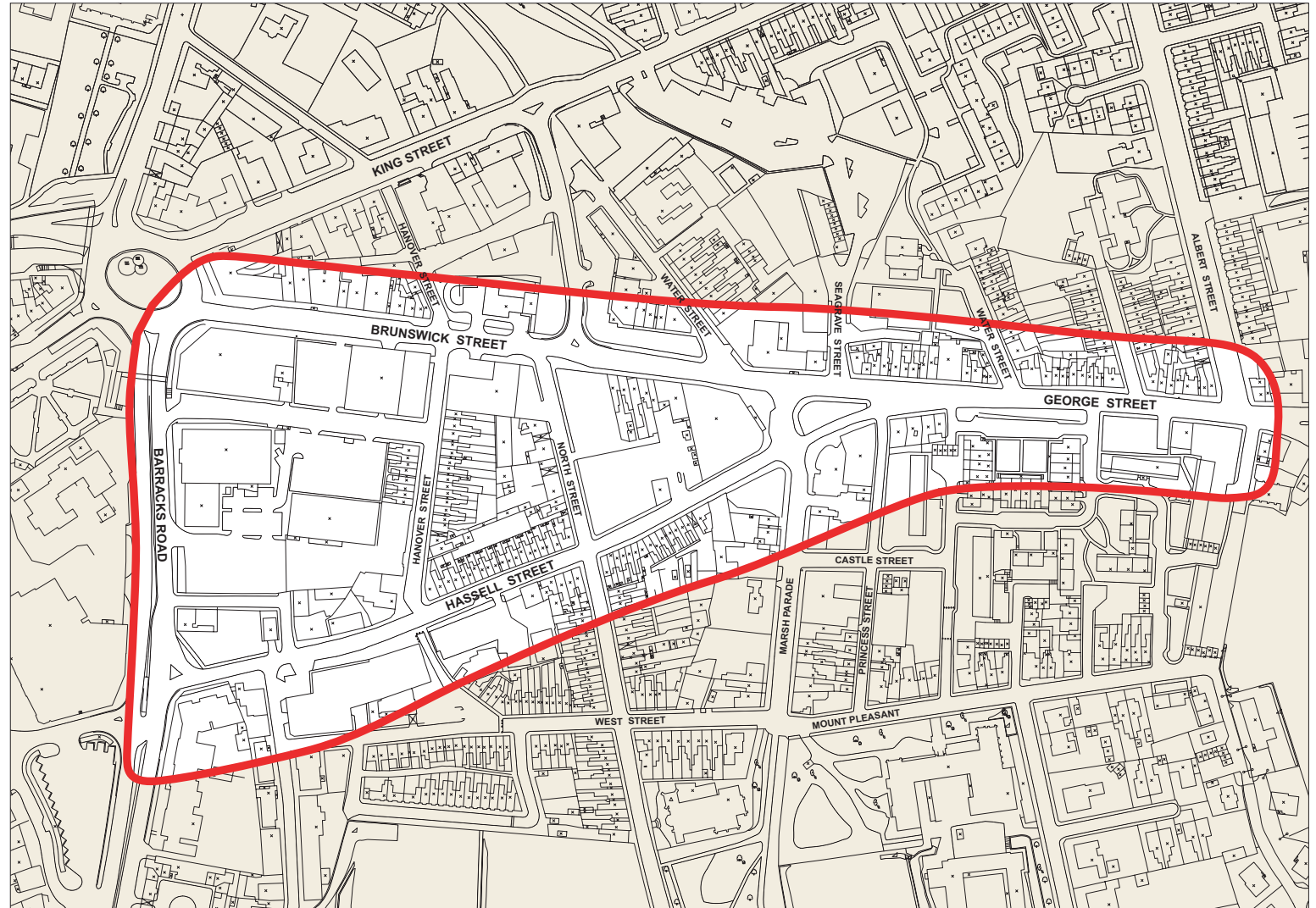
Newcastle Town Centre: Eastern Approaches
Urban Design Study



Eastern Gateway Today



1.0 Introduction



Plan 01 - Study area boundary

1.0

1.1 Study background

This study was commissioned by Newcastle Under Lyme Borough Council in association with Renew North Staffordshire.

The principal objective of the study, as set out in the Client brief was 'to assess the potential of the area, identifying its important features in visual and townscape terms, and provide authoritative guidance for use in future decision making for re-development and/or conservation, and to contribute to the development of future policy'.

1.2 Study area

Whilst recognising that any consideration of a complex urban area means that the influences and impacts of adjoining areas cannot be overlooked the study area boundary was tightly defined. It forms a triangular area formed by Barracks Road, Hassell Street and Brunswick Street and extending via George Street to the borough boundary. The study area is shown on Plan 01.

1.3 An area of change

The Council and Renew by commissioning this study have acknowledged the significant potential for change within the study area. Not least as a result of committed development, current planning applications for major development and Renew funded project activity. Other factors would also seem to suggest that the area is attractive to developers and investors including the close proximity of the study area to the town centre core, adjoining conservation areas and good road connections to the wider town centre, Hanley and Stoke.

1.4 A significant opportunity

The study presents an opportunity to develop views about the extent and nature of urban design guidance which could be used to influence and promote the process of change in a positive manner. Guidance must help realise the full potential of the area to achieve high quality mixed use development that will:

- create an enhanced gateway into and out of the town centre with a distinctive character and identity;
- help deliver the Renew North Staffordshire vision of Newcastle as 'an exemplar of town centre living';
- support and enhance existing economic activity including local shops and the professional office sector within and adjoining the area;

- support and strengthen the existing local residential community; and
- contribute to the vitality of the wider town centre.

1.5 A promotional approach

The Council own a number of sites within the study area, including in prominent gateway locations. The urban design guidance outlined in this document can be used to inform the development of proposals for their redevelopment and or environmental enhancement in the short to medium terms. The Council has, where opportunities arise, the potential to actively promote high quality development on such sites that can raise the profile of the area, influencing the perception of the area in the minds of developers and investors and encourage high quality development on other sites.

1.6 Study Preparation

This study has been prepared with information provided by Council officers with responsibilities for planning policy, development control and Council owned land, including car parks.

No consultation was undertaken as part of this study with potential developers, landowners and or their advisors, building occupiers, local residents or other stakeholder groups.

It is recognised that other areas of the town centre also have significant potential for change including the Lower Street corridor. It has been beyond the scope of this study to consider the implications of such areas on the study area. However, given their significance this will be required as part of the Town Centre Area Action Plan preparation process.

This study has not included an assessment of prevailing or projected market conditions, market views about the potential for various types of development within the study area and the potential implications of other major development opportunities elsewhere in the town centre.

The study therefore represents the views of the consultant team.

1.7 Structure of the document

The document includes the following sections:

Section 2 – A design vision – sets out a potential vision for the area and design guidance and potential interventions that can help achieve it. This section can be read, if necessary, as a stand alone document;

Section 3 – Policy framework overview – a summary of key national and local level design policy and guidance;

Section 4 – Context analysis – the main findings of the analysis;

Section 5 – Recommendations;

Section 6 – Next steps.

2.0 Vision and Guidance Framework



Eastern Gateway Today



Introduction

This framework represents a component of an urban design study commissioned by Newcastle Under Lyme Borough Council in association with Renew North Staffordshire. The primary audience of the study is intended to be internal staff, officers and elected members of the Council.

The study has been undertaken via an intensive work programme with the assistance of key Council officers. It represents the views of the consultant team and did not involve consultation with local stakeholders or the general public. This document does not represent adopted supplementary planning guidance.

The purpose of the framework is:

- to provide an input to the preparation of the Town Centre Area Action Plan;
- to create an understanding of local context which can inform the consideration of development proposals within the area.

The study represents a valuable opportunity to lay the foundations of a more promotional stance that encourages high quality development within the area set within a coherent spatial framework based upon an understanding of the local context. This will assist the development control process and developers, including their design advisors, by helping to provide more certainty about the context for development and the overall potential of the area. The alternative is to rely on existing local plan and central government policy and guidance and to respond to planning applications as they arise. This could frustrate the area's ability to achieve its full potential and its ability to strengthen the vitality of the town centre.

Challenges facing the area

A context analysis was undertaken which considered the following aspects of the urban structure:

- research into the historical development of the area;
- an outline character appraisal;
- a survey of building uses;
- identification of Council owned land;
- a survey of building heights;
- a survey of building materials;
- an appreciation of the vehicular route network, public transport routes and car parks;
- an appreciation of the pedestrian and cycle route network and destinations;
- an overview of the design of the public realm;
- a legibility analysis.

The findings of the context analysis are set out in more detail in the main body of the study report.



An area of change

number of challenges face the area they include the following:

- To stimulate high quality new development which is responsive to local context and which helps to realise a bold contemporary vision for the area that will help it to realise its full potential;
- To raise the standard in terms of the quality of future buildings, setting a benchmark above that established by recent development that performs poorly in urban design terms;
- To reverse the decline in the existing building fabric that has resulted from under investment and poor maintenance, including poor quality shop frontages, under utilised buildings and vacant sites;
- To address the significant loss of continuity and enclosure resulting from open cleared sites, building set backs or buildings of inadequate height;
- To ensure that existing active frontage is improved and reinforced and that new

developments maximise opportunities to create additional active frontage;

- To address the poor image and appearance of the area resulting from a degraded and fragmented public realm that has suffered from low investment and poor levels of maintenance over a prolonged period;
- To address the poor quality pedestrian and cycle environment within the area – reducing the impact of vehicular traffic, establishing a better quality network of pedestrian routes that link destinations within the area, connect to adjacent destinations and areas (eg. King Street area and Marsh Parade, Stubbs Walks area) and to the town centre;
- To address the remote and disconnected image of the area by repositioning it in the minds of potential investors and developers, the existing local business and residential community and potential residents as an area that is the subject of a positive and directed process of change and renewal.

A number of positive factors suggest that the study area has the potential for significant change they include the following:

Location

- close proximity to the town centre including prime retail, bars, restaurants and bus station. The centre of the study area is within a five minutes walk of the town centre core;
- proximity to adjacent conservation areas and King Street/Queen Street professional office quarter;
- a number of significant public green spaces are located immediately adjacent to the study area.

Land use pattern

- existing mixed use character, including an existing residential community, shops, restaurants and office accommodation.

Towards a vision

Land and buildings

- Council ownership of sites with redevelopment potential;
- a number of buildings, sites and street blocks with potential for redevelopment and or refurbishment.

Movement and access

- good strategic highway and bus route connections;
- significant potential to improve pedestrian and cycle routes.

Market activity

- current levels of market interest within the study area (witnessed by committed development and other proposed major development schemes) and elsewhere within Newcastle town centre;

Regeneration programme activity

- project activity of Renew North Staffordshire (ie. group repair scheme, proposed environmental improvements) and the identification of Newcastle as having potential to become an exemplar of town centre living within the wider pathfinder area;

Having gained an understanding of the area, and its potential for change, through the context analysis the following outline design led regeneration vision for the area has been developed. The further definition and delivery of this vision clearly requires consultation with stakeholders and potential partners and detailed feasibility work in respect of potential projects. However, it is presented as a starting point to promote and guide the future direction of the study area. In this sense whilst acknowledged generic principles of urban design should be applied within the study area the guidance set out in this document seeks to underpin and assist in the delivery of the following area specific vision.

‘..a reinvigorated live work quarter..’

- a vibrant mixed use area – including housing, offices and local shopping frontages;
- an area that is a high quality connecting corridor to the wider conurbation and gateway to the town centre;
- an area with a distinctive environment with buildings and spaces that are adaptable to different uses and which help to create a greater sense of community safety;
- an area with a coherent network of pedestrian friendly routes and spaces that are welcoming, easy to navigate and to move around and which connect to public transport facilities;
- an area with a public realm that is engaging and functional, of consistent quality and that is well maintained;
- an area that compliments and links other areas of quality;
- an area that supports economic activity within adjacent areas and contributes to the vitality of the wider town centre.

Structuring principles

The following have been identified as structuring urban design principles for the area:

1. new development should respond to the underlying movement structure and reinforce the street hierarchy;
2. new development should reinforce key nodes;
3. encourage reworking and or the repair of damaged street blocks;
4. ensure continuity of building frontage and building line;
5. ensure active ground floor building frontage;
6. create opportunities for improvements to the pedestrian and cycle environment;
7. promote continuity and consistency in the use of building and landscape materials.





Guidance framework

The following areas of guidance have been developed:

Potential development sites

A number of sites have been identified with potential for redevelopment or improvement. They are shown on Plan 02 which indicates development opportunities within the following categories:

- opportunities to rework the structure of entire street blocks. This should not result in super block development but fine grain development defined by a permeable street and pedestrian route network;
- opportunities to repair blocks via selective building interventions; and
- opportunities to improve existing building frontages.

Land uses

The objective is to reinforce and enhance the mixed use character of the area. Accordingly new mixed use building development (including horizontal and vertical mixing of uses) is to be encouraged across the area with the exception of protected residential sub areas.

Clearly the degree of mixed use will be influenced by a range of factors including the following:

- development site area;
- building height and density of proposed development;
- nature of adjacent land uses.

The mix of land uses should include residential apartments (including an allocation of social housing where appropriate), office accommodation and restaurant/A3 type uses. The loss of existing 'shopping' frontage other than conversion or refurbishment to A2/A3 type uses should not be permitted.

New development should be designed such that conversion to other commercial uses is possible in the future. This should be reflected in adaptable plan forms, including floor to ceiling heights, window to window dimensions, internal access and circulation arrangements, and location of service areas.

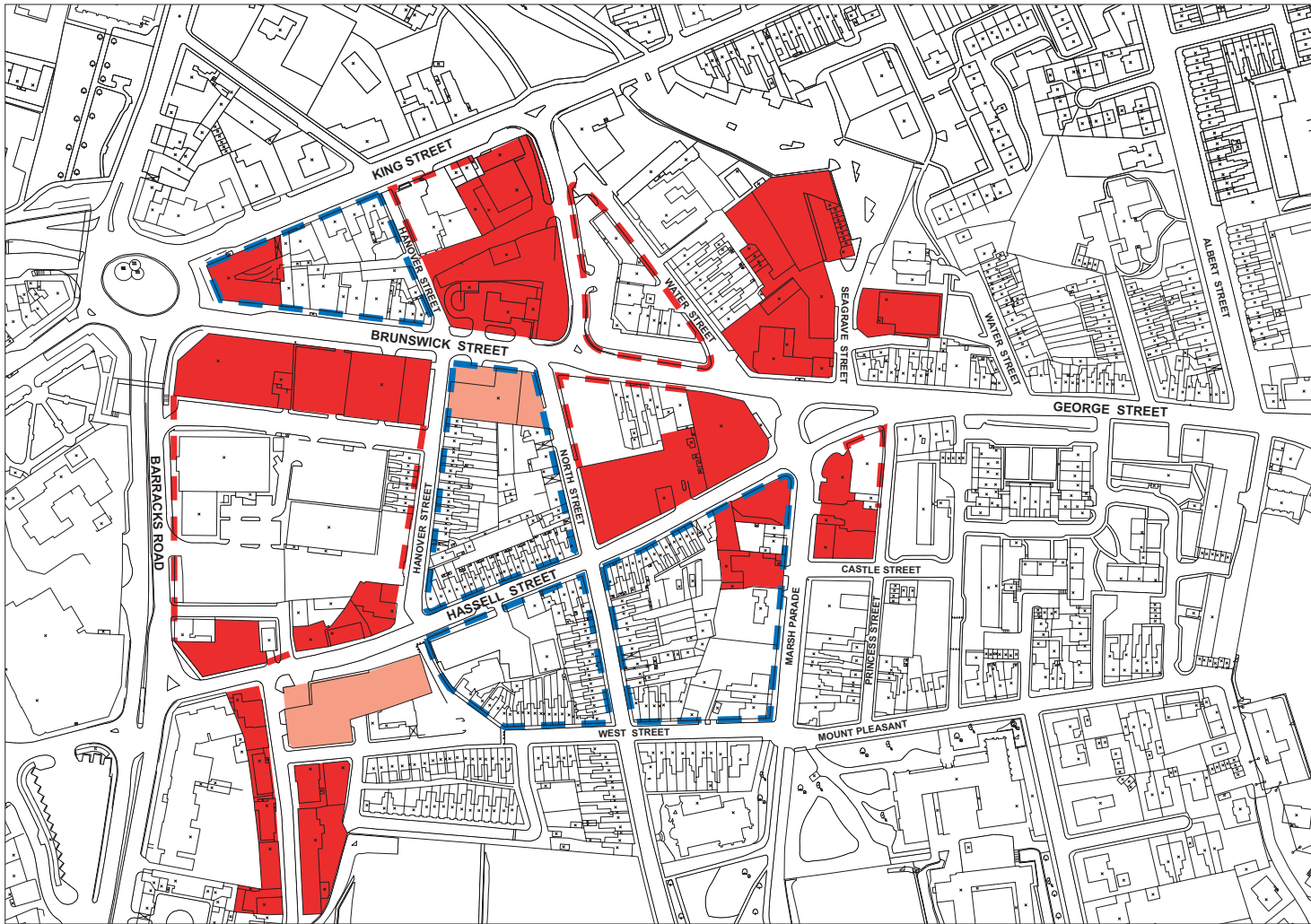
Building height

The following factors have been used to develop guidance in respect of the height of new buildings within the area:

- site location relative to the hierarchy of pedestrian/vehicular routes ie. primary route or secondary/tertiary route;
- the height of adjacent buildings and buildings within the wider area;
- the need to provide appropriate enclosure relative to the width of the street on which they are located;
- the potential at a limited number of prominent locations to create landmark buildings that reinforce key nodes and contribute to the legibility of the area reinforcing it's role as a major gateway into the town centre.

Guidance on maximum building heights is shown on Plan 03. Building height is also related to the density of development on any particular site. This will involve consideration of other potential impacts of proposed development, both positive, neutral and negative.

The visual impact of higher buildings can be









Plan 02 - Block Development Principles

- Potential Development Sites ■
- Committed development ■
- Consolidation of block ▬▬▬
- Potential to restructure block ▬▬▬



SCALE 100M

Plan 03 - Maximum Development Heights

1 storey		4 storey	
2 storey		5 storey	
3 storey		6 storey	

Primary Landmark Opportunity Site 

Secondary Landmark Opportunity Site 

Existing Landmark 



SCALE  100M



considerable on views within the area and views into or across the area. This impact can be reduced by skilful architectural massing including set back pavilion storeys or attic floors. The potential visual impact of roof top plant and machinery should be considered from the outset and minimised. Where landmark building opportunities exist building lighting schemes should be encouraged which reinforce their night time appearance and help create a more welcoming, dynamic and safer area image.

Building line

The character of the area has been adversely affected over time by the erosion of the common building line, often represented by the back of footpath. This has resulted from development which has been set back, building clearance creating open sites and surface car parks. The cumulative effect of these significant gaps in the building fabric is a fragmented and poorly defined structure of streets and spaces. Plan 02 indicates where the building line should be re-established as development opportunities permit. The continuity of the common building line should be maintained and unnecessary setbacks avoided.

Active frontage

Active frontage is a significant factor in making successful places and streets which sustain and stimulate pedestrian footfall with all the consequent benefits – potential economic opportunities and natural surveillance which contributes to a safer environment.

Accordingly active frontage can be considered to be:

- ground floor building uses that interact with the public domain ie. shops, restaurants including windows that enable good visual connections between uses within the building and the public realm;
- frontages with entrances off the street, overlooking windows of habitable rooms.

Active frontages do not therefore exhibit the following characteristics:

- blank gable walls;
- long uninterrupted blank ground floor building elevations lacking windows or windows set above pedestrian height; or grilled openings to internal car parking floors;
- vacant or under utilised upper storey space such as that above shops.

Plan 04 indicates where active frontage should be achieved as redevelopment or refurbishment opportunities allow. The achievement of continuous active ground floor uses is likely to be unrealistic and not necessarily desirable. However, existing retail frontages should be improved and enhanced and opportunities to maximise active ground floor uses encouraged. Inward looking 'gated' developments are to be avoided as they reinforce negative impressions of the area that may stimulate rather than reduce the fear of crime.

Street blocks

The street block structure of the study area has in the past been the subject of some significant interventions. They include the introduction of the Ring Road, Borough Road, and the York Street area. However, the street block pattern should be respected and enhanced by new development. The latter may arise from opportunities to rework major street blocks which combine a number of sites and offer the potential for a more comprehensive development approach. This should include the provision of new pedestrian routes which connect to and form an extension of the existing pedestrian network. These routes should exhibit the qualities described above, being defined by perimeter development, and where the scale of development permits linking to new destinations (eg. a new public space focus). Plan 02 indicates those street blocks with potential for such an approach. Any potential redevelopment of the block fronting the ring road should consider the opportunity to create another pedestrian crossing that links directly to a new street that helps to subdivide the block.



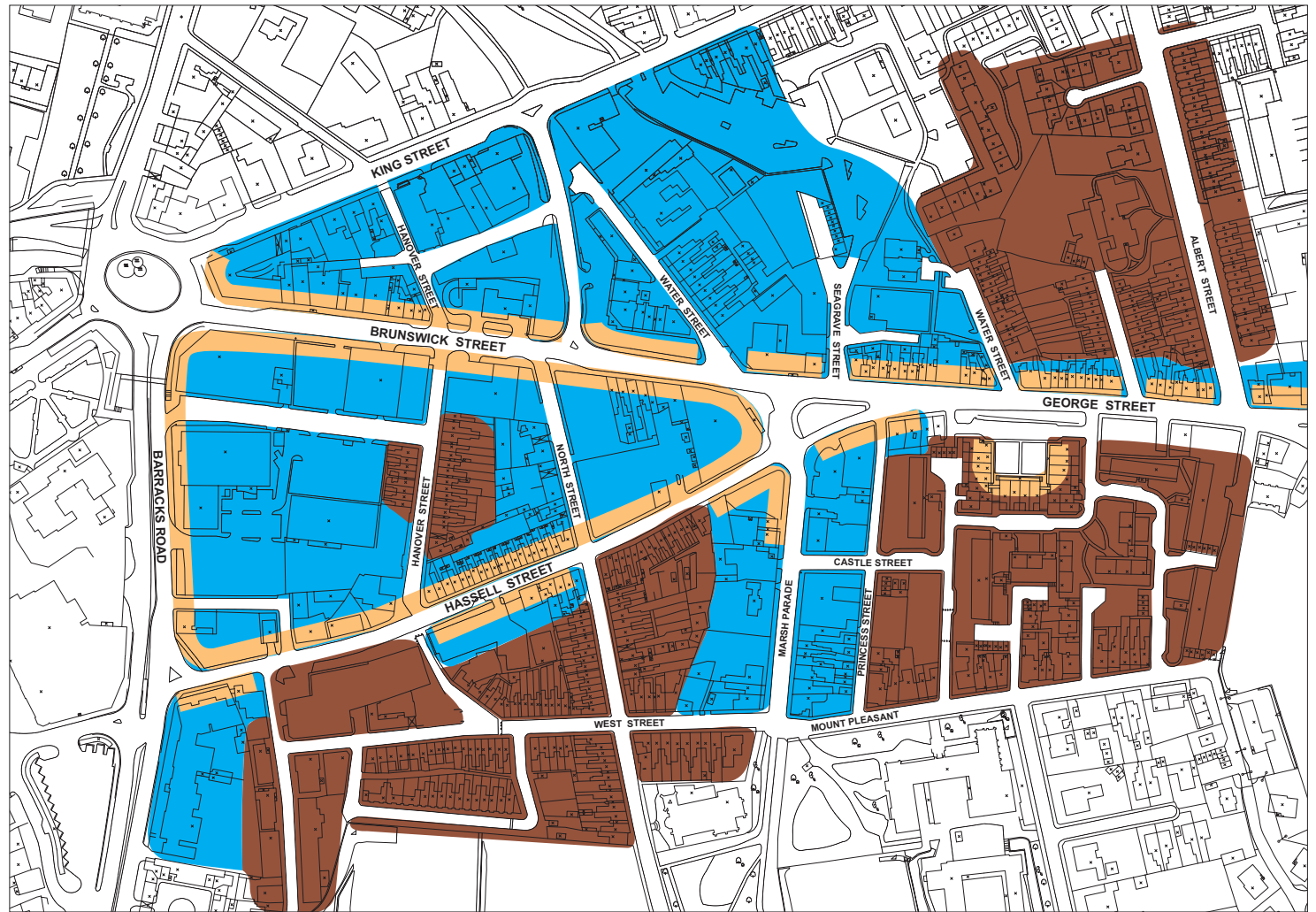
Plan 04 - Land Use Principles

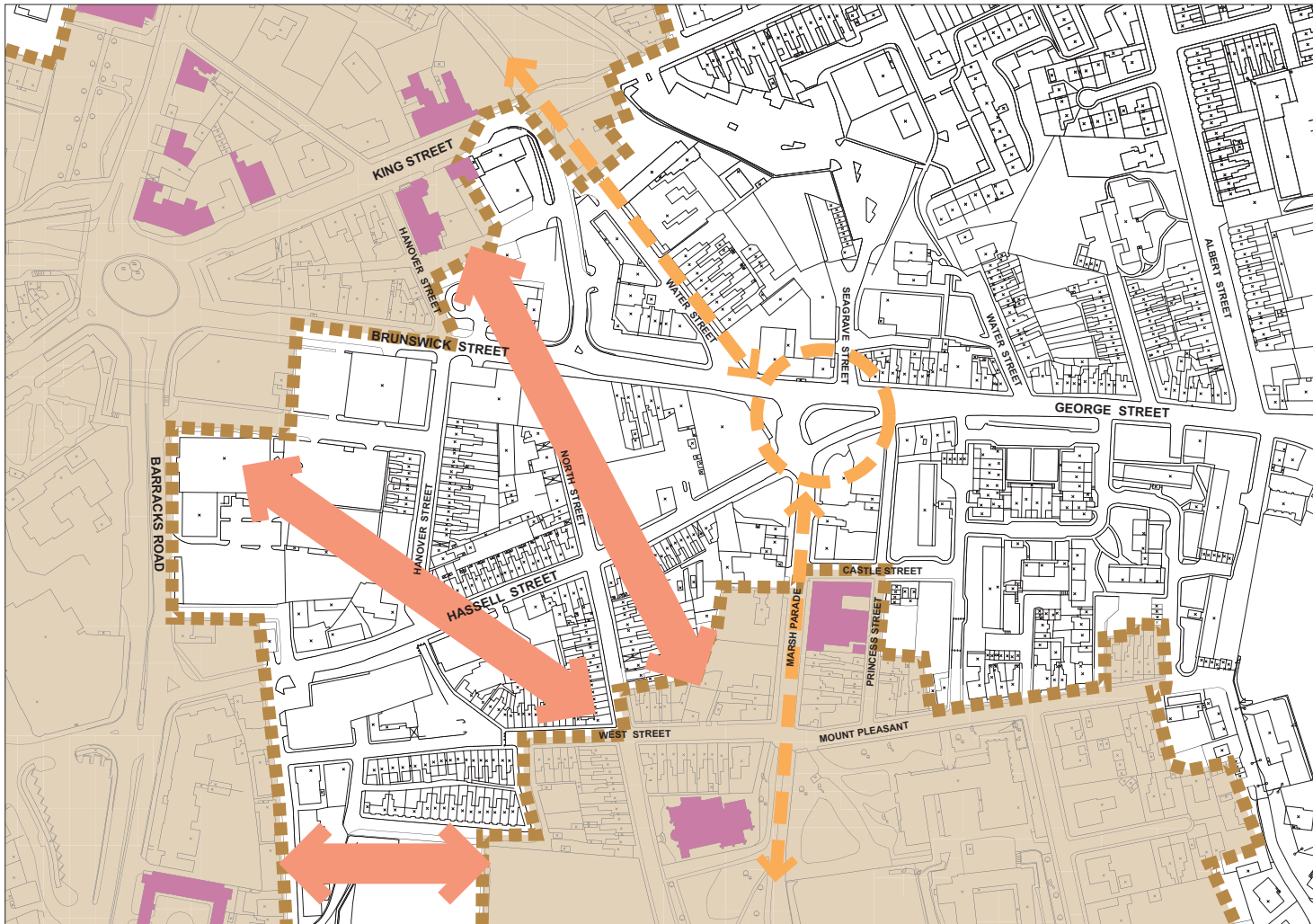
- Mixed Use ■
- Residential ■
- Active Frontage Desirable ■



SCALE

 100M





Plan 05 - Consolidation of Conservation Areas

- Listed Buildings
- Conservation Areas
- Sympathetic Consolidating Development
- Quality pedestrian routes linking conservation area
- Focal point and route node



SCALE

 100M

Building Materials

The context analysis has shown that red brick, painted render, clay and slate tiles form the historic building palette of the study area. More recent development has introduced coloured and profiled cladding materials often of modest quality and crudely applied to expansive areas of building facades. These materials have different performance characteristics to traditional materials and will not weather and mellow in the way that clay brick and tiles do, being at they are inherently short life materials that will require replacement sooner rather than later.

The use of a more limited palette of higher quality materials is advocated. The use of this palette will help to establish a more coherent appearance to the area (colours, tones, patterns) whilst introducing contemporary themes and providing a basis for innovative high quality architectural solutions. External building materials should include red brick, terracotta cladding, timber cladding, natural stone details, and glazing. The degree of materials mix in any one building should be informed by adjacent building materials and, subject to proposed building uses, large building blocks (ie. sites of block significance and not necessarily infill plots) should avoid over use of a dominant building material. The Council supports and encourages the use of building materials which are sourced from the region.

The Council encourages and promotes the integration of artistic work within building design. This could take many forms from building lighting schemes, entrance floorscape designs to sculptural works. Artistic work should be considered from an early stage in the development of building design proposals.

Examples of the proposed building material palette are shown below.



Public realm

The context analysis has highlighted the poor quality and lack of consistency of surface treatments and street furniture designs across the study area. The use of a limited palette of paving materials and street furniture is proposed. These materials should be specified as part of a wider public realm handbook for the area. However, all materials and street furniture should reflect the following criteria:

- robustness and ease of cleaning and maintenance;
- ease of installation/laying and reinstatement following works to underground services;
- ease of sourcing and cost effectiveness (the latter may also be achieved through economies of scale, particularly if designs are used elsewhere in the town centre).

Subject to further design feasibility it is proposed to promote distinctive street furniture design to reinforce the character and identity of the area; in particular its status as a major gateway into the town centre and a connecting corridor to the wider conurbation. This approach may result in the design of bespoke street furniture and the potential involvement of artists or craftspeople but with the emphasis on delivering a public realm that is attractive and engaging but also has clarity and coherence.

A number of potential public realm projects are identified within the main body of the study report. These projects require further development, feasibility and costing. However, they include an indication of potential development sites which could, subject to negotiation, result in financial contributions to the rejuvenation of the public realm via the use of Section 106 planning agreements.



Movement and access

It should be recognised that more radical improvements to the public realm would be enabled by interventions to the underlying movement and access structure of the area. Potential movement and access projects are identified in the main body of the report. They require further development, feasibility and costing; in particular to assess their potential impacts on traffic movement in the wider area.

Good practice points

The following good practice points are identified to assist the use of the Vision and Guidance Framework:

1. The use of the above principles and guidance within the planning process is advocated from an early stage. If possible from the point of pre planning application discussion with developers and or their professional advisors. The extent to which it informs development control decision making will be subject to Council approval and inclusion within the Town Centre Area Action Plan preparation process. The latter will include public consultation.
2. The application of guidance set out in this document should be informed by familiarity with the area context gained from a number of site visits. It's application should therefore be informed by local knowledge. The guidance is not intended to stifle high quality contemporary or innovative design; quite the reverse. Such area knowledge will enable a more positive and considered response to creative proposals.
3. Guidance prepared by central government, in particular 'By Design, Urban design in the planning system: Towards better practice', and Building in Context published by CABI and English Heritage should be used to inform the further development and application of urban design principles within the study area. Applicants should be encouraged to demonstrate their appreciation of context within illustrated design statements.
4. Applicants should be encouraged to present major development proposals for review by Urban Vision, the North Staffordshire Architecture and Urban Design Centre.

Contacts and further information

For further information about the Newcastle Town Centre Eastern Approaches Urban Design Study and the Vision and Guidance Framework please contact:

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Aspirational Images for Newcastle Eastern Approaches