

Newcastle Under Lyme Town Centre Western Edge Urban Design Contextual Study

January 2006

Prepared by
Latham Architects: Urban Design

On behalf of
Newcastle Under Lyme Borough Council

January 2006

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Bibliography

Credits

Appendix 1 - Historic Maps

Appendix 2 - Transport Report



Vacant Pub, Blackfriars Road



Lower Street car park



Post war office building, Lower Street



The Castle Public House, Pool Dam



High Street



Pedestrian underpass


Introduction 1



Plan 01 - Study area boundary



SCALE
0 100M

Study area 

1.1 Study background

This study was commissioned by Newcastle Under Lyme Borough Council. 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

The study area is located to the west of the town centre with Lower Street forming its unifying axis. The High Street and the northern section of Lower Street define the eastern edge of the study area. Castle Hill Road, Stanier Street, Pool Dam, Lyme Brook and Blackfriars Road define the western extent of the study area. The study area is shown on Plan 01.

1.3 An area of change

The study area contains a number of large opportunity sites that are proving attractive to potential developers; some of whom are now coming forward with proposals that could help transform the area.

1.4 A significant opportunity

Urban design guidance must help realise the full potential of the area to achieve high quality development that will:

- Support the expansion of the town centre beyond Lower Street, particularly for larger floorplate uses that cannot be easily accommodated within the historic street pattern of the core.
- Transform Lower Street into an attractive, safe and active route that will form part of the town centre rather than a barrier to it.
- Reintroduce, where possible, lost east-west pedestrian permeability through barrier blocks and across Lower Street.
- Support the objectives of Renew North Staffordshire and assist with the delivery of their vision for Newcastle as 'an exemplar of town centre living.
- Ensure that new development is compatible with the needs of both town centre users and local residents.

1.5 A promotional approach

The Council own a number of sites within the study area, including the Midway multi-storey car park. There are however many additional under-used and vacant privately owned sites within the study area and adjacent to it that help to make this an area of major potential with the capacity to transform the image, identity and offer of the town as a whole. The proximity of the area to the town centre and major through routes make it highly visible and for this reason new development must be of the highest standard.

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 Eastern Approaches and the Newcastle College areas. This study has been formulated with some knowledge of the land use and development recommendations for the Eastern Approaches and has therefore sought to develop proposals for the Western Edge in a complementary manner. It is beyond the scope of this study to consider in implications of change elsewhere within the town. The forthcoming Town Centre Area Action Plan will be required to demonstrate understanding context within which this study sits.

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 – Vision and guidance framework – 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 background – 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 and next steps.

Vision and Guidance Framework 2



Street market, High Street



Redlion Square



Lower Street



The Guildhall



Former Blackfriars bakery



Roundabout

Western Edge Today



Introduction

This framework represents a component of an urban design study commissioned by Newcastle Under Lyme Borough Council. The primary audience of the study is intended to be, 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.

Purpose of Framework

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.



Understanding Context

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.



Church Road



Challenges

The following challenges have been identified as facing the area:

- To stimulate high quality new development which is responsive to the local physical context and which helps to realise a bold contemporary vision for the area that will help it realise its full potential;
- To ensure that the area operates in a manner that is supportive of and complementary to the continued success and strengthening of the town centre;
- To establish a quality benchmarks for new development within the area that are influenced by national and local exemplars rather than by the immediate built environment;
- To encourage the redevelopment of poor quality vacant and under-used buildings and sites and stimulate maintenance and refurbishment investment in retained structures;
- To correct the imbalance between the car and the pedestrian throughout the area;
- To ensure low levels of frontage activity within the area are reversed by new development and refurbishment that incorporates active ground floor uses where-ever possible especially along principal walking routes;
- To address impermeable nature of many of the blocks located to the east and west of Lower Street and where possible encourage the re-introduction of lost east-west pedestrian routes, integrating these with the towns wider pedestrian and cycle network;
- To replace the fragmented, under-used, unattractive and unwelcoming perception of the area with a positive image, repositioning it in the minds of potential investors and developers, the existing business community and existing and potential residents as an area that is subject of a clear and directed process of change and renewal.



High Street south

An area of change

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 the prime retail and leisure destinations, bars, restaurants and the outdoor market. The centre of the study area is within a five minutes walk of the town centre core;
- proximity to Queen Elizabeth Park and Lyme Brook green corridor;
- proximity to attractive and well established residential areas to the west

Land use pattern

- the Western Edge is sandwiched between a predominantly residential area to the west and the retail and leisure town centre core to the east, it has the feel of a zone of transition;
- historically this was an important employment area and at least one significant industrial occupier remains;
- the Western Edge is now characterised by the diversity of its large floor plate buildings that have largely replaced industrial uses. These include multi-storey car parks, car retail, light industry together with vacant buildings and cleared sites;
- much of the historic urban grain has been lost with exception of the area adjacent to the Market Place.

Land and buildings

- the council owns a number of sites within the Western Edge that have redevelopment potential;
- a number of vacant and under-used buildings, sites and urban blocks within the area have potential for redevelopment and refurbishment.

Movement and access

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

Market activity

- there is considerable market interest in the Western Edge and the council has been approached informally by a number of developers and landowners to discuss development options for sites within the area.



Towards a vision

Having gained an understanding of the area, and its potential for change the following 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 distinctive connecting quarter supporting a vibrant town centre and desirable residential neighbourhoods..’

- a mix of uses – residential, offices, retail and leisure,
- a mix of formats – fine grain development supported by some larger floor plate development that can not be accommodated within the core,
- active frontages fronting pedestrian routes throughout the area,
- supporting the commercial core by providing capacity for additional and complimentary retail, office and leisure uses,
- a connecting area that re-establishes the links in the urban fabric and movement system of the town,
- a distinctive built environment that exploits the potential the area has to redefine itself,
- a place that has built-in long term adaptability and flexibility of use,
- a coherent network of new and enhanced pedestrian friendly routes,
- a place that is characterised by its new and improved public open spaces, including the opened up river frontage,
- a public realm of consistent quality that links seamlessly to the town centre.

Structuring principles

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

1. new development should respond to and enhance the underlying movement structure of the area and where improved block permeability can be introduced or re-introduced this should be sought;
2. new development should reinforce key nodes; and where appropriate add new pedestrian routes in order to enhance permeability;
3. new development and refurbishment must seek to introduce active ground floor frontage;
4. ensure that the new development respects the roof line of the town centre;
5. ensure that new development responds to and enhances views into and out of the area;
6. new development should repair damaged urban blocks and where appropriate re-introduce lost finer urban grain;
7. sub-divide large barrier blocks to extend the finer urban grain of the town centre core to the west;
8. ensure that development adjacent to Lyme Brook assists with developing the amenity and movement potential of this asset by integrating it into the green space and movement network of the wider town;
9. promote access to the riverside and reinforce its integration into the pedestrian route network of the town.
10. create opportunities for area wide improvements to the pedestrian and cycle network;
11. new development should promote the use of high quality material for building and landscape;
12. new development should be informed by reference to national and local design exemplars and must avoid pastiche;

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 Western Edge includes part of the transitionary belt that separates the inner residential areas to the west from the retail, office and leisure core of the town centre to the east. It is anticipated that current land uses will change over time but that the transitional role of the area will remain important.

The fractured and disjointed nature of the land use transition between east and west will be replaced by a more continuous and gradual transition. The objective is to accept the transitionary nature of the area but to transform its character from one of fragmentation to one of unification.

The area has the capacity to successfully re-connect the east and the west, extending established and successful adjacent land uses and where these meet mixed-use developments should be encouraged. New mixed use development opportunities (dominated by residential

or commercial uses) are indicated on Plan 04 Land Use Principles. Office, leisure, retail and food/drink uses should be encouraged on at least ground floors that front major pedestrian routes, movement nodes and gateways.

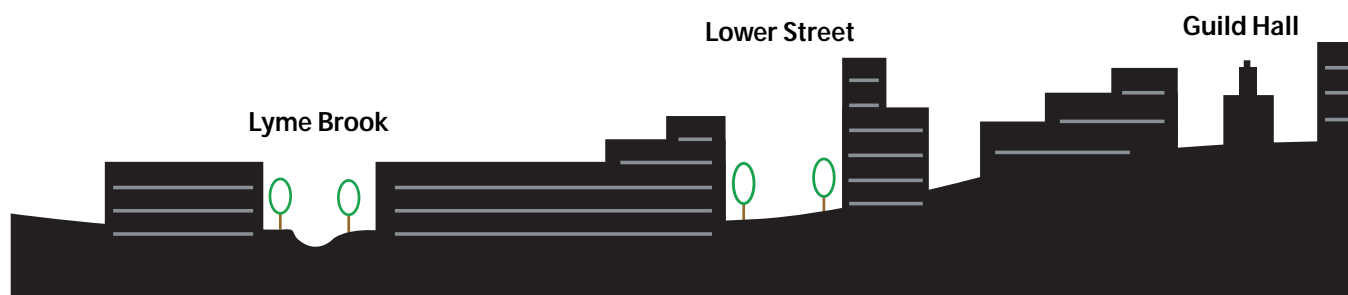
Building height

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 i.e. 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 its role as a major gateway into the town centre.

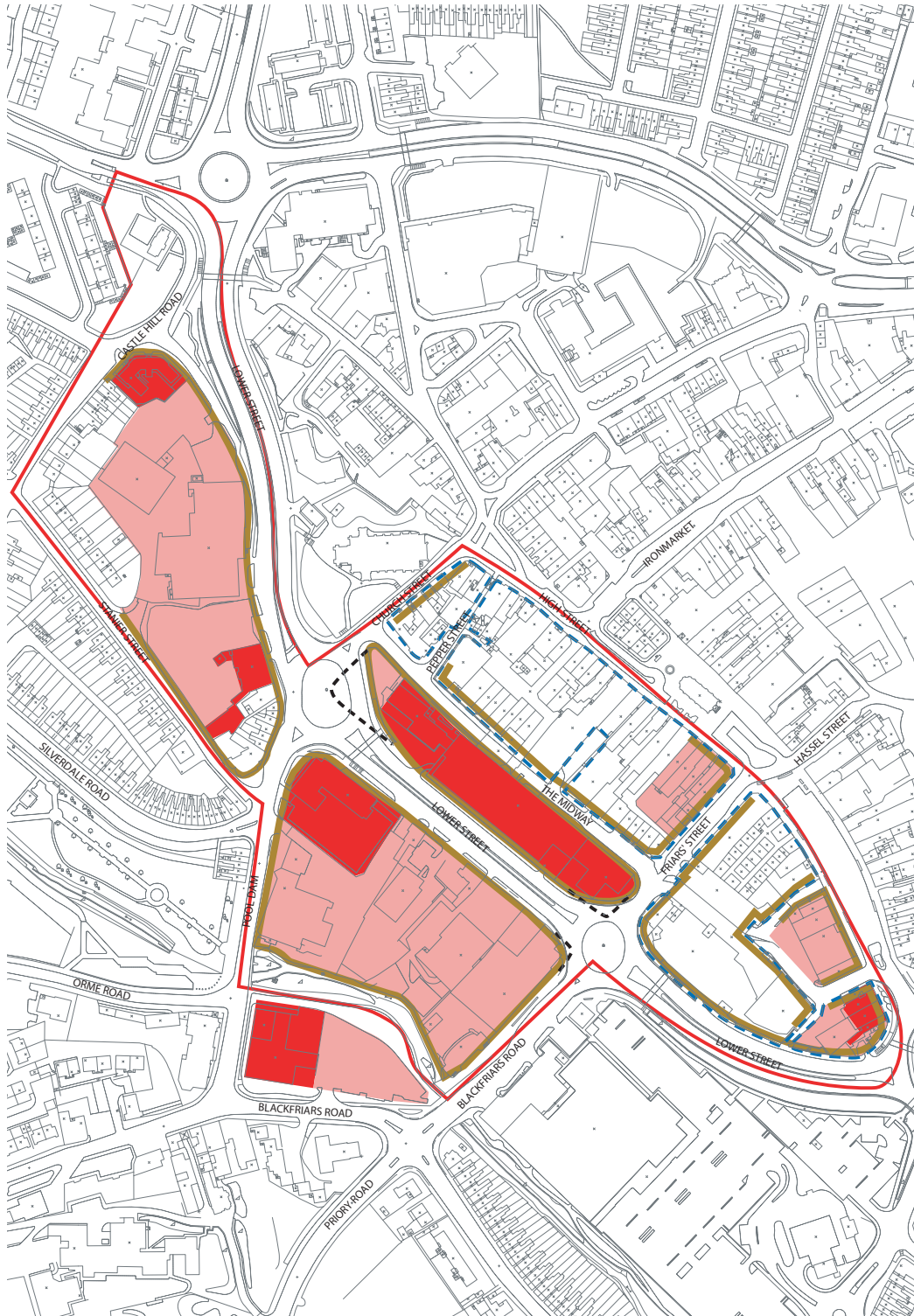
Guidance on maximum building heights is shown on Plan 03. Building height is also related to the density of development on any particular site. This will involve consideration of other potential impacts of proposed development, both positive, neutral and negative.

The visual impact of higher buildings can be 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.



Illustrative Section





Plan 02 - Block Development Principles



Soft Potential Development Sites (short-mid term)

Hard Potential Development Sites (long term)

Consolidation of block

Potential for block realignment

Potential for frontage improvements

Study area

SCALE
0 100M

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 or poorly enclosed streets 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:

- 1 ground floor building uses that interact with the public domain i.e. shops, restaurants including windows that enable good visual connections between uses within the building and the public realm;
- 2 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.

The High Street is the priority area for qualitative frontage improvements and new frontages should be priorities on sites lining the main walking routes linking the town centre to the western residential areas and Morrisons.



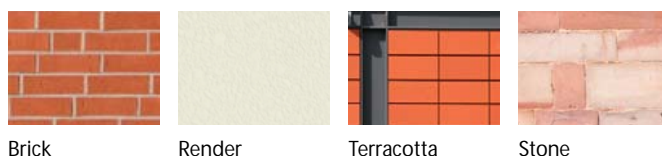
Street blocks

The historic street block structure of the study area has in recent decades been the subject of some significant interventions, including the widening of Lower Street and the introduction of large single use buildings. Opportunities exist to rework major street blocks which combine a number of sites and offer the potential for a more comprehensive development approach. This increased permeability should result in 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 (e.g. a new public space focus). Plan 02 indicates those street blocks with potential for such an approach.

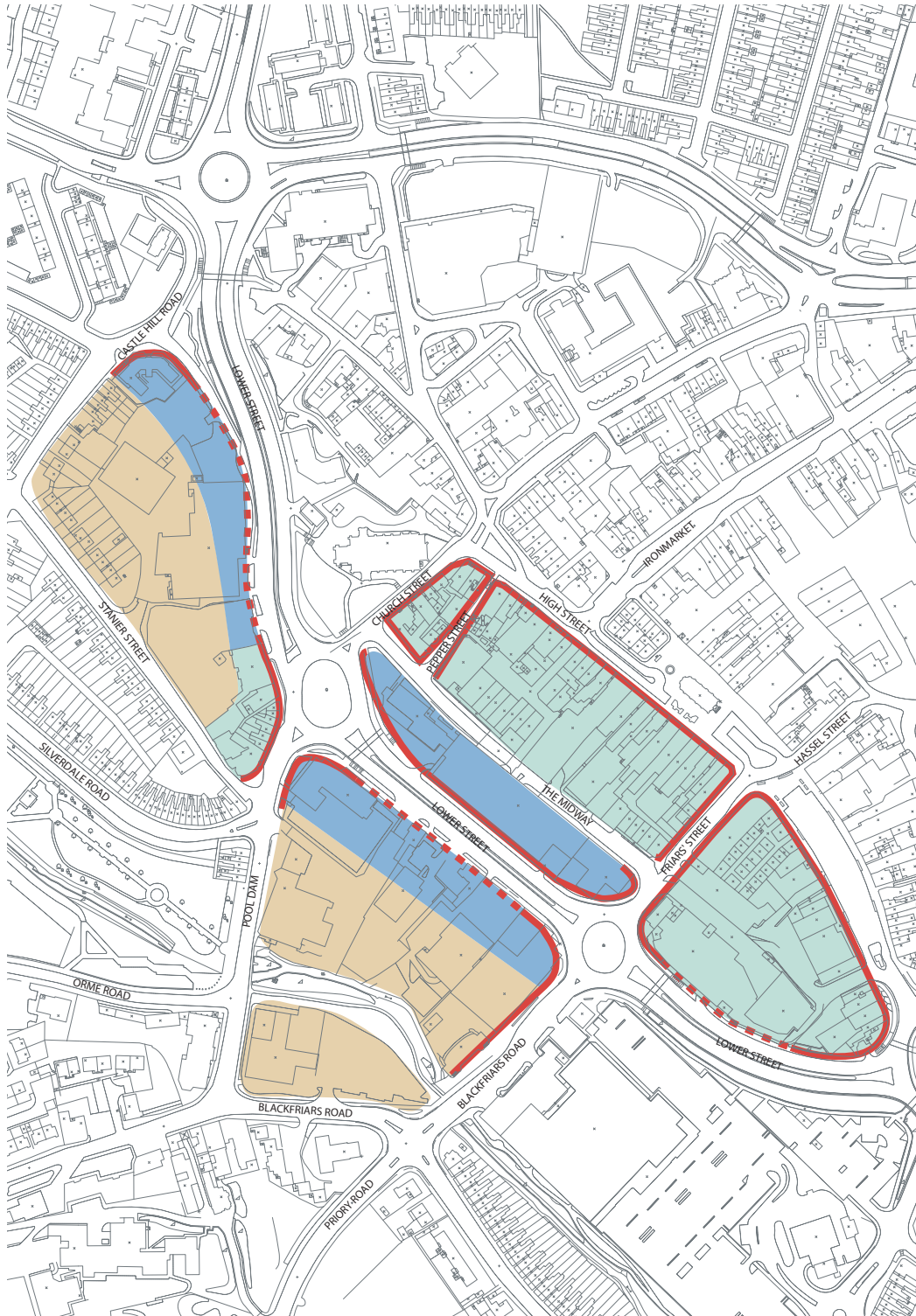
Building Materials

The context analysis has shown that red brick, painted render, clay and slate tiles form the historic building palette of the study area with a limited use of natural stone confined to major civic and regional buildings. More recent development has introduced coloured and profiled sheet 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 that 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, natural stone details, and glazing. See above.





Plan 04 - Land use principles



SCALE
0 100M

- Mixed Use ■
- Residential ■
- Town Centre uses - retail domination ■
- Active ground floor —
- Overlooking and frontage access - -



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 (i.e. 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.

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.

The integration of artistic work within building and landscape design proposals is to be encouraged. Helping to reinforce local identity this could take many forms including creative building lighting, public realm improvements, entrance floorscape designs and sculptural work. The potential for artistic work should be considered from an early stage in the development of design proposals.



Stone paving flags



Set paving stone

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 plan 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 identity of the area. This approach could include the design of bespoke street furniture and the potential involvement of artists or craftspeople. The emphasis should be on delivering a public realm that is attractive and engaging but also has clarity and coherence.

Movement and access

It is 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 an assessment of their potential impacts on traffic movement in the wider town centre 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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Policy Background 3



High Street



Georgia Pacific Road



Friars' Street



St. Giles Church



Pedestrian subway, Lower Street



Recent development, London Road

Western Edge Today

3.1 National policy context

Central Government guidance has over recent years highlighted the important role of design within the planning system and its contribution to successful regeneration, place making and delivery of the sustainable communities plan.

Planning Policy Statement 1: Delivering sustainable development (PPS1) states that 'Good design ensures attractive, useable, durable and adaptable places and is a key element in achieving sustainable development. Good design is indivisible from good planning.'

Furthermore PPS1 states that design which is inappropriate in its context, or which fails to take the opportunities available for improving the character and quality of an area and the way it functions, should not be accepted. Good practice in planning for the achievement of high quality and inclusive design is set out in By Design, Urban Design in the Planning System: Towards Better Practice; Safer Places: The Planning System and Crime Prevention; and Planning and Access for Disabled People: A Good Practice Guide.

Planning Policy Statement 6: Planning for Town Centres states that it is essential that town centres provide a high-quality and safe environment if they are to remain attractive and competitive and that policies for the design of development for main town centre uses, regardless of location, and for development in town centres, should promote high quality and inclusive design, in order to improve the character and quality of the area in which such development is located and the way it functions.

Planning Policy Guidance note PPG15 (Planning and the Historic Environment) and PPG16 (Archaeology and Planning) are both relevant to development within and in the vicinity area.

By Design, Urban Design in the Planning System: Towards Better Practice is the governments core urban design guidance document. It identifies the following objectives or principles of design; they are mutually reinforcing:

1. **Character** – to promote character in townscape and landscape by responding to and reinforcing locally distinctive patterns of development, landscape and culture.
2. **Continuity and enclosure** – to promote the continuity of street frontages and the enclosure of space by development which clearly defines private and public areas.
3. **Quality of the public realm** – to promote public spaces and routes that are attractive, safe, uncluttered and work effectively for all in society, including disabled and elderly people.
4. **Ease of movement** – to promote accessibility and local permeability by making places that connect with each other and are easy to move through, putting people before traffic and integrating land uses and transport.
5. **Legibility** – to promote legibility through development that provides recognisable routes, intersections and landmarks to help people find their way around.
6. **Adaptability** – to promote adaptability through development that can respond to changing social, technological and economic conditions.
7. **Diversity** – To promote diversity and choice through a mix of compatible developments and uses that work together to create viable places that respond to local needs.

3.2 Local policy context

Newcastle Under Lyme Local Plan 2003

A number of design related policies form part of the are relevant to the study area they include the following:

Policy S15 states that 'the external design and appearance of all new development or extensions and alterations to existing buildings must be in visual harmony with the character of the area in which the development is situated. Buildings should be massed and grouped together so that in conjunction with varied space between buildings and imaginative landscape treatment they create notable architectural compositions that add distinction to their surroundings and seek to maintain local distinctiveness.'

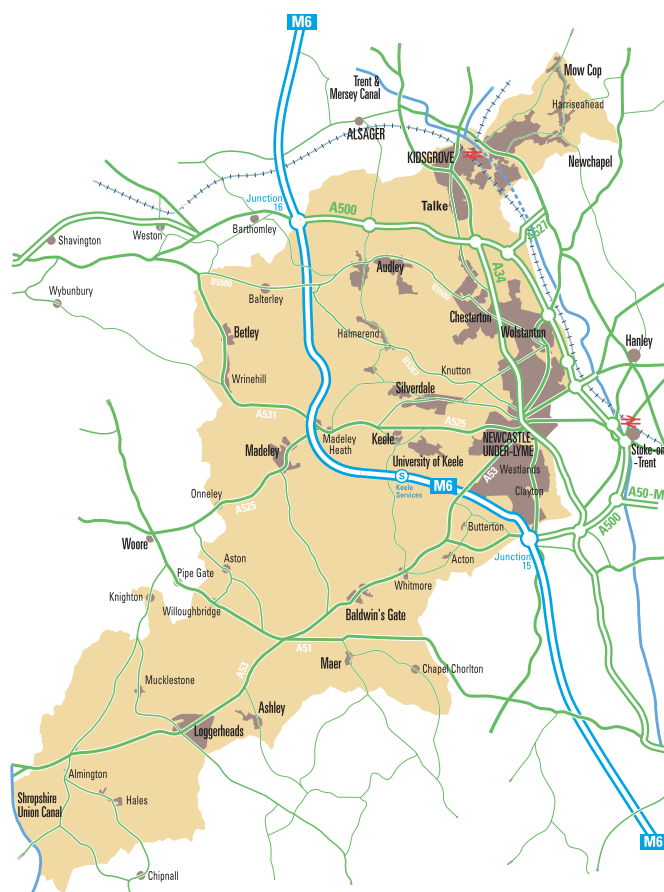
Policy R11 states that 'any development adjoining the ring road should add to the attractiveness of the approaches to the Town Centre. Buildings and the treatment of spaces and edges should display a high quality of design, reflecting visual importance of prominent locations and, where appropriate, provide landmark features at main road junctions'

Local Development Framework

The Local Plan will be replaced by the Local Development Framework (LDF). The preparation of the Newcastle Town Centre Action Plan (AAP) has commenced and a draft is planned by the Autumn of this year. It will form a part of the LDF. The study will provide an input into this process and offers the potential to consider the wider implications of developing integrated urban design policy and guidance for the wider town centre area. The AAP will reflect Newcastle's potential, identified by Renew North Staffordshire, to become a fine example of how town centre living can become attractive and popular. Furthermore the AAP will enable an integrated consideration of the regeneration potential of prominent development sites within the study area, the Lower Street corridor and other central locations facing significant change.

Supplementary Planning Guidance: Space around Dwellings

This Supplementary planning Guidance note (SPG) was adopted by the Council in July 2004. It acknowledges that government policy encourages high densities for housing development in sustainable locations within the urban area and close to town and district centres. The note states that where high-density development is proposed, good design is particularly important, as are the requirements for appropriate levels of privacy and space.



Context Analysis

4



High Street



High Street



Lower Street



Church Street



High Street



Lower Street

Western Edge Today

4.1 Introduction

The following sections sets out the findings of a context analysis:

- Study area wider context;
- Historical development;
- Land use structure;
- Movement and access structure;
- Building design overview;
- Streetscape and landscape design overview;
- Urban analysis;
- Scoping potential.

4.2 Study area wider context

Strategic location

The study area forms the western edge of the town centre and is bisected by Lower Street which forms the western section of the ring road from Knutton Lane roundabout to Grosvenor Roundabout. The ring road is connected to the regional highway network and to strategic routes to Hanley and Stoke. Lower Street is also part of the A34 a key route linking the town with Manchester via Kidsgrove and Congleton to the north as well as Stafford and the M6 motorway to the south. The A34 is a key access route into the centre of Newcastle under Lyme for car parking, servicing and general access and accommodates significant traffic flows. Plan 05 shows the location of the study area within the context of the north Staffordshire conurbation.

The High Street which forms the eastern boundary of the study area is a core component of the towns prime retail frontage. It is also one of the most significant elements of the historic spatial structure of the town.

Impact of the ring road

The ring road acts as the major barrier to pedestrian and cycle movement between the town centre historic core and the rest of the study area. It's visual appearance is poor and detrimentally affects the first time visitors impression of the town centre and what it has to offer. It has also served to disconnect the communities that lie to the west of the ring road from town centre functions of shopping, leisure, and council services. It has also perhaps contributed to a lack of investment in frontage sites and to poor quality development.

Other potential areas of change

The Western Wedge area has been identified by the Council as having significant potential for change resulting from the extent and nature of potential development sites, the level of developer interest within the area and the wider town centre, the proximity of the area to the town centre core and associated land uses and the good local and strategic highway connections. The Western Edge is one of a number of areas with potential for change but also with potential to make a fuller contribution to the economic, social and cultural well being of the town centre and the wider borough.

Possible tensions between these areas in terms of conflicting or competing land use proposals and urban design objectives will be resolved through the AAP preparation process. This will enable the study area to be set within a more integrated framework. This process may result in the need to make some adjustments to the vision, guidance and potential interventions identified in this study. Plan 06 shows the study area in relation the wider town centre.

Plan 05 - Study area within the context of North Staffordshire conurbation



- Newcastle Under Lyme Urban Area
- Stoke-on-Trent Urban Area
- Study Area Boundary

Plan 06 - Study area within the context of the town centre



4.3 Historical Development

A study of the historical development of the area was based upon the following:

- An analysis of historic Ordnance Survey mapping and comparisons with current map data;
- An analysis of historic photographs and references;
- Research into the nature and location of listed buildings, conservation areas and historic features within and adjoining the study area;
- A review of the Historic Environment Record of Staffordshire County Council; and
- An on site visual/photographic survey.

Extracts from the resulting character appraisal are set out below.

Origins and Development

Newcastle originated as a small settlement enjoying the protection and opportunities for trade afforded by an early twelfth century royal castle. Immediately to the west of the study area the remnants of the motte and bailey Norman castle and later foundations are to be found. They are scheduled as Ancient Monuments. In addition much of the valley floor and the area to the south of the church of St. Giles had been identified as of archaeological significance.



High Street, nineteenth century



Redlion Square looking Northwest, 1897

Stanier Street (formerly Poolside) and Pool Dam appear to be on the line of what was once the eastern and north-eastern boundary of the oval-shaped castle garth, the form of which can still be read in the modern-day street pattern.

The original settlement was centred on the northern edge of the study area, in the vicinity of the spacious junction between what is now Castle Hill Road (formerly Lower Green), Dunkirk and the remnants of Holborn, extending north across the Ryecroft roundabout along the line of the northern stretch today's Lower Street, formerly Upper Green. Its movement to the east of the parish church took place in the 13th century, from which time developed the medieval pattern of a High Street with parallel streets and linking alleys that in part survives today.

The medieval street pattern spread to cover the whole of the area between the High Street and Lower Street. A series of steep lanes connected the two thoroughfares, the remnants of which survive in the form of Pepper Street, Friar's Street and a series of alleys and yards now subsumed by the Roebuck Centre or abruptly terminated by The Midway.

Lower Street was the for many years the main through-route, its role only supplanted by the High Street in the late eighteenth century when Newcastle became an important coaching town.

Other old streets can be traced within the study area, the main ones being the aforementioned Pool Dam and Blackfriars Road, both to the south-west of Lower Street and both leading to bridges over the Lyme Brook. Long, thin 'burgage' type plots did at one time distinguish the Lower Street frontage of the area between these two roads, though industry gradually came to dominate the valley floor.

Plan 07 - Ordnance Survey Map 1879



This was served by a branch of the North Staffordshire (later London Midland Scottish) Railway that ran along the straightened line of the Lyme Brook, connecting with the terminus of the Newcastle under Lyme Canal which lay at the south eastern corner of what is now Morrison's car park. A bridge carried a spur of the railway over the Lyme Brook, serving until the 1920s a brewery on the site of what is now the Kwik Fit garage.

Industrial activity extended north up the valley as far as a now lost tributary of the Brook which cut-through on a line between Frognall and Stanier Streets, bounding what is now the southern part of the Georgia Pacific site.

Development of the western part of the study area began with the laying out of Silverdale Road during the last half of the nineteenth century, the first pocket of small-scale, terraced housing appearing at the point where it curved to meet Pool Dam Road and the start of what is now Stanier Street. Plan 07 shows an extract from the 1879 ordnance survey map. Further historic OS maps are shown in Appendix 1.

Further expansion occurred in the aftermath of the First World War, with the construction of the low rise, low density housing that occupies the rest of the Silverdale Road–Stanier Street triangle. New housing of a more traditional, high density form replaced older buildings on Lower Green (Castle Hill Road) and Dunkirk. Older buildings were also cleared along the eastern side of Lower Street, opening up land that in the 1960s would be largely taken up by the dual carriageway and roundabouts of the inner ring road.

The post-war construction of the inner ring road brought with it massive changes to the centre of Newcastle. Wholesale clearance of the remaining buildings to the east of Lower Street, the obliteration of Goose Street and the severance of minor streets resulted in the present disconnection of the western part of the study area, the sense of isolation being heightened by the creation of The Midway, and the erection of the multi-storey car parks, office and entertainment buildings that have all but destroyed the historic link between the High Street and Lower Street. Pedestrianisation of the High Street and surrounding areas followed, although limited access for traffic has been retained.



Friar Street looking Southwest, 1937

The Roebuck Shopping Centre was erected behind the retained facades of a number of High Street Buildings, with an elevated section bridging The Midway. A new telephone exchange was built on the corner on the corner of Pool Dam and Lower Street, the railway disappeared (replaced by a green walkway that extends into the post-war Queen Elizabeth Park).

Older industries on the valley floor declined, leaving a sense of dereliction that is hardly alleviated by the large-scale warehousing that has sprung up over recent years, and the recent construction of the Morrison's superstore on the site of the old cattle market, immediately across Blackfriars Road.

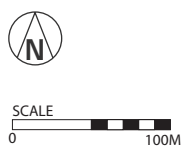
Prevailing or Former Uses

The High Street is predominantly given over to retail and commercial use, though with less residential occupation that would until quite recently have distinguished the area as one of 'mixed use'. A market is still held and the parish church remains in use.

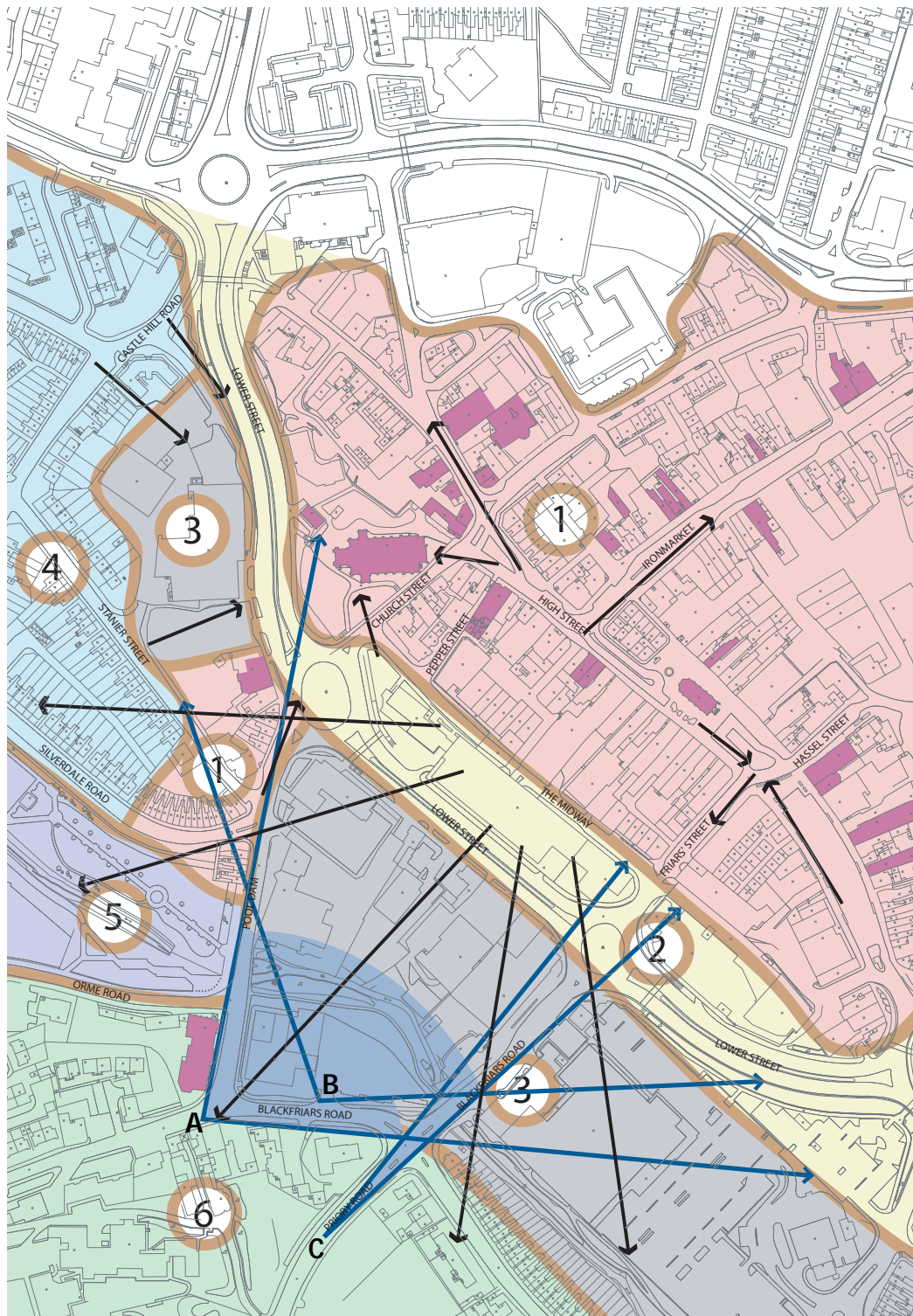
Much of the character of the High Street stems from this historic continuity of use, with the historic pattern of long, narrow plots of land interspersed with alleyways and yards still in evidence. This small-scale, fine-grained urban environment or the High Street did until quite recently extend down the hill to embrace Lower Street, extending northwards along the valley before petering out in a cluster around Lower Green (Castle Hill Road). It is now interrupted by the large scale, predominantly single-use structures that line Lower Street.



Plan 08 - Conservation Areas and Listed Buildings



- Study Area
- Listed Buildings
- Conservation Areas
- Monument boundaries
- Findspot ★



Plan 09 - Character Areas



SCALE
0 100M

- Fine grained traditional urban ①
- Open unstructured traffic and building dominated ②
- Industrial premises, retail warehousing and yards ③
- 'Garden City' - Low rise small scale housing ④
- Green municipal parkland ⑤

- Green suburban slopes ⑥
- Listed Buildings
- Key View
- Views



View A



View B



View C

Although Newcastle did not share to any great extent in the pottery industries of neighbouring Stoke on Trent, archaeological evidence has revealed sites of clay-related industries on the valley floor. An iron and brass foundry also flourished on a site adjacent the old castle motte on Silverdale Road, just on the edge of the study area, though this was out of use by 1900 and its buildings cleared by 1924. The brewery on Lower Street sat next to a tannery.

A number of mills were constructed towards the end of the nineteenth century (including a saw mill) and by the time of the 1924 OS map there were three fustian mills within the study area: one on Stanier Street on what is now an empty site behind Maxim's club-bar, one on the site of what is now the car dealership on Pool Dam and one on land behind the Kwik Fit garage (and which subsequently became a warehouse). A paper mill sat the point where Holborn met the old end of Lower Street, west and just north of the parish church.

Old OS maps also indicate a tradition of bakeries on the land to the north-west of Blackfriars Road on what is not the site of the derelict Blackfriars Bakery.

The industrial and commercial nature of the valley floor persists to this day in the form of various warehouse-based activities, though in a much degraded context of under-use and dereliction which in the northern part of the study area gives way to a series of quiet, residential streets of suburban character.

Contribution of Listed Buildings and Key Listed monuments

There are five Grade II listed buildings within the study area, three on the High Street, one on Church Street and one on west side of Lower Street. More listed buildings and structures lie just beyond its boundaries, five of which serve as significant local landmarks and hence have a clear relationship to the area: St. Giles' Church (II*), the adjacent Unitarian Meeting House (II), the freestanding Guildhall (II) and Market Cross (II) in the High Street, and the Old Orme Boy's Primary School (II) at the southern end of Pool Dam.

The facades of a number of listed buildings also help define the character of the High Street, particularly where it terminates as Red Lion Square. There is an extreme presumption in favour of the retention of all listed buildings, and the protection of their settings, in as much as this forms a part of their special interest.

A number of key unlisted buildings also contribute positively to the character of the study area, particularly in terms of the overall townscape of the High Street and the other surviving older streets. These are important in that they play a key role in creating local distinctiveness.

Isolated buildings such as the derelict Sutherland Arms public house on Blackfriars Road also add a certain character to the area, albeit that their impact is generally degraded by the poor quality of their setting.

Character Areas

The character of the study area and its immediate environs can be summarised in terms of six distinct character. They are shown on Plan 09.

1. Areas with a fine-grained traditional urban character with narrow plots, active ground floors, continuous frontages of 2–4 storey facades with strong vertical proportions and intimate historic lanes and yards behind, a predominance of traditional materials, and a general sense of order and unity, despite many variations in the style and detail of the architecture.
2. The open, unstructured character of the inner ring road and its immediate environs, dominated by large, monolithic buildings and structures on the slopes above. Trees and municipal planting do little to soften the impact of this harsh, traffic-dominated environment, the sense of disconnection being reinforced by uninviting subways, safety barriers, retaining walls, embankments and stepped crossings.
3. Areas comprising large industrial and commercial buildings, often derelict or semi-derelict, set in a wasteland of car parking and yards, sub-divided by high fences with no enclosure of space and no discernible structure, despite the occasional presence of a building of positive character. Virtually the whole of the valley floor to the west of Lower Street exhibits this character, the one notable exception being the tree-lined corridor of the Lyme Brook
4. Low-rise, small-scale housing of 'garden city' character, with short terraces or semi-detached dwellings set back from road within their own gardens. The overall feeling is one of greenery and spaciousness, with the clear distinctions drawn between public and private, reinforced by boundary treatments that include wooden picket fences and neatly-trimmed hedges. Stanier Street, Castle Hill Road and adjacent streets are representative of this type.
5. The green, municipal character of Queen Elizabeth Park, a post-war creation which overlays the line of the old railway and other features.

6. The steep, suburban slopes of the south-western side of the valley of the Lyme Brook, where Victorian and Edwardian terraces and villas sit within a heavily treed landscape, interspersed with schools and similar institutions.

4.4 Land use Structure

Development Activity

Plan 10 shows principal building uses and Plan 11 also identifies potential development sites. There are no major committed development schemes within the study area or planning applications for significant development projects. However, the Council has received a number of enquiries regarding the potential for residential development on land between Lower Street, Pool Dam, Blackfriars Road and Lyme Brook and on land fronting Lower Street north of Pool Dam. Developer interest in land with potential for residential development is echoed in other areas of the town centre, notably the Eastern Gateway.

4.5 Movement and access structure

Vehicular routes network

The A34 forms part of the principal local highway network and runs through the study area to the south as well as acting as the north-eastern boundary of the study area. The A34 itself forms a key route linking Newcastle under Lyme with Manchester via Kidsgrove and Congleton to the north as well as Stafford and the M6 motorway to the south. The A53 also provides a connection to the M6, via Blackfriars Road and Priory Road southwest of the town centre. The vehicular network is shown on Plan 12.

The A34 is a key route into the centre of Newcastle under Lyme that carries significant traffic flows throughout the day, and is particularly busy at peak periods. The A34 also makes up part of the town centre ring road from Knutton Lane roundabout to Grosvenor Roundabout, south east of the town centre.

Along this length of the ring road (Lower Street), the road is a dual two-lane carriageway with a number of unsignalled roundabout junctions allowing access to the town centre. The ring road section was observed to carry large volumes of traffic, noticeably HGVs.

In addition, a number of businesses in the Lower Street area are accessed from the ring road, including car repair centres and a car dealership based on the lower floor of Midway multi-storey car park. Servicing areas for town centre / High

Street retail premises are also accessed via the ring road, principally at Friars Street and The Midway.

Pool Dam borders the study area from the roundabout junction at Church Street and the ring road to a signalled junction at Blackfriars Road. To the west of the study area, Stanier Street provides one-way access from Pool Dam into a main residential area. Blackfriars Road continues along the edge of the study area via a signalled junction at Priory Road to another ring road roundabout junction at Lower Street. A number of vacant business premises border the western side of Blackfriars Road.

Within the study area, High Street makes up part of the principal pedestrianised area in the town centre, and is currently designated as primary shopping frontage. Vehicular access is provided from Grosvenor Roundabout to service the street market which operates on 6 days a week. At the north-eastern end of High Street, service vehicle egress is provided allowing service vehicles to exit the town centre via Church Street and the ring road at an unsignalled roundabout junction. Pedestrian crossings are provided where the pedestrianised area meets Friars Street (which remains open for vehicular use).

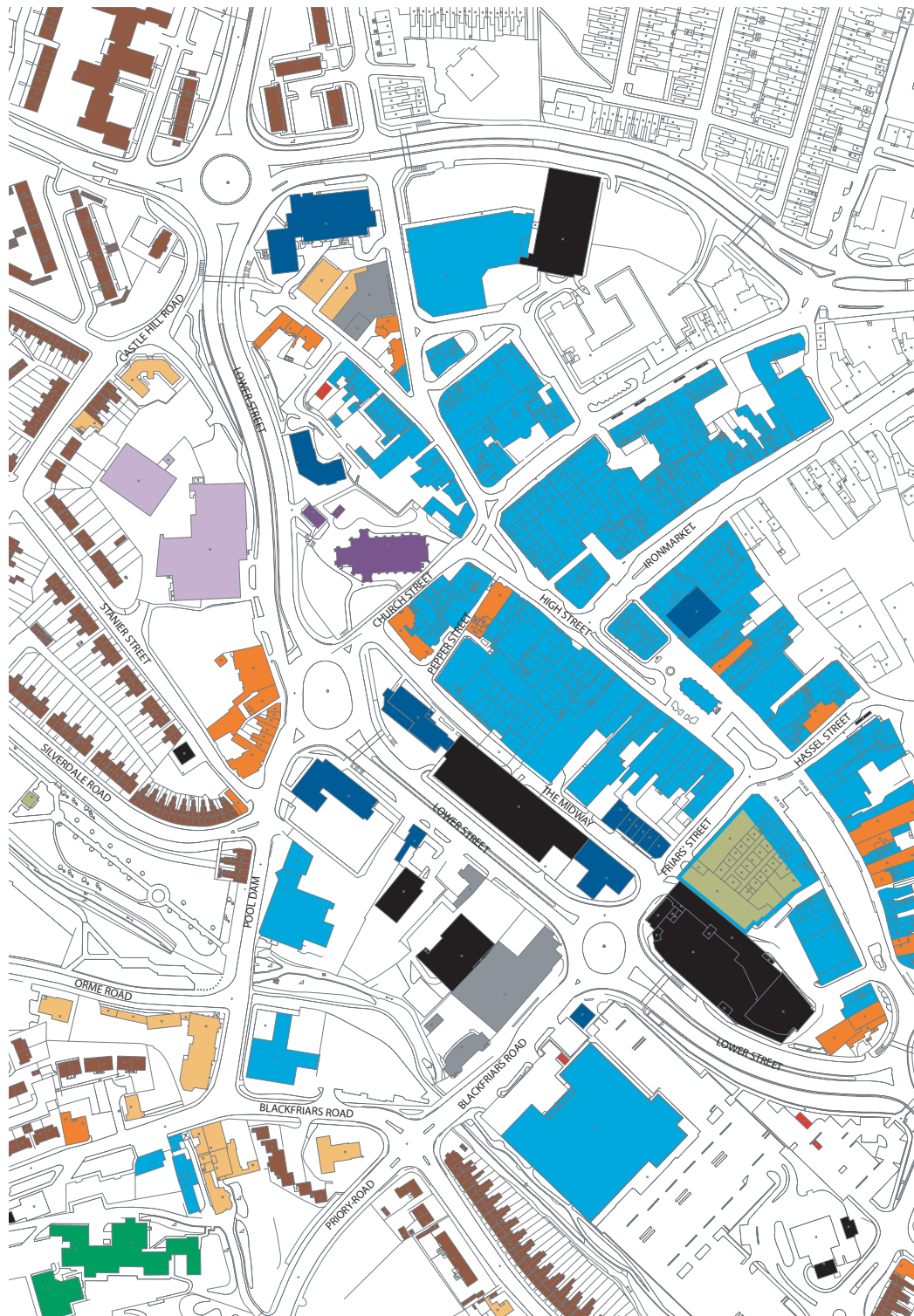
Car Parking

There are a number of multi-storey car parks within the study area, all of which are principally accessed from the ring road. The cinema car park is accessed via Grosvenor Roundabout, and The Midway car park is accessed from Lower Street Roundabout via Friars Street and The Midway. The majority of parking in the study area appears to be confined to the multi-storey car parks, with the exception of a small amount of on-street parking on Friars Street and a number of spaces for disabled drivers at the north-eastern end of High Street.

On-street parking was very much in evidence in the residential areas west of the town centre around Stanier Street and Castle Hill Road.

Public Transport

Newcastle under Lyme bus station is located approximately 150m from High Street, east of the town centre adjacent to the ring road at Barracks Road. The station provides the main access point to the local bus network as well as longer-distance National Express coach services.

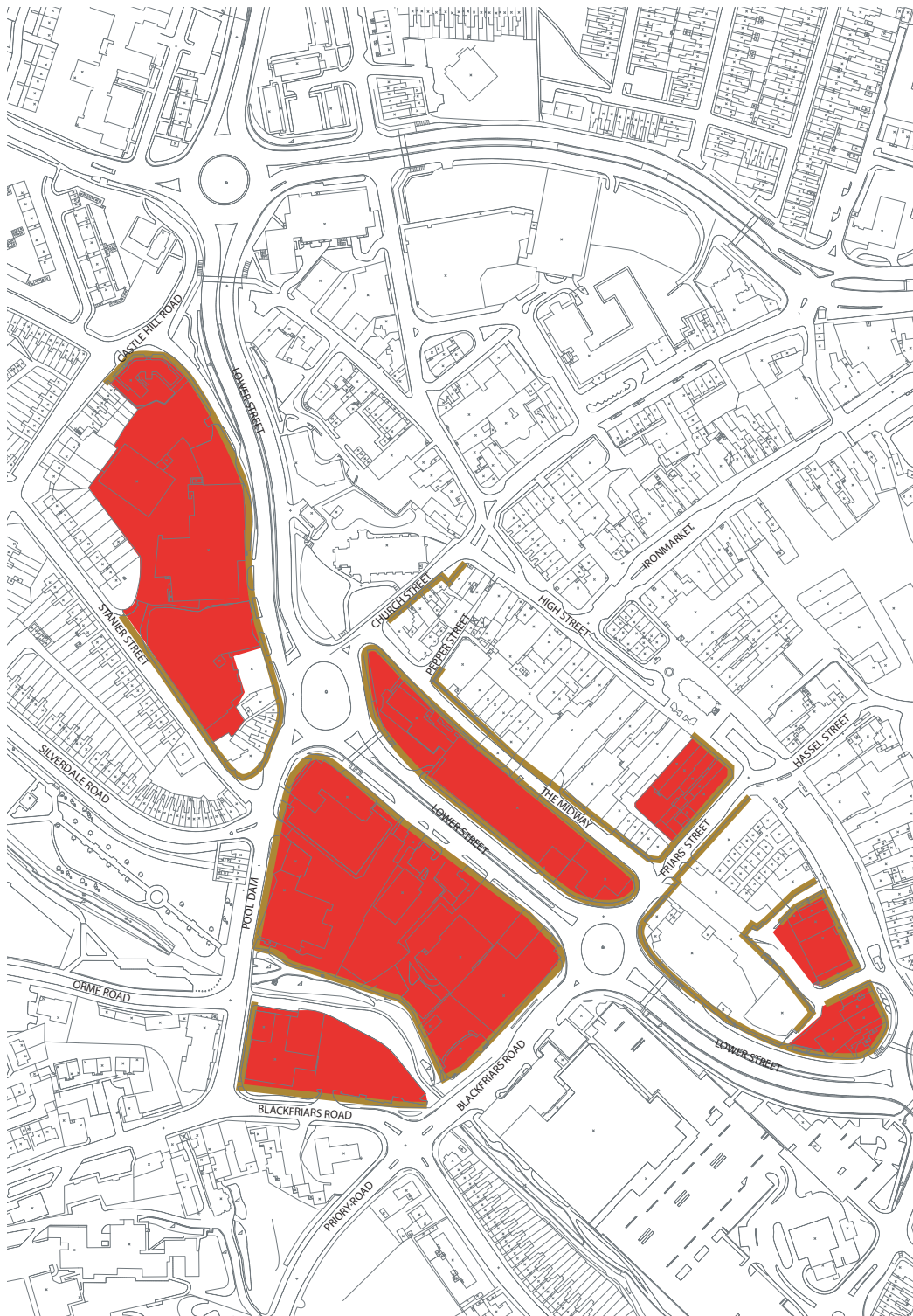


Plan 10 - Building Uses



SCALE
0 100M

Place of Worship	Leisure	Food/Drink	Services
Community	Vacant	Office	
Health/Beauty	Residential	Education	
Transport/Car parks	Retail	Light industrial	



Plan 11 - Potential Development Sites



SCALE
0 100M

Potential Development Site ■
Potential for frontage improvements □

The A34 is designated within the Local Transport Plan (LTP) as a Quality Partnership Route. Bus services to Kidsgrove to the north and Stone to the south operate on this route. Discussions with local transport officers indicated that despite the designation of the route as Quality Partnership Routes, there are no on-road bus priority measures (such as bus lanes). During the site visit it was observed that there are no other bus priority measures elsewhere within the study area.

A number of operators run local bus services in the Newcastle under Lyme area. First Group operate the principal local high-frequency 'Overground' bus network, covering the North Staffordshire area. The number 29 bus service between Newcastle under Lyme and Hanley provides connections to Stoke on Trent rail station at frequencies of up to 15 minutes.

Pedestrian route network

The primary pedestrian route formed by the High Street links the predominantly residential communities north of Ryecroft, Dunkirk and the Newcastle College area with the town centre. To the south this route or spine links with communities off London Road. The High Street with its lively shopping frontages and street market is a core component of the town centre pedestrian experience and has an important impact on the image and identity of the town as a whole.

Primary routes connect to the north east and east linking to the Civic Offices, Police Station, Ironmarket shopping, and the Bus Station. Church Street forms the primary connecting route to the south and west. This route extends over the roundabout junction on Lower Street to extend along Pool Dam linking with Queen Elizabeth Park, Poolfields Youth and Community Centre, Blackfriars School and adjacent residential communities.

The secondary pedestrian network provides infill route connections along the Lower Street corridor and from High Street via Friars Street to Blackfriars Road and Morrisons supermarket. Important secondary routes are formed by pedestrian only alley ways and internal routes within the Roebuck Shopping Centre. The pedestrian route network is shown on Plan 13.

Summary

The strategic role of Lower Street within the road hierarchy is reflected in the high traffic flows currently using it. Much

of this volume is perhaps through traffic; offering little to the town centre other than reinforcing a low grade image and restricting the regeneration potential of existing poor quality building fabric that forms its frontage. The delivery of an improved pedestrian environment and an enhanced public realm needs to be supported by creative traffic management and highway engineering solutions. Such solutions need to balance vehicular access to the wider town centre for parking and servicing with the need to promote a high quality pedestrian environment and coherent route network that is to the benefit of visitors and local communities.

The quality of the pedestrian environment on High Street is in stark contrast to that offered along Lower Street. The latter is particularly low grade and dominated by the adverse impacts of vehicular traffic. Pedestrian crossings are very few and subways are poor quality and often avoided by pedestrians. The problems of severance, noise and pollution are echoed along the length of the ring road.

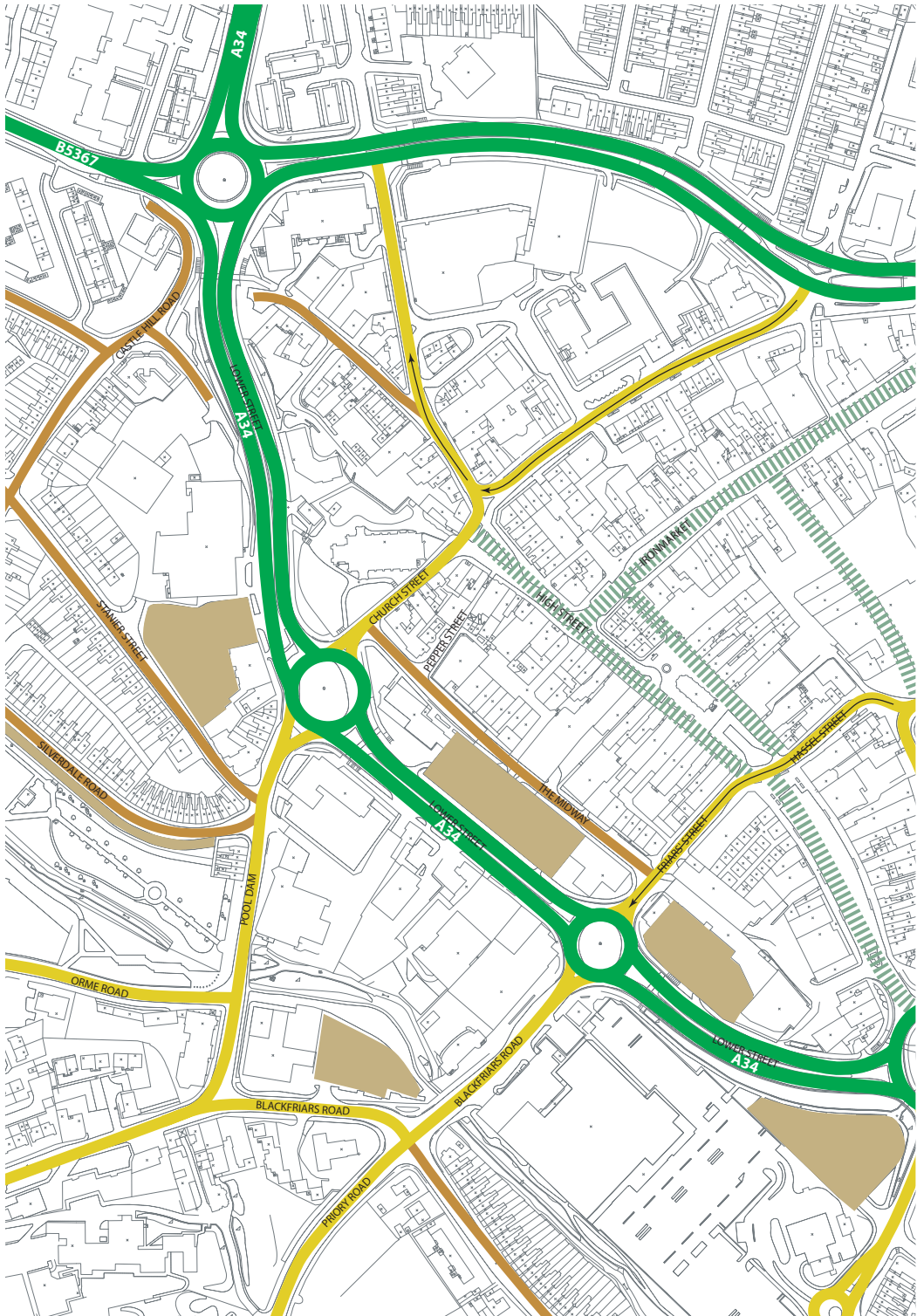
4.6 Building design overview

Impact of topography

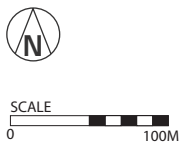
The study area slopes from the High Street to the valley floor of the Lyme Brook. This fall in ground level is most marked on Church Street, Pepper Street and Friar's Street which descend to Lower Street from High Street. Church Street and Friar's Street offer key views over the valley floor to the wooded slopes of the western side of the valley. Lower Street forms a terrace on the slope side. Post war development on the eastern side of the street is of a significant height and creates a barrier to views towards the High Street from the valley floor and in particular from the potential development site which fronts the Lyme Brook and includes the former Blackfriars bakery. The visual impact of the multi storey car park blocks (height, scale and massing) is particularly detrimental and exacerbated by poor building design. However, the upper floors provide panoramic views of the Western Edge of the town centre. Any development proposals should seek to respond sensitively to the topographical characteristics of the area. For example any new building blocks proposed between Midway and the Lyme Brook should step down the slope and create new view corridors back to the core of the town centre. Plan 14 illustrates the topography of the study area.

Building materials

A variety of building materials are to be found across the study area. Arguably the most common material is brick



Plan 12 - Vehicular Network



- Primary routes
- Secondary routes
- Tertiary routes
- Pedestrian zone
- One way
- Car Parking



Plan 13 - Pedestrian Network



- Primary routes —
- Secondary routes —
- Pedestrian Crossings =
- Destinations ■
- Car park ■
- Bus stops ●

often complemented by clay or slate roof tiles. However, this more traditional palette of materials is contrasted with historic landmark buildings faced with stone such as St. Giles Church and the Guildhall. Painted brick and render also feature within the study area although in the main concentrated within the core of the town centre.

There are notable breaks with the use of traditional materials in respect of postwar buildings particularly those of significant height, scale and massing. These include the use of cladding panels such as those used on the multi storey car park structures along Lower Street (including the extensive use of concrete and other man made panels) and on buildings fronting the east side of Pool Dam. The visual impact of cladding panels, often used in consistent profile and colour over extensive building facades, can be very significant. Factory produced cladding panels of coated metal, plastic and other man made materials have different weathering properties to more traditional materials. When used insensitively and as a cheap means to enclose a building the results can be detrimental often eroding the character of an area.

Shopfronts

The Western Edge study area contains a high concentration of existing retail units located on the southern side of the High Street together with a few others on Church Street, Pepper Street and Friars' Street. There is another cluster of retail units on Pool Dam at the junction with Lower Street. There is an inconsistency in shop front design quality throughout the retail core with the limited number of high quality survivals being matched by the limited number of high quality contemporary examples. Many recent shop fronts are unsympathetic to both the buildings that they occupy and the wider streetscape being constructed from stock components, such as extruded powder coated aluminium (frame) and plastic sheet (fascia/lettering). The proposed Newcastle Town Centre Urban Design Guide should set out the design requirements for new fascias and shop fronts.

4.7 Streetscape and landscape design overview

The streetscape and public realm review was based upon a consideration of three broad zones described below. The results of this review are shown on Plan 17. It has highlighted the poor quality of the public realm across much of the study area.

Zone 1 – Upper valley and town centre core – High Street to Midway

The High Street by contrast has at least seen some investment given it's prime retail function. However, the wall to wall block paving now looks tired and the street furniture is similarly dated and unco-ordinated. Significant potential exists in this location to create a first class public realm that provides a higher quality and distinctive setting to historic buildings and reinforces the pivotal importance of the high Street and market area within the spatial structure of the historic town centre core. Midway is very much relegated to the role of service route and access to the multi storey car park. The quality of pedestrian routes which connect to High Street (Pepper Street and alley way next to No.70 High Street) is very poor.

Zone 2 – Lower Street Corridor

The impact of the ring road on the fabric of the town centre is considerable and is exacerbated by it's low grade appearance in terms of footway surface treatments, street furniture (including lighting, vehicular signing, subway infrastructure etc). Limited street tree planting helps to reduce its impact but does not continue along it's full length. Pedestrian crossing and subways are limited in number and of poor quality.

Zone 3 – Lower Valley and west of Lower Street

Within the study area the Lyme Brook is an under exploited environmental asset. Significant potential exists to improve pedestrian access to the riverside as part of a wider integrated strategy to reconnect the town centre with the Western Edge area and the green space corridor that is formed along the course of the Brook; including measures to reveal and communicate the relationship between the town centre core and the site of the Norman castle which gave the town it's name.

4.8 Legibility analysis

Plan 18 shows the results of a legibility analysis. The