

Hexham Vision 2020 and Town Plan 2014 - 15



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1. Executive Summary

This is really three documents in one. Hexham Vision 2020 gives an insight into the longer-term strategic vision for the town that Hexham Town Council members have for the town generally and that the three active town plan working groups have for their respective areas of development. The Town Plan 2014-15 lays out the first year's steps and decisions towards this vision.

The statistical section 'This is Hexham' (really the third document) makes a start at pulling together the town's core data and offering an interpretation of this. It identifies the main features behind the statistics and the principal contrasts. It underlines the diversity that exists within the small town of Hexham. In its relatively small population (11,829 at the last point of Census), Hexham contains both the demographic and commercial characteristics of a self-sustaining compact market town and the presence of a very mobile, commuting sector. Central to the town's ambition to sustain the vitality and spirit of its town centre is its ability to serve this diversity outstandingly well.

The working groups, it must be noted, were re-jigged in the course of their 8 months of operation, in last January, in fact. Originally there were six groups, corresponding to the six Themes in the Town Plan 2013. To build on the good progress being made in some working groups, six became three – Economy, Arts and Heritage, Health and Well-being, and Built Environment and Transport. The Health and Well-being group has made impressive progress in its 3 months existence, it must be said.

Before considering the development priorities that the working groups present, it is worth considering the achievements that they identify in their respective areas of operation for the period September 2013 to April 2014. They reveal progress by discussion, decision and action. They can't and don't claim responsibility for initiating all the achievements (quick wins, we called them, and many were already alluded to in the predecessor Town Plan 2013), but these do reflect the energy in the town.

In **Economy, Arts and Heritage**, the vitality of the Hexham town centre is a prime focus. The impetus of the new Abbey Visitor Centre is a boost, and there is an ambition, shared by Abbey representatives, that the town will share the benefits of an increased visitor flow. This will be matched with an exploration of more events and market-type activity and options for better access to the town centre from the lower (e.g. Wentworth) car parks.

Totally Locally (TL) has been identified by the working group as an example vehicle for advertising the advantages of shopping locally (think here of Hexham's diversity), but they are clear that the Town Council should not play a direct role in this (TL's own rules). Equally the Town Council can not itself generate more visitor accommodation in the town, but it will be helped by the group to investigate an increase in B&B and holiday rentals in the town and address the challenging 'chicken and egg' (higher visitor numbers and more in-town accommodation). Finally, two demanding strategic issues are on the agenda – Hexham may become a Business Improvement District and have a Neighbourhood Plan.

In **Health and Well-being** there is initially attention to the interests of the older and younger generations. A refurbished skate park and Hexham's first skating rink have been signals of the Council's intent to listen to the younger generation. These will be backed up

by the working group's support for a new initiative to make instruments more widely available to young people.

Hexham's doubly ageing population is well documented in the 'This is Hexham' section and the working group is taking this very seriously. An active network is emerging of physical fitness specialists (Wentworth Leisure Centre staff), residential care homes and their staff, and the H&WB group, which augurs well for all our futures. Benefits may spin off, carefully, into older residents' own homes. The Wentworth has also been involved in the first steps towards Hexham becoming a dementia-friendly town.

There will be benefits to be had for all ages if the current exploration of options for additional amenities (e.g. a fitness trail, specially designed to provide access for all) at Tyne Green get an eventual green light (NCC is the probable purse-holder for this).

The **Built Environment and Transport** working group is not afraid to court controversy in the interests of good decisions for the town. It doesn't avoid the polemics surrounding the environment and sustainability, brown fields and green belt, and the future of the Hexham Market Place.

The town centre issues of the conflict between the interests of traffic and pedestrians, traffic calming, obtrusive signage and the location of the bus station are all covered, and next steps for the Town Council are clearly identified.

The working group has unearthed a housing issue that has not been recently articulated – namely overcrowding in too high a proportion of households and an unmet demand for affordable housing. This is another aspect of the diversity that is such a strong characteristic of our town and it must not be neglected.

With a feeling for Hexham's past, there is support for the re-invigoration of the Hexham Bandstand appeal, and a look into the future, with intentions to improve cycling and walking (for both personal fitness and respect for the environment) in the town. Finally, there is a recognition that a Neighbourhood Plan for Hexham, (if it's within the town's resources), will add more valuable weight to the town's planning powers.

HTP Editor 07/05/2014

Abbreviations commonly used in the Town Plan

HTC	Hexham Town Council	NCC	Northumberland County Council
HCP	Hexham Community Partnership	HCS	Hexham Civic Society
HBF	Hexham Business Forum		
EA&H	the Economy, Arts and Heritage working group for the HTP		
H&WB	the Health and Wellbeing working group for the HTP		
BE&T	the Built Environment and Transport working group for the HTP		
HTP	Hexham Town Plan		
WG	Working Group, for the Hexham Town Plan		

2. Introduction by the Deputy Mayor of Hexham

Hexham needs a vision and a plan for the future

We are a small town with much ambition that must be channelled realistically and purposefully. As a Town Council we have limited financial resources. However, what we do have is lots of goodwill, energy and a commitment to improving Hexham's future for the sake of all its residents, visitors and businesses. It is all of this, and more, that is driving the *Hexham Vision 2020 and Town Plan 2014-15*.

I wish to express my gratitude for the time and expertise that has been brought to this year's working groups by their many members who have formulated their visions of how Hexham should be in 2020. They include representatives of many Hexham organisations as well as Town Councillors.

The *Hexham Vision 2020 and Town Plan 2014-15* is designed to target specific areas in the coming year, 2014-15, but our horizons and ambitions are higher, reaching forwards over coming years. Each annual *Hexham Town Plan* must be a realistic targeting of financial and human resources on the road to our higher ambitions.

Hexham is a fascinating and diverse place. Whether we think of the contrasts between a 24-hour superstore and a family-owned independent retailer, the A69 bypass and St Mary's Chare, the differences in housing, or the eclectic mix of leisure pursuits on offer, from chess to triathlon, Hexham brings it all together.

The *Hexham Vision 2020 and Town Plan 2014-15* will help in guiding much of the Town Council's thinking in the coming year, and, if necessary, the Town Council will use whatever influences and skills it has to help bring them to fruition. The solid involvement of Town Councillors in the working groups this last year will assist this process.

As a small market town in an era of internet shopping, out-of-town retail giants and the centralisation of decision-making, Hexham faces many challenges. The *Hexham Town Plan* aims to retain and build on the features of the town's social, religious and commercial heritage and move Hexham forward so that it retains its vitality and remains an attraction to residents, visitors and businesses alike.

Cllr Trevor Cessford

7th May 2014

Acting Mayor of Hexham

3. Our Vision for Hexham 2020

Members of the Hexham Town Council collaborated in this Vision for Hexham:

Always welcoming and family friendly, Hexham in 2020 will be a thriving historic Market Town, ambitious and enterprising, with so much to see and do, amid unrivalled countryside, well loved by residents and visitors alike.

The Economy Working Group added its Vision for the Hexham Economy 2020:

In terms of its economy, Hexham will be self-sustaining and resilient, able to meet locally the needs of its residents and visitors through its well-maintained and well-known facilities and services, encouraging enterprise and the development of new strengths.

It will therefore have:

- a self-sustaining, self-reliant & resilient economy – Hexham will satisfy the needs of its residents and businesses, thus minimising the need to travel elsewhere and minimising reliance on large external organisations;
- an economy which maximises Hexham’s existing strengths and encourages visitors, allowing Hexham’s wealth of facilities to be well maintained, well-known and well-used;
- an environment to encourage enterprise – Hexham’s infrastructure and administration will encourage enterprise;
- an economy which recognises the value of tourism and actively encourages visitors to discover Hexham and explore the new and historic elements of the town and wider area.

The Health and Wellbeing Working Group has the following Vision for Hexham’s residents and visitors:

As we approach 2020, more of Hexham’s residents of all ages will enjoy improved health and wellbeing. They will have access to facilities and support that encourage healthier lifestyles and provide a better quality of environment.

While many of Hexham’s citizens enjoy the range of amenities provided by the town and engage with its cultural and leisure facilities, by no means all of them do so. The reasons for this are varied including isolation due to frailty, ill health or poverty and poor transport facilities.

Some areas of the town continue to have sub-standard aesthetic and environmental appeal despite a good quality of housing provision. Some areas have under-utilised potential for both improving the health and fitness of residents and attracting visitors to the town.

By 2020 the people of Hexham should see the town as a happier, healthier place to live. Already, there is a great deal of excellent work by community-based and voluntary organisations to address inequality due to poor housing, low educational attainment, poor health and unemployment. Co-operation between these existing and emerging agencies and initiatives should be extended in order to secure their common long-term aims and objectives. In addition, based on feedback received, developing new local projects will help continue the improvement of Hexham people’s health and well-being.

The Built Environment and Transport Group has the following Visions for Hexham in 2020:

Hexham's built environment will retain its essential character and setting as an historic market town. New development will underline local distinctiveness, vibrancy, diversity and sustainability and blend these progressively with both the character and setting.

Crucial to this are:

- protect the past for the future: the historic environment will be protected and used to underpin future economic and social success;
- kerb Appeal: the public realm will be well maintained and improved;
- made in Hexham: local distinctiveness and quality in new buildings will be ensured (in this context the BE&T Group recommends that the HTC should adopt the Neighbourhood Planning process as this will enable Hexham-level decision over details of planning);
- gateways to Hexham: Hexham's approaches will be improved to set a scene of character and quality (road approaches and car parks, especially Wentworth);
- open for Business: the Market Place will be redesigned to work for people and traders;
- diversity for Residents: champion the characteristic diversity of the Town's housing and commercial stock, including for new build, and promoting the availability of brown field sites;
- Support for Sustainability: ensure Hexham remains a vibrant market town and visitor destination for future generations with Town Plan actions fitting together to deliver:
 - ◇ *sustainability of place – physical improvements to the infrastructure and fabric of the town,*
 - ◇ *sustainability of people – ensuring that the skills remain in the town to deliver the Town Plan and to meet the needs of residents and visitors,*
 - ◇ *sustainability of the environment – embedding environmental sustainability and low carbon approaches to development in all areas of activity, with particular emphasis on sustainable transport and on local food, produce and services.*

Our vision for Transport in Hexham 2020 is to become a secure, healthy, safe and attractive place in which to live and move around, where people can enjoy the green and outdoor spaces. The town centre will be a more attractive, less polluted and congested location.

While bus and train transport will remain key for both commuters and shoppers, the needs of those on foot or bicycle or with a disability will be prioritised. Motor transport will be encouraged to share roads with other users.

This will be achieved by:

- making recommendations to improve and re-shape the way people and goods move in and out and around Hexham. Improved, easier access will be provided to Hexham town centre and local services via bus, foot, scooter and cycle;
- seeking infrastructure improvements in and around Hexham that will improve quality of life for Hexham residents, and visitors, in terms of 'active travel', i.e. walking and cycling for many purposes;
- encouraging all aspects of the way Hexham functions to embed sustainable transport considerations.

4. This is Hexham – Hexham’s Core Data

The associated Data Booklet provides the charts and tables that underpin this section.

1. Hexham’s Population Profile

In Hexham currently, the working population (25-64 year olds) as a proportion (50.1%) of the total population is slightly lower than in Northumberland and England. While the school population (5-15 year olds) in Hexham is consistent with Northumberland and England, the pre-school population (0-4) is significantly lower (at 4.5%), especially compared to England (6.3%). Given this lower base-line proportion of pre-5s, and a lower proportion of working/parenting age people, Hexham schools will not be planning for the same increases in numbers of young children as in other areas of England.

It is in comparisons in the data for the older generations (65+ years) that the biggest differences appear. Hexham has an older population than Northumberland and England overall, significantly so when compared to England. 12.0% of Hexham’s population are 75+ years old (in Hexham East this figure is as high as 15.3%), while in Northumberland overall 75+ year olds are 9.2% and in England 7.7% of the total population. There are important conclusions to be drawn for housing, retail, health services and targeted support services.

Tynedale Age Profile 2006 and 2021 - an Ageing Population

The chart **Tynedale Population Age Profile 2006 and 2021** (see the Data Booklet) shows the expected changes in Tynedale’s age profile. It underscores Tynedale’s and with it Hexham’s ageing population.

The projected profile for 2021 shows that ages 0-49 are under-represented when compared to the national (England) proportions, most significantly at ages 20 to 39. In stark contrast, ages 50 and above are over-represented, significantly so at ages 55 to 74.

This profile is substantially top-heavy, reflecting that the higher population proportions are among the older people, aged 50 and above.

Looking further at relevant population data, the Office for National Statistics, as reported on the Northumberland Knowledge website, projects that the overall the population of Northumberland will rise by 14,000 or 4.5%, by 2035. In individual age groups below age 65 there are, however, overall reductions, significantly within the working age population 45 - 64. It is the projected disproportionate increase in age groups above age 65 that leads to the projected overall increase.

The 65+ age group overall in Northumberland will increase by 40,900 or 63.5%, and the age group 90+ is expected to increase threefold. In this period nationally the group 75+ is projected to increase by 78%; in Northumberland the figure is 98%.

There are conclusions to be drawn, for Northumberland, Tynedale and Hexham itself, relating to the services and support that older people may need and deservedly expect. There will be implications across support services, retail, housing and even entertainment that must be considered sooner, in the next 5 years, starting with this Hexham Town Plan, rather than later.

This is Hexham – Hexham’s Core Data

2. Economic Activity Levels – among people aged 16-74

Overall levels of economic activity among people in Hexham are close to Northumberland and England figures. Part-time employment in Hexham is higher than the national figure, particularly among people in Hexham Central. The self-employed form a much higher proportion of this wide age-group in Hexham West (12.3%) than in England (9.8%), thus accounting for the slightly higher figure for Hexham overall (10.4%).

Figures for long-term unemployment in Hexham West in particular (2.4%) are well below the national trend (4.4%), and also but to a lesser extent in Hexham Central (3.5%), although in Hexham East they match the national figure.

The figures for full-time students in Hexham (2.4%) are lower than nationally (3.4%), although the overall figure for Northumberland is slightly lower still (2.2%). This is to be explained not by a reticence among Hexham’s younger generation to study beyond the age of 18 but rather by reasons of location, as Hexham’s (and Northumberland’s) young people move away to study and there is no compensatory flow of students into the town to attend FE or HE institutions.

This is Hexham – Hexham’s Core Data

3. Employment Sectors – people aged 16-74 in employment

One surprise perhaps in the above table relating to the sectors in which Hexham residents are employed is the low figure relating to Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing (1.0% of Hexham’s workers), which is much lower than the Northumberland proportion (2.5%) and closer to the proportion for England as a whole (0.8%). The conclusion must be that few residents travel outside of Hexham to work in the surrounding farms and forests.

A smaller proportion of Hexham residents (7.4%) is engaged in manufacturing than is the case nationally (8.8%) or in wider Northumberland (9.2%). In this sector, the contrast between the Hexham wards is instructive, as in Hexham Central 8.1% of the at-work population is engaged in manufacturing, compared to 6.6% in Hexham West.

The table confirms that it is slightly more difficult than in other places to find a builder or a plumber when you need one, unless you happen to live in Hexham Central and get on well with your neighbours!

Hexham has a smaller proportion of residents employed in the two sectors Information/Communication and Finance/Insurance (respectively 2.8% and 2.3%) than is the picture nationally in England (4.1% and 4.4%). With no significant media or marketing organisations in the town, beyond what are expected of a relatively self-sufficient community, and no large financial organisations, apart from bank branches, these sectors are understandably under-represented.

In the Professional, Scientific and Technical sector, Hexham West (10.5%) overshadows not only the other two Hexham wards but also the stats for Northumberland (5.2%) and England as a whole (6.7%). The proportion of people in Hexham engaged in the Education sector (12.9%), in particular in Hexham East (14.4%) and Hexham West (15.0%), likewise significantly exceeds the figures for Northumberland (8.9%) and England as a whole (9.9%).

The location in the town of the General Hospital, serving also an extensive, out-of-town hinterland, may explain why the figures for Hexham people engaged in Health and Social Work (17.3%) are higher than for Northumberland (15.4%) and England as a whole (12.4%).

This is Hexham – Hexham’s Core Data

4. Employment Roles - aged 16-74 in employment

Two occupations are well represented in Hexham, well above the national proportions. These are Professional Occupations, above the national (17.5%) figure in Hexham East (19.5%) and significantly above in Hexham West (29.9%), and Caring, Leisure and other Services occupations (due to figures that are higher than national (9.3%) proportions in Hexham East (12.1%) and Hexham Central (12.8%)).

The numbers of Managers, Directors and Senior Official occupations also in Hexham West, relative to the working population as a whole in that ward, are higher than the national figure for England by a full third.

There is a smaller than national average proportion of Hexham’s working population engaged in Administrative and Secretarial occupations in each of Hexham’s three wards.

This type of data has a number of different uses nationally, based on particular assumptions. One use is within the retail trade, to judge the local and ‘travel to shop’ profile, in turn to help to define retailers’ stock policies.

This is Hexham – Hexham’s Core Data

5. Levels of Qualifications - aged 16+

The category of qualification that jumps out is Level 4 Qualifications and above (generally HND or degree level, plus further experience or training that often focuses on the management of people) not only in Hexham West (49.8%, or as good as half the 16+ population) but also in Hexham East (32.4%) and Hexham Central (28.3%). The equivalent all-England and Northumberland figures are 27.4% and 25.6% respectively.

Certain levels of qualification are under-represented in Hexham West, but given the huge proportion in the single category (see above) this is statistically inevitable.

All qualification levels are solidly represented in Hexham by national standards, again underscoring the diversity that the town of Hexham enjoys.

This is Hexham – Hexham’s Core Data

6. Travel to Work - Aged 16-74 in Employment

It is interesting to look first of all at the ‘on foot’ figures, as they are directly related to the proportion of the population that lives and works locally.

It is in Hexham East that the proportion of residents who walk to work stands out (30.1%), with the probability that the figure for Hexham Central (25.2%) would be similarly high if

Central data did not include Acomb (where a bus is probably taken to go to work in Hexham). Add to this the 14.6% of walkers to work in Hexham West, and the overall Hexham figure of 25.2% is well above the Northumberland and England figures (11.5% and 10.7% respectively).

This reflects in some ways the extent to which Hexham remains a relatively self-sufficient, somewhat isolated market town, that provides a full range of employment in services to support the lives of local people and to run the commercial activities that cause other people to travel into the town.

The broadly rural nature of Northumberland (longer travel to work distances) is reflected in the high proportion of people who travel to work by car (72.8%) compared to England at 63.4%. At 60.9% Hexham is relatively low, for the reasons proposed above.

The low Hexham overall figure however conceals a relatively high figure for the proportion of car travellers to work, 69.9%, in Hexham West, higher than in Hexham East (56.6%) and Hexham Central (61.0%). These 3,500 or so residents travel away from the town to work, with a large proportion no doubt commuting into the city of Newcastle upon Tyne, where they can also shop and pursue evening leisure/entertainment activities.

These are the residents who are and feel most mobile and who have easy opportunities to shop elsewhere. They are the portion of Hexham residents that the town's independent retail sector is less likely to do regular business with, unless targeted steps are taken towards this.

This is Hexham – Hexham's Core Data

7. Accommodation type - all household spaces

Detached houses predominate in Hexham West, semi-detached in Hexham East, and terraced houses, flats and maisonettes in Hexham Central, although of course all types are represented in each area.

Accommodation types in Hexham follow generally the patterns for Northumberland and England overall. The sole outlier in this is the low figure for flats, maisonettes and apartments in Northumberland, which is well below the corresponding figures for England and Hexham.

This is Hexham – Hexham's Core Data

8. Accommodation tenure - all households

The higher proportion of homes owned outright in Northumberland than in England as a whole stems probably from the difference in house prices, as houses in the North-East are on average among the least expensive in the country.

Home-ownership is strong in Hexham, with homes owned outright proportionately higher in Hexham East and especially Hexham West than in Northumberland and England as a whole.

Residents in the process of buying their homes by mortgage or loan constitute again a higher proportion in Hexham West (35.8%) than in the other two wards, and at the same time higher than in Northumberland and England overall.

There is very little social rented accommodation in Hexham West (at 1.8%), unlike in the other two wards, where proportions are much higher than the Northumberland and England averages.

Private rented tenures also figure more strongly in Hexham East and Central than in Hexham West.

This data on households by tenure shows again the diversity that characterises the town of Hexham. There is diversity within Hexham East and Hexham Central as well as in Hexham overall. The fact that there is one ward whose data reveals a more uniform population in respect of household tenure only underscores that diversity.

This is Hexham – Hexham’s Core Data

9. Business Start-ups and Closures

Business Activity Levels in Hexham and Tynedale

Using the latest figures available on the Northumberland Knowledge website, in 2010 the number of active enterprises in Tynedale was relatively high by national, Northumberland and NE standards generally. In common with the general picture in Northumberland, the highest proportion of these consisted of small businesses employing 1-4 people. Given that the two districts that exhibited the highest numbers of active businesses relative to the working age population were Berwick and Tynedale, this is probably a consequence of their remoteness from centres of population and commerce, for example the City of Newcastle upon Tyne. Thus one of the strengths of Tynedale and indeed Hexham is their necessary levels of self-sufficiency, with most types of enterprise and service represented and equally most types of employment, with the exception of heavy industry.

Business Start -ups

The latest Northumberland business-start-up data (2011) shows Hexham Central (which covers perhaps two-thirds of the Hexham Town Centre) in a positive light, near the top of the Northumberland table and topped only by the two Ponteland wards that share that town’s centre. This is therefore a re-assuring set of statistics for the vitality of the Hexham town centre.

Hexham Central covers the western sections of the town centre, everything west of and including the western side of Fore Street, including Back Street, Hencotes, Market Street, three sides of the Market Place, Battle Hill, Beaumont Street, Haugh Lane and its industrial estate.

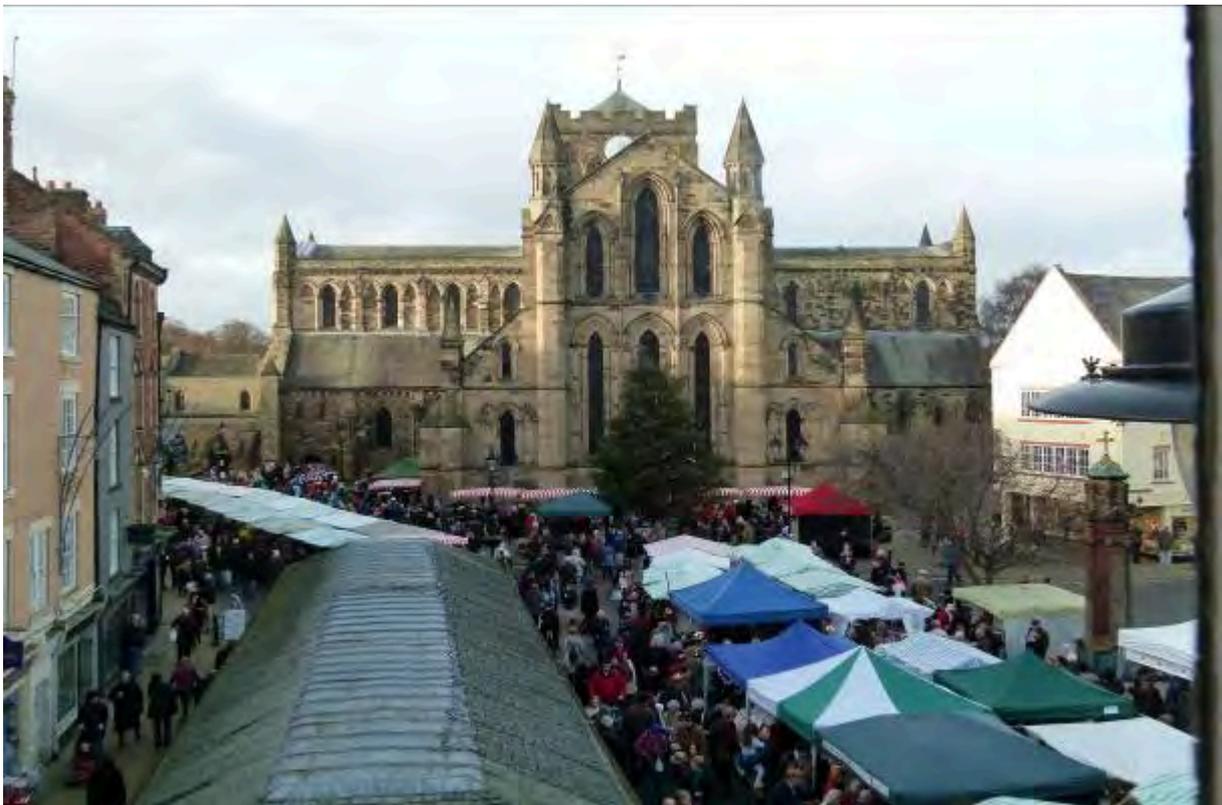
The picture is also positive for the wider western area of Tynedale of which Hexham lies at the centre, as start-ups are a positive feature of the commercial life of Corbridge to the east, South Tynedale to the south-west and Bellingham to Hexham’s north

Business Closures

Northumberland (at 10.9%) had a lower shut-down rate of businesses in 2010 than the North East (13.1%) and England (13.1%) averages. Blyth Valley (12.9%) is the former Northumberland District with the highest business closure rate followed by Wansbeck (12.4%), both having a higher shut-down rate than the whole of Northumberland but still lower than the North East and England.

Tynedale, in which Hexham is the largest centre of both population and commercial activity, had the highest number of business closures in 2010 but the lowest proportionate rate of business closures of the six former Northumberland districts.

These are further positive signals of Hexham's commercial vitality. Even in the more recent years of austerity, we have seen in the centre of Hexham, for example, retail business closures quite quickly being followed by the opening of new businesses in their place, in most cases within 12 months.



5. An Introduction to the Working Groups

The structure of working groups taking the Hexham Town Plan forward has evolved in the course of the last year.

Six Themes were inherited from the previous Town Plan 2013 and six working groups were established in September 2013 to build on the existing aspirations.

To bring Town Plan developments closer to the Town Council, each of the groups was chaired by a councillor and there were to be in each group one or two additional councillors alongside people active in other Hexham groups and organisations. A good number of the people who had committed much time and expertise to the Town Plan 2013 were included in the new Town Plan groups.

It was agreed that the Hexham 2020 Town Plan should contain a substantial vision for Hexham and its services. There should be a substantial demographic analysis of present day Hexham, to illustrate the town's key characteristics, upon which to build for the future. The working groups should identify on the one hand some potential 'quick wins' from the content of the previous plan and accomplish these in the period to May 2014. On the other hand it was going to be necessary to explore longer-term issues in greater depth to present to the Town Council plans for next steps to start in 2014-15.

By December it was clear that the structure was not working well – some people were too stretched and as a result progress across the groups was uneven. It was also evident that there were overlaps in the issues the groups wanted to make progress on: for example the Transport and Built Environment groups had agreed to meet jointly to explore the possible refurbishment of the Market Place.

Working groups were merged to form 3 effective groups, with the following memberships:

Economy, Arts and Heritage: Chair: Cllr Tom Gillanders; Sue Chapman, Peter Forsyth, Cllr Christine Hanley, Cllr Rad Hare, Mike Rowson, Helen Stephenson, Cllr Terry Robson (ex officio, as Mayor of Hexham).

Health and Wellbeing: Chair: Cllr Nuala Rose; Tamsin Beevor, Senga Bond, Geoff Cant, Cllr Mark Graham, Rosemary Theobalds, Cllr Terry Robson (ex officio, as Mayor of Hexham).

Built Environment and Transport: Joint Chairs: Cllr Peter Oliver and Cllr Dave Clegg; Wendy Breach, Philip Clark, Cllr George Ferguson, Bob Hull, Ted Liddle, Tim Tatman, Roz Waller, Cllr Terry Robson (ex officio, as Mayor of Hexham).

Our thanks go to the members of these working groups for the valuable contributions they have made in the interests of Hexham residents and business as a whole.

6. Economy, Arts and Heritage

SUMMARY OF PROGRESS to above date

1. Short-term Priorities 2013 to April 2014

- 1.1 **Visit Hexham:** [Hexham Community Partnership](#) (HCP), in collaboration with Hexham Business Forum (HBF), has produced a leaflet (Discover Hexham) extolling the attractions which a visitor to Hexham may see. Financial support came from Hexham Town Council (HTC) through their Community Engagement Committee, Northumberland County Council, and significant support from local businesses through advertising. This leaflet was launched on 19th and 20th March in Alnwick and Hexham and is available at Tourist Information Centres and other 'visitor-facing' destinations around the county and beyond.
- 1.2 **Shop Local:** The traders group have been asked to support the introduction of posters/leaflets/etc to encourage residents to shop locally. This will require some funding – although of a limited nature. Typically, these leaflets will look something like that shown in Appendix 3, which is from materials used successfully in Kendal.
- 1.3 **Appearance:** The town centre needs to be regularly cleaned in order to attract visitors. It is planned to have regular “litter-pick” events.
- 1.4 **Website:** The website run by HCP “[VisitHexham](#)” is now linked into other sites such as that run by HTC. In turn, the [Town Council website](#) has been refreshed and features many more items of interest, including sections devoted to New Businesses and Young People.
- 1.5 **Business Enterprise Hubs:** Both ADAPT and National Parks have successfully applied for grants to form Business Enterprise Hubs. Work has commenced in both locations to put the necessary infrastructure in place.

2. Medium- and long-term priorities from May 2014

These will require further discussion and decision in the course of 2014-15:

- 2.1 The development of a Neighbourhood Plan: This is currently being discussed within HTC and after any decision taken to proceed with such a plan it will take about eighteen months to come to fruition. See the BE&T proposal on Page 42 for more information on this.
- 2.2 The promotion of the new visitor centre at Hexham Abbey to link in with the promotion of the wider community and other Hexham visitor attractions. It is expected that all the necessary building works will be completed in time for the summer 2014 tourist season (with an official opening in early 2015) and that this work will increase visitor numbers from 100,000 to 120,000 annually.
- 2.3 HCP has plans under way to continue to provide high quality events designed to promote both artistic undertakings and retail efforts of traders. This will be in addition to the Book Festival, the Food Festival, etc. (This will possibly link with the investigation of a renovation of the Market Place to be undertaken by the BE&T working group – see their Appendix 1, on Page 30). See EA&H Appendix 7, Page 22.
- 2.4 Town Centre Manager: The appointment of such an individual will provide a focus for many activities.
- 2.5 Review access from the Wentworth and other lower car parks to the Town Centre to encourage more visitors to make this journey. See EA&H Appendix 5, Page 21.

- 2.6 The introduction of a Business Improvement District: for more information, see EA&H Appendix 4, on Page 20.
- 2.7 The provision of an increased level of tourist accommodation, especially of a family-friendly self-catering nature, to contribute to an increase in the numbers of visitors staying in Hexham. See EA&H Appendix 6, on Page 21.

EA&H Appendix 1 Background statistical data.

Source: Census Ward Fact Sheets – taken from the Northumberland Knowledge website. Much of the data was collected in the 2011 National Census and made available in 2012.

In order to ascertain the employment levels of all the residents it is necessary to establish the ages of those who are available for work. Table 1 shows the ages and identifies both the areas of employment and how they travel to work in the three wards – and as an overall result. It can be seen that percentage unemployment is slightly lower than other parts of the County. The North East, in general, has an unemployment rate of 7.1%, while Hexham has an overall average of 3.4%. The greatest numbers of residents are employed in the area of health care and social work. Other areas are detailed.

Table 1: Numbers of residents; employment figures; and how they get to work.

Work Statistics	Central with Acomb		Hexham East		Hexham West		Hexham Town	
	No.	Percent	No.	Percent	No.	Percent	No.	Percent
All people	4,691		4,185		4,221		13,097	
Males	2,230	47.5	1,945	46.5	2,049	48.5	6,224	47.5
Females	2,461	52.5	2,240	53.5	2,172	51.5	6,873	52.5
Unemployed	121	3.5	123	4.2	72	2.4	316	3.4
Retirees	564	17.7	554	19.1	642	19.6	1760	18.8
Employment								
Human Health and Social Work	409	17.9	336	18.2	315	15.9	1,060	17.3
Wholesale and Retail trades	397	17.3	311	16.8	252	12.7	960	15.6
Education	212	9.3	267	14.4	297	15.0	776	12.9
Prof, Scientific and Technical	135	5.9	124	6.7	207	10.5	466	7.7
Manufacturing	185	8.1	134	7.3	131	6.6	450	7.3
Construction	188	8.2	92	5.0	118	6.0	398	6.4
Acc. and Food Services	149	6.5	126	6.8	94	4.7	369	6.0
Public Admin. etc	120	5.2	79	4.3	119	6.0	378	5.2
Admin/Support services	67	2.9	58	3.1	43	2.2	168	2.7
Travel to work								
Car, van, etc	1,397	61.0	1,046	56.6	1,383	69.9	3,826	62.5
Foot	577	25.2	556	30.1	289	14.6	1,422	23.3
Public transport	118	5.2	105	5.7	99	5.0	322	5.3
Bicycle	35	1.5	18	1.0	15	0.8	68	1.1
Home workers	139	6.1	109	5.9	174	1.0	422	6.9

Table 2 gives the educational levels and occupations of the town residents. Although almost 1/5th hold no qualifications, over one third of residents hold level 4 or better qualifications. Level 4 qualifications recognise specialist learning and involve detailed analysis of a high level of information and knowledge in an area of work or study. Learning at this level is appropriate for people working in technical and professional jobs, and/or managing and developing others. Level 4 qualifications are at a level equivalent to Certificates of Higher Education. These qualifications are reflected in the variety of jobs where almost one half of working residents are in professional, managerial or technical jobs.

Table 2: Ages of residents; educational levels and occupations

	Central with Acomb		Hexham East		Hexham West		Hexham Town	
Age								
0 – 4	235	5.0	177	4.2	196	4.6	608	4.6
5 – 15	529	11.3	470	11.2	581	13.8	2,180	12.1
16 – 24	467	10.0	439	10.5	427	10.1	1,333	10.2
25 – 64	2,444	52.1	2,007	48.0	2,125	50.3	6,576	50.1
65 – 74	529	11.3	450	10.8	469	11.1	1,448	11.1
75+	487	10.4	642	15.3	423	10.0	1,552	11.9
Education (aged 16 +)								
No qualifications	918	23.4	856	24.2	391	11.4	2,165	19.7
Level 1	541	13.8	398	11.2	275	8.0	1,274	11.0
Level 2	619	15.8	511	14.4	490	14.2	1,620	14.8
Apprenticeship	147	3.7	135	3.8	93	2.7	375	3.4
Level 3	472	12.00	361	10.2	388	11.3	1,221	11.2
Level 4 and above	1,111	28.3	1,147	32.4	1,716	49.8	3,974	36.8
Occupations								
Professional Occs.	374	16.3	363	19.6	591	29.9	1,328	21.9
Assoc. Prof. & Technical	234	10.2	229	12.4	268	13.5	731	12.0
Managers, Directors, etc	223	9.7	205	11.1	289	14.6	777	11.8
Caring, leisure, etc	294	12.8	223	12.1	159	8.0	676	11.0
Skilled trades	290	12.7	180	9.7	164	8.3	634	10.2
Admin and Secretarial	209	9.1	139	7.5	189	9.6	537	8.7
Sales/customer Services	204	8.9	151	8.2	138	7.0	493	8.0
Machine/Process Operatives	189	8.2	112	6.1	68	3.4	369	5.9

EA&H Appendix 2 Background information on Hexham's Commercial Vitality

Funding for development in the town comes from both internal and external investment or/and from grants gifted by either Government Departments or charitable foundations. Examples of all of these can be seen within the Hexham business community.

Internal investment is characterised by the £200m spent by Egger over the last six years in its Anick Grange Road plant. This was reinforced by the opening of a "Training Academy" in October 2013. While this plant is not in Hexham itself it relies upon the town to provide a large proportion of its 550 direct employees and 1500 indirect employees.

External investment can be seen in the recently opened Homebase superstore in Station Goods Yard attracting with it other national chain stores. It is expected that this will create eventually in total over 100 full time equivalent jobs. The development of the area around the current bus station (if it ever comes) will be another example of external investment.

It is often considered that Hexham as a trading town is under-represented in terms of the quality and quantity of the shopping experience it offers and there is often doubt cast on the town's economic survival. It may be that the quality aspect is reflected in the smallish number of specialist shops within the town centre. There are some outlets (Petals, The Medal Shop, etc) which cater for the specialist shopper but these are not the majority.

However, having 220 retail outlets within the town centre of which 59% are regional/independent traders; 41% have a nationwide presence, and 28% of which are multiple traders is a sign of vigour. Vacant units are an important indicator of the vitality and viability of a town centre. The presence of vacant units over a period of time can identify potential weaknesses in a town centre, whether due to locational criteria, high rent levels or strong competition from other centres. A recent survey of Hexham indicated that 9% of the retail outlets are vacant which, compared with the vacancy rate across all town centres in Great Britain of 14%, reflects favourably on the town's commercial strength.

When looking at the differences between trading outlets a distinction must be made between Convenience shops which will supply low cost goods such as newspapers, tobacco, some foodstuffs (e.g. sandwiches), etc to locals and those passing, and Comparison shops which will sell food, clothing, white goods, etc which people will be prepared to travel some distances in order to purchase. Within Hexham the percentage of Comparison to Convenience shops is 77% to 23 % respectively. Traditional retail theory suggests that a good balance of Comparison and Convenience Shopping is anything over a two thirds Comparison offering. In this respect Hexham is on the right side of the line.

Another benefit to the town is the presence of stores known as key attractors. These are national retail businesses that are particularly important in terms of attracting visitors and shoppers to a town. However, the character and profile of a town often also depends on the variety and mix of independent shops that can give a town a "unique selling point" and help distinguish it from other competing centres. A sustainable balance of key attractors and multiple names alongside local independent shops is therefore likely to have the greatest positive impact on the vitality and viability of a town. In the town we are fortunate to have a number of these, ranging from Dorothy Perkins and M&CO to Argos and Carphone Warehouse within the town centre; to Waitrose, Tesco, Next, Marks and Spencer, Aldi and now Homebase on the outskirts. In the next few months those on the outskirts will be joined by at least two others in Station Yard - as previously mentioned.

In the background to the trading services are a range of support services all employing a large number of people either on a full-time or a part-time basis. Such services as vehicle dealers (18 of them), jewellers (7), builders' suppliers including equipment hire outlets (8) and a range of other support services. There are also the small engineering firms situated around the industrial estates and tucked away in corners of older buildings. These are all employers and make a contribution to the town's economy. All of these are ensuring that the percentage of those claiming unemployment benefit stands at an average of 3.4% - a favourable comparison to the rest of the County (7.1%).

An on-line opinion survey of town centre users, run during November 2013, asked the simple question "What two suggestions would you make to improve the economic performance of the town centre?" These have yet to be fully analysed but a very large number of suggestions related to the enhancement of the town (better street furniture and improved signage); and to the removal of parking charges. Many of those responding to the survey request said that they would spend longer in the town and spend more money if it became easier to park and there was a wider diversity of shops. The removal of parking charges has been accomplished (April 2014) but an increase in the diversity of the retail offer is a problem about which this working group can do nothing.

The example of Adapt (North East) shows that initiative and ambition are strong in Hexham's voluntary sector. Adapt (NE) is a registered charity, company limited by guarantee and successful social enterprise working across Northumberland, delivering a range of services which support health and well-being. It delivers transport services for disabled and rurally isolated people and deliver door to door Dial a Ride services across Northumberland. It provides day clubs for disabled and older people in both Haltwhistle and Hexham. There is a Wheels to Work service, providing low cost loans of cars and scooters which include electric scooters across Northumberland to enable people to access employment.

Adapt (NE) employs 35 staff at two sites in Hexham and Berwick and has a history of joining opportunities together. Currently the Hexham base on Burn Lane is being developed to provide an Enterprise Hub which will provide rental units for new and fledgling businesses and also offer studio space for artists. Within this development will be a café with space for artists to display their work.

EA&H Appendix 3 Totally Locally – a campaign to encourage people to shop locally

Totally Locally is an award-winning social enterprise and shop local movement. It is a two person team which offers support to independent retailers with a free branding and marketing campaign for their town. Teams of volunteers use the campaign to promote the value of local shopping, celebrate their high street, create community events, and ultimately lift their local economy. Totally Locally is more than a shop local campaign, it's about working together to lift a whole town. It's in over 50 towns in the UK and many in Australia and New Zealand, with many more starting it in their town.

Totally Locally has inspired huge local markets (one which included beach huts placed though a town!), co-working, Pop Up shops, Sunday openings in towns where it never

happened, award winning events, produce swaps and much more. It's up to the individual group. And when people do something great, Totally Locally asks that they share the knowledge and give it away to all the other towns.

However, one of the golden rules before the support is offered is that there should be no involvement from local Councils or business/trade associations. It needs to be started from scratch with an innovative and determined team. The website has a FAQ page and offers a series of free items like posters and loyalty cards along with a "How to get started pack".

This must only be undertaken at a time and in a way which do not conflict with or risk diluting other parallel initiatives.

Proposal for the Hexham Town Council: the EAH working group will talk with local traders to encourage consideration and adoption of this and with the Hexham Business Forum as their representatives may offer advice and marketing support. The EAH group will report to the Town Council in October 2014 on progress in this.



EA&H Appendix 4 Business Improvement District for Hexham

The Economy working group is considering recommending to Hexham Town Council that they form a Hexham Business Improvement District. These groups (known as BIDs) are funded by the business ratepayers who face a levy on their rates. This can be a levy for the whole town or simply one portion of it. Levies can be as high as five percent but would normally be at an affordable one percent. The levies are collected by the Local Authority (in the case of Hexham, Northumberland County Council) and can be spent on agreed improvements within the area of the BID. What is not permitted is spending on those services or facilities which should be provided by the Local Authority.

There is a procedure in place where BID funding can be matched with other Government funding thus providing leverage to the BID. Before a BID is organised by the Local Authority all businesses that would be located within the District must be consulted and agree – on a majority basis, that any such levy is reasonable and equitable and serves valid purposes. Once agreement has been reached then the levy is mandatory.

Proposal for the Town Council: the EAH working group will seek feedback from the Hexham Business Forum and Northumberland County Council representatives who attended a briefing on this in order to update the Town Council (Finance and General Purposes Committee) in September 2014 and offer a forward plan for this.

EA&H Appendix 5 Improved access to the Town Centre from the Wentworth car park

The EA&H working group discussed recommending the provision of a shuttle bus on Market days and festivals which would run from Wentworth Car Park to the Market Place but no agreement was reached. Alternatively, the group considered installing a covered escalator running from Wentworth up to the rear of Prospect House, but did not reach agreement.

In addition to the above the Group Chair held discussions with ADAPT (NE), Hexham Community Partnership, Hexham Business Forum and Tynedale Business Network.

Proposal to the Hexham Town Council: The EAH working group will continue to investigate options and take views on this with a view to offering a firm plan at a later date.

EA&H Appendix 6 Increasing Visitor/Tourist Numbers in the Town

The Town Council and the HCP have been involved in recent meetings organised to encourage the establishment of a Hexham Tourism Group. Any Hexham influence on efforts of Northumbria Tourism to promote the county into prominence in the public perception is down to a very small team of people lead by Hexham Community Partnership. Unfortunately, the lack of finance available to this team means that Hexham is very much left on the sidelines as the Northumberland-wide body pushes locations like Hadrian's Wall and the Dark Night Sky Park at Kielder. The promotion of the VisitHexham website and the availability of the of Discover Hexham leaflet (launched 19th/20th March 2014) will assist in promoting Hexham as a tourist destination but will not satisfactorily deal with the issue of low tourist numbers.

One of the main reasons that visitors don't stay and spend time (and money) in Hexham is believed to be the lack of suitable accommodation. Most families prefer to stay in self-catering accommodation where they are free to do what they wish rather than have the constraints (both financial and domestic) of a guest house or hotel. Self-catering properties are not widely available in Hexham. Interestingly, at a recent meeting the average spend of the 10 million day visitors to Northumbria was estimated at £27.00 per head. Within Hexham, the Tourist Information Centre deals with upwards of 13,000 enquiries a month during the summer and about 1/3 of that during the winter months.

The Economy Working Group considered how the Town Council could positively influence this supply of adequate accommodation and one member described where she stayed recently where redundant office space was opened up to make visiting family living accommodation. If a developer could be obtained who would be interested then HTC could assist in identifying unusual or "quirky" spaces which might be developed. The WG recognised that there was something of a chicken and egg situation. The developers don't invest because there are not enough people staying; and people aren't staying as there is little choice of places to stay.

Proposal for the Town Council: the EA&H group will take advice (from e.g. the Tourist Information Centre and Northumberland County Council tourism officers, current local accommodation providers, and potential developers) and report to HTC by the end of 2014, including important next steps.

EA&H Appendix 7 The provision of additional specialist markets in Hexham, in keeping with the town's rich arts and cultural heritage

The Hexham Community Partnership has investigated this area for development and has provided the Working Group with the following information.

Additional Specialist Markets and Events

Options

1. Weekly or monthly Sunday markets throughout the year

There is little support for this proposal from potential event organisers.

- Hexham is starting from a very low base line for Sunday activities and there is a view that it would be very difficult to attract traders to Sunday events.
- Unless events are commercially viable they will need to be run by volunteers on a not for profit basis – the pool of volunteers willing to give up a day of their weekend to carry out what can be fairly heavy physical duties as well as taking on responsibility for Health and safety etc is very limited.
- Outdoor events are not an attractive option for arts, crafts, antiques and books for more than a very limited summer season.

2. A trial of specialist markets/events throughout the summer to aim to build up Sunday trading and activity in the town.

These could include:

- Antiques Market – see Malcolm Eglin's proposal below
- Continental Market - this is booked for 16th to 18th May. A three-day event allows traders to reduce the risk of a poor day on Sunday by anticipating successful days on Friday and Saturday.
- Book Fair - Mark Benjamin trialled a Sunday Book Fair in the Torch Centre in March 2014. This is a stand-alone event but is not based directly in the town centre.
- Ecofairs – awaiting proposal and costs
- Hawick 500 – opportunity to use the Market Place for other types of events working with local businesses.

Churches Together in Hexham and the Abbey have been approached regarding their view on the use of the Market Place and Abbey Flags on Sundays.

Hexham Antiques and Collectors Fair, proposed by Malcolm Eglin

The proposal is to organise and set up a Marquee in the Hexham Market Place in which a number of quality antique dealers can exhibit and sell a wide range of antiques and collectables. This could become a regular Hexham event on the calendar.

If the event got off to a good start and was reasonably well supported, it could spread to the Abbey Flags, with consent of course. A second marquee could be set up in the park

adjacent to the “Cenotaph” and also looking to the future, the new visitor centre at Hexham Abbey could be a wonderful venue.

The success of this type of event will initially depend on recruiting a number of quality antique dealers to take a stand. If some good dealers can be persuaded to attend the event, it could, even with only moderate public support, be financially self-sufficient. It would however need the full support of the Town Council in terms of logistical and marketing activities.

The cost of the event would depend on whether it would be a 1, 2 or 3 day event. This would also affect the potential profit that might be realised, i.e. marquee costs would be the same for 3 days as for 1 or 2 days. But the more days it was on, the more entrance money could be raised, of course.

There are useful links between this and the investigation of the potential for refurbishing the Hexham Market Place by the BE&T working group. See BE&T Appendix 1, Page 30.

Proposals for the Town Council: the EAH working group to receive reports from the above interested parties and others in the course of 2014-15 to be able to develop an appropriate project in the Town Plan 2015-16.

Appendix 8 The Contribution of the Hexham Arts Forum

It is widely recognised that in Hexham there is an impressively large number of organisations and groups practising various aspects of the Arts and interested in diverse ways in Hexham’s heritage. The vast majority of these are flourishing and independent.

The interest of the Economy Working Group, recently expanded to become the Economy, Arts and Heritage Working Group, lies in investigating ways in which this wealth of activity can add to the town’s appeal and assist the increase in visitor numbers that Hexham is targeting.

The Hexham Arts Forum is a broad-based, proactive, dedicated and enthusiastic group. A lot goes on behind the scenes and there are some great ideas and plans for events to encourage participation, promote Hexham and showcase local talent.

Examples of the proposed events have been:

On Saturday March 8th at 7.30 in The Queens Hall “Core 5- Live!”: a concert to celebrate Core Music’s 5th Birthday, featuring classical, folk, rock and jazz acts involved with Core Music over the years.

The first event planned by The Youth Arts Forum for April 5th & 6th was aimed at School & College students in the Tyne Valley who enjoy art-based subjects & may have careers in The Arts in mind. The Saturday afternoon session enabled them to meet & chat with

professionals already working in a variety of fields in the Arts and culminated in a Social evening with local entertainment.

The next day, Sunday, there was an opportunity to meet and talk to an actor who had just completed a run in the National Theatre production of War Horse, followed by a repeat showing of the NT live production of War Horse, in The Forum Cinema at 2.30pm.

Other events included or will include:-

Sunday March 30th	A Book Fair in The Torch Centre
Saturday 26 th April	Eating Festival & Spring Fair
April 26 th - May 8 th .	Hexham Book Festival
May 16 - 18 th	Continental Market & Art Trail
May 24 th - 25 th	Hexham Gathering & Art Trail

11th – 14th September will be Northumberland Heritage Open Days; and also in Spring 2015 an event will be organised to coincide with the opening of the Abbey's new Visitor Centre.

Meanwhile **the Railway Goods Shed** is a further arts-based development that promises much for the town. Situated between Hexham Station and the new Homebase retail development, it has been earmarked as the new home for Hexham-based world theatre company Théâtre Sans Frontières (www.tsf.org.uk).

The large old Goods Shed, with standing space for up to 300 people, will be available for music, conferences, rehearsals, meetings and exhibitions and will provide a very different space to that already on offer around the town. The old water tower will be a café. The heritage of the building and its connections with the town and the wider area will be brought to life in exciting ways. A highly visible underused heritage building will be brought back into public use.

Heritage Lottery Funding stage one support has been secured along with further support from Network Rail and the Historic Railways Trust. This development work is being done in co-operation with the Hexham Community Partnership in 2014, with further fundraising in 2015 and opening in 2016.

Proposal for the Town Council: through the nominated Councillor and the Community Engagement Committee, the Town Council will continue to value the diversity and contribution of the town's arts and heritage communities and offer support where this is relevant.



* image by kind permission of Roger Clegg



7. Health and Well-being

1. Short-term Achievements and Progress in this area 2013-14

This working group started to operate as late as February 2014. It has already acknowledged important developments in the area of Health and Well-being and is starting to lay the foundations for further progress.

- 1.1 **Food bank:** a food bank has been established based in Hexham to serve the Tynedale area, from Prudhoe to Haltwhistle, thanks to the hard work of a small management group, contributions from members of the public and the support of two local supermarkets. The co-ordinator gave a presentation to the Town Council at its November 2013 meeting and the Council expressed thanks for the progress made.
- 1.2 **Refurbishment of the Sele skate park:** this was performed for the benefit of the town's younger generation, funded by the Hexham Town Council, to improve security, with graffiti-work added by members of the Hexham Youth Initiative.
- 1.3 **Hexham's first skating rink:** with children and young people in mind, the Town Council put this on as part of the town's Countdown to Christmas activities.
- 1.4 **Increased distribution of flower containers:** the Town Council made more containers available in the town centre, to help make the town as attractive as possible. These are watered and maintained by local shopkeepers.
- 1.5 **Activities for residents in care and nursing residential homes:** a telephone survey has been conducted to establish the activities provided to residents of care homes and the limitations to this provision, as a baseline for future plans.
- 1.6 **Interview survey of residents of Chareway Estate:** a small face to face survey has been conducted to establish residents' views on the local environment and amenities.

2. Medium- and long-term Priorities from May 2014

These require further exploration and planning, including costing, before they can become approved priorities for Hexham Town Council.

- 2.1 The Chareway Estate – improve the living environment of this small estate of affordable and social rented houses and flats in collaboration with ISOS Housing, including the creation of a residents' forum. See H&WB Appendix 1, on Page 26.

- 2.2 Develop Hexham as a Dementia Friendly town, in collaboration with the Alzheimer Society, to enable local people to offer care and assistance to older people who may be suffering from any form of dementia. See H&WB Appendix 2. Page 26.
- 2.3 Forge links between the Wentworth Leisure Centre and care/nursing homes to increase the physical activities engaged in by residents and provide opportunities for sports trainees to engage with older frail people. See H&WB Appendix 3, Page 26.
- 2.4 Wider availability of musical instruments – by supporting the Core Music initiative aimed at recycling good quality musical instruments so that more young people from all backgrounds can learn to play an instrument and enjoy the sense of achievement and well-being that this engenders.
- 2.5 Fitness trail – develop the amenities along the south bank of the River Tyne, on both sides of the Hexham Tyne Bridge, to include a widely accessible fitness trail and a viewing platform for the salmon jump and the planned salmon ladder. See H&WB Appendix 4, on Page 27.
- 2.6 Frailty among older people – as the population of Hexham ages at double the speed of the UK generally, it will become vital that health and care professionals fully understand the clinical significance of frailty; it can deflect diagnosis and disrupt the expected effect of prescribed medicines for the elderly. See H&WB Appendix 5, P28.

3. Health and Wellbeing Appendices: rationale and action plans

3.1 H&WB Appendix 1: The Chareway Estate

This small estate comprising mainly housing association houses and flats is in need of regeneration. There is no established residents' forum or apparent community support from other agencies, such as N^o 28 in Hexham East. A small interview survey in March 2014 found that those residents who took part would welcome improvements such as better storage areas for waste bins, planting trees and flowers in patches of ground currently lying waste and the addition of seating in the large quadrangle communal area currently under-utilised apart from washing lines around its perimeter.

Proposal to the Hexham Town Council: the Health and Well-being working group will continue to investigate the feasibility of physical improvements to the Chareway area in collaboration with ISOS Housing and subsequently report to the Town Council in November 2014.

3.2 H&WB Appendix 2: Hexham – a Dementia Friendly Town

In light of Hexham's doubly ageing population (see the This is Hexham data section for the age profile of Hexham's current and projected population), it is important to think ahead and prepare residents to live alongside and better understand the needs of older people who have an increasing chance of suffering from a dementia-related condition.

Links have already been established between the Wentworth Leisure Centre and the regional branch of the Alzheimer Society (AS). The AS regional development manager has spoken to Wentworth staff to raise their awareness about the nature of forms of dementia and how to assist and guide older dementia sufferers both caringly and purposefully.

Arrangements will be made with the AS regional development manager to input into the update and training of Citizens' Advice Bureau staff and volunteers, as part of a wider plan for dementia awareness raising across the town's services, within an action plan towards accreditation as a dementia friendly town.

Proposal to the Hexham Town Council: before the end of 2014, the AS regional development manager will give a presentation to the Town Council on the advantages of increasing people's awareness of dementia and ways of assisting dementia sufferers. Approval will be sought for a town-wide action plan towards dementia friendly town accreditation.

3.3 H&WB Appendix 3: Improving the fitness and well-being of older residents

Wentworth Leisure Centre offers a fantastic range of resources for fitness related activities including swimming pools, gym, activity rooms, running track and sports hall that are well used for clubs such as judo, tai chi, badminton, five a side football and dance groups that include ballet and zumba. It also hosts more leisure-type activities such as tenpin bowling and bridge and hosts specialist exercise groups for example for people who suffer from multiple sclerosis.

Using the Wentworth facilities, the H&WB working group would like to increase participation in exercise among those frail elderly people currently at home or in residential care. The increasing proportion of older people in Hexham (see again the data on Hexham's ageing population, in the This is Hexham section, on Page 8) with attendant problems of physical and mental frailty, underscores the significance of this kind of development.

In the current year, sport trainees based at the Wentworth Leisure Centre will be introduced to working with older, frailer people. They will improve the availability of physical activity to older people in care and nursing homes (something that our telephone survey confirmed care homes will generally value). In a later phase they may provide this support and stimulus for older people in their own homes, perhaps to groups of friends.

Improved opportunities for transport for frail elderly residents to the facilities of the Wentworth will enable them to have access to suitable support and equipment, encouraging the maintenance of as active a lifestyle as possible.

Proposal for the Hexham Town Council: the H&WB group will promote new developments to support older people in Hexham, reporting mid-year to the Town Council (e.g. November 2014).



Hexham Junior Triathlon 2013

3.4 H&WB Appendix 4: Amenities along the South Bank of the River Tyne

In the town plan survey conducted in January/February 2013, of 768 respondents 80% agreed that Hexham Riverside should be used for more walking, cycling and fitness activities.

The H&WB working group aims to act on these views and improve one of Hexham's potentially greatest assets by

- improving the existing pathways along Tyne Green on both sides of the Hexham Tyne Bridge which are currently impassable by those with mobility problems and wheelchair users;
- constructing a 'fitness trail' to encourage a higher level of fitness activities by a wider age range of residents and visitors and attract a greater number of users to the area;
- creating an improved link between the areas of the Tyne bank on either side of the Tyne Bridge. The area to the east of the bridge can be developed into a leisure space with seating and picnic tables overlooking the salmon jump and eventually the salmon ladder, to be created by the Tyne River Trust in 2014/15 (it is understood at time of publication);
- seeking partners for the above developments.

Proposal for the Town Council: In December 2014 the H&WB working group will present plans covering the above for the Council's approval and support. Subsequently, negotiations with Northumberland County Council will assess the feasibility of the different elements of this plan, cost these and agree a timeline for implementation.

3.5 H&WB Appendix 5: Frailty among Older People

Medical research is starting to define 'frailty' among older and especially elderly people in quite special ways. Frailty can impede the normal processes of GP diagnosis, as the characteristics of ageing can combine to deflect an accurate judgement by the doctor. Also prescribeable drugs, tested to required exhaustive standards for most possible patients, lose the accuracy of their effect on older, frailer members of the population.

The population of the UK is ageing rapidly, and this is a well publicised challenge to NHS expertise and resources. The population of Hexham, this lovely little Northumberland town

that attracts an additional population of young retirees, is ageing at double the UK rate. (See again Hexham's ageing population data, Page 8).

We have thus double the reasons to want to serve our older and elderly neighbours well. Local health and care professionals must be helped to be aware of the latest research and its implications for the way frailty is recognised, treated and delayed. This can increase the cost-effectiveness of medical services in the town and put the town's health services at the forefront of elderly care.

Proposal for the Hexham Town Council: the H&WB working group will research 'frailty' further in 2014-15 to be able to make firm proposals to the HTC for the planning year 2015-16.

8. Built Environment and Transport

1. Short-term Achievements, September 2013 to May 2014

These are the 'quick wins', informed in part by the Town Plan 2013.

- 1.1 **Shopfront Design Guide:** working in collaboration with Hexham Civic Society (HCS - originator of the Guide, which had previously been adopted by the Tynedale District Council), the Guide has been condensed and subsequently adopted by the HTC as its preferred guidance. Working with the HTC, HCS will make the Guide available to proprietors and developers of Hexham town centre retail premises in a timely and supportive manner, especially at a point of change of ownership or a proposed renovation
- 1.2 **Potential 'brown-field' sites:** proprietors of potential development sites (residential and/or commercial) are being asked about the availability of and their intentions for such sites. Responses have been swift and helpful. Similarly, existing and proposed planning applications for new housing units in Hexham are being collected. These processes will continue, to provide an evidence base to inform the Council's participation in the next round of NCC Local Plan (Core Strategy) consultation. See BE&T Appendix 9, Page 43.
- 1.3 **Parking Map for Hexham:** after the production of this was overtaken by the introduction of free parking in the town, it is currently being updated.
- 1.4 **A Sustainable Town:** to help create a more sustainable town economically, socially and environmentally and to maintain its vitality for generations to come, a Sustainability Policy has been formulated for presentation to the Town Council in July 2014 and eventual approval and adoption.

- 1.5 **Article 4 Direction:** i.e. conservation area type protection for separately sited buildings. NCC Conservation Team responded positively to our reminder of their intention to pursue this. The Conservation Team will exploit a temporary increase in staff to start this process and to establish a Conservation Advisory Group for Hexham. BE&T has offered assistance.
- 1.6 **Demographic and other relevant data:** data sets that have been drawn together include:
- i. potential brown-field sites (see 1.2 above), see BE&T Appendix 9, Page 43
 - ii. overview demographic data for Hexham and the three Hexham electoral wards, with NCC and England comparable data (see the Data Booklet)
 - iii. ageing population data, see This is Hexham, on Page 8
 - iv. social housing and the associated waiting lists in Hexham, see BE&T Appendix 5, Page 37.

2. Medium- and long-term priorities from May 2014

These require further discussion and research before they can be planned in detail, costed and fed into the HTC's prioritisation process:

- 2.1 **the Hexham Market Place**, which could benefit from a substantial refurbishment and become an attraction to underline to visitors Hexham's thriving market town, commercial and retailing heritage; (see Page 30)
- 2.2 **the Hexham bus station** – influencing the issues that will remain the responsibility of the NCC around the options for the bus station's location, including issues of bus pick up, set down and waiting up, as well as passenger amenities; (see Page 34)
- 2.3 **improved signage in Hexham town centre:** the County Council is to undertake a review of signage in Hexham; the BE&T has proposed a representative who is awaiting involvement; (see Page 35)
- 2.4 **slower speed areas:** review with NCC the desirability, feasibility and options for calming traffic and increasing vehicular, cyclist and pedestrian safety in the town centre; (see Page 36)
- 2.5 **supply of affordable and/or social housing** – working with ISOS to gauge supply and demand in this in order to put the Council in a position to influence local policy on this; (see Page 37)
- 2.6 **the re-invigoration of the town's Bandstand Appeal**, to restore this Hexham icon (along with the nearby water fountain) so that it can continue to host many events on Hexham's busy calendar; (see Page 40)
- 2.7 **improving the walking and cycling experience and safety**, initially the walk and cycle to work area at Hexham Tyne Bridge / Ferry Road; (see Page 41)
- 2.8 **the development of a Neighbourhood Plan for Hexham**, parallel to the NCC's Local Plan processes, to align with and influence the latter more consistently and transparently, and improve on hitherto piecemeal planning. The affordability of this is a decision for the Hexham Town Council; (see Page 42)

3. Built Environment and Transport: rationale and action proposals

3.1 BE&T Appendix 1: The Hexham Market Place

The nature of market town retail is changing. Competition from both out-of-town outlets and the internet is getting ever stronger. Town centres, especially in traditional market towns that have only a relatively small local potential clientele, will not survive unless they become an attraction in themselves, exploiting their history and what must be a very special, independent shopping offer.

The refurbishment and even re-design of the Hexham Market Place could make this an additional attraction for visitors to the town, complementing the New Hexham Abbey Visitor Centre (to open in late summer 2014) and offering visitors and residents alike a new social, retail and café area.

N.b. The principal aim behind this is to help to cement in people's minds the attractions and advantages of shopping in and visiting Hexham. The expressed views of some retailers suggest that the current level of parking in the Market Place is crucial to their business activity. This must be investigated and hard evidence sought upon which a sound decision to proceed with a refurbishment or otherwise can be made. It is not the Town Plan's purpose to impede the viability of local business.

Hexham Market Place – a vision shared

Let's think differently

Think of the Market Place differently. Think of it as somewhere where you can sit and enjoy a coffee and soak up the splendid heritage around. Somewhere where there is the real bustle and colour of a daily market, like the old days, with music and dancing at special times. Somewhere that is central to Hexham town and says just what a market town is about – people, commerce, restful corners, time and place for a chat, interest, business, life.

Through-traffic will be minimised, safe for everyone at last, and much calmer. Hexham Abbey and the Abbey Flags will be part of the whole, sitting grandly in the west, facing the fine old Moot Hall, across an attractive space of social and market activity.

You'll notice the Shambles, representing the daily market life that has characterised Hexham since the 13th Century, carefully renovated to help to highlight Hexham's history. Come the evening, think of subtle lighting that will sustain its presence, helping to colour the space impressively into the night.

The central area will be as flexible as the town's busy events diary needs. Perhaps a buskers' corner, a stage for Hexham's bigger bands, space if you want for dancing, or a regular children's carousel, amidst a busy, real-life, characterful market. There should be no future problems siting Hexham's skating rink, complete with bouncy castle and burger van.

The Abbey's planned Visitor Centre will not be isolated. It will be part of an informative and entertaining visit to a vibrant, interesting town that values its history, its people and its future. It will treat its visitors very well, whether they want to shop, eat and drink, relax or learn. It will all start in a Market Place that we are already thinking quite differently about.

There will be problems to solve, reality checks to be had. Can we find additional parking in the town centre to make up for the spaces that will disappear? Can we calm the traffic, make the attractive space safe for all? Will the solution be in traffic management, one-way, and no quick way just to the A69?

Think of the Market Place as an asset, for commerce and visitors alike. Can it make a visit to Hexham more attractive? More attractive to more people? Will Hexham town, the Abbey Visitor Centre and the town's Market Place together become a 'must visit', alongside Hadrian's Wall?

Can we afford it? Can we afford not to??!

A Vision for the Hexham Market Place

A more systematic vision for the Hexham Market Place which makes clear the purposes and potential advantages of a substantial refurbishment and re-design follows. The Market Place is defined in this context as stretching from the Abbey entrance to the Moot Hall and, north-south, from shopfront to shopfront.

Hexham Market Place 2020

The Built Environment and Transport Working Group of Hexham 2020 (the Town Plan) would like to see:

- Hexham Market Place and its surrounds enhanced and improved by 2016 in celebration of the building of the current Shambles 250 years ago;
- An attractive public realm, in keeping with its historic surroundings, which will encourage people to linger there - whether to enjoy organised events, to socialise, to shop, to sit and relax, to drink coffee or wine, or to visit Hexham Abbey, the Moot Hall or the Old Gaol;
- A heritage-conscious redesign of the Market Place that complements the ambitious Abbey Visitor Centre and which attractively and informatively introduces visitors to Hexham's market town traditions and heritage;
- A refurbished Shambles;
- A careful consideration of how (and how often) the market place will be used, such that the space is attractive when empty of people and activities, as well as allowing for full use of the space for daily activity including markets, musical events, dancing, etc.;
- A space for celebrations and concerts, a focal point for the townspeople, one which is flexible enough for a Christmastime skating rink (!) and which links easily to Hexham Abbey; (think autumn evenings, a month of son et lumiere (like Durham) or musical fountain (like Barcelona));
- Consultation with independent shopkeepers to ensure that they are comfortable with the plans;
- An uncluttered space with road signs, bus stop signs, bollards and kerbs removed, and which encourages shared, rather than segregated use of the space;
- Suitable, attractive, historic-style lighting (attached to buildings rather than free-standing);
- A space of considerably improved aesthetics such that looking down or at eye-level is as attractive a sight as looking up at Hexham's marketplace skyline;
- Car parking removed from the market place itself, with the possible exception of spaces for disabled users, and possibly increased parking spaces in Beaumont and Market Streets;
- An attractive as well as robust highway/footway surface and inclusion of trees and planters, that will take into account the area's multiple uses including heavy vehicular access for delivery of goods, environmental factors such as drainage, and easy, level access particularly for vulnerable road users - pedestrians, cyclists, and those using buggies or disability scooters;
- Integration - rather than segregation - of all users of the market place and surrounds, whether those users are shopping, driving, delivering goods, socialising or walking through the space to access other parts of Hexham;
- A reduced number of motorised vehicles accessing the market place area and traversing the area at a slower speed;
- Drivers who, when travelling through this newly uncluttered space, will need to show heightened respect for other road users - both vehicles and pedestrians, rather than assuming that they

- have unfettered right of way;
- Emphasis on high quality, sensitive design and high quality materials which will act as a catalyst to changing the way in which people interact within this public realm;
- The final design planned and executed by an expert in townscape heritage, traffic management and/or shared space, who has consulted with all user groups, and particularly disabled persons;
- Consideration of one-way traffic in Beaumont Street and Market Street with Hallstile Bank closed for at least a part of each day (allowing delivery vehicles to exit down Hallstile Bank);
- Consideration of how visitor coaches will be allowed to travel through Beaumont and Market Streets to access the Hexham Abbey Visitor Centre, or whether coach parking could be allowed for a short period on the current bus bay next to St Aidan's Church.

The Vitality of Hexham Market

The Northumberland County Council Market Manager was interviewed to discern what levels of market activity there are currently and might be expected in future on the Hexham Market Place.

Background: Hexham Charter Markets are held every Tuesday. Markets are also held every Saturday, with the second and fourth Saturdays covered by the Hexham Farmers' Market. Daily there are market stalls in the Shambles.

The Royal Charter for markets in Hexham and Morpeth was granted by Henry VIII. There has been a market in Hexham on the current site since the 13th Century, an original Charter being dated 21st October 1222. The Hexham Shambles was originally the outdoor site for meat stalls, suitably protected from the elements and the sun.

Findings:

- ✚ The Hexham Charter Market is robust and in good commercial health.
- ✚ Across Northumberland, its levels of activity are comparatively high – only Berwick market has a higher activity level, and this only in the summer months.
- ✚ Levels of Hexham market activity would suffer if any refurbishment led only to a prettification of the Market Place, reducing space available for stalls and marginalising market purposes.
- ✚ An energised market would contribute to the overall purposes of a planned refurbishment – increased attraction and retail opportunities for residents and visitors alike.
- ✚ Repeat traders are in the majority on market days, but one-offs still arrive and are accommodated whenever possible (some have to be turned away).
- ✚ Traders are both local and regional. On Tuesday Market days one trader travels from Edinburgh. Satisfaction rates (with levels of business on the Hexham market) are good.
- ✚ Approaches have been made by third parties, with a view to holding specialist markets on other days, including Sundays.

Conclusion: The Hexham Charter and Farmers' Markets could play a significant role in the revitalisation of the Hexham Market Place.

The Market Place in recent Surveys

Survey 1: The Well-being Survey 2011, Central Tynedale Community Forum

Over half of respondents (54%) would like to see the Hexham Market Place made more attractive, compared to 43% who think it is OK now. A very small number of people (3%) say they don't know. It is the under-50s who are most positive about change in this context, with almost three in every five (nearly 60%) in favour of a more attractive market place.

Survey 2: Hexham Town Plan 2013 Survey

Something must be done to make the Market Place more attractive and flexible for visitors and shoppers. (Question 2)

Agree/Strongly agree = 68.5%; Disagree/Strongly disagree = 8.9%;

No preference/No answer = 20.8%.

There is overwhelming support among respondents for some action to make the Hexham Market Place more attractive and flexible.

Survey 3: Car Parking in the Hexham Market Place, by the Transport Working Group

Sensitive to the need to find out why people find parking in the Market Place so useful and desirable, members of the Transport working group undertook a survey of drivers' intentions. Summary results are as follows:

A survey of people parking in the Market Place took place in late February / early March 2013. A total of 118 drivers were interviewed on a Thursday, Friday, Saturday and Monday. All interviews were between 12.00 and 2.00pm, with additional hours on the Saturday.

Drivers were interviewed either just as they had parked or as they were leaving. A quarter were stopping for less than 15 minutes, 20% between 15 and 30 minutes and 31% between half an hour and one hour.

Most of those parked (86%) were local and nearly half (47%) drove into Hexham four or more times a week.

Most people parking included a visit to at least one (average 1.6) commercial premises (mostly multiple stores) and were in the main regular visitors to Hexham. Among local retailers, butcher's shops figured most frequently. If they hadn't been able to park in the market place, half said they would find another town centre site, a third use the lower car parks and the rest didn't know.

Overall conclusion: The BE&T Working Group will consider a substantial bid to the Townscape Heritage programme (designed specifically for "schemes which help communities improve the built historic environment of conservation areas in need of investment across the UK") of the Heritage Lottery Fund, to be presented in outline and with further information to the Town Council for consideration in September 2014.

Above are three views of



the Hexham Market Place – 1930s, current, and with reduced through-traffic.

PROPOSAL for the Town Council: The BE&T working group seeks HTC's approval to explore further the issues relevant to a substantial and appropriate refurbishment and/or re-design of the Hexham Market Place.

3.2 BE&T Appendix 2: The Hexham Bus Station

Background

The Hexham bus station is currently situated very centrally and thus very conveniently for passengers. Its location has in the past received firm support, in the shape of a 2,000 signature petition against the removal of the bus station to an alternative site.

The bus station has recently been subject to a minor upgrade by the County Council that has provided shelter, more seating and a safer non-slip surface for queuing passengers.

There are however no satisfactory standard passenger amenities, either a waiting room or toilets, the latter being most significant of course for longer-distance travellers, for example Newcastle – Carlisle, as well as for general passenger comfort.

Regular bus traffic and turning in such a central and tight location in the town, intersecting with passengers, passing pedestrians and general traffic, adds to the congestion and reduces the level of safety of bus station operations.

The bus station itself limits access to a substantial development site consisting of the rear of the bus station (usually under-occupied, by parked buses and few cars) and an adjacent area of derelict commercial buildings (part being a former garage and car showroom). This explains the interest that a developer, Dysart, and the NCC have in making the wider bus station zone a more valuable commercial asset to the town.

Further modifications to the very rear of the bus station can provide a thoroughfare giving access to the M&S store (a 'pull-factor' retailer) and its surrounding car park, thus adding to the retail attraction and vitality of the town centre.

Current position

One unsatisfactory proposal by the NCC has been shelved, thanks to the many residents and local groups who wrote to complain. The proposal was to replace the bus station with bus stops along Priestpople and to insert a roundabout at Benson's Monument to serve also as a bus turning circle.

The Town Council expressed its concern at the proposal and requested that the NCC's officers research six options for siting the bus station, including its current location, and provide an appraisal document for consultation, to inform a substantive decision in this long-running tale of uncertainty.

The Hexham Town Council and the BET working group will insist that, within any proposals to move the bus station to a different site, there will be a substantial safe, covered and comfortable bus stop on either side of Priestpople, where the bus station currently stands.

At the time of writing, the NCC has acceded to the Town Council's request and an options appraisal document for Hexham bus station will be made available in mid June 2014.

Proposal to the Town Council: the Council should respond to the bus station options appraisal document (when available) by participating in the ensuing debate, listening to residents' and passengers' views and judging the balance of options and views, and make a clear representation to the Northumberland County Council on Hexham's behalf, by September 2014.

3.3 BE&T Appendix 3: Signage in Hexham Town Centre

An audit of signage in the Hexham town centre is on the Northumberland County Council's agenda and the BE&T group has proposed a local representative who can serve Hexham's interests in this.

The purpose will be to identify poor and/or superfluous signage that can have a negative impact on the streetscape. It remains important that the Hexham streetscape is as appealing and uncluttered as possible in order to present Hexham's architectural and cultural heritage attractively to visitors and residents.

Once the arrangements for free parking have bedded in, it will be necessary to review the signage associated with car parking to make sure there is no possible confusion in the different parking areas for residents and visitors alike.

Proposal for the Hexham Town Council: Hexham County Councillors must continue to put pressure on the relevant NCC officers to move forward with this signage audit and involve the Hexham representative in this to ensure that progress reports to the Council can ensue.

3.4 BE&T Appendix 4: Slower Speed Areas

The introduction of 20mph limits in the town has been necessary and successful in specific areas of the town – around the High School / St Joseph's Middle School and in the area of Maidens Walk and White Cross.

Hexham town centre streets were not designed for traffic in the bulk and speeds that we see today. In most places drivers' unimpeded vision extends no more than 50 yards, and there are pinch points in carriageways that pose particular hazards, for example the mouth of Market Street and the top of (indeed the whole length of) Battle Hill. Formal restrictions in traffic speed will underline what is already good practice for a lot of drivers in Hexham as there are few places in the town centre where speeds of 20+mph can feel safe.

The town centre of Hexham needs to redefine its real purpose as a historical and retail zone that is not undermined or rendered less safe by the speed and frequency of through traffic. Shoppers (both locals and visitors) must feel and be safe at all times, and encouraged to consider the town as a 'good place to shop'.

The safety of older folk, drivers of mobility scooters, children walking to school, mums with pushchairs and wheelchair users is prime in a town with numerous pedestrian crossings. As the number of older people in the town is increasing at double the rate experienced in

most other parts of the country, attention to their safety in a busy town centre is paramount.

In the 2011 Wellbeing Survey, a total of 70% of people supported a move to controlling the speed of traffic locally. Only around a quarter of people (25%) think that the speed of traffic locally is OK now. A higher proportion of women than men are in favour of a speed restriction, and more in the over-50 category than in the under-50s.

The definition of a 20mph zone covering the centre of Hexham including retail and residential areas will be open to debate, but current thinking in the BE&T group would support the introduction of a 20mph within the following boundaries: north – Hexham Tyne Bridge / Ferry Road; south – Fellside and Beaumont Park; east – Hexham Priory School; west – Hexham Golf Club. Corresponding signage could be positioned on the boundaries and raised carriageways used in the very centre of the town to re-assert the need for low speed.

Proposal for the Hexham Town Council: the BE&T working group will consult with the County Council and formulate options for 20mph limits for submission to the Town Council by December 2014 so that one proposal will be approved by April 2015, for subsequent detailed planning.

3.5 BE&T Appendix 5: the Supply of Affordable and/or Social Housing in Hexham

Overall in Hexham, 17% of the local housing stock is social rented housing. In the Hexham Central ward (Wydon Park down and across to Tyne Green) the figure stands at 26%.

At 17%, the proportion of social rented housing in Hexham is higher than in Northumberland overall (15%).

In a town of the size and with the geographical location of Hexham (relatively isolated and distant from the north-east's principal conurbation, where there is quick access to both housing and a variety of employment), it is important that the supply of housing, especially for long-term resident families whose members are most likely to seek employment in the town, is adequate.

Initial research into the theme of affordable and social housing in Hexham has revealed high levels of demand by Hexham residents for existing social housing units in the town. At the same time there are high levels of overcrowded households in areas of the town.

The Built Environment Working Group requested up-to-date information on the levels of supply and demand locally for social rented housing.

The following data was supplied by Karla Keegans, Head of Housing, Northumberland County Council, on 18 November 2013.

SOCIAL HOUSING DATA, provided 18 November 2013 by Carla Keegans, Head of Housing, NCC

Below is the current social housing stock by bedroom size in the parish of Hexham (FYI):

Hexham Vision 2020 and Town Plan 2014-15

Landlord	Bedroom size of property				Total
	1	2	3	4	
Bernicia	9	34	15	3	61
Isos	297	408	169	6	880
Homegroup	1	0	0	0	1
Johnnie Johnson	17	0	0	0	17
Riverside	1	0	0	0	1
Two Castles	0	12	0	0	12
Total	325	454	184	9	972

*note: Homegroup & Riverside are supported accommodation type properties

People registered on Homefinder who live in Hexham, and what size property they are eligible for:

Bedroom size	Homefinder applicants	%
1	144	55%
2	81	31%
3	29	11%
4	9	3%
Total	263	100%

Number of properties in Hexham advertised in 12 month period 14.11.12 to 14.11.13

Property Type	1 Bed	2 Bed	3 Bed	4 Bed	Studio apartment	Totals
Bungalow	7	1				8
Flat	30	33			2	65
House		41	11	1		53
Maisonette		2				2
Sheltered	5	1			11	17
Total social housing properties advertised 14.11.12 to 14.11.13						145

Number of bids received per property type (average per advertised unit in brackets) in above 12 month period

Property Type	1 Bed	2 Bed	3 Bed	4 Bed	Studio apartment	Totals
Bungalow	127 (av 18)	4				131
Flat	540 (av 18)	267 (av 8)			11	818
House		548 (av 13)	64 (av 6)	6		618
Maisonette		6 (av 3)				6
Sheltered	3 (av less	4			17 (av less	24

than 1)			than 1)
Overall total bids for social housing units 14.11.12 to 14.11.13			1,598
		Average per unit	11

Some Conclusions drawn by the BE&T working group relating to the social housing stock in the Parish of Hexham in the 12 months to 14 November 2013:

- There was high demand for the current stock of social housing in Hexham (972 units in total) by existing Hexham residents;
- On 18 November 2013 there were 263 Homefinder registrations (waiting list) of people living in Hexham;
- The majority of Homefinder applicants (55%) in Hexham were searching for a 1-bedroom property, and almost one third (31%) desired a 2-bedroom property;
- Turnover of tenancies within the 12 months to 14 November 2013 reached a total of 145 (or 15%);
- The type of property most commonly available was 2 bed roomed (54% of advertisements);
- 42 1-bedroom properties became available, contrasting with the 144 registrations on the waiting list;
- 78 2-bedroom properties became available, closely equating to the 81 registrations on the waiting list;
- The total number of bids for vacant tenancies in this 12-month period was 1,598 – an average of 11 per vacancy;
- For every Flat or Bungalow 1-bedroom property advertised, there were on average 18 bids;
- For every 2-bedroom house advertised in this 12-month period, there were on average 13 bids, and for every 2-bedroom flat there were 8 bids.

OVERCROWDED HOUSEHOLDS in Hexham 2012

The following data is taken from the Northumberland Knowledge website, Ward and Parish Factsheets 2012, based on Census 2011 data, and shows the levels of overcrowding in homes in the three Hexham Wards, in Northumberland overall and in England overall.

Overcrowded Households, as a proportion of total households

Where:	% overcrowded
Hexham East	5.7
Hexham Central	6.2
Hexham West	1.5
Hexham overall	4.8
Northumberland	3.6
England overall	8.7

N.b. Overcrowding is defined here as an occupancy rating of -1 or worse (rooms)

Based on the 2011 Census, using a consistent measure, 4.8% of Hexham households are

officially overcrowded: 260 households in total. This is above the Northumberland average of 3.6%. In Hexham Central the figure is 6.2% (145 households) and in Hexham East the figure is 5.7% (110 households).

PLANNED NEW BUILD OF AFFORDABLE/SOCIAL HOUSING in Hexham

As of March 2014, there is a planning application registered with Northumberland County Council for 26 affordable homes in Hexham, off the Corbridge Road, opposite the Ford car dealership (NCC Reference 13/02253/FUL).

There are in addition plans by ISOS for four 3-bedroom dwellings for affordable rental in Hexham, north of Wydon Park, and the associated re-siting of the play-area. This application was accompanied by the following needs assessment:

Isos Housing

Housing Development Wydon Park, Hexham

Housing Needs Statement

Northumberland County Council's Strategic Housing Services were consulted to establish the local demand for affordable housing within the Hexham area.

The Housing Enabler for the north area provided evidence in support of the proposed development, which is summarised as follows.

The total number of applicants on the Northumberland County Council Homefinder for the Hexham area is 346, of which 56 are aged 65 and over.

Applications by the number of bedrooms required are as follows:

1 bedroom = 196 2 bedroom = 105 3 bedroom = 32 4 bedroom = 12 5 bedroom = 1

This shows that demand is highest for one and two bedroom properties. However, there is also significant demand for three bedroom properties.

The four three-bedroom properties proposed would meet an identified local demand for affordable housing.

N.b. The information above differs from the data provided to the BE&T working group in that it is based on all applicants for affordable rented in Hexham, not solely applicants resident in Hexham.

Proposal to the Hexham Town Council: the BE&T working group will investigate this further, in collaboration with ISOS, and make associated recommendations to the Town Council to guide its influence on local and County housing policy, in September 2014.

3.6 BE&T Appendix 6: The Hexham Bandstand Appeal

Background

The bandstand is located in the Abbey Gardens which were added to pre-existing Sele Park in 1911. The bandstand was donated to the park by local wool merchant Henry Bell in 1912, the year after the park land had been bought by the town council from the Beaumont Family. A plaque in the bandstand commemorates the gift.



The drinking fountain was installed into the Sele Park at approximately the same time as the erection of the bandstand.

Although 100 years of painting and maintaining both structures has enabled them to survive into the next century, unfortunately a full

renovation is needed to enable them to continue to be at the centre of life in the park.

** image by kind permission of Andrew Da Costa, Minerva*

The Need for Renovation

There are significant numbers of elements missing from the roof, structural and cast iron components require either repair and/or replacement and the majority of the bandstand requires specialist cleaning prior to recoating. It is the contracted specialist's recommendation that the bandstand be dismantled and delivered to a specialist restoration/conservator workshop where the work can be undertaken prior to reinstatement.



Similarly, it is recommended that the fountain also be dismantled, returned to the contractors workshop for specialist cleaning, repairs as required and painting before reinstatement.

In addition, there is a Grade 1 listed ruinous shed attached to the curtain wall of the Abbey dating from around 1823, which has been assessed as part of the survey and the recommendation is to re-lay the top 3 courses and add a timber roof, door and window fitting to enable it to be used as storage for users of the bandstand (to facilitate band performances etc). This would be a good use for the building and save it for future generations, combining its use with the adjacent bandstand.

Continuing the Appeal

Community events and seminars to disseminate the findings of the restoration project will be held. These will include work with schools, courses, public lectures and workshops, to help the people of Hexham learn more about their cultural heritage and enable future generations to appreciate traditional skills.

The Town Council will continue to work with its partners in the appeal, the Hexham Community Partnership and Northumberland County Council, supported by various other organisations and groups wishing to see the Bandstand and the Water Fountain restored for community use and appreciation.

Councillor Rad Hare is the Town Council's contact for this appeal and is pleased to speak to people who are keen and able to help.

Proposal to Hexham Town Council: The Town Council will continue to work with partners in the town to sustain momentum for the Bandstand Appeal in 2014-15.

3.7 BE&T Appendix 7: Improving Walking and Cycling

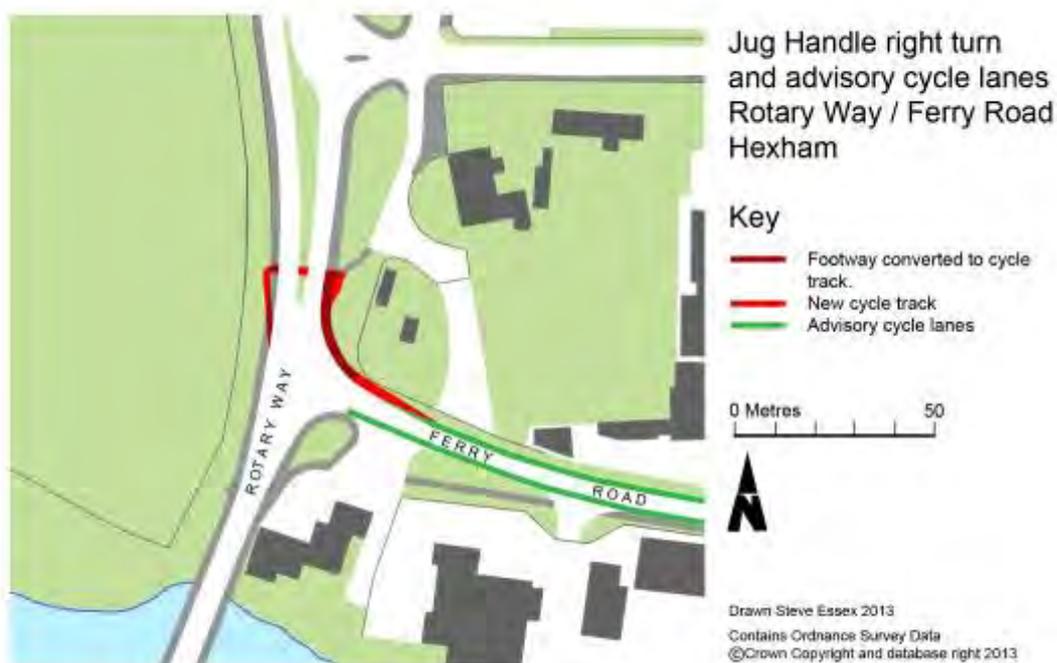
As the Ferry Road junction at the north of Hexham Tyne Bridge is a key walk and cycle to work junction for the Egger factory, as well as being part of Hadrian's Cycleway, it must be made safer.

Removing the centre lines and providing an Advisory Cycle Lane (ACL) on each side of the carriageway of Hexham Tyne Bridge will highlight the presence of cyclists to vehicle drivers thereby reducing risk of a collision AND making cyclists feel safer whilst crossing this bridge.

The northbound ACL will lead naturally and safely to the proposed jug handle whilst the southbound ACL will allow cyclists to safely enter the ACL over Hexham Tyne Bridge from Ferry Road with traffic flow.

A key factor of increased safety is removing the need to turn right into Ferry Road from the centre of the start of Rotary Way. Apart from undertaking HGVs, this is known to be most dangerous manoeuvre cyclists can make in terms of injury and loss of life.

Being Hadrian's Cycleway, an important northbound link to employment, to Corbridge and Acomb and to Hexham for southbound cyclists, this section of route MUST be made safer.



N.b. not re-painting the faded centre white line on Ferry Road is integral to this.

Proposal for Hexham Town Council: County Councillors and the BE&T group will build on the recent positive response by NCC Sustainable Transport and provide support for the detailed implementation planning for the above while keeping further projects readily available; to be reported to the Town Council in November 2014.

3.8 BE&T Appendix 8: A Neighbourhood Plan for Hexham

Background

Neighbourhood Plans allow districts to take over control of the detail of some important planning policies, for housing, commercial and industrial premises and highways. They

are developed in parallel to the wider statutory Local Plans that Local Authorities, for example Northumberland County Council, have already produced or are in the process of producing, for example the NCC Core Strategy.

A Neighbourhood Plan may not conflict with the wider Local Plan but it can provide greater implementation detail through its own agreed policies.

Benefits to the District

In collaboration with Sandhoe and Acomb Parish Councils, Hexham Town Council would through a Neighbourhood Plan acquire increased joint powers relating to the detail of housing and employment (commercial and industrial) land use in the district.

Within the town of Hexham, if local consensus supports this, new detailed powers could cover provisions to retain the heritage features of the town, for example shopfronts and street lights, or to facilitate retail development, for example simplifying the process for cafes to develop attractive outdoor seating areas.

With the Neighbourhood Plan formulation process there are significant requirements for community engagement and consultation, which the Town Council should see as further advantages. The demanding process of preparation could last 18 months to 2 years and there would be an associated cost for necessary specialist support/consultancy.

Central Government grants are still available to local councils to embark on the Neighbourhood Plan process. A Neighbourhood Plan can provide further financial benefits to a council, for example by triggering an additional Community Infrastructure Levy, which would come to the neighbourhood council(s).

Proposal: the Hexham Town Council should continue to research the benefits and demands of a Neighbourhood Plan, developed in collaboration with neighbouring parishes, to be able to reach a decision and make any necessary financial commitment by September 2014.

BE&T Appendix 9: Potential Development Sites in Hexham

Background

The Northumberland County Council Core Strategy (Local Plan) is still in the process of formulation and consultation.

Documentation to support the November-December 2013 consultation on 'Preferred Options for Housing, Employment and Green Belt' in Hexham proposed quite substantial use of the Hexham green belt as locations for housing and employment sites, principally in Hexham's west end.

Since then, questions have been asked about and objections raised to both the statistical underpinning of the associated population projections (housing need) and the feasibility of the associated infrastructure development (traffic, power etc).

To contribute to the evidence base for future rounds of consultations (of which there will be two) the BE&T working group has requested from Hexham landowners and collated

information relating to potential development sites within the Hexham town boundaries. These are available 'brownfield' sites.

There is a duty on the local authority to consider these before proposing future development which may impinge on existing green belt.

Brownfield Sites in Hexham

So far, the BE&T working group's enquiries have resulted in the identification of 9 brownfield sites that would otherwise have been omitted from the NCC Local Plan considerations.

These vary in size and location, but all are available for consideration for purchase and/or planning – for either residential or employment use. One large site, dormant for some time, will be subject to an initial planning options review by the owner's architects in mid-2014. The intention is to develop residential units (with potential for up to 35 – BE&T estimate). Another large site, covering approximately 4 hectares and capable of containing upwards of 50 units is for sale.

Details of all 9 sites have been passed to the NCC Local Plan/Core Strategy team.

Current Planning Applications - Housing

Considering current planning applications for housing developments in Hexham and those known to be 'in the pipeline', there is considerable expansion envisaged. Many of these are so-called 'wind-fall' units – impossible to predict or plan for but significant in their overall total. This must be accurately quantified as without this it is impossible to project levels of additional housing need that may (or may not) justify substantial use of the Hexham green belt for housing or employment land.

In the Council year 2013-14 alone, there were applications for a total of 256 new dwelling units. These include substantial developments planned for the Corbridge Road with a probable 166 dwelling units and plans and permissions for 72 dwelling units in the town centre.

To this 2013-14 total can be added a further 95 that are 'in the pipeline', as knowledge that the developments are approaching stages of planning and permission are very reliable.

Proposal for the Hexham Town Council: the BE&T working group acting on its behalf will continue to assemble information about 'brownfield' sites and plans for new housing units in Hexham to provide an evidence base for a Town Council contribution to the future NCC Core Strategy/Local Plan consultations.



Priorities for Action 2014 – 15

The following are the **Proposals** identified by each Working Group that will be taken forward in 2014-15, detailing the next steps to be taken.

Ref	Priority	Next Steps	By when
1. Economy, Arts and Heritage Working Group			
1.1	Neighbourhood Plan for Hex'	HTC decision awaited (see also BE&T 2.8 below)	Sept '14
1.3	New Town Events etc	With HCP and HAF, WG will prepare proposal for HTC	Mar '15
1.4	Totally Locally	Decision for traders and HBF; WG to report to HTC	Oct '14
1.5	Access to Town Centre	WG to continue to investigate options	Mar '15
1.6	Business Improvement District	After feedback from HBF and NCC, WG to report to F&GP	Sept '14
1.7	Tourist accommodation	After advice from TIC and NCC, proposals to HTC	Feb '15
2. Health and Well-being Working Group			
2.1	The Chareway Estate	Feasibility options with ISOS, to report to HTC	Nov '14
2.2	Dementia Friendly Hexham	Presentation to HTC and WG to formulate plan	Dec '14
2.3	Fitness of older residents	WG to promote new initiatives and report to HTC	Nov '14
2.4	Amenities at Tyne Green	Options and plans to HTC for negotiations with NCC	Jan '15
2.5	Frailty among Older People	Research developments in 'frailty'; proposals to HTC	Mar '15
3. Built Environment and Transport Working Group			
3.1	Hexham Market Place	Further exploration of the issues; to report to HTC	Jan '15
3.2	Hexham Bus Station	Await NCC options appraisal; HTC	Sept '14
3.3	Town Centre signage	Pressure on NCC to take the planned review forward	Sept '14
3.4	Slower Speed areas	Consult with NCC on options for this, for HTC decision	Dec '14
3.5	Supply of affordable housing	Take advice from ISOS, for report to HTC	Nov '14
3.6	Hexham Bandstand Appeal	Maintain momentum with partners, report to HTC	Apr '15
3.7	Improve walking and cycling	WG to build on NCC interest; to report to HTC	Nov '14
3.8	Neighbourhood Plan for Hex'	HTC decision awaited (see also EA&H 2.1)	Sept '14
3.9	Brownfield sites and housing	Strengthen evidence for NCC Local Plan consultations	Sept '14

The Hexham Town Council conducts business at full Town Council meetings (scheduled for the first Monday of each month (unless a Bank Holiday) and at meetings of its Committees. These are currently:

Finance and General Purposes	Planning and Infrastructure
Community Engagement	Hexham Town Plan Committee
Hexham Neighbourhood Plan Committee	

Town Plan Working Groups have an advisory capacity.

Abbreviations commonly used in the Town Plan

HTC	Hexham Town Council	NCC	Northumberland County Council
HCP	Hexham Community Partnership	HCS	Hexham Civic Society
HBF	Hexham Business Forum		
EA&H	the Economy, Arts and Heritage working group for the HTP		
H&WB	the Health and Wellbeing working group for the HTP		
BE&T	the Built Environment and Transport working group for the HTP		
HTP	Hexham Town Plan		
WG	Working Group, for the Hexham Town Plan		

Monitoring and Evaluating the Hexham Town Plan

The Hexham Town Plan 2014-15, with an underpinning vision for Hexham 2020, is designed to be easily, and democratically, monitored and evaluated. With most of its proposals for further actions seeking Hexham Town Council approval, either directly or via a Council Committee, its progress will be able to be noted and validated regularly and publicly.

The members of the Town Plan working groups, non-councillors as well as councillors, are active in other groups in the town, for example the Community Partnership, the Civic Society, Patients Group, the Arts Forum, and while not having a strict duty to represent these groups they are able both to feed back on progress and take new ideas back to the Town Plan groups.

For 2014-15 it is proposed that the Hexham Town Council will also establish a Chairs' Group to bring the Chairs of the three working groups together, with the Mayor, to assess progress and assist in overcoming blockages.

In the run up to the Hexham Annual Town Meeting and the Town Council AGM in May 2015, a monitoring and evaluation document will be provided so that residents can see the impact of the Town Plan 2014-15.



Bibliography and Addendum

1. Bibliography

If read on-line, this provides active links to the respective web-based documents.

The source of the statistics that underpin **Section 5 This is Hexham** is the [Northumberland Knowledge](#) website:

<http://www.northumberland.gov.uk/Default.aspx?page=15711>

The data comparing the three Hexham wards, Northumberland and England can be found on the Places section, using the links to [Wards](#), [Parishes/Towns](#) and [Other Area Profiles](#).

For more detailed age profile analysis and projections, we used '[Northumberland's Population is out of Balance](#)'.

For more detail on the local economy and business start-ups and closures, we used the '[Northumberland Local Economic Assessment, Statistical Update 2012](#)'.

The latest information about Northumberland's emerging [Local Plan](#) (or Core Strategy, as it is sometimes referred to) is most easily accessed on the main NCC website, Planning and Development.

Copies of recent [Hexham-based surveys](#) (the Well-being Survey 2011 and the Town Plan 2013 Survey) can be obtained on the Hexham Town Council website: www.hexhamtowncouncil.gov.uk.

For more information on the Totally Locally award-winning social enterprise, go to its [website](#).

Guidance on establishing policies and programmes to help develop [wellbeing through physical activity](#) is to be had through NICE (the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence).

The Hexham [Market Town Welcome Plan 2009](#) provides interesting and still relevant background reading on the town's potential to attract more visitors. It can be accessed on the [Community Partnership](#) website / Library.

Local organisations provide information about their own activities and the town of Hexham on their own websites, of which the following are most relevant to this Town Plan 2014-15:

HTC – [Hexham Town Council](#)

HCP – [Hexham Community Partnership](#)

HCS – [Hexham Civic Society](#)

NCC – [Northumberland County Council](#)

HBF – [Hexham Business Forum](#)

TT - [Transition Tynedale](#)

2. Addendum: Local Groups

N.b. This list is by nature incomplete. With the help of Hexham groups and organisations, however, keen to help HTC offer a complete and accurate version, the final list will be transferred to the Hexham Town Council website for the information of readers in general. (To provide further detail, i.e. new groups and/or contact information, please email the Town Council, fao Cllr Hanley).

Organisations existing within Hexham to support Arts and Crafts

Venues

Queen's Hall
The Forum Cinema
Hexham Abbey
Core Music

Galleries

Haslam's of Hallgate
Matthew Forster
Robinson-Gay

Clubs and Societies

Tynedale Academy of Performing Arts
Hexham Art Club
Friends of the Queens Hall
Hexham Amateur Stage Society
Hexham Embroiderers' Guild
www.hexhambroiderersguild.org.uk
Hexham Branch of the Sugarcraft Guild
Hexham Decorative and Fine Arts Society
Hexham Photographic Society
Northern Society of Costume and Textiles
Tynedale Accordion Club
Tyneside Guild of Weavers, Spinners and Dyers
Tynedale Scottish Country Dance Club
choir.org.uk
Tynedale Symphony Orchestra
Queen's Hall Theatre Club
Network Artists in Northumberland
Hexham Abbey Guild of Bell Ringers
www.hexhambells.growability.org.uk
Music and Movement
Singing Babies
Terpsichore
Hexham and District Music Society
Hexham Arts Forum

Education and Local Authorities

Community Arts Officer
Community Education

www.tapa.uk.com
www.hexhamartclub.ning.com

[www.info@hexham-orpheus-](http://www.info@hexham-orpheus-choir.org.uk)

www.terpsichoredance.co.uk

philogg@gehs.net
01434 610321

Events

Hexham Gathering

Northumbrian Music Nights

Hexham Abbey Music Festival

Tynedale Music Festival

Core Music

Hexham Book Festival

Art Tour

Dickinson's Design Week

01434 685047

info@coremusic.co.uk

admin@networkartists.org.uk

Choirs

Hexham Abbey Choir

Hexham Abbey Festival Chorus

Hexham Male Voice Choir

Hexham Orpheus Choir

Antiphon Choir

Hexham Community Choir

01434 602031

01434 605414

07751346487

01434 606293

