

SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORT PLAN FOR HEXHAM

Hexham Town Council



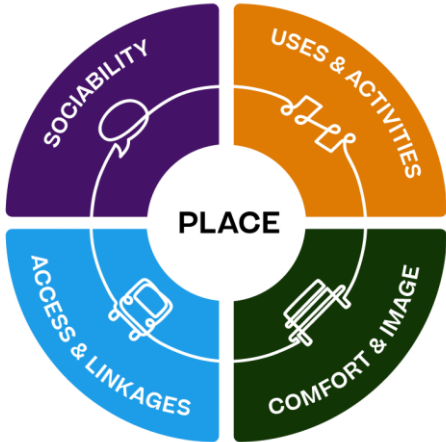
February 2023



1. Introduction

1.1 In common with other towns nationally and abroad, Hexham faces the challenge of adaptation and mitigation to substantial environmental problems, primarily the climate emergency, and also localised pollution, congestion, health and liveability issues. Encouraging sustainable movement is a cornerstone of sustainability, and this document, prepared by Hexham Town Council’s Sustainable Transport Working Group, sets out a plan as to how travel choices for residents, visitors and businesses in Hexham can be made more sustainable, to the benefit of all.

1.2 Providing an environment more conducive to sustainable and active travel is also in accordance with the principles of placemaking, this being the aim of creating public spaces that promote people’s health, happiness and well-being.



The importance of “Placemaking”

1.3 Placemaking aims to reimagine and reinvent public spaces at the heart of every community, as well as strengthening the connection between people and the places they share. Specifically, providing spaces which are less dominated by traffic, which enhance the environment for social interaction, and which improve opportunities for walking and cycling, are in accordance with the principles of placemaking.

1.4 This Plan for Hexham mirrors national commitments to promote sustainable modes of travel, to make sustainable choices easier, improve health through active travel and helping to reduce reliance on more polluting modes.

1.5 It represents an important opportunity to initiate a step change in the patterns of transport in Hexham. It comes at a time when Northumberland County Council (NCC) has declared a climate emergency and set a target to create a net-zero Northumberland by 2030 and a pledge to halve the County Council’s own carbon footprint by 2025. Additionally, Hexham Town Council (HTC) has declared a climate and biodiversity emergency and has recently adopted a Neighbourhood Plan which includes policies relevant to sustainable transport.

1.6 Key to achieving net-zero and tackling the climate emergency is transport, given that it is the single biggest contributor of emissions in Northumberland, accounting for 35% of CO₂ in 2018. Decarbonising transport requires a shift to short journeys being made by cycle or on foot, with longer journeys made by public transport or in an electric vehicle. Recent figures (February 2021) from the Centre for Sustainable Energy (in collaboration with Exeter University and the Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy) shows that



private transport in Hexham¹ emits the equivalent of 7,603 tonnes of carbon dioxide per year.

- 1.7 There is significant potential for active travel and use of sustainable modes of transport in Hexham. The Town is compact and of a scale that is walkable and cyclable and is connected to local towns and villages by a range of public transport options. The Town offers a wide range of retail, educational, employment and leisure opportunities, catering to its resident and wider local population. With a trend to shop local and to support local businesses in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, this Plan aims to support these trips to be undertaken by sustainable means.
- 1.8 The economic future of Hexham will be built on the quality of its environment but current and increasing traffic flows on narrow historic streets is detracting from the quality of Hexham's built environment and is unsustainable. Recently voted the happiest place to live in Great Britain for the second time in 3 years and in a location close to a World Heritage Site and with increasing levels of cycle tourism within the local area, this Plan aims to build upon these foundations by making Hexham a more attractive place within which to live, work and to visit.
- 1.9 The Plan represents an opportunity to tackle congestion and the health of the local community, by improving opportunities for active and sustainable travel. It also aims to assist in making the Town more accessible and inclusive, in particular for vulnerable road users, children and people with disabilities.
- 1.10 Increased car ownership and use of cars, particularly for short trips which could be undertaken by walking or cycling, has contributed to more sedentary behaviour, which Government sources report is responsible for 1 in 6 deaths and costs the country an estimated £7.4 billion a year.
- 1.11 Regular physical activity has many health benefits for people of all ages. These include improving cardiovascular and respiratory health, achieving healthy weight, improving psychological wellbeing, maintaining mobility and reducing the risk of falls. Active travel makes physical exercise part of everyday life rather than an additional, optional activity. Active travel has the triple health benefits of providing exercise, reducing air pollution and combating climate change. The damaging health impacts of air pollution are well described and climate change is acknowledged as the biggest current threat to public health.
- 1.12 Those with disabilities comprise a wide range of people, including wheelchair users and the visually-impaired. The growing prevalence of the motor car, particularly on historic streets with narrow footways, presents an added disadvantage for these groups of people, who themselves are often not car drivers. Therefore, improving the environment for pedestrians in general can be expected to benefit those with disabilities as well. Holding a driving licence is common among adults in England but the rate is lower for disabled people. Of disabled

¹ [Impact | Community carbon calculator \(impact-tool.org.uk\)](https://www.impact-tool.org.uk)



people aged 17-64 years old, 55% hold a full driving licence compared with 83% of non-disabled people (Sep. 2021).

- 1.13 In the current cost of living and cost of energy crisis, enabling more walking and cycling has the potential to cut family costs for fuel.
- 1.14 This Plan seeks to deliver a future for Hexham that will be built on the quality of its infrastructure and townscape. Tourism is based around the Town's historic core, heritage and cultural attractions, in combination with the Town's close proximity to Hadrian's Wall and the countryside of the Tyne Valley and surrounding area. Tackling the issues of congestion, noise and air quality and providing improved opportunities for active travel and accessibility for vulnerable road users can have the added benefit of enhancing the Town's historic core, by providing more attractive environments within which people will want to spend more time.
- 1.15 Following this Introduction, this Plan provides the following:
- **Section 2** - provides relevant policy, guidance and evidence at the local, regional, national and global level;
 - **Section 3** - describes the vision and objectives of the Plan;
 - **Section 4** - provides the context of the Plan, highlighting the existing challenges and opportunities in conjunction with the transport environment of Hexham;
 - **Section 5** - gives recommendations for Hexham, with the aim of these being to provide an environment that encourages and provides for increased sustainable travel, in order to satisfy the stated vision, objectives and relevant policy; and
 - **Section 6** – provides an outline for future prioritisation and deliverability of the recommendations of the Plan.



2. Relevant Policy

Introduction

2.1 Local, regional, national and global policies relevant to the preparation of this sustainable transport plan are summarised below.

Hexham Town Council Policies

2.2 HTC’s existing sustainability policy (adopted 2015, revised and readopted 2018) recognises the global challenge of climate change and states the Council’s commitment to caring for a sustainable future for the town. Amongst the aims of this are:

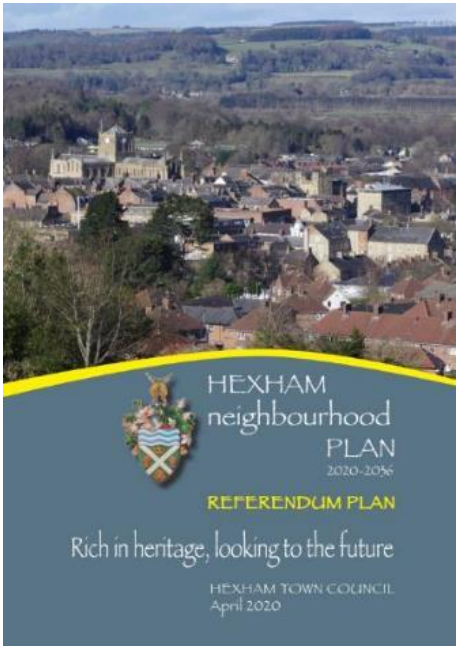
- to pursue the social, health and economic needs of the town while minimising environmental impacts;
- to seek to reduce or prevent pollution and minimise emissions of greenhouse gases wherever possible; and
- to encourage the adoption of sustainable working practices by its stakeholders, local businesses, other public bodies, local organisations and individuals.

2.3 The Town Council’s Net Zero Action Plan includes the following aims:

- to encourage healthy and responsible living by working with NCC to make walking, cycling and public transport options more available and thus reducing the need to use cars; and
- to encourage the use of electric vehicles through encouraging the installation of more electric vehicle charging points (EVCPs).

2.4 The Hexham Neighbourhood Plan (adopted 2021) includes the following policies relating to sustainable transport:

- Policy HNP6 - Development in the Market Place must not harm highway safety and should pay particular regard to pedestrians and cyclists and the needs of visitors with a disability; and
- Policy HNP21 - Proposals which improve pedestrian and cycle links between Hexham town centre and the countryside, including Tyne Green and the National Cycle Network, will be supported.

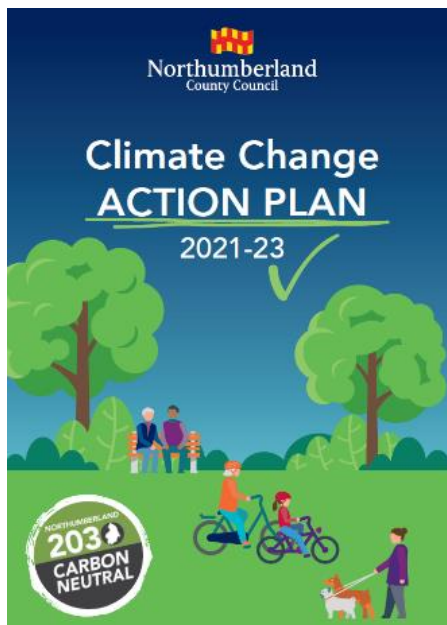




Northumberland County Council Policies

2.5 Northumberland County Council's (NCC) [Climate Action Plan](#) 2021-2023 identifies:

- That fundamental to the delivery of the Action Plan will be a county wide change in mindset and behaviours. Within the Plan, 'Priority Action Area 4 –Transport', identifies



transport as the biggest single contributor of emissions in Northumberland, accounting for 35% of CO₂ emissions in 2018; and

- The requirement for a shift towards short journeys being made by cycle or on foot. It also describes how there is an opportunity to incorporate active travel, and climate emergency solutions in general, into broader town investment plans;

2.6 Northumberland County Council's (NCC) [Climate Action Plan](#) 2021-2023 states that between 2021 and 2023, the Council will:

- Explore other mode shift opportunities for cycling and walking, including opportunities for further funding, with this including schemes such as active travel neighbourhoods, quiet streets, play streets, e-bikes and e-cargo bikes.

2.7 In terms of Active Travel, the Plan also describes how, in June 2020, the Northumberland Cycling and Walking Board published the '[Our Way](#)' report, a vision for cycling and walking in the county. The introduction to this report describes how Northumberland:

- "...should be synonymous with walking and cycling, with an aspiration for pedestrian and cycle friendly towns...[which] readily offer residents and visitors, the opportunity to walk or pedal in the county whether to commute, relax, work up a sweat, or access local facilities and attractions"
- And has "...a vision that Northumberland will deliver a high-quality walking and cycling experience to be enjoyed by increasing numbers of residents, businesses and visitors".



2.8 The Council's [Local Transport Plan](#) (LTP) 2011-2026 mentions the following issues and objectives in relation to sustainable transport:



- CO₂ emissions in Northumberland from road transport per head of population are higher than the regional and national figures. This is likely to increase in the future if action is not taken now.

2.9 And especially,

- the objective to minimise the environmental impact of transport by reducing carbon emissions and addressing the challenge of climate change.
- the objective to improve transport safety and promote and enable healthier travel.
- the objectives of delivering sustainable low carbon travel choices and enabling and encouraging more physically active and healthy travel.

2.10 The County Council's new [Local Plan](#) (adopted March 2022) supports development that promotes sustainable travel choices, including:

- supporting, providing and connecting to networks for walking and public transport; and
- providing infrastructure that supports the use of low and ultra-low emission vehicles.

2.11 Relevant Local Plan policies include:

- Policy STP4 Climate change mitigation and adaption (Strategic Policy);
- Policy STP5 Health and Wellbeing;
- Policy STP6 Green Infrastructure; and
- Policy TRA1 Promoting sustainable connections (Strategic Policy).

2.12 It is also worth noting that, at the time of preparation of this Sustainable Transport Plan there are proposals to enhance the walking and cycling infrastructure of Northumberland's towns, including Hexham, as part of Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans (LCWIPs). The preparation of these specifically relates to Goal 1 Sustainable Towns of the '[Our Way](#)' report.

2.13 Consultation on the LCWIPs took place in March/April 2022 to gather public views on the principles of designing networks and walking and cycling corridors, with the aim of further consultation taking place in the future regarding specific infrastructure improvements. It is understood that a programme of schemes will ultimately be developed to target emerging funding opportunities.

2.14 Results for the [LCWIP consultation](#) for Northumberland as a whole were issued on 16th June 2022. With relevance to Hexham, the following are included in the results:

- 83% of Hexham respondents either completely or partially support the proposals;
- Hexham railway station was referenced by residents, relating to the potential in reducing private vehicle usage by connecting cycle routes to railway stations, to allow people multi-modal trips on sustainable transport that are efficient, safe and attractive.



- 2.15 The consultation summary document concludes that the process has improved local understanding and that the consultation will shape the delivery plan of proposals for when an appropriate funding stream becomes available. It also concludes that gaining local support for the infrastructure investment and encouraging local public engagements, should increase uptake of active travel as a main mode of transport.
- 2.16 Referencing the proposals and findings above, the recommendations of this Sustainable Transport Plan have common elements with the LCWIP proposals for Hexham. Whilst the development of a LCWIP for Hexham is still at a relatively early stage, clearly the rationale behind its development and the themes that have been developed as part of the consultation have much in common with the theme of this Sustainable Transport Plan. On this basis, the LCWIP proposals for Hexham at this stage are discussed in greater detail later.

Regional Guidance

- 2.17 Produced by the North East Joint Transport Committee (NEJTC), the [North East Transport Plan](#) sets out the region's transport aspirations up to 2035. It recognises the importance of active travel and states a desire to expand the active travel network across the region. The NEJTC recognises the need to support Councils in the region with the preparation of LCWIPs, acknowledging that these are a vital part of the Government's strategy to increase the number of trips made on foot or by cycle.
- 2.18 The document acknowledges that evidence supports the reallocation of space to walking, cycling and socialising alongside measures to restrict traffic, including around schools at peak times. It also recognises that keeping active with a better pedestrian environment can contribute to both mental and physical health and the economy².
- 2.19 It also specifically acknowledges:
- the intention to work with partners to invest in measures to make active travel an attractive option for short journeys;
 - that walking and cycling should be seen as a safe and enjoyable means of everyday travel;
 - that communities should lead on how space is best used in their localities;
 - a need to ensure our towns, cities and neighbourhoods enable safe and easy walking for all, with adequate space, good design, crossings, lighting and signage, so that walking becomes the natural choice for short everyday journeys and combines with public transport for longer travel.

² [The Pedestrian Pound, 2018.](#)



2.20 In terms of active travel, the document summarises with the policy statement:

“We will help more people use active travel by making the cycle network better across the North East. This will include being flexible in how we use road space to help cyclists and pedestrians”.

2.21 The NEJTC have also prepared the [Making the Right Travel Choice Strategy](#) document, which outlines actions needed to make it easier for people to travel sustainably and what can be done to encourage more people to use active travel and public transport where possible.

2.22 Fundamental to this is the hierarchy that walking/cycling should be the first choice of travel, followed by public transport. This is then followed by more sustainable patterns of car use, with single occupancy petrol/diesel car trips being at the bottom of the hierarchy.

National Policy and Guidelines

2.23 The [National Planning Policy Framework](#) (NPPF, July 2021) relates to development proposals and plan-making, stating that transport issues should be considered so that:

- Opportunities to promote walking, cycling and public transport use are identified and pursued.
- Planning policies should provide for attractive and well-designed walking and cycling networks with supporting facilities such as secure cycle parking.

2.24 The [Highway Code](#) (2022) sets out the following guidance:

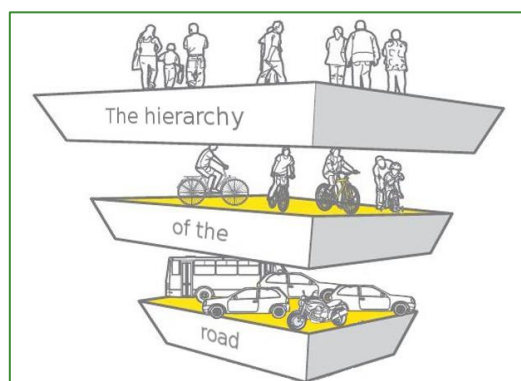
- The ‘hierarchy of road users’ is a concept that places those road users most at risk in the event of a collision at the top of the hierarchy. The hierarchy does not remove the need for everyone to behave responsibly. The road users most likely to be injured in the event of a collision are pedestrians, cyclists, horse riders and motorcyclists, with children, older adults and disabled people being more at risk.

2.25 [Manual for Streets 1](#) (2007) and its companion document [Manual for Streets 2](#) (2010). These documents replace the car-centric Design Bulletin 32 (DB32), which for many decades set out the design approaches expected by Highway Authorities from new development. Whereas the 2007 MfS1 focuses on new-build applications and relatively lightly-trafficked streets, MfS2 explores in greater detail how and where the key principles of MfS1 can be applied to existing busier streets and non-trunk roads, including in towns. The documents replace DB32 in its entirety and give firm backing to the imperative for highway engineers, planners and developers to create a greater sense of place and to provide an environment that is safe and accessible, and which enhances quality of life.

2.26 Endorsed by various organisations, including the Department for Transport (DfT), Homes England and English Heritage, MfS2 includes the following principles:



- Applying a user hierarchy, with pedestrians at the top, meaning they should be considered first when designing and improving streets;
- Recognising the importance of the community function of streets as spaces for social interaction that integrate, not segregate, communities and neighbourhoods;
- Reflecting and supporting pedestrian and cyclist desire lines in networks and detailed designs;
- Creating networks of streets that provide permeability and connectivity to main destinations and choice of routes; and
- Developing street character types on a location specific basis, requiring a balance to be struck between place and movement in many of the busier streets.



Road User Hierarchy

Global Policy

- 2.27 Transport accounts for about 64% of global oil consumption, 27% of all energy use and 23% of the world's energy-related CO₂ emissions³. There is a global trend towards providing more walkable urban centres, with bike lanes and electric mobility options to improve the quality of life in urban areas.

Policy Summary

- 2.28 The preparation of this Sustainable Transport Plan is therefore in accordance with a wide range of existing policies at all levels, with the combined aims of reducing vehicle use and creating more attractive spaces, which are accessible by sustainable and active travel modes.

³ [International Institute for Sustainable Development – Earth Negotiations Bulletin 'The Road to Sustainable Transport'](#)



3. Vision and Objectives

Vision

- 3.1 Hexham is a vibrant and attractive town but one which faces the challenges of fitting modern transport expectations into an historic heart. It needs to think imaginatively, and to embrace sustainable movement to meet the challenges of the 21st century – resources, climate crisis, ease of movement, health, wellbeing and liveability.
- 3.2 This document sets out a vision for sustainable movement in Hexham, this being:

To address the new Central Government movement hierarchy which puts pedestrians, cyclists and public transport before private vehicles, but which must also ensure that changes maintain accessibility for Hexham's currently car-dependent rural areas and also ensure access for the mobility-impaired (whether these are drivers with a blue badge or those dependent on footways to get around, e.g. vision-impaired people). This is about bringing forward a unified vision for how Hexham can be a better place for all and bring all residents on board as Hexham makes these changes.

Objectives

- 3.3 This Plan seeks to:
- put sustainability at the heart of decisions affecting travel and movement within Hexham;
 - improve the safety of the town for all users, particularly vulnerable users, the young, pedestrians and cyclists, in line with the new Highway Code's user hierarchy (January 2022);
 - improve the health of all people living, working and studying in Hexham, through enabling more active travel and improving air quality;
 - promote measures which enhance the economy of the town, including the economic benefits of non-car tourism, leisure cycling and walking⁴;
 - ensure that transport planning respects the unique historic built and natural environment of Hexham, and has full regard to place-making; and
 - improve the connectivity of the town as a whole, and particularly to bring together those areas which are now disparate e.g. lower 'industrial and retail' part of Hexham and the old 'upper town'.

⁴ [The Pedestrian Pound, 2018.](#)



4. Context

Summary of Challenges and Opportunities

Public Transport Connectivity

- 4.1 In comparison to similar towns, including examples within Northumberland, Hexham benefits from reasonably good public transport connections. It has a railway station with fairly frequent connections to other towns and villages in the Tyne Valley, as well as Newcastle and Carlisle. Bus services also operate within the valley, with services both north and south of the River Tyne providing connections to towns and villages to the east, as well as Newcastle.
- 4.2 There are less frequent bus connections to towns and villages north and south of Hexham, including Acomb, Wark, Bellingham, Allendale and Allenheads. However, there are issues of affordability and frequency as well as proximity of stations and stops to residential areas in other towns, which often make the car a more convenient choice of travel to get to Hexham.
- 4.3 Added to this is the distance of the railway station from Hexham Town Centre and, to a lesser extent, the bus station since its relocation from Priestpopple.

Roads

- 4.4 Hexham has good connectivity with the wider Tyne Valley, but suffers from the negative impact of increased traffic on local roads within the town, particularly within the historic part of the Town. The growth of the Town in terms of additional housing has led to an increase in traffic, whilst the increase in retail stores and their associated car parking in the lower part of the town, especially over the last 20 years, has added to trip attractors within the Town.
- 4.5 There is an element of circulating traffic originating from within and outside of Hexham which moves between the historic part of the Town and the lower part of the Town. These patterns of traffic movement have a negative impact on the roads within the central part of the Town, where pavements are often narrow, making it difficult for pedestrians to cross roads, in particularly the mobility-impaired, and creating a perceived safety risk for vulnerable road users, moving in close proximity to vehicles. However, it is important to acknowledge that these central streets were primarily designed for those on foot, as opposed to the north-east area which is primarily designed for motorised traffic and often difficult for pedestrians to negotiate.
- 4.6 All of these issues could be alleviated by a modal shift to active travel.

Recent Transport Investments

- 4.7 Recent transport investments include the relocation of the bus station, the grade-separation of the A69 roundabout, changes to the Alemouth Road/Station Road roundabout as part of the Hexham Gate (Lidl/Travelodge/McDonalds) development and the development of the Queen Elizabeth High School (QEHS)/Hexham Middle School (HMS) site.



4.8 These have done little to help the sustainable transport environment within Hexham, for example:



Hexham's relocated bus interchange on the Corbridge Road

- the relocation of the bus station, whilst providing a vastly improved facility, incurs a longer walk for bus users between the bus station and the historic Town Centre;
- the design of the new A69 roundabout, which failed to take opportunities to provide separate walking and cycling facilities;
- the development of the Hexham Gate, which was a major missed opportunity to open up the at-grade arches which existed below the roundabout to provide pedestrian and cycling connections between the development (and the Haugh Lane Industrial Estate to the west) with the railway station

and the Wentworth car park;

- the absence of a ramp at the south-east corner of The Hexham Gate development forces parents with buggies and wheelchair/mobility scooter users to take a long route alongside the vehicle access road and through the car park in order to reach the Lidl store entrance. The pedestrian route through the car park is not separated from vehicles and the egress to the west of the site discharges users into an area with an incomplete footway; and
- the development of the QEHS/HMS site which failed to take the opportunity to enhance active travel options.



The poor entrance for pedestrians to Lidl is via a cramped staircase

Rural Hinterland

4.9 The setting of Hexham within a large rural hinterland with areas poorly served by public transport or where other factors result in the car being the preferred mode of choice, means that Hexham has a wide catchment area with large parts of this area being car-dependant.



Car Ownership

- 4.10 On average, in market towns in Northumberland 25% of households are without access to a car. This compares to a national figure of 24% lacking access to a car. Additionally, reference to 2021 Census data⁵ confirms that 22.4% of households within the built-up area of Hexham do not have a car, with this increasing to 25.5% in the Hexham East ward. Both of these figures are higher than the Northumberland county figure of 19.7%, thereby confirming an added reliance on other modes of transport by Hexham residents.

Historic/Narrow Streets

- 4.11 The medieval street layout in the centre of Hexham, with its narrow streets was originally designed with the intention to provide for pedestrian and horse and cart use, but is also now used by motorised vehicles, with the result that different road user groups are competing for small amounts of space.

Climate Crisis/Increasing Scarcity of Fossil Fuel Resources

- 4.12 The increasing scarcity of fossil fuel resources will price out some drivers, make public transport an even more sustainable and indispensable alternative and encourage active travel especially for shorter journeys. However, other factors such as availability of services and cost to users can discourage wider take-up of public transport, particularly in rural areas, or housing estates not well-served by public transport.
- 4.13 The introduction of free parking in Hexham in 2014 does not provide an incentive to use active travel modes and is widely acknowledged to have contributed to a lack of available parking spaces in closest proximity to the town centre.

The Geography of Hexham

- 4.14 This report identifies six character areas to Hexham vis movement:
1. The old town on the hill with narrow pavements and limited parking;
 2. The modern supermarkets and leisure centre in the Wentworth area with the recently completed Hexham Gate development further to the west, and the railway station;
 3. Extended, more car-dependent developments along the Corbridge Road and extensive 20th century residential developments up the southern/western hillsides;
 4. Victorian suburbs with a lack of off-street residential parking;
 5. Industrial areas within and outside the town boundaries; and
 6. The lower Allendale Road area which now houses 2 middle schools and Hexham's high school.

⁵ [Office for National Statistics – official census and labour market statistics](#)



The Old Town

- Has an ancient Market Place and, based on the medieval street pattern, reaches through to Hallgate, Hallstile Bank and Gilesgate as well as the wider Beaumont Street, all of which were in existence prior to the development of motorised vehicles;
- One-way Hallstile Bank is often used by heavier than permitted traffic;
- Contains the listed Shambles, The Moot Hall, the Old Gaol and the Abbey;
- Benefits from being in the High Street Heritage Action Zone, funding from which is intended to revitalise the streets of Priestpottle and Battle Hill, plus the recently announced £300,000 for refurbishment of the Shambles;
- Footways are mainly narrow and there is a pinch point leading off the Market Place into Market Street, where there is pedestrian-vehicle conflict making it difficult for wheelchair users and pedestrians;
- Narrow streets also prevent cafes and other shops from spilling out on to the streets;
- Fore Street is pedestrianised and is one of the main shopping streets;
- Parking is limited and those cars that do park detract from the aesthetics of the buildings;
- Has extensive parks;
- Perceived access difficulties from Marks & Spencer and Wentworth car parks due to crossing a busy road/challenging gradient; and
- The junction of Market Street with Back Row is only 4.1m wide between buildings and the footway just 0.41, wide on one side. This is both dangerous and intimidating for pedestrians. There is only space for one vehicle to pass at a time.



Market Street “pinch point”



Modern Retail/Leisure Development and Railway Station

- Have large, free car parks but have no bus service or easy way to walk or cycle up to



The Hexham Gate 250 space car park, west of the Travelodge

the old town or to the railway station;

- The Travelodge has no easy pedestrian access to the railway station or bus station;

- Car parking (which is mostly unused) at the western end of the Travelodge has a good theoretical route to Gilesgate via Haugh Lane, but footways are absent on the eastern side of the road and in hours of darkness there is little overlooking;

- There are electric vehicle charging points but these are

either not commissioned yet, vandalised or very slow;

- The needs of mobility-impaired not given due weight in recent developments, e.g. Hexham Gate site with the most direct access route having steep steps down to the new supermarket;
- The railway service connects Hexham to Newcastle and Carlisle;
- There is no longer a cycle-hire facility at the station;
- Good taxi services operate from the station yard (Also from Priestpopple);
- Pedestrians can walk, traffic-free into the old town or Wentworth car park once having crossed at a pedestrian crossing;
- A walk/potential cycle way (Hall Orchard) from the Station Hotel leads to the Wentworth café, up Hallgate and thence to the Market Place;
- No easy pedestrian or cycling route exists from the station to the Travelodge;
- There are two car parks at the station, north and south of the railway line; and
- Currently cycle parking (including lockers) exists at the station.

Modern Residential Development along the Corbridge Road and the Southern Estates

- There is a continuous pavement along the north side of the Corbridge Road but no continuous pavement along the south side nor a dedicated cycle track or lane;
- Issue of parking bays partially in carriageway and partially on footway, whilst if they were fully in the carriageway it would free up footway space with potential additional provision for cyclists, whilst also narrowing corridor for traffic thereby encouraging slower speeds;
- A speed limit of 20 mph runs for much of the road, otherwise it is 30mph;



- It is approximately one and a half miles from the Market Place to the recent Park Well residential development;
- Being a flat and wide carriageway offers a good opportunity for cycle use between residential areas along its length and the town centre, although it also encourages fast driving; and
- The hospital, bus station and a number of estates are on or lead off the Corbridge Road.
- The southern estates are up steep hills making the carrying of shopping etc. unattractive;
- There is a town bus service which could be improved – a study could be commissioned to develop a cheaper, more frequent, better routed bus service to attract more residents for whom walking and cycling is less of an option in terms of moving to and from the town centre;
- An on-demand bus service could be considered;
- Many properties have off street parking; and
- Low density of development means there is less demand and a viability issue for bus provision.

The Victorian Suburbs

- Original design was oriented to pedestrian movement prior to the development of the private motor car;
- The majority of houses have no off-street parking;
- There is little opportunity for off-street electric vehicle charging points although elsewhere charging via bollards, lamp columns and in-kerb points is being trialled;
- On-street parking can cause difficulties for refuse collections and emergency access, as well as for sweeping the gutters of debris; and
- Most offer an easy walking/cycling distance to the town centre.

Industrial Estates within and outside Hexham Boundaries

- Topography lends itself to easy walking and cycling but the Haugh Lane estate has been laid out with low regard to non-car modes, e.g. discontinuous footways and poor permeability to surrounding areas;
- Areas are generally level but laid out for ease of vehicle access; and
- Major impediments to sustainable access (over rail and river bridges and heavily-trafficked Ferry Road);



Haugh Lane (Industrial Estate) – with poor pedestrian provision



*Absence of Footway Provision on
Eastern side of Railway Bridge*

Schools Near Allendale Road

- Concentration of schools leads to conflicts between foot traffic, vehicular drop-off and school coach movement;
- Existing road network is highly constrained with narrow footways and lack of safe crossing points;
- Location on west side of Hexham means majority of movements are to/from one direction – the east; and
- Dangerous not only for school students walking to and from the new Middle and High School site but also wheelchair users, those pushing pushchairs or walking with young children.



The Road and Cycle System

- Many roads, especially in the old part of Hexham were not designed for vehicular, motorised traffic. It is only in the comparatively recent life of those roads that they have become so dominated by cars;
- Road layouts at the Coop / Eilansgate junction, into Ferry Road, at the Eastgate junction, the Tesco roundabout contribute to traffic congestion and air pollution, making walking and cycling through these areas very unpleasant and unhealthy;
- Two narrow bridges dominate one entrance to the town, preventing easy access for cyclists and walkers to quiet roads and lanes to the north of the river, as well as creating air pollution;
- Cycle route 72 to the east also carries heavy vehicles to Egger and lots of lighter but quickly moving traffic to Corbridge. A gravel quarry has been proposed that would also lead to use of that road by many heavy vehicles a day;
- Cycle route 72 is also compromised in having to use the often very busy river bridge over the Tyne;
- Cycle parking is improving but still not adequate. A survey undertaken by Active Travel Tynedale in May 2022 found a variety of issues associated with cycle parking at main food stores/shopping areas/public buildings including:
 - poorly located and poorly signed cycle parking;
 - lack of space to access cycle parking, including inability to accommodate cargo bikes/bike trailers; and
 - substandard cycle stands and a lack of shelters.
 - The Queens Hall /Library has only 2 stands
 - The Community Centre has only 3 cycle stands
 - The Swimming Pool has only 2 cycle stands
- The parish councils of Haydon Bridge to the west and Corbridge and Stocksfield to the east are keen to work with Hexham Town Council to campaign for a safe Tyne Valley cycle route linking these centres of population.



5. Recommendations

Introduction

- 5.1 Having set out the vision of the Sustainable Transport Plan and considered the challenges and opportunities within the context of Hexham, recommendations are provided below to deliver the vision in accordance with the range of local, regional, national and global policy objectives.

Create Space for Sustainable and Active Travel

- 5.2 There should be a positive re-allocation of road space to sustainable modes. Wherever possible, where footways are insufficient, roads should be narrowed and footways widened especially the recently LCWIP defined Priority Walking and Cycling Corridors:

- the east-west route through the town, including the Allendale Road;
- the route over the River Tyne;
- the Market Place and surrounding streets;

Provide a Cycling and Walking Infrastructure

- 5.3 More needs to be done to improve the environment for cyclists and pedestrians to assist in a mode shift away from the car, for trips both within the town and from further afield. In particular:

- improvements to the railway station - the large forecourt at the station, a key gateway to the town, should have seating and cycle parking;
- cycle routes could be marked through the park and the Sele
- clearly defined and raised pedestrian crossing points/courtesy crossings;



E-bike charging point on Newcastle's Quayside

- for hire, up to date e-bikes could be installed at the railway station and at the bus station. Recharging through solar power is possible and examples have already been installed at Haltwhistle railway station. Ideally, others would be placed within the Market Place;
- for hire e-scooters could also be available from here;
- although new cycle parking has been installed throughout the town, further parking should be added generally;



- Provision for cargo bikes, which require a longer bay;
- Provision of wheeling ramps at the edge of steps to assist cyclists as well as pushchair users, e.g. at the steps from the Fox lane to the Sele and over the railway station footbridge;
- The priority of pedestrians over traffic would be emphasised and the safety of those crossing streets enhanced through installing raised table crossings and junction end treatments. These slow down traffic and could be placed across:
 - a narrowed Beaumont Street at Benson's monument and outside the Queen's Hall;
 - at crossing points in Priestpottle and Battle Hill; and
 - where the Hall Orchard footway (now traffic free) crosses the access road (Chisholm Place) into the Wentworth car park should also benefit from a more obvious raised crossing, e.g. a change in surface material

Reduce the Demand for Travel by Car

5.4 In addition to providing better space and infrastructure for walking and cycling, the following should be considered to reduce the demand for travel by car:

- a 20mph speed limit throughout the town⁶. This has been shown to reduce road traffic collisions and make walking and cycling a more pleasant and safe experience;
- car parking charges, to reduce car use for short journeys in particular;
- a shuttle bus to link the lower areas of the town with the old centre;
- innovative ways of transporting people into the town without using cars e.g. a rickshaw taxi service;
- reinstatement of an e-car club in Hexham;
- a better bus service;
- more homes in central Hexham which encourage active travel, in preference to peripheral expansion; and
- the principles of the 15 minute city, whereby future development is located within a 15 minute walk of key shops, services and public transport connections.



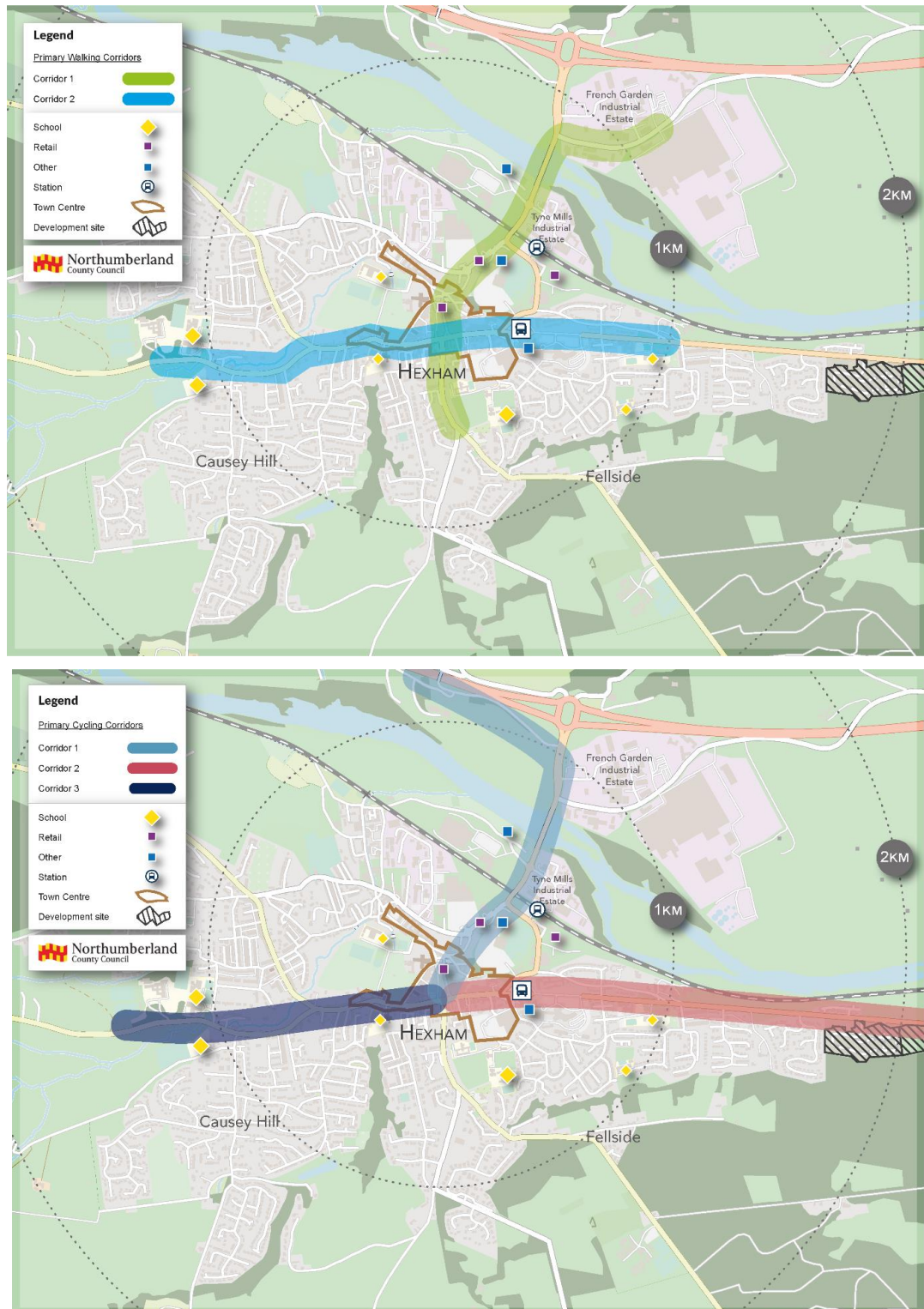
Using 'Cycling without Age' rickshaw in Hexham

⁶ Wales has such a speed limit by default, and such schemes have been implemented in numerous towns across the UK, including locally in Corbridge.



Improve the East-West Routes into and out of Hexham

5.5 This has been described as a primary walking and cycling corridor in the NCC LCWIP document.



Source: Northumberland County Council Local Cycling & Walking Infrastructure Plan consultation March/April 2022



5.6 The route consists of 3 parts

- The Corbridge Road;
- Priestpople and Battle Hill;
- Battle Hill to the Fox public house and on to Lowgate

5.7 A further priority walking and cycling corridor should be from the Fox to the Cemetery and the West Road.

The Corbridge Road

5.8 This road, from the bus station to the Peth Head junction, has adequate paths and a wide carriageway, but parking straddles the footway and impedes pedestrians. Moving the parking into the carriageway will have the effect of narrowing the road, helping to ensure the traffic stays at 20mph. That will also free up space on the footway for a dedicated cycleway.



Corbridge Road on street parking

Priestpople and Battle Hill

5.9 A remodelling of the street is to take place through the work of the High Street Heritage Action Zone. Ideally, it would provide:

- wider pavements;
- clearly delineated, raised crossing places at every junction off the road, including the Eastgate junction and replacing the existing light controlled pedestrian crossings; and
- taxi rank parking should be retained but other parking spaces should be reduced in number and widened.

From Battle Hill to the Fox public house

- opportunities should be taken to reduce the width of the carriageway and widen the pavements;
- parking for Blue Badge holders should be put in St. Mary's Wynd which is not a main thoroughfare.

From the Fox public house to Lowgate

5.10 This is a very busy section of road, with very narrow footways on one side and no footway at all in places on the other. It is recommended that the footway on the northern side of the road be widened to accommodate pedestrians with pushchairs and young children. It would help to make the route to the schools safer, as would the proposed 20mph speed limit. If an acceptable pavement width precludes two-way traffic, consideration should be given to an



oncoming- vehicle priority arrangement with horizontal deflection points in the problem areas, to allow for footway expansion and greater pedestrian safety.

From the Fox to Quatre Bras, the Cemetery and along the West Road

5.11 The current potholes make cycling hazardous. The route from the crossroads to St Andrews Cemetery and beyond should have a cycle lane incorporated into both sides of the carriageway, which is generously wide. Reducing the speed limit to 20mph to the cemetery will make it safer for cyclists.

The route over the Tyne and railway

5.12 This is also considered in the LCWIP proposals for Hexham.

5.13 It is difficult to see how space can be created for safer cycling and walking across Hexham

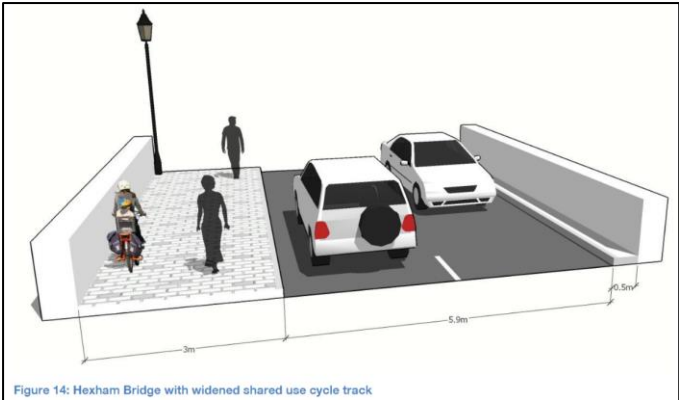


Figure 14: Hexham Bridge with widened shared use cycle track

Source: Hexham Sustainable Transport Audit by Sustrans, January 2015

Tyne Bridge unless the proposals suggested by “Hexham Sustainable Transport Audit” of 2015 report are followed. That report states that Hexham Bridge should have its western footway widened to 3m. This can then be used as a shared cycle and walkway. The footway on the east would need to be narrowed to 0.5m to leave a 5.9m carriageway. An alternative

arrangement could be a signalised bridge with single line of traffic only – as at Corbridge. This would leave ample space for pedestrians and two-way cycle traffic, with a central single carriageway.

5.14 The rail bridge is narrow. A footway exists on the west side, separated off by a raised kerb and guard railing. The eastern footway from Tyne Mills Industrial Estate ends abruptly without a pedestrian crossing point. This is an extremely dangerous section of the road for cyclists and pedestrians.

5.15 “Hexham Sustainable Transport Audit” of 2015 recommended building a prefabricated footbridge adjacent to the existing bridge. It is difficult to envisage a better solution now that the tunnels under the bridge have been filled in. That short-sighted measure taken as part of the Hexham Gate development prevented the development of a safe pedestrian link between the Railway Station and Travelodge, so reducing the footfall over the bridge. Can the tunnels be reopened?

Redevelop the Market Place and Surrounding Streets

5.16 Measures which would enhance the environment of the historic heart of Hexham are set out below.



- Beaumont Street is dominated by parked cars. On the park side of the street parked cars overhang the footway, reducing its available width and restricting the visibility of the crossing area. The bays should be made to occupy more of the existing road. Parking on the Queens Hall side of the street should be stopped up, with the resulting space used to both widen the path slightly and to widen the road to compensate for the loss of space on the park side of the street;



Traffic dominated Beaumont Street hinders pedestrian movement

- Raised crossing points or a change in surface material should be introduced either side of Benson's monument and to complement and enhance the Queen's Hall crossing;



Informal crossing at Queen's Hall which drivers cannot see.

- At present the latter is marked by projecting pavement and tactile paving, but there is no variation in the road to alert drivers to the crossing point. A raised table, emphasising the entrance to the Queen's Hall would be a useful addition here;
- The junctions either side of Benson's monument should have their radii reduced to single lane making it easier to cross, and obviating the need for excessive signage;
- More radically, the length of Beaumont Street could be remodelled to create a shared space and parking restricted to create more space for street activities such as cafes and landscaping;



- In 2017; the Market Place plans for limited pedestrianisation were rejected by Councillors, although initially the most radical scheme had nine times as many residents in favour than the “do nothing” version. A new scheme could restrict Beaumont Street to access only, the current loading area turned into a turning circle, the rest of the roads in the marketplace be paved in the same style as the current footways so that drivers are forced to give way to those on foot or cycling.



Sustrans' design idea for Market Place

- Beaumont Street / Market Place Courtesy Crossings - Two courtesy crossings exist at the Market Place. While these are not features of the highway code, or enshrined in law, they are a not-unusual feature to reinforce pedestrian crossing points and encourage drivers to give way out of courtesy to pedestrians. Studies have shown that raised table pedestrian crossings are more effective than those flush with the carriageway, and consideration must be given to enhancing the existing crossing points at the Market Place to reinforce pedestrian primacy;
- Vehicle access to Hallstile Bank should be restricted to residents and businesses. Raisable and lowerable bollards should be put in at the top of the road. These could be operated electronically;
- The pinch point into Market Street should be closed except to an electric rickshaw or shuttle bus;
- Coaches which currently drop tourists off outside the Abbey should use the bus stop opposite St Mary's Church and then park in the Wentworth. Infirm tourists could use an electric rickshaw, shuttle bus, or a wheelchair to return to the coach;
- Gilesgate/Market Street - from the entrance to St Wilfrid's Gate to the Market Place - should be pedestrianised with vehicular access only for residents and businesses along Back Row. On this basis, the small number of vehicles which would need to turn around (having been parked on Gilesgate between the Gilesgate car park and St Wilfrid's Gate) would be able to do so using the junction with Cowgarth.

Consider the reintroduction of car parking charges

- Shoppers or all-day paid-for permits can be resurrected;
- This could reduce car use for short journeys; and
- Fines for not paying or overstaying could go towards paying for the incentivisation of rail and bus travel.



A shuttle bus to link lower areas of the town with the old centre

- A vintage style bus could be a tourist attraction, linking the Travelodge to the Wentworth, the station and the Market Place



Reintroduce a centralised e-car club

- Club membership would entitle members to hire an e-car at short notice for a short time; and
- This could reduce the need for personal car ownership.

Other recommendations

- Businesses could encourage their staff to travel actively by providing cycle parking and by joining the government's cycle to work scheme;
- Footways should be installed along the in-town industrial estates to facilitate easier walking and wheelchair use and reduce vehicle dominance. Where widths are presently inadequate for both, chicaned carriageways with priority arrangements should be used to return space to pedestrians and encourage slower vehicle speeds
- Campaign for a better bus service both within the town and linking the neighbouring villages, including exploring options for rural villages, e.g. Dial-a-Bus; and
- School Streets for QEHS/HMS and St. Joseph's and Hexham East to function much like the Sele School.

Summary and Conclusions

- 5.17 In summary, the recommendations outlined above are intended to deliver the vision and objectives set out in this Plan, as well as assist in ensuring that the travel patterns of Hexham are compliant with the range of local, regional, national and global policies previously described.
- 5.18 In particular, with reference to the vision, the recommendations are intended to address the new Central Government movement hierarchy which puts pedestrians, cyclists and public transport before private vehicles, through the suggestion of a range of measures which aim to enhance the transport environment for pedestrians and cyclists, as well as the mobility-impaired.



- 5.19 The vision also recognises the current car-dependent nature of Hexham’s rural hinterland, through the recommendation of alternative solutions to connect the main parking areas of the lower part of the town with the upper historic part of the town.
- 5.20 With the recent addition of a high level of free public parking to the west of the Travelodge as part of the Hexham Gate development, the added attraction of the development itself and continued car growth, it is considered that such new and innovative solutions will be increasingly required to enhance the connectivity between the lower and upper parts of the towns in conjunction with the increasing demand to move between the two areas, in order to preserve the environment of central Hexham.
- 5.21 Referencing the objectives, the Plan aims to put sustainability at the heart of decisions affecting travel and movement in Hexham, with the ambitions that:
- the safety of the town will be improved for all users, particularly vulnerable road users;
 - an environment will be created that encourages more active travel, with improved air quality;
 - the benefits of non-car tourism, leisure cycling and walking will be promoted;
 - the historic and natural environment of Hexham will be respected in conjunction with the themes of place-making; and
 - the connectivity of the town will be improved as a whole.
- 5.22 It is considered that the implementation of the recommendations outlined above will assist in delivering these objectives, whilst also resolving the deficiencies which currently exist within the sustainable transport network of Hexham.
- 5.23 Recognising the fact that large parts of the town were not designed for motor vehicle movement and are not able to sustain ever-increasing numbers and sizes of vehicles, the desire is to provide a holistic transport solution, which caters for all users and enhances the environment of the town.
- 5.24 With encouragement of mode shift, in conjunction with improved connectivity between Hexham and its surrounding area, as well as within Hexham itself, it is recognised that delivering less motor vehicle-dominated streets and spaces will enhance the attractiveness of these spaces.
- 5.25 Through providing a more attractive environment within which people will want to spend more time, this in itself can be expected to provide an added attraction for the town of Hexham. This also allows spaces to be used for alternative purposes, thereby satisfying the themes of place-making.
- 5.26 At the same time, it is hoped that providing the facilities and spaces which give priority to walking and cycling, will encourage more residents and visitors to take up these modes, thereby increasing the level of active and healthy travel, whilst at the same time creating an environment better suited to the needs of the mobility-impaired.
- 5.27 This Plan aims to lay the foundations for achieving all of the above.



6. Delivery

Introduction

6.1 Further to the recommendations provided in the previous section, the table below provides details of prioritisation and deliverability of the proposed recommendations.

| No. | Recommendation | Priority | Deliverability |
|-----|---|----------|----------------|
| 1 | Increase allocation of space to pedestrians on Allendale Road | | |
| 2 | Increase allocation of space to pedestrians on Tyne Bridge | | |
| 3 | Increase allocation of space to pedestrians in Market Place and surrounding streets | | |
| 4 | Improve seating and cycle parking at Hexham Railway Station | | |
| 5 | Signed cycle routes through the Sele park | | |
| 6 | Clearly defined raised pedestrian crossing points/courtesy crossings | | |
| 7 | Installation of e-bikes for hire at railway/bus station/market place | | |
| 8 | Provision of fore hire e-scooters | | |
| 9 | Addition of further cycle parking throughout the town including provision for cargo bikes | | |
| 10 | Provision of wheeling ramps on steps at SW corner of the Sele and over railway station footbridge | | |
| 11 | Introduce 20mph speed limit throughout the Town | | |
| 12 | Reintroduce car parking charges | | |
| 13 | A shuttle bus service to connect lower areas of town with the old centre | | |
| 14 | Innovative ways such as a rickshaw taxi service to transport people into the town | | |
| 15 | Reinstatement of e-car club in Hexham | | |



| No. | Recommendation | Priority | Deliverability |
|-----|---|----------|----------------|
| 16 | Improvements to bus service within the Town | | |
| 17 | Ensure more new residential development is focussed on central Hexham | | |
| 18 | Relocate Corbridge Road parking to 'in carriageway' and introduce a cycleway | | |
| 19 | Widen pavements and raised crossing points on Priestpopple and Battle Hill | | |
| 20 | Reduce in number and widen parking spaces on Priestpopple | | |
| 21 | Prioritise Blue Badge parking on St. Mary's Wynd | | |
| 22 | Widen/improve footway provision on Allendale Road | | |
| 23 | Cycle lane provision on the West Road in conjunction with a reduction in speed limit to 20mph | | |
| 24 | Improvements for cyclists on route over the Tyne and railway | | |
| 25 | Reduce parking/widen paths/realign Beaumont Street | | |
| 26 | Improved pedestrian crossing points on Beaumont St at Queen's Hall and Benson's monument | | |
| 27 | More radically, create a shared space on Beaumont Street | | |
| 28 | Revive the 2017 Market Place proposals | | |
| 29 | Encourage local businesses to adopt sustainable travel habits/introduce Travel Plans | | |
| 30 | Campaign for better bus services to connect Hexham to rural areas | | |



7. References

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