

## **OUR TOWN CENTRE**

### **Report of the Strategic Head of Place Making and Planning**

#### **1. INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 Meetings of the Development Plan Working Party are being scheduled to take place each month up until April 2022. Each meeting will be introduced to different sections of the emerging draft Stockport Local Plan.
- 1.2 This report details what is currently the fifth topic-based policy chapter of the draft plan, titled "Our Town Centre."
- 1.3 Stockport Town Centre is key to the success of the borough. The Council acknowledges the challenges facing the Town Centre from out-of-centre and online retailing and as a result of economic impacts arising from the COVID-19 pandemic. Consequently the role of the Town Centre needs to evolve into a place that is much more than just about shopping.
- 1.4 With the Mayoral Development Corporation at its heart, our Town Centre has the potential to deliver significant levels of new housing in a sustainable way, close to transport links, jobs, shops and services. This area can deliver the infrastructure required to meet the demands of the new urban community which will be created. The Town Centre will be a healthy and attractive place where people want to live, work and play. It will also be designed and built to meet the demands of Stockport's net zero commitment by 2038.
- 1.5 The Local Plan pro-actively supports the role and function of the Town Centre. It seeks to build upon its existing strengths as a retail, leisure and commercial destination whilst balancing these with its growing role as a place to live. Sufficient flexibility is also in place to ensure we can respond positively and effectively to changes in circumstances over the plan period.
- 1.6 The policies in this chapter will allow the Council to manage development so that it supports or contributes, in particular, to achieving Stockport Local Plan objectives 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7 and 9 (see report titled 'Strategic Policies' considered at the Development Plan Working Party meeting on 18th January 2022).

#### **2. OUTLINE OF "OUR TOWN CENTRE"**

- 2.1 The policies in this chapter are intended to:
  - i. Set a positive strategy for the Town Centre that recognises its evolving and expanding role and outlines that this will be underpinned by ongoing transformational change in key areas of the Town Centre, and by development that promotes a variety of uses that are flexible in response to change and delivers jobs and including traditional uses such as retailing and offices but also housing, that encourages social interaction and extended leisure time, that optimises the development potential and also aids in generating a welcoming place to live and visit.

- ii. Identify the character areas that are in some cases set to experience significant redevelopment and which will complement the overall strategy for the Town Centre, including the ambitious plans for the Town Centre West neighbourhood to be brought forward by the Mayoral Development Corporation, and set the vision for how each character area is expected to develop.
- iii. Support and facilitate the delivery of quality new homes and the neighbourhood, community and social and green infrastructure required to serve new residents and ensure these uses are compatible, to make the Town Centre a vibrant residential community in its own right and the principal location for housing in the borough.
- iv. Promote a high-quality network of public realm to enable increased connectivity and permeability of areas of the Town Centre and set design principles for new build development that will be key to the delivery of an attractive and sustainable town centre including the enhancement of areas that undermine efforts to generate a vibrant and active street scene, the conservation and enhancement of heritage assets and the requirement to secure biodiversity net gain.
- v. Ensure the delivery of appropriate transport infrastructure, making use of existing excellent connectivity and looking for innovative ways to provide the most sustainable means of travel into and around the Town Centre, particularly through improving the ease of movement and safety for pedestrians and cyclists.

2.2 A copy of the working draft chapter "Our Town Centre" is set out as Appendix 1 to this report. The draft chapter references the 'Town Centre Character Areas', Town Centre boundary, 'Town Centre Living Area' and the 'Main Town Centre Use Area' – these are identified in draft on the plan shown in Appendix 2.

### **3. STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT**

3.1 Members will recall that the Council meeting on 15<sup>th</sup> July 2021 considered a report providing an update on the Stockport Local Plan<sup>1</sup>. That meeting resolved, amongst other things:

- That the refreshed approach to developing a Local Plan for Stockport, including the principles set out in an appendix to the report be endorsed; and
- That the approach set out in the report to engaging with communities across Stockport during the Summer to assist in developing a draft Plan be endorsed and supported.

3.2 The Local Plan key principles engagement phase, undertaken between July and September 2021 with some continued stakeholder feedback up until the present time, has resulted in engagement and information sharing with over 2,000 residents through presentations, meetings, briefings, workshops, sharing information and an online survey.

3.3 This early engagement phase has contributed to our aims by:

---

<sup>1</sup> See <https://democracy.stockport.gov.uk/ielIssueDetails.aspx?IId=93437&PlanId=0&Opt=3#AI66943>

- Increasing the understanding of our communities about the Local Plan, why we're doing it, and what it is trying to achieve;
- Creating opportunities for our communities to input to the Local Plan and provide their views on our key principles through an online survey and through group meetings;
- Increasing knowledge amongst our communities about future formal public consultation periods and how they will be able to submit their views. The engagement period has resulted in groups, forums and boards expressing that they want to be kept informed and asking for the Local Plan team to revisit them during the consultation phase;
- Encouraging a broad range of stakeholders and communities with different experiences to input into the engagement period. This has included reaching into underrepresented communities through the Stockport Homes Roadshow, Planning Aid England workshops, and dissemination of information by key networks such as the Cross Sector Forum and
- Ensuring that all engagement activities are accessible for all and are relevant and proportionate to different groups.

3.4 Most stakeholders are supportive of the 6 key principles which were set out, all of which are relevant to the aspirations of the Our Town Centre chapter. Those principles (see <https://www.stockport.gov.uk/our-key-principles>) are that, through the Local Plan, the Council will:

- “Build our plan around our neighbourhoods, celebrating and reflecting what makes our communities unique”;
- “Take a Brownfield first approach to development, protecting our greenspaces as much as possible”;
- “Be design-led, aiming to achieve the highest quality of design for Stockport”;
- “Put local infrastructure and communities at the heart of our approach, recognising the needs of our neighbourhood and areas”;
- “Ensure everything we do contributes to Stockport’s response and resilience to the Climate Emergency”; and
- “Contribute to the good health and wellbeing of our communities”.

## 4. EVIDENCE

- 4.1 The policies in the Our Town Centre chapter have been informed by monitoring of existing Core Strategy policies and the Stockport Borough Wide Retail and Leisure Study 2019.
- 4.2 The Retail and Leisure Study 2019 provides an objective assessment of retail and leisure development needs, an understanding of retail and leisure provision and potential strategic responses and recommendations. In particular, the study explores retail and commercial leisure need over a fifteen period from 2019 to 2034 and provides an up-to-date review of the performance of Stockport town centre and the eight district centres.
- 4.3 The study makes a number of recommendations including the identified need for comparison and convenience goods, the suggested hierarchy of centres, local impact threshold, centre and shopping area boundaries, and advice on the

future retail and commercial strategy for each centre. In respect of the latter, the key finding is that the strategy needs to be able to support the continued development and changes in the 'high street' if they are to successfully compete, the key purpose of it being to build on a centre's existing functionality, be a focus for their communities, attract a mix of land uses beyond retail and leisure and extend the time spent by visitors and residents enjoying the centres.

4.4 On the town centre specifically, the recommendations include the following:

- Support the re-occupation and/or redevelopment of existing units within the primary shopping area for modern floorspace, rather than the development of new floorspace in edge-of-centre or out-of-centre sites;
- Support and promote the development of the town centre as an independent retail and leisure destination;
- Redesign and refurbishment of Mersey Square to create a modern, attractive and multi-functional public space; and
- Tap into the success of the Peel Centre and Redrock, as well as Stockport Exchange by improving integration between different parts of the town centre.

4.5 The Retail and Leisure Study was completed in 2019 but has not been formally signed off, principally due to the need for an update in response to fundamental changes within the retail sector accelerated by the pandemic including the effects of the rise in online shopping, and to take account of the impact of the Government's recent changes to the Use Classes Order. Officers are currently in the process of commissioning appropriate retail planning specialists to undertake the update.

4.6 Other evidence that has been relied upon include:

- Stockport Town Centre West Strategic Regeneration Framework 2019 (see [https://www.stockportmdc.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/StockportTCW\\_SRF\\_Reconfigured\\_v1.pdf](https://www.stockportmdc.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/StockportTCW_SRF_Reconfigured_v1.pdf))
- Central Stockport Infrastructure Delivery Plan Prospectus 2020 (<https://democracy.stockport.gov.uk/documents/s179571/Appendix1StockportInfrastructureDeliveryPlanProspectusv2.pdf>)
- Work undertaken to inform an Economic Study of Greater Manchester's Southern Growth Corridor 2021 (ongoing).

## 5. DISCUSSION

5.1 Members are invited to comment and provide feedback on the draft Our Town Centre policies.

5.2 It is important to note that the draft policies in Appendix 1 and the draft boundaries shown in Appendix 2 are set out purely to enable transparent member deliberation and discussion. No comment is sought at this stage from the public or other interested parties; the time for that will come at the next formal stage of consultation as per the schedule established in the Local Development Scheme (see [www.stockport.gov.uk/stockport-local-development-scheme](http://www.stockport.gov.uk/stockport-local-development-scheme)).

## BACKGROUND PAPERS

See links to documents given within report and associated footnotes.

Anyone requiring further information should contact Richard Wood on 07800617505 or by email to [richard.wood@stockport.gov.uk](mailto:richard.wood@stockport.gov.uk)

## APPENDIX 1 – working draft "Our Town Centre" Local Plan chapter

### 5. Our Town Centre

Stockport Town Centre is key to the success of the borough. The Council acknowledges the challenges facing the Town Centre from out-of-centre and online retailing and as a result of economic impacts arising from the COVID-19 pandemic. Consequently the role of the Town Centre needs to evolve into a place that is much more than just about shopping.

With the Mayoral Development Corporation at its heart our Town Centre has the potential to deliver significant levels of new housing in a sustainable way, close to transport links, jobs, shops and services. This area can deliver the infrastructure required to meet the demands of the new urban community which will be created. The Town Centre will be a healthy and attractive place where people want to live, work and play. It will also be designed and built to meet the demands of Stockport's net zero commitment by 2038.

The Local Plan pro-actively supports the role and function of the Town Centre. It seeks to build upon its existing strengths as a retail, leisure and commercial destination whilst balancing these with its growing role as a place to live. Sufficient flexibility is also in place to ensure we can respond positively and effectively to changes in circumstances over the plan period.

The policies below will allow the Council to manage development so that, in particular, it supports or contributes to achieving Stockport Local Plan Objectives 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7 and 9.

---

### Town Centre 1: Stockport Town Centre Principles

#### 1. **Evolving and expanding the role of the Town Centre**

The Council and partners will plan for and manage transformational change to Stockport town centre to become a high quality, higher density, thriving, highly accessible and sustainable destination in which to live, work and experience. The town centre's role and appeal will be expanded both sub-regionally at the heart of the Southern Growth Corridor within Greater Manchester and as a local community hub for all ages.

2. Development will be encouraged which strengthens its vitality and viability, promotes a diversity of uses that are flexible in response to change and which contributes positively to maintaining and generating footfall and bringing about a vibrant sense of place. Proposals will be supported as appropriate which:
  - a) provide new homes, in support of a town centre target of [X,XXX] units from 2021 to 2038;
  - b) generate a growth in and choice of jobs;
  - c) add to and complement the provision and attractiveness of the town centre office market and meets the growing demand for flexible workspace;
  - d) broaden and enhance the neighbourhood facilities, social and community infrastructure for local residents in recognition of the town centre's increased population and in its role as a local service centre for surrounding communities;
  - e) bring about an expanded range of activities including cultural, creative and tourism uses which complement existing assets on offer;
  - f) support public and private investment to regenerate the town centre;
  - g) create a more attractive mix of daytime and evening uses to help increase the use of the town throughout the week;

- h) accord with the town's pivotal role as the primary sustainable transport hub for South Manchester and improve linkages through the town centre and beyond from key destinations outside the borough, especially by walking, cycling and public transport;
- i) ensure that the Council's commitment to net zero carbon dioxide emissions by 2038 is built-in to the design, build and use and fulfil all legislative requirements such as net biodiversity gain;

### 3. **Key areas of change**

To deliver the above vision, the Council and partners will promote and proactively support comprehensive and transformational redevelopment and regeneration opportunities to enable the transition of the town centre. Residential uses may have a complimentary role to play in schemes where it is not the main form of development, helping to increase the number of people living in the town centre, taking advantage of its opportunities and enabling it to thrive. Current projects and strategic interventions will continue to advance, leading to the completion of the following:

- a) Merseyway for the repurposing of the centre's existing fabric to enable strategic interventions that enhance linkages across the area and beyond to the Underbanks and new Interchange areas, bringing forward a diversification of uses and range of unit sizes to create a destination that is inclusive to all, comprising of leisure, high quality offices, flexible community workspace, retail, library and central customer service hub with community amenity and welfare facilities and toilets;
- b) The Interchange for the creation of a state-of-the-art transport interchange, high quality residential development, new landscaped podium park and improved at-grade access on foot and by cycle, both to the River Mersey and to Stockport Station;
- c) Weir Mill for the delivery of a vibrant mixed-use community and cultural destination with the restoration of industrial heritage at its heart, providing a high profile gateway that complements wider investment in the Interchange and Town Centre West, opens up the riverside and helps to knit together both sides of the viaduct, forming a series of legible and connected high quality public spaces that allow people to congregate and to enable a smooth transition for pedestrians and cyclists.
- d) The Stockport Exchange for the establishment of the town's new premier business location with exceptional transport connectivity, comprising high-specification office accommodation, hotel, commercial business and services uses and car parking;
- e) Stockport Station for the remodelling of the station buildings and surroundings to remove the severance caused by the railway and its sidings, bringing forward a dual-aspect design which will unlock development potential to the west and support Northern Powerhouse Rail, generate a high-quality arrival experience and deliver a more balanced and connected town centre overall in preparation for an increased resident population; and
- f) Royal George Village for the restructuring of the Stockport College estate to provide an intergenerational neighbourhood on the edge of the civic heart of the town centre, delivering high-rise apartments, offices, start-up space, flexible commercial space, high quality public realm and landscaping, enabled through the conversion of existing college buildings and sensitive repurposing of the Grade II listed former Metropolitan Girls' School.

### 4. **A hub for culture and lifestyle**

The Council will positively encourage enhanced and additional cultural activities and experiences that promote social interaction and establish the town centre as a place in which to gather and spend extended leisure time, including:

- a) the modernisation and upkeep of facilities important to Stockport's visitor economy such as performance venues and museums;



- b) the diversification and improvement of the town's leisure and commercial gym offer to promote wellness and appeal to a wide range of users;
- c) new and enhanced markets, outdoor events and fairs;
- d) growing the evening economy, seeking an increase in the number and range of restaurants and the use of public realm for eating and drinking outside and provision of amenities;
- e) enhanced interpretation of the town centre's varied and unique heritage;
- f) opportunities to provide hotels and conferencing facilities to meet demand; and
- g) the temporary use of vacant buildings and sites by creative, cultural and community organisations, particularly where they activate and revitalise the area and the public realm.

5. **Optimising the Town Centre's development potential**

The Council will support opportunities to develop a high-quality place to live and which capitalises on the potential for a compact urban neighbourhood in a highly accessible and sustainable location. Residential development in the town centre will be expected to make the most efficient use of land, subject to amenity and space standards in policies **Environment 10 and Environment 18.**

6. There are opportunities for taller buildings at gateway sites and along strategic corridors. Any proposals would be subject to satisfying the requirements of policy Environment 19.

7. **Improving the Town Centre public realm and environment**

The town centre will have a public realm network that is an exemplar for generating a welcoming and safe place for all ages and abilities to live and as a place for visitors and workers to dwell. All development proposals within the town centre should, where appropriate:

- a) create inviting and safe places with high-quality streets, public spaces, incidental space and attractive routes that are safe to walk and cycle on, thereby increasing the permeability across the town centre and between neighbourhoods;
- b) reduce the severance caused by the A6, the M60 motorway and West Coast Main Line;
- c) capitalise on opportunities to achieve high quality placemaking, particularly alongside the River Mersey; and
- d) introduce environmental and biodiversity improvements to the character and appearance of the streetscape in prominent locations that raise the profile of the town centre.

8. **Main town centre uses and retail development**

The following main town centre uses will be directed towards the 'Main Town Centre Use Area' as defined on the Policies Map:

- a) retail development (including factory outlet centres);
- b) leisure, entertainment and more intensive indoor sport and recreation uses (including cinemas, restaurants, bars and pubs, nightclubs, casinos, health and fitness centres, indoor bowling centres and bingo halls);
- c) offices; and
- d) arts, culture and tourism development (including theatres, museums, galleries and concert halls, hotels and conference facilities).

9. New retail development will be directed towards the Primary Shopping Area within Stockport town centre as defined on the Policies Map and in accordance with the hierarchy in **policy Centres 2.**



## ***Explanation***

### **Evolving and expanding the role of the Town Centre**

The regeneration and evolution of the Town Centre is a priority for the Council and forms a key component of the vision in the One Stockport Borough Plan where it is expected to lead the way nationally in redefining what town centres can be. Whilst retail and town centre uses are directed to appropriate locations in other policies of the Local Plan, this policy looks at embedding the particular character, development and opportunity areas for the town centre as it undergoes necessary change to diversify its offer and to help realise its potential.

Paragraph 86 of the National Planning Policy Framework (2021) requires planning policies to support the role that town centres play at the heart of their communities by taking a positive approach to their growth, management and adaptation, and goes further in the supporting Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) to state that local planning authorities can 'take a leading role in promoting a positive vision for these areas'. Furthermore, Paragraph 86f recognises that residential development often plays an important role in ensuring the vitality of town centres and encourages this on appropriate sites.

Stockport town centre sits within the Southern Growth Corridor, one of six growth locations identified by the Greater Manchester Combined Authority for their unique opportunities and assets and potential to provide a platform for levelling up across the conurbation. In seeking to meet the Greater Manchester Strategy priority of a thriving and productive economy, two ambitions within the document are to ensure employment sites are in the right locations to support economic growth and for the sub region's town centres to be quality places where people choose to live and work. The Southern Growth Corridor stretches from Airport City to the west to Bredbury in the east, and at its heart the town centre with its ongoing investment and regeneration supported by the Town Centre West Mayoral Development Corporation, is recognised as being a 'growth pole' with its expected delivery of high quality housing, town centre employment growth, enhanced retail and culture offer and improved sustainable transport connectivity.

Despite its growth potential, and like many town centres, Stockport has a retail-dominated environment and needs to adapt. In the face of a rapidly changing retail sector and a shift in travel patterns which were already in evidence at the beginning of the decade, the effects of the COVID19 pandemic and surge in demand for online shopping have accelerated the deterioration of the traditional high street leading to the closure of key units and an overall decline in footfall.

The Council has made several key interventions on its journey to effect change, helping to change perceptions of what can be achieved and generating confidence in the market around the capacity to deliver with a £1 billion investment programme. The completion of the first two phases of Stockport Exchange has done much to improve first impressions of the town and is a highly popular business location with all units including the pending Phase 3 being fully let. Redrock is a step change for the leisure and entertainment offer. There is a buzz of activity and tangible optimism with regular family events organised by the Business Improvement District, and an influx of independent businesses taking up space in the historic Underbanks now rejuvenated after £1.8 million of National Lottery Heritage funding has helped to bring derelict buildings back to life.

It is proposed that the wider town centre will increasingly become a focus for high density urban living and the vibrant hub of the town's cultural life. The interventions to date and forthcoming projects are seeking to create the conditions whereby improved leisure, business, services, public realm, evening economy and accessibility will add footfall and vibrancy and ensure Stockport town centre becomes a desirable place to live. Moving forward, the town centre needs to diversify its offer to include a greater range of leisure and experience-focused main town centre uses, cafes and restaurants. There is an increasing contribution to be made to town centre vitality and viability by

other uses including offices, community space, and facilities that will be needed to support a growing town centre residential population. The Council's acquisition of the Merseyway Shopping Centre to remodel and repurpose units for a new public service core, leisure, offices and retail uses, the redevelopment of the old bus station into a modern Interchange with a new town centre park, and the planned overhaul of Stockport Station Gateway are all vital steps in the evolution of Stockport as a place to live, work and spend leisure time.

The accessibility of Stockport Town Centre by a range of modes and its strategic position on the rail network only 2 hours from London is a major attribute for investors and is a key driver for its future role. In addition to the capital, the borough's key destinations are considered to be Birmingham, Manchester, the South Coast, Sheffield, Liverpool, Chester, Wales, Cheshire East and Buxton. The Town Centre Access Plan completed in 2020 and is a £73 million programme which, aided by funding from the Local Growth Fund and Greater Manchester Growth Deal, is aimed at improving access and easing congestion in and around the town centre, helping to increase efficiency and reliability and support the investments made to-date. This will further reinforce Stockport and its town centre as an important place to do business.

### **Key areas of change**

£1 billion of investment and several key projects are underway or are close to completion and will set a high standard for the quality of placemaking that the Council is striving towards in making the town centre a genuine and choice to live in, visit and locate in. Each of the listed projects each have a role to play in delivering the above vision of a multi-functional vibrant town centre.

The aim is for the interventions to collectively raise the profile of the town centre and provide the conditions that help overhaul the public service and entertainment offer and the visitor experience on arrival. Such changes it is hoped will assist in supporting the town centre's ongoing transformation from a retail and service driven centre to a leisure-focussed attraction and more desirable place to live.

Stockport Exchange is the premier location for business in the Borough sitting adjacent the railway station and Stockport Interchange. There is considerable momentum on the project to-date from previous phases which have successfully delivered a 1,000 space multi-storey car park, over 100,000 sq ft of high quality office space, a 115-bedroom hotel and new public realm. The site is in a highly accessible location and within walking distance of the town centre, and is a complementary offer to the wider town centre in accordance with Planning Practice Guidance.

### **A hub for culture and lifestyle**

It is proposed that the wider town centre will increasingly become a focus for high density urban living and the hub of the town's cultural life. It is intended that the town centre will be a vibrant and colourful heart to Stockport and its surrounding communities.

### **Optimising the Town Centre's development potential**

Section 11 of the NPPF requires planning policies to promote the effective use of land in meeting an authority's needs for homes and other uses. In particular, promoting and supporting the development of under-utilised land and buildings and suitable brownfield land is encouraged. In addition, making the most efficient use of land where there is an existing or anticipated shortage of land for meeting identified housing needs by ensuring that developments make optimal use of the potential for each site through the use of minimum density standards is encouraged at Paragraph 124 and 125. In order to respond to these requirements, the Council has sought to maximise the capacity of the existing urban area to accommodate new development when identifying land to meet Stockport's housing and employment needs.

The town centre offers a remarkable opportunity to realise these ambitions in a town centre with excellent connectivity and on a scale surpassing other districts in Greater Manchester. The Mayoral Development Corporation is well placed to bring forward large-scale regeneration with the ability to bring together a wide range of development and land assembly statutory powers that can galvanise market interest and support engagement with the private sector.

### **Improving the Town Centre public realm and environment**

The quality of the built environment and public realm and the riverside will be vital to how future development is brought forward and on-going success of the centre is achieved.

Stockport Town Centre West Strategic Regeneration Framework (SRF) notes that the current environment of much of the town centre is geared around the needs of the motorist and this must be balanced with the right to clean air and safe streets for the community. Removal of through traffic will allow for better and safer connections and the rejuvenation of places on the edge of the town centre, thereby improving access and enticing people in.

The River Mersey runs through the heart of the town centre, but is covered in many places and where surfaced many properties turn their backs on it or do not sufficiently address it. The redevelopment of Stockport Interchange, the proposed public park and enhanced recreational corridors in Town Centre West will provide the catalyst for an enhanced relationship with the riverfront and the provision of improved waterfront open spaces and walkways and cycle routes. It will celebrate its river and will create new environments for living and doing business in the heart of the Town.

In relation to environmental improvements, key aspects will include the designing-out of car dependency and reducing vehicle emissions, maximising renewable energy sources, the improved use of public realm and natural assets to enhance biodiversity, alongside the prioritisation of low carbon construction by building to BREEAM or Passivhaus standards.

### **Main Town Centre Uses and Retail Development**

The scale of future comparison retail growth will be less than previously expected reflecting the impact of the recession, growth of internet shopping and changes in spending patterns. For the future the focus will need to be upon diversifying the town centre's offer and providing new activities and uses which are attractive to a wider audience.

The Main Town Centre Use Area is the name given to the 'Town Centre boundary' as defined in the NPPF glossary. The boundary has been revised as part of the Retail and Leisure Study 2019 to be consistent with definitions in national policy and reflects the current position and will be under review as the town centre expands outwards and the character of areas changes in line with the Town Centre West proposals.

Paragraph 96 of the NPPF requires the specific main town centre uses to be set out and the breadth of uses listed reflects the need to ensure the town centre has a more varied offer and can serve residents as well as visitors.

The prominent locations where environmental improvements would be welcomed include but are not limited to the following:

- Station Gateway
- Mersey Square
- Merseyway
- Great Underbank
- A6 Wellington Road South

- Piccadilly area.

The Primary Shopping Area is also underpinned by evidence in the Retail and Leisure Study 2019 and covers the locations in which the Town Centre's core retail offer is concentrated, largely around Merseyway, Princes Street, St. Petersgate, Warren Street and the Market Place.

---

## Town Centre 2: The Town Centre Character Areas

1. In Town Centre West, the traditional service core of the town centre will expand west of the A6 and beyond Stockport Station and the West Coast Main Line to deliver a new exciting neighbourhood of around 3,500 to 4,000 homes with complementary mixed-use development and supporting social infrastructure offering affordable town centre living, employment opportunities and an enhanced leisure offer in an area rich in heritage. The five Character Areas below will see the following ambitious changes whilst supporting the distinctive characteristics, communities and environmental assets of each area.
  - A. Brinksway** – An exemplar residential community for zero carbon and energy efficient living along the riverside with medium density housing and flexible employment space to meet a range of occupiers in re-purposed and redeveloped buildings. Access to open space at Hollywood Park and the River Mersey will be enhanced to deliver new active travel links and opportunities for play and food growing. Connectivity and mobility hubs will be encouraged to lower emissions and help make the most of this highly sustainable location.
  - B. Weirside** – New homes, flexible workspaces, arts and cultural uses and a new major leisure and culture destination will occupy revitalised former mills, addressing the riverside with high-quality green infrastructure and making the most of its unique and atmospheric location under the listed Stockport Viaduct. This Character Area will be a catalyst for the wider regeneration of Town Centre West, forming a major gateway between the Main Town Centre Use Area and Interchange and that of the emerging Character Areas in Town Centre West, with potential for landmark buildings and pedestrian-focused environments.
  - C. Station Quarter** – The redeveloped dual-aspect station will face a new commercial area to the west served by tram-train and enhanced pedestrian and cycle links between the town centre and Edgeley. A public plaza and green active travel route to Weirside will welcome visitors and take advantage of key views, complementing high-quality office accommodation and a variety of residential dwellings at higher densities and including affordable units. Multi-storey car parking and mobility hub facilities will also be provided to capitalise on the location's unrivalled connectivity.
  - D. Exchange Quarter** – The primary business and commercial location for the borough with Grade A office space, hotel and ancillary retail, with a seamless connection via an iconic bridge to the new bus interchange hub offering a major public town centre podium park, build-to-rent apartments, and vastly improving the visitor experience for all users with ease of access to the town centre, a revitalised public realm and step-free access between travel modes.
  - E. Royal George Quarter** – An area that is home to Stockport College and several designated heritage assets, this Character Area will comprise an intergenerational residential community and supporting ancillary community facilities and commercial space, providing a range of densities and types of accommodation including private rented units and apartments at the listed St. Thomas's Hospital, together with a new intermediate/extra care facility for older people. Public realm, landscaping and pedestrian and cycle routes will be of high quality to encourage ease of movement for all ages towards the station and the Main Town Centre Use Area.

2. Elsewhere in the wider Town Centre, new development must support and strengthen the distinctive role of the Character Areas listed below, raising their overall quality, offer and accessibility.
  - F. Merseyway and Princes Street** – The principal area for retail and other main town centre uses with repurposed and modernised units, an enhanced leisure and entertainment focus, public service core with library and welcome hub. Enhanced public realm, pocket parks and direct walking and cycling routes with active frontages will ensure ease of access to other areas of the town centre for all including families and older people. Complimentary residential development that meets the requirements of policy Town Centre 3 will help to bring more people to the area, helping to create a vibrant and thriving core to the town centre.
  - G. Knightsbridge** – A residential neighbourhood with build-to-rent accommodation and ancillary commercial space and a particular focus on optimising the efficient use of land and a substantial upgrade to the streetscene and public realm in this gateway location. A large public square for the east of the town centre and landmark buildings will attract footfall and enable an anchor and transition for pedestrians and cyclists travelling between the Great Portwood Street area and facilities at Merseyway and the Market Place and Underbanks.
  - H. Great Portwood Street** – This commercial area within walking distance of the east of the town centre includes a popular retail park at the Peel Centre and will predominantly offer large format non-food retail uses.
  - I. The Market Place and Underbanks** – This historic heart of the town will continue to be strengthened as an alternative independent shopping and evening economy destination for the borough, serving a complementary role to the Merseyway, Princes Street and Peel Centre areas and aiding in increasing footfall and enhancing the quality and choice of facilities in the town centre. It will continue to be the principal focal point for creative and cultural uses, outdoor dining and markets; allowing meanwhile uses to thrive, supplemented with repurposed shop units that add to the mix use offer whilst protecting and enhancing the area's unique heritage value.
  - J. South-East Quadrant** - This mixed-use renewal area on the edge of the town centre is of historic and archaeological significance and will offer a range of residential types and tenures within safe and easy walking and cycling distance of the Main Town Centre Use Area and transport interchanges together with a choice of industrial, office and workspace accommodation to meet requirements including small to medium enterprises. The need for environmental improvements, the impact on residential amenity and on employment uses, and the protection and enhancement of industrial heritage and key views will continue to be important factors in its evolution.
3. Subject to policies Centres 2 and Centres 5, development in the Character Areas will be supported for the following:
  - a) The main town centre uses considered appropriate above; and
  - b) Mixed use development for residential and main town centre uses and/or town centre neighbourhood facilities.
4. For developments in Town Centre West, it should be demonstrated that:
  - a) It contributes positively to the vitality and viability of Stockport Town Centre and sustainable economic growth and job creation in the borough; and
  - b) Where a net loss of employment land or floorspace is proposed, the requirements of **policy Business 3** are satisfied; and
  - c) Where no residential is proposed, the development will not undermine the delivery of the town centre target for residential units.
5. Main town centre uses proposed in the Character Areas of Town Centre West that lie within 300 metres of the Main Town Centre Use Area will be treated as 'edge of centre' for the purposes of the sequential test in policy Centres 5, taking priority over locations further afield in the Character Areas.

6. Where applications are judged to have a likely adverse impact on the town centre under the impact assessment of policy Centres 5, the Council will consider whether there are any unacceptable impacts on emerging town centre development and investment by having regard to:
- a) The fit with the positive strategy for the town centre under **policy Town Centre 1**; and
  - b) Whether there is conflict with the proposed Town Centre Character Areas; and
  - c) Additional factors including the progress made towards securing the investment and the extent of impact on turnovers, operator demand and investor confidence.

### ***Explanation***

Paragraphs 15 and 16 of the National Planning Policy Framework (2021) require plans to provide a positive vision for the future of each area and to be prepared in a way that is aspirational but deliverable. Drawing from and delivering the broad principles above, this policy identifies and manages key locations for change and development across the town centre, setting out the specified mix of uses that will form distinctive places in their own right. These locations are referred to as our Character Areas and their boundaries are shown on the Policies Map.

The town centre is growing and changing at a fast pace and it is important to take a plan-led approach to promote areas with potential to increase densities and make efficient use of underused land, helping to set the expectations and ambitions of the Council and to meet Paragraph 120 of the NPPF.

The ten areas have been split into two groups within the policy to reflect the distinct and emerging Town Centre West area which is coming forward under the Mayoral Development Corporation. Each of the Character Areas have unique qualities which contribute towards the diversity and vibrancy of the town centre and are largely based on historic clusters of related uses and existing physical boundaries.

### **Town Centre West**

The Stockport Town Centre West Strategic Regeneration Framework (SRF) (July 2019) establishes a vision, master plan and delivery strategy for how the Town Centre West area could be transformed from a predominantly industrial area into a sustainable residential neighbourhood with enhanced leisure offer and employment opportunities over a 15 to 20 year period. The SRF guides the types of uses which will be acceptable if sites become surplus to current requirements and the Mayoral Development Corporation has the necessary powers to lead its delivery alongside public sector partners who will work with landowners to support sites to be redeveloped and funding to be accessed where appropriate.

The vision of the SRF is for Town Centre West to be 'Greater Manchester's newest, greenest and coolest affordable urban neighbourhood', offering a choice of homes and workspaces, a safe and walkable environment, excellent public transport accessibility and a new residential benchmark for both the borough and for the sub-region.

The five 'neighbourhoods' in the SRF of Brinksway, Weirside, Station Quarter, Stockport Exchange and Royal Quarter were originally chosen to harness their existing features including public transport hubs and historic buildings and to provide a range of living, working and leisure environments, thereby naturally informing the character areas for Town Centre West in the policy.

Any development proposals that would compromise the delivery of the SRF and the ability to maximise the development potential of the Character Areas within it will not be supported.

---

## Town Centre 3: Town Centre Living

1. The Town Centre will become a sustainable and vibrant residential community in its own right and will become the principal location for housing in the borough. Housing will be encouraged in the Town Centre Living Area, as defined on the Policies Map, in balance with other suitable uses.
2. The design of residential development in the Town Centre Living Area should accord with the principles and character area guidance outlined in the Stockport Town Centre Residential Design Guide SPD.
3. The effective and efficient use of upper floors for residential uses within the Primary Shopping Area is supported where proposed as part of a mixed-use development and where compatible with adjacent uses. This will not be supported where it will undermine the economic role of the town centre and/or have an impact on its vitality and viability.
4. To facilitate the changing role of Stockport town centre, development of neighbourhood, community and social infrastructure to meet the needs of the increased population will be supported. Residential development may be expected to contribute towards the provision of such infrastructure. This is likely to include facilities falling broadly within Use Class E (Commercial, business and service), F1 (non-residential institutions) and F2 (local community uses) such as:
  - a) local retail facilities
  - b) community facilities, including community halls, flexible community space, and space for religious or faith activities
  - c) healthcare
  - d) education
  - e) leisure provision; and
  - f) accessible and high-quality open space.
5. Other uses that would demonstrably meet the needs of the Town Centre's residential population, will also be supported.
6. In all cases, Town Centre neighbourhood facilities must support, and not undermine, the vitality and viability of the Town Centre. Where the provision of town centre neighbourhood facilities would result in a net loss of employment floorspace the requirements of policy Business 4 must be met.

### ***Explanation***

Stockport town centre has been identified as a sustainable location for residential development, owing to its location as a transport hub, proximity to facilities and services and its considerable potential to make effective use of vacant and underutilised previously-developed land.

The Stockport Town Centre West Strategic Regeneration Framework has committed to Town Centre West being a 'nationally significant example of town centre living'. The Stockport Town Centre Living Development Framework supports this with a view to improving viability and using public sector powers to unlock land and development. The Council will also prepare a Town Centre Residential Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document which will set a clearly defined set of principles and guidelines for developers when submitting proposals for residential development within the town centre.

Expected population increases from both planned growth in the Local Plan and additional residential development coming forward through Prior Approval following the changes to the Use Classes Order, will place considerable pressure on our existing social infrastructure which in some cases are already at capacity or below standard. Investment in public transport connectivity at Stockport Interchange is also expected to increase visitor numbers.



The town centre has traditionally been a place of work and a shopping or leisure destination, although evidence in the Retail and Leisure Study and emerging trends suggest that the town centre should be more of hub for our communities. The Economic Plan forecasts an ageing population, a large proportion of which will benefit from high quality accommodation at St Thomas Gardens on the edge of the town centre, and the Business Improvement District continue to develop an events programme that attracts young people and families into the centre. It will be important to ensure the new town centre environment offers opportunities for all, in line with policy Communities 1: Healthy and Active Across All Ages.

The Council's vision as part of the Future High Streets Fund to repurpose units in the Merseyway precinct to provide a public services hub, hybrid working opportunities and leisure activities is a crucial first step towards improving the functionality of the town centre although further supporting services will be needed to provide the quantity, quality and mix of uses required to support a high quality place to live. It is important that there is flexibility employed towards such uses ensuring the commensurate provision of supporting local infrastructure and services needed to support both existing and new urban communities.

The town centre is an area of employment, and in many cases town centre neighbourhood facilities will perform an employment function. However, where proposed town centre neighbourhood facilities would not provide an employment function, and would result in a loss of employment floorspace, it will be necessary to demonstrate through an Economic Statement that the requirements of policy Business 4 are met. Where town centre neighbourhood facilities are proposed, these should not undermine the operation of existing uses, and it will be necessary to demonstrate how the proposed use supports, and does not undermine, town centre vitality and viability. Again, this should be set out through an Economic Statement.

---

## Town Centre 4: Public Realm and Design

1. The Council will promote a high-quality network of streets, public open spaces, squares and pocket parks. This will provide places for social interaction and enable increased connectivity and permeability of areas of the town centre, particularly adjacent to major concentrations of activity and at gateway locations. The following interventions will be encouraged:
  - a) Child-friendly environments that provide stimulating, welcoming and multi-generational opportunities for informal 'play on the way';
  - b) Access to toilets and provision of age friendly public seating;
  - c) Enhanced legibility including use of signage;
  - d) Surfaces and levels that have step-free access and avoid steep inclines where possible;
  - e) Use of landscaping and planting with supporting arrangements for management and maintenance;
  - f) Lighting of public spaces and key routes to enhance public safety and security; and
  - g) Use and siting of public art and areas appropriate for street entertainment.
2. Opportunities to encourage and improve access across the town centre will be sought through the upgrading of public spaces and currently unappealing environments. Overcoming barriers to pedestrian and cycle movement created by the A6 corridor on Wellington Road South between the Town Hall and Central Library will be a priority. A high standard of design will be expected at this prominent gateway. Particular attention will be given to the creation of landmark buildings and a contribution to the renewal and environmental improvement of the area.

3. Within the Town Centre boundary, development will be required to achieve frontages that engage positively with the public realm and help generate a vibrant and active streetscene. Blank facades onto the public realm should be avoided.
4. Development should respond positively to the local character and history of the town centre and aspirations for the historic environment. Opportunities should be taken to conserve and enhance the significance of existing heritage assets.
5. The redevelopment of areas of unappealing buildings and underused land/ buildings will be promoted where they are no longer contributing positively to the town centre's environment or commercial or cultural offer.
6. New development must make a positive contribution to public spaces through its design, siting and use of materials.
7. Developments must provide a financial contribution to allow off-site improvements to public spaces to be made and maintained and to help serve the town centre's growing residential community. Where necessary this will be secured through a planning obligation.
8. Opportunities to secure biodiversity net gain under **policy** Environment 2 within areas of public realm and publicly accessible natural assets will be encouraged. This will help to improve streetscenes, the health and wellbeing of people and opportunities for sustainable living.

### ***Explanation***

Good quality public spaces and public realm will make Stockport town centre more attractive and set the standard for the quality of development that is required. They can benefit businesses and make homes in town centres more desirable. The quality of the public spaces and streetscape affects peoples' enjoyment of the town centre and can quickly establish the key function of a place, therefore promoting and encouraging more sustainable and active lifestyles.

The aspiration for high quality design in the Local Plan is set at Policies Environment 17 and 18, although the status of the town centre as a significant growth location and the impacts this will have on the built and natural environment demands a tailored response to ensure we get the balance right.

The need for increased and enhanced 'golden infrastructure' is recognised by Stockport Town Centre West Strategic Regeneration Framework (SRF) and these should be relatively free from traffic, focused on pedestrian and cyclist movement and form a clear and coherent network of squares and linear spaces that link key areas of activity across the town centre.

## **Town Centre 5: Movement to and through the Town Centre**

1. The Council and partners will continue to invest in ensuring the transport network in the town centre is enhanced, is robust and capable of responding to changing travel patterns and behaviours.
2. Public transport infrastructure will be substantially upgraded to improve the visitor experience and inter-modal connectivity for users in line with the schemes outlined in policies Infrastructure 11 and Infrastructure 17.
3. New and enhanced routes and supporting infrastructure for pedestrians and cyclists across the town centre and in gateway locations will add to the sense of arrival. This will also help improve access into and ease of movement around the town centre from surrounding communities, enable shorter journey times, and enhance people's overall experience and safety. Key projects will include:

- a) Dedicated and attractive traffic-free routes along Chestergate for sustainable travel modes including Metrolink, and towards the rail station via the new pedestrian and cycle bridge to Station Road will bring interchange users within easy step-free access of key town centre destinations and to immediate Character Areas in Town Centre West.
  - b) Replacement of bridges to the north and east of the town centre:
    - i. Over the M60 between Heaton Norris Park and Merseyway/Princes Street; and
    - ii. Over the River Goyt between Knightsbridge and Great Portwood Street.
  - c) Provision of a high-quality active travel route to link the Underbanks to communities to the south of the town centre via Hillgate.
  - d) Replacement of Thompson Street bridge to improve connections between Edgeley and the town centre.
  - e) Riverside path and new bridge across River Mersey for pedestrians and cyclists between Junction 1 of M60 to King Street West to improve access from Edgeley, Cheadle Heath and Town Centre West.
4. Key roads and junctions around the town centre will be upgraded to enhance walking and cycling routes, reduce the impact of traffic congestion and improve the efficiency and reliability of the highway network for businesses, residents and visitors. The following areas will be prioritised:
- a) Town Centre West;
  - b) A6 corridor;
  - c) Around Junction 1 of the M60; and
  - d) In the vicinity of Knightsbridge and Great Portwood Street.

### ***Explanation***

The National Planning Policy Framework (2021) highlights at Paragraph 104 that patterns of movement, streets, parking and other transport considerations are integral to the design of schemes and contribute to making high quality places. Furthermore, Paragraph 105 goes one step further to note that growth should be managed in support of this and other objectives by focusing significant development on locations which are or can be made sustainable.

Stockport town centre is already highly accessible by road and rail, and has considerable potential to reuse previously developed land. However, If the town centre is to be a successful growth location then the existing infrastructure needs to be upgraded and ‘future proofed’ to support the anticipated needs of future residents, workers and visitors.

The Central Stockport Infrastructure Delivery Plan (IDP) Prospectus and Technical Report include a range of interventions that collectively will have a transformational effect on the town centre, positioning it at the heart of a rapidly evolving Greater Manchester city region. Transport is a key strand of this programme and is expected to require the largest proportion of funding. Aligned to this is the £73 million Town Centre Access Plan which over two phases has encompassed key projects to improve access to key areas, corridors and sites around the town centre and sought to improve efficiency and reliability of the road network.

This policy has a specific focus on transport requirements for the town centre, whereas the policies in the Our Infrastructure chapter consider requirements for the whole borough. Issues highlighted by the IDP in respect of highways, public transport and active travel include:

- High reliance on the highway network with high car ownership and ineffective use of land for existing car parking provision
- Opportunities to further support the resilience of bus services by improving bus facilities along key corridors

- The rail station is the 5<sup>th</sup> busiest in Greater Manchester however significant improvements are required to increase capacity, local connectivity and passenger facilities
- Benefits from multiple dedicated cycle routes including traffic free routes but the permeability and topography remains a barrier to walking and cycling.

The Stockport Town Centre West Strategic Regeneration Framework (SRF) has identified that creating a stronger dual aspect to the Station Gateway will drive physical change in the area by unlocking west-east connectivity in a location that will also welcome the tram-train and benefit from improved journeys on foot or by cycle to the new Stockport Interchange. However this needs to be complemented by a range of other measures that improve the experience for all users at all gateway locations. Ease of movement will support our Climate Action Now ambitions, will encourage more people of varying abilities to live in, visit and enjoy the town centre, leading to increased footfall to support our local businesses.

---

APPENDIX 2 – working draft boundaries for "Our Town Centre" Local Plan chapter

