

Chesterfield

Town Centre Masterplan

October 2009



Part 1

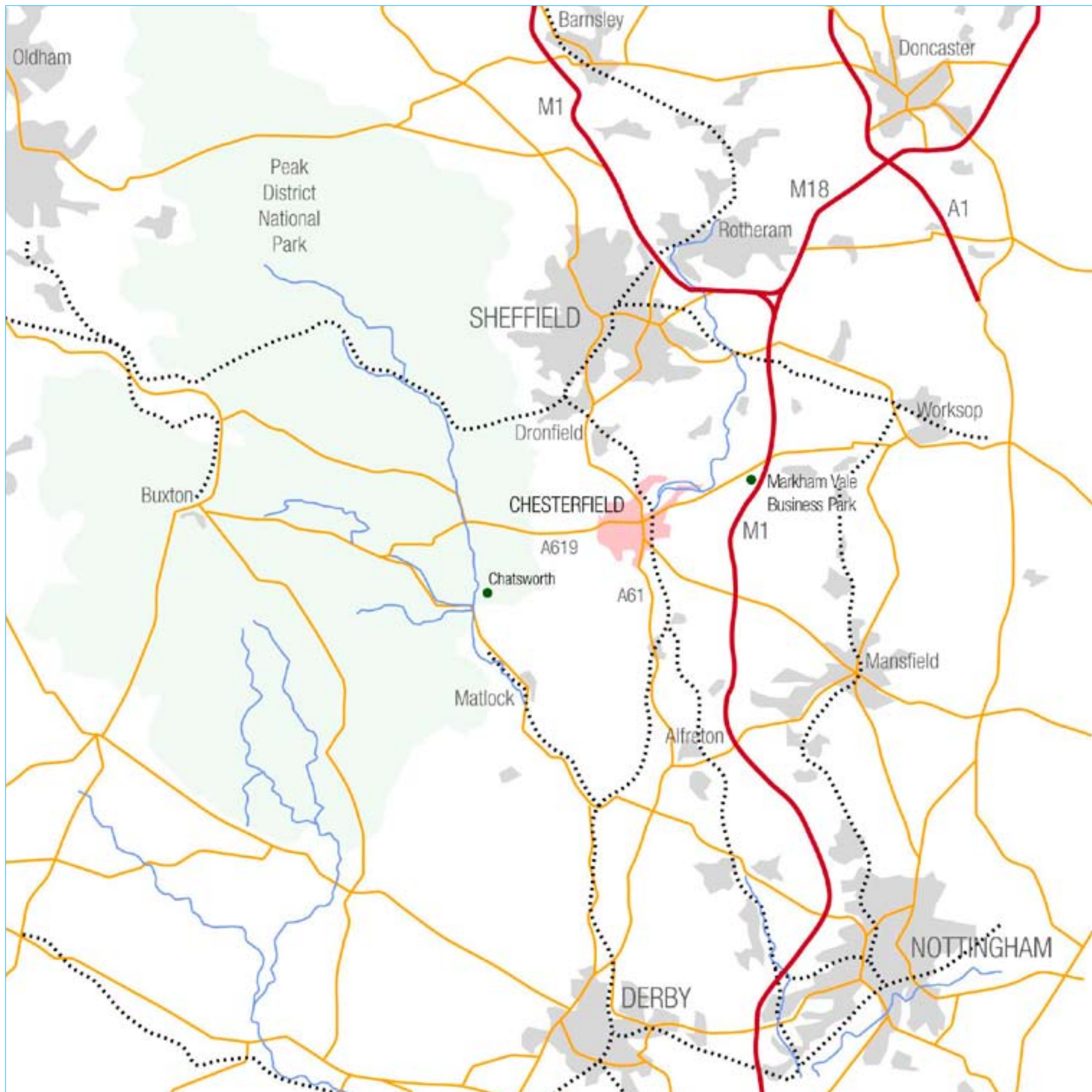
Chesterfield Today

Baseline Summary

- The town today
- History
- Character
- Economy
- The Market
- Access

The baseline study is a snapshot of Chesterfield's current situation in terms of urban form and investment. We looked in detail at the history and character of the town, the economy (including the mediaeval market) and transportation links.

The busy footbridge between the town centre and Queen's Park.



The town today

In which we summarise the baseline position facing the town today, in terms of its Assets, Challenges and Opportunities.

Put simply, Chesterfield is a beautiful historic market town. It also has superb transport connections, and a fine rural setting. Unfortunately, its fine qualities are hidden from visitors behind a concrete fringe of roads, roundabouts, retail sheds and car parks. The Borough economy, although well recovered from loss of heavy industry and mining, exhibits higher than average levels of unemployment and deprivation.

Assets

Our view is that ongoing regeneration can be enhanced by making still more of Chesterfield's exceptionally fine town centre. Anchored by its 800 year old market, the historic environment is home to an array of mainstream and independent retailers, 'holding their own' in retail rankings against stiff competition from surrounding towns and Meadowhall. There are streets of real character, resonant landmarks, parks and squares. Rail and road convenience exceeds many larger cities, and the Peak District setting is unequalled. There is genuine civic pride amongst residents and traders. Chesterfield Council have worked hard to secure investments such as the Chesterfield Waterside scheme, the £3m restoration of Queen's Park, a new Coach Station and £2m Townscape Heritage Initiative.

We believe the town can aspire to be seen as a 'mini' York or Chester, places which combine economic prosperity with enhanced historic character.

Challenges

And yet, for thousands of people skirting the centre each day on the A61 and Markham Road, the impression Chesterfield town centre offers is, at best, basic. Tourists returning to the M1 from Chatsworth are confronted by West Bar's derelict multi-storey car park. Vehicles impact on the Crooked Spire's setting, and Sheffield Road ends at the confusing 'doughnut' roundabout. Pedestrians and cyclists from the station or busy College campus have little choice but to use traffic-dominated routes. The Town Hall sits in a sea of parking, and the main entrance to Queen's Park is a concrete footbridge.

Although appealing to a diverse public during retail hours, there is concern that the town does not make enough of its cultural strengths, and its night time economy may deter as well as attract. Although situated between the National Park and the M1, there are no 5-Star hotels in the Borough. A 4-Star hotel is under construction beyond the town centre; we believe there is scope to add more quality bed spaces in the heart of Chesterfield itself.

The masterplan is needed to allow Chesterfield to stay ahead as other towns improve their offer. Fortunately the Council is aware that chasing retail rankings alone risks harming the independent businesses that make Chesterfield special. Most recent studies show significant evidence of unmet demand and leakage of Chesterfield's spend to other areas, which puts all traders at risk of losing shoppers to competitor destinations if not re-captured.

At the time of writing, investment markets are weak, but Chesterfield's fundamentals are good – housing, commercial, leisure and retail demand will return within the lifetime of this document. Now is the time to put the planning structures in place to harness future growth sustainably.

Opportunities

Fortunately, the problematic 'concrete collar' is also a major opportunity for future development. Fixing the town centre edge will have several advantages. Firstly, new buildings can bring homes, jobs and facilities to the town.

Secondly, a public face friendly to people as well as traffic will transform impressions of the entire Borough. And thirdly, access will become easier and more welcoming, encouraging higher footfall and spending.

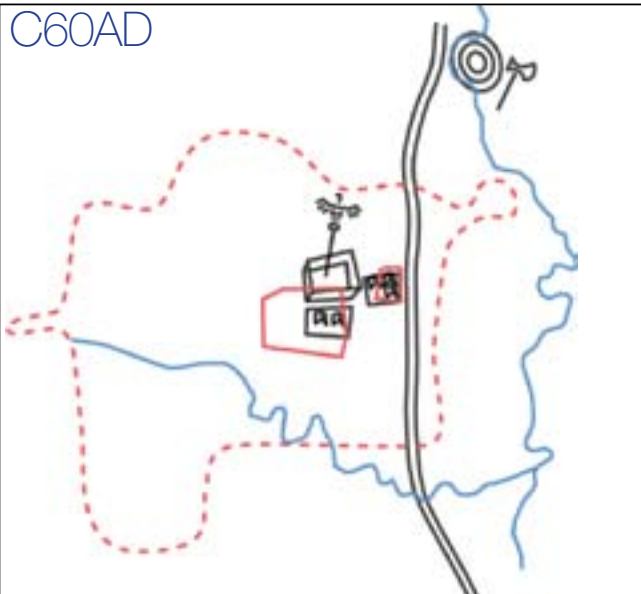
Within the historic core, a relatively light touch is all Chesterfield needs. Physically, there are gap sites to be in-filled and some tired buildings, street surfaces and spaces to be refreshed. But the main focus should be on sensitive and sophisticated town centre management – co-ordinating assets like the market, shops, parking, public transport, streetscape, night-life and heritage attractions. The newly established Town Centre Forum brings together a range of active interests and employers to oversee such matters.

The following pages outline key aspects of Chesterfield town centre's form and function – more detail of our work can be found in baseline documents. The issues are summarised under the five headings: History, Character, Economy, The Market, and Access.



View along High Street towards the Crooked Spire

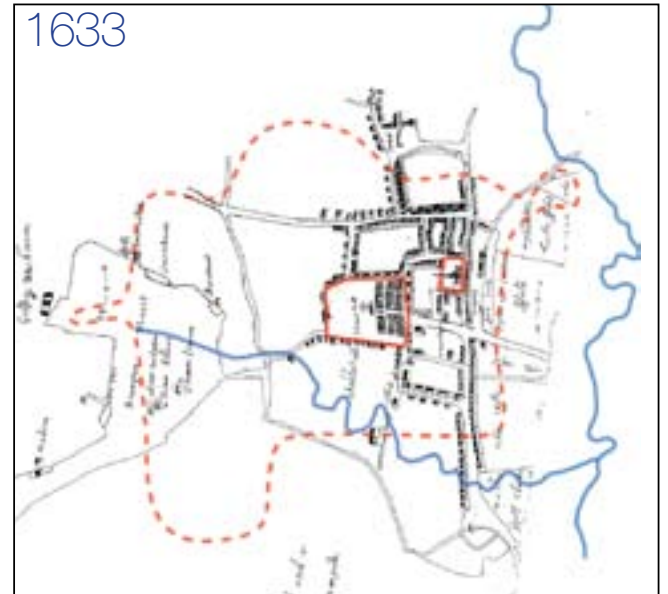
C60AD



C1300



1633



1868



1899



1938



*"Chesterfield is a handsome
and populous town, well built
and inhabited"*

Daniel Defoe, c.1700

*"Early man came close, but the
Romans created Chesterfield"*

Roy Cooper, 1977

History

In which we map the long history of Chesterfield from Iron Age and Roman Britons to the present, and summarise how topography shaped development.



With a Roman name meaning fortified town, Chesterfield developed on the a overlooking river valleys of the Hipper and Rother. A broad chronology is mapped on the facing page. Topography has been especially influential on Chesterfield - several clear links between the land form and evolution of development patterns can be picked out:

The Crooked Spire on the 'headland': Chesterfield developed from a fortified vantage point at the head of a ridge above the two river valleys. This strategic position overlooking ancient trade and military route 'Rykneld Street' was valued by Iron Age and Roman Britons, and is now marked by the Crooked Spire of the mediaeval St. Mary and All Saints

Church, close to the site of the founding Roman fort.

The ancient 'contour' streets along the ridge:

Newbold Road, possibly an ancient route to Manchester, clearly follows the top contour. Then, in descending order, mediaeval Saltergate (carrying Cheshire salt for preserving meat at the market), Knifsmithgate (where butchers' tools were made), Low Pavement, Beetwell Street and the later Markham Road are terraced along sunny southern slopes of the ridge. The Sheffield Road curves along the north side.

The Shambles 'grid' across the ridge: Across these 'lateral' routes are cut the north-south lanes of the Shambles,

originally the slaughter area where livestock was butchered and sold. Their orientation allowed offal and waste to drain downhill towards the River Hipper. As stalls became established, in time their owners gained rights of title, and the mediaeval market layout took permanent built form.

The Market:

The first markets took place near the site of St. Mary and All Saints Church but moved slightly west around the 1220s. Market Place dates from this period, and has enjoyed continuous use ever since, although adjacent buildings are the product of several waves of development. New Square was for centuries 'Swine's Green', the holding area for animals on their way to market.

Railways, industry and parkland in the river valleys:

Being less easily defended and subject to flooding, the valleys were developed relatively late in the town's history, proving better suited to communications and industrial development than housing and commerce. The Rother valley hosts a classic 18th century James Brindley 'contour canal', joined in the 19th century by extensive rail and factory infrastructure. The Hipper and Rother valleys now house heavily engineered highway routes and 'big shed' commercial buildings. The flat valley floor is also ideal for the cricket pitch and lake in Queen's Park.

The suburbs:

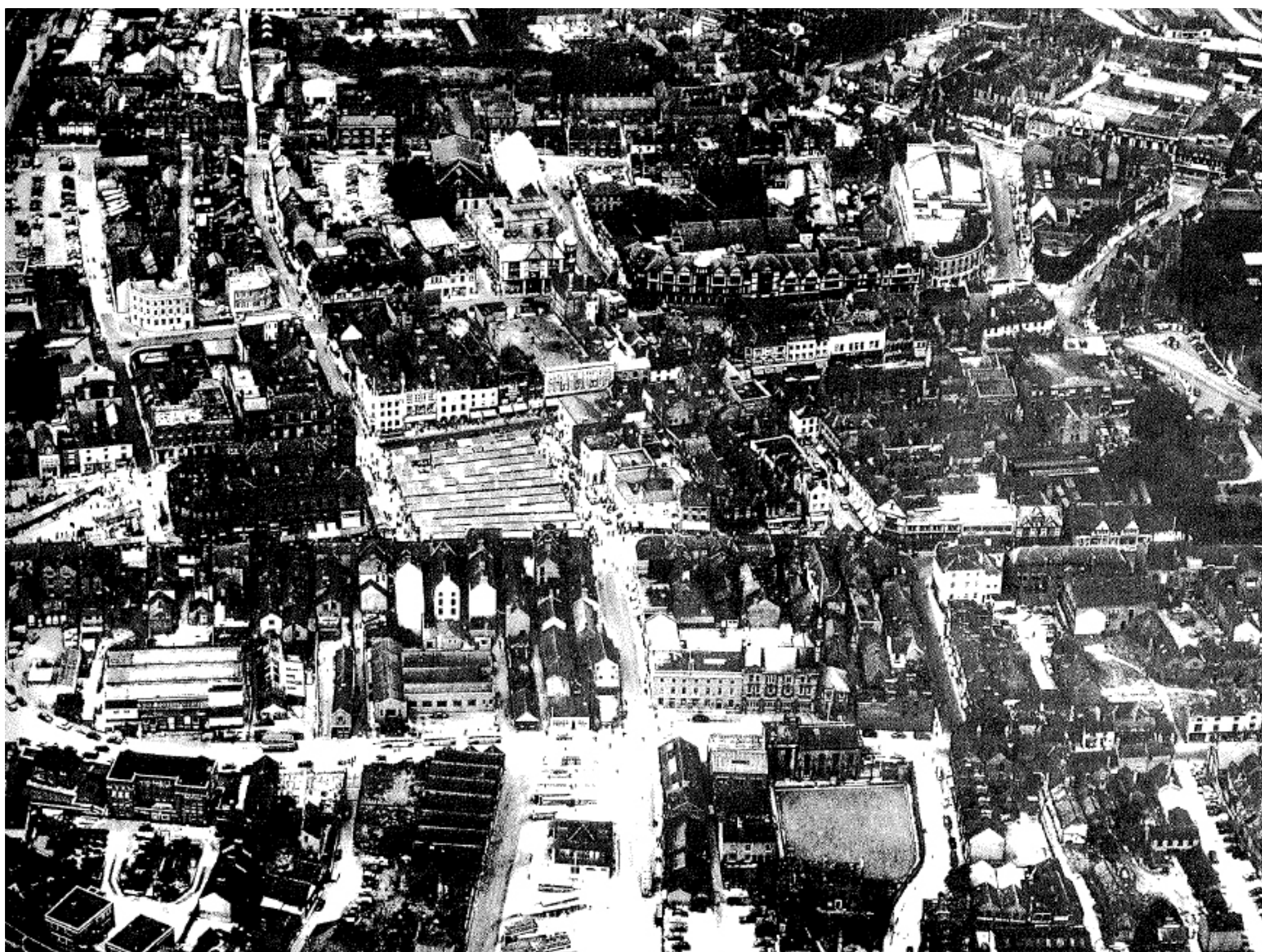
Higher ground upwind of later industrial development was occupied initially by upper and middle class suburban housing, with Chatsworth and Sheffield Roads extending development in linear fashion as Chesterfield's Tramway reached out to the Borough boundaries in the 1880s. In the 20th century these were joined by 'garden suburb' style housing built by the council and private developers.

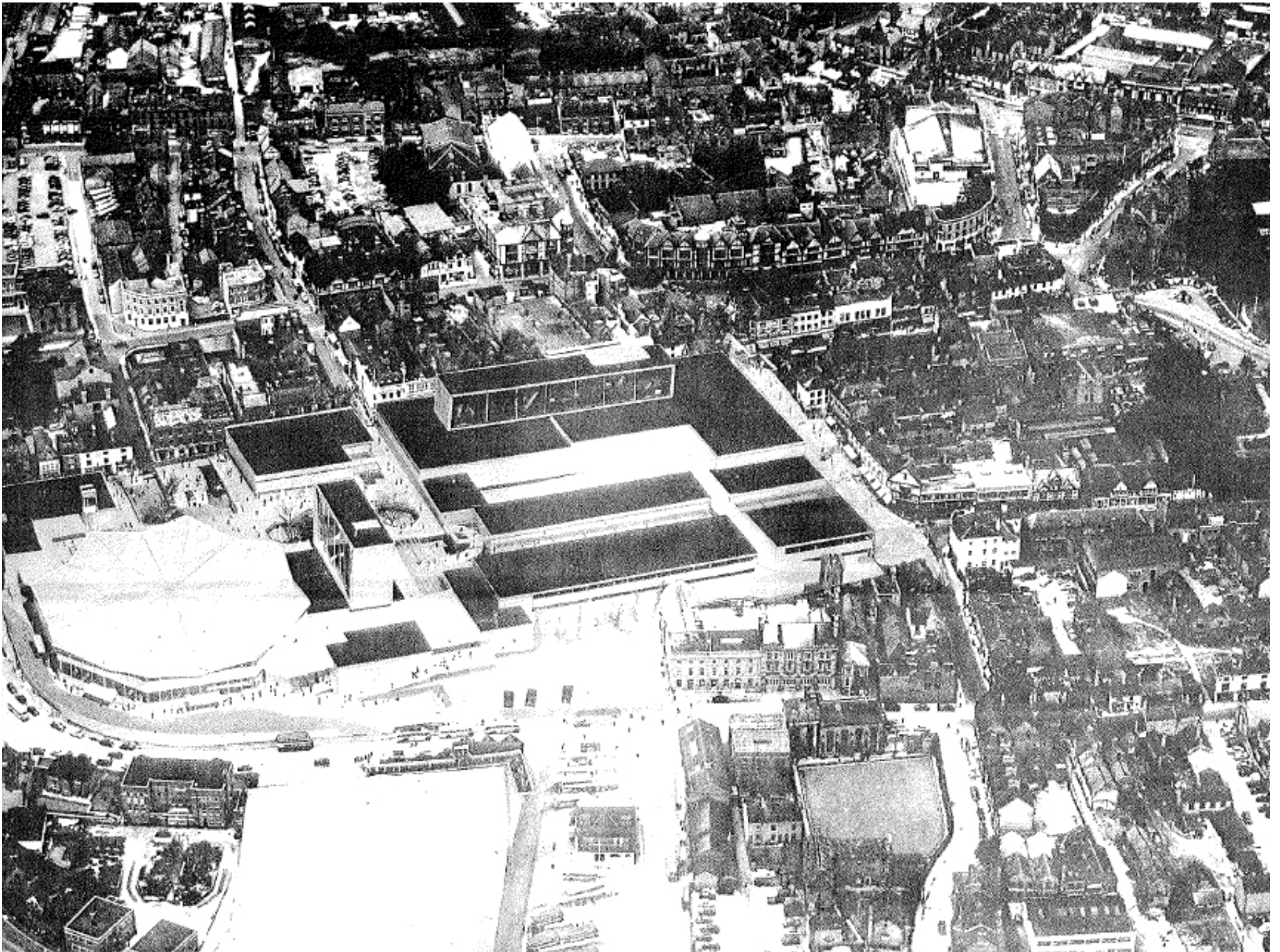
Late 20th century and beyond

Chesterfield escaped the worst excesses of post War 'comprehensive development' only thanks to a determined public resistance campaign (see overleaf). Indeed, some of its modernist buildings, notably the former Magistrates Court, are architecturally excellent.

Even so, heavily engineered highways schemes along the old river valleys and former rail routes have eroded some of its historic character, especially round the edge of the town centre. Former industrial sites have been redeveloped with standard retail and commercial units that do not add any sense of place.

The early 21st century offers a chance to reconnect Chesterfield with its natural environment using new and traditional planning knowledge and building technologies.





Only determined public opposition saved Chesterfield from astonishingly crass post-war 'comprehensive development'. These are before and after images of a scheme proposed by architect and planning consultant J. S. Allen in 1961, intended to obliterate all traces of the mediaeval market.



Area 7 Former Royal Hospital Site

Area 6 Saltergate/ Glumangate

Area 5 Holywell Street/ Knifsmithsgate etc.

Area 1 Town Hall/
Shentall Memorial Gardens/
Queen's Park

Area 2 The Market

Area 4 St. Mary's
Gate

Area 3 Vicar Lane

Area 8 Town Centre Edge

Character

In which we describe the distinct character areas that make up Chesterfield's well preserved town centre, and the frayed edge that hides these fine qualities from people passing through.

Seven distinct character areas within the town centre are identified in the most recent Conservation Area appraisal. The remainder is characterised as the 'town centre edge'.

Area 1 – Town Hall/Shentall Memorial Gardens/Queen's Park

The area forms a civic group around the Shentall Memorial Gardens, a sloping park overlooked by the imposing 1938 Town Hall and the former Magistrates' Court, Chesterfield's finest example of modern architecture. The Gardens commemorate the town's war dead, but in their current configuration have little recreational role.

Queen's Park lies at the foot of a strong axis focused on the Town Hall. Visual continuity is disrupted by the central section of Future Walk, but the pedestrian link itself is clear and well used. The Park has been exquisitely restored to its Victorian glory with help from Heritage Lottery Funds.

Area 2 – The Market

The 13th century Market is an area of intense activity, in buildings, stalls, streets and two 'flagship' spaces east and west of the Market Hall. The large open area and Victorian hall dominate Market Place, with New Square more intimate. There are many listed buildings of various ages,

with taller elevations on the north sides. The Grade II* listed old "Town Pump" is a memorable though sadly inoperable feature. The unchanged layout of the main irregular, sloping cobbled space has been a focal point of the town for over 800 years.

The Shambles to the east is also essentially mediaeval in character, with close-knit buildings overhanging narrow pedestrian passages. This area allows a transition of pedestrian movement east-west and north-south, opening on all four sides into major commercial thoroughfares. Low Pavement is especially historic, with the majority of buildings of 18th and 19th century origin, and the Peacock, a timber framed building from as far back as the c16th century. New Beetwell Street is dominated by development from the



1960s and later, but does retain some historic interest, notably the Elizabethan bowling green, unfortunately obscured from view at present.

Area 3 – Vicar Lane

This modern outdoor shopping area of brick-faced buildings on spacious streets won a Civic Trust award when opened in 2000. It is well connected to pedestrian circuits and has a lively character during the day. Glimpsed views of the hills are available to the east and south, as well as framed views of the Crooked Spire. Church Lane is a key thoroughfare, originally the main mediaeval route from St. Mary's Gate to the Market Place. It continues on its ancient alignment but has been almost entirely rebuilt at its western end to provide service access to shops, underplaying its importance. At its eastern end the street has been successfully widened to form Church Way.

Area 4: St. Mary's Gate

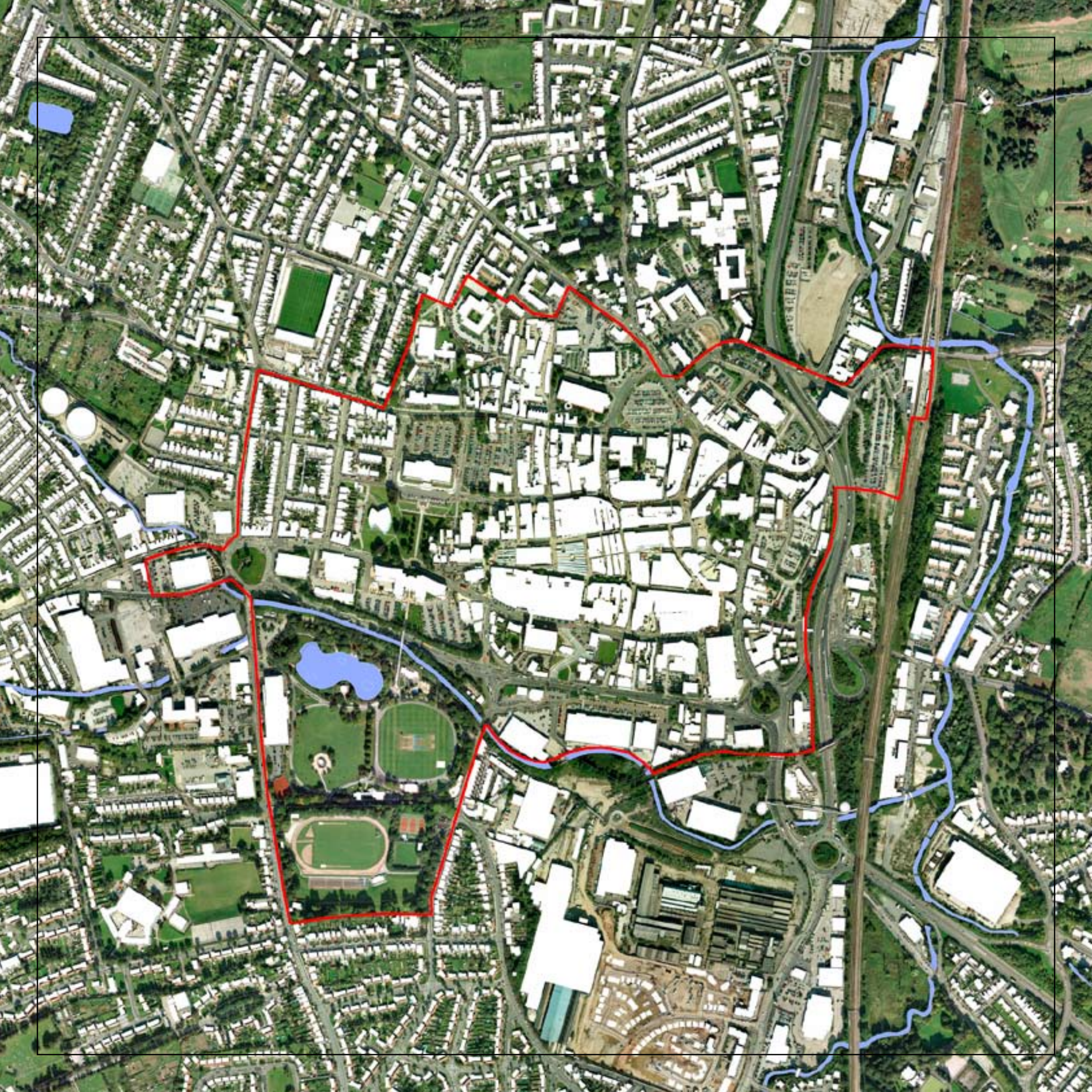
This was the main route through Chesterfield, and probably dates from Roman times. It is now an edge of centre area away from main retail streets. It typi-

fies the varied buildings of Chesterfield from the 13th century to date. Foremost, with its famous 'Crooked Spire', is the Parish Church of St Mary and All Saints, dedicated in 1234. The quarter is further enhanced by the openness of the churchyard, with views to open countryside, and fine buildings like the Stephenson Memorial Hall. It is however spoiled by the stream of traffic, highway environment and narrow pavements on St. Mary's Gate.

Area 5: Holywell Street/Knivesmithsgate/Stephenson Place/Burlington Street/Corporation Street

Much of the Holywell Street area was redeveloped in successful half-timbered style in the 1930s, with the Co-op Department Store and Winding Wheel especially well detailed. Knivesmithgate is one of the town's finest streets, although its once primary retail function is compromised. A few buildings remain from an earlier period, notably Elder Yard Unitarian Chapel built in 1694 and listed Grade II*, Elder Court and the Central Methodist Church. The former ODEON (now a night club) is an interesting art-deco building, but the Telephone Exchange is probably the town's most damaging single piece of architecture.





Character (2)

The Stephenson Place area has a concentration of leisure buildings (nightclubs, theatres and pubs) mixed with retailing and a few offices. On weekend nights thousands of people visit the pubs and night clubs. During the day most of the zone is a secondary shopping area with a concentration of charity shops. Wide junctions and buses travelling at speed disrupt pedestrian comfort at the junctions of Elder Way and Stephenson Place with Knivesmithgate. The Townscape Heritage Initiative is focused on this area, aiming to reverse deteriorating conditions in the historic buildings – this is welcome, but complementary investment in the public realm is very much required.

Burlington Street is now one of the main shopping routes, also used for make-shift stalls on market days. Mediaeval in origin, it was cleared and laid out on its current footprint in the 1830s. Much of the south side has been rebuilt in the late 20th century, but some early 19th century buildings survive at its eastern end. Burton Buildings, dated 1931, is noteworthy, designed in the firm's art-deco 'house style'. Looking east affords excellent views of the Crooked Spire.

Area 6: Saltergate/Glumangate

Saltergate follows one of the most ancient routeways into Chesterfield from the west, once used by salt merchants from Cheshire visiting the earliest known market site at Holywell Cross. Glumangate (named after 'glee-men' or minstrels), now dominated by financial, legal

and property businesses, is probably late 12th century, built to link Saltergate to the then new Market Place. Most buildings in this character area are red brick and terracotta from the Georgian and Victorian period. They represent one of the most striking groups in the town, and give the area a feeling of elegant prosperity. The Georgian townhouses along Saltergate were built for wealthy businessmen, who wanted to live away from their trade in the sometimes squalid conditions of the central area, but stay within walking distance.

There are however some infill buildings and areas which detract badly from the general quality of the streetscape. The most damaging are 'box structures', which lack consideration for scale, materials or urban grain. Detractors include the multi-storey and Holywell Cross car parks to the east, and the Angel Yard car park to the west.



Area 7: Former Royal Hospital Site

This area adjoins the Abercrombie Street Conservation Area to the north-west. Much of the area once housed the Victorian Royal Hospital, closed in 1984. Most hospital buildings have been demolished, replaced by new development. The Physiotherapy Department building is a survivor, built in 1862 as a Baptist Chapel and now Grade II listed.

On the west side is the Holywell Street car park. The area was previously intensively developed but was cleared in the 1960s to accommodate a larger junction. The surface parking supports car access to surrounding uses but interrupts streetscape quality at the Sheffield Road gateway to the town centre. The heavy traffic, basic public realm materials and exposed aspect make for an unpleasant pedestrian experience. This is especially unfortunate on what is a key link route connecting the students and staff from the College to the town centre.

Area 8: Town Centre Edge

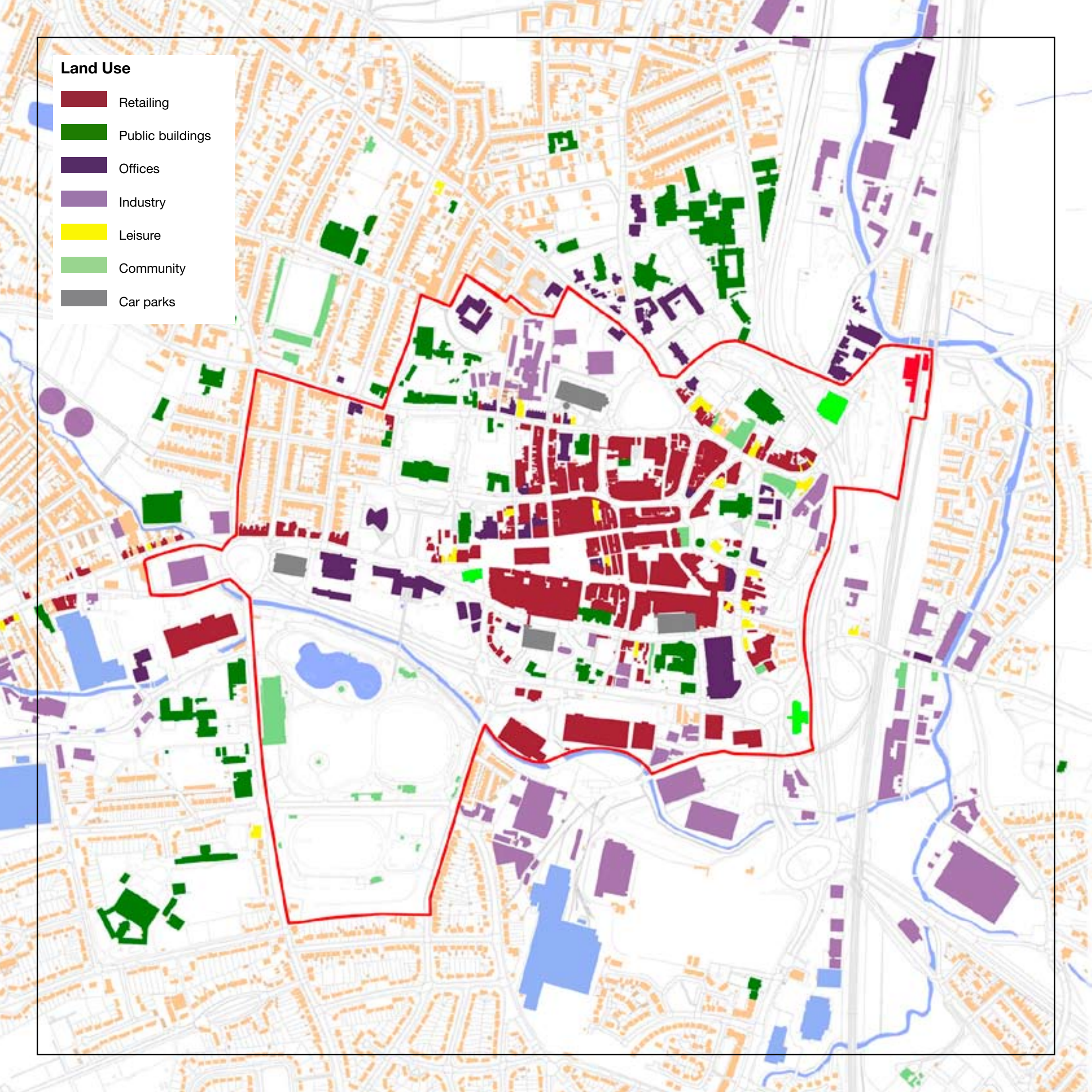
We have characterised the remaining part of the study area as the town centre edge. It is dominated primarily by highway and traffic related infrastructure and associated development patterns – large footprint contemporary buildings, expanses of surface parking, landscape strips and smaller older buildings in need of investment.

Markham Road and the A61 dominate, with a series of slip roads and roundabouts and adjacent retail sheds acting as obstacles between the town centre and adjacent neighbourhoods. The urban typology lacks distinctive features and gives an unfairly 'generic' impression of the town on high profile routes



Land Use

- Retailing
- Public buildings
- Offices
- Industry
- Leisure
- Community
- Car parks



Economy

In which we summarise commercial baseline work led by DTZ to assess retail health and demand for residential, office and leisure floorspace.

Chesterfield serves its population well in terms of jobs and services within the Borough, with relatively high levels of 'containment'. The commuting relationship with Sheffield is one of equals – in fact, slightly more people travel into Chesterfield from Sheffield than vice versa, despite the size disparity, demonstrating the attractions of the town as a place to invest, work and shop. However, there is also a skills deficit in the Borough, with some locals unable to access the type of service related work on offer.

Employment in retail is an important part of the economy and the town centre has performed well in the face of stiff competition from Meadowhall and surrounding city/town centres. The town has a broadly balanced catchment in terms of income, with high prosperity on the western fringes matched by areas of deprivation on the edge of town and to the south.

Retail

The retail health of the town centre is good with most major multiple stores represented and a strong niche trading base anchored by the mediaeval

market (see separate review). Footfall is strong, supported by clear retail circuits. There is, of course, room for improvement. *Venuescore* rankings show the town moving up, but investment in competitor towns is ongoing. *Venuescore* rates Chesterfield as having a 'mainstream' fashionability and a 'lower-middle market' positioning.

This ranking needs to be treated with care because *Venuescore* does not allocate any score to independent or regional retailers. While a useful tool for comparison with competing centres and testing the mainstream offer, it does not paint a full picture of a town's retail attractiveness. Indeed, we would not recommend that Chesterfield target this type of mainstream ranking alone, because it fails to capture the town's traditional qualities and independent retailers.

The development of the Pavements shopping centre in the 1980s and Vicar Lane in the late 1990s shifted the prime retail pitch of the town centre to the south, away from Knivesmithgate. Low Pavement and Burlington Street, connected through the Market Place,

Shambles and Packers Row, create a strong circuit. To the north, traditional retail areas around Stephenson Place and Knivesmithgate have suffered a decrease in shoppers, leaving the Co-op Department Store slightly isolated. This is mitigated to an extent by footfall generated from the 'doughnut' car park, College and bus stops around Elder Way and Cavendish Street. Overall however the secondary retail environment is degraded by conflict with traffic and a tired public realm.

The Chesterfield and North East Derbyshire Retail Capacity Study was undertaken by Nathaniel Lichfield and Partners (NLP) in 2008. The quantitative projections indicate capacity for a further large food store within Chesterfield. The study suggested that convenience floorspace within Chesterfield Borough is collectively trading about 27% above the expected levels. Comparison expenditure retention was 62%, with the other 38% leaking to larger shopping centres such as Sheffield and Meadowhall.

Commercial property

Chesterfield is an established office location that has seen a significant amount of new office space built in recent years in out-of-town and edge-of-centre locations. Prospects for further expansion need to be seen in this context. The town has been successful in attracting inward investment relocations in recent years, with Future

Walk providing Grade A space in a prime location between the Town Hall and Queen's Park.

If a more 'central business district' approach were taken to clustering office space in the town centre, a degree of critical mass could be achieved to sustain ancillary activities such as quality bars and restaurants. Major public sector users can continue to anchor office provision in the centre. The Borough and District Councils, Primary Care Trust and Royal Mail all have significant estates in and around the core. These and other institutions like the College could act as developer partners in future schemes.

Opportunities

The Chesterfield Borough Local Plan allocates three major sites for retail development; Northern Gateway, land south of Markham Road and the Donkin site. The Markham Road and Donkin sites are expected to absorb most of the capacity for retail warehouse development up to 2011. NLP note that the Northern Gateway site is expected to include a large food store and comparison floorspace, and will provide enough convenience (food) capacity. All these sites together are unlikely to meet the need for comparison (non food) retail floor space to 2016 and beyond.



The Market

In which we describe the analysis of the market undertaken by Urban Space Management as part of the study.

Chesterfield's market charter was granted in 1204, making it one of the oldest in the country, as well as one of the largest, with over 200 stalls. Chesterfield never grew into a city like Derby or Sheffield, and is still basically a market town in the classic sense.

The robust semi-permanent wooden stalls with their cheerful striped canopies are an unmistakable feature of Chesterfield's lively centre, dominating the Market Place and to a lesser extent the New Square, with the Victorian Market Hall and its landmark clock tower in between.

The external market, previously in decline, is now steady, and is being entrepreneurially managed by an effective new team, with good trader morale. The

market has very high Council priority, and is and will continue to be a major feature in the town's retail, business and tourism strategies. Events and promotion are being actively pursued.

The immediate opportunity is to build on the good work being done, by increasing occupancy of the permanent stalls, especially on the 'lighter' trading days. In the longer term, there are some substantial changes that could be made.

External investment has been significant in recent years, but existing infrastructure needs improvement, particularly inside the Market Hall. The Market Hall must unite rather than impede footfall between the two squares.

A parallel study is taking place to look at the future use of the Market Hall as



a key building within the town centre. The Assembly Rooms on the upper floor are an underused asset that could bring regular weekend and evening activity if made more accessible.

Several options for a radical external overhaul have been considered. These include replacing the semi-permanent stalls with temporary ones to allow other uses of the space, providing all-weather shelter by covering the external market with large-scale tensile structures, altering the layout, and rationalising stalls from the present two squares to Market Square alone.

On the question of whether wooden stalls should remain permanent; the labour and storage intensiveness of constant erection and re-erection across such a large area would outweigh any design benefits, and replacement has been discounted.

Alternative roof structures are judged to be at odds with the market's well conserved historic environment, its principal competitive advantage, ruling them out.

The existing stall layout could be improved without destroying the traditional outdoor nature of the market. To encourage people crossing the square to walk through rather than around the market, diagonal routes accommodating pedestrian desire lines could be configured - similar to a 'union jack' formation.

Historic photographs show stalls in the New Square in a similar diagonal layout.

Reducing the area covered to a single square would reduce the profile and impact of the market within the retail core, and risk diminishing Chesterfield's status as a market town. The key objective is for the Market Hall to unify the two squares more effectively.





This plan indicates the 'heirarchy' of road routes around the centre.
Dark Red shows the most heavily engineered sections of through-route.
Red shows other still busy historically important through-routes.
Orange shows well used local roads around the town centre.
Green shows streets with only very light vehicular traffic.
Dotted Green shows pedestrianised streets.

Access

In which we summarise conclusions of the transport baseline undertaken by ARUP, covering public transport, road access, walking and cycling.

Chesterfield is exceptionally well located in terms of strategic transport links, with fast access to both major urban areas and fine rural landscapes.

Strategic Rail Links

Chesterfield enjoys excellent mainline rail connections.

There are regular direct rail services to London, under two hours away. Many other cities are directly linked, including:

Sheffield - 20 minutes,
Derby - 20 minutes,
Nottingham - 30 minutes,
Leicester - 45 minutes,
Birmingham – 60 minutes,
Manchester – 70 minutes,
Leeds - 80 minutes,
Liverpool – 120 minutes,
Bristol - 150 minutes
Edinburgh - 270 minutes.

The advantage this gives the town centre can only be undermined by the poor pedestrian and public transport connectivity to the station, which despite its proximity feels very cut off by the A61 and surrounding environment.

The station is a commuter hub, acting as a 'sub regional park and ride' - this sustains good rail services but generates parking and congestion pressures.

A proposed upgrade to facilities at Dronfield may mitigate matters.

Strategic Road Links

Road infrastructure is also first rate. The M1 motorway runs just to the east of Chesterfield, connecting to the M18 and A1(M) to the north. London is around two and a half hours away. Sheffield is only 12 miles, less than 20 minutes drive. The A61 is a key route to Derby and Nottingham.

Trans-Pennine road routes are however less efficient, the 46 miles to Manchester averaging over 70 minutes even without commonly encountered congestion.

Proximity to the M1, and the presence of the A61 and A619 has advantages, potentially encouraging some motorists to break their journey and visit Chesterfield town centre. However, heavy volumes of through-traffic create access difficulties for pedestrians, cyclists and public transport wishing to reach the central area during peak periods.

Parking numbers are catered for at most times, although peak time demand can use up available supply; the lack of variable message controls can lead to congestion as drivers search for remaining spaces.



Pedestrian and Cycle Provision

The core circulation is good but the edges are hostile. The town's historic street grid supports easy walking and cycling round the core, much of which is pedestrianised or subject to various vehicle restrictions. There are however points of conflict with pedestrians and vehicles – Knivesmithgate, the RBS junction, St. Mary's Gate and Low Pavement.

The river valleys contain strategic cycle tracks, although their connections to the centre could be reinforced. An active Cycle Campaign is working to persuade public and private bodies to prioritise this most efficient transport mode.

The sloping topography may be limiting for some moving from the south and east into the centre – for example from Queen's Park and the bus and rail stations. This level change is greatly exacerbated by the severance impacts of the A61 and A619 road infrastructure. Crossing points at junctions, roundabouts, footbridges and subways give pedestrians a low priority relative to traffic speed, an imbalance which restricts footfall from surrounding neighbour-

hoods and cuts off key employment, leisure and transport assets.

Bus Transport

Chesterfield's coach station benefited from investment arising from the 2004 masterplan, and, like the station, offers direct access to towns across the country.

Local bus services are comprehensive and serve passengers from stands encircling the town centre, rather than a single hub. This has the advantage of giving access across the shopping area. A circular bus route linking the station is under consideration. Information and passenger facilities at existing stands are however limited.

There is a debate about whether a bus station should be provided to act as an interchange, but no consensus. The situation should be kept under review and investment meanwhile be made in real-time information and passenger facilities.