

# 02

In which we  
undertake urban  
design analysis  
to further explore  
issues raised  
in the baseline  
assessment of the  
town.

# URBAN DESIGN ANALYSIS







A detailed historical map of Walsley from 1883. The map shows a dense urban area with numerous streets, buildings, and landmarks. Key features include:

- Streets:** Labeled streets include "The Vicarage", "Hollybank", "Church St.", "Brook St.", and "Walsley Rd".
- Buildings and Landmarks:** Notable structures include "Saw Mill", "Parton Cottage", "Co-operative Buildings", "School", "Methodist Ch.", "Catholic Home", "Albert Cottage", "Signal Box", "Signal Post", "Gas Works", "Sedan House", "Church (Iron)", and "Education Road".
- Railway:** A prominent railway line runs diagonally across the lower right portion of the map.
- Topography:** The map includes contour lines and elevation points, such as "B.M. 165.5" and "B.M. 170.7".
- Textual Elements:** Large letters "L L" are visible in the lower right quadrant. At the bottom left, there is a large white text overlay reading "HISTORY". In the bottom right corner, a small black box contains the text "1883 Plan".

## 1883 Plan



Crewe was transformed in the 19th century from a small relatively unimportant Cheshire Village to one of the most important towns of the railway age. The urban fabric of Crewe today retains elements of five distinct phases of the towns development.

### Pre-Victorian

Before the Victorian era Crewe was no more than a small Cheshire village called Coppenhall, set in country lanes around Crewe Hall. The hall was designed by Inigo Jones and dated from the time of James 1st. The 1831 census put the population at a mere 70. This was to change dramatically from the late 1830s when the Grand Junction Railway selected the town (their third choice, after Winsford and Nantwich) as its locomotive works and junction station. This opened in 1837, the year Queen Victoria acceded the throne.

### Victorian

The second phase of change, the Victorian era, saw Crewe grow massively. The plan of the town was laid out by George Stephenson's brilliant apprentice Joseph Locke. He was the Chief Engineer of the Grand Junction Railway (later the London and North Western Railway). By the middle of Victoria's reign, in 1871, the census shows the population of Crewe at 40,000. Thirty years later, at the end of this defining era of the modern age, the town was half as big again.

The 1882 map to the right shows the massive railway works and sheds of the railway. Joseph Locke's grid lies in the north-west quadrant of the railway junction. This shows the civic heart of the town on Earle Street together with Market Street and Market Square. All of the surrounding streets are residential terraces. Beyond this gridded centre the plan shows piecemeal development stretching down to the train station and the start of strip development on Earle Street to the east of the railway.

As the plan to the right shows, the town developed further in the late Victorian and Edwardian periods. Well laid-out streets of

substantial terraces extend to the north and south of the centre with associated community and commercial buildings.

### Inter-War

The third period of development between the two world wars saw the pace of physical change in the central area slowed but the town expanded outwards along the main road routes as private transport became increasingly available. This led to the development of large municipal 'garden suburb' estates to the west of the town centre. These followed a very different and much less dense development pattern to the rigid street blocks of the 19th century.

### Post-War

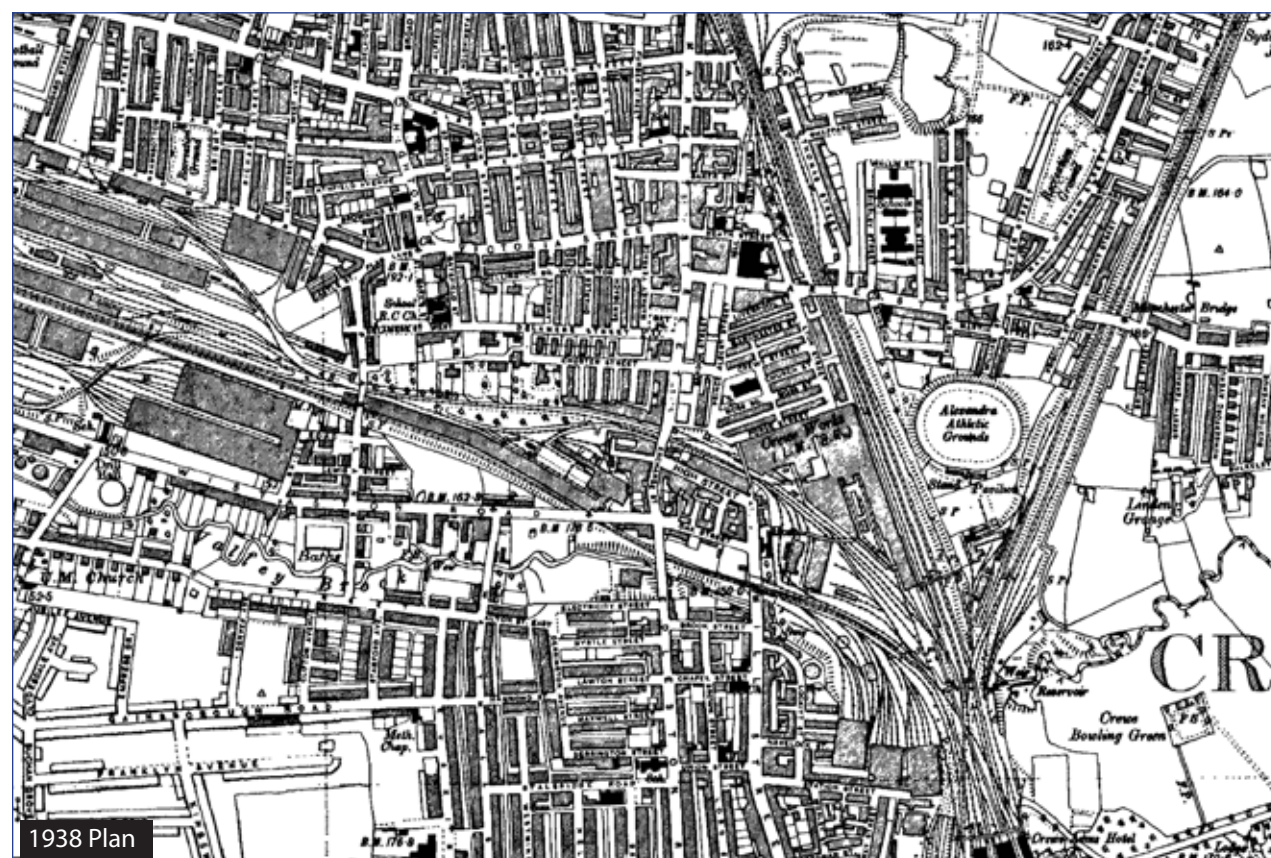
Following the second World War comprehensive redevelopment started to take place in the town centre in response to economic and social change. The most significant of these developments was the shopping centre and bus-station around Market Street and Queensway, with its landmark clock tower. The early developments respected the established street form. However the later development of

the civic complex around the library and police station in the 1970s was less sympathetic with elevated decks over undercroft. Subsequent to this the development of the Victoria Centre undermined the town's street grid and the 'slum' clearance programme associated with the West Street extension road widening scheme further damaged this part of town.

Many buildings were lost at this time. The demolition of the historic Chetwode pub is especially lamented along with the Edwardian baroque General Post Office, the nave of Christ Church, the spire of St. Paul's Church and the splendid art-deco Odeon cinema demolished in the 1980s.

### Turn of the Century

The late 20th century saw further radical change with the closure of the engineering works and the redevelopment of former railway lands for 'big box' retailing. This includes The Grand Junction Retail Park developed in the early 90's and the Asda and Tesco developments within close vicinity of Macon Way.





# FIGURE GROUND PLAN



The 'figure ground plan' shows just the buildings of the town and takes away all other detail. It is a good way to understand the built form of the town, the density of development, the enclosure of public space and the grain of development in the town.

It is instructive to compare the plan of Crewe, to the left, to the plan of Guildford to the right. It is clear from the plan of Crewe that the town is built to a very low density and that many of its buildings are floating in a sea of space.

The extent of the traditional town centre on Victoria street, Market street and Market Square is very limited. This is surrounded by large footplate units such as the Victoria Centre and Asda to the north. To the south and east of the centre more recent large footprint schemes are surrounded by parking and roads with no relationship to the historic structure of the town.

The result is a zone immediately around the central core where the relationship of buildings to space is defined only weakly. The figure ground highlights this shatter zone around the town centre.

Beyond the core and its fragmented edge, the surrounding residential areas are solid and coherent, structured around ordered grids of

mainly Victorian and Edwardian streets. The historic grid of the town survives in these urban residential communities.

The only streets and public spaces that show up clearly on the plan (indicating that they are well enclosed by buildings) are Market Street, Market Square and Queensway and the lower part of Victoria Street. The streets in the surrounding neighbourhood can also be identified well, particularly the Edleston Road from the south. However, apart from this it is difficult to identify any other streets from the plan indicating a very poor level of urban enclosure.



Market Street with its tighter grain and more intimate street scene.





# ACCESSIBILITY



The plan to the left shows the road network of the town. This is a useful tool to analyse the 'permeability' and legibility of the town which relate to how easy it is to move around and orient yourself.

In historic town centres and in many successful town centres today, there is a dense network of streets. Far from dispersing activity these towns tend to be more lively and are more pleasant for pedestrians to use. Crewe starts with a disadvantage in this respect because the railway lines severely limit permeability. There are only two routes into the town from the east and four from the south. This means that the town has never developed an integrated street network connecting it to its surrounding neighbourhoods. However even within the centre the grid laid out by Joseph Locke could have created a very permeable town centre as shown in the inset plan to the right. Unfortunately as the plan today shows, virtually all of the roads have been cut off, even Victoria Street, Market Street and Delamere Street are truncated and the latter will be further blocked by the proposed retail development.

### Road Hierarchy:

The street network of the town is made up of a range of street types. The most important are the High Streets shown in red. These were the original main roads through the town and remain the focus for retailing and civic uses. The traffic however is now diverted onto the strategic routes in blue that are diverted around the town centre. This has greatly benefited the centre in terms of congestion but it does mean that many of the people passing through the town no longer see it at its best. These strategic routes also suffer from the barriers created by the railway and have a series of bottlenecks where they have to use the original Victorian bridges, particularly on Earle Street. The network of secondary and minor streets is particularly fragmented. Indeed there are no longer any secondary streets in the town centre and the road network compares very poorly even in comparison to the Edleston Street neighbourhood to the south. This fragmented street network reduces the footfall in the town centre and makes it less pleasant to use.

Proposals to develop the Green Link between the A5020 and the A500 will help reduce traffic

congestion allowing traffic calming on the Nantwich Road along with measures to improve bus, cycle and pedestrian facilities along this route and the Weston Road/Macon Way Roundabout. This will improve accessibility for all users to the town and railway station.

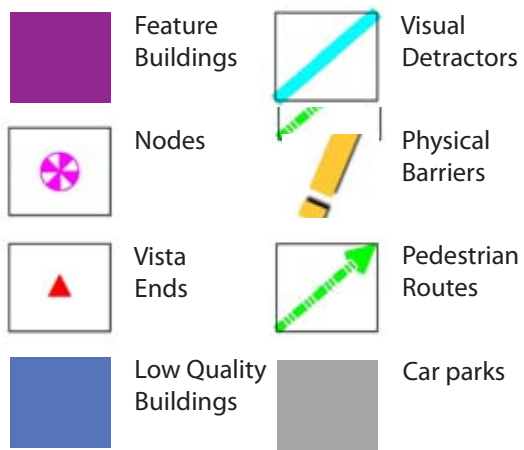
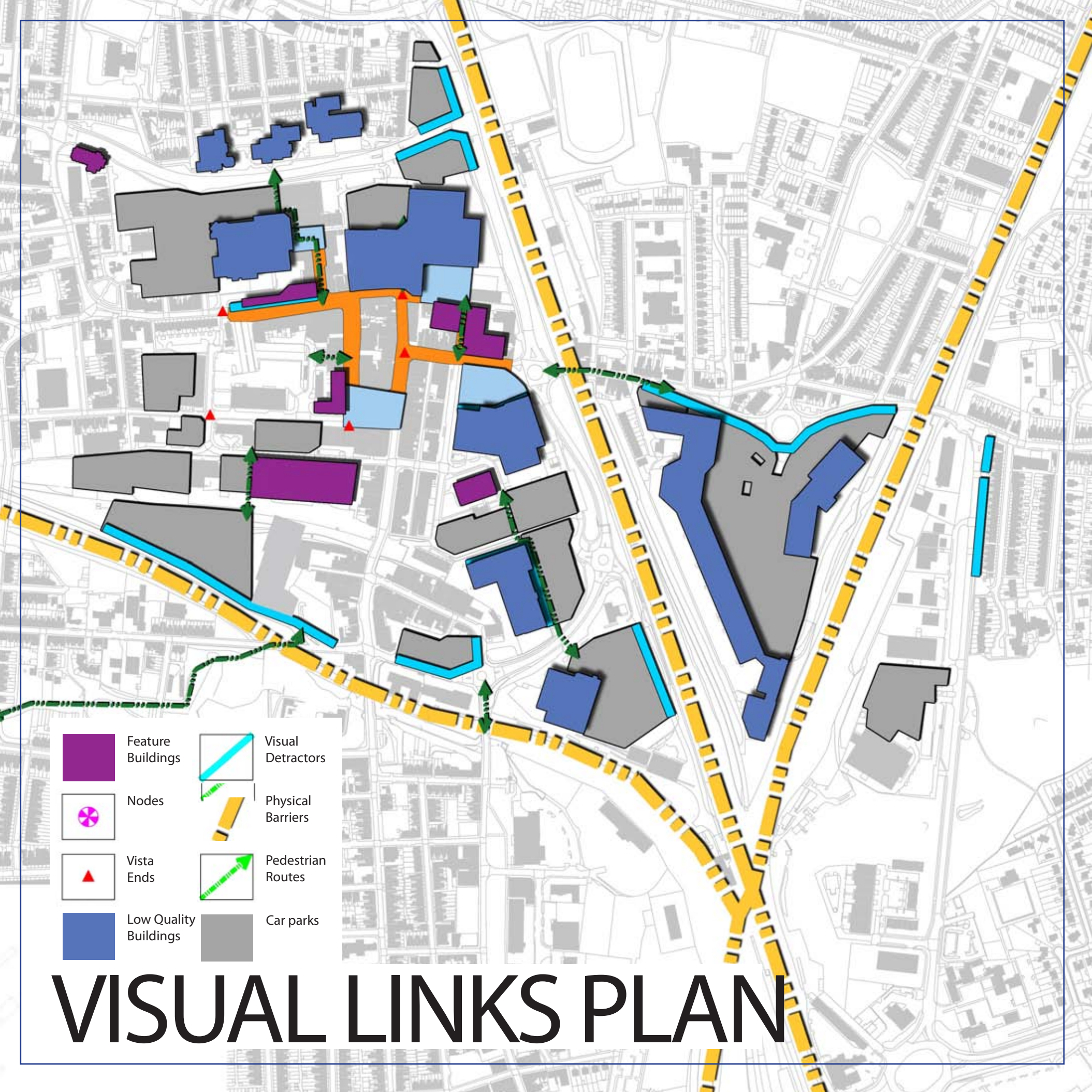
**Public transport:** The town centre is well served by bus routes and the new bus station as part of the Delamere Place development will enhance the experience of arriving in the town centre by bus.

**Pedestrian and Cycle Provision:** Pedestrian and cycle movements in the town centre are supported by a number of pedestrianised streets indicated in the plan opposite. These streets provide good walking links between the four public squares but this is in contrast to the lack of quality pedestrian and cycle routes beyond this area towards the edge of the town and the residential areas within walking distance of the town centre. This problem is exacerbated by the severance caused by the heavily trafficked West Street to the north and Vernon Way to the east. Currently there is not a clear route for pedestrians and cyclists from the station to the town centre.

Crewe's road network is already under pressure due to linkage constraints, location and increased traffic levels.







# VISUAL LINKS PLAN



The visual links plan illustrates how the town centre is understood by users. It highlights key features, landmark buildings and visual barriers to analyse how navigable and legible a town is.

The plan shows that the main physical constraints are the rail lines which limit access into the town centre to a single bridge crossing from Earle Street to the east and four bridges to the south. As we have described this limits permeability and concentrates movements on these constricted routes. It is from these few routes that people gain their impressions of Crewe.

The plan also shows the buildings of the town that contribute positively and negatively to these impressions. There are some fine buildings in the town centre and the arrival point on

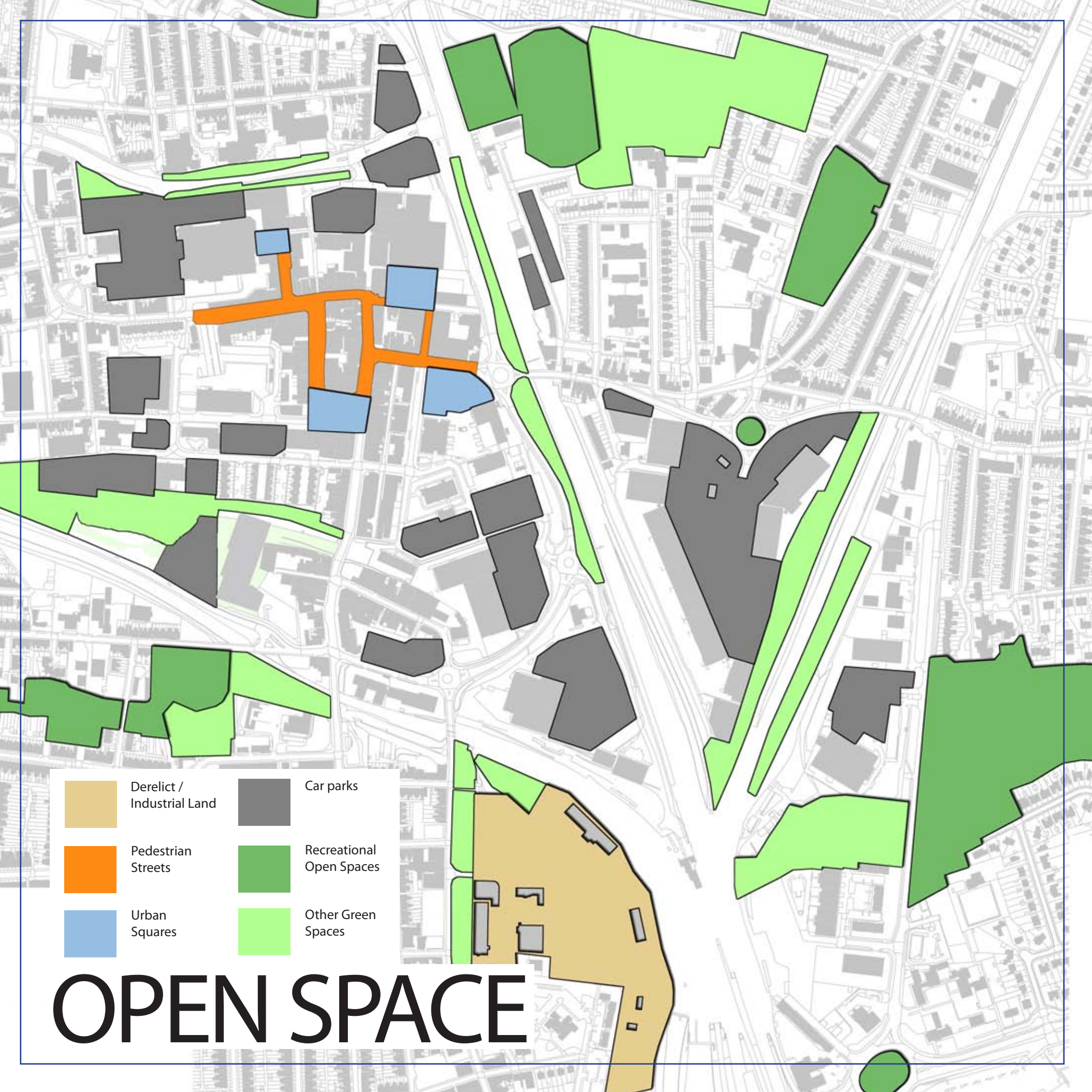
Earle Street shows these off to good effect. However from most of the traffic routes around the town the most prominent buildings do not give a good impression of the town. This is exacerbated by the surface parking also shown on the plan. The result is that the positive aspects of the town centre are hidden from view and the visual impact of the edges of the centre is very poor.

There are a number of vistas within the town centre and the potential to use these to improve views into the town centre. In this way people passing through the town could be given glimpses of Crewe's more attractive side.



There is the need to give people passing through the town centre glimpses of what it has to offer







Overall the town of Crewe is well provided for with good quality parks and open spaces. In the town centre the main under exploited resources are the Valley Brook and a series of public squares.

The open space plan classifies the location and variety of all types of hard and soft landscapes within the town centre. The primary green corridor within the study area follows the Valley Brook. From the east the river sits within wide open park land which crosses the Macon Way coming to an abrupt halt at the railway. This green corridor continues westward with paths meandering through sections of pleasant river park and it is the subject of an improvement programme to improve its quality.

Further out from the town centre significant parks are also located around Crewe cemetery to the north and at Queens Park approximately 1 mile west of the town centre.

The core of Crewe town centre benefits from a fine hierarchy of urban squares:

- The largest and most important in terms of civic function is Municipal Square. This has been relandscaped recently and is a high-quality surface urban space. It's edges are

well defined to the north by the Municipal Building and by Burford House and Imperial Chambers to the west. The Library and Police Station however do a less successful job in providing enclosure to the south.

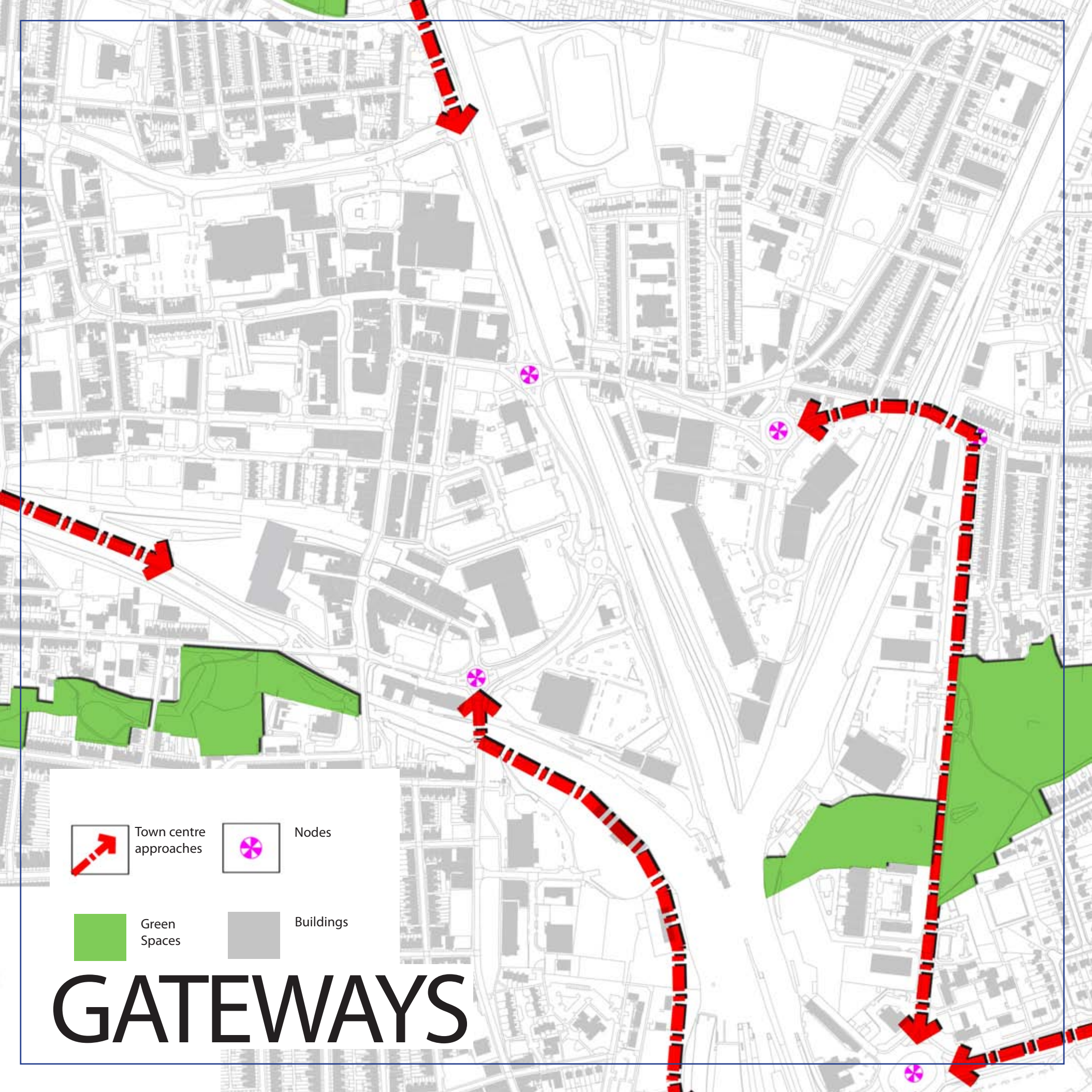
- Market Square is situated on the corner of Delamere Street and Market Street with the prominent clock tower to the west. The square performs an important role in providing a focal point for the retail environment in the area.
- As the name suggests the Lyceum Square forms a strong cultural relationship with the Lyceum Theatre on its southern edge but the square also supports the market.
- Victoria Square is located to the east of the Victoria Centre and provides support to a number of retail units around it's edge.

The plan also highlights the levels of wastage within Crewe town centre as other green space is prominent, this is mainly verges and space left over from inefficient development. Any opportunity to absorb these other spaces as development land or public realm should be taken.



Vernon Way has a large amount of wasted public realm that is not accessible or usable by pedestrians.





Town centre  
approaches



Nodes



Green  
Spaces



Buildings

# GATEWAYS





The A534 roundabout, whilst being at the edge of our study area, is perhaps the most important gateway in Crewe town centre.

The plan to the left shows the main approaches to the town. These have been analysed by TPM Landscape as part of the study to explore their potential as gateways to the centre.

A number of nodes and gateways exist within the Crewe masterplan area where there is a concentration of traffic movement. Unfortunately, few of these areas are clearly defined at present in terms of their relative importance as gateway markers or otherwise and as a consequence the experience of the public realm is diminished.

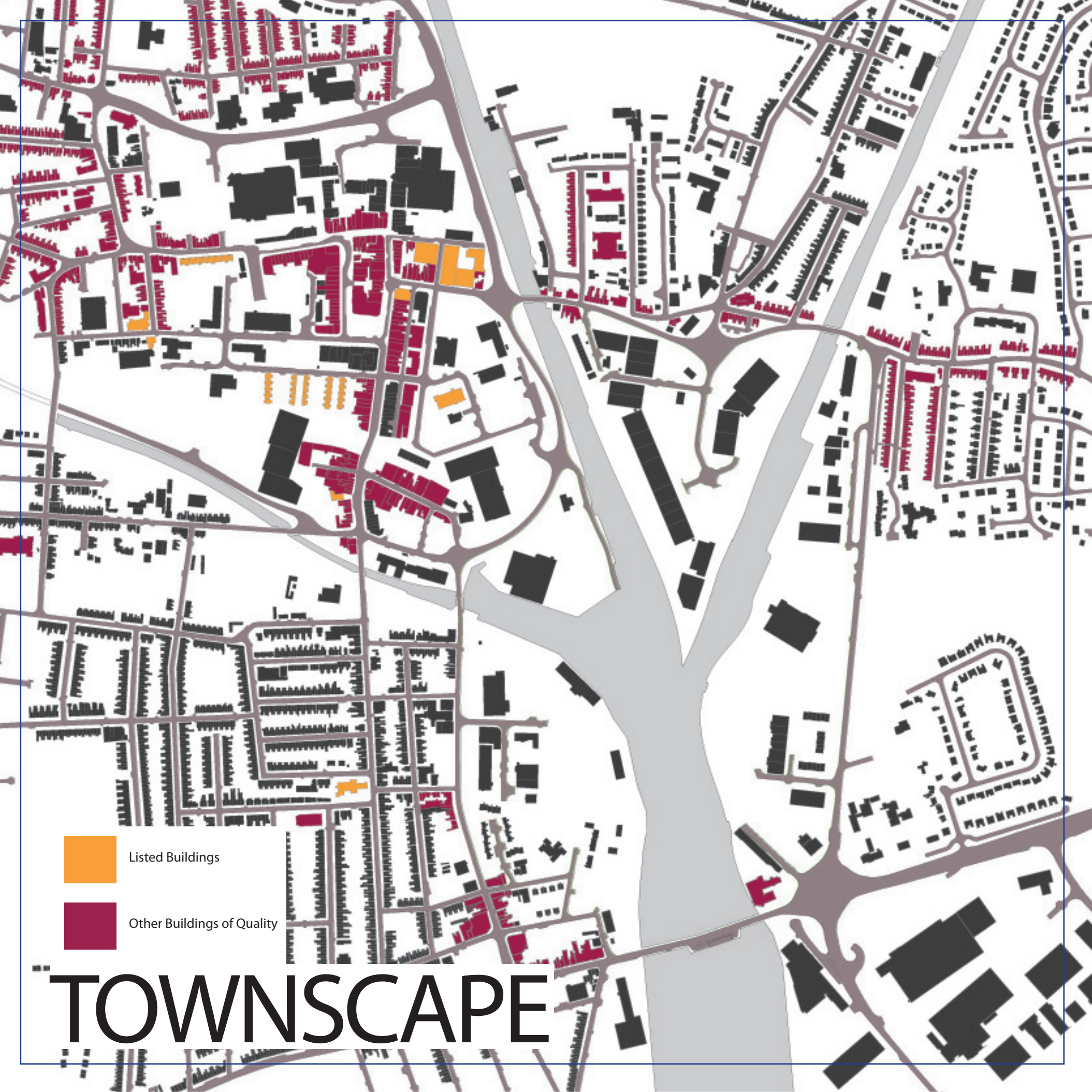
- In areas to the north of the main retail core, Market Street opposite the entrance to Asda currently lacks a visual 'full stop' and activity from the town dissipates into car parking and loading bays.

- The Vernon Way/Earle Street roundabout to the east allows access for traffic directly into the Municipal Square but obscures views of this major public realm space. No indication is given on approaching the roundabout, or crossing the railway before this that the town centre is only yards away and consequently there is no sense of arrival or place at this key gateway junction.
- Currently the Macon Way/Weston Road roundabout is a poor gateway to the town except for some standard landscaping and good Victorian railway and hotel architecture. The present condition of the station buildings and its environs is well below best modern standards, and a steering group of stakeholders, with an interest in the station, has been formed to oversee proposed the development in conjunction with improvements to Nantwich Road (A534).

Planned improvements to the environment around this junction include Cheshire Year of the Gardens 2008 and long-term developments as part of the Crewe Railway Gateway Development.

- The Mill St./Oak St. roundabout and further along Edleston Road lack any concentration of views or vistas or any sense of arrival. Instead road users are diverted around the town or into one of its many car parks without any visual clues as to where the centre lies.





Listed Buildings



Other Buildings of Quality

# TOWNSCAPE





For a town of its age and size Crewe has remarkably few listed buildings. However a significant number of buildings in the centre are of good, if not exceptional quality and there is a good deal of townscape quality to build upon.

The main listed buildings include the Market Hall with its low clock-tower. This is perhaps foremost among the town's buildings. Other notable examples include the ornate Edwardian Lyceum theatre and the Municipal Buildings. This group of civic buildings is the civic high point of the town and provide a high-quality setting for the northern side of Municipal Square.

There are some fine churches and chapels, such as St. Peter's Earle Street. Pubs are another feature of inner Crewe, and there are numerous

fine examples, including the Vine, the Crown and the Royal Hotel. The only other listed buildings in the centre are the few remaining railway terraces on Chester Street and Victoria Street.

The shopping core of the town centre is domestic in scale and the main redevelopment of Queensway dating from the 1950s is in keeping with the character of the town. The area of reasonable quality buildings extends along much of Market Street and remnants still exist on High Street but this is surrounded by big box retailing. Overall the quality buildings in the town centre are few in number and dominated by less attractive recent buildings.