

Existing Public Realm Context

2.2 ~ Planning Context

This section outlines the planning policy context relevant to the PRDG.

National policy

National planning policy statements and guidance provide overarching strategic policy. In particular, they seek to protect and enhance the vitality and viability of city centres such as Chester and promote high quality sustainable design. They also emphasise the need to protect and enhance the natural, built and historic environment.

National policies which are relevant to this project include those relating to sustainability and design quality - PPS1 (Delivering Sustainable Development), town centres - PPS4 (Planning for Sustainable Economic Growth) and Conservation Areas and historic buildings - PPS5 (Planning for the historic environment).

PPS1: Delivering Sustainable Development (2005) outlines a number of principles relating to design and character, which the PRDG responds to. This includes creating high quality, safe, inclusive spaces and 'attractive usable, durable and adaptable places'. It also seeks to protect and enhance areas of townscape character and historic environment. Design should also respond to local context and reinforce local distinctiveness. This will be very important for Chester City Centre's public realm, as it will need to respond to and enhance the historic setting of the conservation area and listed buildings. It must also respond to, and

build upon, what is distinctive about Chester, the City Centre and its different character areas.

"High quality and inclusive design should create well-mixed and integrated developments which avoid segregation and have well-planned public spaces that bring people together and provide opportunities for physical activity and recreation. It means ensuring a place will function well and add to the overall character and quality of the area, not just for the short term but over the lifetime of the development."

PPS5: Planning for the historic environment (March 2010) is particularly influential. PPS5 replaces PPG15 (Planning and the Historic Environment 1994) and PPG16 (Archaeology and Planning 1990). The PRDG boundary falls within the Chester City Conservation Area which includes over 300 listed buildings and structures, therefore principles set out within PPS5 are very relevant. PPS5 relates to all heritage assets and aspects of the historic environment, including buildings, archaeology and conservation areas. When considering development and public realm in a conservation area and in the setting of listed buildings and structures, PPS5 sets out a number of considerations. These include sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets taking into account the positive contribution new development can make. It also encourages schemes

which preserve or better reveal the significance of heritage assets, which would be relevant to public realm improvements. The effect of development on a heritage asset is a material consideration.

"Local planning authorities should take into account the desirability of new development making a positive contribution to the character and local distinctiveness of the historic environment. The consideration of design should include scale, height, massing, alignment, materials and use."

PPS4: Planning for sustainable economic growth (2009) promotes prosperous economies and the vitality and viability of centres. PPS4 focuses on a range of measures to achieve this, which include creating attractive and safe environments and conserving and enhancing the historic, archaeological and architectural heritage of centres. In particular, Policy EC4 promotes competitive centres, by supporting a diverse range of uses, strong retail mix, retaining and enhancing existing markets, taking measures to conserve and, where appropriate, enhance the established character and diversity of centres. The public realm can make an important contribution to supporting the economy and vitality of Chester City Centre.

Local Policy

Chester City Council has now formed part of Cheshire West and Chester Council. They are currently working on their Local Development Framework, and their Core Strategy Issues and Options Report was consulted on in December 2009-January 2010.

Until this is adopted, the local planning policies are provided by the saved Chester Local Plan (2006). The following outlines a number of policies which respond to the key issues for Chester (e.g. heritage) and their relevance to this PRDG. Figure 2.3 shows the allocations relevant to the PRDG study area.

Design quality

The Local Plan promotes high levels of design quality and the relevance of the following policies to the PRDG is set out below.

- Policy ENV9 states that materials must be of a good quality and used in the best way to achieve the environmental and sustainability principles of the council. Materials should be complementary to the surrounding area, durable and appropriate for their purpose.
- Policy ENV10 seeks to ensure that parking and servicing is designed and sited to minimise visual impact. This may be particularly relevant to the city centre, given its conservation area status and concentration of listed buildings and structures.
- Policy ENV11 also promotes safe and secure environments. The public realm can assist in providing spaces which are and feel safe, through careful design and promotion of natural surveillance.

- Policy ENV12 also promotes the provision of strong and active frontages along the inner ring road; and a quality public realm will have a role to play in this.
- Policy ENV 13 supports proposals which enhance the character and appearance of principal gateways and routes into Chester as identified in the Local Plan. The public realm will have an important role to play in enhancing key gateways into the city and providing a high quality setting for heritage assets.
- Policy ENV14 explains that the council has prepared a co-ordinated lighting strategy for key buildings in the city centre, focusing on their historic character and identity and supports this approach to enhance the image of Chester at night.
- Policy ENV17 also protects identified areas of open space from development unless certain criteria are met.

Conservation

As the whole of the PRDG area is within the Chester City Conservation Area, conservation policies are critical to the development of the project.

It is important to note that the whole city centre is designated as a statutory Area of Archaeological Importance under the 1979 Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act. Any works involving ground disturbance, including resurfacing, installation of street furniture, planting, landscaping, services and ducting may affect archaeological remains. At an early stage in the planning for any such works

the Council's City Archaeologist should be contacted to discuss the implications. A location plan and an indication of the extent and depth of works will enable more focused advice to be given.

In cases where archaeology might be affected, a mitigation programme will need to be agreed. This may entail the modification of the proposals or, where appropriate, archaeological investigation before or during the works. As any investigation may require an archaeological contractor to be commissioned, project managers should ensure that adequate provision and contingency has been made in their budget and programme. The City Archaeologist will be able assist the project manager in commissioning any works and will advise on all procedures and processes.

An example of archaeological discoveries made during streetworks include a substantial stone-lined Roman sewer containing an intact Roman pot found during the resurfacing of Watergate Street. Also, at least two major hoards of nationally important Saxon coins have been found during the excavation of service trenches.

- Policy ENV37 seeks to enhance the character or appearance of each conservation area and discourage change which will erode its quality. Of particular relevance to the public realm is having regard to the effect of: the quality and type of materials to be used in any boundary treatments and landscaping; the retention of ancient and historic thoroughfares; and, the retention and maintenance of historic street furniture, surfaces and boundary treatments. The importance of the townscape, including surface materials in the streets and open spaces, street furniture and

boundary treatments is explained. These elements combine to form the fabric of the conservation area, providing a setting for the buildings and creating the public realm. These principles will influence the PRDG.

- In addition, Policy ENV39 states that development proposals which would result in the loss of any historic routes in the city centre will not be permitted. The PRDG also has the opportunity to take this further and enhance historic routes.
- Policy ENV41 stipulates that all new development in the Chester City Conservation Area will need to show a very high quality design that contributes positively to the townscape of a historic city of international importance.
- Policy ENV45 specifically seeks to preserve listed buildings and their setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest. Policy ENV47 also seeks to have regard to the special qualities of locally important buildings of architectural or historic interest. The PRDG has the opportunity to enhance the setting of such assets.
- Policy ENV48 seeks to protect the appearance and setting of Grosvenor Park, which sits within the PRDG boundary.
- Policy ENV51 seeks to ensure that any signage to the Row beams, will be sympathetic in its design, location and use of materials. Projecting or hanging signs on street frontage elevations will only be permitted where they relate to businesses at Row level which have no street frontage; are of appropriate size, design and materials, and are sympathetic to the character and appearance of the Rows.

- Policy ENV31 seeks to protect the site and setting of a Scheduled Ancient Monument or other nationally important sites and monuments. There are a number of such sites within the city centre. Please refer to the plan (Figure 2.3). The public realm will need to be designed accordingly to respect such features.

Important sites include:

- The walls, towers, gates and posterns
- Dee Bridge
- Chester Castle (part)
- The Little Abbey Gateway, Northgate Street
- St John's Church (ruined portions)
- The Roman Amphitheatre (southern part)
- Abbey Green Roman site

Rivers and canal corridors and open spaces

The importance of the city's setting adjacent to the River Dee and Shropshire Union Canal will be reflected in the PRDG. In addition, the designated areas of open space/parks will also be considered by the guide.

- Policy ENV44 explains that the Chester Waterways Study is an important document, promoting a strategic approach for the canal corridor as it runs through the conservation area. The public realm can contribute to a coordinate approach along the canal and river.
- Policy ENV3 seeks to preserve or enhance existing open spaces which contribute positively to the character or appearance of the area. Of particular note within the PRDG boundary is Chester Race Course (Policy ENV15), which is identified as a

Strategic Open Space. The PRDG can enhance the setting of such areas. Linking open spaces and watercourses, Policy ENV19 and ENV26 seeks to protect the integrity, character or continuity of these linear spaces and features, such as the canal.

- Policy ENV20 encourages proposals which improve or increase the amount of amount of publicly accessible greenspace and the value of existing greenspace through improvements to the recreational value, wildlife value, cultural value, and landscape value. Again, the PRDG offers the scope to progress this policy objective.
- Policy ENV28 protects areas internationally important Sites of Special Scientific Interest (e.g. River Dee) and Policy ENV29 seeks to protect features of local importance such as the Grosvenor Park. It is important that the PRDG responds to these assets within the city centre.

Streets and views

Policies relating to streets and views are of relevance to the PRDG.

- Policy ENV 6 notes how development should contribute to the legibility of the area, through its form, layout and detailing.
- Policy ENV8 relates directly to this PRDG. It seeks to secure the highest quality of design, materials and furniture in the treatment and finish of the streets and spaces to reflect their character and townscape. This principle will be fundamental to the guide.

Key

ENVIRONMENT (urban and rural landscape)

Note: Entire study area designated as Chester City Conservation Area (ENV 41 - 43)

-  Inner ring road corridor (ENV12)
-  Forming the Green Network - Strategic Open Space (ENV15)
-  Other Greenspace (ENV17)
-  Forming the Green Network - Urban Corridors (ENV19)
-  Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI's) ENV28
-  Features of Local Importance (ANCV's) ENV29
-  Features of Local Importance (SNCV's and SBI's) ENV29
-  Area Excluded from Conservation Area

HERITAGE ASSETS

-  Sites of National Importance (ENV31)
-  Historic Parks, Gardens and Historic Battlefields (ENV 48)

TRANSPORT

-  Main Pedestrian Routes (TR4)
-  Cycle Routes / Millenium Way (TR5)
-  Public Transport - Buses (Priority Routes) (TR8)
-  Parking (TR13)

ECONOMY & RETAIL

-  Area Allocated for a Range of Employment Uses, Including Cultural and Tourism Uses (EC3)
-  Heritage Related Tourism Attractions (EC14)
-  Primary Shopping Streets (RET2)
-  Secondary Shopping Streets (RET3)
-  Allocations for Retail Development (RET5)

HOUSING

-  Allocations for Housing Development (HO2)

CULTURE AND LEISURE

-  Culture Areas and Historic Sites (CU3)

URBAN RENAISSANCE

-  Urban Renaissance - Site Allocations within the North East Urban Action Area (URBREN1)
-  North East Urban Action Area (URBREN2)

The council will expect the reinstatement of street surfacing after work in the city centre by statutory undertakers and other agencies. They will also promote original and innovative use of traffic regulations in the city centre to encourage signs, markings and associated street furniture to have a minimal effect on environmental quality. The council will also encourage the use of quality signs and other street furniture which reflect a sense of place and help strengthen the individual character of the urban area. The use of unnecessary signage, markings and street furniture will be discouraged and the rationalisation of existing ones promoted. Views (which are identified in an accompanying plan) should also be protected.

This PRDG reflects these principles, which will contribute to the council's objectives for improving streets and important views within the city.

Movement and transport

The policies which relate to movement within the city centre are identified below and relevance to the PRDG project highlighted.

- Policy TR2 seeks to prioritise pedestrians through a range of measures, which include traffic management schemes, such as pedestrianisation, surface treatments, limited vehicular access and other priority measures, particularly in areas of high pedestrian activity, in order to improve pedestrian safety and convenience. The policy identifies six areas where the council will introduce pedestrian improvement measures:

- Lower Bridge Street
- Northgate Street/Upper Northgate Street
- Old Dee Bridge/The Groves
- Pepper Street/Grosvenor Street
- Frodsham Street
- Foregate Street (Frodsham Street to Love Street)

This PRDG addresses all of these areas either through the overall framework in Part 3, or for some locations via the outline and detailed designs presented in Parts 8 and 9.

- Further to the above, Policy TR4 supports the development of a network of safe and convenient pedestrian routes to link the city centre and other major attractors to the main residential areas of the city (as shown on the proposals map – Figure 2.3).
- Cycling is also supported through Policy TR5, which supports the development of a network of safe and convenient cycle routes (as shown on the proposals map – Figure 2.3) and promotes the provision of cycle storage in the city centre.
- Policy TR8 also identifies areas of bus priority (as shown on the proposals map – Figure 2.3)
- Policy TR13 also seeks to make appropriate provision for parking; with some areas identified where reduced levels will be allowed, where they contribute towards alternative means of transport to the private car (as shown on the proposals map – Figure 2.3). This applies to part of the PRDG area.

Tourism

A major role for Chester is as a tourist attraction. Chester's tourism strategy seeks to achieve 8 objectives, one of which relates specifically to the public realm. It notes that Chester's ambience is a key element of its visitor appeal. Improving the public realm therefore is critical in enhancing the experience for visitors and encouraging extended and/or repeat visits. This is vital for the economic prosperity of Chester.

- Policy EC3 therefore allocates three areas to the south of the study area where a range of employment purposes, including cultural and tourism uses, which protect and enhance the historic character of the areas and are compatible with their existing cultural activities, will be permitted. These are the canal corridor, including the Old Port area and the Tower Wharf area, Chester Castle area and the Amphitheatre area.
- Policy EC14 further identifies a number of locations specifically for heritage-related tourism attractions, a number of which are within the city centre. These include the Castle area, (including Chester Castle, Castle Drive, the Little Roodee and St Mary's Hill), the Amphitheatre area (including the Amphitheatre, Dee House, the Roman Gardens, The Groves, Grosvenor Park and St John's Church and ruins) and the canal corridor (including the Old Port area and the Tower Wharf area).

The PRDG responds to Chester's role as a hub for heritage-related tourism and this will be reflected in the underlying principles outlined in the guide.

Retail

The Local Plan sets out the retail role of the city centre. The quality of the public realm should respond to the need to create vibrant and attractive shopping areas.

- Policy RET 1 seeks to maintain and enhance the city centre as a major sub-regional shopping centre and developments which sustain and enhance the attractiveness, vitality and viability of the city centre in terms of retailing, will be permitted.
- Policy RET2 seeks to protect city centre primary shopping streets for retail purposes, to protect vitality and viability and the historic nature of their retail function character. These streets are identified on the proposals map (Figure 2.3).
- Policy RET3 outlines the role of secondary shopping streets. Whilst they are not part of the core shopping area, they have retail character and act as pedestrian links between car park, transport interchanges and the primary shopping streets (see Figure 2.3 for locations).
- Policy RET5 allocates sites for further retail development; which the public realm proposals should respond to (as shown on the proposals map)

This hierarchy of spaces and streets is reflected and interpreted through the PRDG.

Culture and leisure

Policies relating to culture and leisure seek to provide a physical framework for the implementation of the Council's Cultural Strategy. The strategy seeks to ensure that Chester derives maximum benefit from sustaining a lively cultural and entertainment scene. The strategy reviewed a range of areas including the fabric of the city and the public domain.

A key aim of the Cultural Strategy is to:

“Operate as a high quality, cohesive and understandable public realm which reinforces Chester’s unique sense of place and promotes the exploration of the place and what it has to offer”

There are many buildings, places and activities which play an important role in the cultural and entertainment life of the city. Street events are also traditional in Chester, with art based activities taking place in public spaces. The expansion of pedestrianisation in the city centre has created much more space for the pedestrian to enjoy. Of particular interest to this PRDG is commentary on Chester's streets and spaces. It is noted that they, alongside the rows and walls, provide a unique experience.

“This character not only forms the context in which cultural pursuits take place but also affects how visitors and residents alike explore and discover what Chester has to offer. Chester’s townscape and architectural qualities together with its history are its key cultural assets. The Urban Design and Conservation sections in the Environment section seek to ensure that these cultural assets are reinforced, enhanced and properly interpreted”.

Again, this further reinforces the importance of the relationship between the public realm, heritage and culture.

Of relevance to the PRDG is Policy CU3 which identifies cultural / heritage areas (as shown in Figure 2.3) which encourages schemes which are compatible with and reinforce the areas cultural character.

Urban Renaissance

A key government objective is to promote 'Urban Renaissance' through the revitalisation of towns and cities. The council is strongly committed to the regeneration of older urban areas of the city.

A number of masterplans and briefs have been prepared (e.g. Old Port / Tower Wharf and Commonhall Street) and detailed proposals developed for other areas (e.g. Northgate area and the Amphitheatre).

- Policy URBREN 1 identifies large areas around the northern and eastern fringes of the city centre, extending from Northgate, through Gorse Stacks and the railway lands and along the canal corridor to Hoole Lane, as a key regeneration area (see North East Urban Action Area on proposals map – Figure 2.3). The area has been allocated for a range of uses, including residential, leisure, employment, food and drink, commercial, car parking and transport.
- Policy URBREN 2 seeks to ensure all development and surrounding spaces contribute positively to the quality and local distinctiveness of the area. Specific to public realm, the policy requires that the layout of streets, buildings and spaces should be designed to minimise the impact of cars and to encourage movements by pedestrians, cyclists and public transport and cater for the needs of those with mobility problems. The council will expect development proposals to enhance the public realm.

The PRDG responds to the allocation of this area of the city centre as a regeneration area. Improvement of the public realm in this location can contribute to the regeneration agenda.

Other Local Planning Documents

Chester also has a number of more detailed supplementary planning documents in the form of adopted SPDs (Supplementary Planning Documents) and older SPGs (Supplementary Planning Guides), which are considered as part of this public realm strategy. These include:

- Chester Riverside Development Brief, (Reviewed in 2.1 - Previous Studies and Recent Initiatives)
- Gorsestacks Development Brief, (Reviewed in 2.1 - Previous Studies and Recent Initiatives)
- Chester Station Gateway Design Guide and Conservation Management Plan & Supporting Information (2008) (not reviewed in this document)
- Sustainable Development (2008) (not reviewed in this document)
- Advertisements and Banners (2006) (not reviewed in this document)

Vision 2050: A Sustainable future for Cheshire West and Chester

In addition to the above Local Plan policies, Vision 2050: A Sustainable future for Cheshire West and Chester is also relevant. Vision 2050 addresses climate change and provides guidance for Cheshire West and Chester Authority, informing the development of a new sustainable community. It

outlines a strategy for achieving a truly sustainable community and borough by 2050. It sets out what must be characterised the borough and makes recommendations for action, which are focused around ten themes. The PRDG will make a contribution to a number of these themes, including transport and accessibility, development and the built environment and natural resources and flooding.



Chester's Midsummer Watch Parade