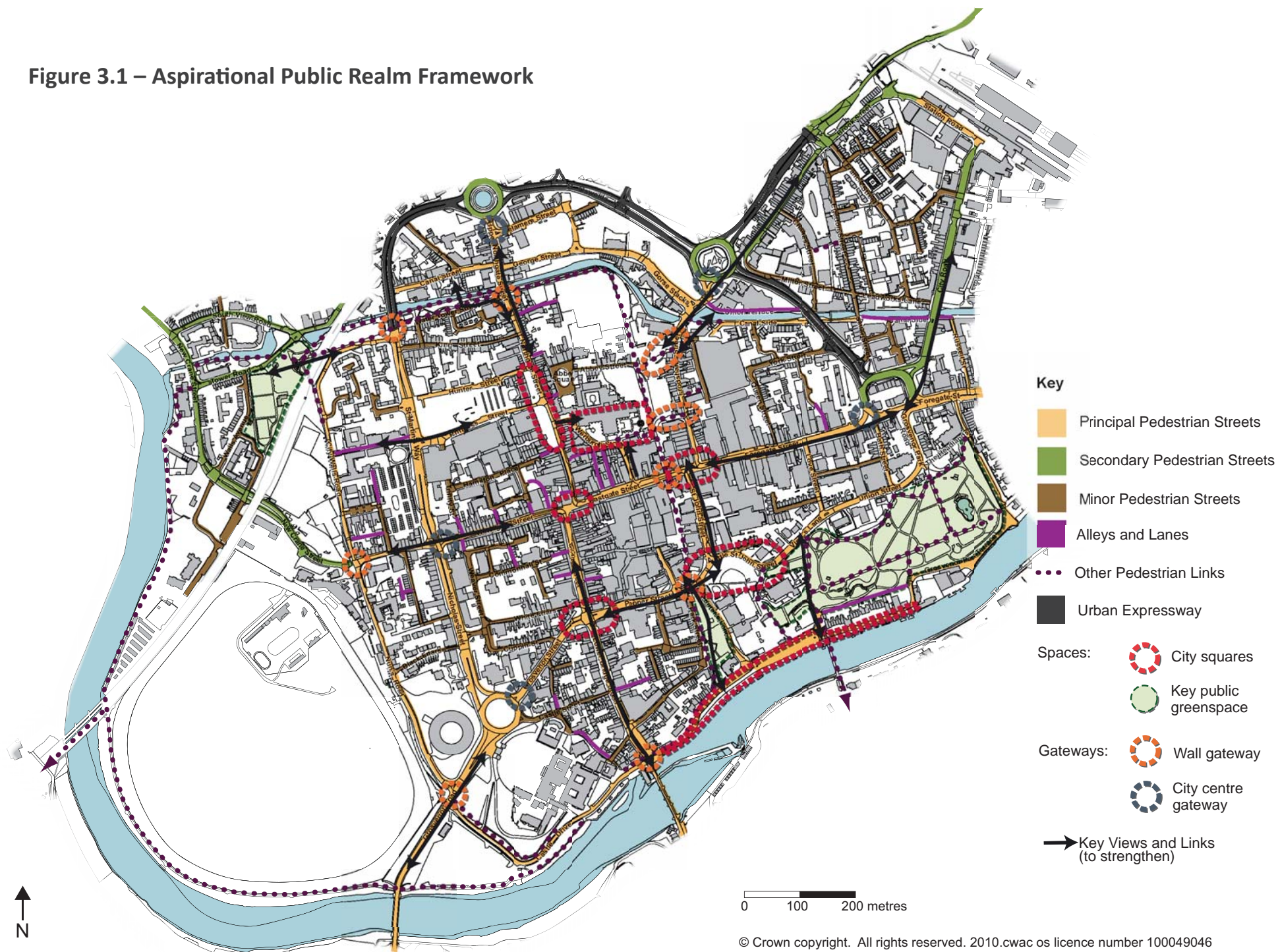


Figure 3.1 – Aspirational Public Realm Framework



## Public Realm Framework

### 3.1 The Overarching Vision and Public Realm Framework...

The vision which underpins the aspirational public realm framework is provided below along with key public realm principles. Together these elements form the framework within which the subsequent parts of the PRDG provide specific recommendations and guidance.

#### The Vision:

Chester's future public realm must build on the city's unique identity and distinctive qualities. Future investment must be of the highest quality, creating a timeless public realm that is built to last and befitting Chester's status as a premier heritage city. As well as respecting the rich history of the city, the public realm must also meet the needs of modern Chester, as a thriving economic and social centre, through the creation of a legible and coherent environment which connects Chester's assets back into the heart of the city.

#### Public Realm Principles:

##### Quality and Character

- 1) The aspiration for quality in Chester's public realm must be set at the highest standard. This should extend to all areas of the city centre in response to the intrinsic character and qualities of the city.
- 2) The setting of Chester's historic and valued architecture should be protected and enhanced by minimising street clutter and ensuring that the palette of materials used in the public realm are high quality and complementary.

- 3) It is essential that Chester's public realm does not become uniform and monotonous, but continues to foster and celebrate its idiosyncrasies maintaining a richness of place through variations in application of materials and detailing.
- 4) A balance should be achieved between historic precedent and modern design approaches through the use of materials that extend the existing tried and tested pattern of sandstone footways, granite kerbs and granite setted carriageways in Chester, whilst allowing for the retention of vernacular surfacing in minor streets and lanes.

##### User Experience

- 5) The public must be placed at the heart of the design and management of the public realm, acknowledging diversity and differences between users. The public realm must therefore be accessible to all and offer convenient, enjoyable and comfortable spaces to use.
- 6) Investment in Chester's public realm must consider opportunities to promote and facilitate a healthy evening economy, allowing Chester to establish a reputation as a place where families can enjoy an evening out.

- 7) Chester is a city full of stories waiting to be told and the public realm should be designed to incorporate animation and elements of story-telling, whether through permanent or temporary artworks, or streets and spaces that can accommodate activities and events.
- 8) The principles of 'Secured By Design' should be used in the design of Chester's public realm so that users feel comfortable and confident using the public realm during the day and night. Consideration should be given to providing well defined and convenient access routes that are well overlooked, maintained and use security features such as good lighting.



Music Hall Passage, Chester



### Access and Movement

- 9) Through the application of materials palettes and general design principles, a consistent and unified design approach should be used to create continuity and promote linkages between different parts of the city centre.
- 10) Chester's public realm should be developed to create a legible environment for users through the extension of high quality public realm materials from the existing core to cover the wider city centre to encourage intuitive exploration. Existing and additional cues in the urban environment should be used, such as street form, distinctive spaces and gateways, vistas and landmarks and use of signage (set out in the wayfinding strategy in Part 6).
- 11) Part 2 highlights the current emphasis placed on accommodating motor vehicles in the design of Chester's public realm. This imbalance must be redressed in the future, with a greater emphasis placed on design for pedestrians and cyclists. The future design of streets and spaces will need to carefully indicate to users what behaviour is appropriate based on this change in emphasis, whether users are motorists, pedestrians or cyclists. This pedestrian-led approach must accommodate the legitimate movement of vehicles, but in a sensitive manner that does not dominate the street and encourages traffic speeds appropriate to the economic, social and environmental functions of the street.



Foregate Street

- 12) It is essential that pedestrian and cycle connections and linkages to the peripheral parts of Chester city centre are highlighted and strengthened. In particular the improvement of connections across the ring road to the railway station and residential neighbourhoods (by providing safe and attractive above ground crossing points), as well as connections to the river and canal which are accessible to all.

### Collaborative Working

- 13) In order to achieve the vision for Chester's public realm it is of paramount importance that all Cheshire West and Chester Council representatives and other stakeholders (including the public) work together. This will require sustained levels of commitment, communication and cooperation.

### Sustainability

- 14) A holistic approach to sustainability is required with the aim of reducing the carbon footprint, addressing climate change and improving the natural environment. This can be achieved using a wide range of design approaches; for example, the design of streets to consider microclimates and changing climate, use of energy efficient lighting and minimisation of life-cycle impact of materials through local sourcing of suitably robust materials. Further guidance on this is provided in Parts 4-7 of the PRDG. In general, designing with longevity, durability, flexibility and adaptability in mind will ensure that the modern day requirements of the city centre are met, both now and in the future.

## Framework Elements

The public realm framework shown in Figure 3.1 is an aspirational plan which sets a strategic vision for Chester's public realm and presents the potential future arrangement of streets/routes, spaces and gateways. The following provides an overview and explanation of the framework elements.

### Principal Pedestrian Streets

The aspirational framework proposes a network of Principal Pedestrian Streets, extending out from 'The Cross' to form an efficient and permeable city centre-wide movement network. Principal streets have been selected based on the scale, character and importance of streets, as well as their current and potential future role as pedestrian routes connecting key visitor attractions. It is envisaged that these principal streets would support medium to high pedestrian use and would be designed to be pedestrian/cycle friendly, while accommodating varying levels of vehicle use.

### Secondary Pedestrian Streets

The aspirational public realm framework proposes a small number of Secondary Pedestrian Streets. These are streets that are located toward the periphery of the city centre and as a result support low to medium pedestrian use and are considered of lesser importance. Secondary streets tend to have greater importance as vehicle approach routes and arrival points in the city.

### Minor Pedestrian Streets

Minor Pedestrian Streets are much smaller in scale than the Principal and Secondary Pedestrian Streets. Minor streets provide vehicle and pedestrian access to residential and business properties within the movement grid formed by Principal and Secondary Pedestrian Streets. As a result minor streets only support low pedestrian use. Minor streets within the city centre (and in particular within the city walls) often display vernacular paving styles and materials.

### Alleys, Lanes and Other Pedestrian Links

Alleys and lanes are generally narrower than minor streets. Lanes still support some limited vehicle access in some locations, whereas alleys are generally too narrow and only provide pedestrian access. A number of historic alleys and lanes are found, particularly within the city walls. These provide connections between Principal Pedestrian Streets and Minor Pedestrian Streets offering intriguing 'routes of discovery' for pedestrians, particularly around the cross streets where they connect with 'backland' retailers and cafes/restaurants. Both alleys and lanes tend to be surfaced in vernacular paving materials.

Other pedestrian links include the City Walls route, riverside walk/promenade, canal towpath and Grosvenor Park. These offer important connections between the city, river and canal not provided by streets. Pedestrian links vary in width and surfacing materials.

### Urban Expressway

These are sections of the inner ring road that have been designed and operate purely for vehicle use and are of no or limited use to pedestrians. As such they are not streets and so do not form part of the city centre's public realm, although they do affect views and perceptions of the northern part of the city centre. For these reasons they have not been considered as part of the street types described and illustrated in sections 3.3-3.8, however consideration has been given to their future treatment in the outline designs in Part 8.

### City Spaces/Squares and Public Green Spaces

These are spaces strongly connected to the city's movement framework, which can provide a destination as well as an opportunity to stop and rest. These spaces can perform a variety of functions, offering seating, shelter, outdoor eating/drinking, meeting places and space for performances or markets.



Other Pedestrian Links include the City Walls Route and Canal Towpath

### City and City Wall Gateways

The locations of proposed City Gateways have been chosen to establish a sense of arrival and improve first impressions of the city for those arriving by car via the inner ring road, as well as strengthen pedestrian orientation and links at a few key locations.

The City Wall Gateways have been identified as additional and historically important gateways to the city of particular relevance to pedestrians/cyclists. The locations of City Wall Gateways have been chosen to highlight the importance of existing gateway structures, as well as highlight the presence of the walls at key pedestrian access points and where physical gateways are missing.



Bridgegate

### Key Views and Links

In addition to the framework of streets, spaces and gateways, Figure 3.1 also identifies the key views and physical links, which need to be protected, enhanced and strengthened in order to improve pedestrian movement and visitor orientation in the city. It is important that as part of improvements to these links issues of accessibility are addressed, particularly to enable better access to the river and canal. The key views and links have been selected using the analysis of existing views in Part 2 (Figure 2.6) and based on the need to improve the links listed under public realm principle 12.

Existing vistas/links to be protected and enhanced through public realm design are:

- The Cathedral viewed from the southern end of Brook Street, from the Town Hall Square and from Eastgate Street;
- Views of the Welsh hills from openings along Northgate Street;
- St Peter's Church/The Cross viewed from Bridge Street;
- Eastgate and Eastgate Clock viewed from Foregate Street;
- Bridgegate/St Michael's Church viewed from Lower Bridge Street;
- Watergate and The Guildhall (former Holy Trinity Church) viewed from Watergate Street;

- Northgate viewed from Northgate/Upper Northgate Street;
- Newgate viewed from Pepper Street/Little St John Street/Vicar's Lane; and
- Views/links between the Grosvenor Bridge and HQ/Castle.

Vistas/links to be strengthened and developed through public realm design are:

- The view/link to Roman Amphitheatre from St John Street;
- the view/link to the river via the Roman Gardens and Souters Lane;
- the view/link to the river via St John's Church/Grosvenor Park;
- the view/link to the river via Lower Bridge Street;
- the link to the canal via Frodsham Street;
- the link to the canal via Northgate Street/Water Tower Street;
- the view/link between the canal, Water Tower Gardens and the City Walls.





St Peter's Church and The Cross viewed from Bridge Street