

# Cheshire West & Chester Council

## Review of Commonhall Street development brief public consultation

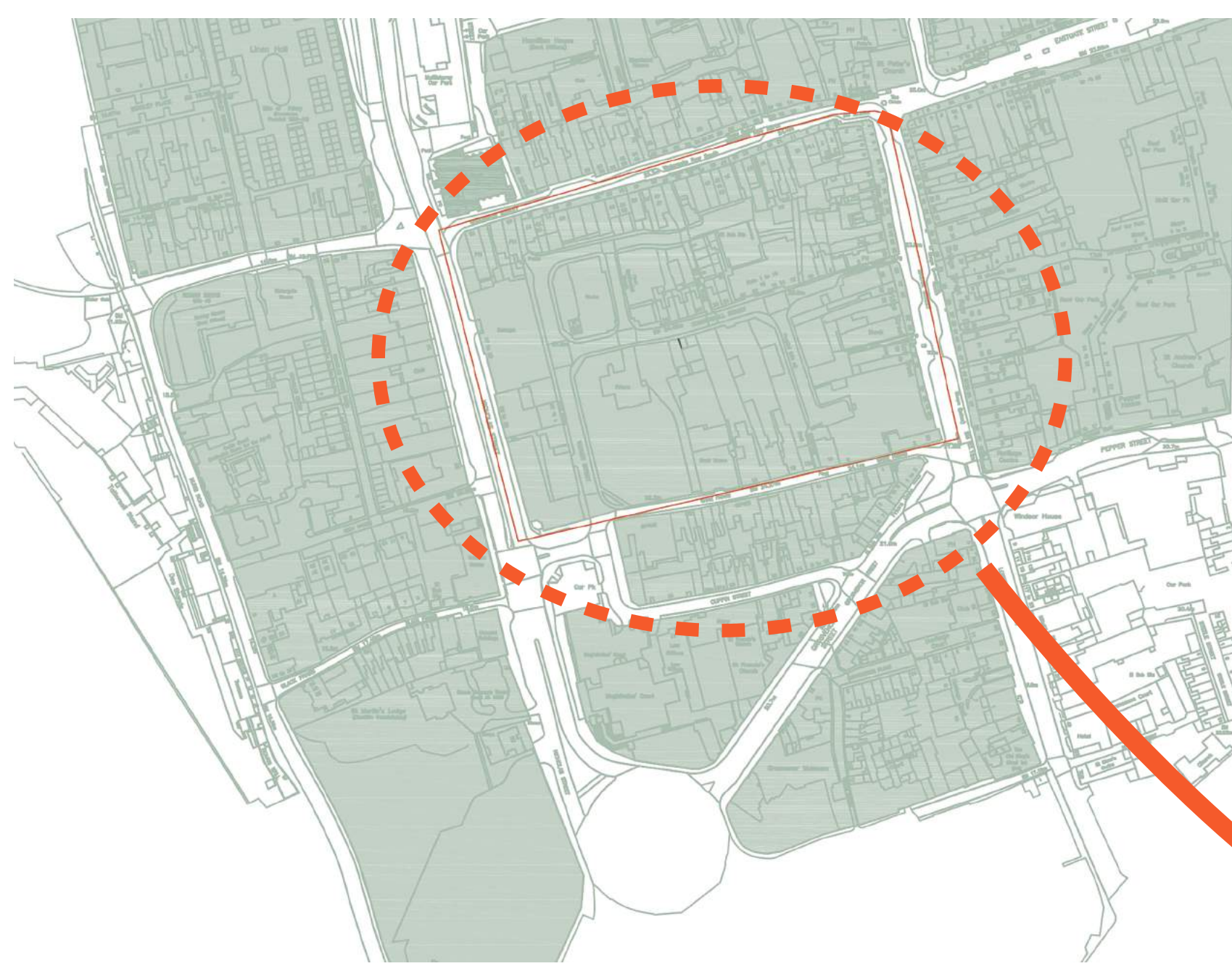
### Introduction

The current development brief for Commonhall Street was prepared prior to 1996. The area was covered by the Greater Chester Local Plan, which was currently under review at the time. Borough wide policy provided for mixed uses of residential and retail in the area and designated primary and secondary shopping streets.

The original development brief for Commonhall Street was intended to be complementary to the Greater Chester Local Plan, enabling area specific policies to be proposed where it was felt that additional policy requirements were not sufficient to guide the future development of the area.

Since the preparation of the original Commonhall Street Development Brief, there have been extensive changes in administration and planning policy, including the amalgamation of the three boroughs of Chester, Vale Royal and Neston and Ellesmere Port into Cheshire West and Chester. Planning reforms at the national level have led to revisions in respect of planning policy, and the Cheshire West and Chester Local Plan Part One (Strategic Policies) has now been adopted, with Part Two intended to be adopted this year.

The economic climate in which development takes place has also shifted considerably. A need was identified to review the original Development Brief for this area, to bring it in line with revised planning policies and identify any additional policies required that would help to guide the future development of the area.



Commonhall Street is located on an east to west axis within the urban block defined by Watergate Street, Bridge Street, White Friars and Nicholas Street. It falls within an area that has a rich historical legacy and existing buildings within the south western quarter possess strong character that contribute significantly to the quality of the townscape. The site also falls within an area of archaeological importance.

Commonhall Street enjoys direct pedestrian linkages to the primary retail frontages of Watergate Street and Bridge Street, including the Rows. These two streets draw significant trade and contribute significantly to the local economy of Chester.

### The Study Area

Commonhall Street is situated within the south western quadrant of the historic central core of Chester, within the borough of Cheshire West. It is located within the Roman City Walls and is included within the Chester City Conservation Area. Chester Race Course is situated to the south west of the study area and Chester Castle, the River Dee and associated walkways can be found a short walk away to the south.



Plans to show site boundary and location of the study area within the historic core of Chester.



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## Analysis

An analysis of the study area was undertaken to identify the issues specific to the area that need to be addressed. The full analysis is available to view within Part One of the Draft Revised Commonhall Street Development Brief, available to view during this consultation event. Key findings have been summarised and are set out below.

## Urban Block Form

The highways improvements of the 1970's have had a significant impact upon sub-block form and legibility within the area. A long term strategy would help to address the repair of the sub-block form in the longer term, that can be used to inform proposals as sites come forward. This should give consideration to the location of active frontages within the street hierarchy.



Rear facades of post 1970's development front onto Weaver Street

## Repairing the Historic Urban Form

The remaining gap sites and vacant buildings within the built form should be brought forward for sustainable re-development, in order to repair the historic urban form and improve the quality of the townscape in this area. Building heights should show consistency within the area and land uses should be complementary to current land uses within the study area. Proposed schemes should be mindful of the impact that their buildings will have upon the existing street enclosure and provide adequate bin storage to accommodate the needs of proposed uses.



Gap sites detract from the townscape quality within the area

## The Rows Interface

A critical issue relates to the interface between the Rows and associated rear façades. Whilst the public face of the Rows contributes greatly to the primary retail areas of Bridge Street and Watergate Street, many of the more functional and unsightly aspects of these buildings occur to the rear. Commercial expansion has reduced available space to accommodate refuse storage, servicing provision, vehicular access and parking. These areas are fully accessible, with no clear delineation between principle pedestrian routes through the area and areas servicing principally as service yard areas.

The strategy for Commonhall Street should include specific policies to address these issues as follows:-

- Develop a clearly defined network of public realm areas that are distinct from service yard areas to inform a strategy for investment relating to public realm
- Due consideration of available space for refuse storage should be given at the planning submission stage for change of use or extension of commercial premises
- Provision of a commercial waste bin store to support commercial uses on the Rows by the local authority waste team
- Define a clear strategy for parking and access to commercial/retail premises on Watergate Street and Bridge Street, to include disabled parking and inclusive access routes.

## Transport Hierarchy and Public Realm

An opportunity exists to re-balance the existing transport hierarchy by upgrading existing pedestrian pavements, so that pedestrian surfaces are improved and existing conflicts between pedestrians and vehicles are reduced. Public realm improvements have the potential to significantly enhance both the visual and physical experience within the Commonhall Street area..



Existing public realm surfacing on Pierpoint Lane needs re-levelling



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## Revised Development Brief Objectives

A review of the 7 principle objectives contained within the original Development Brief has been undertaken. These aims have been slightly modified, but much of the original intent remains in place. Additional objectives in respect of public realm and commercial waste have been added.

### 1. Townscape Quality

Improve the townscape quality in the heart of the city and increase pedestrian activity and vitality in the area. This will be achieved by encouraging refurbishment and re-use of vacant buildings and infill development, to encourage occupation of existing and new buildings.



### 2. Urban Form

Repair the urban block form to provide greater coherency and legibility within the Commonhall area, and provide additional linkages to the wider Chester area. An increase in active frontages would benefit natural surveillance within this area, and help to improve safety for pedestrians and cyclists within the public realm.



### 3. Building Conservation

Protect important historic buildings and fabric, townscape characteristics and archaeological remains, in line with existing planning policies for conservation and archaeology.



### 4. New Infill Development

Encourage economic regeneration for mixed uses including housing, commercial and retail uses, through new development on gap sites and reuse of existing vacant buildings; reinforce city centre retailing by complementary developments, including specialist shops.



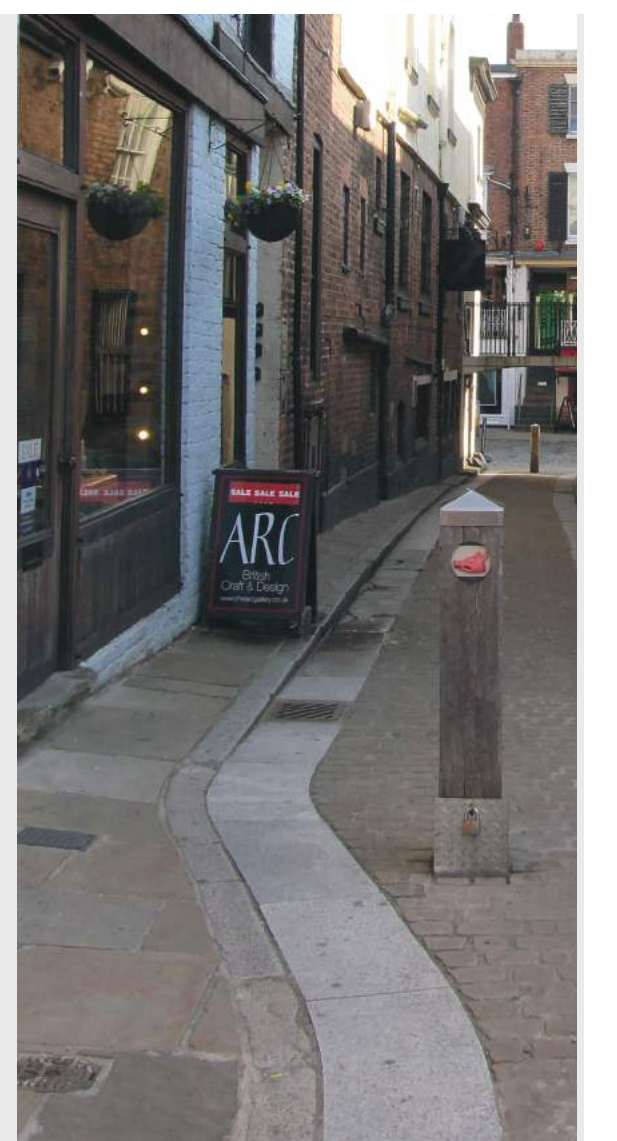
### 5. High Quality Design

Encourage high quality design which reinforces the positive elements of the area and works contextually with the character of the historic core, whilst supporting modern methods of working and living.



### 6. Public Realm Improvements

Define the street hierarchy and resulting public areas clearly through public realm improvements, particularly in respect of pedestrian pavements, and reduce the visibility of areas functioning as service yards to the Rows; create local environments and spaces which make the area a destination, and encourage people to use and enjoy the spaces as well as the buildings.



### 7. Commercial Waste Storage

Ensure that new development incorporates appropriate provision for discretely sited commercial waste provision that is not visible from the adjacent public realm.



### Further Information

More detailed information in respect of these objectives can be found within Part Two of the draft version of the Revised Commonhall Street Development Brief, available to view during this consultation event.



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### The Vision

The vision is to promote an exciting offer of City Centre living and working that enables friends, family and colleagues to enjoy the assets found within the unique historic environment that Chester has to offer, in a safe and accessible environment.

### Location, Location, Location...

The Rows are identified as the most important surviving medieval townscape within western Europe, and the proposals encourage an everyday interaction within an internationally recognised historic core. Strategically, the regeneration intention is to extend the quality of the experience found within the historic core into the study area.

An opportunity exists for future re-development within the area to enhance the existing historic assets, enabling the development of a true sense of place. Building upon the unique historic environment within the Commonhall area, adjacent to the historic core, will provide an attractive environment that will persuade potential residents and businesses to choose Commonhall Street as their preferred location for both their living and working needs.

### Securing a Legacy for Future Generations...

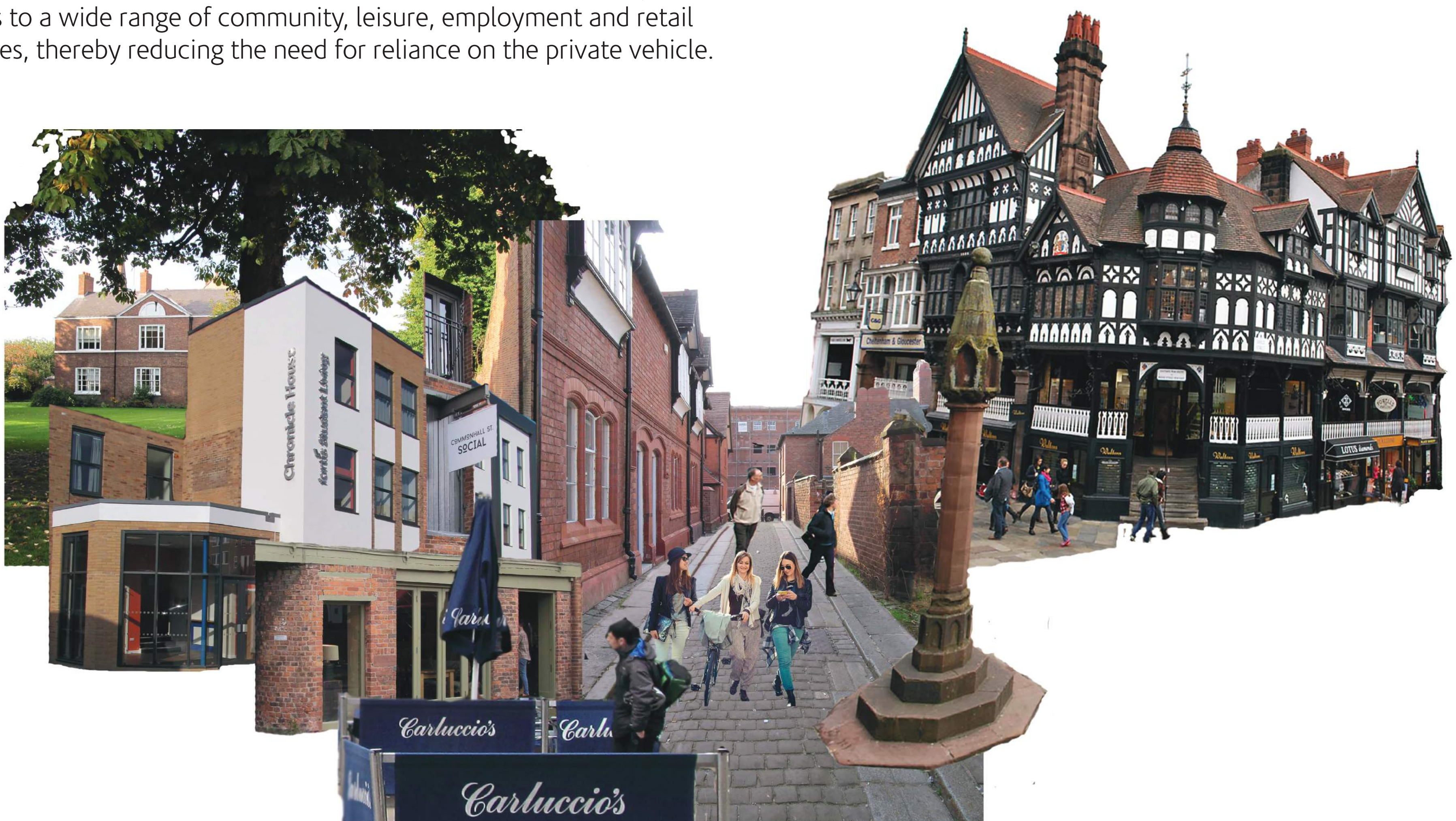
Sustainable development underpins the proposals at all levels, including the re-use of existing buildings, appropriate stewardship of historic assets and re-development on brownfield land, with easy access to a wide range of community, leisure, employment and retail facilities, thereby reducing the need for reliance on the private vehicle.

### Modern Methods of Living and Working...

The original vision for Commonhall Street advocated an artisan quarter, continuing the model of the burghage plot. Recent shifts in working patterns, coupled with IT developments enable working from home as an acceptable alternative to conventional methods of working. A contemporary interpretation of the burghage plot is perfectly feasible in this location, reinforcing the artisan concept originally put forward, but allowing for a wider reach within the population.

### Improving the Public Realm...

In order to improve the pedestrian experience and encourage developer appetite within the Commonhall Street area, opportunities for public realm improvements will be pro-actively sought by Cheshire West and Chester, and land holdings managed with a view to enhancing the townscape quality of the area. Public realm improvements will help to increase investor confidence and support the re-development of gap sites, whilst encouraging quicker wins to be gained from the re-use of vacant buildings.



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# Review of Commonhall Street development brief **public consultation**

**1** Have we identified all the key issues?

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**2** Is there anything missing?

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**3** Do you agree with the vision set out  
for the area?

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**4** Do you agree with the seven principle  
objectives set out?

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**5** Any other comments?

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