

# Alnwick Town Centre Sustainable Travel Audit

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Developing a programme of works for active travel in the Town Centre

February 2015



# 1 Town Centre Audit

## Introduction

Facilities for pedestrian and cycling were recorded within the town centre boundary in order to inform future improvements to the area. This section begins with overall observations of the streets in Alnwick, followed by distinct issues affecting the primary retail and town centre streets.

The location and condition of key pedestrian and cycling infrastructure was recorded, including: drop kerbs, ramps, hand rails, stairs, foot/cycle bridges, underpasses, sub-standard lengths of footway, pedestrian refuges, zebra crossings, Puffin crossings, Toucan crossing, shared paths, cycle routes (off and on road), advisory cycle lanes, cycle parking, pedestrian/cycling signage, obstructive street furniture, pedestrian areas/zones. Full details of the audit and photo index are included at the end of this report.

An interactive map showing locations and features of the audit, as well as recommendations that follow in this report is available at: <http://tinyurl.com/AlnwickTravelAudit>

### 1.1 Bondgate Within

Bondgate Within gives access to the city centre from the east and serves as the main shopping street. Cars are frequently queuing on both sides of the town gate that presents a poor entrance for visitors to the town, either on car, foot or bike. Parking on both sides of this street leave few gaps for pedestrians to cross, which can be hazardous due to poor visibility. Walkway widths are good for observed footfall volumes during weekday but sign posts, planters and other street clutter create pinch points at various locations which can cause some congestion on the footway at busier times (e.g. market days, weekends and school holidays). The remainder of the streetscape is occupied by carriageway and parking bays. Parts of Bondgate Within are cluttered with street furniture that is redundant for the most part.



Figure 1: Bondgate Within is a poor environment for pedestrians with a great deal of disorderly vehicle parking.

### 1.2 Narrowgate

Narrowgate is a continuation of Bondgate Within westwards. Distance between property curtilage is less than 7m, with footway widths less than 1m in parts before the street widens at the intersection with Fenkle St. Parking is restricted with double yellow lines on the street and street clutter is minimal). Kerb up-stands are relatively low but there is a lack of dropped kerbs at desire lines around the intersection and crossing on foot is further impeded by bollards and stepped kerbs. Further west and towards The Lion Bridge the sweeping nature of the street creates some issue with visibility when crossing the street.



Figure 2: Two-way traffic is permitted along Narrowgate despite insufficient carriageway width and narrow footways.

Vehicles flow in both directions, despite there being insufficient width for movement. The proximity of vehicles to pedestrians and shop frontages creates a poor and uncomfortable visitor experience.

### 1.3 Pottergate

Pottergate is a wider carriageway than Narrowgate that joins the latter from the east. The start of the street is adorned with an historic fountain and lighting column in the centre of the carriageway that is flanked by bollards and warning signs. An attractive, green square on the south side with some benches adds to a tasteful gateway and represents the only public park or landscaped area within the town centre boundary. Traffic volume is very low since the road is closed at Pottergate Tower at the top (west end) with bollards that prevents through traffic except cycles. Hence, the street serves as an access road for tenants or residents of adjacent buildings and St James' Church.



Figure 3: Pottergate is a quiet road for accessing a number of properties off the street.

### 1.4 Dispensary Street and Lagny Street

Dispensary St becomes Lagny St nearer the town centre and connects the north-west of Alnwick to the centre. The street is set on a slight incline lined with modern housing developments (apartments) as well as a large supermarket, car park and a number of new housing and business developments. Apart from a signalised crossing near Stonewell Ln, there is a lack of safe pedestrian crossings to serve desire lines across the road. The supermarket (Morrison's) and the main bus station at the lower section of Lagny St generate a great deal of footfall in the area and into town yet pedestrians must navigate a number of lengthy crossings in this approach to the town centre.



Figure 4: Dispensary St lacks suitable crossings for pedestrians.

### 1.5 Clayport and Market Street

Clayport St gives access to the city centre from the west along a relatively steep hill that noticeably encourages speeding. This is compounded by a widening of the street as it approaches the centre. The road is lined with grass and planted verges as well as perpendicular parking for adjacent buildings. Passing the bus station Clayport St turns into Market St where the signalised crossing is located far from all desire lines. The access to the crossing from the south side of the street is accessed via steps or through a narrow ramp lined with pedestrian railings that is a poor use of public space littered with street clutter. Up to this point



Figure 5: The town centre is dominated by a busy vehicle route and cluttered car parking on Market St.

vehicle parking lines both sides of the street, after which they are on the south side only and vary in arrangements.

Seating and public space is poorly served on Clayport, which becomes Market St as the road splits into a wide parking area with cars parked in two open areas on both sides of the road. Hence, this focal area of the town resembles little more than a car park that is completely dominated by parking and passing vehicles. Another controlled pedestrian crossing is located at the lower end of the street where the north side footway is at its narrowest point. A change in surface also guides impaired users over the cobbled car park, but the current provision for users with mobility issues is poor.



Figure 6: Clayport St is a wide carriageway that has the potential for a number of improvements to develop this route into town for various users.

## 1.6 Fenkle Street



Figure 7: As with other central streets in Alwick, car parking is accommodated for over public space and pedestrian movement and particularly evident on Fenkle St.

Fenkle St assumes a character of its own due to its narrower, sloping and uneven gradient towards Narrowgate. Road width and building height proportion create more sense of enclosure on this attractive street. Off-street parking is provided for on the west side, while the east side with double yellow lines and narrow footways is frequently exploited by vehicles parking on the footway for excessive periods. The wider pavements on the west side allow restaurants to use this space while ensuring good access along the street for people on foot.

## 2 Network and Street Development

The following section outlines the recommended improvements to the town centre. Alnwick is a particularly difficult streetscape to explore and navigate on foot, as there are a number of busy roads that bisect the centre. Vistas and general visibility across town is also poor and many visitors or tourists to the area and the Castle and Gardens are in many respects excluded from the town centre by poor permeability and links between these two areas.

In order to inform recommendations in this report, the following conditions in Alnwick Town Centre were pivotal:

- Poor permeability for users on foot to the central retail core from the East, West and South.
- Lack of physical and visual links between Alnwick Garden and Alnwick Castle.
- Car saturation Vs public space- numerous but small pockets of car parking throughout the town centre that interfere with movement and space for people.
- Organic, intricate and interesting street layout; irregular, stepped footways; a range of high quality existing materials; disorganised on-street parking arrangements.

Possible solutions include:

- A consistent, organised design theme and street cross-section that connects new junctions.
- Improved crossing facilities across Dispensary/ Lagny St, Bondgate/ Hotspur St.
- Convenient and direct access between Alnwick Gardens and Castle.
- Widening footways.
- Parking reorganising.
- A long distance route to link Alnmouth, Alnmouth Railway Station and residential areas to the south-east with Alnwick Town Centre.

Town centre developments have been designed to create a gradual phase from traditional highway improvements (formal crossings) on the outer edge of the town centre boundary, to informal traffic calming measures (narrowing strips) to shared space junctions at the town centre core.

Currently, on and off street parking is provided for on every street in a variety of configurations that maximises carriageway space in the town centre for the convenience of car users. In practice, parked vehicles block desire lines, reduce pedestrian-driver inter-visibility and diminish the aesthetic of the town centre. Reorganising and limiting the number of parking spaces (100 max.) within central areas allows essential space to carry out public space improvements mentioned previously. The aim is to cater for those already travelling walking around the town centre, create a safe environment for those walking and cycling to the town centre to shop (~45%) or work (~25%) and encourage more choices for active modes of travel to and within Alnwick.

## 2.1 Crossing improvements: Dispensary/Lagney St

A lack of safe, convenient access to the town centre on foot from the west bus station, Windsor Gardens and Clayport St should be improved with pedestrian crossings at 3 busy intersections, as well as quieter access roads between them. At the east, one existing crossing next to the town gate onto Bondgate St should be improved to provide permeability and access in all directions. Zebra crossings would be most suitable for these sites, which have proven to be most effective in encouraging drivers to give way to pedestrians, reduce traffic speeds and provide a more sensitive crossing than formal signal controlled systems.

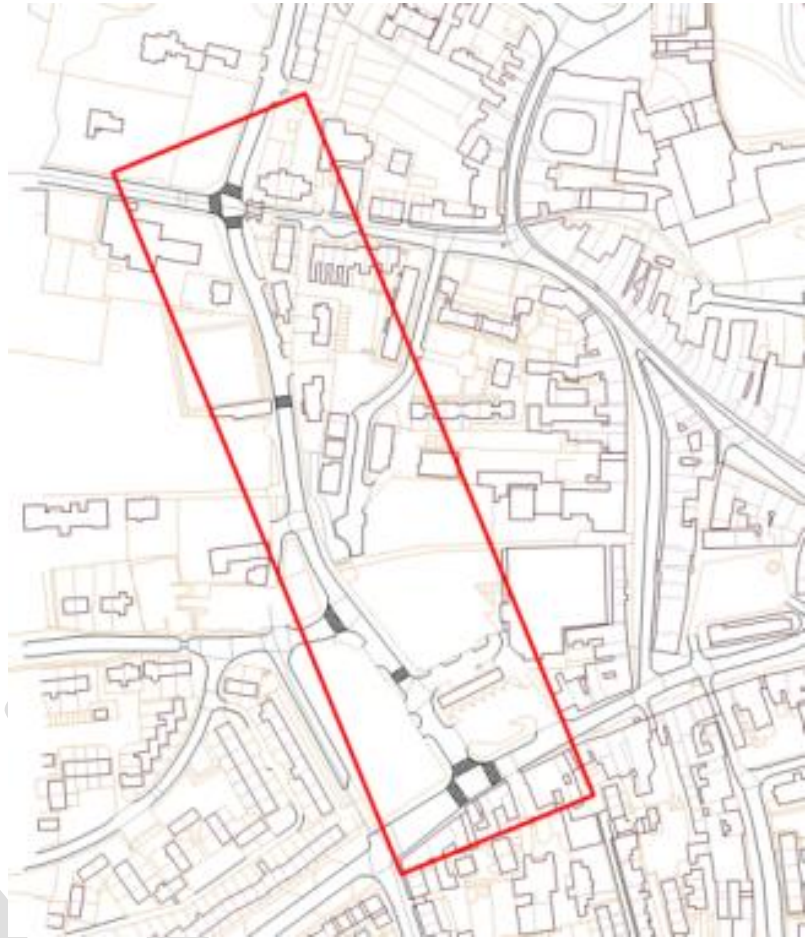


Figure 8: New crossing locations on Dispensary Ln/ Lagney St

## 2.2 Alnwick Gardens and Castle Access

Narrow footways and ambiguous walking routes between the town centre and these two significant attractions in Alnwick do little to lure visitors between them. There are no visual links to the town centre and landmarks, nor adequate semantics and signage to indicate the proximity. Hence, the Gardens and Castle seem disconnected from the town centre, which could benefit from a great deal of custom if more visitors and tourists could be encouraged to make the small trip (and vice versa).

Widening the walkways and providing simple gateway features such as trees and plants as well as suitable signposting, will ease access and encourage visitors to and from the town centre. Improvements should be focussed on two key routes:

1. **Denwick Lane:** the busy B-road into town is a picturesque route that follows the Garden walls into town. Updated signage to accompany or replace the map at the entrance to the gardens, preferably with walking times, would help to guide visitors to the nearby town centre. There is a wide slip road at the former entrance to the gardens that is unused and should be filled and planted to create a continuous footway and inviting path into town. Widening the footway on the west side would also be recommended and a crossing point to serve the bus stop and the Alnwick Infirmary. Finally, planters along the route would highlight a continuous route into the town and mirror the example set by Alnwick Gardens just a short distance away.
2. **Greenwell Rd:** signage and footway improvements on the west side of the road would create a short connection to Bondgate Without (and a new junction/ town gateway at the end of the street). Continuing the footway over the car park entrance creating a raised crossing would also assist users on foot across the side road that also leads directly to a bus stop. These

improvements would aim to create a visual, pedestrian friendly 'corridor' to Bondgate Without that uplifts the car park environment somewhat. Further investigation regarding land ownership should be carried out as some improvements could be made between Greenwell Rd to Alnwick Castle entrance, particularly signage or interpretation boards.

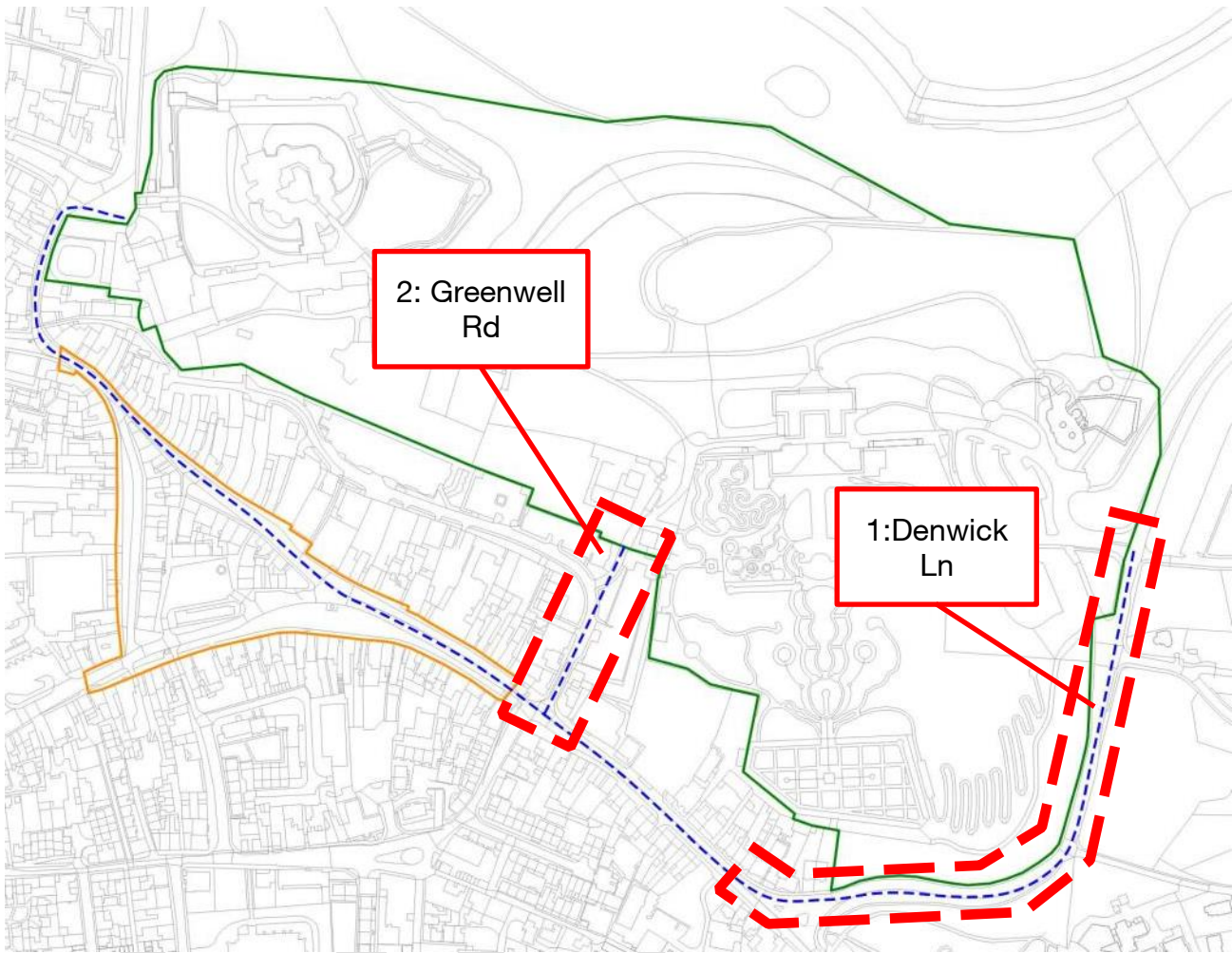


Figure 9: Greenwell Rd and Denwick Lane routes in the context of the Town Centre primary shopping area (orange) and Gardens and Castle boundary (green).

## 2.3 Pottergate 'Quietway'

The wide entrance and isolated fountain at the mouth of Pottergate could be improved by building out the footway to create a small public space that incorporates the fountain. A build out on the south side of the street where the road flares excessively that leads to a raised crossing to the fountain should be included to considerably narrow the crossing and reduce vehicle speeds entering the street. 'Echelon' car parking could be introduced on the north side of the street and would increase capacity to the street and cater for displaced parking lost in the town centre from other schemes. Finally, coloured narrowing strips along Pottergate will help to define the running lanes and visually narrow the street to create a cycle friendly street environment.



Figure 10: Pottergate (top: existing) and concepts (above) showing crossing improvements and an improved parking layout (circa 2 additional spaces)

## 2.4 Bondgate Within/ Narrowgate Shopping Street

Bondgate Within is the busiest shopping street in Alnwick and proposals to improve the street aim to elevate the quality of the public realm, shopping experience and freedom of movement. Car parking could still be accommodated by rearranging the street layout although vehicle movement should be limited to prevent unnecessary traffic using the street to access other areas of the town. Key features include:



- No-entry (except cycles) at Narrowgate.
- Raised table junction at Narrowgate 'with Fenkle St- narrow entry/ exit carriageway flare onto Fenkle St and widen east side footway on Narrowgate (to complement 'no entry except cycles').
- Informal crossing points.
- Raised crossings and public space developments at Paikes St, Market PI alleyway and Greenwell Ln (leading to Greenwell Rd parking).
- North/ east side parking only merging capacity from west/ south side of street (see Figure 15, below).





Figure 11: Narrowgate looking toward Bondgate Within with public space and crossing improvements. Restricting traffic from entering from the Narrowgate end and raising the surface of the road while maintaining a distinction between road and footway gives the perception of space on the street. More importantly, vehicles distanced from pedestrians at this pinch point. (Below: existing)

## 2.5 Market Street Renewal

Market St poses a number of challenges as it serves as the main vehicular route through town as well as a primary shopping street containing a range of businesses and retail services. The street presents itself and the town centre to visitors as an untidy car park with wide roads that are difficult to cross. Hence, a number of improvements have been proposed along the street to reorganise the space, reduce the effective carriageway width, maximise space for movement on foot and uplift the appearance of this vital town centre street. Vehicle access can be maintained for the most part, except at Alnwick Tower- a notorious pinch point.

### 2.5.1 Market Street entrance at Fenkle St



Figure 12: Market St at Fenkle St entrance redesign maximises public space.

Providing a welcoming entrance to the street, reducing vehicle speeds and improving crossing opportunities creates a much needed entrance to the town centre. A redesigned, shared space junction would be highly recommended and a more appropriate solution for the historic setting.

## 2.5.2 Town Centre fountain focal space



Figure 13: Visibility analysis of Alwick. Red areas indicate spaces that are most visible from other places.

Visibility analyses shows that the intersection of Market St and Bondgate Within is the most visible area in the town centre from other areas, including the connecting spaces into Market Square and Market Street. Hence, creating a high quality public space that joins the southern side of Market St with the Market Square area that gives access from to shopping and leisure will not only benefit users on foot, but create a highly visible feature that encourages users from around the town centre.



Figure 14: Exemplar shared space junction redesign in Poynton, Cheshire. Market St carries considerably less traffic volume but would benefit greatly from a more attractive street design that helps people on foot move more freely.

This main intersection in the town centre is currently insufficient to allow safe crossings for pedestrians. A substantial redevelopment of this space would create a focal point within the town centre and highlight the open space, fountain and attractive vistas that orientate visitors. The loss of some on street parking will be required to narrow the carriageway and create shorter, safer crossing points.

## 2.5.3 Market Street road space

Space on Market St itself is poorly used, with a mix of 'echelon' configuration, parallel or off street parking, a wide carriageway but unsuitable footways. Shop frontages are visible due to the slope across the street but this is compounded by vehicles and steps that block access and desire lines.



**Figure 15: Visualisation of Market Street redesign with median strip and crossing points to break up car parking on and off the street.**

A new street design would introduce narrowing strips and a central median strip to reduce vehicle speeds and improve crossing opportunities. The north side of the street that has a redundant bus layby and excessive loading areas could be reallocated with car parking lost from other areas, but in smaller, uniform parking sections that are broken up with build-outs to open up the footway and encourage crossing points.

Awnings or canopies above shop windows serve both an aesthetic and protective role on the street to shelter visitors in bad weather. Properly specified and installed canopies that do not obstruct the footway can create a welcoming and inviting route and entrance to shops. An ideal location would be around the central block bounded by Market St, Bondgate Within and Fenkle St. Landlords could be encouraged to install them, through business grants or planning assistance, for example.



**Figure 16: Examples of consistent and attractive awnings on shopping streets.**

## 2.6 Fenkle St

This characterful street is noticeably quieter than Bondgate Within and Market St as it serves as a route to quieter, northern areas and hosts fewer shops. Similar to Market St though, Fenkle St has a sloping, cobbled parking area that dominates the street and can be difficult to permeate on foot. A number of simple improvements are proposed on Fenkle St to improve facilities on foot and introduce a central focal point that links to an alleyway to the supermarket complex behind Fenkle St.

- **Central crossing point:** a small number of parking spaces should be reallocated to create a small build-out that flanks Stonewell Ln. The existing footway should be constructed to create a continuous surface over the side road. This should include a footway westwards to the Morrison's supermarket at the end of the lane, which is frequently blocked by parked cars. Formalising this route with a dedicated, protected footway will enable this important desire line that is used to avoid the busy bus station area on Lagny St/ Clayport St.
- **Footway widening:** along east side, focussing on the south end that meets the junction with Market St.
- **Parking organisation:** orderly, allocated bays that are parallel at the south end and perpendicular for the remainder of the street, broken up at two locations with planted build-outs to create attractive, informal crossing points.
- **Narrowgate junction:** widen footway on east side, narrow exit lane width and create a raised table crossing area.

## 2.7 The Tower: Alnwick Gateway

The area around Alnwick Tower should be improved to create an attractive space that is more befitting of a welcoming entrance into Alnwick. Key features for improvements to this authentic gateway include:

- Exit/ outbound vehicle traffic only
- Bondgate Without/ Greenwell Rd/ Hotspur St junction redesign, consistent with shared space schemes at Market St (see 2.5.1, 2.5.2) to highlight visitors arriving by car to Greenwell Rd car parks and Hotspur St.
- Public space and landscaping improvements on town centre (west side) to enhance the areas and improve the longevity of The Tower.

## 2.8 Alnmouth Station Cycle Path

The existing cycle and walking route to the nearest main line railway station at Alnmouth is not cohesive and requires some mixing with fast, rural traffic. There are a number of improvements and options to consider in order to provide a continuous route from the town centre. Northumberland County Council have recently approved the extension of the car park to the west of the station and rail line, indicating a continued interest in the station as a commuter and visitor link with Alnwick.

### 2.8.1 Town centre to Prudhoe St/ Barter Books

Improvements to the entrance to the town centre should include cycle friendly infrastructure so a good transition from public space and junction redesign at Alnwick Tower (see 2.7). Mandatory cycle lanes and the removal of the centre line would be appropriate and would cause minimal objection as car parking is already restricted or banned along the road.

### 2.8.2 Barter Books to Lionheart Enterprise Park

#### Option 1: Railway path

The original railway line that terminated at Alnwick station (now 'Barter Books') could be reinstated as a cycle track to create the most direct route. This option would require a crossing at South Rd and would be the preferred route if an A1 footbridge were developed. Although footpaths sections of footpaths make up the route, further investigation will be needed to confirm land ownership north west of South Rd. At Aydon Gardens, a former track should be reinstated between the industrial and residential properties that lead onto South Rd (A1068). Practically speaking, this may require the acquisition of land but would fortuitously link this employment area with the town centre.

East of South Rd, the existing footpath (former railway line) should be widened and resurfaced to upgrade the path.

Bridging the A1 would require a significant investment to create a footbridge spanning the trunk road, but this relatively expensive piece of infrastructure would be a key part of maintaining a continuous and direct route between the town centre to maximise the amount of users. This bridge would also provide a link to the Aln Valley Railway station adjacent to the Lionheart Enterprise Park (as well as the business park itself) that also suffers from poor access on foot or bike.



Figure 17: A prefabricated footbridge spanning a busy trunk road.

#### Option 2: Wagon Way Rd

This quiet road links a number of residential developments, large employers and the Willowburn Leisure Centre. Although it is not as direct as the former option, it would be a cheaper option and one that would avoid the need to bridge the A1.

The road links a number of residential roads but recently had speed cushions removed following resurfacing works. The majority of properties on the street benefit from off-street parking. In order to create an on-road cycle road, 'cycle street' improvements would be applied, such as narrowing strips/ advisory cycle lanes and parking restrictions to prevent the cycle facility being blocked by parked vehicles.



Figure 18: 'Cycle street' concept for Wagonway Rd.

### 2.8.3 Railway path



Figure 19: Northampton and Lamport Railway Line (steam railway) with flanking cycle track.

The planned Aln Valley Railway Line that will reinstate the original route could be supported with a cycle track running adjacent to the tracks. Aln Valley Railway Trust require the construction of an access road that runs parallel to the railway for access and drainage purposes. The Trust have expressed a keen interest in this becoming a cycle track that could precede and foster interest in the development of the railway.

It would be highly recommended to seize this opportunity and support the development of this track, regardless of which option (see 2.8.2) is implemented. Due to the nature and context of this site, local communities would benefit from it as a leisure/ tourist cycle route as well as a safe commuter route to the station.

## 2.9 Signage

Current signage in Alnwick is insufficient with numerous inconsistent finger posts and signage. One of the key improvements outlined in this report is a need for better links between the town centre and Alnwick Gardens and Castle, which could be greatly improved with more appropriate signage.

Cycle and walking route signage is not only an important feature for way-finding, but serves to encourage and reassure users of safe and continuous routes. A new signage scheme with consistent and clear signage is an important aspect of signage design. As with other towns and cities, Alnwick contains a range of signage and information boards at transport hubs, public spaces and visitor attractions. It is highly recommended that new signage is introduced that integrates cycle and walking route signage, visitor attractions and key public transport services.



Figure 20: Clear, consistent 'branded' signage that integrates routes on foot and bike with public transport.

## 2.10 Cycle Parking

One of the barriers to residents and visitors accessing local towns by bike are a lack of convenient and safe cycle parking. Small and frequent bike stands in visible locations can encourage people to cycle that would normally use other modes of transport.

Cyclists generally want to park as close to their destination as possible, not only for convenience but for security concerns of leaving a locked bike unattended. Fortunately, cycle parking is very space efficient and requires little or no maintenance costs when compared to typical vehicle parking. In order to reinforce the transport hierarchy, cycle parking should be sited as close as possible to the

final destination or main access of buildings. Experience suggests that where this is not the case cyclists are likely to ‘fly park’ in locations that are convenient to them.

Alnwick is currently very poorly served by cycle parking, with parking identified at just two locations (Market Pl and Greenwell Car Park). Furthermore, Market Pl cycle parking is arguably privately owned and using unpopular ‘butterfly’ stands (often dubbed ‘wheel benders’). Figure 21, below, illustrates new locations for an extensive network of convenient cycle parking around the town. Locations have been assigned as ‘primary’ (red) for multiple bikes or ‘secondary’ (green) for single bikes (see Annex 4 for examples of cycle parking solutions). Primary locations have been chosen at key locations and entrances to the town centre (Market Pl, The Tower, Pottergate, Bondgate Within and the bus station). Other locations have been chosen for prominent and convenient locations around the town centre without being intrusive or cluttering the footway.



Figure 21: Cycle parking locations.



## 2.11 Development Summary

### 2.11.1 Major developments

	Ref	Scheme	Description
Priority ⇌	4.1	Crossing improvements: Dispensary St/ Lagny St	3no . raised crossings and zebra crossings at Market St, Windsor Gdns and Howling Ln.
	4.2	Alnwick gardens and Castle access	Denwick Ln footway improvements. Greenwell Rd crossing point and footway improvements.
	4.3	Alnmouth Station Cycle Path	Construction of path adjacent to railway. Option 1: footbridge and railway path. Option 2: Wagon way rd cycle street.
	4.4	Bondgate Within/ Narrowgate Shopping St	Shared space improvements at Paikes St. Footway and road reallocation.
	4.5.1	Market St: Fenkle St junction	Shared space junction including road realignment on Fenkle St and Market PI entry, landscaping and footway improvements.
	4.5.2	Market St: town centre and fountain focal space	Shared space junction reconstruction, footway realignment and adjoining carriageway reconstruction between The Tower and Market PI.
	4.7	The Tower: Alnwick Gateway	Junction redesign east of Tower and public space improvements to the west.
	4.6	Fenkle St	Footway widening (south) Central build-out and crossing point with footway improvements at Stonewell Ln. 3no. crossing points.
	4.3	Pottergate 'quietway'	Footway/ build-out reconstruction at fountain Road surface treatment and parking reallocation.

### 2.11.2 Further Improvements

	Ref	Scheme	Description
Priority ⇌	4.9	Signage and way-finding	Development and installation of integrated signage and 'way-finding' scheme.
	4.10	Cycle Parking	7no. 'Sheffield' type stands, 20no. 'cyclehoop' for signpost/ lamppost.