



Heart and Hopes of Hirst - Towards An Imagined Future
Executive Summary

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Introduction

Northumberland County Council (NCC), Advance Northumberland and Bernicia Homes (the Hirst Project Management Group) commissioned Ryder Architecture and our team to prepare a long term regeneration masterplan and business case for the Hirst area in Ashington. The business case is available as a standalone document, and the masterplan and business case should be read in conjunction with one another.

Community and stakeholder engagement has been central to the preparation of the masterplan, embedding an asset based community development approach and building on the strengths of the Hirst. The team would like to thank everyone in the local community who has given their time, provided insights, and supported events and activities throughout the project.

The final reports will be used by the Council and its partners to progress the recommended plans and roadmap for the regeneration of the Hirst estate, including discussions with Government and potential funders and investors, the submission of funding bids, and further engagement with residents and the local community.



Aerial view of the Hirst estate and Ashington, 1961



Aerial view of the Hirst estate and Ashington, 2023

Headlines

Historically, the Hirst had a really important economic role as housing for workers, which it has lost.

The Ashington Group ('The Pitman Painters') is another important touchstone – showing the huge potential of local people when provided with opportunities for self expression.

The Hirst and the wider town have suffered from the decline of the mines, but successful housing developments on the outskirts of the town show there is demand to live in the area.

Relinking the heart of the town via the forthcoming Northumberland Line railway can create the opportunity to regenerate the town.

Engagement has evidenced the important community work that is ongoing, but there are issues with crime, anti social behaviour, and vacant and poorly managed properties that are preventing the town reaching its potential. The loss of people, especially 16 to 24 year olds, shows that currently the neighbourhood lacks a sense of potential and reasons to stay.

Therefore, the Hirst Masterplan is needed to restore the core of Ashington, which will reinforce the work of the town centre regeneration and help the area thrive again.



Community Engagement Event in the Hirst



Rainy Day - Ashington Co-op by Oliver Kilbourn, c.1951 (Museums Northumberland)



Full Circle Food and Ashington Cycle Hub in Hirst Park



Second Avenue, the Hirst

Background to the Project

Hirst

Located adjacent Ashington town centre, the Hirst estate was developed in the early 1900s to house miners and their families working at the nearby Woodhorn Colliery. It comprises approximately 3,300 dwellings and is characterised by high density **former colliery housing**, formed by long terraced residential streets and cross cutting avenues with little amenity space surrounding them.

The Hirst is the heart of **a strong and long established community** in Ashington, in which many local residents take great pride. There are numerous **active community organisations and assets** in the local area including Hirst Park and Hirst Welfare Centre.

However, the Hirst estate also faces challenges. It is the most deprived area of Ashington and is in the top 10% of the most deprived areas in England. The area faces **a number of social challenges** including anti social behaviour and crime, alongside the challenges faced by households experiencing deprivation and low incomes. The majority of the housing in the Hirst is not suitable for people's needs and is not energy efficient. There are issues with **high levels of long term empty properties** and the appearance and condition of streets and spaces.

Over the last 20 years, Northumberland County Council (NCC), along with other partners, has attempted to address these issues by tackling them as singular problems. However, it is now recognised that none of the issues can be resolved in isolation and the council needs to take **a holistic approach** if it is to improve the area and the way residents feel about it as a place.

Project Management Group

As the Local Planning Authority, **NCC** is responsible for implementing the planning policies within which the regeneration of the Hirst estate will take place. The Council has a wider interest in the successful regeneration of the area, with a focus on **improving the lives of residents**. NCC will also take the lead in discussions with national and regional Government and other funders, aimed at securing the investment needed to regenerate the Hirst.

Advance Northumberland is a development and regeneration company, wholly owned by NCC. Advance is the largest single property owner on the Hirst estate, managing a portfolio of approximately 400 rented homes.

Bernicia is a major independent social landlord responsible for the management of a large portfolio of social housing across north east England, including in Northumberland. Bernicia owns and manages a small number of social homes on the Hirst estate and a more significant number in the locality. It is also an active housing developer, investing in building new social homes across the region.

The three partner organisations have an established track record of working together to develop and improve homes in communities across Northumberland.

NCC, Advance Northumberland and Bernicia have come together as the Hirst Project Management Group to commission the Hirst Masterplan which will provide the basis for **long term investment and renewal of the Hirst estate**.

Masterplan

The masterplan aims to build on the strengths of the Hirst in order to address the challenges in the area and make it **a better place to live and visit**.

Investment will also enable NCC and partners to manage the housing stock and local environment on a more sustainable basis in future.

Although funding for future projects has not yet been secured, the masterplan and accompanying business case will be used to attract investment and will form the basis of funding submissions.

Consultant Team

Ryder Architecture has led the engagement and masterplanning process with support from the rest of the consultant team:

Healthy Happy Places (Academic Health and Science Network) - embedding health and wellbeing and a community-focused approach in the masterplan

Identity Consult - cost planning

Metro Dynamics - business case preparation



The Process

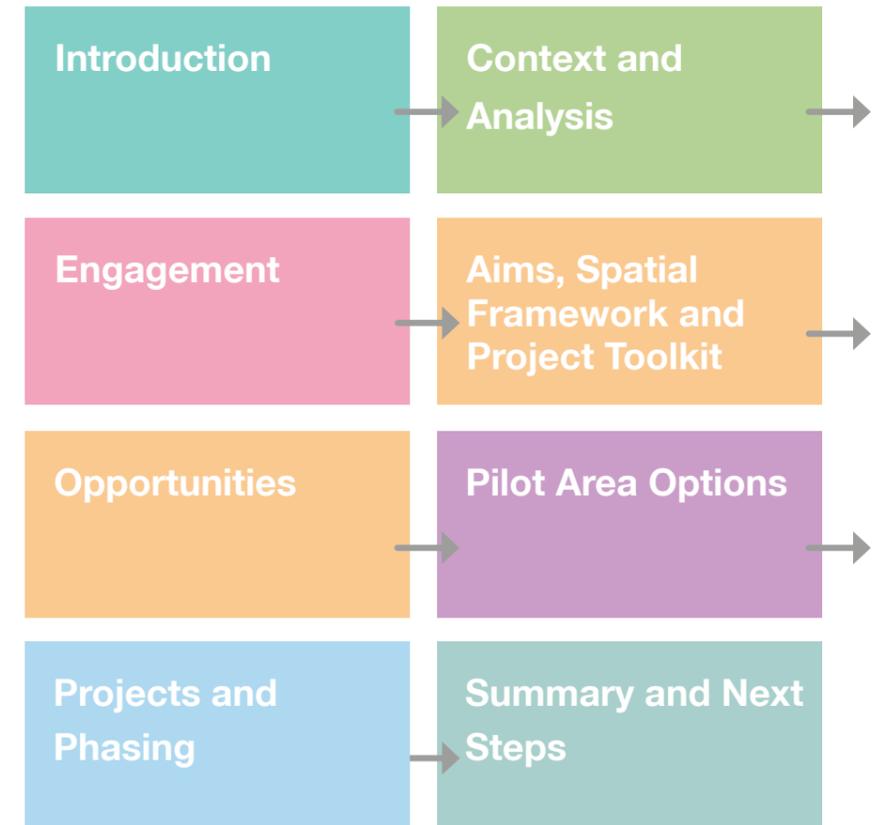
A place based approach has underpinned the masterplan, considering the 'social infrastructure' of the Hirst - the people - alongside the 'built and natural environment' aspects - the place.

The Hirst Project Management Group and the consultant team, took the follow steps to develop the masterplan and business case for the Hirst:

- Understanding the brief with the Hirst Project Management Group
- Initial desk based research and site visits
- Visioning workshop with the Hirst Project Management Group.
- Meetings, presentations and workshops with NCC officers, Town and County Councillors, Town Board, and the voluntary, charity and social enterprise sector (ongoing throughout the masterplan process)
- Design sprint with the Hirst Project Management Group, NCC officers and health leaders to test our analysis, better understand strengths and challenges, and identify initial opportunities collaboratively

- Drop in events with the local community and a workshop with young people to gather views and ideas
- Informed by the engagement findings, the draft masterplan aims, spatial framework and project ideas toolkit were developed
- Service providers workshop and local businesses event to gain feedback on the emerging aims and ideas
- Street event for local residents to gain feedback on the emerging aims and ideas
- Informed by the engagement findings, the masterplan aims, spatial framework and project ideas toolkit were refined
- Development and costing of pilot area options
- Phasing of project actions
- Development of business case.

The Masterplan report collates the work produced during this process. This is organised into the chapters shown on the right, which can be found in the main 'Heart and Hopes of Hirst - Towards An Imagined Future' masterplan report. The Business Case is available as a separate document. The two reports should be read in conjunction with one another.



Investment in the Town

In 2016 the £21m Ashington Leisure Centre opened within the town centre, as well as a £13m retirement complex on the site of the old Ashington Hospital. Station Road benefited from a £1.5m public realm improvement scheme, and in 2017, NCC also successfully secured £2.3m National Lottery funding to rejuvenate Hirst Park. Ashington Football Club moved to a new complex at Woodhorn Lane to enable the development of a large Asda superstore in the town centre and the Hirst Welfare Centre, a multi use sports and community facility, opened providing a range of facilities and activities.

Improving Ashington town centre is a key component of the Northumberland Local Plan. The Hirst Masterplan is part of a much broader plan to regenerate the wider town of Ashington.

A private sector led Town Board has been established which is developing the **Ashington Investment Plan**, setting out ambitious investment proposals in a number of priority areas, including town centre regeneration, business growth, skills and education, connectivity and transport, and housing and placemaking. The investment plan will be used as the basis to attract investment and funding to address the key challenges and opportunities facing Ashington.

Following recent successes in securing major capital funding from the North of Tyne Combined Authority and UK Government, there are now some concrete opportunities to deliver transformational regeneration projects in Ashington town centre including: the development of a new **station gateway at Wansbeck Square** bringing the Northumberland line rail passenger service into the heart of town; a new leisure and entertainment destination at **Portland Park**; and initial catalytic investment in regenerating Ashington's **Station Road high street**.

Ashington Town Council is the first tier of local government for the town of Ashington, within the unitary authority of Northumberland. The Council covers six wards of the town: Bothal, Central, College, Haydon, Hirst, and Seaton. The Council is served by 18 elected representatives (Town Councillors), with three Town Councillors for each ward.

Proud Past, Prosperous Future, Clean Growth Leader

“By 2030, Ashington will be a thriving centre for businesses, residents, learners, and young people, providing thousands of quality jobs in advanced manufacturing and low carbon clean growth industries, more and better homes, excellent skills and education opportunities, an attractive leisure and culture offer, and a great quality of life for a growing and prosperous population.”

(Our shared vision for Ashington: Ashington Investment Plan 2023)

Northumberland Corporate Plan

As set out in the **Northumberland Corporate Plan 2023 – 2026**, NCC is committed to supporting economic recovery and growth and tackling inequalities in communities to support residents to be healthier and happier.

Northumberland Health and Wellbeing Board

The Northumberland Health and Wellbeing Board has produced the **Joint Health And Wellbeing Strategy 2018 - 2028**, a long-term plan to ensure that the needs of Northumberland's population are met and tackle local inequalities in health. Across Northumberland, there is a shared ambition among partners to reduce health, social and economic inequalities that have been exacerbated by COVID-19 and the cost-of-living crisis. This has underpinned the development of Northumberland Health and Wellbeing Board **Inequalities Plan 2022 – 2032**.

Northumberland Local Plan

The **Northumberland Local Plan 2016 to 2036** was formally adopted by Northumberland County Council on 31 March 2022. Policies in the Northumberland Local Plan support the regeneration of the Hirst through making the best use of existing buildings as part of creating sustainable communities, including supporting and enabling interventions to improve and renovate existing housing stock. This also includes considering options, in consultation with local communities, for demolition and redevelopment schemes in areas of low demand or where the existing stock does not meet and is not capable of meeting local housing needs. Introducing a greater mix of uses within Hirst would be supported by the Local Plan, along with ensuring good access to local green space.



The Study Area

Hirst Masterplan Study Area

The 80ha masterplan study area for the Hirst estate includes areas of the Hirst ward, Ashington Central ward and College ward. Because the Hirst estate straddles three different wards, the ward statistics cannot be directly mapped onto the study area. However, as an indication of population density, the Hirst ward, for example, has an estimated population of 5,500 residents which accounts for 19.5% of the total Ashington population.

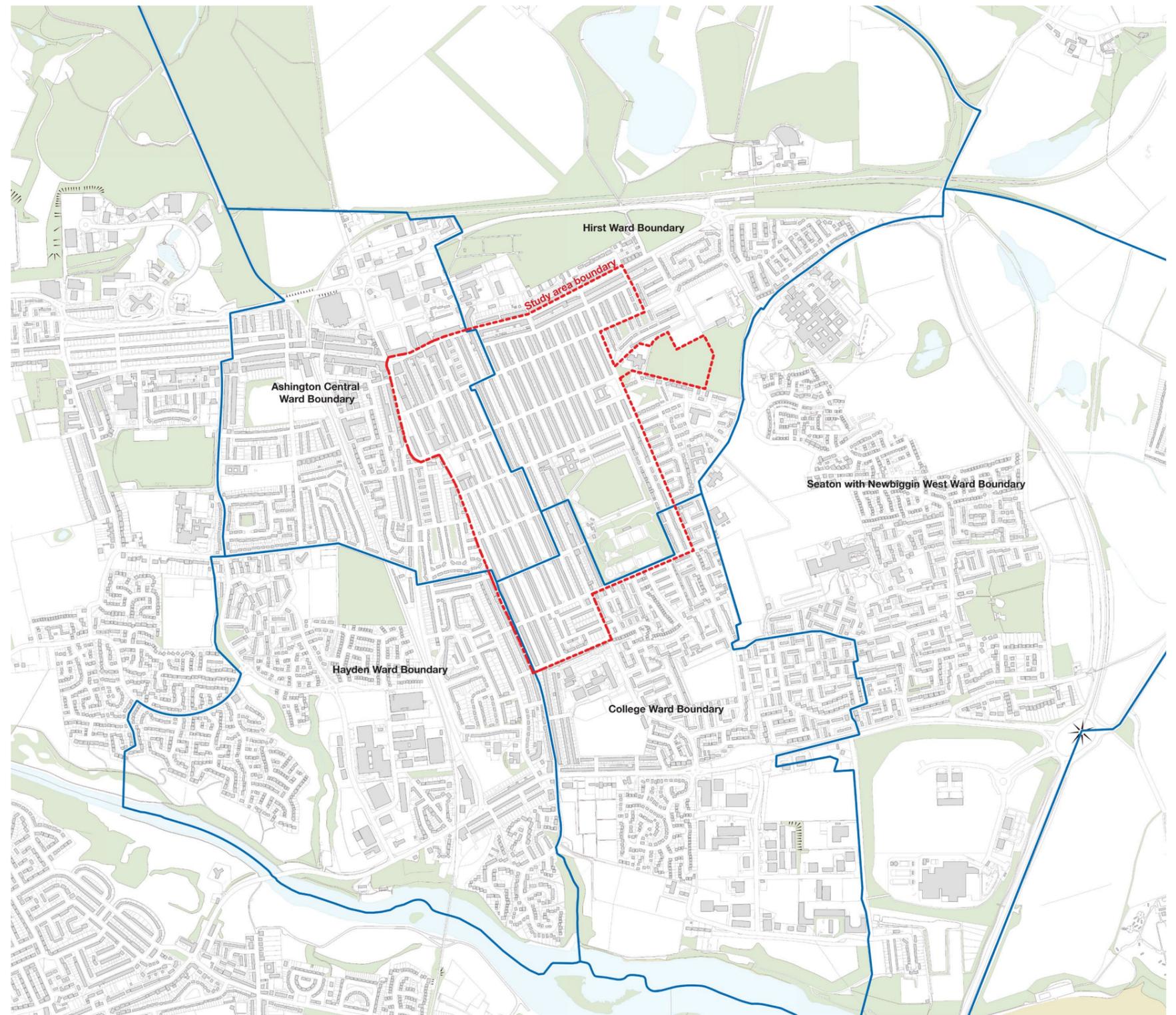
The study boundary encompasses the main area of terraced streets from Woodhorn Road in the north to Seventh Avenue in the south, and stretching from North Seaton Road / Milburn Road in the west to Alexandra Road in the east. This includes the area containing Percy Street, Queen Street and George Street. The study area also includes key assets such as Hirst Park and Hirst Welfare Centre.

The area contains a mix of different ownerships, including a high proportion of Advance Northumberland properties, private landlord and owner-occupied homes, along with a few Bernicia homes. There are many long term vacant properties.

NCC owns some of the key community assets such as Hirst Park and the Family Hub, as well as pockets of grassed areas, car parks and back lanes. In addition to this, NCC owns some larger areas of land to the east and south of the study area, including Dukes C of E Secondary School, the former Coulson School site, and the land behind the Hirst Welfare Centre pitches.

Although the red line shown on the plan opposite is the main focus of the study, the masterplan considers areas beyond the red line including connections to the town centre, education, employment, and other community assets.

The team acknowledge that there are different views locally on what constitutes the Hirst and exactly where the boundaries are. For the purposes of this report, 'Hirst' refers to the Hirst masterplan study area shown on the plan opposite.



Hirst Masterplan Study Area in the context of local ward boundaries

Summary of Strengths in the Hirst

There are several assets and strengths within the Hirst and the masterplan uses these as a starting point:

Community spirit and a strong heritage - reflected in the colliery rows, art, football sculptures, interpretation boards about Hirst Park

Community organisations – several active community groups in Ashington and Hirst, and some key community spaces within the study area, such as Hirst Welfare Centre, Ashington Family Hub and Hirst Park Pavilion

Parks and sports facilities - nearby landscape such as Wansbeck Riverside Park and the coast, with good recreation and sports provision at Hirst Park and Hirst Welfare Centre, amongst others

Proximity of Hirst Ashington town centre – shops, services, and public transport including the forthcoming railway station, plus planned investment at Portland Park, Wansbeck Square, and the college.



Summary of Challenges in the Hirst

However, there are significant, overlapping and complex challenges which need to be addressed:

High levels of deprivation, unemployment and poor health in the Hirst.

Unsuitable homes (size, space, in poor condition, not energy efficient - difficult to heat / higher fuel bills).

Issues with landlords, including some 'absentee landlords' not looking after properties.

Increased long term vacancies – undermines community cohesion.

Poor quality environment (fly tipping, vacant buildings, rubbish in the streets, lack of care and maintenance).

High levels of crime and anti social behaviour, lack of safety and security.

Walking and cycling routes throughout the Hirst, and those linking the area to the town centre and surrounding destinations require improvement.

Further detail can be found in the Context and Analysis section within the main Hirst Masterplan report.



Stakeholder and Community Engagement

Context for Engagement

The process itself, and the emerging vision and aims, have been informed throughout by:

- Existing research and publications such as the Partnerships for People and Place vision report for Hello Hirst
- Place Standard, a toolkit used by NCC
- A community led and inclusive approach

Place Standard Community Conversations

To ensure the voice of residents and the community is at the heart of the Hirst Masterplan, in preparation for the commission NCC completed a series of community conversations with residents during 2022. This engagement used a locally adapted Northumberland version of The Place Standard Tool (Scottish Government - Place Standard).

Having a breadth of consensus of the factors that people value and consider important and understanding where people feel improvement can be made provides a good foundation from which to explore the further development of community centred approaches to address inequalities in the Hirst area.

Hirst Masterplan Engagement

Engagement has been central to the development of the masterplan. Engagement was carried out from **January to July 2023** through a variety of methodologies, including visioning sessions, design sprints, interviews, workshops, online surveys, drop in events and pop ups.

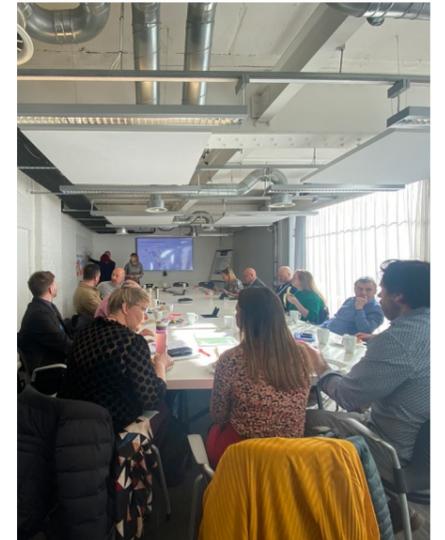
This included core partners at NCC, Advance Northumberland, and Bernicia Homes, local people and Hirst residents, County Councillors, the local MP for Wansbeck, Ashington Town Council, Northumberland Communities Together, Ashington Town Board, Northumbria Police, NCC departments such as planning, transport and education, and a wide range of representatives from service providers, businesses and the voluntary, community and social enterprise sector.

Further detail can be found in the Engagement section within the main Hirst Masterplan report.

200+
local residents
attended pop up
events



4
workshops



We have spoken
with over
30
young people



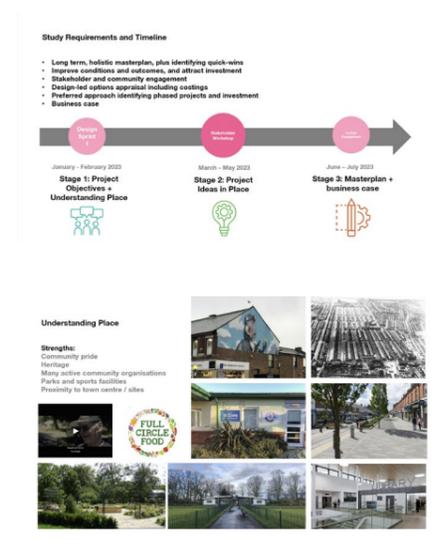
500
flyers and postcards
distributed at local
events



We have engaged
with
28
VSCE organisations,
community groups
and service
providers



5
meetings with local
councillors and town
board



Approach to the Masterplan

This ongoing engagement has shaped the approach to the masterplan and has highlighted the following:

- Build on what is already happening in the Hirst
- The local community want to see change happening in the area quickly
- Actions, even small scale ones, will begin to build trust with the community
- There is a need to 'get the basics right' first
- However, at the same time, the masterplan must be ambitious
- Recognition that this is a long term plan which will require significant investment, including revenue funding
- There should be a clear plan for delivery, and clarity on who is responsible for this

Building on the NCC Inequalities Plan, Place Standard Community Conversations, and the council's ongoing Asset Based Community Development work, the masterplan focuses on **'what is strong, not what is wrong'** in the area, whilst recognising that the Hirst faces significant challenges which must be addressed.

The masterplan is the start of the journey, and should be part of an ongoing conversation with the Hirst community and stakeholders. It is therefore intended to be flexible so that it can be adapted based on the outcomes of **further community conversations**.

Two key themes which have been highlighted throughout the engagement to date are:

Inclusion: Making sure that all individuals have equal access, opportunity and dignity in the use of the built environment.

Community cohesion: A sense of belonging for all communities, with connections and trust between them. Diversity is valued and people of different backgrounds have the opportunity to develop positive relationships with one another.

The Council is a key strategic partner for the Northumberland Health and Wellbeing Board Inequalities Plan 2022 – 2032. The plan identifies an initial phase of short term culture change enablers (2025 - 2026) which will provide the foundations to achieve long term ambitions based on the evidence based Marmot indicators. These timescales align with the Hirst masterplan proposed phasing, particularly complementing the work in Phase 1. The Inequalities Plan aims to establish key goals that can be delivered at scale over the coming years to level off and start to reduce the gap in healthy life expectancy.

There is a wealth of evidence demonstrating the impact of the built environment on the physical and mental health of residents, as well as environmental, social and economic effects. For example, **Homes England Measuring Social Value, Paper 1: Measuring the placemaking impacts of housing led regeneration** (September 2023). The Town and Country Planning Association (TCPA) have identified a set of **Healthy Homes Principles** as a benchmark for what we should be achieving in new homes.

As part of the masterplan team, **Healthy Happy Places** have been instrumental in embedding a health and wellbeing layer within the masterplan.

Informed by this, the masterplan includes:

10 Aims for the Hirst - these have been generated through the engagement process.

Spatial Framework - a 2D plan which maps how the Hirst and its connectivity to the wider area could evolve over time.

Project Ideas Toolkit - a variety of potential approaches which could be taken to the revitalisation of the Hirst. These could be developed further with the community and brought forward when funding is identified.

Opportunities - potential approaches and project opportunities are described in more detail, including how they could address issues raised throughout the engagement and analysis process, and which of the Aims they support. Included in this section are examples of what has worked well elsewhere, illustrated with precedent images. Opportunities are grouped under each of the 10 Aims for the Hirst.

Phasing and Delivery - identifies projects already underway or planned, alongside three phases of project actions for Hirst and the wider area. As part of this, **Phase 1** has been identified as the very first step on the journey. These 'getting the basics right' actions will help to lay strong foundations for the longer term masterplan. This phase also sets in motion a number of community led projects also intended to build capacity and engagement for the future.

Pilot Area - A potential **'Pilot Area'** is identified in Phase 2, where a range of project ideas could be considered including the three options included in the report. This area has been identified with the Hirst Project Management Group and a small group of stakeholders. This should be explored further with the community and other stakeholders during Phase 1.

Further detail can be found in the Masterplan sections within the main Hirst Masterplan report (Aims, Spatial Framework, Project Ideas Toolkit, and Opportunities).

Aims for Hirst

The aims below have been generated from the community and stakeholder conversations, and have evolved throughout the masterplan process. **Further detail can be found in the Engagement section within the main Hirst Masterplan report.**

The aims underpin the masterplan, including the Spatial Framework and Project Ideas Toolkit. Within the main masterplan report, the Opportunities section sets out each aim and outlines opportunities within the Hirst to contribute to each aim, along with precedents to show what has worked elsewhere.

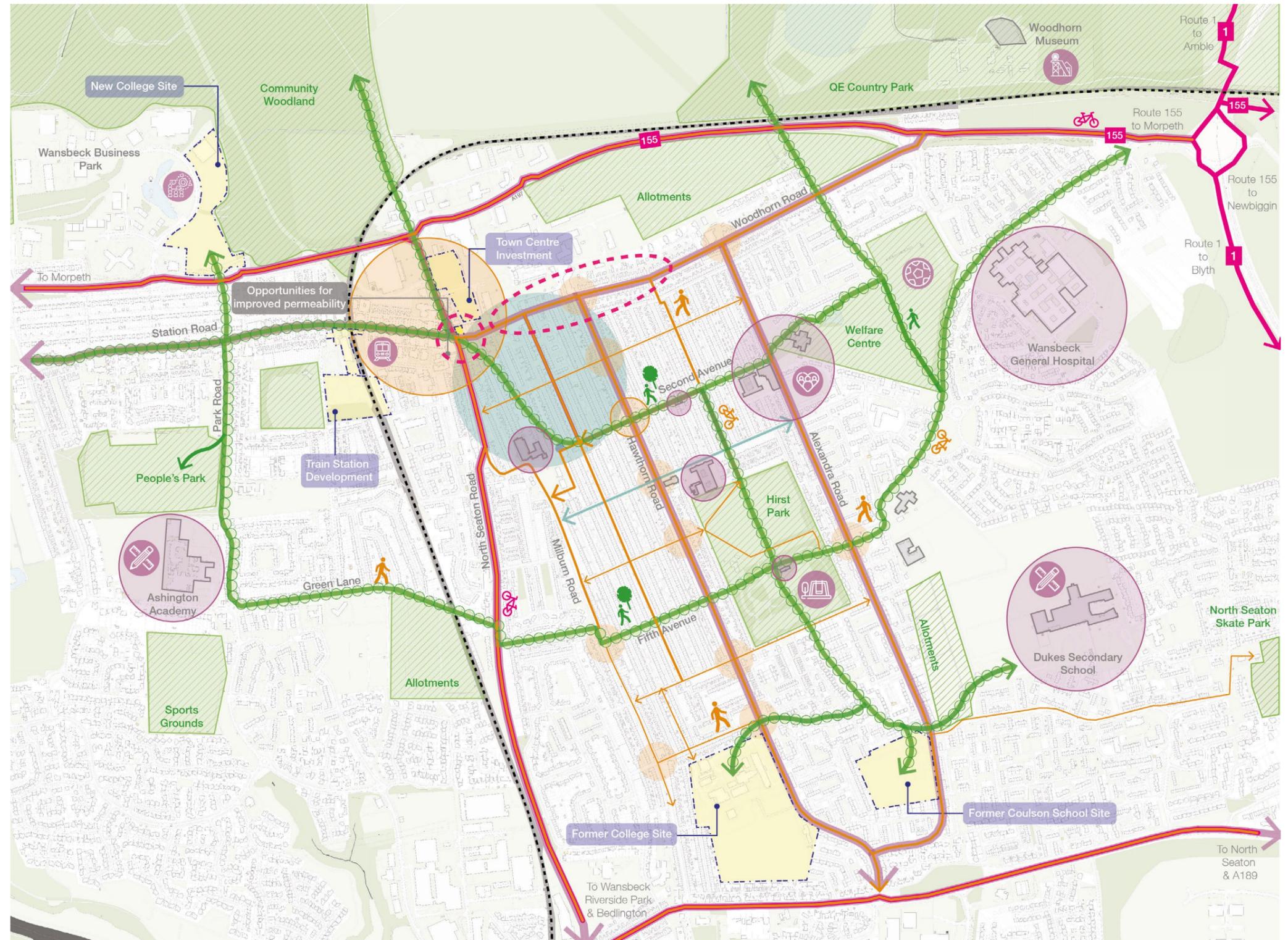
Within the Phasing section, the aims are attributed to project actions within the project tables for each phase.

Aim		Aim	
	A community approach where everyone that wants to can contribute and participate in the shaping of places and spaces, and focuses on 'what is strong, not what is wrong'		Creating green spaces that people will want to use and look after
	A place that helps people to have opportunities for good physical health, mental health and addresses loneliness		A place where people can hope, learn and achieve their goals through the right skills training and job opportunities
	Community spaces to meet, be creative, share ideas and skills, and advice and support		A neighbourhood that is safe, well used, welcoming to all, and keeps the spirit and pride of Ashington alive
	A range of good quality and well managed house types and sizes that are suitable for different needs and good for the planet (energy efficient)		Having streets that are clean, having access to internet, being able to get around easily on public transport
	A diverse range of shops and things to do for all ages, and all cultures		Easy to move around with safe, enjoyable travel routes for walking and cycling

Spatial Framework

The **Spatial Framework** sets the overall framework for development and change within the Hirst, identifying key areas for improvement including walking and cycling connections, gateways, focal points, green spaces, and community assets, illustrating how these complement existing and forthcoming investment in the town.

- Key**
-  Cycle routes
 -  Pedestrian routes
 -  Main traffic routes
 -  Key green links
 -  Northumberland Line
 -  Improved bus routes
 -  Green and growing spaces
 -  Potential pilot area
 -  Key community assets
 -  Improved gateways and focal points
 -  Planned / Future opportunity sites
 -  Cycle routes
 -  '155' National cycle route
 -  '1' National cycle route



Project Ideas Toolkit

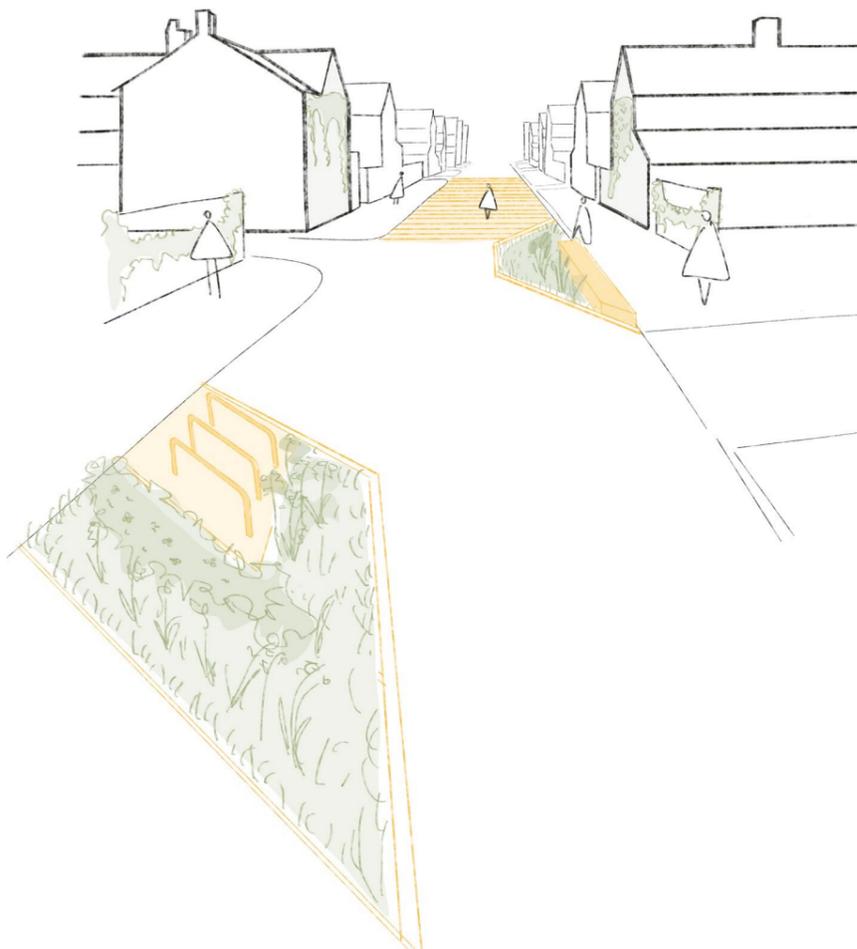
The **Project Ideas Toolkit** shows a variety of potential approaches which could be taken to the revitalisation of the Hirst, and which would sit within the Spatial Framework. These short, medium and long term project ideas should be developed further with the community and brought forward when funding is identified.



Improve views and links between Hirst and the town centre, and improve activation of gateway sites.



Green streets, improved for walking and cycling



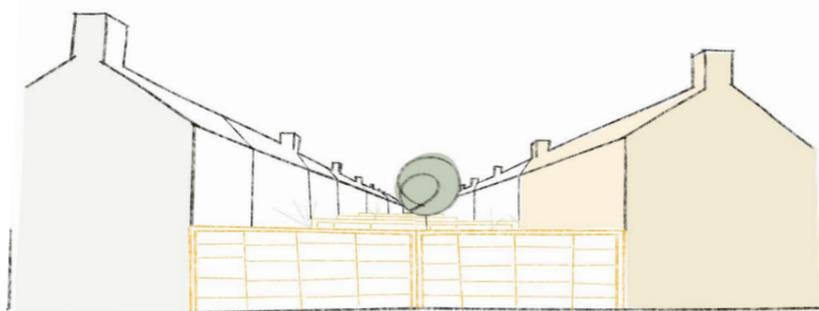
Squares and event spaces



Improve existing gateways - activate vacant buildings, provide seating, planting, lighting and improved links



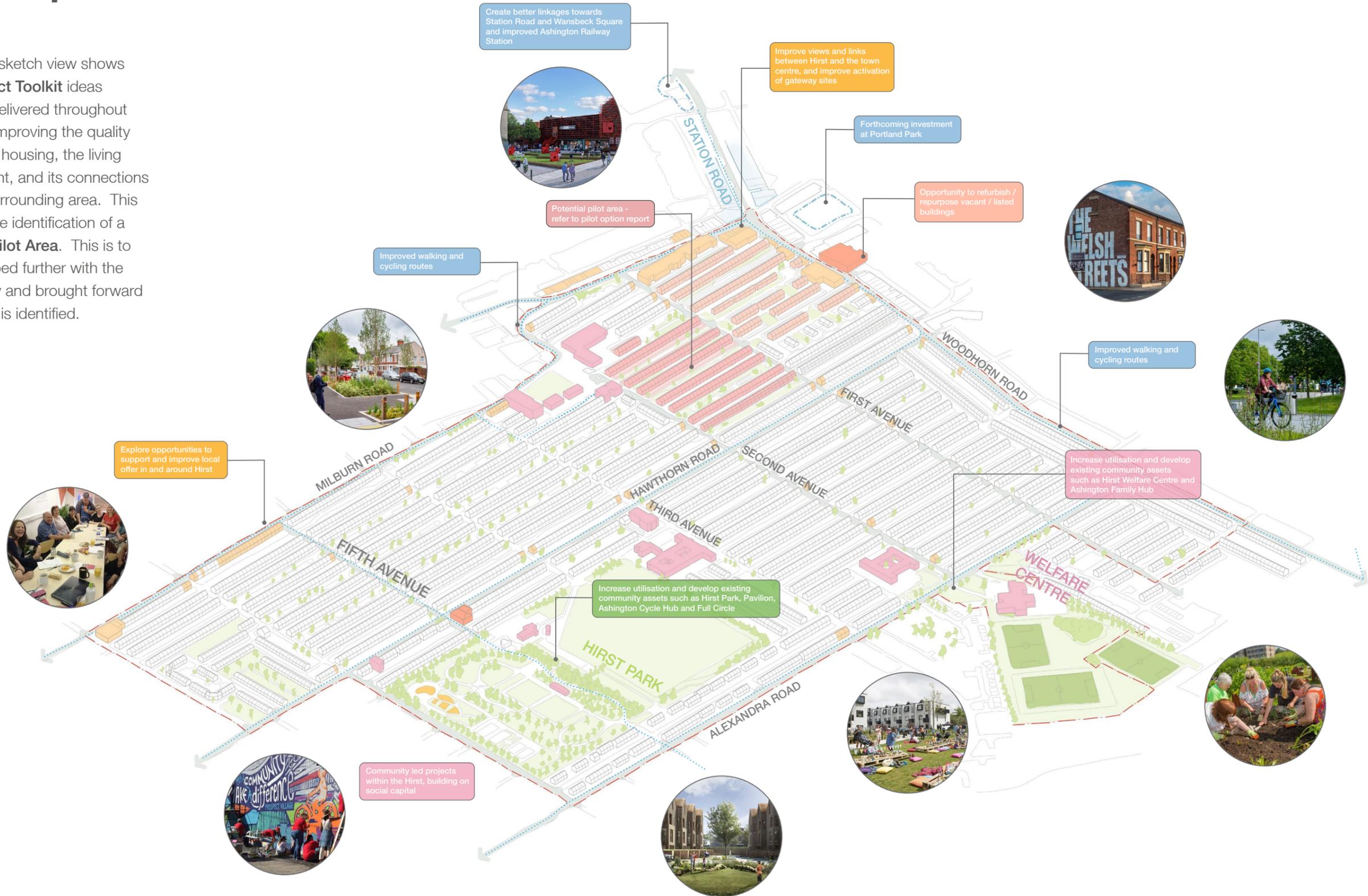
Improve safety, provide larger secure private back gardens, and combine properties to create larger homes



Increase utilisation and develop existing community assets such as Hirst Park, Pavilion, Ashington Cycle Hub and Full Circle Food

Masterplan Overview

This aerial sketch view shows how **Project Toolkit** ideas could be delivered throughout the Hirst, improving the quality and mix of housing, the living environment, and its connections with the surrounding area. This includes the identification of a potential **Pilot Area**. This is to be developed further with the community and brought forward as funding is identified.



Pilot Area Options

A Pilot Area for Hirst

Due to the large size of the Hirst masterplan study area, a pilot area would enable context specific proposals from the Project Ideas Toolkit to be delivered within a smaller ‘trail blazer’ area, before being implemented within the rest of the Hirst through a phased approach.

Treating the north western gateway between the town centre and Hirst as a pilot area would help to open up views and connections between the two areas, and would be visible from the town centre, supporting principles of the spatial framework around connectivity. However, this area includes very limited Advance housing stock / empty properties so would be more challenging to modify.

Other possible pilot areas include the area between First and Second Avenue, adjacent the north western gateway. This area connects key community assets such as Central Primary School, the Family Hub and Hirst Welfare Centre. Public realm improvements could be made and key gateways improved to enhance access between the town centre and this pilot area. The principle of a green corridor could be introduced, linking in with investment in the town centre, the new railway station, and Hirst Park, along with several other community assets.

It should be noted that ownership is pepper potted throughout the study area, and that even clusters which appear to have a high proportion of Advance Northumberland housing stock and empty properties, also include buildings in other ownership.

Three options have been prepared as part of the masterplan, focused on this Pilot Area and ranging from a minimum to a maximum level of intervention. These options are identified as part of Phase 2 in the masterplan, and have formed the basis of the Business Case for the Hirst.

Further detail can be found in the Pilot Area Options section within the main Hirst Masterplan report.



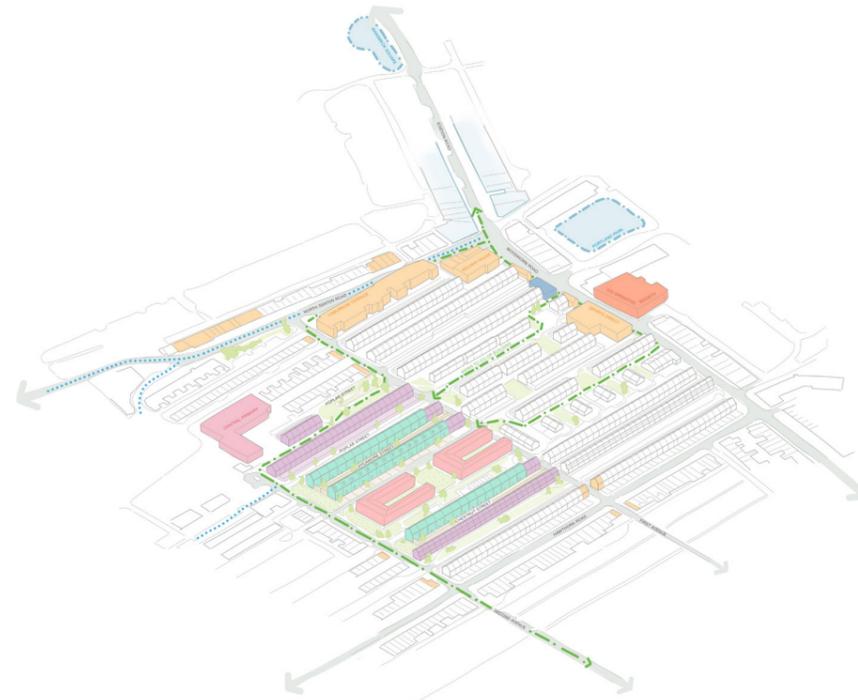
Minimum Option

- Retrofit of properties within the pilot zone
- Repairs and maintenance to boundaries, gardens etc
- Improve back lanes (parking, green spaces, planting, refuse etc)
- Improved routes through north west quadrant
- Pocket Park on First Avenue (to include mounds / natural play, planting, seating, renewed community noticeboard)
- Infrastructure to enable District Heat Network in 2030



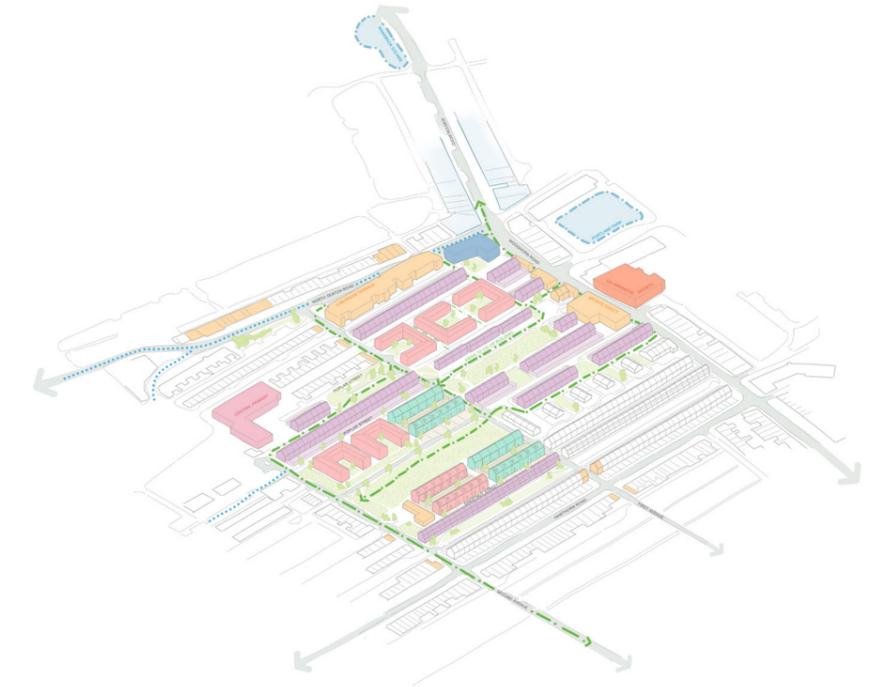
Intermediate Option

- As Minimum Option, plus:
- Reconfigure existing properties into modern, larger homes
- Selective demolition and new build homes
- New central, open public space with play, seating, shelter, trees, planting (created by selective demolition of properties in centre of block)
- New rain gardens and street greening, opening up ends of terraces



Maximum Option

- As Intermediate Option, plus:
- Significant redevelopment of Pilot Area with new homes and spaces enabled through selective demolition of existing properties
- Significant redevelopment of north west quadrant with retrofit, reconfiguration, new homes and spaces.
- Redevelopment of Bellway House including community, food, leisure, residential, greening and public space opportunities, involving the opening up of this block to allow views and access



Projects and Phasing

Overview

The project actions included within the phasing plans and tables are linked to the masterplan aims which were drawn from analysis, engagement and initial ideas / opportunities for the Hirst.

The phasing plans and tables identify projects already underway or planned, alongside three phases of project actions for Hirst and the wider area. As part of this, Phase 1 has been identified as the very first step on the journey. These ‘getting the basics right’ actions will help to lay strong foundations for the longer term masterplan. This phase also sets in motion a number of community led projects also intended to build capacity and engagement for the future.

Further detail, including project tables and phasing plans, can be found in the Phasing section within the main Hirst Masterplan report.

Phase 1: 2023 - 2027

Phase 1 is the foundation for the rest of the masterplan phases. It includes projects and initiatives which are already underway in the Hirst, and the continuation and development of these. The creation of a **Hirst Partnership Board** is key to drive this process forward.

Phase 1 also seeks to address key challenges about the appearance and maintenance of the homes, streets and spaces which have been raised by local people and organisations operating in the area.

A key catalyst for the delivery of Phase 1 will be the creation of a **Hirst Strategic Lead** and supporting team. This will complement the existing community coordinator role in the Hirst to ensure delivery of Phases 1 and 2.

In Phase 1 the **development of the former Coulson School site** is an important catalyst which could facilitate the Pilot Area initial stages of development (Phase 2), enabling homes to be refurbished / redeveloped within the Hirst. It will be important to protect existing residents from widening inequalities by ensuring that housing is affordable and accessible to existing residents.

Phase 2: 2027 - 2035

Building on the community-led projects, capacity building and co-design in Phase 1, the project actions in Phase 2 focus on a series of pilot projects within a focused area. Responding to the brief and community and stakeholder feedback throughout the masterplan process, these projects aim to provide a high quality living environment for residents by improving the quality, size, accessibility and energy efficiency of homes, as well as the safety, accessibility and appearance of streets and spaces.

Phase 2 identifies a potential ‘Pilot Area’ where a range of project ideas could be considered including the three options included in the Pilot Area Options section of the report. This area has been identified with the Hirst Project Management Group and a small group of stakeholders. The location, scale and scope of this should be explored further with the community and other stakeholders during Phase 1.

Alongside the ‘Pilot Area’, projects for the whole study area are proposed as part of Phase 2, including connectivity, infrastructure, community spaces, and community-led shaping the neighbourhood.

By this point, several strategic projects will have been delivered in Ashington, including Wansbeck Square, Portland Park, and the emerging Ashington District Heat Network and Walking and Cycling Improvements. The Phase 2 study area project actions and wider area recommendations have been developed to complement and connect to these planned strategic projects.

Phase 3: 2035+

Phase 3 considers the longer term evolution of the Hirst, whereby the successful projects and strategies implemented in the earlier phases are developed, with the community, across the rest of the Hirst study area. Focusing on initial ‘priority areas’, the proposals - which may include retrofit, reconfiguration, replacement of existing with new homes, and improving streets and spaces – should be adapted to each location / context, and be community led.

Reflecting the community and stakeholder discussions throughout the masterplan process, this aims to provide a high quality, sustainable living environment for residents with a good mix of homes, businesses, local services and activities, well connected to the town centre and surrounding areas. A place which is fit for the future and climate resilient.

Phase 3 must continue an asset based community development approach, forging strong bonds in the community, enabling community led projects and spaces for people to flourish.

Next Steps

The Challenge

Over the last 20 years, Northumberland County Council (NCC), along with other partners, has attempted to address these issues by tackling them as singular problems. However, it is now recognised that none of the issues can be resolved in isolation and the council needs to take a holistic approach if it is to improve the area and the way residents feel about it as a place.

The Opportunity

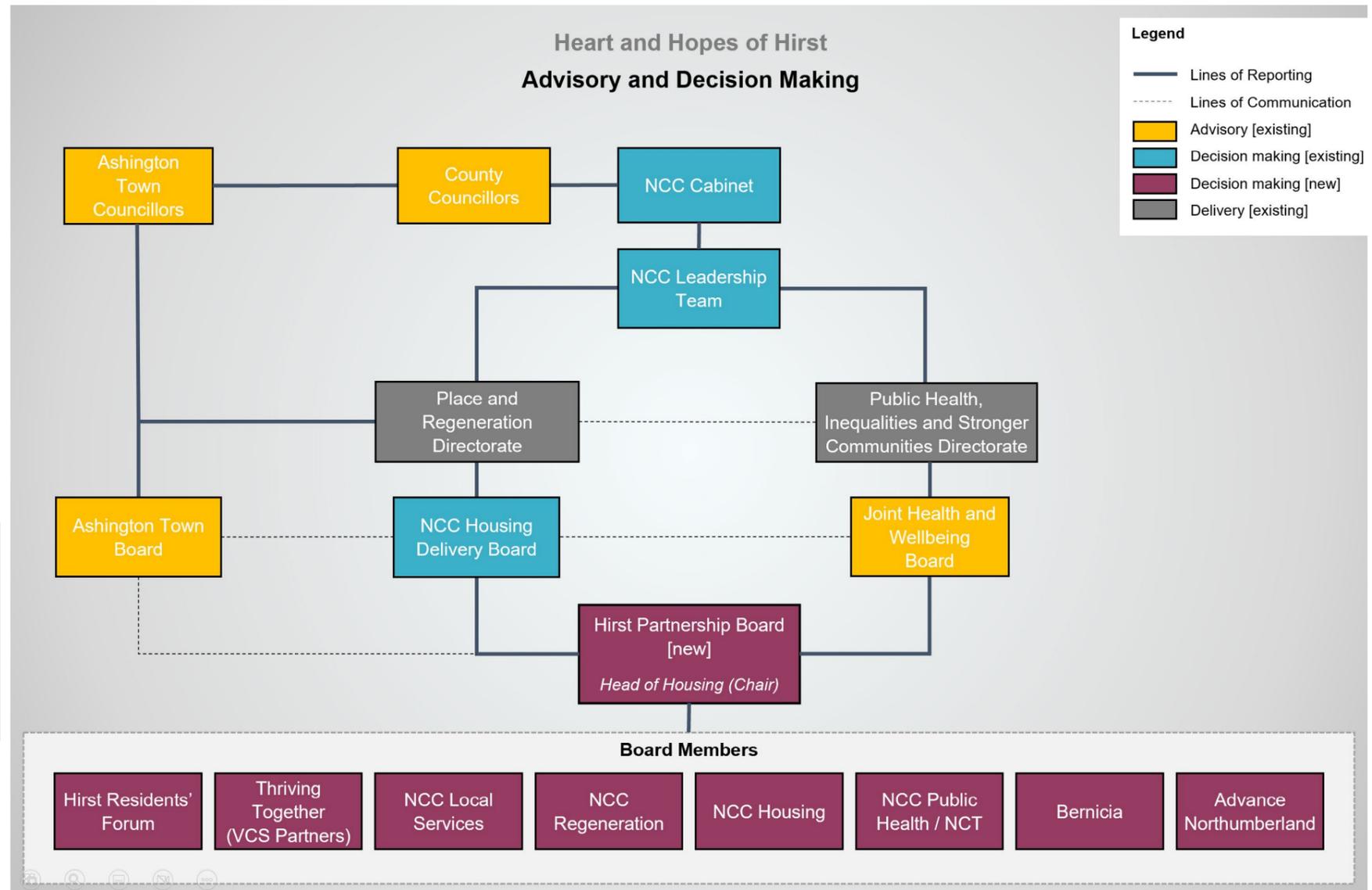
Engagement with local residents, Councillors, businesses, community groups, service providers, and stakeholders, underpins the Hirst Masterplan and provides a clear mandate for action. The masterplan sets out the aims for the Hirst and a series of phased short to long term projects which will achieve these. The Business Case clearly describes the strategic, socio economic, commercial, financial and management benefits of this approach to the Hirst.

Taking this Forward

The support of NCC Leaders will be key in taking the Hirst Masterplan forward and harnessing these benefits for Hirst, Ashington and Northumberland. This will enable a strategic, joined up approach, based on the formation of the Hirst Partnership Board.

The existing NCC governance structure is illustrated in the graphic on this page. Working with the existing advisory, decision making and delivery elements, a new Hirst Partnership Board with decision making powers will be formed consisting of:

Building on the strong track record of working together, NCC, Advance Northumberland and Bernicia will continue to work in partnership for the benefit of the Hirst and will explore opportunities to implement project actions contained within this Masterplan.



Delivery

The **Hirst Partnership Board** will oversee the delivery of Phases 1 and 2 of the Hirst Masterplan, including the Pilot Area within Phase 2.

In terms of immediate next steps, establishing the delivery structure shown in the graphic on this page is key to the successful progression of the Hirst Masterplan.

Project actions detailed in Phase 1 of the masterplan (2023 - 2027) aim to build community capacity, continue community engagement and co-design, and address key challenges with the appearance and maintenance of the homes, streets and spaces which have been raised by local people and organisations operating in the area.

A key catalyst for the delivery of Phase 1 will be the appointment of a new **Hirst Strategic Lead** supported by a new **Community and Housing Programme Manager**.

In Phase 1 the **development of the former Coulson School site** is an important catalyst which could facilitate the Pilot Area initial stages of development (Phase 2), enabling homes to be refurbished / redeveloped within the Hirst. It will be important to protect existing residents from widening inequalities by ensuring that housing is affordable and accessible to existing residents.

Phase 2 (2027 - 2035) focuses on the delivery of the Pilot Area within Hirst, alongside improvements in the wider study area. A new **Hirst Project Manager** role will be created to lead the delivery of this project, supported by a new **Hirst Delivery Manager** role to manage the input of design and construction contractors.

These new roles will work closely with the existing Hirst Community Partners, Community Coordinators, Hirst Delivery Partners and Hirst Project Support Team throughout Phases 1 and 2.

The championing of the Hirst Masterplan by NCC Leaders will ensure that we build on the ongoing activity and strength of the community within the Hirst, the momentum of the masterplan process in bringing these issues and opportunities to the fore, and the imminent investment within Ashington town centre, maximising opportunities for inclusive growth.

