

Hexham Sustainable Transport Audit

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

January 2015



1 Town Centre Audit Summary

Introduction

Facilities for pedestrians and cyclists were recorded within the town centre boundary to inform future improvements to the area. This section first outlines the key issues and recommendations for the primary retail or town centre streets. This is followed by a more detailed summary of the audit within the town centre boundary.

The location and condition of walking or cycling infrastructure was recorded for the purposes of this audit. These features include: 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.

The following chapter describes a brief summary of the conditions of the primary streets in Hexham in order to contextualise recommendations in section 4.

1.1 Hexham Station Access

Access to/from the station- a sustainable transport gateway- is of mixed quality on foot or bike. There are a number of incomplete or potential routes to the station. A Zebra crossing is located across Station Rd close to the desire line for the station main entrance. However, guard rail by the bus stop diverts pedestrian from their desire line.

The layout and lack of signage to the cycle parking and bike hire on the station platform makes navigation and finding facilities within the station particularly difficult.

A bike hire scheme is currently available on platform 2, along with existing cycle parking stands. These are somewhat concealed from most visitors to the station and the cycle racks are too close together which limits how many cycles can be parked.



1.2 Priestpottle/ Battle Hill

Priestpottle is a busy road that carries a significant volume of traffic to connecting areas in Hexham. There are a range of established, independent shops and businesses along the length of Priestpottle that becomes Battle Hill to the west after Cattle Market.

Puffin crossings are spaced evenly along the street but are insufficient for the amount of footfall along the length of the street. Crossing at the bus station entrance is hazardous due to turning buses as a number of services terminate here. Bus stops are situated in the centre of a bus turning area but pedestrians must first cross two wide sections of road, where priority is unclear. Northumberland

County Council has explored proposals to relocate the bus station and any redevelopment of this area should aim to provide a continuous pedestrian footway across the mouth of Commercial Place.



1.3 Market Place



Figure 3: Market Place on market day

This central area serves as the historic and architectural town square, overlooked by the Abbey and a number of historic features. This area once served as the social, cultural and economic hub of the town and unfortunately its character has been substantially eroded by highway developments and street clutter.

Market Place is dominated by parked vehicles except for Market days on a Tuesday. With parking charges being replaced by disc parking from April 1st 2014, the pressure on parking has increased. The market place has 15 marked bays plus 2 on its north side for disabled. In

contrast to market day, the area demonstrates a poor and hazardous use of

this focal point of the town centre, which serves as a hub for visitors to Hexham's attractions and shops.

There is no pedestrian crossing at the top of Hallgate leading into the Market Place despite it being a busy crossing point for pedestrians coming up the hill from Hallstile Bank. Hallgate is a cul-de-sac access to the parking at the back of Beales Department store and as such carries relatively low volumes of traffic throughout the day.



1.4 Beaumont Street

Beaumont Street is a wide, elegant street flanked by The Sele Park on one side and attractive historic buildings on the other, including the Library and Queens Hall. As with most town centre streets it is totally dominated by parked vehicles. One issue on the park side is that the fronts of angled parked vehicles overhang the footway reducing its available width.

There is an informal crossing point with build-outs on Beaumont St from the park to Queens Hall with scope for improvement. The angled parking also restricts the visibility of the crossing.

1.5 Fore Street

This pedestrianised street is the retail hub of the town centre and is bustling environment with a mix of shops and businesses. Walking along Fore St is a pleasant experience and also serves as a useful link North- South between Market Place and Priestpopple. Cycling is currently prohibited on the street as with all other traffic between the hours of 10am and 4pm.

High quality materials have been used to create this public space which has a comfortable and secure environment.

1.6 Market Street

Market St has lower footfalls than other retail streets in the town but has a greater proportion of public buildings, restaurants and businesses compared to shops.

Footways on the street are narrow and often cluttered with signage. The junction of Market Street with back Row is only 4.1m wide between buildings and the footway just 0.41m wide on one side. This is both dangerous and intimidating for pedestrians. There is only space for one vehicle to pass at a time.



2 Network and Street Development

Introduction

The following observations were central in developing the recommendations in this study:

- Hexham has popular pedestrian zones, parks and public realm within the town centre boundary, which can be added to and expanded.
- Lack of or incomplete footways on some key pedestrian links in to the town centre e.g. Broadgates, Argyle Terrace, bus station; as well as hazardous narrow pinch points at footways at a number of corners and streets, such as Market St.
- An easy motor vehicle route through the town centre encourages car dependency and convenience for motorists.
- The historic attractions- The Abbey, Old Goal and Market Place- are dominated by parked cars which also permeate into other town centre streets such as St Marys Wynd and cause problems for pedestrians.
- A large area of the lower town is used for car parking for the leisure centre and supermarkets.
- Potential for cycle routes that link the station, parks and NCN72 over Hexham Bridge.
- Poor and dangerous environment for walking and cycling between Ferry Rd and the town centre boundary, with particular reference to Hexham Bridge and Stations Rd.

In order to cater for some of the parking displaced that would be required in some of the schemes outlined in this section, it may be possible to increase the capacity of Wentworth car park by narrowing the circulation roads and redesigning the parking layouts.

2.1 Battle Hill/ Priestpopple Rd Shopping Street

Hamilton-Baillie Associates were commissioned by the Hexham Town Council to produce a master plan for improving Battle Hill and part of Priestpopple around the proposed redevelopment of the existing bus station.

These proposals involved major remodelling of the street to provide wider pavements, replacing the Pelican crossings with shared space paved crossing areas and median crossing strips, rationalise parking areas and introducing trees. A similar scheme has been installed in Poynton, East Cheshire.

Elements of these proposals such as paved area crossings could be installed as a first phase of town centre improvements. A visual continuation of the pedestrianised Fore St has been suggested, creating a focal, shared space area at the heart of the street. Footway widening at this point to create a larger public space could be utilised by traders or businesses.

Continuing down the street, narrowing strips, the removal of the centre line and strategically placed informal crossings would serve to calm the traffic approaching this area and enable improved crossing opportunities.



Figure 6 - Priestpopple proposals by Hamilton Baillie Associates

The latest proposals for the relocation of the Hexham Bus Station indicate a site just beyond the extent of Priestpople on Dene Ave. This reaffirms need to create a gateway feature and high quality pedestrian route on Priestpople to accommodate increased foot traffic on this street. Similarly, improved crossing facilities on the roundabout approaches at Maiden's Walk and Station Rd will be highly recommended and also serve visitors to the hospital.



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2.2 Market Place Public Area and Town Centre

While there is some street activity in terms of pavement cafes on paved areas, there is great potential to create a much more pedestrian friendly environment less dominated by parked cars. Footfall in this area is relatively high but impeded by parked cars and highway layout.

Paving treatments across the road similar to those proposed for Battle Hill would enhance the area, the most significant improvement to enhance this central space in the town would be to prevent parking and close the road to create a pedestrian square with cycle access allowed.



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Figure 7: Market Pl circa 1890 (top) and 1966 (above).



Figure 8: Hallgate is a confusing road layout where maximum space and priority has been given to the highway.

A row of bollards across the road with a turning area at the end of Beaumont Street would still allow access to the Market Pl. This would then create a substantial and more appropriate town square for a range of activities or events.

The existing 15 parking spaces in the Market Place could be reduced to a few essential disabled users who have limited mobility and the redesign of the Wentworth car park could take the displaced parking.

The area that leads to Hallgate should be improved with a raised and paved crossing area to provide a large, informal crossing that serves the various desire lines in the area, while maintaining vehicular access to the businesses that lead from this street.

As part of the public realm improvements for the Market Place, Market Street should also be closed to traffic except for access and cyclists from Gilesgate car park. Some disabled parking could be provided up to the Cowgarth road entrance, which would provide a suitable turning point for returning vehicles. This would greatly enhance this route into town, with car users encouraged to leave their vehicles at the car park. Future developments on Market St could include a shared surface that caters for all users, display or seating areas in front of shops and all the while still allowing for some vehicle access for adjoining properties and businesses.



2.3 Beaumont Street Improvements

It would be recommended to widen the footway adjacent to The Sele Park to create a more suitable footway connection to the rest of the town.

A raised, informal crossing on a speed table would give pedestrians a better chance to cross the road as it would also slow vehicles down on this historic street. The street closure would serve to limit through traffic and this piece of infrastructure would help to visually break up the street as well as providing an accessible crossing point.

The crossing at the top of Beaumont Street to The Sele is very wide for pedestrians who need to cross two lanes of traffic- there are no dropped kerbs for access into the park for a variety of users. The

junction radii should be reduced and entry lanes downgraded to a single lane for both entry and exit to the east of the street. A speed table crossing installed and paved area to extend to the existing park entry would complete this improvement and make use of a large hatched area and unused highway.

2.4 Fore Street Pedestrian Zone: Cycle Access

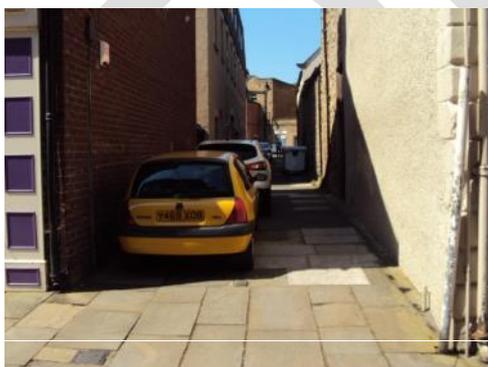
Fore Street shopping street is pedestrianised and not legally available for cyclists between 10am and 4pm to the "No Vehicles" traffic order restriction that has been used. This restriction is on the most direct route across the town centre from Market Place to East gate

avoiding the busy road alternatives.

It would be recommended to alter this restriction to allow cycling at all times, such as New Street, Birmingham and a number of other town centres across the UK.



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2.5 St Marys Wynd: Parking issues

St Marys Chare is a useful pedestrian link from The Sele into the shopping area but has become dominated by parked cars, either in official designated places or on the footways or in private areas.

St Mary's Wynd is a narrow lane that links to St Mary's Chare and is regularly blocked by parked vehicles and refuse bins. The existing bollards at each end have been removed.

In contrast the yard behind the In the Chare café has been repaved and a courtyard café created.

The status of this lane should be investigated to confirm its status as a public highway and if so the bollards that were at each end reinstated. This would keep it clear for pedestrians to use. The area which is currently paved could become a raised crossing on a speed table. In the longer term the whole of this area could be paved to create a shared space and parking restricted to create space for more street activities such as cafes and landscaping.

2.6 Northern Corridor

A continuous off-road route from NCN72 on Ferry Rd to Market Pl (and continuing west, see Abbey and Cowgarth Path Route) could feasibly be created following a number of improvements along the route. This would enable safe and cohesive access between NCN72, Hexham Station, Market Pl and the Town Centre.

The NCN route 72 skirts the north of the town centre and heads over Hexham Bridge which is narrow and busy with traffic (purple line below). It is linked to the town centre by the National Byway which is intermittently signed along Tyne Green Road, Gilesgate to the Market Place.

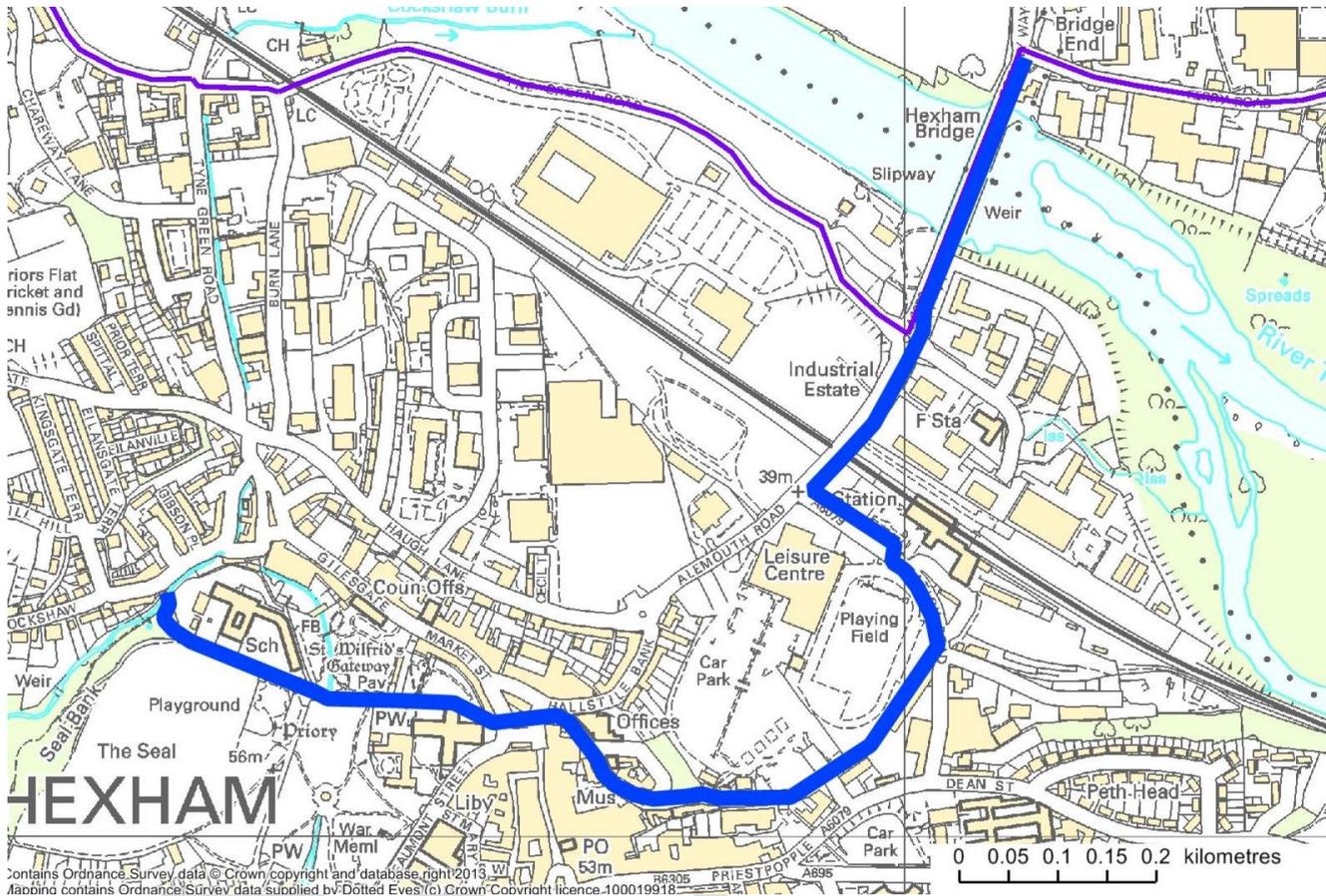


Figure 12: A 'Northern Corridor' would create a continuous route across Hexham, via the Station and avoiding a relatively steep climb on Hallstile Bank.

2.6.1 Hexham Bridge

The junctions at both ends of Hexham Bridge are very challenging for cyclists and not of a standard that an unaccompanied 12 year old cyclist could use comfortably or safely. Both involve right turns at:

- the southern roundabout after crossing the bridge into Hexham and
- Ferry Lane toward the Egger Factory, major employer.

NCN 72 proceeds over Hexham Bridge, an historic structure with Grade II listing. The bridge is 6.4m wide and footways 1.5m wide on each side. The road is generally busy with traffic throughout the day. The bridge is only considered suitable for use by experienced and confident cyclists with the current layout.



Figure 13: Hexham Bridge.

Two options for improving the bridge for cyclists and pedestrians are considered below.

OPTION 1: Widened shared use cycle track

The footway on eastern side is widened to 3m as a shared use path for all users. The footway on the west side would need to be narrowed to 0.5m to leave a 5.9m carriageway.

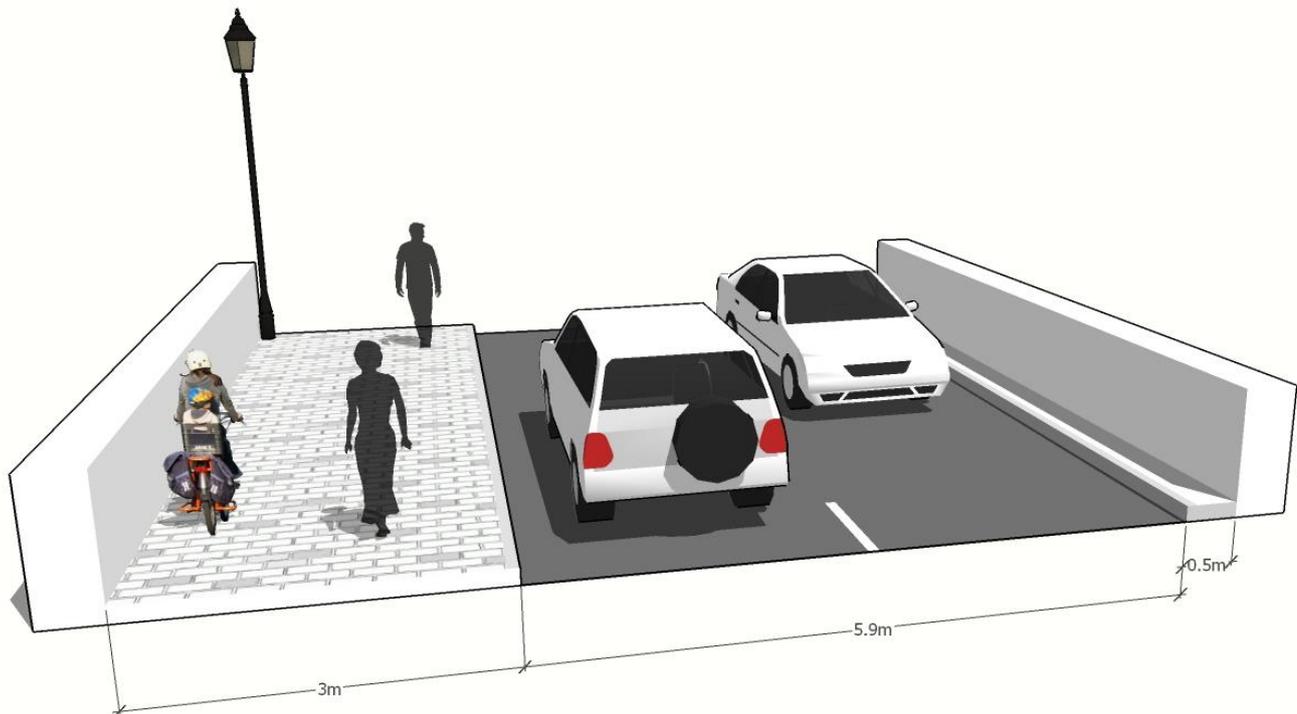


Figure 14: Hexham Bridge with widened shared use cycle track

This option would cater for less experienced cyclists, while more experienced cyclists could still use the carriageway. Furthermore, this arrangement would also mean that the right turn on the busy A6079 into Ferry Lane could be avoided and at the other end of the bridge, the track would link in to the existing subway under the A6079 so avoiding the right turn at the roundabout to continue on NCN 72 (see 2.6.2, below). Anecdotal evidence suggests that the majority of foot traffic uses the east side of the bridge, which also benefits from street lighting.

OPTION 2: Cycle Lanes

The Town plan suggests that advisory cycle lanes are installed on the bridge and the central road markings are removed. Installing advisory cycle lanes 1.5m wide on each side would leave a core traffic lane of 3.4m as shown below (4.1- 4.8m is the recommended preferred width). This option could work with traffic signals at either end of the bridge with shuttle one-way working for motor vehicles. However it is likely to be expensive and would require modelling for traffic effects. While the road would still be suitable for experienced cyclists to use it would also not cater for less experienced cyclists.

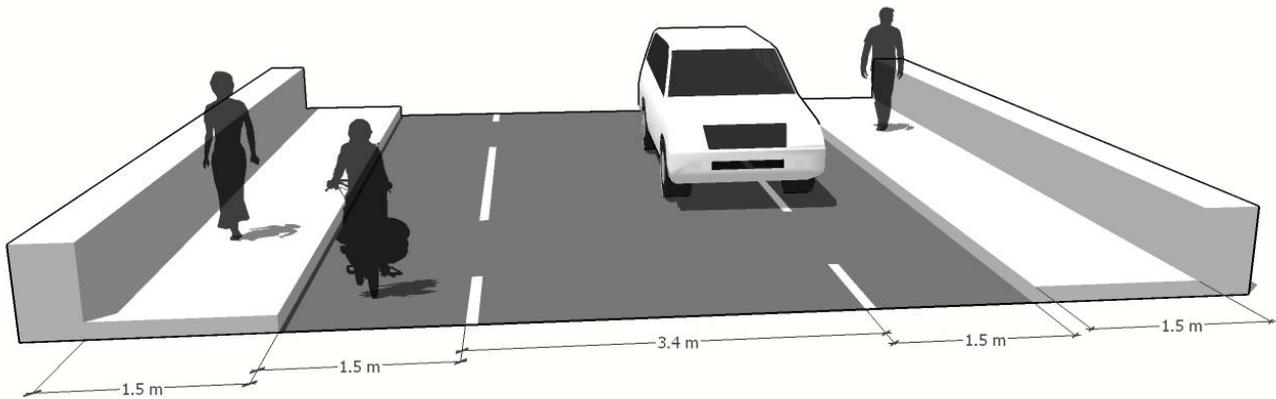


Figure 15: Hexham Bridge cycle lanes and centre-line removal.

2.6.2 A6079 Subway



On the Hexham side of the Tyne there is an existing subway under the A6079 between the Rotary way/ Tyne Green Rd roundabout and Hexham Bridge, which is 5.0m wide and has headroom of 2.4m. The worn paths on the approaches show it is currently used by pedestrians and some cyclists to avoid the roundabout at Tyne Green Road. It is unlit and reasonable gradients on the approaches.



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The subway is considered a useful link and requires the



Figure 17: Subway entrance (East).



entrance clearing of vegetation, access paths surfaced and re-graded to provide gradients of 5% or less, lighting and signing. It would provide an alternative link to the NCN 72 to avoid the roundabout for less experienced cyclists.

2.6.3 Railway Bridge and A6079/ Station Rd Roundabout

The section of road between the two roundabouts that flank the railway line are a particularly hazardous and intimidating location for cyclists, with no provision for use and only a single footway for pedestrians. Provision should first be made at the entry to Tyne Green Industrial Estate, with junction improvements and raised table crossing on the east arm of this roundabout. An enlarged roundabout island (8m radius) with 1.5m overrun strip would maintain traffic flow but seek to calm traffic.



Figure 18: 32m fully clad footbridge over the railway between Halfway and Kilamarsh.

Heading south towards the road bridge that crosses the railway line, only the west side of the road boasts a footway that is separated from the road with trief kerbs and guard railing. A footway runs along the east side from the Tyne Green Industrial Estate to the bridge abutments, where it ends abruptly with no crossing point. Visibility is poor, which compounds this dangerous section of road for users on foot.

A prefabricated footbridge would be a preferable off-road alternative flanking the existing road bridge over the railway line. (The alternative solution, to create a continuous footway would also require significant modification of the roundabout south of the bridge in order to create a safe environment for pedestrians to cross and cyclists to safely use the carriageway.)

2.6.4 Hexham Station Access

Pedestrian and cycle access to the station need to be addressed in order to build on improvements made that have seen the reinstatement of a station forecourt. Cycle parking should be moved from the station platform or split to the front of the station. Currently the station forecourt is a large pedestrian area, which although is appealing is wholly unused and would benefit from well-placed cycle parking and seating.

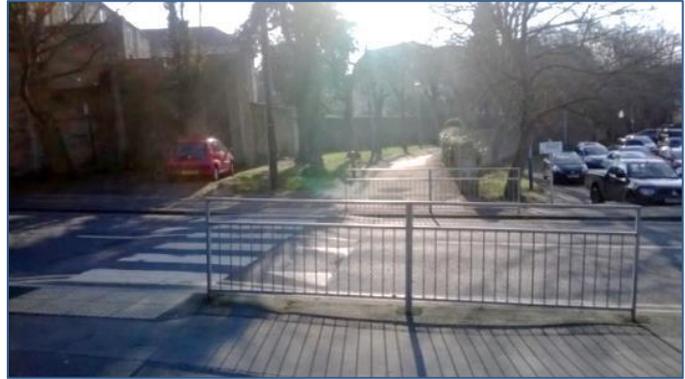
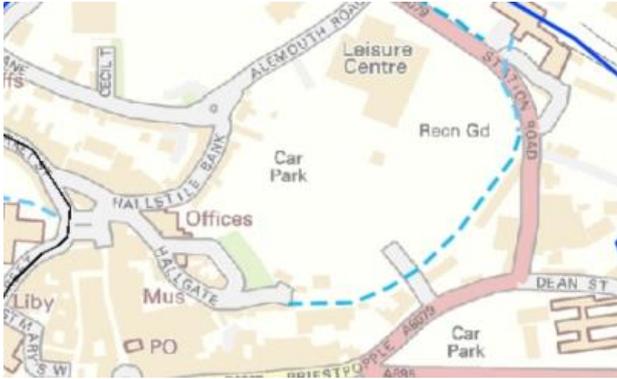
Northern Rail has recently completed the development of car parking to the north of the Newcastle (Eastbound) platform. Cycle parking and signage to this new facility would enable visitors to access the station (Carlisle platform via barrow crossing) avoiding the railway bridge until a suitable alternative is constructed. Visitors to the station could then use either the Barrow crossing or pedestrian footbridge (including steps).

2.6.5 Access to Station from North West

Figure 19: Railway bridge as seen from the Carlisle Platform (left) and Bunker brownfield development site (right).

Access to the Station to and from the North West Tyne Green area could be improved by using the existing disused arch under the railway bridge under the busy A6079. This would require new paths linking the Station car park through the Network Rail compound or from the station platform through the Bunker brownfield site on the other side of the A6079 linking to the industrial estate.

2.6.6 Hall Orchard Road Crossing improvements



There is a 3.7m wide track leading from Station Road to Wentworth Place & Hallgate, known as Hall Orchard Rd. This has been closed to traffic with bollards and offers a direct and mostly traffic free pedestrian and cycling route from the town centre to the station. The lane crosses the access road to the Wentworth car park on a narrow speed table which is flanked by guardrailing.

The crossing should be widened to match the width of the lane either side and the guardrail removed. Staggered bollards may be required to highlight the crossing while maintaining a cohesive route. Give way markings on the carriageway would give pedestrians and cyclists priority over access traffic and ensure traffic speeds are low.

Resurfacing of the track is required to create a high quality surface linking the station and the town centre.

Finally, improvements to the access onto Station Rd, such as bollard removal and footway widening are required to complete the link to the existing zebra crossing outside the train station.

2.7 Abbey and Cowgarth Path Route



There is a potentially useful cycle and walking route into the town centre from the West using Cowgarth and the path that runs alongside the Abbey shown below.

The route uses lightly traffic roads and paths which may be legal to cycle on (there are no signs indicating if you can or cannot cycle). At the end of the route the path drops down to a narrow bridge crossing a stream with a ramp down to Cockshaw. This could be widened and improved to



allow cyclists and pedestrians to use comfortably.

Restricting vehicle traffic on Cowgarth except for access would be an ideal improvement from Market St, creating a pedestrian and cycle only route into The Sele, Abbey grounds and The Sele First School. This would require minimal infrastructure changes to the existing carriageway, aside from minor surface treatments, signage and bollards.

Figure 22: Existing narrow bridge to Cockshaw.

2.8 Argyle Terrace: 20mph limit, cycling access and home zone

Argyle Terrace is a short one way street from Priestpople to Maidens walk. It has a motor vehicle access restriction and is a useful pedestrian route to Marks and Spencer’s store and hospital.

It has paved informal pedestrian crossings at each but lacks footways in places along the frontages of homes and there is parking on the pavement opposite.

The speed limit on the street is 30mph and 20mph the adjoining Maiden Walk. Cars tend to ignore access restriction and cyclists can only use the street one way.



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In the short term this street could be made a 20 mph zone and two-way for cyclists by amending the traffic orders. In the longer term this street is a good candidate for a ‘DIY Street’ scheme (see **Error! Reference source not found.**, page **Error! Bookmark not defined.**). This would prompt a redesign of the street over a series of design workshops and events that engages the residents and business.

2.9 Pedestrian/cycle route signing

There is a network of existing pedestrian finger post signs on finales pointing to various destinations e.g. Railway Station, Town Centre. The font size on the signage is too small for easy reading and the signs look tired and missing at key locations.



It is recommended that pedestrian signing design and locations are reviewed with the aim of producing a new brand of way-marking key destinations, including consistent maps. It is also recommended to consider including times or distances to destinations on the signs as well as integrating with public transport in the town.



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.

There is scope to add to the existing provision in Hexham, with a number of locations spread across town. New locations have been chosen to create an extensive network of convenient cycle parking around the town. Locations have been assigned as 'primary' (green) for multiple bikes or 'secondary' (red) for single bikes (see Annex 4 for examples of cycle parking solutions). As the main shopping streets in Hexham are relatively short, many primary locations have been located at the entry points to the town centre boundary, with secondary locations intermittently found along the streets to serve individual shops and businesses.



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2.11 Network Development

2.11.1 General Improvements

	Ref		Description
Priority ⇄	4.6.4	Station access	<p>Raised zebra crossing speed table</p> <p>Removal of guardrail and installing new speed table crossing across station access road.</p> <p>Widening existing speed table, removal of guardrail and installing give way markings and signing (Wentworth PI)</p>
	4.7	Abbey/Cowgarth path cycle route	Signage and bollards
	4.9	Pedestrian and cycle route signing	Replacing existing pedestrian finger post finales and signs with new clearer signing
	4.4	Fore Street/St Marys Chare ped zone cycle access	Amending traffic orders and signing to allow cycling in these streets 24/7 and to consider two way cycling
	4.8	20mph limit and two way cycling Argyle Terrace	Amending traffic order and signs to extend 20 zone to Argyle Terrace and allow two way cycling in one way street
	4.2	Market street pinch point closure	Bollards and signing to close Market Street at narrow point
	4.2	Market PI/ Hallgate crossing	Speed table paved crossing of end of Hallgate
	4.6.2	Subway under A6079	<p>New ramped paths to subway</p> <p>Subway cleared of vegetation and lit</p> <p>New signing of NCN 72,</p>

2.11.2 Major Improvements

	Ref		Description
Priority ⇄	4.2	Market Place shared area pedestrian zone	Major town centre upgrade, repaving with high quality materials and closed/ restricted access.
	4.1	Priestpopple/Battle Hill paving	Removal of existing signalled crossings and repaving street scape to create shared area to slow traffic and improve crossings
	4.6.1	Hexham Bridge cycle track	Widening footway on eastern side of Hexham bridge to 3.0m and reducing it on west side to 0.5m to create shared use cycle track.
	4.6.3	A6079 Footbridge over railway	Newly constructed 3m wide warren truss full clad pedestrian and cycle footbridge Ramps, access and groundworks
	4.8	Home zone Argyle Terrace	Involving residents and businesses in DIY streets project to create home zone -
	4.7	New Bridge Cockshaw	Replacing existing narrow bridge with wider structure, approach ramps over beck
	4.3	Beaumont St	Speed table paved crossing by Queens hall Footway widening west side Parking rearrangement, signage and sundries
	4.5	St Marys Wynd	Parking control, footway widening and bollards
	4.6.5	Station access NW across Bunker site	New shared use paths across site and under railway bridge to access station – development related