

CENTRAL WREXHAM PLACEMAKING PLAN

WHAT IS THE PLACEMAKING PLAN?

The Placemaking Plan is about improving the centre of Wrexham and encouraging people to re-imagine and influence how it should look, feel, and function. Specifically, we want placemaking to promote better design and development, and help establish more appealing social, cultural, economic uses and activities.

The final version of the Plan will include a comprehensive delivery plan reflecting wider consultation and involvement. It will include agreed priorities for both the Council and its partners, identifying the level and sources of funding and governance structures that will steer the Plan's delivery.

In June 2022 Wrexham County Borough Council became a signatory of the Placemaking Charter in Wales. We apply the principles of the Charter to the whole County Borough, and they provide a framework for delivering our ambitions of becoming the UK City of Culture and other plans such as the Destination Management Plan, the World Heritage Site Masterplan; the Council Housing Strategy; the Active Travel Plan, and the emerging Digital Plan.

WHY ARE WE DOING THIS?

Wrexham is a place with a unique and proud identity. Currently, it is one of the most talked about places in the UK and has a growing international profile. Our growth and ambition have been raised significantly through the award of City Status for the whole County Borough, advancing to the final stage of the 2025 City of Culture, and there's also the global spotlight on Wrexham following the Hollywood takeover and recent successes of Wrexham FC. This has resulted in increased opportunities and interest for investment in Wrexham and has boosted local pride in the centre of the city that serves the whole community.

HOW DID WE GET HERE?

Engagement began in autumn 2021, with an online consultation and stakeholder workshops discussing placemaking and what would make a successful city. We captured a large amount of feedback and ideas about the then town centre and how concerned people are about its future. Since this time, there have been several Council Officer, stakeholder and Council Member workshops to formulate ideas, opportunities and priorities to shape the Plan.

We recognise that the engagement so far has not been exhaustive; hence, the Plan is only in draft, and we are beginning a period of public consultation to further shape the priorities for Wrexham.

WHAT DO WE WANT TO KNOW?

Firstly, we want to know how much you agree or disagree with what's in the Plan as it stands, and then we want to get your wider views to make the Plan as representative as possible.

WHAT AREA DOES THE CENTRE OF WREXHAM COVER?

The central area of Wrexham covered by the Placemaking Plan is shown on the PDF 'Wrexham Placemaking Plan'.

WHAT CHALLENGES DO WE NEED TO ADDRESS?

Just as the wider economy of Wrexham has been transformed over the past twenty years, Wrexham's centre needs to go through its own period of transformation. Work is already under way, in response to changing trends in shopping and living, and to grow its cultural, commercial and community assets. However, there are significant challenges facing the centre that the proposed strategies and projects set out in the Plan will seek to directly address.

- Local people's preference to visit and spend more of their money in out of town retail parks and neighbouring towns than in the centre of Wrexham
- Need for a range of new and appealing activities and facilities to attract more families, students and households living in outlying countryside communities
- Negative external perceptions and concerns about anti-social behaviour
- Vacant property remain a challenge and there's a lack of owner/investor confidence in the centre
- The leisure and cultural offer is relatively small and undeveloped, and there's a need for a stronger family entertainment and evening economy
- Reduced demand for office space and declining employment base
- The scale and type of residential development in the centre hasn't realised the desired regeneration benefits
- Navigation and wayfinding across the centre are poor with pedestrian and cycling routes obstructed, counter-intuitive and unattractive
- The value and potential of historic buildings and environment has not been fully realised or celebrated

THE PLAN'S VISION & OBJECTIVES

The Vision for the centre provides a strategic response to the identified opportunities and challenges.

Vision - The Placemaking Plan will help Wrexham to fully capture the benefits of its city status to create a place of regional and national significance. The centre of our city will be playful, sociable, entertaining, and inclusive to all who live, work, visit, and invest in it.

Our centre will:

- Be the first choice for people from across the Wrexham area, as a place for shopping, working, learning, culture and entertainment
- Be a safe, comfortable, and convenient place to visit and get around
- Have a strong identity defined by its built heritage, high-quality environment and culture
- Be well-managed and clean, and regularly host exciting events and activities to establish Wrexham as a top destination in the region
- Provide developers, businesses and organisations with the confidence and encouragement to invest

The Vision is underpinned by eight strategic objectives, which lie at the heart of our investment approach and will drive positive change through collective action

1. **Economic Diversity** - Create a more multi-purpose, higher quality and enjoyable daytime and night-time economy that appeals to the people that live, learn and work in Wrexham
2. **Property Market** - Rebuild private sector confidence in the long term viability & investment returns. Becoming more attractive than out-of-town locations. Includes masterplanning large scale redevelopment opportunities and re-purposing vacant buildings for new uses and smaller occupiers
3. **Employment** - Increase the number and quality of jobs located in the centre by encouraging the growth of independent businesses, attracting new employers and encouraging more collaborative social, cultural and public work-hubs
4. **Centre Living** - Create large scale, viable and mixed tenure residential development opportunities providing a more diverse population that supports new social and community facilities
5. **Access and Movement** - Ensure that pedestrian movement within and on the approach to the centre is safe, comfortable, inclusive, easy to navigate and attractive
6. **Townscape and Environmental** - Enhance existing and create new public realm and spaces to reinforce a coherent and authentic sense of Wrexham's identity and attract and encourage greater public use
7. **Inclusive and Social** - Broaden the inclusiveness and sociability of the centre with inter-generational, accessible, and cultural improvements
8. **Digital 'Smart' City** - Embrace the Smart cities approach to a digitally enabled centre with a data driven approach to management and business support

SPATIAL FRAMEWORK

Wrexham's centre is rich and varied in character and, to assist with developing proposals, the Placemaking Plan identifies four distinct spatial areas each defined by their urban character, dominant land-uses and potential for change. (See Wrexham Placemaking plan Spatial framework).

Old Town – defined by its heritage, street pattern and retail and cultural land uses. The aim is to celebrate Wrexham's identity through the continued enhancement and repair of its historic townscape character and create a destination at the 'historic heart' of the centre.

Civic Quarter – defined by its open, green campus form and concentration of civic facilities and employment. The aim is to reinforce the character and function of the northern part of the centre as a 'civic campus' - i.e. a collection of institutional buildings within an attractive and open landscape setting.

Regent Street Corridor – defined by its linear form and connection to the railway station and investment at Wrexham Gateway. The aim is to facilitate the evolution of the centre over the long term, by establishing redevelopment opportunities of scale, augmenting the diverse range of land uses, improving strategic connections between places of arrival and key destinations, and through enhancing the townscape character.

Gwenfro Brook – defined by its fragmented urban form and large vacant or underused sites. The aim is to support sustainable and diverse urban living by developing at a large-scale, though currently disconnected sites, on the southern edge of the central area.

ACTIVITIES

The Placemaking Plan includes seven thematic activities with the potential to support the whole centre.

1. **Land use and property** – the aim is to build confidence in the centre as a place for private sector property owners and investors and to address the vacant and underutilised buildings
 - Grants and loans that encourage investment that diversifies uses, creates modern quality premises and appropriately sized and affordable smaller units
 - Direct public sector intervention to acquire the most important and impactful vacant buildings and to assemble larger scale sites for development.
 - Supportive planning system with consistent and fast decision making and sufficient flexibility to encourage investment.
 - Data insights– providing business and investors with up to date, 'smart' information about the centre's performance, footfall, visitors and spending patterns
 - Enforcement – where necessary to ensure property owners bring empty and problematic properties back into use

2. **Business and enterprise support** – a package of business support to grow and diversify the business base and to encourage new and independent business start-ups
3. **Place management** – activities that address negative perceptions and harness local pride and greater level of use and activity. Proposals include place branding, improved street environmental management, and use of smart technology for a data-driven approach to monitoring footfall, spending patterns, frequency and dwell times. The Plan recognises the need for a new partnership and forums that effectively involve civic leaders, stakeholders and businesses in the management and improvement of the centre. The feasibility of a Business improvement District (BID) for the centre is currently being explored.
4. **Traditional Markets** - Wrexham’s history as a market town is the source of great local pride and investment is taking place in the Butcher and General Market. Proposals include examining alternative locations for the Monday Market to help create a ‘markets quarter’, initiatives to grow a new generation of market traders supporting an “authentic” shopping experience.
5. **Active travel, transport and parking** – supporting proposals for improving the active travel network that aid navigation and quality of experience for pedestrian cycling within and on approach to the centre. And a review of vehicular movement and management within public spaces to support public realm improvements and attract all potential users.
6. **Public realm and green infrastructure** – the centre has a well distributed public realm, which includes streets, squares and parks etc with clear opportunities for targeted improvements to provide opportunity to socialise, dine, relax, be entertained and do business, etc.
7. **Green and health city** - proposals that help with carbon reduction and reducing energy costs. The short and long-term impacts of rising energy costs on businesses and the energy efficiency of town centre buildings is an opportunity and ideas include exploring the potential for urban solar network. The centre would also benefit from a comprehensive network of Electric Vehicle and E-bike charging

DELIVERY AREAS

The spatial areas and activities are a call to action that is both exciting and formidable. Delivered individually, each activity offers considerable benefit, however, the key advantage of developing a holistic vision through the Placemaking Plan, is that the beneficial effects may be multiplied through the coordination of a number of projects together

By grouping projects in geographical clusters, six potential ‘Delivery Areas’ have been identified. Each area presents an opportunity to play a specific role within the overall

Placemaking Plan – albeit with flexibility to adapt and change to circumstances. The identified areas are:

1 - Market Quarter

The proposal is to redefine and re-imagine High Street and its associated markets, as the ‘heart’ of Wrexham’s centre. Considerable investment is already in place to regenerate the markets however, despite successful building enhancement projects the street itself remains underused and subject to issues of dangerous driving and anti-social behaviour. Public realm enhancements in this area will help to manage these issues and, in coordination with the relocation and promotion of outdoor markets, will help to establish the area as the go-to cultural and civic heart of the City. Strengthening the role of High Street as a higher quality day time destination and encouraging the hospitality sector will also strengthen the area as an attractive evening and night time destination.

The Hippodrome site is an opportunity to provide a family orientated space with playful facilities and temporary stores, further strengthening the Market Quarter as a destination.

2 Lord Street / Queens Square

The opportunity is to redefine a discrete part of the centre as the location for cultural and family entertainment through the reuse and adaptation of prominent vacant and underutilised buildings and the enhancement of public spaces. Key opportunities include investment in Chapter Court, the former Woolworths and Library buildings. Queens Square could be better used for outside seating/hospitality/events for more diverse and higher quality daytime and night-time activity.

3 Regent Street Gateway

The opportunity is to strengthen the importance of this area as a place to experience heritage, culture and the arts. It is also an important arrival point linking the city centre with the Wrexham Gateway with Wrexham General Station and the regeneration of the Racecourse Ground, transport hub and University. The new Football Museum of Wales development will significantly strengthen the heritage cultural role of this area. The proposed Mold Road Corridor active travel improvements will significantly improve access and connectivity for pedestrians and cyclists as well as enhancing the public realm

4 Island Green

This represents a longer term opportunity and is one of a limited number of possible large scale redevelopment opportunities within Wrexham’s centre. The area would allow significant urban reshaping and a desire to refocus retail uses more centrally and create an area of sufficient scale for residential development

5 Bridge Street & Brook Street

This area is a potential opportunity to redefine and create a new residential community within walking distance of the city centre and coordinated with the rejuvenation of the commercial properties fronting Brook Street

6 Wrexham Gateway

This is a landmark initiative led by the Council in partnership with Welsh Government, Wrexham Glyndwr University and Transport for Wales. The aim of the regeneration programme is to harness the economic development, social and transportation opportunities in the area of the Wrexham General Rail Station, the Wrexham Racecourse Football Ground and adjacent privately owned parcels of land, creating a high profile and perception changing modern mixed use development.