

# 04

In which we synthesise baseline assessment, analysis plans and consultation to present URBED's view of the town's situation, its pressures and its opportunities for the future.

# CONCLUSIONS





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DIAGNOSIS



There is a mismatch between Crewe's economic performance and the quality of the town centre. It is one of the fastest growing towns in the region and there is demand for development in the town, however the current quality of the centre is poor and the views of residents and stakeholders generally negative.

The baseline study shows that Crewe is performing reasonably well. Compared to other towns tackling industrial restructuring, it retains a healthy demand for retail and residential development. The reason is its location in an affluent part of the region and so provides a haven of affordability and land availability in an area where land is generally expensive and scarce. The proposals by Modus to redevelop part of the shopping centre are indicative of this as is the Mill St. scheme between the town centre and the station.

This development pressure is a real opportunity for Crewe to address the serious issues facing the town. The urban design analysis highlights a series of significant failings in the physical structure of the town. As a planned railway town it was probably never picturesque, however the quality that it had has been seriously eroded by 20th century development and the attractive core of the town is confined to a small area around Market Street and Earle Street. The biggest problem is the 'shatter zone' around the edge of the centre that creates a poor impression to passing traffic and cuts the centre of the town off from its neighbourhoods.

The consultation results confirmed that Crewe's main challenges relate to its identity and pride in the town. It is seen as the poor relation of the Cheshire towns, cheap and accessible but without the character and history of Nantwich or Middlewich. There was a real desire in the workshop for radical change and the current market interest makes this possible.

An example of modern development within the town centre.



Crewe has a number of fine buildings but relatively few as a result of recent development.





A high-angle, close-up photograph of a dark asphalt road. Several thick white lines are painted on the surface, creating a grid-like pattern. One line runs diagonally from the bottom left towards the top right. Another line runs horizontally across the middle. A third line runs horizontally near the top. A fourth line runs horizontally near the bottom. In the upper right quadrant, there is a rectangular metal storm drain grate. The overall scene is captured in a slightly desaturated, high-contrast style.

PROGNOSIS





What then is the prognosis for Crewe, what will happen if current trends are allowed to continue?

The danger that Crewe faces is that uncoordinated development will take place around the town centre exacerbating the current with the physical environment. Crewe could become just another 'clone town' with the same chain retailers trading from characterless car parks and ring roads. The town will become increasingly congested and dominated by cars. It will develop a reputation for being cheap, and down market rather than just affordable. Trade may increase but it will be at the expense of character and, consequently the loyalty and pride of local people upon which all towns rely. This runs the risk of the improvements brought about by current developments being short term. If Crewe's offer is not distinctive it will lose out as other centres also improve as they will inevitably do in the future.

The consultation exercise confirmed this, revealing that people wanted to develop the traditional and historic character of the town centre. This is how the prognosis can be avoided. The development interest in Crewe

needs to be harnessed to transform the town. An alternative future would see development opportunities harnessed in a way that repairs the historic character and structure of the town centre. Crewe would continue to offer convenience and choice – so not competing head on with the likes of Nantwich – but would nevertheless become more distinctive and pleasurable to use. To do this the town needs to exploit to the full the opportunities it has as outlined in the following section.



Aerial view of Macon Way highlighted the severance issues that Crewe face.



Crewe has many medium to large format retailers but suffers from a lack of choice.



Crewe's competitors have a unique heritage, the town should look to develop its own unique offer.



# OPPORTUNITIES





Crewe has high quality open space already in the town.



In developing this alternative future Crewe has a number of opportunities that it must exploit:

### Accessibility

The accessibility of the town, combining the rail links with the easy access to the M6 is one of its greatest assets. This can be used to attract economic activity to strengthen the local employment base.

### Commuting

In an increasingly mobile world the people of Crewe will also increasingly commute to work elsewhere. Manchester, Liverpool and Birmingham are all within a commutable distance from Crewe railway station. It is even possible to commute to London. The improvement or redevelopment of the station is the opportunity to create a world-class facility with parking to encourage this.

### Students

The expansion of the Manchester Metropolitan University Campus to the east of the town on Nantwich Road. This is currently isolated from the centre and yet will increase to 5000 students. This student population needs to be drawn into the town centre along with student halls and entertainment facilities.

### Affordability

Crewe sits in an expensive county and benefits from relative affordability. Because of this, retail and residential developers are very interested in investing in the town that creates the potential to bring about significant physical change.

### Land Availability

The council has strategic land holdings in the town centre and therefore has the ability to shape this development. It would be possible to create significant development sites through joint ventures with existing landowners to drive the delivery of the town centre strategy.

Because of these opportunities there is interest for a range of developments in the town. This creates a number of possibilities for the masterplanning process:

- The redevelopment of large format retailing in a way that relates better to the urban structure of the town
- The promotion of Crewe's evening economy and cultural uses to make it an attractive place to socialise
- The development of new housing around the town centre to increase the population within easy reach of the centre.
- The exploitation of the student population of the Manchester Metropolitan University of Cheshire by drawing them into the town centre.

All of these opportunities should allow Crewe to reconstruct and restructure the shatter zone around the edge of the centre. This will better link to the surrounding neighbourhoods and create an attractive face to the outside world.



Crewe has strong street scenes that can be enhanced with sensitive, council led development.