



Report to: Cabinet Meeting - 24 February 2026

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Claire Penny, Sustainable Economic Development

Director Lead: Matt Lamb, Director for Planning and Growth

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<b>Report Summary</b>	
<b>Type of Report</b>	Open Report / Key Decision
<b>Report Title</b>	Newark Town Centre Masterplan and Design Code Update
<b>Purpose of Report</b>	To update Cabinet on the Newark Town Centre Masterplan, including key principles, consultation process and recommended next steps to ensure implementation. Additionally, to update Cabinet on the Newark Town Centre Design Code, which was developed in line with the Masterplan, including area codes, consultation process and recommended next steps, given significant planning policy changes in 2026.
<b>Recommendations</b>	<p>It is recommended that Cabinet:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>a) note the update provided in relation to the Newark Town Centre Masterplan;</li><li>b) adopt the Newark Town Centre Masterplan as planning guidance from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2026;</li><li>c) allow for a review of not less than 6 months of the implementation of the Town Centre Masterplan, with delegated authority for any necessary amendments being delegated to the Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Economic Development in consultation with the Chair of Planning Committee and Director – Planning &amp; Growth; and</li><li>d) note the update provided in relation to the Newark Town Centre Design Code and endorse its adoption as guidance as part of an updated Newark Conservation Area Management Plan the publication of which is already delegated to the Council's Director of Planning &amp; Growth.</li></ul>

<b>Alternative Options Considered</b>	<p>The option to discontinue work and not finalise the Newark Town Centre Masterplan has been ruled out. Establishing a clear, deliverable strategy for the nature of future development and design that will be supported is considered essential.</p> <p>Taking the Design Code forward as a Supplementary Planning Document has been impacted upon by changes to the planning system and is therefore discounted. The alternative option of taking the Code forward as part of the Newark Conservation Area Management Plan is a sensible alternative that will ensure that the document has planning weight and can inform decision-making.</p>
<b>Reason for Recommendations</b>	<p>It is important that the Newark Town Centre Masterplan is carried forward in order to provide a clear, framework for shaping growth, investment (by the Council and others), and regeneration in line with community priorities. Adoption ensures that future development can be influenced. This directly supports the ambitions of the Newark &amp; Sherwood Community Plan 2023–2027 by breaking down barriers to opportunity, improving health and wellbeing through active travel and green spaces, reducing crime through better-designed public realm, celebrating culture and heritage, and advancing climate resilience and net-zero objectives.</p> <p>Incorporating relevant elements of the Design Code into an updated Newark Conservation Area Management Plan also provides an effective approach to support its integration into the Development Management process.</p>

## 1.0 Background

- 1.1 In Autumn 2023, Newark and Sherwood District Council (the Council) commenced working in partnership with Historic England (HE) to deliver a Newark Town Centre Masterplan and Design Code. Allies & Morrison (A&M) urban designers and architects were instructed to deliver this programme, alongside public consultation on both documents. Developing these documents in parallel, with the same team, has ensured consistency and efficiencies throughout the project.
- 1.2 This report will outline the main principles of each document and the recommended next steps.
- 1.3 Newark Town Centre Masterplan
- 1.4 The purpose of the Newark Town Centre Masterplan is to provide a strategic framework to guide development, regeneration, and investment within Newark's Conservation Area and its immediate context. It supports the Amended Core Strategy, Allocations & Development Management DPD, and the Conservation Area Management Plan. The document will inform planning decisions, being a material consideration for planning decision-making. The document should also inform

funding bids, future investment decisions and partnership working within and beyond the Council.

- 1.5 The vision for Newark Town Centre is that it will remain a historic market town while embracing sustainable growth, creativity, and connectivity. The town centre will be compact and walkable, with the Market Place as its vibrant heart. It will be economically resilient, offering a diverse mix of retail, leisure, residential, and cultural uses. The town will be inclusive and accessible, with improved public realm and active travel routes within it, and celebrated for its heritage, green spaces, and riverside assets.
- 1.6 The masterplan is structured around six themes:
  1. Revitalising the Market Place as a safe and flexible space.
  2. Supporting a strong economy and town centre living.
  3. Promoting education, skills training, and creative industries.
  4. Enhancing riverside leisure and flood resilience.
  5. Improving walking, cycling, and public transport links.
  6. Celebrating Newark's history and cultural assets through interpretation and events.
- 1.7 The masterplan was shaped by extensive engagement with residents, businesses, and stakeholders, as follows:
  - Stage 1 (October 2023): Ideas gathering through an online survey (1,550 responses), website (830 visits), workshops (65 attendees), market stall event (350+ comments), and focus groups with businesses and Newark College students.
  - Stage 2 (Nov 2023–Feb 2024): Draft vision shared for feedback.
  - Stage 3 (Sept–Oct 2025): Exhibition of draft proposals online and in the Buttermarket, supported by staffed market stall drop-ins. Over 80 detailed responses were received and incorporated into the final plan.
- 1.8 Feedback highlighted tackling vacant shops, improving riverside leisure and activities, and better parking provision as top priorities. Other strong themes included more events, an improved night-time economy, safer and greener public spaces, greater town centre living, consolidating retail to the core and better transport links. Students emphasised the need for improved connectivity, creative spaces, apprenticeships, and youth-focused leisure.
- 1.9 Consultation feedback mirrored many challenges that the town centre current faces, including traffic congestion and poor integration of public transport, vacant retail units and a declining evening economy, fragmented public realm and poor maintenance, limited overnight accommodation for visitors, and flood risk along Tolney Lane and riverside areas.
- 1.10 Opportunities include improving station gateways and wayfinding to the town centre, activating vacant shops with art and community uses, expanding residential

provision in the town centre, enhancing green spaces and biodiversity, and developing riverside leisure with continuous walking and cycling routes.

- 1.11 Challenges and opportunities highlighted in the Masterplan will now be incorporated into a Newark Town Centre Action Plan, which will be seeking to address these recommendations insofar as what this Council can directly and what we can do to work with and/or influence others, such as the Highway Authority or landowners for example.
- 1.12 The Masterplan character area framework sets out tailored opportunity projects for nine areas, including the redevelopment of St Mark's Place, improvements to Town Wharf, and transformation of London Road car park. Key opportunity sites include Cow Lane Scrap Yard for riverside development, the former Orchard School for housing, and the Back of Lock Keep for mixed-use development. It also sets a number of general principles new developments should achieve. The town's infrastructure, comprising its historic streets and buildings, is largely fixed in form and, in some areas, creates constraints on transport and movement. The Masterplan identifies opportunities to address these challenges, offering examples of how spaces can be made more accessible, attractive, and better connected. Delivering these improvements will require further consideration and close collaboration with the highway authority, particularly as part of the transition into and beyond Local Government Reorganisation (LGR).
- 1.13 Members will recall that no funding is allocated for any of the major project opportunities or interventions set out in the Masterplan document. Rather, the masterplan serves to identify priority sites where landowners will be supported with guidance, advice, and comfort as to what is likely to be supported. A sites identification may be levered to secure funding from appropriate external sources. Successful delivery will require collaboration between Newark and Sherwood District Council, landowners, developers, and funding bodies. However, it should be noted that viability remains a significant challenge for development of major projects in Newark, and therefore interventions to assist with viability gaps should be considered to unlock larger opportunities. As Members will be aware, and as the Masterplan has identified, the Council has already delivered or commenced a number of projects which can act as a catalyst to raise standards, values and vibrancy. This includes the Council's Offices at Castle House, the Newark Air & Space Institute, the Construction College Centre of Excellence, Newark Buttermarket, the former Robin Hood Hotel, 32 Stodman Street, Newark Castle Gatehouse, Newark Town Centre Events (Newark Creates and Newark Cultural Heart), and Newark Market Place.
- 1.14 The Masterplan will represent a general strategy of the District Council and not hold formal planning status itself. It will however be capable of being a material consideration in planning decisions, and the emerging Amended Allocations & Development Management DPD provides policy support for schemes delivering its objectives.
- 1.15 Newark Town Centre Design Code

- 1.16 The purpose of the Newark Town Centre Design Code is to provide clear, detailed design requirements for development within the town centre, helping to deliver the vision and principles set out in the Masterplan. It will establish consistent standards for architecture, materials, public realm, and sustainability, ensuring that new development respects Newark's historic character while meeting modern requirements for accessibility, climate resilience, and quality of life.
- 1.17 The Design Code is a largely technical document. The production of the Design Code was agreed to follow a 2-stage consultation process given its detail and complexity. Stage 1 consultation has now taken place with key professional stakeholders, including architects, developers, Historic England, and Newark & Sherwood District Council planning officers. This occurred between July and September 2025. This engagement focused on testing the principles, technical guidance, and practical application of the code to ensure it was robust, deliverable, and aligned with heritage and planning requirements.
- 1.18 Feedback shows support for the principle of introducing a Design Code, and the benefits that this could provide, but in some cases concern around the detail has been raised by local professionals active in the Town Centre as well as from internal officers. To address these concerns, there would need to be additional work on the code before a second stage of consultation could be undertaken. This is expected to conclude over the summer.
- 1.19 It had been intended that the Design Code would be taken forward as a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD). Following some changes as part of the national new plan-making system this is no longer possible. Whilst this reduces the 'statutory' status of what may eventually be adopted it does not reduce its ability to inform decision-making. Indeed, it is recommended that the guidance is now adopted as part of the yet-to-be published Newark Conservation Area Review and associated Management Plan. It is this latter document which offers technical information, advice and guidance to inform new development and set expected standards.

## **2.0 Proposal/Options Considered**

- 2.1 Newark Town Centre Masterplan – Proposed Next Steps
- 2.2 From a regulatory perspective, and subject to Cabinet approval, the next steps are to adopt the Newark Town Centre Masterplan and revised the Design Code as part of the Newark Conservation Area Review and Management Plan. The implementation of documents of this scope and scale with decision-makers and developers will take time, particularly for development proposals which are already well advanced. It is therefore suggested that the guidance is adopted from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2026 (noting that it will be referenced in negotiation with immediate effect) and is subject to a review after at least 6 months of adoption. This will allow the Planning Development team to ensure the masterplan is influencing outcomes and is received by the development industry.

2.3 To ensure the Newark Town Centre Masterplan translates into tangible outcomes, the Council is developing a comprehensive Town Centre Action Plan aligned with the Masterplan's principles and recommendations. This Action Plan will set out clear priorities, delivery mechanisms, and timescales for short-, medium-, and long-term interventions. This will be clear on what the District Council can do directly, what can be done by others (with our support and/or influence), and what may need further future funding decisions. It will include practical steps to revitalise the Market Place, enhance public realm, improve connectivity, and support a balanced mix of uses—such as increasing town centre residential provision while managing a meaningful quantum of retail floorspace in line with changing trends. The Action Plan will also identify quick wins that can be delivered within existing budgets or through external funding, alongside larger strategic projects requiring partnership and investment. By providing a structured framework for implementation, the Action Plan will give confidence to Members, stakeholders, and developers that the Masterplan is not just aspirational but actionable, ensuring Newark's town centre remains vibrant, sustainable, and economically resilient.

2.4 Newark Town Centre Design Code – Proposed Next Steps

2.5 The Council's Conservation Team is confident, following the completion of the stage 1 'professional cohort' consultation that a user-friendly and useful Code can now be developed. It is proposed that this be incorporated into the work associated with the consultation and adoption of a revised Newark Conservation Area Character Appraisal and Management Plan. The Director for Planning & Growth has existing delegated authority to progress this. This would be subject to consultation with the Planning Committee and Portfolio Holder for Economic Development.

### **3.0 Implications**

3.1 In writing this report and in putting forward recommendations, officers have considered the following implications: Data Protection; Digital & Cyber Security; Equality & Diversity; Financial; Human Resources; Human Rights; Legal; Safeguarding & Sustainability and where appropriate they have made reference to these implications and added suitable expert comment where appropriate.

3.2 If the Design Code is not advanced as a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD), and instead relevant elements are incorporated within an updated Newark Conservation Area Management Plan, this would change the statutory status of the Design Code. SPDs are prepared under the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 and the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012, and while they do not set new planning policy, they support implementation of the Development Plan and can be material considerations within the Development Management process.

3.3 Conservation Area Appraisals and Management Plans derive from the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 and fulfil the statutory duty to identify special interest and set out proposals for the preservation and enhancement of Conservation Areas. Although not formal planning documents, they too may be

treated as material considerations and are routinely used to inform advice, negotiate design changes and support decisions in Conservation Areas.

Implications Considered			
Yes – relevant and included / NA – not applicable			
Financial	NA	Equality & Diversity	Yes
Human Resources	NA	Human Rights	NA
Legal	Yes	Data Protection	NA
Digital & Cyber Security	NA	Safeguarding	NA
Sustainability	NA	Crime & Disorder	NA
LGR	NA	Tenant Consultation	NA

### 3.4 Financial Implications (FIN25-26/6815)

There are no financial implications arising from this report.

### 3.5 Legal Implications - LEG2526/2392

Cabinet is the appropriate body to consider the content of this report. The Newark Town Centre Design Code as guidance as part of an updated Newark Conservation Area Management Plan will be subject to the relevant consultation requirements.

### 3.6 Equalities Implications

The Masterplan and Design Code are expected to deliver positive outcomes by improving accessibility, safety and inclusivity across the town centre's public realm, transport routes and facilities. The focus on enhanced walking and cycling connections, high-quality public spaces, and support for diverse community, cultural and educational uses will help meet the needs of all groups, including those with protected characteristics. No adverse equalities impacts are anticipated.

### Background Papers and Published Documents

Except for previously published documents, which will be available elsewhere, the documents listed here will be available for inspection in accordance with Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972.

[Newark Town Centre Masterplan Report Link](#)

[Newark Design Code \(Stage 1 Consultation Document\) Link](#)

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