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# The Future of English City Centres:
# The Case for Newcastle upon Tyne

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# The Case for Newcastle upon Tyne

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# Abstract

21st century cities operate in new patterns that are radically different from urban models of the 20th century. In the broad context of urban studies, there is a growing focus on future cities and the assertion of what new technologies can offer. At the cusp of this change, there is an increasing interest in the study of city centres where these transitions are being played out. The complex interconnections of current social, environmental, political, and economic transitions could be at the core of the future of UK city centres. The perceived ability of city centre to traverse disciplinary edges makes it an important subject for many established disciplines and creates the possibility for cross-disciplinary and inter-disciplinary research. This thesis aims to critically review the environmental, social, economic, and political perspectives of the city centre in Newcastle upon Tyne in the UK in order to provide insights on its future transitions. An improved understanding of these perspectives is critical for developing scenarios for the future of the city centre.

The study makes a timely contribution to the existing literature by presenting a comprehensive commentary and Framework for the Future that can be used by a wide range of participants who might shape the future of the city centre. These two documents go beyond the physical structure and recognise the key dimensions of environmental, social, economic and political perspectives in the future visioning and planning of the city centre. The framework highlights the significance of the relationship between buildings and spaces and points to a faster turnover of uses in the future while identifying action points for the creation of inclusive spaces. The framework also recognises the importance of considering city centre users as social groups as well as economic contributors in order to develop a heterogeneous population. The research shows that the retention of economic value within the boundary of the city centre is of great importance. This study identifies the move from government to governance as a critical political issue in any future scenario for English city centres.

# Publications

Some of the material in this thesis has been presented or published in the following publications:

- Giddings, B., Rogerson, R. J., Charlton, J., & Hajisoltani, S. (2023). Newcastle upon Tyne UK. In *The future of the city centre: Global perspectives* (pp. 47–64). essay, Routledge.

- Giddings, B., Rogerson, R. J., Hajisoltani, S., & Bacon, N. (2023). Social Change. In *The future of the city centre: Global perspectives* (pp. 150–165). essay, Routledge.

- Hajisoltani, S. (2018, September 14–15). *The Concept of the City Centre* [Paper presentation]. Space International Conference on Architectural Culture and Society, London, UK.

- Hajisoltani, S. (2022, April 4–6). *Future of English City Centres: The Case of Newcastle upon Tyne* [Paper presentation]. IPGRC: Resilience in Research and Practice, Manchester, UK.

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# Acknowledgements

# Author's declaration

I declare that the work contained in this thesis has not been submitted for any other award and that it is all my own work. I also confirm that this work fully acknowledges opinions, ideas, and contributions from the work of others.

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# The Future of English City Centres:
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## 1.0 Introduction

### 1.1 Background to the Study

Cities are the places where the majority of society lives, works and finds recreation, and city centres are literally at their core. They have deeper significance than merely functional attributes and it differentiates them from other urban areas. Yet, the notion of a traditional city centre with preserved buildings and urban form is being contested, while its presence is still a key element in positioning the city as a whole. Current situations are raising fresh questions about the future rationale of centres and how they should be managed. Since the middle of the 20th Century, communities have been moved out of city centres to peripheral locations and suburbs (Soja, 2000), and urban cores became predicated on commercial and retail activity. Although there was some attempt at re-occupation towards the end of the Century, the notion of more inclusive centres, associated with the extension of the social mix of users appeared more myth than reality (McNeill and While, 2001). The 21st Century has been increasingly characterised by the fourth industrial revolution. The digital city has been growing exponentially and major casualties have been the viability of commercial and retail premises in centres. It has been suggested that home working and online shopping were created by the pandemic. This is not true but they were certainly accelerated by it. Much as the early 20th Century pioneers had done, urbanists in the 21st Century were starting to look around them and ask – What is a city centre for?

Academic and policy researchers in urban studies are seeking to understand how urbanisation and its footprints are evolving. At various times, different standpoints have been generated in understanding the process of urbanisation and exploring the nature of change across city centres. A form of comparative urbanism was introduced that aimed to tease out those aspects of cities and

urban processes which are common from those differentiating places. Early approaches examined the shared features evident in cities by exploring the consequences of inter-connectedness, but urban research has also emphasised difference and particularity (Clarke, 2012).  In Europe and England in particular, there has been a specific interest in the monocentric structure as a particular type, with the centre as a meaningful spatial entity.  Emerging from the focus on this structure was the rise of what has been termed a new paradigm – dense, walkable, mixed use – in short, what has often been characterised as the compact city. It recognises that the role and nature of the urban core is changing over time, and at a faster rate. Its functions should now be more diverse than just commerce and retail, and include leisure, culture, and residences.  However, the composition needs to be more fluid and responsive to change.  Buildings and spaces have become almost limited by particular uses.  In future, they may be required to return to a pre-industrial model where they are designed for re-use as different functions (Millington et al., 2020).  For most people, the city centre still represents the heart of the city, not just in terms of its physical location but also in providing a distinctive identity for the city and its citizens.  As some observers have expressed it, the overall identity of an urban area is typically defined by its city centre.  An example is the Derby City Masterplan 2030:

> *Having a vibrant city centre is crucial to the direction of travel for the city as a whole. It is a vital hub for jobs, services, culture, leisure, transport links and community activity.  Successful city centres are drivers of the wider economy* (Vibrant City Partnership, 2016)

With the global shift towards service and financial sectors and more generally the knowledge economy, it is the ability to enhance creativity and transfer of knowledge through face-to-face interactions that could be the re-defining feature of the city centre's appeal.  People are choosing semi-rural housing for what they perceive as a more relaxed lifestyle, while being willing to travel to the city centre for occasional meetings.  The key advantage is that centres have the potential to bring people together in a way that digital working and online shopping cannot. Therefore, team working could be promoted for its effectiveness, and the problems of isolation highlighted.  There have already

been concerns about the mental health of people working digitally (Oakman et al. 2020). Retail must demonstrate its unique qualities. This may be part of the social experience of the city centre, which is coupled with the need for careful design of public spaces. In addition, it could literally be a shop window, in which items can be seen and felt that would then be purchased online; and it could specialise in high value low bulk goods, and local products (Dolega and Lord, 2020). The economy also functions at different levels. An active centre supports small businesses. From the corner cafes and takeaways that offer quickly available food - to bars, restaurants, and other leisure – they survive and prosper when there are number of people in the public spaces. Yet, city centres are places that offer more than just economic activities. One of the challenges is how to re-gain their social position. It is reasonable to differentiate between the terms downtown or central business district and the city centre, with the latter being a real place where people wish to spend time, come together, and socialise (Navarro et al. 2018). It can be associated with employment, but it also includes those living in the city centre, and visitors and tourists, whose presence is more sporadic and short-lived. Shops, restaurants, cafes and bars that operate in the city centre exist because of the collective gathering of residents, people working in the centre, and regular travellers from the surrounding metropolitan area, as well as national and international visitors who seek to spend time there. Similarly, cultural services and institutions such as libraries, museums, and theatres are valued as a consequence of people wishing to spend time together. In turn, the presence of such facilities reinforces and helps to perpetuate the dynamism and energy of a vibrant city centre. It is therefore not just a place for the exchange of goods and services but also information and ideas, and a place where work interacts with leisure, and where people's lives intersect. Over temporal periods, there are the hourly, daily, weekly, and seasonal flows of people. They include commuting that marks out the diurnal movement which connects the city centre with those residing in the suburbs and beyond (Heblich et al., 2020).

Nevertheless, dynamism has produced some core challenges for city centres (Polka, 2017). On the one hand, there are pressures to retain some elements of the fabric of the city centre even when their original function has passed, as a

means of resisting heritage loss. This desire to hold back change has become a key element, with considerable attention being given to ensure that there remains value in what is earmarked as legacy. On the other hand, there is a desire to reduce periods of vacancy to maximise income, speeding up the dynamics to ensure that moments of change avoid disrupting and diminishing the wider value of the city centre. Dynamism has a long temporal expression as well. Knox (1991) famously describes the contemporary city as being increasingly restless, constantly, and continuously being the setting for new activities and new ways of life. In this respect, change is a constant state for the centre. One consequence of this situation is that the urban structure is not synchronised with contemporary needs and desires. The resultant vacant buildings, derelict land, and abandonment of space can be viewed as negative, and indeed often it is. The neglect of buildings and spaces, reflect the capitalist perspectives used to assess cities. For them, this is market failure, loss of income and tax revenue, and frequently environmental degradation. Yet, such obsolescence could also be an opportunity, a chance to return the city to a form of equilibrium, and new uses could be found for the buildings and spaces (Fiorentino, 2019). More imaginative approaches in the interim could stimulate chances to use them for other non-market purposes.

The future of city centres should be investigated from a number of different perspectives, in order to construct a comprehensive picture. Clearly the physical structure is the most evident aspect. It involves buildings and spaces, movement, uses, and related issues such as air quality. This group could be termed the environmental perspective. There are two distinct building typologies. The first should be reserved for buildings that have symbolic functions for the community. The second type is more to do with context, unity, and harmony. They are essentially private and offer more commonplace uses. The proportion of heritage building must also be taken into account as it can help to define the personality of a place. Urban space has always been the place for the community rather than the individual and is therefore public rather than private in nature. They include streets, squares, alleys, courts, which in turn express much of the character of each centre (Giddings, 1996). Green spaces have been disappearing from many urban cores, but there is a growing

clamour for them to be re-introduced as healthy places, and there are associated with good air quality (Hunter et al., 2019). Movement is multi-faceted. It starts with transport that enables people to move in and out of the centre, and smaller scale systems to move about within it. This opens the debate about public, private and personal transport (Oeschger, 2020). Walking is perceived as highly desirable, and it is associated with the quality of spaces. The uses of buildings and spaces should be determined, as well how many of them are in active usage. The second standpoint is about people. The case for permanent residents is well-known, but there is debate as to who these residents may be. Since families were moved out by local government policy in the 20th Century, there has been rather a vacuum and centres tended to be home to only a few people. At the end of the 20th Century, strategies for re-urbanisation started to occur. It produced the notion that city centres were becoming occupied by young professionals who would only stay for a few years (Thomas et al. 2015). Whether or not this is an accurate picture requires investigation. A further assumption has been that even now, there is an insufficient number of quasi-permanent residents, and temporary residents have been encouraged. These transient inhabitants are predominantly students, visitors, and tourists. Other groups are regular travellers from surrounding metropolitan areas. Their reasons for coming into centres have mainly been for work, shopping and recreation. In the context of the fourth industrial revolution, there are questions about how to attract these regular travellers in future. Exemplified by Camus (1942), there has also been the concept of the stranger. Variously, these people have ranged from the anonymous to the feared. In a transient city centre, it may be difficult to define who the strangers are. Moreover, if temporary residents are the majority, citizens may feel like strangers in their own city (Percy, 2018). An evaluation of all these groups could be brought together as a social perspective. An understanding of income and expenditure in the city centre is clearly important. A simple or even simplistic concept is circular flow, in which individuals provide labour for businesses to create goods and services, which are sold to individuals generating income for businesses, which are expended on different costs, including individuals' labour. This approach overlooks a number of issues including exchange between cities. There is also the impact of various sectors.

The financial sector embraces savings and investment as sources of funding. The government sector taxes individuals and charges business rates on companies, and the overseas sector directs imports and exports (Gwartney et al., 2009). In addition, recreation and hospitality are constituent parts of private sector activity. The public sector contributes with health, education, and transport. As already shown, social groups are diverse. Those living in centres, people who spend time there on regular occasions, workers, students, shoppers, leisure and pleasure seekers, and visitors and tourists have complex income and expenditure interactions (Andersson, 2017). The crucial issue is the amount of income and taxes that are actually retained and spent in city centres, but also how much is contributed from other local, national and international sources. This may be difficult to unpick, and secondary indicators may be necessary. The utilisation of buildings and land will be significant in this respect. Traditionally, there has been competition for the scarce resources. According to the bid rent theory, high demand and limited supply define centres as the places of highest income and expenditure, and a substantial contributor to the tax base. It appears that this position is starting to fragment and there are calls to reduce costs, including the business rate (Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, 2019b). All these factors represent an economic perspective. Government can be at national, regional, and local levels, and the layers are a constant source of debate. Regional government has never really gained traction in England. Attempts to introduce it have mainly been associated with Labour governments, whereas the Conservatives favour direction at a national level. Much influence is determined by where the budgets are located (Gray and Barford, 2018). The squeeze on the fiscal and regulatory powers of municipalities is further eroding the visibility of opportunities presented by the city centre. Thus, local authorities appear to be losing influence and a leadership vacuum is starting to be evident. In reality, not only public authorities but also companies and communities at the local level are involved in city centre activities. It is therefore clear that public sector government is only part of the process, and guidance on the development of city centres requires broader engagement. Rather than being a synonym for government, governance signifies a change in meaning, which refers to a new process for enhanced conditions of ordered rules. Governance can also be

seen as a pattern that emerges in the socio-political system resulting from interactions between various actors. These interactions are based on the recognition of interdependencies. No single actor, public or private, has the knowledge or data required to solve complex, dynamic, and diversified problems, and the concept of governance should not be reduced to one actor or particular group of actors.  The use of IT and social media could be a means of democratising the city centre (Udall, 2018), enabling access to information and decision-making, and stronger integration of public and private sectors with the community can be forged through envisioning and share governance.  The umbrella for these issues is a political perspective.

Derived from Garvin (2019) the following is a summary of some of the characteristics of a vibrant and idealised city centre:

- museums, libraries, hospitals, schools, and other institutions that serve the entire metropolitan region
- popular cultural and entertainment centre
- convenient and attractive public realm that includes streets, alleys, squares, promenades, parks, and playgrounds that are open to anybody and provide something for everybody
- trees and greenery that sustain a habitable environment
- public transportation system that makes the centre easily accessible to residents from the whole metropolitan area while providing convenient, safe, affordable circulation when they get there
- heterogenous residential district
- tourist destination
- flourishing place of business
- prosperous concentration of shops and restaurants
- public and private agencies, such as Business Improvement Districts to keep the centre safe, clean, and attractive

## 1.2 Newcastle upon Tyne

In order to collect in-depth data, it was decided to focus on Newcastle upon Tyne as a case study, with the intent of extrapolating principles that can be used to inform the futures of other English cities.  Newcastle is one of the most iconic cities in Britain, famous for its industrial heritage, brown ale, popular nightlife and distinctive Geordie dialect (Johnson 2020).  The city is the regional capital of the North-East of England, approximately 50 miles (80km) from the Scottish border and 10 miles (16km) to the North Sea.  It forms the heart of the Tyneside conurbation, the eighth most populous urban area in the United Kingdom.  The city centre is compact and monocentric, confined by protected green spaces to west, north and east, and by the River Tyne to the south.  The river sits in a ravine creating a slope from north to south.  Immediately on the other side of the river is the town of Gateshead, and the two places are linked by seven bridges.  Newcastle was at the forefront of the industrial revolution, with the early development of the railways, and factories along the Tyne, which dovetailed with the maritime heritage operating from the core of the city.  However, the wholesale collapse of the area's industrial base, resulting from over-concentration on the interrelated mining, shipbuilding, armaments, and heavy engineering industries in the inter-war years, left a legacy with which the city was forced to struggle for decades. Almost phoenix-like, a series of innovative initiatives to revolutionise socio-economic structures grew from within the city.  Over the past fifty years, industry has given way to a rise in the commercial and retail sectors, and significant regeneration of the city centre. Newcastle is keen to transform itself into a cultural landmark and becomes renowned as a business and social hub (Johnson 2020).  The historic layers of the city centre are still evident.  An attempt to modernise the entire city centre with Corbusian decks in the 1960s had limited effect as it was halted by the property market collapse, although some of the scars remain.  The downside of the layers is that the city centre tends to lack a spatial coherence - with little pedestrian network, squares and green spaces.

Gateshead and Newcastle Councils have been working together since 2009, in a kind of sub-regional government, and proposed shared planning frameworks for Gateshead and Newcastle. The decision to prepare a joint plan was justified

by recognition of the economic advantage to both local authority areas (Newcastle City Council and Gateshead Council, 2015). Thus, the urban core extended to both sides of the river. Nevertheless, it continued to be perceived as two separate places by the population. In 2018, the North-East Combined Authority of seven councils split between north and south of the Tyne. In addition, despite the definition of the urban core, the city centre is identified as the geographical unit on a significant number of occasions throughout the document. Specifically noted are – high science provision; regeneration and enhanced heritage assets; gateways to the city centre; entrances to university campuses; transport; improved pedestrian and cycling access; links to surrounding communities with permeable streets; and a vibrant city centre. Newcastle City Council now works in partnership with the business improvement district NE1, funded by 1400 of the city's most significant businesses. NE1 functions exclusively in the city centre, and its activities include improvement to the public realm, temporary installations, events, and changed business practices to better fit the needs of customers (Patterson, 2018). Since the curtailed 1960s city centre redevelopment plan, renewal has been mainly achieved by fine grain, small site redevelopment on the principle of a rich built environment being generated by small contributions by numbers of people over time. The main exception was the Eldon Square Shopping Centre, which occupies a large area of land to the west of Northumberland Street. As the 21st century unfolds, attention is focused on larger parcels of land, inclining towards the re-development of entire districts of the city centre (see Table 1.1).

*Table 1.1: Current Development Areas*

| | |
|---|---|
| **Stephenson Quarter** | predominantly a brownfield district but includes significant cultural heritage. After decades of neglect, a private developer was appointed to manage the development of the whole area but financial difficulties led the City Council to terminate the contract. In July 2020, the Council entered into an agreement with another developer to complete the second and final phase (Whitfield, 2020). |
| | 27Ha representing one of the most strategically important city centre opportunities (Lawless, 2016). |

| | |
|---|---|
| **East Pilgrim Street** | The area was sold to an international real estate investment and development company in 2016. Since then, most of the buildings have been emptied and some demolished. There have been reports of proposals for £200m-£300m of luxury leisure, shopping and living but there does not seem to be a definite agreement (Ford, 2019). |
| **Newcastle Helix: Science Central** | 10Ha site of the former Newcastle Brewery. The £350m regeneration scheme has received investment from European Regional Development Fund and UK Government. It is claimed that it will become one of the most important innovation hubs in Europe and the UK's biggest urban development outside London (Newcastle helix, 2022). It has been partly constructed but in 2018, it was rebranded to bid for more investment from around the world (Property Funds World, 2018). |
| **Forth Goods Yard** | brownfield area presented by the City Council as an opportunity for developers to deliver a new gateway entrance into the southwest of the city centre. The framework document sets out an ambition to deliver a vibrant mix of uses with a linked green infrastructure. Movement emphasises enhanced provision for cyclists and pedestrians (Lawless, 2019). The location is not part of the metro network and there is concern that it will increase traffic. |

Traditionally, all the land was owned by the community and administered by the City Council. Over time, some large sites have been purchased by the private sector, and freeholds of significant areas are now owned by international investment and development companies (Invest Newcastle, 2020). This means that decisions can be made remotely with little input from citizens, and these ownership patterns at least imply increased privatisation of public space. Proposed uses in current plans seem to be set in late 20th century models i.e., retail, offices, leisure and residential. The advent of the fourth industrial revolution was already starting to reduce demand for offices and retail in particular, and this trend seems to have accelerated under Covid-19. There is optimism in the Council's statement that it is setting out ambitious plans to transform the city centre's retail core into the North of England's leading retail

district and a significant European destination (Newcastle City Council, 2022a). The stability of demand that was established in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century now appears to be more precarious. One of the failings of the early part of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century has been the loss of existing activities in favour of built environment regeneration through demolition and re-building. This requires considerable time scales and there are no guarantees that the re-building will actually take place. The current temporary buildings might be more permanent than was ever envisaged. It may be that an increased resident population could enhance demand, but it is important to achieve a heterogeneous population. The notion of an exclusively party city or student playground does not meet community needs and is not sustainable in the long term. It is a similar situation with visitors and tourists. The continuing hotel development responds to and generates visitors and tourists; but there are debates about a tipping point where citizens start to feel like strangers in their own city (Wilcox, 2018). People from the region who regularly come to the centre from the hinterland, form another significant group; and it is essential that they are not alienated. Newcastle is regarded as a small, large city, with a well-defined and compact centre. Its historical legacy is evident in the built fabric and its topography is like no other. The city continues as the clear regional capital and a focus for the largely rural counties around it. The people are supportive of the place and generally take considerable interest in what is happening to it. There is a highly qualified population with staff from two universities, and about 15,000 students graduating each year, numbers of whom choose to remain in the city.

The city centre still feels like an active place. Retail and commercial enterprises continue but perhaps not at previous levels. Some of the streets are busy with people but not all, and there is a notion of zoning by time. This is because certain uses predominate in sub-areas of the centre. If the Monument is taken as the geographical nucleus, the hospital and universities occupy the northern part, with retail between them and the Monument. The southern part is mainly commercial, hotels and hospitality. As a generalisation, the northern area is for day-time functions whereas the southern area provides the night-time economy. It remains a destination for weekend breaks. This partly explains high activity

levels on Friday and Saturday nights, with much quieter streets from Sunday to Wednesday. The dynamic nature of the city centre is determined by a number of indicators (Forrester, 1969). Land and building use are the most stable, but there are indications that re-use may appear more frequently in future. This requirement seems to favour incremental change, rather than large scale development; and buildings that can be easily re-purposed for a number of uses. The metro provides good access to the centre from several miles away. However, the routes favour some communities, and a tram system is needed for others, as well as a link from the Quayside to the plateau. Buses currently perform these roles, and their operation is flexible, but they lack the impact of a tram system. Street space for vehicles has diminished recently, and some of the temporary Covid-19 provisions may become permanent. This has created greater space for cyclists and pedestrians, but movement networks must be more nuanced than just closing vehicle routes. Employment has moved from a small number of large-scale employers to numbers of small-scale enterprises, which are considerably more vital. The city centre population needs to be heterogeneous, and the number of those who regularly come into the centre increased.

It has already been established that Newcastle is regarded as a small, big city. While offering all city facilities, there continues to be concern about achieving a critical mass of population to support them. Although employment patterns have improved in recent years, there is still unease about job availability, and employment opportunities take priority in local decision-making. It will be important to recognise future trends, retain educated and enterprising people, develop capacity building, and enhance skills. The reduction in local government has caused difficulties with services and support for the community. The City Council is moving towards undertaking only its statutory duties, as resources for innovative ventures decrease. There is already an embryonic partnership between the two universities, NHS and the City Council. Required changes to the city centre may depend on future demand for buildings. It seems unlikely that the retail and commercial sectors will revive. If culture is to occupy a major role, there should be a strategy for its provision and development. There is a danger that indecision will lead to more temporary

buildings and meanwhile uses.  The public realm requires greater consideration, including how its enhancement will be financed. Newcastle is not particularly blessed with an integrated public realm and lacks fascinating pedestrian networks.  There is a commitment to improving existing public spaces and creating new spaces (Newcastle City Council, 2022b), although there are no indications as to how this will be achieved.  The development of such spaces has always been perceived as a cost rather than an investment.  In order to determine direction, more extensive debates will be necessary as to what the city centre is for.

Newcastle upon Tyne city centre may be at a critical point in its history.  Rapid changes are occurring, and strategies are needed.  Developing a city centre that attracts local people to spend more time there, as well encouraging a population of all ages to live in the centre, could be vital for the future.  Access for pedestrians is a priority but if it just means that existing street space will be re-surfaced, and the structure remains the same, a fascinating pedestrian network is unlikely to be achieved.  There will be a necessity to apply criteria for the design of public spaces. In established areas fine grain renewal might be favoured.  There should be a case for the local authority to retain more of its tax income, especially as the number of retail and commercial premises diminishes.  Increased council tax income could be achieved by an enhanced residential community.  Visitors and tourists can supplement income, but the numbers should be controlled so that they do not dominate the number of residents. Transport may undergo a revolution in the next few years, and the traditional categories of vehicles may no longer be evident.  The organisation of movement in the city centre may therefore require re-consideration.  One of the bigger challenges is to transform the party city into a cultural hub (Percy, 2018).

## 1.3 Aim and Objectives

The aim is to critically review the transition of English city centres through the case of Newcastle upon Tyne and develop framework for the future.

The above aim will be delivered through the following objectives, to:

- Establish a theoretical position based on environmental, social, economic, and political perspectives

- Develop a methodology to examine the theoretical perspective through data collection in Newcastle upon Tyne

- Explore the environmental, social, economic, and political data in the city centre of Newcastle upon Tyne, collated through surveys, plans and interviews, which can be triangulated

- Analyse the data from surveys, plans and interviews

## 1.4 Structure of the Thesis

The thesis is organised in the following seven chapters of different sizes to reflect the balance of the content:

1.0 Introduction

Sets out the background to the study, which establishes the significance of the city centre. It demonstrates that it is a crucial time, with the influence of the fourth industrial revolution disrupting the stable position established in the middle 20th Century. Environmental, Social, Economic and Political Perspectives are recognised as the key dimensions. The City of Newcastle upon Tyne is established as a case study and its present circumstances are identified. These sections lead to the aim and objectives of the study and the structure of the thesis.

2.0 Theoretical Perspectives

Establishes the theoretical perspectives of the study. This chapter creates a comprehensive understanding of the concept of city centres through the key environmental, social, economic, and political perspectives. The main goal of this chapter is to highlight the core challenges for the future.

3.0 Methodology

This chapter attempts to identify and develop a multi-methods methodology to collect different kinds of data in Newcastle upon Tyne and cross-reference the findings to examine the theoretical perspectives in the form of triangulation.

### 4.0 Findings

This chapter utilises a multi-method approach to explore the environmental, social, economic, and political data in the city centre of Newcastle upon Tyne collated through surveys, plans and interviews. Each section explores the issues and presents data through the four key perspectives.

### 5.0 Analysis

Presents the analysis of data collection completed from surveys, plans, and interviews. The fundamental goal of this chapter is to validate the research findings and use triangulation to develop knowledge from collected data and create the basis for a Framework for the future in the following chapter.

### 6.0 Proposal and Framework for the Future

This chapter utilises the data results and presents the commentary and the final product of this study which is a Framework for the Future based on the analysis. The proposed Framework for the Future provides recommendations for decision-makers and identifies key action points for the four key perspectives.

### 7.0 Conclusion

This chapter provides a summary of the thesis and illustrates the research outcomes. It sets out the implications of the research findings, reflections on the literature, the contribution to knowledge and future research.

# 2.0 Theoretical Perspectives

The concept of the city centre is explored through environmental, social, economic, and political perspectives in order to discover what distinguishes the city centre. Without an understanding of the importance of the centre to the perception of the built environment, the notion of the city itself may be undermined (Moughtin, 2003). The city centre forms the core of a wider system, which is a product of growth and may comprise several districts. However, while the overall city may expand outwards, the centre is often contained within a geographical boundary, where renewal is the process of development. In a similar way to the overall city, the centre never becomes a finished product, as it remains in continuous process. Thus, there can be links of the past, present, and future within the same geographical boundary, which may be reassuring to local people and stimulating for visitors.

## 2.1 Environmental Perspective

### 2.1.1 Introduction

The essence of this section is the unfolding physical form and characteristics of the city centre that distinguishes it from the other urban areas. While other environmental factors such as air quality and environmental noise are important in the context of city centres, this section will focus on structure and movement, and spaces and buildings, and how people interact with them. Alexander (1987) identifies the centre as a distinct entity beyond geometric concept and emphasises that the centre of the city is not merely the middle of an urban area. Other pioneers, such as Lynch (1960) identify the centre as a conceptual anchor point, which gives meaning to its existence as a distinctive place.

### 2.1.2 Structure and Movement

The structure of city centres is determined by Grand Plans or Incremental Change or a combination of the two.  Grand Plans originate in the Renaissance,

which established the concept of the ideal city.  It established a lineage, some of which is shown on table 2.1.

*Table 2.1: Grand Plans*

| Thomas More | Utopia | 1516 |
| Christopher Wren | London | 1666 |
| Georges-Eugene Haussman | Paris | 1853 |
| Ebenezer Howard | Garden City | 1898 |
| Antonio Sant'Elia | Futurist City | 1914 |
| Tony Garnier | Industrial City | 1917 |
| Le Corbusier | City of Tomorrow | 1929 |

From the latter part of the 20th Century to the early part of the 21st Century, further futurist cities have been constructed throughout the world.  They include Hong Kong, Singapore, Toronto, Seoul, Brasilia, Masdar, Tokyo and Dubai. These tend to be global cities and grand plans are less likely in second tier cities.  Nevertheless, it depends on the age of the settlement.  While not particularly futuristic, especially in the New World, the ubiquitous grid plan layout is evident in all levels of cities (Martinelli and Mangialardi, 2018). Historically, the Grand Plan resulted from demands for beautifying the city, military action, and quasi-natural disasters.  In the 20th Century, it became more of a response to the technological age, and aspects of Le Corbusier's City of Tomorrow began to be applied to UK cities.  A critique of this approach has been expressed in film as much as any other medium.  As long ago as 1927, Metropolis demonstrated the dystopian and restless city that could ensue. Alphaville 1965, and Blade Runner 1982 continued the theme.  The Grand Plan in the UK probably reached its greatest expression in the New Towns.  They were developed in waves during the second half of the 20th Century, to relieve the density of large cities.  For example, Harlow and Basildon were aimed to relieve overcrowding in London, Runcorn and Skelmersdale took on the same role for Liverpool, and Telford was to alleviate stress in Birmingham (Forsyth

and Peiser, 2019). Over the same period, existing cities were subjected to comprehensive development areas. Recent Grand Plans have been criticised by communities for their lack of soul and loss of individual city identity.

The alternative to the Grand Plan is Incremental Change, which recognises that various components form the physical qualities and architectural backdrop of the city centre. It is often associated with organic and traditional layouts. Lozano (1990) describes how a traditional layout can meet human needs as follows:

> *the main streets originate at the town gates and lead to the main spaces…thus permitting immediate orientation. The maze of secondary streets and alleys that fill the interstices between the main streets offer diversity of all kinds - surprise, mystery, multiple options, alternative interpretations…. It is possible for one to be immersed in a surprising, intriguing and mysterious environment and yet feel safe knowing that one can become re-orientated within minutes – an assurance that makes the experience all the more pleasurable.* (p273)

However, many cities do not display such a clear and appropriate structure, although it may remain an objective. The advantage of incremental change is that it retains the familiarity of a particular centre, and arguably its distinctiveness. The principal disadvantage is that it inhibits improvement to the structure in terms of the kinds of spaces and the inter-relationship that Lozano (1990) identifies. Moreover, Authorities' recent change of ethos from encouraging vehicles, to trying to restrict them by closing through routes, limiting access, and generating cul-de-sacs, is making orientation more obscure. On-going analysis of city centre layouts may therefore be important, to record the effects of any changes. In his well-known but pioneering work on perceptual form, Lynch (1960) delineates elements as districts, nodes, landmarks, paths and edges (see Figure 2.1). These can help to identify and define the city centre. In this case, the district is the centre, nodes are highlights within the centre, paths are the routes of streets, and through squares and parks; and edges can help to define a notional city centre boundary. In terms of current tools, digital city centre models with city information modelling layers can provide effective analytical and predictive information.

DISTRICT      NODE      LANDMARK      PATH      EDGE
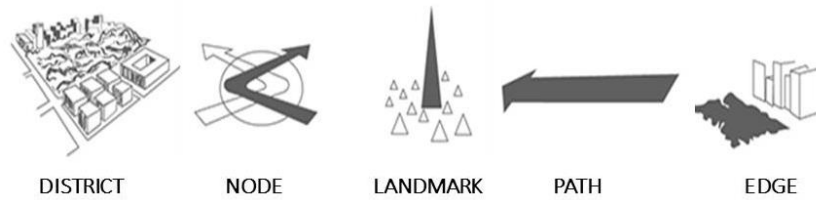
*Figure 2.1: Elements of a city (Lynch, 1960)*

Land Ownership

The complexion of change within the urban core is greatly influenced by land ownership.  The issue is who should own the city centre. The paucity of literature on this essential issue is really disturbing. In the past, ownership has been in the public sector. The privatisation of public spaces has been hotly debated over many years and there is a huge literature on it. However, even Carmona (2022) relies on recent evidence on the phenomenon of selling public land gathered by The Guardian newspaper, which investigated and interrogated and the notion of systemic sale of public space. The Guardian states that *public space is a right not a privilege; yet Britain is in the midst of the biggest sell-off of common space since the enclosures of the 17th and 18th century* (Garrett, 2017). The implication of selling public land is that communities lose all influence on the way their centres are shaped, as any private organisation including global speculators can impose their visions to maximise profit. In addition, the usability of these developments may be short lived and unsustainable, with companies announcing that that they no longer meet strategic needs (Newcastle Building Society, 2020).

From the local authority perspective, there are multiple challenges. They are experiencing the extensively reported decline in demand for commercial and retail premises, on which their 20th Century policies were predicated. They have suffered from Osborne's austerity, which was reminiscent of Thatcher's rolling back the state. The loss of local authority staff has been hugely reported in the media and they are now essentially reduced to their statutory duties. It may therefore not be surprising that they are willing to sell assets that, in the short term, could be viewed by them as liabilities. As they are not able to instigate the rescue of city centres, they are obliged to consider that perhaps the private

sector may be able to do it. The difficulty with this approach is that it opens a kind of pandora's box, in which there is little control on what will be the outcome. In the past, it might have been considered that development management would have mitigated this situation, but it seems that the current and potentially future situation in reviving economic activity in the city centre is worth almost any development risk. As Carmona (2021) points out, the approach of the Planning Inspectorate to design has long been a concern, and schemes are routinely successful on appeal where they have been rejected by local authorities.

City Centre Boundary

It may be problematic to identify a line at which the centre ends and the hinterland begins. Heidegger (1971) refers to indeterminate edges that people perceive around places; and a boundary that cannot be represented easily on a plan. Individuals know of such perceptual boundaries by experience and instinct but may not be able to locate them precisely. This is even the case when part of the boundary is delineated by distinct geographical barriers such as a river. Nevertheless, boundaries remain vital to people's identification of place. The city centre may therefore differ from other urban areas in its boundaries as well as its places. Accordingly, a boundary may be where there is recognition of arrival (Sharr, 2007), and can be conceived of as more than just a physical act of getting somewhere new (Chawla 2008). In this context, sensory embodied experiences of place reflect connections with other places (Holton and Riley 2014). The perception of arrival to the city centre is a personal experience and can differ for each user. It has a close link with transport nodes that function symbolically as gateways.

Movement, Activity and Repose

Human beings require city centres to perform certain functions. People need to easily move around and obtain access. They like to engage in activities, which may take place outside or inside. City centres are dynamic areas supporting a complex web of overlapping uses and activities in different spaces at different

times (Bromley, Tallon and Thomas, 2003). Nevertheless, it is important to discover places of repose, which act as havens from the hustle and bustle associated with urban life. Historically, city centres facilitated movement by offering proximity among centrally located facilities (Riley and Taylor, 1967). Lynch (1960) highlights that in the design of a centre, people and their movement are just as important as the inanimate structures. Architecture has the potential to function as a stimulus for movement; however, movement is typically considered as a separate domain (Bloomer and Moore, 1979). The process of going to a place can be by different means and can be categorised as public, non-motorised transport and private motorised transport. The balance of public or private modes can be a contentious issue. Public transport is strongly influenced by structural organisation of the urban area while private transport appears to be dependent of lifestyles (Camagni, et al., 2002). Each of these different modes creates a distinct way of experiencing the centre and city culture. Jacobs (1961) and Whyte (1998) are two of the pioneers who established the importance of the pedestrian experience to city culture. It is widely accepted that there is a direct relationship between the type of movement and the quality of the public realm (Gehl, 2011). The quality of the space has direct impact on motive force, velocity, rhythm, route, experience, and friction that are constituent parts of human mobility (Cresswell, 2010). Movement also provides access which is a priority and a special advantage for a city centre. Acknowledging a lack of systematic attention to the entire range of the dimension of access, Lynch (1981) classifies access according to the features by which access is given, and to whom it is afforded. A city centre has the potential to provide opportunities to a number categories of access (see Table 2.2).

*Table 2.2: Classification of access (Lynch, 1981)*

| **People** | physical proximity with other people |
|---|---|
| **Human activities** | financial, medical, recreational, educational, and religious services |
| **Material Resources** | goods |
| **Places** | shelter, open space, focal and symbolic places; and natural environment |

Human activity is a vital component of the city centre that specifies the characteristics and impression of the centre but also has a physical presentation. According to Gehl (2011), the following three main categories of activity can be identified for outdoor activities, as shown in Table 2.3.

*Table 2.3: Classification of outdoor activities (Gehl, 2011)*

| Necessary | Compulsory activities in which those involved are required to participate. |
|-----------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Optional  | Those pursuits that are participated in if there is a wish to do so.       |
| Social    | All activities that depend on the presence of others in public spaces.     |

Necessary activities, such as going to school or to work, can be independent of their environment, while optional ones only occur if the places make them possible. Regardless of their category, the extent and character of these activities are greatly influenced by the physical qualities of their setting. Normally an increased level of optional and social activities is encouraged within city centres with an aim to create a vibrant centre and to contribute to its vitality. High levels of urban movement and an active pedestrian scene are characteristic of a centre. The frequency of the outdoor activities is not uniform and can change during the working day, evening, night-time and weekends. Most activities are generally distinguished in terms of either moving or staying and are time related. An understanding of the complexity of the city centre activities requires a focus on the timeline (Bromley, Tallon and Thomas, 2003). Spaces of repose will make people not only stop but also spend time at the space and create the potential for relaxation and exchange.

**2.1.3 Spaces**

In the context of city centres, environmental elements such as squares, green spaces and streets facilitate and encourage movement and repose and accommodate various forms of activities. Outdoor activities can transform spaces into a public realm. It is worth noting that there is a distinction between

public and civic places, as public places offer a setting for shared activities whereas civic places are where people share citizenship (Scott Brown, 1990). According to Gehl (2011) squares and streets are the essential ingredients around which all city centres are organised. They are known as the domain of social encounters and political protest, sites of domination and resistance, places of pleasure and anxiety (Fyfe, 1998). Jacobs (1961) states that they hold a particular fascination for those interested in cities. These spaces can be seen in many different forms and their dimensions, design, and relationship to surrounding buildings; and their ability to generate and contain activity has a long history of study by notable pioneers (e.g., Alberti, 1475; Sitte, 1889, Unwin, 1909). Thus, one of the most important physical qualities is enclosure. This is usually provided by buildings. However, they are more significant than merely enclosed space. They are the physical embodiment of the city.

Squares were probably the first way of using urban space. They are contained urban spaces, provided as communal places for the benefit of the public. They are also the most intensively used public spaces in a social sense and are considered to be the fulcrum of human interaction and a focus of urban life. Squares have developed to address the need to provide a focal point for reinforcing collective identity (Corbett, 2004). They can also indicate that citizens and visitors have reached the heart of the city. They enhance urban liveability and foster true urban sustainability (Project for Public Spaces, 2010). In addition, there is an opportunity to engender more symbolic value. Of all types of urban space, squares are most representative of the societies that created them. The agora, forum, cloister, mosque courtyard are all examples (Krier & Rowe, 1991). The size and shape of a square is fundamental as to how or whether it will be used. Often, they are excessively large. According to Sitte (1889), the very biggest squares in traditional cities are only about 145m x 60m. There may be an association with major public buildings. Unwin (1909) suggests that they offer buildings dignity, and the location of a principal building determines whether each square is deep plan or wide plan, and this notion of direction is an important feature. The relationship between the height of surrounding buildings and the size of the square is important to visual containment. Where the buildings are relatively too low, enclosure will be

dissipated. Conversely, where the buildings are relatively too high, there can be a tendency towards claustrophobia. Containment is also determined by openings. While it is not practical or even desirable to view a continuous frame, too much opening can lose the feeling of the square. Considerable experimentation in North-West Europe has established the design criteria shown on Table 2.4.

*Table 2.4: Design Criteria for Squares in North-West Europe (Giddings et al., 2011)*

| Dimensions | Length to width | Length to height | Width to height | Perimeter | Number of openings | % of openings to perimeter |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| small 30x12m avg. 70x50m 90x35m max.100x70m 120x50m | 1.1 to 3.0:1 | 1.4 to 8.0:1 | 0.8 to 3.0:1 | 75-335 m | 2-5 | 8-28% |

Nevertheless, compliance with the design criteria does not necessarily create a worthwhile space. There are issues about positioning within the centre and relationship with routes. Yet arguably it will be uses that are the main determinant for each square. Attractiveness, whatever its definition, will enable informal meeting places and social interaction between various members of society. However, it may be that more organised events are necessary. Notwithstanding the uses that are part of surrounding buildings, there could be outdoor markets, concerts, political meetings, charitable collections, theatre, religious gatherings, sporting activities like road races and cycling, spectacles like firework celebrations and light shows and many more functions. To maintain interest, such events would need to take place on a regular basis and be locally organised (Worpole and Knox 2007). With reductions in local authority funding, it is unlikely that they would be able to fund and organise them. It could be that combinations of business improvement districts, public-private partnerships, and community groups themselves may be more appropriate.

The first generation of purpose-built public parks in the 19th Century attempted to spatialise the city-nature binary by bringing built and natural environment together. Creation of urban parks within cities indicate the desire of humans to re-order the physical environment by introducing healthy greenery (Gandy, 2002; Schuyler, 1986). These spaces can be seen as breathing spaces, offering moments of silence and encounter. They can feel quiet, calm, ordered, and safe (Wunderlich, 2013). Thus, they are extremely important to the well-being of cities as a whole. Nonetheless, they tend to be large scale and at the edge of the centre. Urban cores require additional strategies. The two most appropriate techniques would appear to be pocket parks, and green corridors and networks. Both need to be part of the public realm. The first type varies greatly in its elements and expression, but the essence is that these spaces are small. As previously implied, public spaces can be too big to be comfortable for community gatherings. Smaller spaces are places where people can relax, exercise, socialise and play. They can serve as focal points of activity and interest in central areas. Common elements tend to be benches, tables, fountains, playgrounds, monuments, art installations, community gardens and local sporting facilities. The UK Government introduced what it called a Pocket Parks Plus Scheme in 2018 (Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, 2018c). It provides support through grants to community-led organisations working in partnership with local authorities. The Government's aim is to create new pocket parks or bringing existing green spaces up to a safe, usable and inviting standard. Improved green spaces will have long-term benefits supporting people to progress their health and wellbeing, enhancing communities by providing accessible local space. There is also an issue of how to sustain improvements over a longer term. Green corridors and networks introduce the natural environment in routes across the heart of cities. They can be a means of linking large parks at the periphery (Zhang et al., 2019). In the context of lower demand for commercial and retail premises, there should be a debate on how to imagine central space. With the emphasis on mental as well as physical health, these provisions would be attractive to people within the region. The advantages include increased positive levels of contact with nature for urban citizens, and enhancing social interaction in urban populations. While pollution is likely to reduce in future with transport innovations, trees reduce

residual air pollution and mitigate against the heat island effect. They assist an urban network that separates pedestrians from vehicles and provides a natural network for wildlife to move through urban areas by joining-up green spaces and increasing biodiversity (Parris et al., 2018).

Originally streets were derived from the need to spread a settlement once all available space around the central square had been built-on. They provide a distribution of land and give access to individual plots. Streets are confined, directional and associated with movement (Sharifi, 2019). Layouts should be designed for different purposes i.e., pedestrians, cyclists, and vehicles, although complete separation of pedestrians and vehicles carries with it the danger of isolation of the pedestrian area. All streets should be safe and an integral part of the urban environment. The need for streets to be enjoyable places as well as routes is a consequence of the fact that they constitute a large part of outdoor urban space (Gehl, 1989). The oldest and most prevalent planned system of street layout is the grid. It is used for its convenient and economical arrangement of building blocks but has considerable disadvantages. First, it produces a monotonous effect. Secondly, street pictures are not closed, and vistas lose city centre containment. Thirdly, one way movement patterns may ease junctions but generate surprisingly complicated situations in finding specific addresses. Modifications to the strict grid may ease these circumstances. The most applicable may be staggered junctions and adjustment to suit the topography (see Figure 2.2). In older cities, street patterns grew as a result of gradual development of main routes of communication leading from the countryside to a natural centre (Han et al., 2020). To either side of the principal streets, a profusion of narrow alleys with less intense movement, complete the layout, similar to Lozano's (1990) observation. At first sight, some of the irregular shapes appear to have little purpose, but closer examination shows that they are devised to offer enclosed views and set the scene for groups of buildings. So, traditional patterns are not as arbitrary as might be supposed but result from activities and orientation.
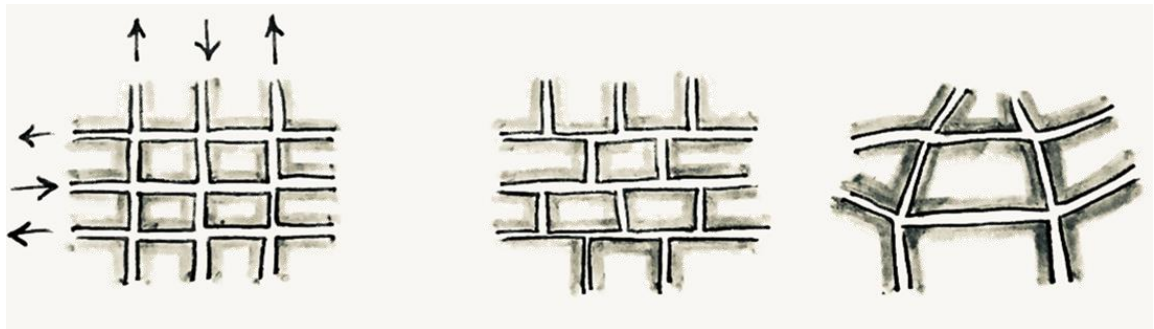
Grid – one way movement    Staggered Junctions    Adjusted to suit Topography

*Figure 2.2: Grid of Streets and Modifications*

An appreciation of the types of streets and their arrangements are important to future centres. The three types of users i.e., pedestrians, bicycles and vehicles all have potential for conflict with one another. The notion that any of them can share spaces does not create comfort for any of these users. Electric bicycles and scooters further complicate the picture (Nello-Deakin, 2019).

The layout of the squares and streets can facilitate different kinds of movement and multiplicity of routes from the direct to a variety of options that are required in the city centre (see Figure 2.3).
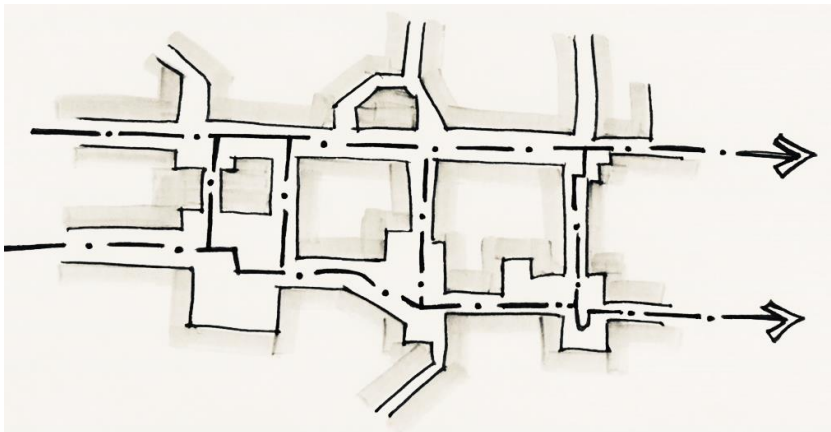


*Figure 2.3: Different kinds of movement through spaces*

While vehicles benefit from direct routes, the special effect that results from walking from one square to another in a cleverly grouped sequence is that reference points change constantly, creating ever new impressions. Also, an

orientation landmark - sometimes a tower or dome visible above the rooftops - is always within a short distance of any place in the centre, so that nowhere is more than a few minutes' walk from a visual reference. In addition, the recurring prospect of a landmark viewed from different positions, achieves multiple value from that landmark (Czyńska and Rubinowicz 2019)  (see Figure 2.4).
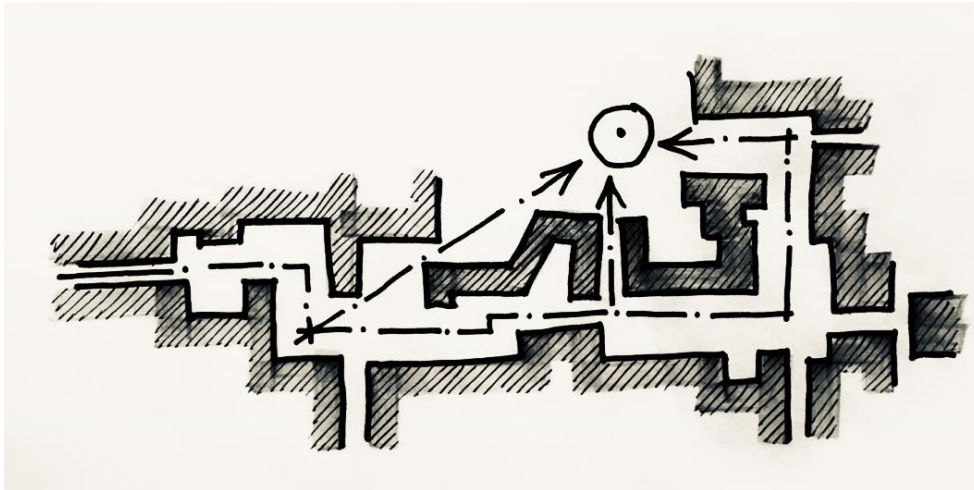


*Figure 2.4: Different views of a landmark*

### 2.1.4 Buildings

Buildings can be defined as comprising two distinct types. The first type has been variously termed public, principal, focal and notably symbolic buildings. They offer unique uses for a particular community and are usually recognised by elements of professional design and styles of high culture - for examples see Table 2.5.

*Table 2.5: Examples of Symbolic Buildings (Giddings, 1996)*

| | |
|---|---|
| Government | castles, palaces, parliaments, town halls |
| Religion | temples, cathedrals, churches, mosques |
| Public Facilities | museums, theatres, exhibition halls |
| Law | courtrooms |
| Health | hospitals |
| Education | universities |

The centre contains a concentration of symbolic buildings with an accumulation of cultural and historic features that most significantly mark its evolution. A concentrated wealth of cultural references can be observed, which accurately expresses the embodied memory of the city (Castello, 2010). Innovation is also an essential part of this tradition, and future symbolic buildings should not try to mimic the past. They may even be experimental and should not be subjected to the cost constraints that might otherwise be applied. For many citizens and visitors, the city centre is a place of civic identity, pride, architectural dignity, and symbolic significance that is in tune with a profound depth of emotions. Unwin (1909) argues that part of the dramatic effect of the main symbolic buildings would be lost if they are not concentrated in the city centre.

The second type relates to generation of human habits. This type is more to do with context, unity, and harmony. These buildings are essentially private and offer more commonplace use, such as: residence, employment, leisure, and shopping. This type can be referred to as contextual or background buildings and perform two roles. First, they define and contain urban space. Secondly, they provide the frame for a principal building (Sitte, 1889). Thus, there is a need for visual continuity, even if the constituent parts of the frame are not physically attached in a continuous manner. Modern planning tends to create a desire for closed forms, with left-over space purporting to be a square or street. Setting out the spaces first may result in irregular buildings, which could be in conflict with the economics of geometric planning. Alexander et al. (1977) expresses the view of a number of pioneers, in noting that building fronts should take on slightly uneven angles to accommodate the shape of a street. Setbacks should only be used where they are designed to create additional positive space, although he notes that most set backs are actually unsuccessful in this respect. Emphasis should be given to buildings in special situations, such as street corners and other junctions. These could be marked by a variation in building form and/or a particular flourish. One aspect of the role in containing urban space, is that a group of buildings may be required to define two different spaces. Thus, the concept of front and back needs careful consideration. Often in city centres, the backs do not have any recognised architectural form and appear chaotic.

Building sections produce significant effects on urban space. Essentially, they are determined by four factors – building depth, height, roof form and façade form. The use of deep plans has increased with time, and there are implications. They reduce permeability in the urban structure of the city centre. Occupants have reduced access to daylight and view (Lee et al., 2022). The use of artificial light, heating, cooling, and ventilation are all expensive in capital terms, as well as increased energy costs. They also tend to stand as enclosed solids, and it is difficult to use them to define external spaces. In the future, it is likely that buildings will change use more rapidly than in the past. It will not be economically viable nor environmentally desirable to demolish and rebuild each time a particular use becomes redundant. Thus, flexibility for re-use will become a significant feature. Alexander et al. (1977) notes that natural light is one of the main criteria for flexibility, and therefore advocates that building depth should be no more than 8 metres. This kind of depth certainly assists in forming buildings to achieve positive external spaces. Building heights have also been increasing with time. With low to medium heights, it is possible to maintain social contact with a square or street. People can be seen at the windows and conversely, they can see people and external details. There has been a recent tendency to return to high rise developments. Yet, there seems to be little logic behind this move (Zarghani, E. et al. 2019). The usual reasoning is competition for space, but this has never been particularly intense in English cities. Even in London, it has been partial. In the future, it is likely that the demand for city centre buildings will reduce. Moreover, there are safety issues with tall buildings. The usability of lifts during fires is still rare, and therefore a level of fitness is required to exit via escape stairs. It has been well-established that high rise creates adverse environmental conditions. Wind speeds are increased around them, and edges are created in which rain travels in various directions. Finally, they do not meet the criteria for framing squares as shown on table 2.4. Traditionally, the roof was a significant feature in appearance of buildings. As the 20th Century progressed, the walls became higher, and roofs flatter, to an extent where they are not visible at all. The great English architects CFA Voysey and Edwin Lutyens felt that the enveloping nature of roofs, produces a comforting psychological effect for the occupants. The expression of the roof certainly

seems to be re-assuring for both users and the public (Holder, 2021). The façade form also influences people's perception of the built environment in a city centre. Symbolic buildings can be grander statements, where three dimensional forms that reflect different sizes of internal volumes are more significant than a façade. Conversely, breaking down the façade into understandable elements helps public appreciation of contextual buildings. They need a clear vertical or horizontal emphasis, expression of floor positions, relationship of panels and openings, depth, and shadow lines, and so on, all of which help people to read the building (Abrams, 2021).

In this respect, it is not for any contextual building to dominate a symbolic building. City structures were damaged in the 20th Century by large scale commercial and retail buildings. As previously noted, the demand for these kinds of developments has diminished in the 21st Century, but there is still the new trend for high rise apartments, and large-scale hotel and leisure buildings. In addition, the traditional notion that symbolic buildings are the products of professional design whereas contextual buildings are part of custom and practice, has long been an outdated view. All buildings in centres involve professionals, and any Framework for Future City Centre Development needs to express the hierarchy of urban form and contain criteria and parameters for both types (de Oliveira, 2022).

Historical Buildings

Numbers of city centres have an identifiable old town or historic core. Their buildings embody political and cultural functions as well as historical landmarks in place and time. They may also represent the maturity of a society as the more conscious a society is of its history, the more effortlessly and thoroughly it can handle elements of architectural language. It is argued that lessons from historical examples might help to rediscover the community design metier, forgotten after the Industrial Revolution (Schmal, 1981). Elements presented by the pre-industrial city show that historical centres suggest desirable models of collective life. Nevertheless, modern materials and construction methods are

incompatible with the disciplines of historical styles, so setting aside criticisms of pastiche, it is often not practical to copy historic buildings. Much historic stock is underused, and not always in a good state of repair. Hence, the continuing challenge for the years ahead lies in using the historic assets for economic benefit without compromising their cultural value and physical qualities (Wang and Liu, 2021). There is an ambivalent attitude towards historic buildings. For citizens, they provide a feeling of stability, longevity, and identity. For visitors, they are fascinating places. The property industry has little interest in them, as they do not represent a commercial image. They do not offer the kind of large floorplates that have almost become a requirement, and it is difficult to install air conditioning and building services. Other developers are concerned about the limitations that may be imposed by listing and conservation areas, and the extra costs that may be incurred working with historic structures and envelopes. Despite these potential restrictions, users and especially residents can be excited by these unique places (Morrison and Waterson 2019). Perhaps there is an issue about whether they would be prepared to pay a premium to own or rent such a building.

The above exposition demonstrates an unfolding physical essence of city centres in which squares, green spaces, and streets represent voids, and buildings represent solids in the urban structure. According to Alexander (1987), the voids can be either negative as leftover space after buildings are constructed or can be understood as positive spaces defined by the two-dimensional facades of the buildings framing the space. He argues that these spaces can be the focus of attention and the buildings, i.e. the solids, could just be the tools with which these spaces are created. Perhaps this perception does not take full account of symbolic buildings. Yet, the principle is that it reverses the situation in other urban areas, where buildings are perceived as the focus of attention. In the city centre, the facades of buildings can explicitly become the background to urban space. The structure of voids and solids can create patterns that produce distinctive city centres (Zecca and Laing, 2020), but an issue remains as to how to generate comfortable conditions.

## 2.1.5 Microclimate and Air Quality

Microclimate

The attraction of city centre spaces will be enhanced by ameliorating climatic conditions. Their design needs to produce conditions that meet microclimatic criteria. In Northern Europe, the objectives are generally to increase temperature, lower wind speeds, and reduce noise. In terms of temperature, the aim is to maximise the number of days where it falls between the band of 13-$24^0$C, and especially the number of hours when it is tending towards the top of the band to enable sitting outside. Strong winds can be unpleasant. It is therefore desirable to reduce them. The ideal would be around 4 mph, rising to 8mph as the temperature increases. Noise is incompatible with city centre living, especially at night. It should be kept to no more than 65db(A) in the vicinity of apartments and houses (Giddings et al. 2011). The criteria are summarised on Table 2.6.

*Table 2.6: Microclimatic Criteria*

| Microclimate | | |
|---|---|---|
| Temperature $^0$C | Wind in miles per hour (mph) | Noise db(A) |
| 13 - <br><br>**24** <br>Gehl (2006) <br>Pushkarev and Zupan (1975) | <4 -   no noticeable  pedestrian discomfort <br>**4-8 - wind is felt on the face** <br>Cooper Marcus and Francis (1997) | 40 – private discussion <br>50 – ambient background /noise level/ light traffic 30m away <br>60 – conversation at 1m/ singing birds <br>**65 – maximum at night to avoid sleep disturbance** <br>70 – maximum during day to maintain acceptable internal noise levels <br>Sharland (1972) <br>Sacre (1993) |

Air Quality

Since cities moved from industrial to commercial models, factories have ceased to be major sources of air pollution. There are now three principal concerns regarding air quality. They are domestic and commercial gas fuelled heating, vehicles, and heat waves due to climate change. It is argued that the last of the three concerns results from the first two. There are plans to maximise renewable energy systems, change the composition of gas by introducing hydrogen, and develop more nuclear power stations (Cai et al. 2018). While some of these provisions are occurring already, others are long-term developments. The issue generating most immediate attention is the use of vehicles. Authorities are restricting their use by the re-organisation of street space and increasing penalties. There are Government incentives to encourage pedestrian spaces and cycling. In some cities, there are strategies for edge of city parking, with public transport providing access to the centres. These actions are unlikely to significantly reduce car usage and may in fact increase pollution at the periphery. The trend for online shopping is also increasing the use of commercial vehicles. The long-term solution is the advancement of different kinds of clean transport. The current measurement of air pollution involves the following emissions - Particulate matter PM10 and PM2.5, Ozone O3, Nitrogen Dioxide NO2, Carbon Monoxide CO, and Sulphur Dioxide SO2 (World Health Organization 2021).

## 2.1.6 Conclusion

The objective of this section has been to establish the principles of the environmental perspective for the city centre. It is important to appreciate the origins of a particular centre. Generally, they are derived from grand plans or incremental growth or various combinations of both. Therefore, analysing structural trends is a significant feature. The ownership of land continues to be critical to the future shape of centres. Where it is publicly owned, the community has a stake in the way it is developed and used. Private owners are not even required to declare their ownership, and development is based on individual sites rather than consideration of patterns in centres. The identification of

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boundary can be open to debate but mainly there is an agreed interpretation of where a centre begins and ends. Usage is fundamental to future fulfilment of centres. This is determined by movement, activity, and repose. The main physical elements are spaces and buildings, and their configurations will arguably have the greatest influence on how the future unfolds. There needs to be clear definition of squares, green spaces, streets, and their networks. There should also be positive differentiation between symbolic and contextual buildings. The latter is not about individual projects but how they fit into a framework. There is also a requirement that the role for historical buildings is determined, and provisions for their use and maintenance safeguarded. Finally, are comfort conditions, with developments that enhance microclimate and air quality.

## 2.2 Social Perspective

### 2.2.1 Introduction

While city centres are known for their functions and activities, there is substantial literature that promotes them as places for social interaction. The ability to support social relationship and communication, and exchange between people is one of the most important features of city centres that is worthy of study (Smyth and McKnight, 2015). The social perspective is an extensive and profound topic covering those factors that link people to each other and to society. Humans are social beings and need to be surrounded by people and establish interaction and contact. Assembly of these meaningful contacts initiate social interactions (Merrill, 1965) that have the ability to change the behaviour and attitude of the interacting persons by influencing the overt behaviour and state of mind of individual and groups. This impact may result in constant adjustment, re-adjustment and establishment of relationships and patterns of behaviour specifying what is acceptable and what is not in the society. Accordingly, social interaction can be defined as dynamic sequence of social actions between individuals and groups forming the foundations of social structures that may promote cultural development (Heatherton and Walcott, 2009).

### 2.2.2 Principles

The literature on social interaction in an urban environment covers a number of key attributes including impact of distance on social contacts and efficiency of resulted interactions. The relationship between social interaction and distance has been studied extensively in urban studies and it is typically assumed that distance is costly to social interactions and that spatial proximity facilitates them. New and emerging technologies have evolving influence on how people maintain social contact and their advancement has asserted that technology can bring people together (Cairncross, 2001). However, recent studies (e.g. Levy and Goldenburgh, 2014; Büchel and Ehrlich, 2016) provide solid evidence that virtual proximity is only an illusion and that distance is still highly

detrimental to forming and maintaining social ties. Other authors like Antonucci et. al (2017) are cautiously optimistic about the promise of technology to expand, but not replace traditional forms of social contact. Building on this assumption, there is a body of literature that claims social interaction increases with local population density (e.g., Marshall, 1890; Glaeser, 1999). The argument is that densely populated areas facilitate more contacts and thus accelerate social learning process which can be defined as learning through the observation of other people in the environment. It is evident that learning and social behaviour that construct meaning, and identity can be acquired by observing and imitating other members of the society rather than by innate or internal forces. The emphasis of this learning behaviour is on the cognitive process of learning resulted by the dynamic interaction between people and the environment. According to Tonnelat (2010) places that provide an opportunity for watching the scene turn into an environment for social learning that push one to behave civilly toward diversity.

The findings of empirical studies on impact of density in this context i.e., Duranton and Puga (2004) and Schlapfer et al. (2014) confirm that the average number of social interactions increases with population size. However, focusing on the unique characteristics of these social interactions, other authors (e.g., Berliant et al., 2006) argue that the impact of higher density is not necessarily on quantity of social interactions but rather on the quality and efficiency of them. This argument is on the basis that social interactions can have various characteristics and that their quality matter in terms of impact. The efficiency of these interactions is of particular interest in an urban setting and this has mainly been discussed in form of weak or strong social ties and their wider social impact. The notion of the strength of a tie is a combination of various factors. Granovetter (1973) identifies these as the amount of time, the emotional intensity and intimacy between interacting bodies, and also the reciprocal services of responding to one action with hope or expectation of future positive response which characterise the tie. He defines weak ties as a social relation between two individuals or groups who have no overlap in their personal networks and do not share deep connections. In other words, weak ties are the ones that allow reaching beyond one's own social circle and are significantly

important in terms of their impact on vulnerable groups within society with limited strong ties within their network. These weak ties allow for sustained interactions with individuals and groups that represent mainstream society and are vital for an individual's integration to modern society and can result in social isolation if diminished (Wilson, 2012). Granovetter (1973) argues that weak social ties being more formal and rationalised interactions are often more valuable in terms of the distribution of information and resources across society, in comparison with strong ties that are more intimate or informal. Thus, weak ties even if superficial, are still broad and have a greater reach than strong ties that are narrow and deep. As seen in Figure 2.5, weak ties can bind groups of strong ties together.
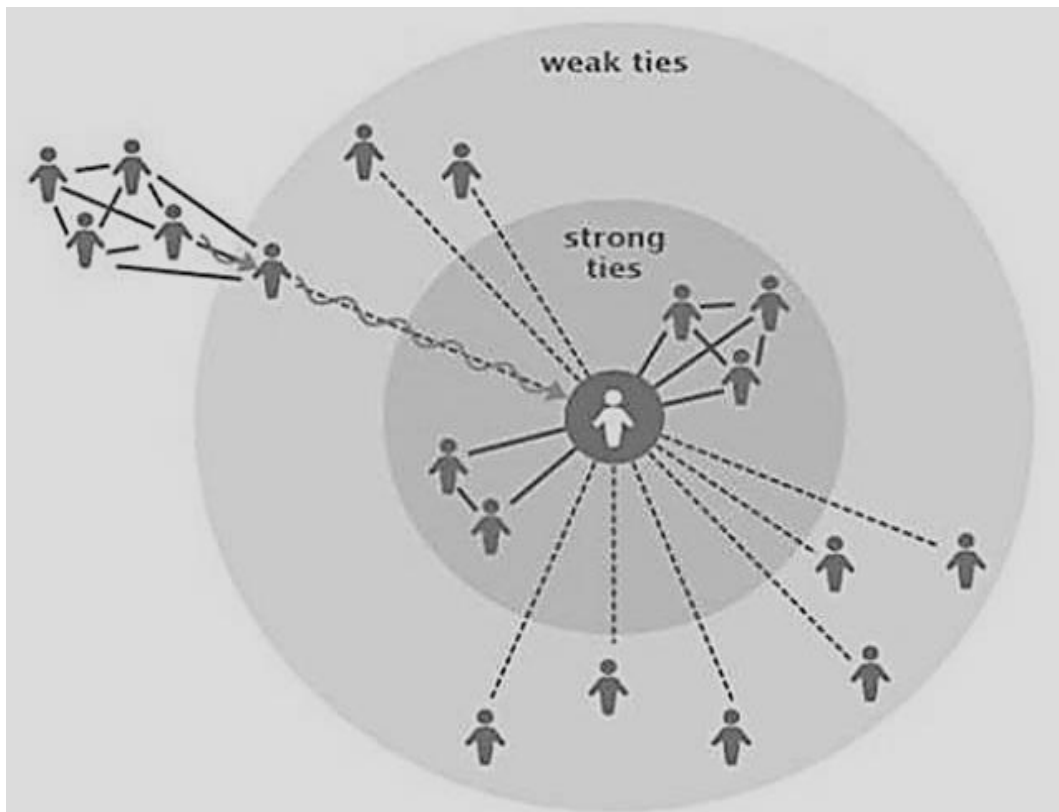


*Figure 2.5: Weak Ties and Strong Ties (Bakshy, 2012)*

These attributes i.e., impact of distance on social interactions are applicable for a better understanding of how centres are socially different from other urban areas. City centres can be viewed as a complex product of interactions between humans and their physical environment and a social organism with constituting elements that have relations with the society as a whole. As highly dynamic

areas, they are seen as the main reference point of social life and distinctive places with an identifiable urban image and identity in relation to their social components including the variety of people using it. Their overlapping uses can represent the vitality of the society (Wahlberg, 2016) and offer evidence about socio-cultural structure of the place (Gruen, 1965; Gratz and Mintz, 1998; Rypkema, 2003). City centres are known as key sites for historical and cultural trajectories forming the most critical and vital part of the city. They are the focus of civic identity, expressing the essence of what each city was in the past and how it is different from other areas (Worpole, 1993). They are a product of time, and the transformation of the social relations has put them at the core of spatial restructuring of the physical environment in cities. Chaney (1994), and Simmel and Levine (2015) argue that city centres reflect the changing constitution of social order. Worpole (1993) also identifies city centres as the focus of the urban public realm. It is evident in the analysis of public spaces within city centres that they are a place for performing social rituals and expression of cultural values; and these places have represented major historical events (Corbett, 2004). Lefebvre (1991) points out that space is not a container that simply needs to be filled but as place itself is an active and ongoing inventor of social relations. According to Madanipour (2010), urban spaces may physically change very slowly, but socially they may embody new beliefs and behaviours and adapt to the new social norms at a faster pace. Society's social configurations have changed from agrarian to industrial to services, and these changes may have left some spaces intact. However, the pattern of their use and the nature of their meaning for the urban populations have changed dramatically. These changes can introduce new beliefs and practices, undermining the established patterns, and liberating some groups from their inferior positions. In the context of city centres, the implications of these transitions in terms of social configurations directly influence the use of the space within these areas and also result in transformation of the perception of this space for different people.

City centres facilitate a multiplicity of encounters with non-familiar others that are essential for everyday life and help to consolidate the social order (Madanipour, 2010). According to Gehl (2011), the majority of social

interactions in city centres are generated from passive contacts and unfocussed interactions. These modest types of weak tier are still very appealing for people. The urban fabric in this part of the city in form of public spaces and buildings provides a setting for social interactions including social relations of production, exchange and consumption of goods and service. According to Johnstone and Conroy (2008), the activity of trading that occupies a significant area in the centre, can also be seen as part of social environment.

In the social context accessibility, intensity, and diversity of uses and activities have been identified as fundamental characteristics of city centres (Paumier, 2004; Worpole, 1993; Whyte, 2009; Balsas, 2007). These characteristics are closely interlinked to allow city centres to accommodate and form key social activities.  Accessibility is facilitation of movement and is what guarantees the free circulation of persons and goods and is also what allows the emergence of collective representations wherefrom images of the city centre are produces (Tonnelat, 2010). In this context centrally located facilities assist access by minimising the mount of movement needed. This is an advantage for city centres as it provides access to a wide range of overlapping uses but also creates opportunity for social encounter through reduced distance. Accessibility can be related to public spaces that are located in the city centre and lie outside the boundaries of individual or small group control, providing places that mediate between people, and may give access to private spaces, as well as performing a multiplicity of functional and symbolic roles in the life of an urban society (Madanipour, 2010). Much emphasis has been given to the accessibility of the city centre from outside, but the inner accessibility of the city centre is just as important (Monheim, 1998). The intense daily use is another main characteristic of the core. Authors such as Kennedy and Kennedy (1974) also make reference to a surrounding lower density frame in which business functions are mixed with residential uses or other non-central activities acting as a buffer for the core and providing complementary uses. The social implications of the buffer are also of significant importance as they attract a range of diverse users to these areas. The diverse and complementary uses offered in this part of the city attract significant number of people to the centre. The combination of these characteristics and their social functions result in a multi-layered social

product made of meanings, languages and symbols that go beyond just a physical setting and triggers social interaction among various social groups. Each of these groups can be seen as actors in reproduction of collective identities in the centre over time.

### 2.2.3 Social Groups

Social interactions invariably result in the production of social groups that can be defined as a collection of humans that share certain characteristics and a common identity that generates a sense of unity. City centres accommodate a concentration of multiple social groups. In this context these groups are seen as key components and are closely linked with the twin key indicators of the changing dynamics of city centre; vitality and viability. Vitality relates to how busy the centre is at different times and locations and viability is seen as the continued ability of the centre to attract investment, not just for maintenance but also to allow improvement and adaptation to changing needs (Ravenscroft, 2000; DoE, 1996). Teller et al. (2010) highlights the importance of identifying these social groups and understanding that they differ in character. In this context, these groups are different in terms of their types of interactions and their perceptions of the place. As a result, their experience of the centre can differ based on by whom and what they encounter. The experience of engaging with other people represents an opportunity for stimulation. When compared with experiencing buildings and other inanimate objects, experiencing people, who speak and move about offers a wealth of sensual variation (Gehl, 2011). No moment is like the previous nor the following, when people circulate among people and as a result, the number of new situation and new stimuli is limitless. The opportunity to see, hear and meet people from different social groups is a very important attraction. People are attracted to other people and human activity is arguably of the greatest interest (Gehl, 2011; Whyte, 2009).

Social interactions also result in production of social norms that coordinate people's expectations and impose uniformity of behaviour within a given social group but can substantially vary among groups (Blume and Durlauf, 2017). An

important element in the study of social groups in city centres is the level of visibility of particular individuals or groups in the same location at certain times. As highlighted by Madanipour (2010), social groups can make or withdraw claims over space, thereby implicitly or explicitly contesting the claims of others, instigating a process of inclusion and exclusion, creating spaces with overlapping meanings based on the common values shared by members of each group. The ability to shape and determine some of the features of the urban space depends on the level of political, economic, and cultural power and influence of these social groups. Dominance of space by certain social groups can change considerably during the day and night and can significantly influence the character of the place.  This presence and in some cases perceptions of associating one social group with a dominating behaviour may not be welcomed by the state or other individuals or groups who may not share the same characteristics and values. This conflict may result in consequences such as introduction of various forms of control orders in these areas with the justification of prohibiting any type of behaviour perceived to negatively impact the quality of life. These limitations on access and behaviour may discourage certain groups and encourage others in the city centre. Heap and Dickinson (2018) acknowledge that there has been limited research and debate on this topic and argue that these control orders can create new frontiers in intolerance, exclusion and marginalisation of vulnerable groups and highlight street sleeping homeless people as an example of one such group.

Categorising different social groups can be developed into study of interactions between these groups.  It appears that in the study of the city centres, scholars have identified particular social groups in isolation rather than studying the relationship and interaction between different groups (Teller and Elms, 2010; Hart et al., 2013). Table 2.7 identifies how these independent groups have been studied separately and presents an overview of the different groups in the city centre and their subgroups based on existing literature. Each of these groups can cover people of different age, gender, culture, status, and ability.

*Table 2.7: Identification of different social groups in city centre literature*

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Age** | Children | Matthews (1980) |
| | | Woolley et al. (1999) |
| | | Alarasi et al. (2015) |
| | Youth/ Teenagers | Woolley and Johns (2001) |
| | | Woolley et al. (2011) |
| | Young adults | Tallon and Bromley (2004) |
| | | Chatterton and Hollands (2005) |
| | | Allen (2007) |
| | Middle aged persons | Tallon and Bromley (2004) |
| | Elderly | Pain (2001) |
| | | Fobker and Grotz (2006) |
| | | Temelová and Dvořáková (2012) |
| **Gender** | Female | Worpole (1993) |
| | | Pain (2001) |
| | | Smyth and McKnight (2010) |
| | | Crewe and Martin (2016) |
| | LGBT | Ruting (2008) |
| **Culture** | Tourists | Simpson (1999) |
| **Status** | Homeless population | Johnsen et al. (2005) |
| | | Ismail and Turiman (2016) |
| | | Watt (2018) |
| | Students | Chatterton (1999) |
| | Shoppers | Thomas and Bromley (1996) |
| **Ability** | Physically disabled | Bromley, Matthews and Thomas (2007) |
| | Mentally disabled | McClimens et al. (2014) |

The classifications presented in Table 2.7 are all legitimate ways of categorising social groups. However, they do not provide a comprehensive system for defining them in the city centre. The use of these categories could be problematic due to the various overlaps between them that may cause double counting. This is due to the different nature of the groups and the lack of clear connection between them. To address the need for a system, the concept of social worlds by Unruh (1980) could be used as an appropriate tool to understand the complex social dynamics of different individuals and groups in the city centre. This concept is generated from his historical review of academic discussions about the emergence of social worlds. This includes communities within communities (Goode, 1957), behaviour systems (Holingshead, 1939), activity systems (Irwin, 1977), social circles (Kaudushin, 1976) and subcultures (Cohen, 1955). These authors published their work in the 20th Century. However, according to Shipway et al. (2013) and MacLean et al., (2020) the landmark studies they produced are still valid for application in the 21st Century. Unruh (1980) argues that the communication and interaction between people are used to determine the boundaries of social worlds. The shared understanding is shaped by a variety of factors, including language, culture, history and power relations.

According to this concept, every social situation contains four types of groups - insiders, regulars, visitors, and strangers. In the context of the city centre, Insiders are integral to the place. Regulars have a life outside the city centre but are nevertheless closely associated with it. Visitors are transient and temporary members, staying only as long as the social world satisfies their needs, and provides interest and entertainment for them. The last group is strangers. By definition, they are outsiders as they do not conform to the rules of society. Without permanent addresses, registered work, bank accounts and so on, they tend not to appear in official documentation, and occupy space in an anonymous manner. The classification of city centre social groups into the four categories of insiders, regulars, visitors and strangers is mainly focused on the way each group occupies space and time. Framing city centre social groups through Unruh's (1980) system addresses the issue of fragmentation, overlap and double-counting that could result from alternative approaches, and focuses

on the unique characteristics of each group. The following section provides a detailed investigation of each of these social groups in the context of the city centre.

**Insiders**

This group comprises of residents of the city centre. The choice of living in the city centre, hinterland or suburbs depends on how the notion of residential amenity is valued by individuals. Insiders can be at different stages of their lives; their period of residency within the city centre can vary, and as a result they may value the notion of amenity differently. For this group, certain features including proximity to work and access to consumption, cultural and leisure amenities can be the main attraction for city centre living. Tallon and Bromley (2004) identify the practical and mundane attractions of the city centre living to be more important than the more widely publicised lifestyle and cultural attractions. Their study also points to differences in attitude between age groups of insiders, with younger adults placing greater value on the range of social and cultural activities in the city centre, whilst older people express high level of satisfaction with physical elements including attractiveness of the physical environment. According to Allen and Blandy (2004), insiders tend to form into two distinct groups; young people seeking a short experience of city centre life and authentic dwellers who are interested in long term residency within this area. The same study categorises the latter group into three sub-groups that are all committed to live in the centre for long period of time. These groups include successful agers, counter-culturalists and lifestyle changers. Successful agers are drawn to the centre by the cultural scene of the city centre. Counter-culturalists are attracted to the centre because it provides a tolerant environment in which non-traditional lifestyles and pattern of association can be fostered and sustained. Lifestyle-changers are those who are attracted to the centre because it accommodates the single or childless family lifestyle. In terms of residential amenity, given the diversity of the uses and activities in the centre, the interchange of residential amenity and non-residential activities, particularly in terms of evening and night-time activities can be relevant to this social group

as they would directly impact on the quality of their place of residence. Unlike other areas of the city, the inconvenience living in the centre is not a major problem for most insiders because for this social group, the attraction of city centre living goes beyond the notion of convenience.

Perceptions of the centre for this social group can include different aspects of change over time as they may have memories of the centre in the past. Dealing with negative perceptions associated with city centre such as environmental factors including noise, Light pollution resulted by other uses in the city centre and other negative elements such as crime can be part of the challenge of promoting the varied attractions of city centre living to a mix of social groups. This is especially the case for future city centre dwellers. Oc and Tiesdell (1997) argue that increased number of insiders and encouragement of city centre living can result in safer city centres and a more pleasant living environment for insiders. City centres are seen to be more attractive and vibrant if they are accommodating a significant population of insiders.

Stereotypically, a young population is perceived as comprising the majority of residents. Among them, students can be the most apparent. Despite the rapid growth in the city centre populations and policies aimed at a balanced mix of insiders from different backgrounds, a substantial transient population continues to be evident in many cities (Lager and van Hoven, 2019). This can lead to a conflict in policy objectives, in which a heterogenous population is deemed socially desirable, but transients are considered to offer economic advantages. A major issue is the availability of a variety of affordable house types, and access to private green space is also significant. A factor already noted in the Environmental section is the potential clash between residences and noise generated by the night-time economy. In the context of an ageing population, recent pedestrianisation schemes and cycle tracks have not depicted the city centre as a welcoming place for the elderly population or members of disability groups. This situation highlights the need for a focus on the interactions between social and spatial constructs for an older and less able population so that they can help to revive the city centre. There needs to be a considered debate on whether centres should remain the playground of the young or a more civilised approach to urban living.

Increased employment opportunities are seen to be an attraction for young professionals. There is scope for retaining students in the city centre as young professionals by offering opportunities once they complete their courses, to address the issue of outflow of graduates.  Attracting young families is currently being pursued by the local authorities, and some areas of centres could be seen as a suitable location for family-friendly developments. However, the expectation is that even if families choose to live in the city centre they may move out after a few years. This is rooted in the lack of access to schools and other facilities that are valued by families. Public transport can also be inconvenient for those with small children and private vehicles are valued by them. Yet, most authorities are restricting car access. While there is the attraction of readily available entertainment and cultural amenities within short travel distances, the notion of convincing a wider population that the urban core is a safe and comfortable, family-friendly, and age-friendly place to live, is still problematic (Florida et al., 2021).

**Regulars**

This group comprises users who spend time in the city centre on a regular basis. The reason for such regular visit by these habitual participants can be work, education, leisure, pleasure, shopping, or a combination of these factors. The period of the time spent in this area by this group can vary depending on the reason for their visit and associated activities. The length of engagement and the mix of activities in the centre can influence the sense of belonging to the centre for this group. If the attraction to the centre is due to work, they may have a sense of belonging to the centre due to economic dependence on the place as a source of income. Regulars choose a range of places in the suburbs or hinterlands as their place of residence. Their choice of not considering city centre living can be due to access to a higher level of residential amenity in those areas for example in form of larger properties or access to open green space or cheaper and better value accommodation options. Given their distance to the centre and the requirement for regular commute, they have to choose from available transport options. Accordingly, a key factor in understanding this

social group is the element of travel and their experience during the commute to the city centre. Depending on their residential context, certain important factors such as distance to the centre and proximity to transport options can influence their experience. These factors also have an impact on the time and travel cost for this group. Congestion and the level of control on certain private transport options may encourage the use of public transport to and from the centre. However, this highly depends on the quality and existing transport infrastructure.

A number of authors (e.g., Currie and Stanley, 2008; Urry, 2007) argue that public transport by definition involves travelling with others and hence provides opportunities for social interaction during trips. The notion of sharing public transport enables social encounters and result in production of causal socialising opportunities and formation of weak social ties. Overall given the length of travel and the perception of privacy, it is unlikely that these interactions are substantial, but they exist, nonetheless. According to Currie and Stanley (2008) the social interaction between commuters in short distances during inter-urban commutes including the ones to and from the centre remains untapped from a practical research perspective. However, Evans and Wener (2006) suggest that there is evidence of greater social interaction between commuters in relation to disrupted service as a result of a psychological response to the frustrations caused by delays and the need for reassurance in a situation of uncertainty. There is also evidence of cases where people with specific social needs for example isolated elderly residents were travelling on public transport only for the purpose of interaction with others including the staff.

Different regulars come into the centre at various times of the day and night. The strategy is invariably to support an increase in the number of regulars and to entice them to spend longer periods there. One way this can be achieved is by encouraging them to engage in activities other than the main purpose for their visit. This will require the creation of a comfortable and inviting environment, and the provision of an easy, affordable, and appealing travel experience. Moreover, centres with these advantages can provide more opportunities for social interaction, which can be seen as a welcome characteristic. The growth in flexible working, usually expressed as hybrid

working, is diminishing the number and frequency of regulars who come into centres for employment purposes. A flexible working pattern could be a popular choice for those with caring responsibilities and personal obligations beyond the centre. In particular, the provision of childcare facilities could impact on working patterns and location. Often, these are not located in centres but in neighbourhoods and therefore it is convenient to work in the same or adjacent neighbourhood, although the flexibility can mitigate the potential difficulties of where the childcare is located (Raes, 2020). Thus, improvements in communication technology have provided an opportunity for numbers of regulars to reduce the frequency of their trips by working remotely. However, this option is not available or suitable for all sectors that employ regulars. Some employment requires personal contact. The same kind of technology is available for online retail and shopping patterns, which have changed as a result. The retail and hospitality sectors are therefore being adversely affected by these changing patterns, in addition to the other causes for their regression. Without significant intervention, this change could have implications on the overall number of people coming into the centres on a daily basis. Despite the shrinkage of the retail sector, shopping will continue to attract regulars within a region due to its advantages in terms of immediate access to goods and social face-to-face interaction during the purchase. The advantages of in-person shopping have recently been advertised as part of a back to the centre campaign. They include the ability to actually see and feel items at the time of purchase. This may lead to hybrid retail where items can be experienced in-person but purchased and delivered online. The combination of shopping and leisure opportunities, including culture and entertainment or eating and drinking may also contribute to the retail experience. There will need to be more innovation to attract regulars to the city centre. It will involve interdisciplinary activity, with the environment, economics and governance providing the context in which social activity can be enhanced. Events in public spaces could offer new kinds of social contact and reinvigorate regulars' relationship with the centre (Smith, 2015).

**Visitors**

This group includes people who travel to the centre either to whom the centre is the main destination and place of interest or the ones to whom the attraction is not based in the centre, but it is the first point of arrival and departure. According to Worpole (1993), city centres are key sites for visitors. This social group includes tourists and residents of hinterlands and suburbs who may come to partake what the city centre has to offer for either leisure or entertainment, shopping or even for work commitments, however unlike regulars they don't make such visits on a regular basis. Given their irregular visit, the experience of arriving in the city centre is important and can give visitors an indication of what to expect.

The motivations of visitors can be seen as a driving force for all kinds of associated activities for this social group (Crompton, 1979). Holloway (2004) divides these motivations into eight broad categories of holiday, business, health, visiting friends and family, religious, economic benefits, education/ sport, and other physical activities. In the context of city centres, shopping and retail experience is gradually becoming a significant motivation that has been overlooked among the motivations of this list. Shopping for tourists is no longer a supplementary activity in leisure travel and is considered as a primary motivation while travelling (Zaidan, 2015). In most cases visitors can satisfy a number of separate needs simultaneously (Holloway, 2004) which may overlap. This group is associated with contribution to local vibrancy and achieving economic sustainability and is a major consideration in the study of social groups in this context and opportunities for sustainable economy, however the emphasis is either on attractions for visitors and enhancing their perception of the centre or encouragement for spending longer periods of time in this area and as a result the dimension of uses of space by this social group has been largely unexplored (Zandvliet and Dijst, 2006).

There are various categories of visitors. According to Galí-Espelt (2012), the most obvious distinction differentiates two categories depending on whether the motivation for the visit is primary or secondary. In a similar approach, Ashworth and Tunbridge (1990) identify two types of visitors as intentional or incidental.

The attractions that draw the intentional visitors to the centre are a destination for them while the attraction for incidental visitors is a complementary attraction.

Visitors are portrayed as significant contributors to the vibrancy of the city centre. As a result, policies and interventions continue to encourage this social group. Such an approach is rooted in its economic contribution without significant consideration of the social issues associated with a high number of visitors. Where visitor numbers start to dominate the number of insiders, this is known as the tipping-point, and it has implications for social structures. Without pre-empting the concept of the stranger, even city councils recognise that citizens can feel like strangers in their own cities. By the nature of their activities, visitors are a visible social group. Unlike insiders and regulars, they are not based in their houses but are in centres to see them. They also play a larger part in the night-time economy (Zmyslony and Pawlusiński, 2020). There is an argument that the continued development of hotels is stifling the delivery of permanent houses and apartments. It is a different form of commercialising the urban core from the 20th Century priorities of office and retail. Not only does this intervention create economic disadvantages in terms of affordable housing but appears to promote visitors over and above permanent residents, leading to adverse effects on a sense of community. There is also a notion that visitors and citizens are occupying the same space without interaction. It is like a parallel existence. Moreover, each group may exhibit different behaviours that may not be appreciated by the other group. Therefore, a key objective might be to bring the groups together. One approach might be to encourage cultural visitors rather than economic tourists. Another traditional group of visitors has been those involved in business activity. In the context of the fourth industrial revolution accelerated by Covid-19, the amount of time spent in workplaces has significantly reduced. The current requirement in the public sector is only a minimum of 40% of total hours should be spent in the workplace (Surma et al., 2021). A corollary of this situation is the likely reduction of business visitors, especially as online meetings are becoming almost habitual. A future expansion that has been suggested is the number of events in public spaces. To date, these have been generally large scale, organised by national companies, and attracting very large visitor numbers over short periods. The effects can be quite

disruptive to the city centre as a social space. It could be that smaller scale events would relate better to insiders and regulars and generate more social cohesion.

**Strangers**

This group is formed by collections of individuals who are not yet able to take part in the formal institutions of mainstream society (Unruh, 1980). There can be an attitude of impartiality and detachment among this group because they are either not accepted by other social groups or because they do not accept others. Simmel (2002) identifies strangers as the ones whose position in society is determined by the fact that they have difficulty in belonging to it. While the involvement of strangers may be characterised by marginality and detachment from common features shared by other groups, their activities provide points of reference and comparison for other social groups. Strangers can be a collection of individuals rather than an identifiable group and are generally treated with suspicion by other social groups (Shaftoe, 2012). The presence of strangers in this context can be seen in the parallel between accessibility and anonymity. Public places in city centres are accessible for them and would not deter strangers. The notion of anonymity in the city centre creates a level of social comfort because anyone is entitled to be physically present in public space. Such anonymity enables strangers to be as comfortable as others only in that they may not be recognised. Presence of strangers makes these spaces less personal and more transient (Madanipour, 2010). However, Madanipour (2005) highlights that it is possible for this social group to have access to a place but not to the activities going on there, as they can feel excluded by society. The concept of a collection of individuals is the defining factor. As such, it produces a difficult situation in terms of planning for this group and the interaction of these individuals with others. There is an image of social misfits – rough sleepers, homeless, and beggars with drug and alcohol misuse.  They make other city centre users feel uncomfortable, although it is debatable as to whether they actually deter other groups, especially as they are evident in cities throughout the world. Their numbers can be overstated, and it is quite feasible to provide

social housing and mental health care to ameliorate the problems. However, the evidence is that resources are diminishing in many cities. In addition, the displacement of supportive charities is causing concern. A broader interpretation of strangers opens conversations about rights to the centre. Lefebvre (1991) identifies the right to urban life. This could be interpreted as accessing, being and participating. Accessing is associated with public space, where everyone should be welcome. The privatisation of public space creates ambiguities. It may be difficult to perceive where public space ends and private space begins. Citizens are unlikely to be challenged in these circumstances, but strangers may feel insecure. Being is the right to dwell and occupy. This will enable them to stay in centres for longer periods and integrate into permanent society. The final stage of strangers becoming part of the community is participating, where they become engaged with urban democracy, revisioning and decision-making. These are quite radical stages and may be quite overwhelming for many strangers. It also depends on whether they wish to become part of the community. Unless mentally ill, there is a natural human desire to belong (Koefoed and Simonsen, 2011). It is therefore contended that being a stranger should be temporary and associated with arrival into a new centre. Integration may require a growth in confidence associated with little victories, which are incremental achievements deeply rooted in popular culture.

### 2.2.4 Conclusion

The essence of this perspective is unpacking the social perspective as part of the argument that distinguishes the centre from the other urban areas. Existing literature identifies the urban core as a place for social interactions and characteristics in the form of accessibility, concentration, diversity, mix of uses, and activities that accommodate key social interactions. The resulting social groups as summarised in Figure 2.6, categorised by the four main groups of insiders, regulars, visitors, and strangers. The unique ability of city centres to host a mix of high populations of these social groups and their subgroups at different times of the day including evening and night-time makes them distinctive when compared to other urban areas. This is particularly important

when seen in connection with the socio-economic performance of the city centre.
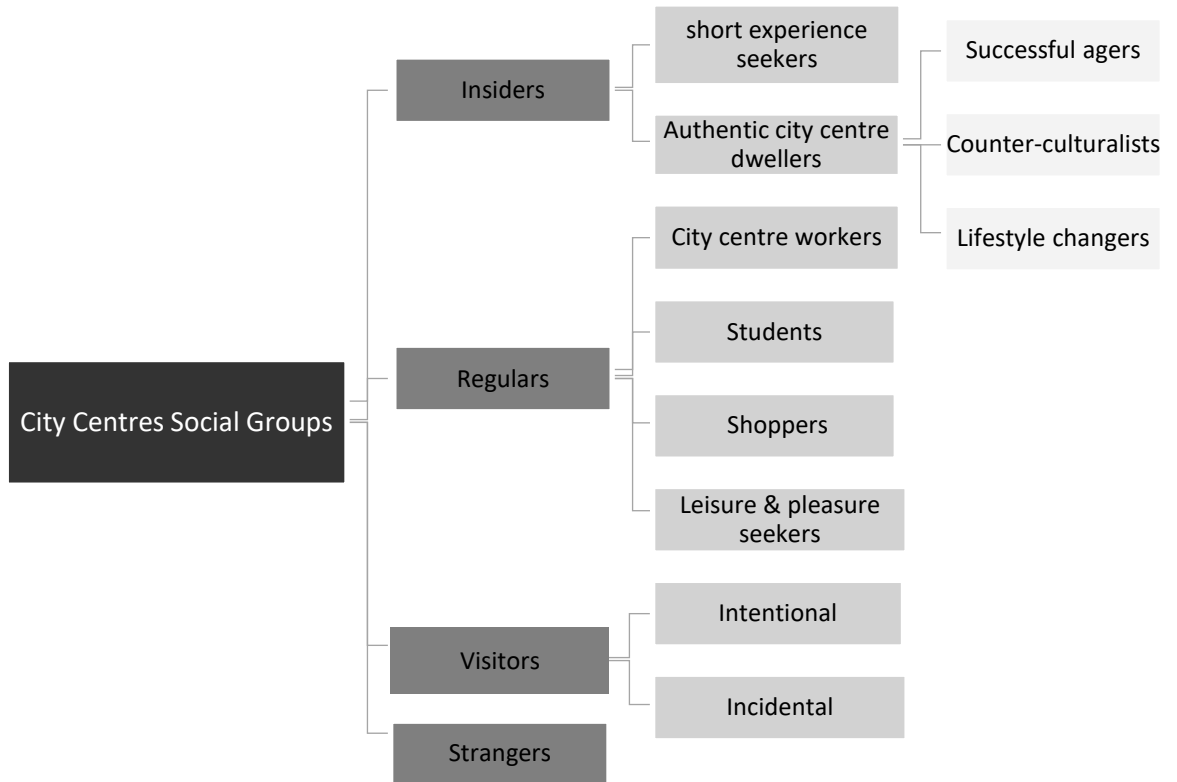


*Figure 2.6: Categories of social groups in the city centre*

## 2.3 Economic Perspective

### 2.3.1 Introduction

City centre economy is an integral part of the wider economic life of the city; it reflects the city's prosperity and plays a key role in its development. The significance of the economic role of the city centre is reflected in its deep history of accommodating the key activities of trade and manufacturing. Periodic changes to the patterns of production and consumption have resulted in restructuring experiences, followed by reconstitution of new activities (Hutton, 2010). According to Sassen (2006), the economics of the city centre encompasses structural advantages, most notably, centrality, density, and labour supply. Given the notion that economic efficiency is a desirable goal, urban economics has traditionally focussed on allocating scarce resources amongst competing users to achieve the highest level of efficiency. New approaches challenge this notion by identifying the urban economy as an evolving complex system (Anderson, et al., 2018). Paddison and Hutton (2015) acknowledge the challenge in defining dynamic economic processes and refer to a conceptual repositioning by explaining that it is mainly based on supply and demand and the capacity of trading goods and services. These two key themes are influential in developing this theme; however, a critical look at the determinants would require consideration of income as the real driver of economy with expenditure representing the aggregate demand for goods and services. It would also be necessary to investigate the interaction of economic actors who engage in economic activity (Heikkila and Wang, 2009; Lemoy et al., 2010).

The aim of this section is therefore to examine the economic perspective of the city centre from the four key themes of: - Income and expenditure - Goods and services - Supply and demand - The role of economic actors. To understand the economy, it is important to consider the interaction of both individuals and businesses. In a two-sector model developed by Knight (1933), individuals provide labour that enables businesses to produce goods and services, and businesses provide individuals with income (see Figure 2.7). The latter is then spent by individuals on goods and services provided by businesses.

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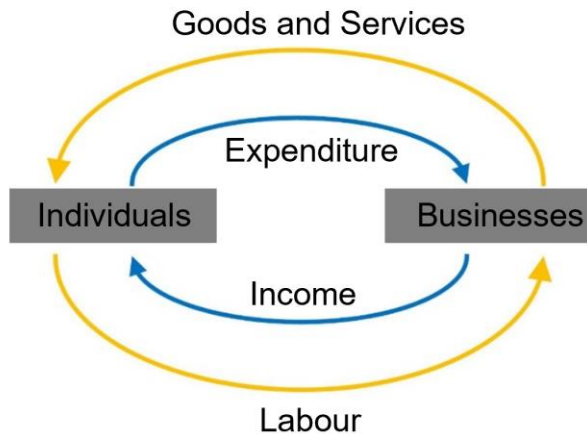
*Figure 2.7: The circular flow of income and expenditure (Knight, 1933)*

While the concept of the circular flow of income is useful in explaining some principles in the general economy, it is evident that the economy of the city centre is more complex than this initial model. The complexity applies to a variety of sectors involved as well as the dynamics of interactions between them. One of the assumptions of this two-sector model is that all income gained by individuals is spent on goods and services produced in the same city centre, and conversely, that all expenditure is derived from income in that centre. Also, no saving or investment in businesses is acknowledged within this cycle. Thus, the role of the financial sector, such as banks, is overlooked. Saving is closely related to investment, and both are crucial in economy. Saving reduces spending on goods and services but creates an opportunity for banks to lend more to businesses for investment in the production of goods and services. However, increased saving does not necessarily result in a positive impact on economy. If the majority of individuals save at once, it can cause a drop in aggregate demand and may cause a recession. Keynes (1936) refers to this phenomenon as the Paradox of Thrift. Another flaw in this model is that the economic role of government and its tax-raising powers are disregarded. Moreover, it assumes that there is no economic activity between cities and even countries, overlooking imports and exports.

These deficiencies led to the development of a five-sector model (see Figure 2.8) in which the economy is divided into individuals and businesses as well as other actors who have interaction in city centre economy including government,

financial and overseas sectors. This model can be seen as a more realistic representation of the city centre economy. The income of individuals is derived from businesses. When individuals receive their incomes, they may choose to save a proportion of it in banks or spend it all on consumption. The financial sector channels savings into the economy by investing in businesses. The government is the recipient of the main two categories of tax on properties in the city centre, the council tax for individuals and families, and business rate. This income is required for government to maintain the city centre and provide public services. There are two main levels of government – national and local. There is much debate about level of support from national government, and whether particular local authorities should retain all their income, or whether it should be redistributed by the national government. One significant issue in the debate is the differing spending priorities of the two levels of government. This model also recognises that the overseas sector generates income for businesses through exports and withdraws money from the economy from imports. The combination of individuals' consumption, investments in businesses, government expenditure and net exports generates income for businesses. The five-sector model refers to the withdrawals and addition of money to the economy. When the rate of money removed and added to the economy is equal, equilibrium occurs, otherwise it would be the case of an economic downturn or upturn.
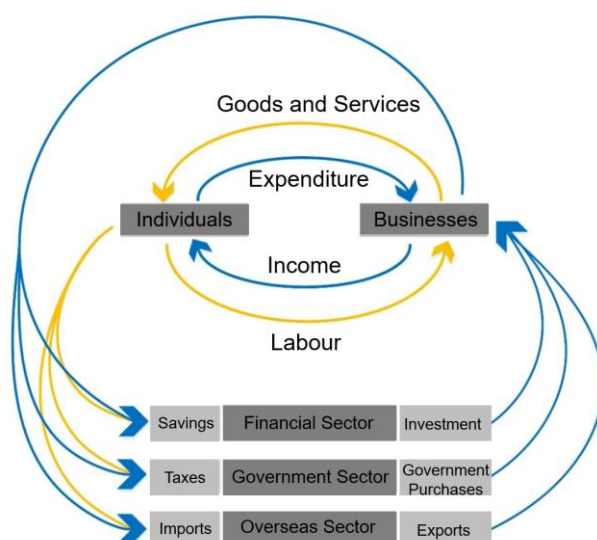


*Figure 2.8: Five-Sector Circular Flow adopted from Gwartney, et al., (2009)*

## 2.3.2 Income and Expenditure

In the context of city centre economy, it is important to investigate the relationship between income and expenditure. This is because the balance between them is directly linked to location decisions. Provided that income is more than expenditure there is a surplus that is advantageous to the centre from an economic point of view. According to O'Sullivan (2019), location decisions by businesses are based on competitive advantage in order to maximise profit, and this is directly affected by the level of rents and business rates (Håkansson and Lagin, 2010), while for individuals the decision aims to maximise utility. Employment has long been identified as a significant factor in location decisions for individuals (Vega and Reynolds-Feighan, 2009). There is an argument that people who live and work in the centre will spend more of their income in the centre.

In principle, expenditure on buildings, transport, utilities, and tax can be viewed as similar for individuals and businesses. Utilisation of buildings is key to economic activity and involves expenditure in the form of rent, mortgage, or cash purchase. Another expenditure is the tax imposed on both individuals and businesses. As already suggested, tax raised in the city centre is not necessarily spent there. This tax contribution can be spent on local authority services such as welfare, health, environment, and education but a percentage of it could be withheld for national government priorities. In the circumstances of significant reduction in allocations by central government to local government, council tax and business rates are increasingly seen as a replacement source of income for local authorities. Transport is another important expenditure for both sectors. Businesses transport is essential for the delivery of goods and services, and for individuals connectivity to and within the centre is vital. Studies show linkages between transport and consumption expenditure (e.g. Johnson, et al., 2013) as transport plays a key role in supporting the vitality of the centre.

A clear objective is to maximise the retention of income within the city centre. While there are figures regarding the amount of income produced in a centre, it is often unclear what happens to this finance. Thus, the figures are not particularly useful as sums may not be used to support the urban core but be

used for other purposes, in other places. Conversion of employment income, business investment, and taxation for the benefit of the urban core is vital to its future. As the 20th Century city centre was predicated on offices and retail, their 21st decline has adversely affected the economic balance (Florida et al., 2021). Other uses for city centre space are therefore necessary, whether they are permanent or temporary. Historic buildings have amenity value but as there are additional costs associated with them, they may require subsidies. The aim is a heterogeneous composition of business organisations, especially in terms of size. In particular, there is a history of small numbers of large-scale employers experiencing fatal problems, and the concept of a branch plant economy, in which parent companies can close places of work at short notice (Verbeke et al., 2018). A positive approach to commerce could be offered by business improvement districts. Re-investment for enhancement of the environment as well as mitigating the stresses of intensive use, are fundamental to the attractiveness of place. This will assist in bringing people into the centre, where expenditure by incomers participating in activities and events that are located there, and locally managed, can be an additional funding stream.

Local ownership of facilities, so that income from visitors does not dissipate to other parts of the country and overseas is important. Notification of public ownership of property is available through freedom of information requests. However, names of private owners are not available (Myers, 2019). It is an ethical question as to whether the community should know who owns its city centre. Nevertheless, the current situation means the destination of this income is unknown, including the amount retained within the centre or the city. A taxation structure that ensures an agreed proportion of council tax and business rates is returned to the centre could be a significant source of income. At present, much is controlled by central government, although there have been recent debates about returning more to councils. So far, there has been no identification of how this might be achieved in practice. Some cities have proposed that all taxation raised within a city should be held within that city. Yet, there could be a role for regional and central government, as the ability of city centres to raise taxation may be variable, and there is a danger that some centres become richer whereas others become poorer, without any intervention.

Another concern is the recent strategy by central government that requires local authorities to bid for funding. This is based on central government defining the criteria for expenditure (Sandford and Mor, 2019). Councils can feel obliged to apply even though their communities do not feel these projects to be priority, or even desirable. Moreover, as previously demonstrated, local authority areas are considerably more extensive than just city centres. Arguably, they also have a greater demand on finance beyond the urban core. Schools and social care are examples of high demand in neighbourhoods.

### 2.3.3 Goods and Services

It is the combination of production, distribution and consumption of goods and services that underpins economic activity within a city centre. Goods imply the tangible commodities or products that are generally categorised into consumer and producer goods. The first category is the end result of production and includes those items that people purchase. Copeland (1923) classified consumer goods into the three main categories of essentials, shopping and luxury items. Based on his definition, essential goods are readily available and are the ones that are low value and are purchased on a frequent basis. Holton (1958) found this definition to be problematic and too imprecise to measure buying behaviour. He identifies the time spent on price and quality comparison as an important attribute in classification of essential items. Copeland's (1923) classification for this category also indicates that consumers are in the habit of purchasing essentials at stores located conveniently near their residence, their place of employment or at a point that can be visited easily on the way to and from their place of employment or on a route travelled regularly for purposes other than buying trips. The term shopping associated with the second category of goods by Copeland (1923) is problematic as it could be applied to any category of purchase. It could be replaced with the term household to avoid confusion. This category of household items is usually less frequently bought. Certain attributes of these goods such as quality, price, and style matter to the consumer. The stores may have a central location to attract consumers from a wide territory and create the opportunity for comparison with other similar goods. However, in order to justify the expense of operation in such locations,

the volume of sales must be significant. Examples of these outlets could be department stores and non-luxury specialist shops. The third category comprises luxury goods. The term luxury was historically applied to items that were both rare and available only to the elite few (Nueno and Quelch, 1998). These are branded and high in value and their purchases are made at infrequent intervals. According to Bucklin (1963), a luxury good is one for which the preference is so strong that the customer bypasses, or would be willing to bypass, the purchase of more accessible substitutes at lower prices in order to secure the most wanted item. The luxury market is a significant segment in the marketplace and the rise of luxury consumption is being fuelled by a confluence of social forces and business factors (Butman, et al., 2014). As a result, a luxury shop is located at a point to which consumers can be drawn from a wide area. Research shows that there are significant variations in the perception of goods and where to purchase them (e.g. Hauck and Stanforth, 2007). According to Mason (2005), Copeland's (1923) definitions overlook the notion that the social characteristics of goods or place of purchase could significantly influence consumer choice. Mason's (2005) work on the social dimensions affecting consumption show that decisions about where to buy could be as important as product and brand in the eyes of consumers. In his research, Bourne (1956) argued that a growing number of products had to be sold to social groups rather than to individuals if they were to be successful in the marketplace. This recognises the concept of fashion and status in the place of purchase as well as the product. However, as shopping patterns fragmented, in some instances place began to lose its kudos, and decisions became based on convenience. In the context of city centre, this decision is closely linked with out-of-town retailing set up in competition with the city centre (Thomas et al., 2004) and disruption to city centre economy caused by online shopping was soon added (Weltevreden, 2006).

Studies in the areas of consumer behaviour and consumption (e.g., Belk, et al., 2003) have examined the distinction between different motivations for buying and have categorised them into needs-driven, wants-driven and desire-driven consumption in city centre. Table 2.8 shows the differentiation between the

three categories of consumer goods and provides a comparison of other aspects including behaviour and spatially significant criteria.

*Table 2.8: The differences between consumer goods- adopted from Laaksonen et al. (2018)*

| Driver in consumption | Type of consumer goods | Value | Aspects emphasized in consumption | Spatially significant aspects in consumption |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Need** | Essentials | Low value | Routinized behaviour | • Access to stores and goods<br>• Number of stores<br>• Physical location of stores<br>• Physical distance to stores |
| **Want** | Household | Average Value | Selective behaviour | • Access to a variety of stores selling various items<br>• Diversity of stores selling particular items to allow comparison<br>• Relative distance between different stores |
| **Desire** | Luxury | High value | Recreational shopping behaviour to address emotional needs | • Perceptual, functional, social, and mental aspects of the urban context<br>• Retail environment<br>• Atmosphere, design, and aesthetic |

In contrast to consumer goods, producer goods are resources required indirectly for economic activity and are not consumed. Nevertheless, they provide the setting for production, distribution, provision and consumption of goods and services. In the context of city centres, producer goods are defined as building and spaces, and their relationship with consumer goods needs to be demonstrated. Following Lefebvre's (1991) directive that a commodity needs space, the relationship between space, and the production and consumption of goods and services has been the subject of a great deal of research (e.g., Douglas and Isherwood, 2003; Crang, 2008; Mansvelt, 2008; Woodward, 2014). According to Clarke et.al (2003), consumption actively reconfigures buildings and spaces. Economic activity may require reshaping, reusing, and transforming them to adapt to alternative uses as well as increasing their attractiveness and accessibility. If the economic output in form of consumption of good and services is not high, the demand for buildings and spaces may decline. Services are the other key element forming the city centre economy. By definition, they are intangible and are not manufactured, transported or stocked. Such characteristics make it difficult for customers to evaluate the services before purchase (Donnelly and George, 1981). One significant aspect of a wide variety of services is that it involves people. This can be seen in the knowledge-based industries such as financial services and business consultancies (Kim and Rennie-Short, 2008). For some service providers such as financial services, the economies of agglomerations and the ability to provide face-to-face contact are of great importance. For some others such as health, transport and recreation and hospitality, the customer's presence is required for the service to be performed and the consumption is a critical component of the service experience (Grönroos, 1998). Storper and Venables (2004) expound the positive benefits of fact-to-face contact in economy and identify it as central to co-ordination of the economy. The literature refers to a wide range of services located in city centres. These include health, education, transport, recreation, professional and hospitality (DoE, 1994). Table 2.9 provides examples for each category of identified services in the city centre and the spaces associated with them.

*Table 2.9: Examples of services and buildings and services associated with them*

| Categories | Examples | Buildings and Spaces associated with this category |
|---|---|---|
| **Health** | Public and private health services | Hospitals, medical centres |
| **Education** | Primary and higher education | Schools, Universities |
| **Transport** | Rail and road | Stations |
| **Recreation** | Leisure, sports, cultural, dining | Theatres, cinemas, museums, bars, and restaurants |
| **Professional** | Financial, administrative services | Offices, banks, |
| **Hospitality** | Accommodation | Hotels |

As seen in this section, buildings and spaces play a key role in the economy by providing the setting for production and consumption of goods and services. Figure 2.9 summarises the categories of goods and services in city centres.

```
          ┌────────────────────────────┐
          │      Building and Spaces    │
          └────────────────────────────┘
              ┌──────────┴──────────┐
         ┌─────────┐          ┌─────────┐
         │  Goods  │          │ Services│
         └─────────┘          └─────────┘
              │                    │
         ┌──────────┐         ┌──────────┐
       ──│Essentials│       ──│  Health  │
         └──────────┘         └──────────┘

         ┌──────────┐         ┌──────────┐
       ──│Household │       ──│Education │
         └──────────┘         └──────────┘

         ┌──────────┐         ┌──────────┐
       ──│  Luxury  │       ──│Transport │
         └──────────┘         └──────────┘

                              ┌──────────┐
                            ──│Recreation│
                              └──────────┘

                              ┌──────────────┐
                            ──│ Professional │
                              └──────────────┘

                              ┌──────────────┐
                            ──│ Hospitality  │
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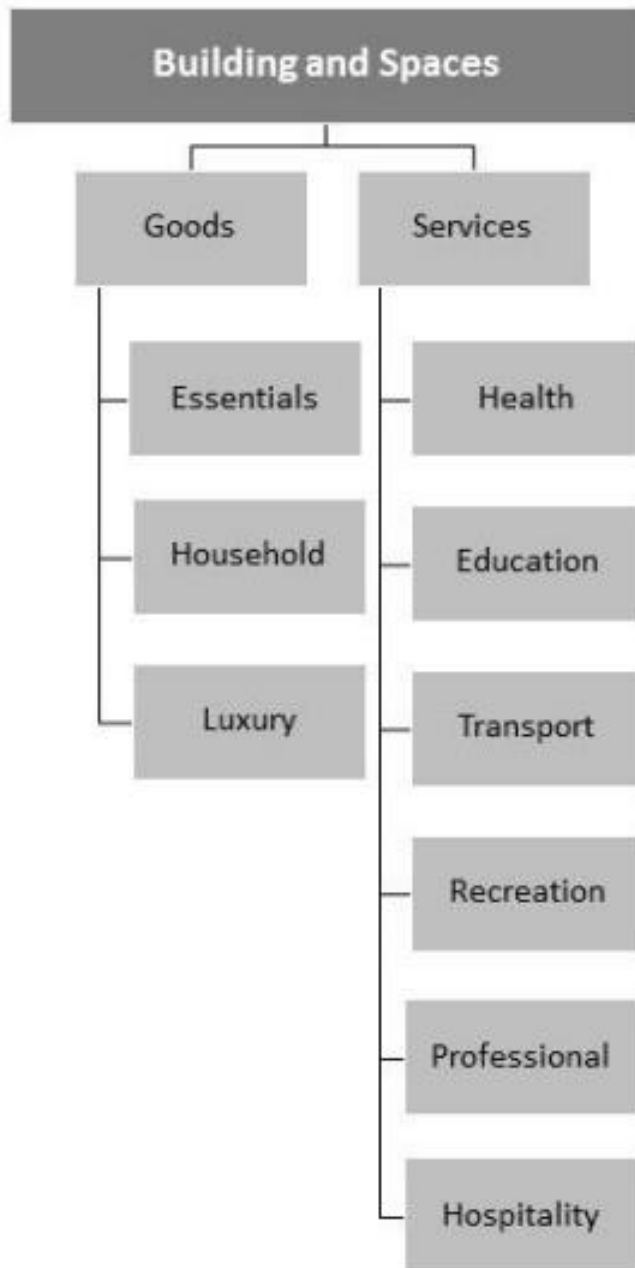
*Figure 2.9: Categories of goods and services hosted by buildings and services in the city centre*

Production, distribution, and consumption in city centres go through a number of phases. In an industrial city, there is a key production role in addition to the trade in goods and services. However, in many cases, there has been a transition from a manufacturing-based to a service-based economy as part of the change from industrial city to commercial city, and the majority of production

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has moved outside the urban core. According to McKee (1994) despite the historical significance of manufacturing, the importance of services was foreshadowed in the actual structure of cities in that the centre was intended to provide all urban residents with maximum access to the services which cities offered and the employment opportunities which services provided. It is valid to argue that centres still have a production role, however with a differing proportion in production of goods in comparison to services. In addition, creative and technology-intensive industries have modified production to a more sophisticated type of manufacturing. One of the main benefits of the centre is seen to be proximity or agglomeration which benefits businesses by creating the opportunity for exchange of ideas and information, with technological spill overs and socio-cultural networks that support continued intensity of activity (Kim and Rennie-Short, 2008). This factor is critical for a knowledge economy in which the production of goods and services is based on knowledge-intensive actions. The changing nature of goods and services has a direct impact on the nature of processes of production, distribution and consumption and their social and spatial configuration (Madanipour, 2013). Another key activity is the process of making goods and services available for customers or business use. The timely and smooth distribution is crucial to the viability of economic activities. Delivering and collecting goods entail processes of transportation, handling, and storage of goods as well as home delivery services. This can be done directly by the producer or service provider or by distributors or logistical intermediaries. Movement of goods represents a considerable proportion of urban traffic volume (Gupta, 2017) and distribution of goods vehicles entering city centres have negative environmental effects. These impacts in terms of noise and air pollution can affect health and wellbeing, with negative implications for living and working conditions. This can result in reducing the attraction of the city centre as a place for living and working and adversely affect the economy (Pignier, 2015).

Mainstream economists identify consumption of goods and services as the final stage of economic activity. The exchange of money for consumption is a mechanism that plays a central economic role. The extent of these transactions is closely linked with economic growth and understanding the dynamics of

consumption is essential in comprehending fluctuations in the economy. Jayne (2006) argues that despite advances in spatial theory, research has tended to overlook the power and dynamism of consumption. In the context of the city centre, the decline in production has been followed by strategies for increased consumption. As the most central place from the consumption point of view (Hernandez and Jones 2005) it is viewed as a dynamic multi layered space for different forms of consumption. Among these forms, retail and leisure can offer a wider choice to a greater number of customers (Fothergill and Houston, 2016).

## 2.3.4 Supply and Demand

To understand production, distribution, and consumption more fully, it is necessary to study the relationship between supply and demand. Supply represents the capacity of the market to deliver goods and services. Demand refers to the quantity of goods and services desired by consumers. Figure 2.10 illustrates the relationship between supply and demand in a simple form in which the demand curve shows the consumer reaction and the supply curve models the supplier reaction. This diagram is an approximation of what happens in free market and is more a theoretical model than an expression of reality. In this diagram equilibrium is achieved where the price and quality in demand, matches price and quantity in supply.
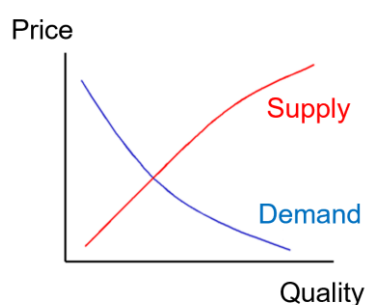


*Figure 2.10: Diagram for Supply and Demand*

Among the factors influencing the price and availability of goods and services are market forces. These drivers push up prices when supply declines and demand rises and drive them down when supply grows or demand diminishes. There are obvious limitations to this diagram. For instance, it assumes that the

changes in supply and demand are taking place in a perfect market and that activity external to the city centre, in terms of production and consumption does not take place. The relationship between supply and demand is not necessarily the same for different categories of consumer goods. In reality, there are other inhibitors to the free market, such as tax. Nevertheless, it is useful to be aware that fluctuations in the economy can have direct implications for the relationship between supply and demand, with the attendant effects on income for both individuals and businesses. Moreover, city centre users are not a homogeneous group and different actors can also produce additional fluctuations in the economy.

From the intersection on Figure 2.10, a movement to the right creates an imbalance between supply and demand that generates vacancy in property, and to the left it produces inflated prices. The current situation is causing the former, and it is likely to continue in the future. This is most evident in redundant offices, shops and upper floors, and abandoned sites. It may be due to lack of business opportunities, digital markets, technical issues including planning consents and building regulations, and legal complications such as private ownership and multiple owners. The future is likely to involve alternative uses, including meanwhile uses. Economic feasibility will almost certainly involve only short-term occupation by a single use and flexibility in design that enables buildings to accommodate a variety of uses over time, some of which may not even be envisioned at present (Dawson, 2022). It certainly demonstrates that the fixed views of the property industry, which have never served city centres well, are out of tune with the future of urban space. The difficulty with property industry-led development is that it is only interested in the latest incarnations of commercial proposals. These are usually based around maximising floorspace, incorporation of new technologies, and reducing costs through energy conservation. This approach should not be confused with improving the environment for employees, nor any enhancement of the built environment. In the late 20th Century, there was much criticism of office environments, especially related to lack of natural light and ventilation, and views. There were a number of innovative projects that showed the way, but they were never embraced by the property industry (Picard et al., 2021). The implication for the

local economy is that each of these incarnations is a rigid approach that soon becomes undesirable and redundant. A significant aspect of future economics will be to avoid the waste of redundancy.

Supply of office space continues despite the fourth industrial revolution reducing demand. There appears to be an almost sleight of hand where displacement of employment to some central places is presented as new office developments actually creating employment. This approach leaves behind redundant floorspace in other central areas. Many cities throughout the world are bringing student campuses into the city centre (Brennan and Cochrane, 2019), as a means of enlivening the local economy. This expediency is a simplistic response that demonstrates a porosity of ideas about economic regeneration. As noted, the economy of the city centre needs to be varied and based in the community. Also, it has heightened the development of student accommodation in the urban core as a means of filling the gap in demand for retail and commercial property. A greater variety of housing types is clearly needed to encourage a heterogeneous population. In numbers of cities, centres are colonised by students and young professionals. In others, the term empty nesters applies to people in later life, who have downsized and moved to the urban core.  A conflict can occur between the lifestyles of younger and older people, but the real challenge is to involve the middle aged and families, if the economy of the urban core is to be sustained.


## 2.3.5 Economic Actors

Understanding the role of economic actors and the relationship between them is crucial in understanding the economy of the city centre. In classical economic theory, there is an assertion that the public all behave in the same way. However, in modern economics, behavioural analysis is focusing on heterogeneity of activity (Baddeley, 2017). Social groups can behave in different ways and therefore have different influences on the economic performance of the city centre. The psychological and sociological factors of the economic actors are closely linked with the complexity of the economy and instabilities in the financial system. Keynes (1936, 1937) analysed these impacts of the

economy arguing that economic and financial decision making is driven by social conventions. To better understand the role of social groups, the economic activity of the four categories from the social perspective is considered:

**Insiders**

This group comprises a resident population who are attracted to the urban core by the convenience and experience of city centre living (Allen and Blandy, 2004). It is believed that increasing the population of insiders will have positive economic outcomes (Heath, 2001). An increase the numbers may result from better employment opportunities and can generate more footfall and spending power. The increase in knowledge-based employment opportunities e.g., marketing, finance and legal services can contribute to a larger share of the young skilled work force (Tallon and Bromley, 2004). The city centre can be a source of income and at the same time a place of consumption. There are overall economic benefits from spending on goods and services. Moreover, an increased permanent population offers the perception of a desirable place, which may engender indirect economic growth. Residents also contribute to city services through payment of council tax. This group can include transient populations such as students and young professionals and as such the economic contribution of a proportion of insiders may not be long term. Some of these people are also not be contributing to the public services they are consuming, as they may be exempt from council tax. There is much debate about the role of students (Bromley, Tallon and Roberts, 2007). As already noted, cities are using them as an attempt to increase economic activity, especially with respect to consumption. However, they do not have the same spending patterns as permanent residents. In particular, students do not engage with investment goods. Most of their expenditure is on food, drink, and entertainment. While it is difficult to map the routes of expenditure, it is a reasonable assumption that staffing aside, most of it will be directed to national and international organisations, rather than being retained in the city centre. There is also an advantage in residents being economically active. Thus, attention should be focused on this group rather than students and the retired.

Mechanisms should be introduced to enable appropriate housing supply in a conducive physical environment. The demand for city centre living has a direct influence on the residential property market, where prices reflect supply and demand.

**Regulars**

This group includes users who spend time in the city centre on a regular basis. They comprise city centre workers, students, shoppers and leisure and pleasure seekers. Their presence creates footfall for businesses and increase demand for goods and services. This footfall drives city centre employment, public services, and transport (Hubbard, 2017). Maximising the economic potential of regulars requires commuter networks and housing supply in the suburbs. The income of this group is not necessarily generated in the city centre, but they can be engaged in city centre employment, and the centre is often a place of consumption. Regulars comprise a number of sub-groups related to when they travel to the centre. Those coming to the urban core during weekdays are generally engaged in employment and shopping. People in the centre at weekends may also be there for shopping, but also food and drink and entertainment. There are similar activities in the evenings, but the night-time economy stimulates a different kind of atmosphere and spending pattern (Wickham, 2012). The purpose and nature of sub-groups can substantially affect the composition of the city centre economy. In addition, the more often people visit and the longer they stay, the more likely they are to be involved in different activities. This may enable a broader range of goods and services to be supplied and greater overall spend. In terms of council tax contributions, it depends whether they are residents within the same local authority. Thus, it is quite a complex economic picture, in which the location of living and working plays a significant role. Regulars can also include subgroups of transients with short and medium-term economic contribution.

**Visitors**

This group includes people who travel to the centre and comprises intentional and incidental visitors. Their source of income for is located outside the city centre and their economic contribution is in terms of expenditure. They are identified as a positive group for income to recreation and hospitality sector, whose aim is to ensure that when they are in the city centre, visitors stay longer and consume more goods and services. This can be helpful if it can be translated into a local supply chain. The impact on the economy can be short or medium term as they may only come to the centre seasonally or for a particular event. It can be difficult to track the benefit of visitors' contribution. Claims that visitors contribute significantly to employment are not particularly convincing. Before Brexit, it was noticeable that many transient Europeans were employed in the visitor economy. They benefited from seasonal employment and the need to move between employers and centres to follow demand. They could even travel between EU countries for the same reason. Thus, they were relatively unconcerned by the fluctuations in work availability. This arrangement also suited employers in city centres, as they could engage staff to respond to demand as it occurred (Martin and Gardiner, 2019). Leaving the EU has resulted in a great loss in numbers of these people. Indigenous residents have different priorities. They require consistent employment throughout the year in locations that they can easily access from their homes. Thus, the post-covid environment has been subject to staff shortages, reduced opening hours and adverse effects on the local economy. However, not all visitors come to the centre for pleasure. Chadwick (1987) has attempted to classify visitors by their primary purpose of their travel into four types, namely, business, pleasure, visiting friends and relatives, and other personal reasons. He also recognises that while there may be a primary motive for travel, there may be secondary motives and activities. As a result, the contribution of this social group to the economy should be studied in connection with their primary and secondary motivations. Among this group, one distinct category of visitors are tourists who do travel for pleasure and are seen as a potential contributor to development ambitions of local authorities (McKee, 1994). In particular they encourage major tourist attractions and large-scale events, such as stadium concerts, which can

be rather overwhelming for insiders. Page (1995) identifies city centres as distinctive in attracting urban tourists. The focus on promoting tourism in the city centre involves a mix of implications for transport, communications, entertainment, hospitality, and support services. Increased numbers in the centre have environmental and social impacts that can cause conflicts between this group and other social groups such as insiders and regulars (Snaith and Haley, 1999). These conflicts can have negative economic consequences. Moreover, the notion that visitors can cover the gaps in spending by insiders and regulars, does not stand up to examination. This is principally because, like other transients, visitors do not spend on investment goods and services. Another group with significant contribution to the hotel industry are business visitors (Callan and Kyndt, 2001). As a result of these different types of visitors, centres may undergo substantial physical adjustments, prompted by them. This may result in reduced provisions for local needs.

**Strangers**

This category is formed by a collection of individuals who are not yet able to take part in the formal institutions of mainstream society (Unruh, 1980). This group is not a coherent group, and it is difficult to assess their economic contribution, the source of their income and their expenditure. It is generally perceived that certain categories of strangers such as scroungers, beggars, and the homeless population negatively impact on the economy. This is partly because people experiencing homelessness may require interventions in form of publicly funded services including health (Downie et al., 2018) and temporary accommodation (Rugg, 2016). It is also asserted that they provide disincentives for some people to live in an urban core and for others to take part in its activities. There is evidence of city authorities are cleansing their centres by removing them. Yet, they form a very small proportion of the population, and may not be at all representatives of strangers. The latter have always made local people nervous, as identified by Camus (1942). It is based on fear of the unknown. However, strangers may also be visitors and the point at which people cross the socio-economic divide is an interesting concept.

**2.3.6 Conclusion**

The essence of this section is exploring the economic perspective of the city centre through four key themes of income and expenditure, goods and services, supply and demand and the role of economic actors. In this context, there are structural advantages for economic activities in the city centre due to its centrality, density, and labour supply. Investigating the role of these key themes, it is evident that the city centre is not a closed entity but there is much economic flow in and out. An increase in the population of insiders and regulars would make a significant economic contribution as they have the greatest opportunity to live and work in the centre. Also, an increase in the number businesses could help to make the centre more attractive to these groups and assist in building a stronger economy. There is a challenge in retaining income for deployment within the city centre. A significant aspect is business rates. A present these are collected by central government, although other mechanisms are being proposed. They might be collected by the local authority with additional support from central and regional government where revenues are low. With governments that are tending towards neo-liberalism, local authority finance is restricted, and therefore councils have demands on their resources that may lead them to fund other areas beyond the urban core. This is particularly important when seen in connection with the political forces that control city centre policymaking. Decline in demand for offices and retail will require that imaginative alternative uses are explored.

## 2.4 Political Perspective

### 2.4.1 Introduction

The city centre political perspective refers to processes of decision making on how to plan, finance and manage it. These processes take place at various levels and involve a wide range of different public and private actors and the complex structures that may vary from one city to another. These decisions lead to policies that are closely linked with how city centres actively shape the built environment, social character and economic futures and are also indicators of their capacity to face challenges. The essence of this section is to investigate the political perspective of city centres by reviewing the power structures at the different levels of local, regional, and national government.

### 2.4.2 Local

Local government comprises geographically defined, multi-functional organisations pursuing a variety of social, political, economic, and environmental objectives either through direct provision or the commissioning, indirect funding, regulating, and monitoring an extensive range of services for the local community (Wilson & Game, 2011). Its nature has been shaped by history with most of the responsibilities being required by national legislation (Stewart, 2000). Local governments are created by statute and their duties are set out in numerous Acts of Parliament or through secondary measures. These have accumulated over the years with successive pieces of legislation. While some remain vital, others may no longer be needed or may create unnecessary burdens or restrictions. However, there has been no reduction in the statutory duties (Local Government Association, 2019).  Until 2011, there was not a comprehensive appraisal of these duties (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2011). As a result, there was little understanding of the cumulative responsibilities at the local level. Central government, therefore, agreed to undertake a review and compile a list to give clarity about what these are. This review aimed to create a valuable record that had previously not existed. The outcome is a table of local authority duties, but it is in outline only, and therefore should not be taken as setting out all the statutory responsibilities.

The review also fails to provide a classification of these duties. In addition, since the review, some statutory duties have been repealed and others introduced. Certain regulations have also been reviewed independently by government departments. As a result, there seem to be gaps in the development of a comprehensive picture of what local authorities are asked to do. In the absence of a clear classification in government publications, Wilson & Game (2011) provide a useful categorisation of major local government service types as shown in Table 2.10. Need services are provided for all, regardless of means, and therefore contribute to the redistribution of resources within the community. Protective services are those that provide for the security of people, to national guidelines. Access to them cannot be restricted and use by one person must not affect the ability of others to use them. Amenity services are provided largely to locally determined standards to meet the needs of each local community. Facility services are available for people to draw on if they wish, sometimes in competition with private sector provision. All four categories include a combination of statutory and discretionary services.

*Table 2.10: Categorisation of local services* (Wilson and Game, 2011)

| Categories of local services | What they cover |
|---|---|
| **Need services** | Education |
| | Personal social services |
| **Protective services** | Community safety and crime reduction |
| | Fire, rescue, and emergency planning |
| **Amenity services** | Highways, transportation, and traffic management |
| | Planning and Development (development control and strategic or land use planning) |
| | Environmental and public Health |
| | Economic development and regeneration |
| **Facility services** | Housing |
| | Libraries |
| | Leisure, arts, and recreation |

Local government arrangements vary from one city to another. Much of England has two tiers of government- county and district - with responsibility for services split between the two. Other areas have a single unitary authority responsible for all local services (**Local Government Association, 2018a**). Figure 2.11 shows the distribution of powers among local authorities by council type.
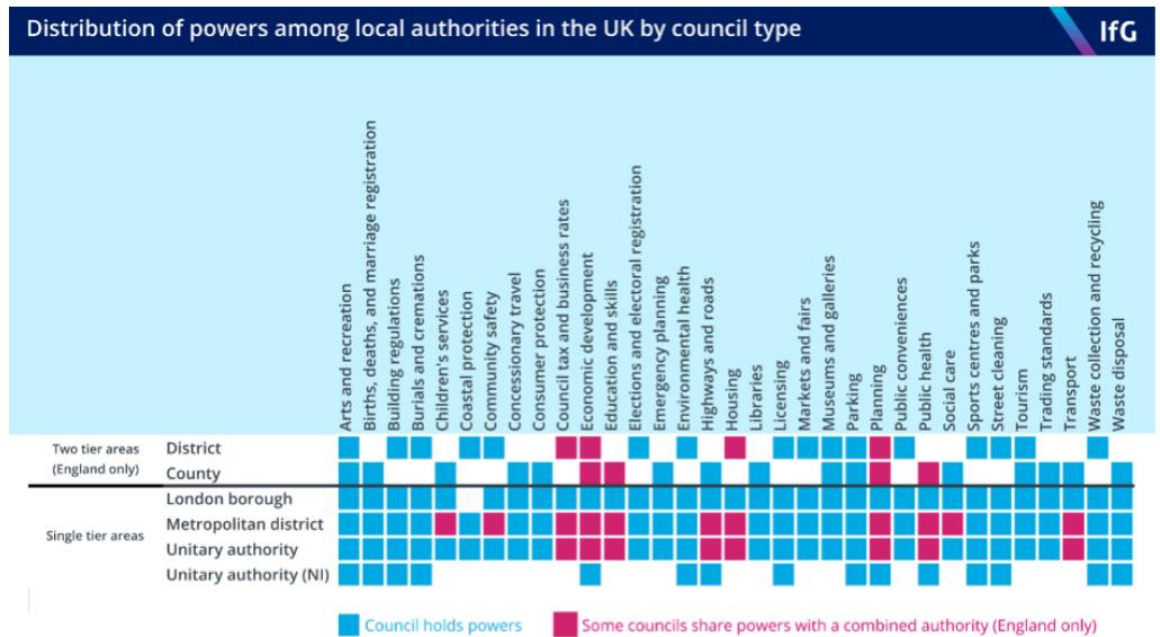


*Figure 2.11: Distribution of powers among local authorities in the UK by council type (Wilson, 2020)*

City centres are therefore governed by a variety of different local authority types. Appendix-1 provides the list of 51 English cities and variations of local authority in charge of them. However, the extent of the services in the centre is different from that provided outside. This is directly linked with the complexity of city centres as a result of the mix of uses and their unique characteristics. The Local Government Association (2018b) identifies six main specific functions in city centres and emphasises the importance of clarifying the roles and responsibilities of councils. These functions include parking, travel, and access; planning and property; streetscape and public realm; business support; place branding and marketing; and digital technology and data collection. Most of these responsibilities are also carried out beyond city centre boundaries, but not with such intensity as within (Oc & Tiesdell, 1998).

Issues with access, travel and parking have mainly been in connection with impact on increased footfall, daytime, and nightlife economy (Tyler et al., 2012). Whereas property and planning decisions are aimed at refining the form and purpose of centres. Spatial planning policies aim to rebalance the roles of city centres and provide a broad range of uses which is particular to them. Local government is also responsible for the public realm. In city centres, this responsibility goes beyond mere maintenance, to creating a potentially competitive advantage by enhancing the vibrancy of centres. Business support services offered by local authorities aim to address commercial, retail and hospitality activity and promote the evening economy. This would require consistent and coherent communication activities to support city centre marketing objectives. Place branding may be included and aims to emphasise the cultural character of the place and create a collective image. Events are a critical element of place branding and have been used to attract new visitors. Digital technology and data dissemination are other innovations that seem to be considered as opportunities to provide a commercial advantage. Government groups (e.g., Digital High Street Advisory Board, 2015) have made recommendations for digital development of city centres in the form of provision for omni-channel retailing to extend customer choices, big data, personalisation and social media to recreate the classical one-to-one customer relationship, in-store experiences and street-trading.  These provisions are aimed at generating digitally interactive locations to attract footfall, encouraging social sharing and further new technologies. The importance of digital technology has been more evident since the Covid-19 pandemic. A proportion of city centre retail activity was already moving online, and this has been accelerated by the virus conditions. Table 2.11 provides a summary of the main functions. It shows that the majority are linked to amenity and facility services and that there seems to be less focus on provision of need and protective services. What seems to be missing in this categorisation are the protective services for the homeless population, as street outreach tends to be concentrated in city centres (Fitzpatrick, et al., 2000).

*Table 2.11: Summary of main functions in city centre*

| Main functions of city centres | What categories of services they relate to? |
|---|---|
| Parking, travel, and access | Amenity Services |
| Planning and property | |
| Streetscape and public realm | |
| Business support | Facility Services |
| Place branding and marketing | |
| Digital technology and data | |

Local Governments have a responsibility to plan the future of cities. This is vital to ensure that environmental quality does not decline and that the sustainable needs of future communities are being considered. Planning authorities should prepare local plans which provide a positive vision of their area and set planning policies for future development. Once in place, they become part of the local statutory development plan. These are aspirational, but at the same time, they should realistically address the spatial and land-use implications of economic, social, and environmental change (Collinson, 2020). They have multiple audiences including other council departments, communities, developers, agents, and infrastructure and service providers (Planning Advisory Service, 2019). They include policies that determine decisions on planning applications and set out opportunities for development; and provide clear guidance on what will or will not be permitted and where. Local Plan strategic priorities cover housing, commercial, public, and private development, including transport infrastructure, along with protection for the local environment. Table 2.12 provides a list of what local development policies aim to deliver. These plans are reviewed and updated at least every five years.

*Table 2.12: list of what policies aim to cover in local plans* (Collinson, 2020)

| What policies aim to deliver in local plans: |
|---|
| Housing, including affordable homes |
| Retail, leisure and other commercial development |
| Infrastructure for transport, minerals, waste, energy, telecoms, water supply and sewage treatment |
| Education, health, police and community facilities |
| Energy, including from renewable sources |
| Protection and enhancement of the natural and historic environment, including landscape, wildlife, open space, listed buildings and archaeology; and |
| Protection of homes and property from flooding from rivers and the sea |

While these plans are prepared at a local level with some consultation including public engagement and notification to relevant organisations, there is a level of intervention by the central government in the adoption of plans in the form of modification, approval, or refusal. Regardless of the process of generating the plans, local authorities actually have limited influence on the progress of development in their city centres, as they can only assess proposals by others, initiating very little themselves. Local authorities require extensive funding to carry out these important responsibilities and there are complex sources of finance (House of Commons Library, 2020). They are mainly funded through combinations of four main types of sources:

Council tax

This is the main source of locally raised income for local authorities (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2016). It is a domestic property tax, and the amount depends on the number of residents and the property's estimated value. It is separated into different bands to cover the price range of houses. Set and collected by each authority it is also subject to

capping by central government (Wilson & Game, 2011) which allows for the council tax rate to be raised by 2% annually without holding a referendum (Atkins, 2020). Authorities can retain all the funding raised from council tax in the area to support their budget. There are a few council tax exemptions. When a property has been occupied by a single person, there will be 25% discount. Full-time students do not have to pay council tax and student accommodation is automatically exempt. These exemptions can have specific implications on city centres where certain characteristics such as a high proportion of single-person households and a rising number of students are reported (Bromley, Tallon & Roberts, 2007). As a result, this source of funding is mainly generated from outside the city centre.

Business Rate

Business rate is another source of income and is mainly generated from the concentration of businesses within the city centre. This rate is set by central government and is calculated on a property's 'rateable value' estimated by the Valuation Office Agency, which is part of HM Revenue and Customs. It is estimated by multiplying the rateable value by the current 'multiplier' which is the amount set by central government. Local authorities have expressed a desire to have greater control. The resulting debates have focused on the development of a reformed business rate retention scheme to allow councils to retain a higher percentage (from 50% to 75%) of business rate (Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, 2018a). The government consultation for this scheme closed in 2019 and there has been piloting, but the scheme is not yet active. The combination of revenue from council tax and business rate form what councils rely on for most of their funding.

Grants

Central government provides several grants for local authorities to finance revenue expenditure on service provision. The largest is the annual Revenue Support Grant which is the primary source of funding from the central

government (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2013). This grant is not ring-fenced and may be spent according to the priorities of the local government. The amount is established annually through the local government finance settlement. Some additional ring-fenced and non-ring-fenced grants are also available outside the annual settlement. The number of grants that are ring-fenced is controlled to fund a particular service that is a national priority. These seem to have become increasingly visible e.g., cycle lanes and road closures. Each of the grants is distributed to authorities on an almost ad hoc basis (House of Commons Library, 2020) with the means of distribution varying from grant to grant (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2013).

Fees and Charges

Local authorities can set fees and charges for the use of some services that they have the power but not a duty to provide. These alternative ways of generating income are a strategy to address the gap in the amount of money needed to pay for services that are not currently funded through other sources. These activities also increase autonomy and reduce reliance on central government support (Burrell, 2018). They cannot be used to make a profit, but they could provide the opportunity to invest in infrastructure because all aspects of service provision can be included in the cost calculations. These charges can also be used to make a strategic contribution in encouraging or limiting the use of certain services. In the context of city centres, one of the most debated issues has been the structured parking charges. They are being used as a tactic to reduce vehicles in the city centre whilst generating significant income. It has been common for all revenue from penalty charges, metered parking, car parks, and residents parking to be spent on transport including highway maintenance and environmental improvements. With significant cuts and the budgeting forecast, this income could be used for any part of the local authority budget, whereas it should be used as a strategic tool to support city centre transport and reduce congestion in city centres.

Another important charge is planning gain, to mitigate the impacts of a development proposal in the city centre and securing additional public benefits.

These charges are directly related to a development, reasonably applied to the scale of a development, and may require developers to provide contributions for infrastructure or other contributions that would be beneficial to a community. Changes in permitted development rights could have an impact on these contributions and ultimately result in lost opportunities for public provision, including affordable housing, community infrastructure (such as libraries or parks), and environmental safeguards.

The main sources of income for local authorities are shown in table 2.13 in terms of who sets the amounts and who collects it.

*Table 2.13: Summary of funding sources for local authorities*

| Sources of funding | Who sets it | | Who collects it | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Local Government | Central Government | Local Government | Central Government |
| Council Tax | ✓ | | ✓ | |
| Business Rate | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Grants | | ✓ | ✓ | |
| Fees and Charges | ✓ | | ✓ | |

### 2.4.3 Regional

The term regional is defined and utilised in several different ways. In the context of this research, it can be defined as a territorial unit smaller in physical extent and political significance than the national level (Hardill, 2006) acting as spaces of political order and regulation (Lavenex & Schimmelfennig, 2009). Regions have definable characteristics but despite what might be reflected in the definitions, they are not necessarily coherent (Agnew 2012; Hudson, 2005). Regardless of the variations in homogeneity, they are at a scale that enables their personnel to know about localities. This contrasts with the national and local power bases. For national government, while they have an overview of all

cities, they may not know each in detail. Local authorities on the other hand may know the detail but may not view it in context. According to Zetter (2004), the two power bases have two opposing views with local government being focused on community needs and national government being driven by state interests. Against this background the regional level becomes a meeting ground for these views and can provide a mediation mechanism. Colomb & Tomaney (2015) state that the issue of appropriate scale of decentralisation within England brings together complex demands for urban identity, economic functionality, policy efficiency, and democratic legitimacy, which may function at a regional level.

The literature on decentralisation regularly argues that the presence of a regional level can boost economic growth, and better reflect differences in local identities and preferences to allow more local character and innovation in public services (Rodriguez-Pose & Sandall, 2008).  Yet, inequalities in resources and uneven development have shaped England and its regional trajectory for decades. This has been referred to as the 'north-south' divide in wealth and opportunities or the regional problem (McCann, 2017). There have also been claims by communities and local politicians for increased control over regions and the cities they contain. There is not a strong tradition of regional government in the UK and this tier has been subject to constant change. Between 1997 and 2010, the Labour Party re-established a considerable network of organisations, offices, and policy making responsibilities at the regional level. However, most of the landscape of these regional institutions no longer exists as their funding streams were closed down by subsequent national governments. Figure 2.12 provides a summary of these regional networks and their transition over time. The majority were introduced by Labour governments, only to be dismantled by the next government. This regular reform in structure has damaged the potential to make substantial progress on the possibilities for stronger regional government. This presented challenges for researchers and practitioners (Salder, 2020) and has disrupted institutional and organisational memory at the political and official levels (Norris & Adam, 2017).  Some transitions resulted in fundamental changes in function, space, and practice e.g., developments in the shift from Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) to

Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs). Devolution is a work in progress, and it is difficult to judge the effectiveness of these re-structuring episodes with their short lifespan (Institute for Government, 2019b). Schneider & Cottineau (2019) concur that the data necessary to assess the performance of regional structures rely on longitudinal processes.  Thus, there is a requirement for institutional frameworks for policy, and data collection, to have consistency and not alter with every change in central government, to build both longitudinal evidence and policy continuity. As seen in Figure 2.12, it is evident that this temporal consistency has not been met in recent decades.
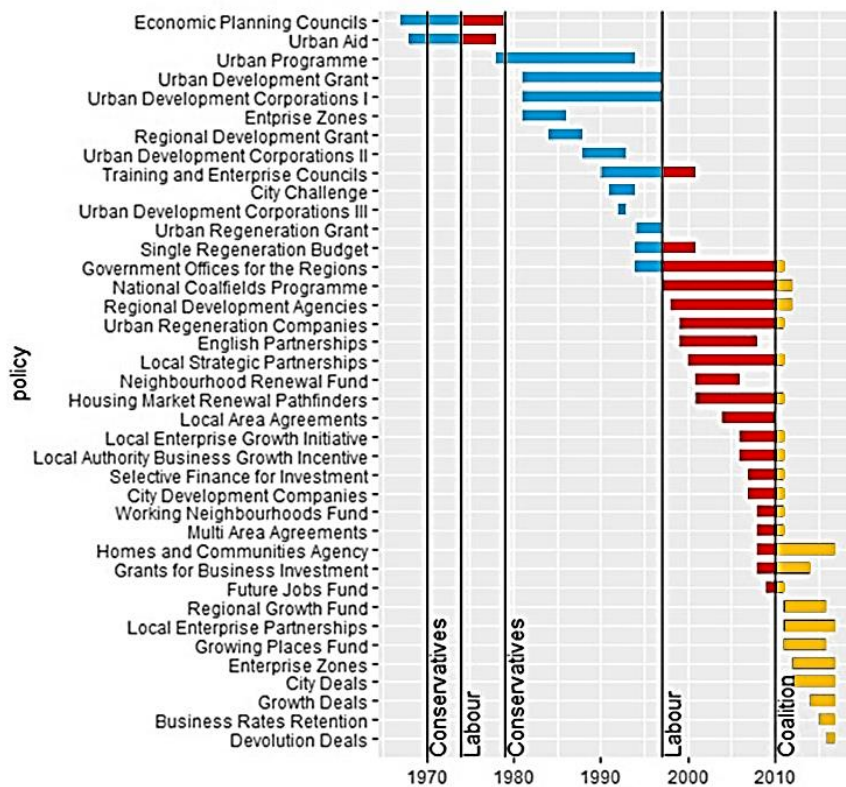


*Figure 2.12: Timeline of decentralisation and urban/regional policies in England, along with changes in U.K. Government, 1968–2016 (Schneider & Cottineau, 2019)*

Norris & Adam (2017), have traced the barriers to a more stable regional government in England. They conclude that it is competing ideas about the purpose of regional government that result in alterations to their operation. While there is a broad agreement that regional government drives economic

development and growth, there seem to be competing factors in terms of the recognition of regional identity (Cox & Jeffrey, 2014).  This inhibits better value and effective public services and produces only an intermittent desire to create a new democratically accountable tier of subnational government. There is also a continuing debate on how central government should approach regions, moving between managerial and entrepreneurial practice (Bristow & Healy, 2020; Harrison, 2010; Soja, 2015).  Another factor is disagreement about the most appropriate spatial level, which is a major influence on the regular re-organisations (Institute for Government, 2019b). This is particularly an issue where the geographical boundary is not aligned with the local functional economy. City Deals, which are agreements on funding and decision-making powers negotiated between the government and a city, were introduced to manage this problem but did not eliminate it. There is also inconsistent demand by citizens who can be unclear about what they want from a regional government. There is evidence that citizens instinctively feel the existence of regional bodies could be beneficial for the local economy, but they are opposed to more government bureaucracy (Gash, et al., 2014). Without their continued support, inconsistency is more likely to prevail, and organisations subjected to regular modification.  Another barrier to developing a more stable regional government has been the national government nervousness about devolving significant powers, as ministers could be held accountable in regional failures for which they can no longer be responsible. According to Norris & Adam (2017), this has been a particular concern in the absence of strong regionally accountable personalities. The centralised political and media culture of the UK contributes to this obstacle (Gash, et al., 2014). This means that central government often feels most comfortable creating new institutions, rather than relying on existing ones; because reorganisation can destabilise the position of incumbent politicians including members of parliament and local councillors who otherwise would be powerful interest groups. They are close to electors and can exert considerable pressure from both within and outside political parties. Table 2.14 provides a summary of the barriers.

*Table 2.14 - Barriers to a more stable regional government (Norris & Adam, 2017)*

| Barriers to a more stable regional government |
|---|
| Disagreement about the purpose of regional government |
| Disagreement about the appropriate spatial level to which to devolve powers |
| Inconsistent demand by citizens |
| Central government unwillingness to place trust in existing structures, instead preferring regularly to create them anew |
| Incumbent local politicians opposing local reform |

There are currently nine regions in the UK. They are North-East, North-West, Yorkshire and the Humber, East Midlands, West Midlands, East Anglia, Greater London, South-East, and South-West (see Figure 2.13). Table 2.15 shows the list of cities within each region. All of these regions have the same status, except London, which has more substantive devolved powers (Committee of the Regions, 2015). Elsewhere in England, devolution has been fitful. The legislation could allow for the setting-up of elected assemblies in the regions but only if there is a positive popular vote by referendum. At present, no regional assembly has been set up in England and there are no plans to do so (Council of European Municipalities and Regions, 2016).

*Table 2.15: List of cities within English regions*

| English Regions | Total number of cities in each region | List of Cities |
|---|---|---|
| North-East | 3 | Newcastle Upon Tyne, Sunderland, Durham |
| Yorkshire and Humber | 7 | Bradford, Leeds, Sheffield, Wakefield, Kingston upon Hull, York, Ripon |
| North-West | 7 | Liverpool, Manchester, Salford, Lancaster, Preston, Carlisle, Chester |
| East Midlands | 4 | Derby, Leicester, Nottingham, Lincoln |
| West Midlands | 7 | Birmingham, Coventry, Wolverhampton, Stoke-on-Trent, Worcester, Hereford, Litchfield |
| East Anglia | 6 | Peterborough, Cambridge, Norwich, St Albans, Chelmsford, Ely |
| Greater London | 2 | City of London, Westminster |
| South-East | 7 | Brighton and Hove, Portsmouth, Southampton, Oxford, Winchester, Chichester, Canterbury |
| South-West | 8 | Plymouth, Bristol, Exeter, Gloucester, Bath, Truro, Wells, Salisbury |
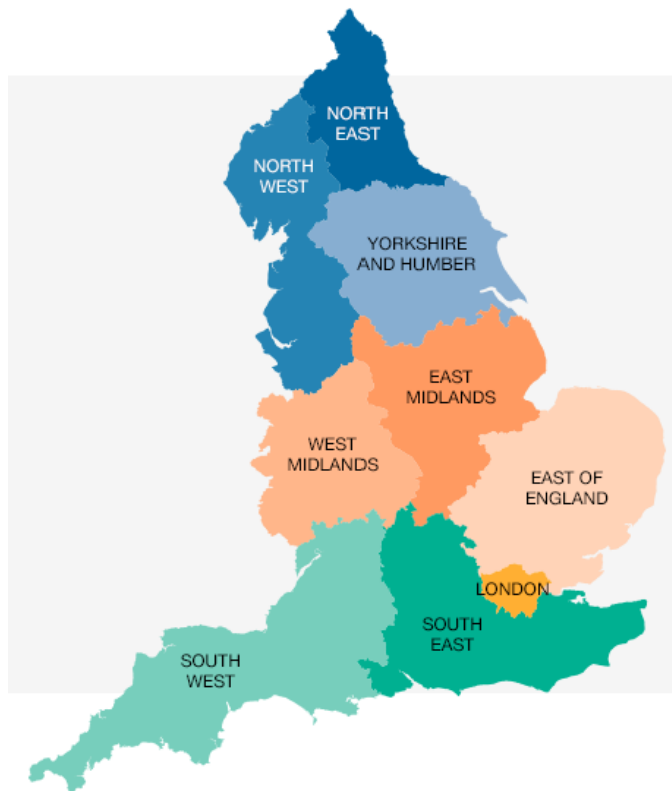
*Figure 2.13: Regions of England (Campaign Resource Centre, n.d.)*

To add to the complexity, since 2015 English regional policy has focused on metro mayors, elected for combined authorities in what have been termed city regions.  Currently, there are eight city regions - Birmingham, Manchester, Liverpool, Newcastle upon Tyne, Sheffield, Middlesbrough and Stockton-on-Tees, Bristol, Cambridge and Peterborough and Brighton and Hove (See Figure 2.14). When metro mayors were first established, the legislation gave them responsibility for transport, economic development, and regeneration. They may take on statutory functions transferred to them by order of the Secretary of State, plus any functions that the constituent authorities agree to share. This means that in principle, there is provision for their exact functions to vary across combined authorities, depending on the content of the devolution deal reached with central government (Jeffrey, 2020).  Although much commentary has emphasised the bespoke character of the devolution deals (Government Office for Science, 2015), many of the powers made available have actually been substantially similar among the mayors.  These include local transport budgets, an education budget, powers over compulsory purchase and the call-in of

planning applications, the establishment of development corporations, support for long-term unemployed people and an annual investment fund. The most important factor is that they are directly accountable to central government.
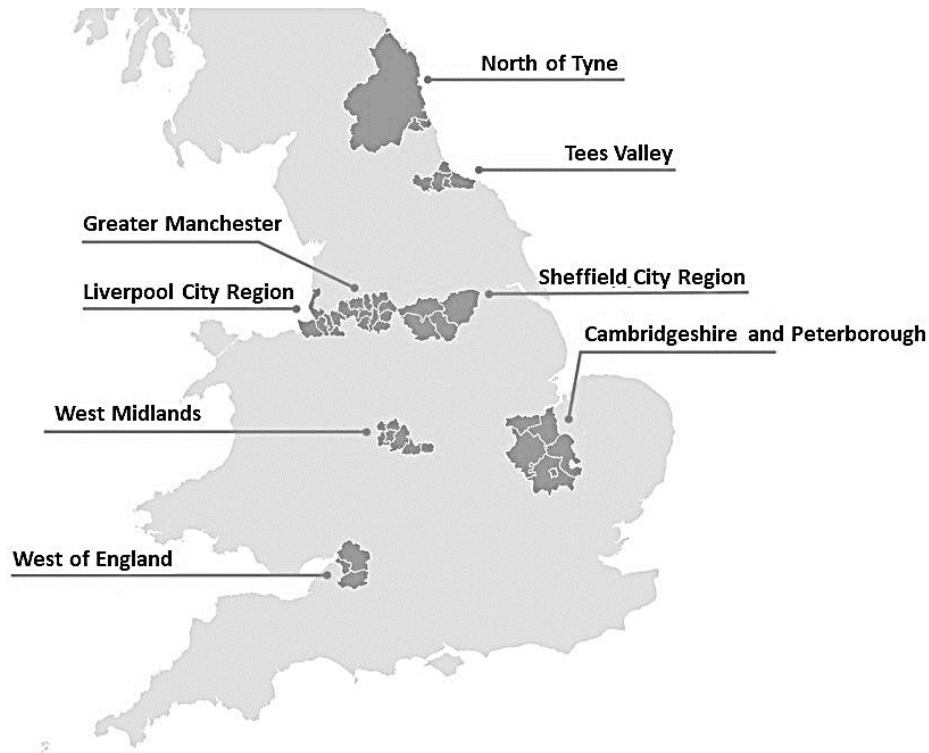


*Figure 2.14: English City Regions (Harrison, 2016)*

This new tier of devolved government was created without referendums or much public debate about the rationale for the new institutions. Their formation has been technocratic and top-down. Unlike devolution elsewhere, the new bodies were created not to align with historic governmental boundaries or patterns of local identity, but to reflect functional economic areas. This approach leaves these institutions with a struggle to establish their legitimacy and results in a lack of public support. Tomaney (2016) suggests that too much attention is paid to the claimed benefits and too little regard for the potential risks. He draws attention to evidence that suggests the distribution of the benefits of devolution is crucially dependent on the configuration. He argues that as the current structure is based on an economic model with limited forms of democratic accountability, it is likely to produce regressive social outcomes and the reinforcement of existing local elites. One topic often debated in combined

authorities is the need for better regional transport infrastructure to and from city centres (CBI, 2017). Tallon, et al., (2006) highlight the regional dimension to cultural development and city centre events, and official documents for assessing the scope of city centre leisure, office, and retail uses; and emphasise regional provision (Communities and Local Government, 2009). It is clear these city regions are based on the national government's economic strategy, through enterprise-led decentralisation rather than traditional social policy at the local level.

### 2.4.4 National

Central government has legislative and budgetary roles at national level. In terms of urban policies, it provides regulatory authority and strategic guidance, and it is involved in many areas such as health, education, and environmental issues through funding various departments. National governments can be categorised in the two basic types of unitary and federal. The main difference between the two categories is in the distribution of power and form of relationship that exists between the centre and units of the states. The unitary governments possess centralised power, with the provinces being subject to delegation. As a single power, it can choose to create and abolish sub-national units.

The UK government is unitary, and England remains highly centralised (Paun & Hazell, 2008). The political party that wins the most seats at a general election forms the government for a period of five years. Each political party includes certain policies in its manifesto for general elections. A key area captured within these policies has been devolution of power. Different political parties have distinct and often conflicting agendas on power-sharing. This is more evident between the largest two parties – the Conservatives and Labour. Devolution is generally interpreted as transferring powers to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. England has largely been ignored in the devolution process and devolution of power to cities in England has lost momentum (Institute for Government, 2019a). National governments have chosen not to devolve power to cities. Localism was used as a buzzword in the early days of the UK coalition

government in 2010 (Swain & Baden, 2012). Although it was only vaguely defined, the rhetoric signalled a reduced role for the local state in the management of urban change. The concept was that central government would bypass local authorities and relate directly to communities (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2010).

Reduction in the influence on planning at sub-national level, started with the abrupt abolition of Regional Spatial Strategies in 2010 and Regional Development Agencies in 2012. England is now the only major country in north-western Europe without effective sub-national government structures for spatial planning (McGuinness & Mawson, 2017). This reinforces the national perspective and raises concerns over the ability to achieve long-term spatial objectives (Baker & Wong, 2013; Boddy & Hickman, 2013; Gallent et al., 2013) due to lack of a common understanding of shared priorities. In 2015, the Conservative government promised to take the localism agenda further by giving more power to local communities over the control of development. Nevertheless, the outcome has been the imposition of top-down pressure for local authorities to accept new developments (HM Treasury, 2015). According to Colomb & Tomaney (2015), the localism agenda of the Conservative government has thus been shaped by pervasive traditions of centralism in the UK government and has additionally been conditioned by austerity politics. This have resulted in drastic cuts of the funding allocation for local authorities by central government while they retained significant statutory responsibilities for local services. One consequence is the rapid downsizing of local planning departments. Spatial planning is currently undertaken through the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) which aims to achieve the over-arching economic, social, and environmental objectives of the planning system. It provides a framework within which locally prepared plans for housing and other development can be produced. According to planning law, applications for planning permission will be then determined by local authority planning departments, in accordance with the development plan. The NPPF requires planning policies and decisions to support the role that centres play at the heart of local communities by taking a positive approach to their growth, management, and adaptation (Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local

Government, 2019b). The Framework requires planning applications to ensure city centre uses are located within the centre, in order to strengthen the 'city centre first approach'.  Enervated local authorities may interpret these stipulations as coercion to accept almost any proposed development.

The Framework is specific about city centre uses - retail development (including warehouse clubs and factory outlet centres); leisure, entertainment, and more intensive sport and recreation uses (including cinemas, restaurants, drive-through restaurants, bars and pubs, nightclubs, casinos, health and fitness centres, indoor bowling centres and bingo halls); offices; and arts, culture and tourism development (including theatres, museums, galleries and concert halls, hotels and conference facilities). The specificity of uses raises questions about the established use class order system, which reflects existing city centres. Central government has exerted control over the use classes, and can decide to change, simplify, and merge them to reflect its perception of city centre premises.  Such revisions can be enacted despite the local authority's plans for their city centres to address issues such as over-concentration of various uses or local amenity impact.  The Framework document was first published in 2012 and has since been updated in 2018 and 2019. It is an attempt at a pragmatic approach to recognise dynamic changes in the retail and commercial sectors, and uncertainties in forecasting long-term trends, but it is controlled at national level.  Government's response to the changing retail environment has been in the form of allocation of a £675 million 'Future High Street Fund' in England – a maximum of £25 million competitive fund per town or city centre in 2018. The funding will not make contributions to city centres seeking to save traditional retail but will mostly be used to fund capital projects such as improving transport access, and vehicle and pedestrian flow, congestion relieving infrastructure, facilitating new housing, and supporting projects to convert vacant retail units and office space into residential use (Rhodes, 2019). The government has also introduced expert panels and a programme of work through the newly formed Future High Street Task Force. Little detail has been provided on its operation and it is not yet clear whether its activities will expand beyond an advisory role, nor how staff will be appointed (Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee, 2019).  All of these provisions emphasise the increasing direct

control that central government is exerting over city centres. Even local authority tools such as compulsory purchase orders (CPOs) have become ineffective. Local authorities no longer have the funds, nor the staffing resources to deal with these time-consuming and expensive processes. Another key element of planning policy controlled by central government is permitted development rights (PDRs). These allow certain types of development, notably changes between the different use classes, to take place without the requirement for planning permission. Over the years, governments have amended these rights, mainly in extending them to incentivise investment for provision of housing. Recent changes have been the extension of permitted development rights in terms of change of use from office and retail spaces to residential use. This provision has been severely criticised, mainly due to the incompatibility between commercial and residential spaces, and the low quality of housing schemes proposed by developers (Bibby, 2020). In addition, there are wider implications of these schemes on people's lives, including reduction in community facilities funded through planning gain (Clifford, et al., 2018).

As already noted, central government also influences city centres in the establishment of taxation regimes. The amount of business rate and systems for its retention are controlled by central government. With the reduction in demand for commercial and retail premises and the challenges of digitalisation, amendments to this rate and introduction of payment holidays have been demanded at the local level, to slow the decline. Over the years, there have been various permanent and temporary rate reliefs. The accumulation of these measures has resulted in a complex system that is not transparent. According to the Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee (2019), a property tax in the context of city centres in this new digital era is no longer fit-for-purpose. Business rates are widely seen as a competitive advantage to online operations. To address this historic avoidance of corporation tax by online retailers, central government introduced a Digital Services Tax in 2020 which aims to set at 2% tax on the revenues of digital businesses which derive value from their UK users (Seely, 2020). How successful this tax will be and whether the revenue finds its way to city centres, remains to be seen.

National government guidance creates an impression that local authorities are in charge of city centre change.  Yet, with fewer resources available at the local level important questions are raised about local capacity in taking the lead when it comes to city centre management. Previous research into the ability of local government to deal with guiding the evolution of city centres has concluded that the task is too overwhelming for them (Beauregard, 1996; Stone, 1993). This has been recognised in the discourses proposing a shift from government to governance, and critiques of the change from managerialism to entrepreneurialism (Harvey, 1989; Koch, 2012).  According to da Cruz, et al., (2018), these are often understood as processes where the power of local government decreases relative to private actors like business associations, management consultants, nongovernmental organizations and even philanthropies. In both academic and public arenas, the dominating narrative of governance seems to revolve around addressing political issues of unequal power, democratization, representation, and public participation; but there is little evidence of it happening at national level.

### 2.4.5 Conclusion

There seems to be discrepancies between the aspiration of central government for the future of city centres and the resources and capacity at the local level for a meaningful contribution towards these ambitions. The constant reforms at the regional level have been damaging and there seems to be no focus on city centres at this level. These structural matters are particularly important in any form of decision-making process and will have implications on the future of city centres.  With changes in the political landscape, some scholars suggest an alternative route, asserting that they are no longer able to be led by central government and free market enterprise alone. Some suggest that local stakeholders could create formal partnerships that include the local authority, business improvement districts and other private sector organisations, and the community (Coca-Stefaniak, 2013, 2014). Others deride such partnerships as a meaningless concept and that the role of partnership is limited in principle and practice (Reeve, 2004; Peel, 2003; Whyatt, 2004).  Evidence would suggest that organisations only come together for their own benefit (McLaughlin, et al., 2009). It would appear that there is no easy way to resolve this matter, as forms

of best practice are difficult to find (Healey, 2005) due to the complexity of place and the culture of organisations. It is evident that change demands guidance, and local authorities are in a difficult position, while central government has other priorities (Sweeting, 2002).

# 3.0 Methodology

## 3.1 Introduction

Research has been described as a systematic investigation (Burns, 2000) whereby the ultimate output is to explore new knowledge by processing various relevant and inter-related pieces of information generated through observations or experiments or experiences (Mukherjee, 2020). According to Malcolm (1999), questions of research dictate qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods approaches. **Qualitative methods** strive to understand some type of social phenomena through the perspectives of individuals involved (Glesne, 2006) and aims to contextualise, understand, and interpret a situation through the collection and analysis of data which is descriptive and observational.  With their emphasis on people's 'lived experiences', qualitative data are fundamentally well suited for locating the meanings people place on the events, processes, and structures of their lives: their perceptions, assumptions, prejudgements, presuppositions, and for connecting these meanings to the social world around them (Van Mannen 1997, as cited in Miles and Huberman, 1994). Alternatively, the experimental nature of **quantitative method** is deductive in its approach, meaning that inquiries progress from the general to specific. Data that is collected is subsequently condensed through numbers, indices and statistics related to the research design (Glesne 2006; Libarkin & Kurdziel, 2002). Each study has its own design and set of statistical approaches as applied to the measurement of the variables specified in the research question (Isaac & Michael, 1997). According to Creswell (2015) quantitative and qualitative approaches are not as discrete as they first appear and may represent different positions on a continuum that should not be viewed as rigid, distinct categories, or polar opposites. Acknowledging, through this flexibility **mixed methods** emerge as a third approach. Johnson et al. (2007) define mixed methods as one in which a researcher combines elements of quantitative and qualitative research approaches for the broad purpose of breadth and depth of understanding and corroboration. The core assumption of this form of inquiry is that the integration of methods yields additional insight beyond the information

provided by either approach alone and will provide a stronger understanding of research problems by integration of data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

This section reviews the landscape of existing philosophical paradigms and research methodologies and establishes the methodologies to be used in this research. It critically reviews relevant research philosophies, strategies, and methods for collecting and analysing primary and secondary data, before identifying preferred methods to be utilised within the proposed research. Finally, it focuses on challenges during data collection phase, followed by ethical considerations for this research.

## 3.2 Philosophies

Research philosophy refers to a system of beliefs and assumptions about the development of knowledge, allowing for the evaluation and selection of research strategies and methods that underpin the research (Saunders, 2019). The analysis of philosophical approaches enables researchers to decide what approach should be adopted and why. According to Slife and Williiams (1997), data is seen as a fact only once it is given an interpretation that is dependent on ideas that do not appear in the data themselves. Therefore, while philosophical assumptions can appear hidden in research, they influence the practice of research, guiding the methodological choice, research strategy, data collection techniques and analysis procedures, and need to be identified.

Wahyuni (2012) identifies two main philosophical dimensions relating to the nature of knowledge and its development respectively: ontology and epistemology. **Ontology** relates to the understanding of reality, things that exist and their characteristics (Almeida, 2013). According to Saunders (2019), ontological assumptions may seem abstract and far removed from intended research; however, they shape the way in which the researcher studies the project and tries to study acceptable, valid, and legitimate knowledge and beliefs. They are concerned with basis of knowledge (Vanderstoep & Johnson, 2009) and learning about the world as well as communicating knowledge to others (Burrell & Morgan, 2017).

In addition to these two fundamental philosophies, Wahyuni (2012) identifies two assumptions that influence the way reality can be investigated: Axiological and methodological assumptions. **Axiological** assumptions study judgements about value and ethics (Saunders, 2019), encompassing the roles of values in the research and the researcher's stance in relation to the subject studies. One of the key axiological choices facing researchers is the extent to which they view the impact of their own values and beliefs on research. **Methodological** assumptions refer to a model for undertaking a research process in the context of particular paradigm and are the ways in which knowledge is acquired in the particular field of study (Goudarzi et al., 2011), including what data to collect, the method to collect and analyse data and who to collect data from (Denscombe, 2017).

When conducting research, it might be necessary to take guidance from the particular research community within which the researcher is working. These verified research models and preferences are known as research paradigms and most of them emerge from the three of the approaches to research that are positivism, interpretivism and critical theory (Abdul Rehman & Alharthi, 2016; Ryan, 2018). The first paradigm applies the natural science model of research to investigations of the social world. The common belief among positivist researchers is the existence of a universal generalisation that can be applied across contexts. They agree that the findings of one study can be generalised to another study of a similar kind and that different researchers observing the same factual problem will generate a similar result by carefully using statistical tests and applying a similar research process in investigating a larger sample (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). This approach is based on the notion that social reality is external and objective and maintains the separation of the researcher from the researched by taking the stance of the outsider perspective. It advocates the use of quantitative data and statistics to generate acceptable knowledge (Wahyuni, 2012). The second paradigm by contrast is primarily concerned with developing insights into people's beliefs and their lived experience through the use of qualitative data. According to interpretivist researchers, human behaviour cannot be determined by pre-defined probabilistic models, and they are subjective in nature and influenced by several

factors including people's attitudes, feelings, and behaviours. According to Denscombe (2017), the social world is regarded as a nuanced, multi-layered phenomenon whose complexity is best understood through a process of interpretation. Interpretivists argue that researchers' thinking will inevitably be shaped to some extend by their own experiences and identities as members of the social world within which their research take place.

Given (2012) refers to critical theory as a perspective from which analysis of social action, politics, science, and other human endeavours can proceed. It has undergone some changes; however, it has retained its fundamental postpositivist character even in its transformed state. Critical theory has critique at its centre entailing examination of both action and motivation and is particularly concerned with the issue of power relations within the society and interaction of race, class, gender, education, economy, religion, or other social institutions that contribute to a social system (Asghar, 2013). Critical paradigm is flexible to adopt any methodology or technique as long as it can be justified in terms of suggesting an improvement in the unbalanced society (Hussain, Elyas & Naseef, 2013). Regardless of the techniques used for collecting data, critical theory puts heavier responsibility on researchers to observe, perceive, analyse, and interpret the data.

In practice, the three-paradigm depiction of research can be seen as an over-simplified model. However, the distinction between the three paradigms serves to capture broad notions about different styles of research and their underlying assumptions, and choices of research strategies. Table 3.1 provides and general comparison for different research paradigms and characteristics of philosophical assumptions.

*Table 3.1 - Comparison of research philosophies- adopted from (Ornstein, et al., 2016 and Saunders, 2019)*

| Philosophical Assumptions | Research Paradigms | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | **Positivism** | **Interpretivism** | **Critical Theory** |
| **Ontology** | External, objective and independent of social actors | Socially constructed, subjective, may change, multiple | Historical/ Virtual realism shaped by outside forces, material subjectivity |
| **Epistemology** | Only observable phenomena can provide credible data, fact. Focus on causality and law-like generalisation, reducing phenomena to simplest elements | Subjective meanings and social phenomena. Focus upon the details of situation, the reality behind these details, subjective meanings and motivating actions | Findings are based on values, local examples of truth |
| **Axiology** | Research is undertaken in a value-free way. The researcher is independent of the data and maintains an objective stance | Research is value bond, the researcher is part of what is being researched, cannot be separated and so will be subjective. | Values should be freely chosen. Values are constructed in terms of power. |
| **Methodology** | Highly structured, large samples, measurement, quantitative, but can use qualitative | Small samples, in-depth investigations, qualitative | Usually qualitative but also quantitative |

## 3.3 Strategies

There are various options available to researchers at various stages of an enquiry. A strategy is the general plan of how the researcher will go about answering the research questions (Saunders, 2019). Research strategy is a consistent set of methods, techniques and procedures aiming to collect and interpret the research material (Verschuren, 2003). According to Bryman

(2012), determining a research strategy is considered to be an important element in determining a general orientation to the conduct of research.

According to Denscombe (2017), the selection of the strategy to be used relies on three major considerations: a) ethical issues, b) feasibility of research and the limit to which the researcher can control the events of the actual research activities and c) suitability of strategy for the issue being investigated.

The first consideration is that social research involves collecting data from people and about people (Punch, 2014) and researchers need to protect the participants; develop a trust with them; promote the integrity of research; guard against misconduct and impropriety that might reflect on their organisation or institutions; and cope with new challenging problems (Israel & Hay, 2009). Ethical matters should occur at various stages of research; prior to beginning the study, beginning the study, collecting data, analysing data and reporting, sharing, and storing data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The second consideration relates to the feasibility of research and considers certain practical aspects of conducting research. This can relate to issues pertaining to access to data and also time constraints that are crucial for the choice of research strategy. The final consideration highlights the importance to judge various strategies in relation to the purpose of the study and think of them in terms of how appropriate they are. The justification for the choice of any specific strategy must depend on having a clear understanding of the research question (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

There are various strategies for different kinds of research. Johannesson and Perjons (2014) classify research strategy into the following 9 types:

### 3.3.1 Experiments

An empirical investigation under controlled conditions is known as experiment when designed to examine the relationship between specific factors. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), an experiment systematically manipulates one or more variables to evaluate how this manipulation impacts an outcome or outcomes of interest. This was first applied to natural sciences with a purpose to

study causal links. The objectivity of experiments and impartiality associated with the findings are regarded as an advantage. Some experiments are also repeatable and can be checked by others using identical procedures. The nature of experimental research also permits a high level of precision and consistency when it comes to the measurement of data. The controlled conditions and limited number of variables allow the researcher to identify the exact causes and explanations. However, there are a number of disadvantages to experiments. The artificial settings, especially in relation to laboratory experiments, pose questions about whether the experimental situation creates conditions comparable with real-world situations. The control of the researcher over independent variables could also allow for manipulation of various experimental conditions (Ghauri et al., 2020).

### 3.3.2 Surveys

The aim of surveys is to make contact with suitable respondents to obtain data from a pre-defined target population and view a subject of interest comprehensively. Schonlau (2002) emphasizes that the researcher should take a holistic approach to survey design by consciously considering all aspects of the survey process and stresses the importance of appropriately communicating the survey to respondents. The author states that questionnaire and interviews are common data collection methods in the survey process. Surveys can also involve the observation of behaviour and analysis of documents. Both qualitative and quantitative data can be produced by surveys. Yet, there are disadvantages to surveys. With an emphasis on collecting empirical data, there is a risk of not devoting adequate attention to the analysis of data and leaving the data without an adequate account of the implications of relevant issues. Data produced through surveys may also lack depth and detail especially where qualitative data are used, as the low response rate can be a challenge for the researchers. This is particularly apparent where potential participants are selected at random and where researchers have no personal contact with participants. Surveys are easier to use where the research population can be identified and contacted through some pre-existing directory (Denscombe,

2017). Conducting a pilot survey can check for potential problems and is necessary and in providing the groundwork for a survey including determination of the feasibility of the study, recruitment of subjects and data entry and analysis.

### 3.3.3 Case studies

Yin (2014), defines case study as an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context. According to Robson (2005) it uses multiple sources of evidence, each focusing on one or just a few instances of a particular phenomenon with a view to providing an in-depth insight of events, relationships, experiences, or processes occurring in that particular instance with an aim to illuminate the general by investigating the particular. Case study research can accommodate both qualitative and quantitative data, allowing the researcher to get a rich mix of data however, in practice it has become aligned with qualitative research rather than quantitative research. The case study approach allows the use of a variety of methods depending on the circumstances and the specific needs of the situation (Merriam & Merriam, 2001). However, it is crucial that the subject to be studied has some distinctive identity that allows it to be reviewed independently from its context. According to (Guest et al., 2013), because it is the case's special attribute that are of interest, sample sizes are generally small, usually one to several case.  Most of the criticism of the case study approach is in relation to the credibility of generalisations made from its findings (Crowe et al., 2011; Ebneyamini & Sadeghi Moghadam, 2018).

### 3.3.4 Ethnography

The main purpose of ethnography is to study cultures (Ladner, 2016). It has its origins in early social anthropologists whose aim was to provide a detailed account of cultures and lives of small, isolated communities (Agar, 2001). According to Dewan (2018), ethnography entails examining the behaviour of the

participants in a certain specific social situation and also understanding their interpretation of such behaviour. This involves observation of social practices and interactions. The depth and detail of such observations are vital to allow real insights into the situation being studied. One of the characteristic features of ethnography is the significance of the role of the researcher and his/her identity, values, and beliefs in the process of research. Ethnography aspires to holistic explanations and focuses on processes and relationships that lie behind the narrative. There is an open and explicit awareness of the role of the researcher in the choice of the topic, process of research and construction of the findings and conclusions. The disadvantages of ethnography are the challenges of gaining access to relevant people, and ethical considerations due to the close involvement of the researcher with the cultures being studied. In terms of reliability, the conditions are difficult to replicate to check findings, and are based on records kept by the researcher.

### 3.3.5 Grounded theory

Where the emphasis is on theory building, grounded theory is an appropriate strategy. It aims to formulate, test, and reformulate prepositions until a theory is developed (Saunders, 2019). It is adopted to predict and explain a behaviour and is among most influential and widely used modes of carrying out qualitative research across a wide range of disciplines (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). According to Denscombe (2017), it is used by those engaged in small-scale projects for the study of human interactions particularly where researchers wish to investigate practical activity and routine situations from the participants' perspective, and by those whose research is exploratory and focused on particular settings. The author states that in this strategy, the data generates a theoretical framework without any fixed ideas about the nature of the setting that is about to be investigated. According to Suddaby (2006), grounded theory is not perfect for all research questions and is more appropriate for understanding how a process that subjectively perceived by a group or person, or to study how a reality is understood rather than to generate knowledge regarding objective reality. According to Chong & Yeo (2015) generalisation from the findings can also be misunderstood and the generated theory might be

contaminated by researchers' bias so collaborative form of inquiry seen effective in avoiding personal bias.

### 3.3.6 Action research

Action research is considered 'Practice-based' research (McNiff, 2010), allowing professionals to use research to improve their effectiveness as practitioners, to improve practice (Elliot, 1999). This orientation that research should affect operations (Lewin, 1946) as opposed to only being used to gain a better understanding of situations has remained a defining character of action research. The process of action research has become associated with a trend towards involving those affected by the research in its design and implementation to encourage participation rather than being subjects of it. According to Denscombe (2017), the four defining characteristics of action research are: its practical nature, change, cyclical process, and participation. According to this author advantages of this strategy can be seen as participation in the research for practitioners, professional self-development, and addressing practical problems and associated benefits resulting in a continuous cycle of development and change. However, the necessary involvement of practitioners limits the scope and scale of research. It is also clearly geared to resolving problems that confront people in their routine work, and as a result the impartiality can be seen as a challenge. The integration of research with practice also limits the feasibility of exercising controls over factors of relevance to the research. Ownership of the process and involving an extra burden of work for the practitioners can impact on effectiveness.

### 3.3.7 Phenomenology

This approach to social research represents an alternative to positivism and describes the philosophical approach that what is directly perceived and felt is considered more reliable than explanations or interpretations in communications (Remenyi, 2010). Phenomenology generally deals with an individual's lived

experiences within the world (Neubauer et al., 2019). The key characteristic of the approach is its emphasis on describing authentic experiences. Phenomenological research relies on in-depth interviews (Kvale, 1996) and does not require sophisticated or expensive equipment for the purpose of data collection (Cohen et al., 2000). It offers an opportunity for the researchers to deal with the complexity of the social realities and representing research that is far removed from any abstract theorising. According to Lester (1999), Phenomenological approaches are powerful for understanding subjective experience, gaining insight into people's motivation and actions that challenge structural or normative assumptions.

### 3.3.8 Simulation

The process of simulation aims to analyse process behaviour, risks and complex systems with their inherent uncertainties and provides insights into the designs of development processes and projects before significant time and cost has been invested (Müller & Pfahl, 2008). Stein Greenblat & Uretsky (1977) emphasises that simulation is an explicit statement about what the researcher believes about some reality they are attempting to simulate and would be a theoretical proposition about reality. The authors note that therefore there are three types of validity associated with simulation; Theoretical validity, that considers the degree to which the structure and outcomes conform to the theoretical base or display logical principles. Empirical validity refers to how well the structures and outcomes replicate the real-world structure and outcomes. Lastly, Face validity. determines whether the simulation feel real to observers.

Table 3.2 provides a summary and overview of the discussed research strategies and research purpose.

*Table 3.2 - Summary of Research Strategies*

| Strategy | Purpose of research |
|---|---|
| **Experiments** | • Identify the cause of something<br>• Observe the influence of specific factors |
| **Surveys** | • Measure aspects of a phenomenon<br>• Gather facts in order to test a theory |
| **Case Studies** | • Understand the complex relationship between factors as they operate within a particular social setting |
| **Ethnography** | • Describe cultural practices and traditions<br>• Interpret social interaction within a culture |
| **Grounded Theory** | • Clarify concepts or produce new theories<br>• Explore a new topic and provide new insights |
| **Action Research** | • Solve a practical problem<br>• Produce guideline for best practice |
| **Phenomenology** | • Describe the essence of specific types of personal experience<br>• Understand notions through the eyes of someone else |
| **Simulation** | • Analyse process behaviour, risks, and complex systems when uncertainty is high |

## 3.4 Methods of data collection

It is important to understand how different methods can be used for collecting both primary and secondary data. According to Thangamani & Kumar (2019), primary data are original in character and are not subject to any processing or manipulation whereas secondary data refer to data that have already been collected and analysed by someone else. According to Johannesson and Perjons (2014), there are six main methods of data collection – questionnaire, interviews, focus groups, observation, and documents. Using any of these methods is associated with specific research strategies and suitability of each method for the specific purposes of the investigation. This section provides an overview of these four methods and their key features including their value and limitations.

### 3.4.1 Questionnaires

This method of data collection is completed by the respondent in written format (Polit & Beck, 2004) or online (Wright, 2006). According to Marshall (2005), carefully designed questionnaires can yield high quality usable data, achieve good response, and provide anonymity. However, the author identifies that the following conditions should be met: a) the target audience, even if geographically spread, can be clearly defined and identified b) respondents know what is asked of them c) the questionnaire yields qualitative data. Furthermore, Deutskens et al. (2004), establish that shorter questionnaires help not only to increase response rates, but also improve response quality, compared to long questionnaires. According to Bell and Waters (2018) the more structured the questions are, the easier they are for the researcher to interpret the responses. The authors also highlight that piloting before the questionnaire is distributed, helps to ensure reliability and validity.

### 3.4.2 Interviews

This method is valuable for exploring the construction and negotiation of meanings in a natural setting (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007). An interview

can be defined as a conversation, whose purpose is to gather perspectives from the interviewee (Kvale, 2005). It is appropriate where the research explores complex and subtle phenomena. According to Kvale (2005), interviews are most effective for attaining and exploring events that are not observable. Denscombe (2017) identifies three main contexts: a) Opinions, feelings, emotions and experiences where the aim of the research is to understand them in depth rather than report them in a simple word or two b) Complex issues where the research focuses on complicated matters that call for a detailed understanding of how things work, how factors are interconnected and how systems operate c) Privileged information where the opportunity arises to speak with key players in the field who can give particularly valuable insights and wisdom based on their experience or position. The structure of the interview can vary depending on the extent of questions and answers in the research agenda. It is conventional to classify interviews as being structured, semi-structured, or unstructured (Bryman, 2012). According to (Leavy, 2020), there are also different forms of interviews: individual or group interviews. Individual interviews involve a meeting between one researcher and one respondent. These interviews may sometimes be less lively than group interviews but the process is easier for the researcher to control. Group interviews are more dynamic and flexible in discussions. Group interviews can be used for example, when the researcher is not so much interested in people's descriptions of their experiences as in how participants discuss, argue, and justify their opinions and attitudes.

### 3.4.3 Focus Groups

These consist of small group of people who are brought together by the researcher to explore attitudes and perceptions, feelings, and ideas about a specific topic. Ideally, focus groups should comprise six to nine people (Denscombe, 2017) which is a large enough number to allow a range of views and opinions to be present among the group but not too large to be unmanageable in terms of the discussion. Focus groups aim to allow individuals to discuss their views about a topic defined by the researcher (Cronin, 2015). The researcher's role is to facilitate the group interaction rather than the lead

the discussion where group dynamics and interaction within the group are emphasised as means of eliciting information (Daymon & Holloway, 2011). However, Cronin (2015), identifies that the focus groups can suffer from problems, i.e., lack of engagement, dominance of individuals and private conversation, and highlights that a useful exercise is for the facilitator (researcher) to think about what strategies could to be adopted (i.e., direct questioning, taking breaks, reminder of the purpose of the focus groups, discussion in pairs first, etc.) to encourage group discussion and minimise disruption.

### 3.4.4 Observation

Observation entails the systematic noting and recording of events, behaviours and objects chosen for study and can range from a highly structured, detailed notation of behaviour structured by checklists to a more holistic description of events and behaviour or characteristic of objects (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Denscombe (2017), recognises that the process of observing is far from straightforward. This is mainly due to the issue of perception and the possibility that the researcher's perception of the situation might be influenced by personal factors. Observation should be objective to be make it a scientific observation. The observer (researcher) should also have the skill to observe, document, and interpret what has been observed, to improve the quality of the observation (Chandra, & Hareendran, 2018).

### 3.4.5 Documents

Organisational and institutional documents have been a staple in qualitative research for many years (Bowen, 2009). They can be a source of both primary and secondary data and can be written text, digital communication, or visual sources. Documents have two features that are useful, first they contain information that can be used as evidence of something. Built into the concept of a 'document' is the idea that the information it contains is of value beyond its literal contents. It stands for something, and it conveys something that is

significant and useful. Second is the notion that documents provide record whose existence, if not permanent for all of time, does at lease persist in a stable form well beyond moment in which it was produced. There are various sources of documentary data. These can be: government publications and official statistics, newspaper and magazines, record of meetings, letters and memos, diaries and web pages and the internet (Denscombe, 2017). An alternative to text-based documents, is image-based research that can be used as data in their own right (Cleland & MacLeod, 2021). Researchers can generate images specifically for the purposes of their investigation. The visual images in this sense provide primary source data. For the purpose of research, it is important that any documents used as sources of data are evaluated in relation to four basic criteria of authenticity, representativeness, meaning and validity (Scott, 2006).

## 3.5 Sampling

Sampling is the process of selecting or searching for situations, context and/or participants who provide rich data of the phenomenon of interest (Polit & Beck, 2021). It is a strategy employed by a researcher to systematically select a relatively smaller number of representative items or individuals from a pre-defined population to serve as subjects for observation or experimentation as per objectives of his or her study (Sharma, 2017). According to (Fink, 2003), a good sample is a miniature version of the population of which it is a part and is representative, or a model of the population. The choice of sampling method determines the accuracy of research findings, reliability and validity of the study and has immense implications on the overall quality of the study. The principal advantage of sampling is saving time and resources during data collection (Taherdoost, 2016). According to (Suter, 2012), sampling appears to be used for reasons of practicality and efficiency when no serios bias is suspected with its use.

## 3.6 Methods of data analysis

This is the process of evaluating data using analytical and logical reasoning to examine each component of the data provided. Data analysis can be divided into the main three categories of quantitative, qualitative, and mixed method (Edmonds & Kennedy, 2017). The first category has quantifiable results while the second one provides some level of understanding, explanation, and interpretation of patterns and themes in textual data. A mixed analysis involves using qualitative and quantitative data analysis techniques within the same study (Onwuegbuzie & Combs, 2011).

## 3.7 Research Design: This study

This study seeks to improve the understanding of future visions for UK city centres. This requires a clear understanding of the nature of current issues and factors affecting city centres. The research will focus on the city centre of Newcastle upon Tyne as principal source of data. The choice of Newcastle city centre is based on the option to access and draw from expert participants within existing networks between the Department of Architecture and Built Environment of Northumbria University and organisations and stakeholders, who play key roles in the environmental, social, economic, and political use and future of Newcastle City Centre. Evidence from the literature and preliminary investigations indicated that it is necessary to gather data on the current status of Newcastle city centre in order to have a clear picture of how buildings and spaces are currently used in the context of social, economic and political structures . A review of policies and plans is also required for an improved understanding of the transition of UK city centres and also to investigate development of strategic policies and identifying key decision makers. Furthermore, it is crucial to document the perception of various stakeholders from different environmental, social, economic, and political backgrounds who are involved in shaping the future of the city centre; through semi-structured interviews. Therefore, three types of data are required to address the aim of the research:

1) Survey: primary data - Current uses within Newcastle city centre
   Secondary data – reports, websites, books, journal papers, freedom of information
2) Plans and Policies: Secondary data - on the transition of Newcastle City Centre
3) Interviews- Primary data - Stakeholders' perception

An epistemological assumption, which takes into account the variety of forms of knowledge has been adopted to reveal the reality of the current use of the city centre identify factors that may influence future scenarios and evaluate perceptions of stakeholders. This approach offers the freedom to select methods which suit the aims and objectives of the research. Based on the types of data required, survey has been identified as the initial research method, within which observation, and document analysis are included. The plans will be analysed and interviews undertaken. These methods are applied to collect the three data types identified, and in doing so address the aim of the research.

**3.7.1 Survey – Observation of current uses within Newcastle City Centre, and scrutiny of documents**

Observation as a methods of data collection relies on direct evidence of situations at first hand. In the context of this study, observation is used as a tool for mapping how levels of buildings (ground floor, first floor and second floor) and spaces are used within Newcastle city centre (primary data). Therefore, for the purpose of data collection, it was deemed necessary to define the boundary of the city centre. A review of policy maps from the late 20th Century to the early 21st Century will allow for a consensus of the boundary to be generated. In addition, the documents will provide data on the social, economic and political context (secondary data).

### 3.7.2 Plans relating to Newcastle upon Tyne

The second method of data collection is the analysis of plans and policies (secondary data). In the context of this study, analysis of the plans will be associated with evidence-based practice and will include a rigorous and systematic review of briefing, strategy and policy papers including published policies for Newcastle upon Tyne and analysis of city plans since the second half of the 20th century to present (Table 3.3). Analysing the contents of these documents will allow to identify any direct correlation between development plans covering the study area to establish the consistency of applied policies over time.

*Table 3.3 List of Development Plans in Newcastle since 1985*

| Development Plans in Newcastle since 1985 |
|---|
| City Centre Local Development Plan -1985 (CCLP) |
| Unitary Development Plan -1998 (UDP) |
| Planning for the Future – Core Strategy and Urban Core Plan for Gateshead and Newcastle upon Tyne -2015 (CSUCP) |

### 3.7.3 Interviews - Stakeholders' perception

To complete the data collection, the findings established from the observations, in form of visual maps, and findings established from the systematic review of documents, together with the analysis of plans, will be discussed with identified participants representing key stakeholders. Semi-structured interviews will be used to determine the stakeholder's perceptions of future trends relating the city centre. To select the participants for the semi-structured interviews, purposive sampling will be used.

The method of sampling relies on the judgment of the researcher when it comes to selecting the units that are to be studied (Istighfaroh & Nuraeni, 2020). This sampling technique is driven forward by practical and pragmatic considerations

and is designed before the research starts (Emmel, 2013). To gain the insight required, two participants will be selected from five categories representing key stakeholder groups: public sector, businesses, academia, planning consultants, and the community.

### 3.7.4 Triangulation of collected data

On completion of the data collection through survey, plans, and semi-structured interviews, triangulation will be conducted to obtain confirmation of findings through corroborating evidence from primary and secondary data gained from the three identified methods (Figure 3.1). Triangulation of data will contribute to development of a proposal and a framework for the future of the city centre.
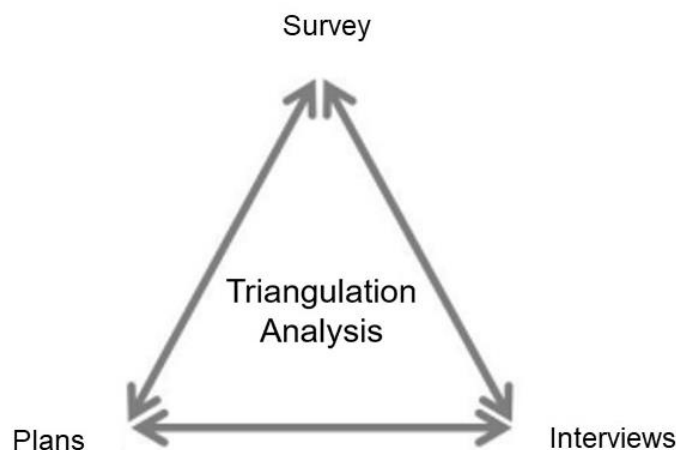


*Figure 3.1- Triangulation of findings from different methods*

## 3.8 Impact of Covid-19 Pandemic on Research Design

The Covid-19 Pandemic and the measures to contain the spread of the virus including lockdowns and social distancing had a significant impact on the research design and approaches adopted within this study. The first phase of data collection in the form of mapping uses within buildings in Newcastle city centre was carried out according to the initial research plan in the summer of 2019. As such, this phase of primary data collection portrays the use of city centre buildings before the pandemic. With the impact of the pandemic, the

initial plan to undertake a follow up exercise to map the uses within the study area at the end of data collection to identify changes over time was not possible as the findings would have been heavily skewed as a result of the pandemic and lockdowns.

The national lockdown in March 2020 imposed significant challenges in completing data collection in terms of stakeholders' perceptions. The initial research Design identified focus groups as an appropriate data collection method however social distancing rules made it impossible to have in-person focus groups. With concerns relating to group engagement on digital platforms and the depth of information required for this study, the research design was revisited and subsequently amended to adopt online interviews as an alternative option. The high-level role of the interviewees selected for semi-structured interviews and their busy diaries post-covid meant this phase of the study required an extended time frame in the research plan.

## 3.9 Ethical Considerations

Researchers are expected to approach their study in an ethical manner and consider the moral, legal and safety issues that may rise during planning conducting and evaluating research. Ethical considerations can be specified as one of the most critical parts of the research that are getting increased attention (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Such scrutiny is intended to ensure that the design of the research includes appropriate measures to protect the interests of people and groups covered by research (Denscombe, 2017). Throughout all stages of this research, ethical issues will be considered, and all necessary measures will be taken to comply with Northumbria University's Ethical Standards. In this regard, it is necessary to have ethical approval before the start of the investigation. Ethical approval was gained via Northumbria's Ethics process by the Faculty Research Ethics Committee with the reference 0185 (Appendix 2). Other necessary permissions will be granted prior to study. As part of the process, a participation information sheet and an informed consent form will be prepared (Appendix 3). The consent will be in writing to act as a way of formally recording the participation agreement. The informed consent form will a) include

adequate information on the subject and objectives of the research, b) clarify of the reasons for identification of participants, c) confirm that participation is voluntary and that participants can withdraw from the research at any time they wish to do so and d) specify what kind of commitment is being required. All participants would have the opportunity to ask questions about the purpose of the study and how data will be used and what their participation would involve. All participants will be offered anonymity and within this research will be referred to by their respective job titles. Data will be kept secure by storing all digital information in a password protected hard drive held in a secure location. Other, non-digital information will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in Northumbria University Campus. This research has been funded by Northumbria University, as part of a full-time PhD studentship over a three-year period. It is important to note that throughout the research process, Northumbria University will not exert any explicit influence on the research process or interpretation, after initial approval of the project by the Ethics Committee within the Faculty of Engineering and Environment.

## 3.10 Summary

This chapter has outlined the justification for the selection of the methods to address the aims of the research. Table 3.4 outlines the overall research project aims, and objectives and applied methodologies.

*Table 3.4 - Summary of Methodology*

| Aims | Objectives | Type of data | Methods of Data Collection | Primary or Secondary Data |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| To critically review the transition of UK city centres through social, environmental, political, and economic perspectives | To enhance the understanding of connections and logical sequence in the transition of UK city centre, thus determining how future scenarios may unfold | Review of policies, plans and reports on the transition of UK city centres | Systematic review of documents | Secondary |
| | | Current uses in the city centre | Observation | Primary |
| Develop a conceptual framework for the future | To evaluate the perceptions of individuals and organisations that are shaping future city centres | Stakeholder's perceptions | Semi-structured interview | Primary |
| | To inform decision making at local and national levels, so as to assist the strategic development of UK city centres | Review of policies, pans and reports on strategic development in the city centre | Systematic review of documents | Secondary |
| | To assess how policies and plans for future scenarios may be delivered. | Assessment of current policies and plans | Systematic review of documents | Secondary |

# 4.0 Findings

## 4.1 Surveys

### 4.1.1 Introduction

The theoretical perspective shows that in principle, the future of the city centre lies in people using it. The survey was undertaken between August and October 2019. The first part discovered the number and distribution of city centre uses, as well as vacancy.

### 4.1.2 Environmental

**Buildings**

Table 4.1 represent the number of building floors that are dedicated to specific uses. It is recognised that the floors are different sizes, and this will be taken into account within the narrative. The survey sub-areas are shown in Figure 4.1. This enables the results presented in Table 4.1 to be viewed as a number of horizontal slices across the city, to show the distribution of uses. The horizontal slices are appropriate as the development of the city centre has been predominantly south to north. The pattern follows a bell curve configuration with the greatest intensity of uses in zones E and F.

Symbolic Buildings

The significance of buildings and activities that define society cannot be overstated, and the importance of symbolic buildings occupying prominent positions in city centres and locating them in proper settings is at its core (Giddings et al. 2011). By definition, symbolic buildings are not numerous e.g., there is usually only one civic centre or town hall. Table 4.2 shows the established definitions of symbolic buildings on the left, and the survey categories to the right. An adjustment was required to bring culture and public services into line with public facilities and government. It also shows the number of symbolic building floors. There are two universities with 332 building floors, one hospital with 58 building floors, two cathedrals and 16 other places

of worship, and public facilities representing culture with 24 museums, theatres, art galleries and societies. Government is epitomised by the Civic Centre, and law by the Central Police Station, Magistrates and Crown Courts. There are no absolute measures for the number of symbolic buildings but as all categories are well represented, it would be a reasonable supposition that there are sufficient buildings to define society. Their settings require further consideration in the spaces section of the findings.
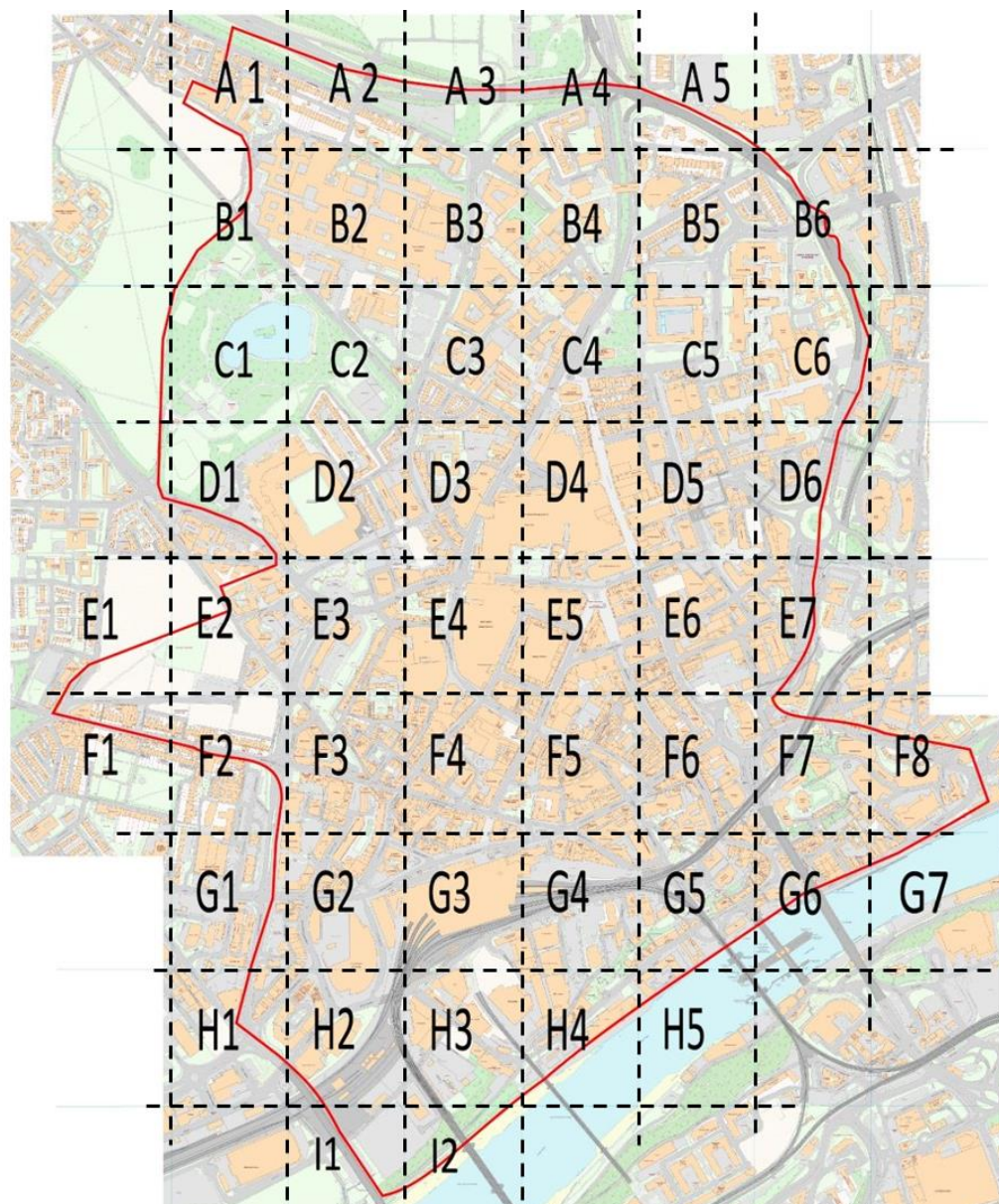


*Figure 4.1: Survey Sub-areas*

*Table 4.1: Uses – The Results*

| | | | A | B | C | D | E | F | G | H | I | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Shops** | 1 | Essentials | 2 | 1 | 2 | 7 | 35 | 22 | 9 | 4 | | 82 |
| | 2 | Household | | | 6 | 86 | 138 | 78 | 8 | 4 | | 320 |
| | 3 | Luxury | | | 2 | 9 | 23 | 3 | | 2 | | 39 |
| | 4 | Department Stores | | | | 7 | 5 | | | | | 12 |
| **Financial, professional and business services** | 1 | Banks & Building societies | | | 15 | 7 | 12 | 2 | | | | 36 |
| | 2 | Professional Services | | 1 | 14 | 4 | 6 | 13 | 4 | | | 42 |
| | 3 | Offices | 22 | 19 | 33 | 83 | 110 | 237 | 88 | 18 | | 610 |
| **Personal Services** | 1 | Beauty Services | | | 14 | 17 | 23 | 30 | 6 | | | 90 |
| | 2 | Repair & cleaning services | | | 1 | 3 | 1 | 4 | | | | 9 |
| | 3 | Other services | | | | 11 | 16 | 2 | 1 | 4 | | 34 |
| **Food and Drink** | 1 | Pubs andBars | | | 12 | 16 | 23 | 44 | 53 | 3 | | 151 |
| | 2 | Fast food | | | 12 | 20 | 59 | 25 | 21 | | | 137 |
| | 3 | Cafes and restaurants | | 4 | 9 | 32 | 101 | 93 | 43 | 6 | | 288 |
| **General Industries** | 1 | Industrial | | | | | 1 | 6 | | | | 7 |
| | 2 | Storage | | | | | 1 | | | 2 | 3 | 6 |
| **Hospitality** | 1 | Hotels | | | | 5 | 10 | 40 | 64 | 26 | | 145 |
| | 2 | Hostels | | | | | | | | | | |
| **Residential** | 1 | Dwellings | 209 | 160 | 152 | 216 | 15 | 293 | 117 | 60 | | 1222 |
| | 2 | Student accommodation | 60 | 43 | 51 | 39 | 32 | 15 | 6 | 2 | | 248 |
| | 3 | Care homes | | | | | 4 | 3 | 1 | | | 8 |
| **Recreation** | 1 | Sports | 3 | | 6 | 4 | 6 | 2 | 1 | | | 22 |
| | 2 | Entertainment | 2 | 2 | 8 | 6 | | 45 | 20 | 6 | 3 | 92 |
| | 3 | Culture | | 2 | | 3 | 6 | 6 | 6 | | | 23 |
| | 4 | Gambling | | | | 4 | 14 | 7 | | | | 25 |
| **Education** | 1 | University & College | 27 | 135 | 114 | 32 | 18 | | 6 | | | 332 |
| | 2 | Schools | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 3 | Pre-school | 2 | | | | | | | | | 2 |
| **Health** | 1 | Hospitals | 9 | 30 | 19 | | | | | | | 58 |
| | 2 | GP Surgeries | | | | 2 | | | | | | 2 |
| | 3 | Specialists | | | 8 | 23 | 8 | 2 | 2 | 2 | | 45 |
| **Other public buildings** | 1 | Religious | 5 | | 4 | 3 | 4 | 15 | 12 | 3 | | 46 |
| | 2 | Public Services | | | 11 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 3 | | | 26 |
| | 3 | Law courts | | | | | 4 | 6 | | | | 10 |
| **Transport** | 1 | Stations | | | | 2 | 1 | 2 | | 3 | | 8 |
| | 2 | Car Parks | | 4 | | 25 | 6 | 19 | 7 | 12 | | 73 |
| **Vacant** | 1 | Vacant Units | 1 | 39 | 34 | 71 | 224 | 295 | 88 | 32 | | 784 |
| **Unknown use** | 1 | Unknown Use | 2 | 29 | 13 | 14 | 108 | 91 | 15 | 2 | | 274 |
| **Construction sites** | 1 | Construction sites | 2 | 9 | | | 4 | 3 | 6 | | | 24 |
| **Totals** | | | 346 | 478 | 542 | 754 | 1023 | 1405 | 590 | 188 | 6 | 5332 |

*Table 4.2: Symbolic Building Floors*

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Education: Universities | Universities | **332** |
| Health: Hospital | Hospital | **58** |
| Religion: Cathedrals and other places of Worship | Religious | **46** |
| Public Facilities: Museums, Theatres, Galleries | Culture 23 +15 | **38** |
| Government: Civic Centre | Public Services 26 - 15 | **11** |
| Law: Magistrates & Crown Court | Law courts | **10** |

Contextual Buildings

Table 4.3 shows the Contextual Building Floors.  According to Barke and Clarke (2016), the population in the centre fell dramatically to 2,775 people in 1971.  By 2001, it had grown to 4,300 and to 15,200 by 2018.  Over this period, the number of city centre residents grew by 250% while the increase for the region was 5.6%.  This trend indicates that there would be 18,000 people by the time of the survey (ONS, 2020).  However, 14% of the residents are aged 18-19 years, and 56% are 20-29 years old, whereas 0-17 years are only 5% (UK Office for National Statistics 2018).  These figures indicate that families are only a small part of the city centre population.  Moreover, according to Percy (2018), approaching 10,000 new student bedspaces have been created between 2011 and 2019, adding to the nearly 3,000 existing bedspaces.  It appears that a significant proportion of houses and apartments are also being used as student accommodation in the city centre.  Newcastle is ranked first in the UK for multi-person shared houses occupied by full-time students, per head of population (Newcastle City Council, 2018).  The numbers for traditional uses of offices, shops, and food and drink are still among the most frequent uses, followed by the increasing number of hotels.  According to the Newcastle and Gateshead Initiative (D. Bowe, personal communication, 26, March, 2021), there are almost 5,000 hotel rooms in the city centre.  The number of visitors using hotels is therefore similar to the number of permanent residents.  Entertainment and beauty services are also well represented.  There does not seem to be a

decrease in car park capacity, even with the Council's strategies for reducing the use of cars in the city centre.  It should also be recognised that some car parking is associated with hotels and residences.  Bank and building society branches have clearly reduced, mainly due to the advent of online banking. Gambling can have negative connotations, but it is relatively well contained in 25 building floors.  The number of building sites shows modest development activity.  It is debatable as whether the football stadium should be recorded as a symbolic building, but it does not fit any of the established categories.  It is a dominant structure within the city.  Other sports facilities are small and much less conspicuous.  Department stores are small in number but are significant, especially where they are anchoring other shops.  The loss of a single department store can produce a substantial void in provision, and adversely affect properties in the vicinity.  Other uses with small incidence are not so important, except stations.  These are important nodes (see Figure 4.2) and comprise a mainline railway station with 25,000 passengers per day, four metro stations with 25,000, 15,000, 14,000, and 1,400 passengers per day; and three bus and coach stations with 16,500, 15,000 and 7000 passengers per day. Vacancy in all buildings is approximately 15% of floorspace.  This might appear higher than expected from a normal turnover of uses.
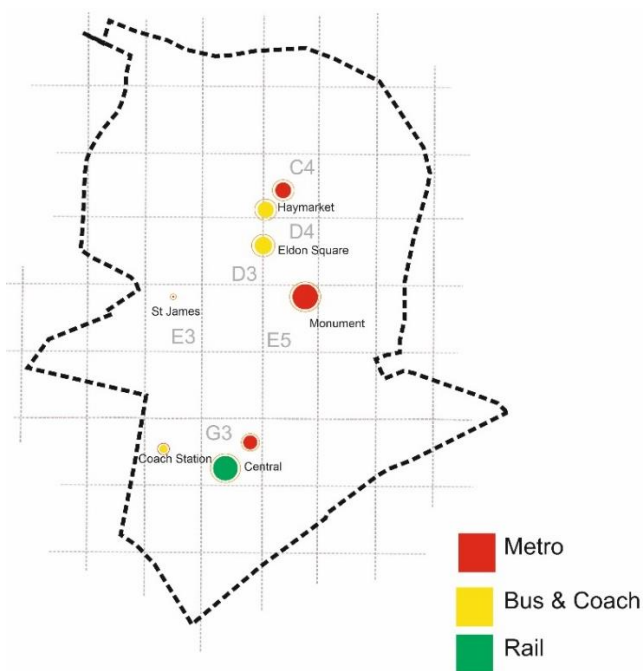


*Figure 4.2- Distribution of Transport Nodes and Average Entries and Exits*

*Table 4.3: Contextual Building Floors*

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Residential | Dwellings | 1222 |
| Vacant | Vacant Floors | 784 |
| Office Businesses | Offices | 610 |
| Shops | Household | 320 |
| Food and Drink | Cafes and Restaurants | 288 |
| Unknown use | Unknown Use | 274 |
| Residential | Student Accommodation | 248 |
| Food and Drink | Pubs and Bars | 151 |
| Hospitality | Hotels | 145 |
| Food and Drink | Fast Food | 137 |
| Recreation | Entertainment | 92 |
| Personal Services | Beauty Services | 90 |
| Shops | Essentials | 82 |
| Transport | Car Parks | 73 |
| Health | Specialists | 45 |
| Office Businesses | Professional Services | 42 |
| Shops | Luxury | 39 |
| Office Businesses | Banks & Building Societies | 36 |
| Personal Services | Other services | 34 |
| Recreation | Gambling | 25 |
| Sites | | 24 |
| Recreation | Sports | 22 |
| Shops | Department Stores | 12 |
| Personal Services | Repair & Cleaning Services | 9 |
| Residential | Care homes | 8 |
| Transport | Stations | 8 |
| General Industries | Industrial | 7 |
| General Industries | Storage | 6 |
| Education | Pre-school | 2 |
| Health | GP Surgeries | 2 |
| Hospitality | Hostels | |
| Education | Schools | |

Historic Buildings

These are represented by conservation areas and listed buildings. They also comprise the physical heritage, which is attractive to residents, visitors, and tourists. Thus, large numbers of historic buildings are perceived as a considerable positive, provided they are in good condition and especially in use. If redundant, they can have quite a negative effect on the environmental quality.

The three conservation areas are shown on Figure 4.3, and they occupy about half the area of the city centre. The vacant building floors are also approximately 15% of the total, which indicates that there is no difference between vacancy within or outside the conservation areas. The majority of listed buildings are within the conservation areas, as shown on Figure 4.4. There is a particular concentration within the largest conservation area, which could be considered as the historic core of the city. It is often felt that listed buildings are more liable to be vacant, due to the restrictions of the listing. However, in this instance, it does not appear to be the case.
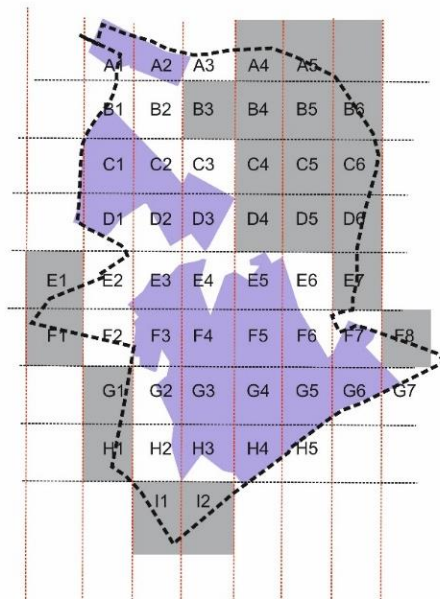


Figure 4.3: Conservation Areas



Figure 4.4: Listed Buildings

**Spaces**

Streets - vehicle, cycle and pedestrian

The public realm is predominantly comprised of streets, most of which were designed for vehicles. The emphasis is on a clean, healthy, safe, and accessible city centre, primarily as a result of restricting motor vehicles and increasing pedestrianisation. There are issues associated with this approach. The area of pedestrian space is enlarged, as streets are paved over, but there is no real feeling of coherent pedestrian routes offering a variety of experiences. It requires a re-structuring of spaces defined by containment. Recently, there has been an expansion in the development of cycle routes. These are not particularly distinctive and mainly occupy former street space.

Squares and Parks

There is a very small number of squares and they have limited appeal as meeting places. Old Eldon and Charlotte are the only formal squares in the city centre. Even the City Council admits that they are not attractive places to spend time. The Blue Carpet is a missed opportunity to create a real square and showcase the Laing Art Gallery, as it lacks a coherent building framework. The current local authority strategy is to divide-up streets to imply that they could become squares. Of course, they continue to feel like parts of pedestrianised streets, as they do not meet the design guidelines. The objectives in the design of squares are to generate appropriate pedestrian movement and follow dimensional criteria that will maximise the number of days when the microclimatic targets are met. As shown above, symbolic buildings are evident in the centre – two cathedrals, museums, theatres, galleries, library, civic centre, courtrooms, hospital and two universities; but none are related to squares, and some are uncomfortably located on streets. Leazes Park is located at the northwest edge of the centre. Otherwise, there is little green space, although the Town Moor and Jesmond Dene are within 10-15 minute walk.

Structure

The historic layers of the city centre are still evident. The city started with the river crossing and a steep rise up to the plateau, where the vast majority of the centre is now located. As shown, the downside of the layered structure is that it tends to lack a spatial coherence - with little pedestrian network, squares, and green spaces. Figure 4.5 illustrates that the greatest intensity of building is in the established shopping area – Northumberland Street and Eldon Square, and in the historic core. This forms the solids. The voids are less clear as they represent usable space, demolished buildings, and space left over. It is apparent that most of voids are around the periphery, and this reflects the concentration of buildings towards the middle.



*Figure 4.5: Solids and Voids*

Land Ownership

Traditionally the land was owned by the community and administered by the City Council, however this pattern has changed over time and large areas are now owned by various others. Nevertheless, the local authority still owns the majority of land, as shown on Figure 4.6. In the northern part of the city centre, substantial areas of land are owned by NHS (Royal Victoria Infirmary),

Newcastle University and Northumbria University. Network Rail also owns a large area around the central station and the Forth Goods Yard, which has become a brownfield development site. There are some minor ownerships – Tyne and Wear Passenger Transport Executive and Crown Estates – with the remaining land owned by the private sector. UK companies own comparatively small areas, distributed throughout the centre and comprise mainly housing. Overseas companies own larger blocks of land, and their holding is seemingly increasing. They tend to be mixed use and more commercial in nature. This means that decisions about a notable area of the centre are being made at distance – not dissimilar to the branch plant economy of the past.
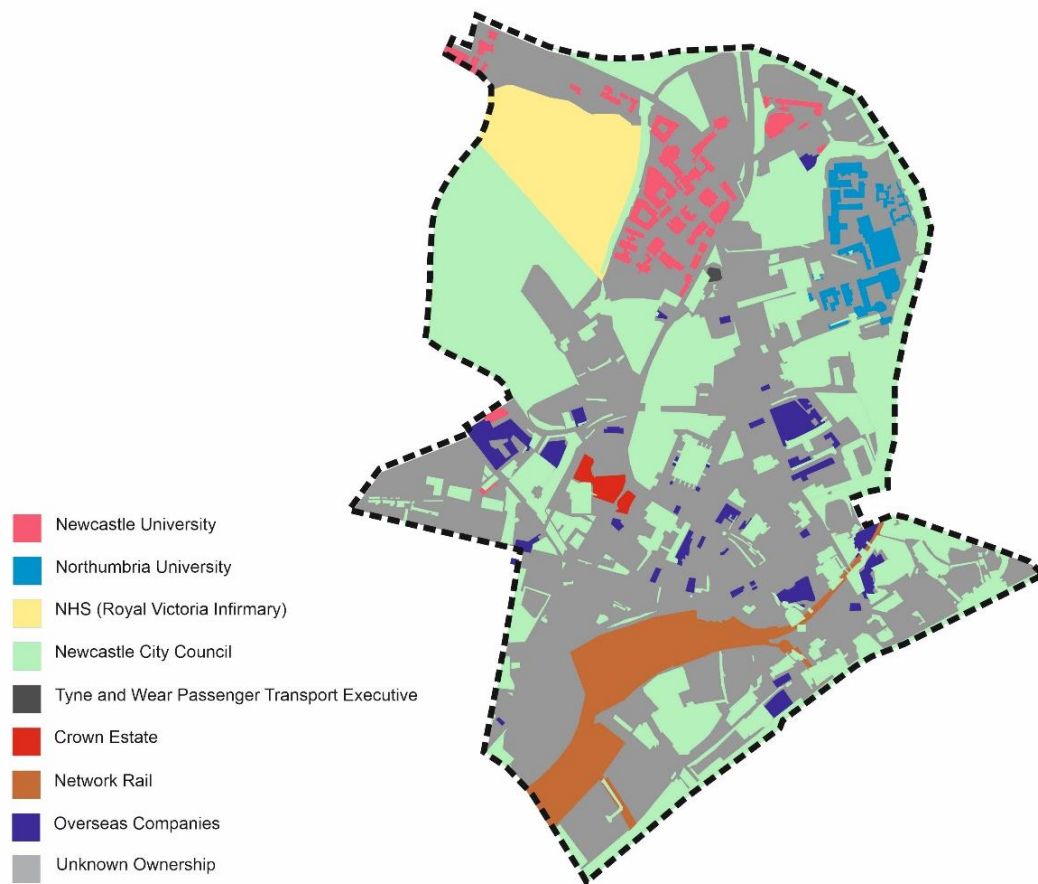


*Figure 4.6: Land Ownership*

Figure 4.7 illustrates ownership in relation to buildings and spaces. In terms of the major owners – the Universities, NHS, City Council, Network Rail and overseas companies, there is quite a balanced picture. The most significant

aspect is that the local authority owns fewer buildings than might have been expected.  By contrast, the majority of spaces is owned by the City Council.
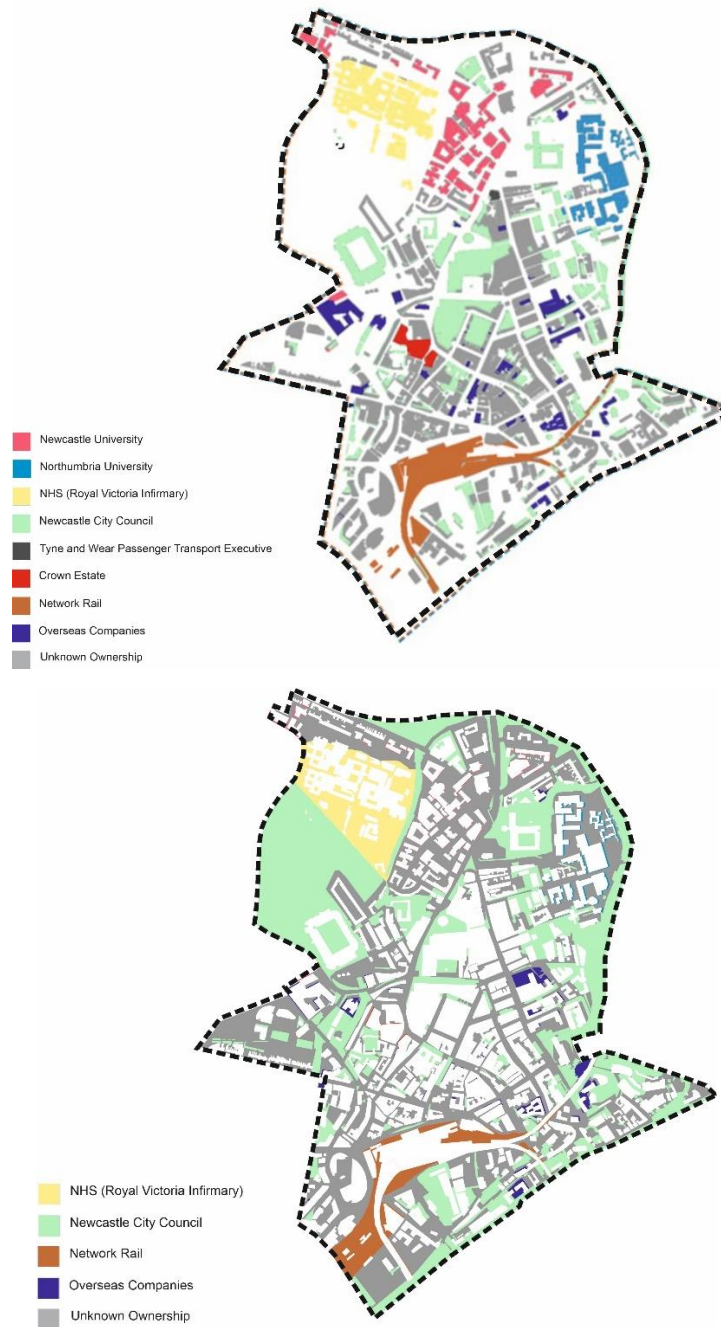


*Figure 4.7: Ownership of Buildings and Spaces*

Air Quality

During 2019 Newcastle City Council undertook monitoring at 48 locations.  With predictable ambiguity, the report states that *the general trend in 2019 is*

*showing improvement at some locations and deterioration at others in terms of air quality* (Newcastle City Council, 2019). There is an established system of five categories of air pollution, but the survey adopted just the nitrogen dioxide measures. The data shown on Figure 4.8 should be treated with caution as they are part of a campaign for increased pedestrianisation and cycle routes, including applications for central government funding. The Daily Air Quality Index comprises a ten-point scale. The lowest three points are classified as *enjoy usual outdoor activities.* The bottom point is 0-67µg/m$^3$. Traffic management strategies can influence the measurements. Focusing vehicles onto a smaller number of streets, clearly increases the numbers. In addition, the City Council has dramatically increased the number of taxi licences. Between 2014 and 2019 the number of licenses show an increase of 1121 private hire vehicles (Freedom of Information Team, personal communication, 19 April 2019). At the same time, the amount of space for taxis at the Central Station has been reduced as part of glazing the portico. It moved the greater volume of taxis to a rank in the tunnel at Orchard Street, which then generated the worst pollution reading for the city centre in 2018 of 95.6µg/m$^3$. In 2019, this location was not monitored but a nearby monitor on Neville Street recorded 69µg/m$^3$.
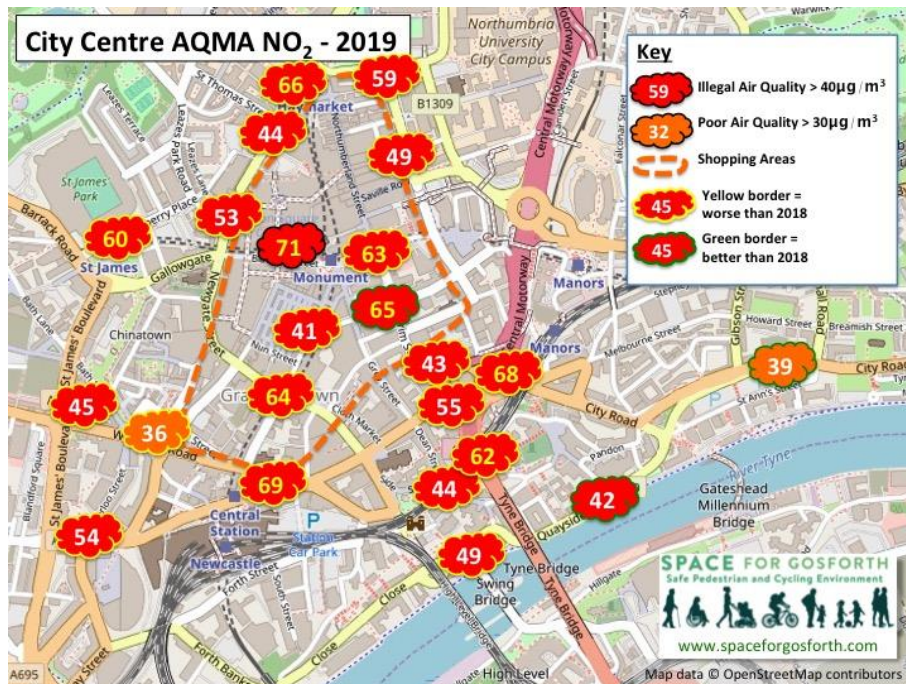


*Figure 4.8: City Centre Air Quality (SPACE for Gosforth, 2020)*

### 4.1.3 Social

The theoretical section on the social perspective shows that city centres should accommodate a concentration of multiple social groups with numerous interactions between them and the environment. These social groups are categorised as insiders, regulars, visitors, and strangers.

**Insiders**

Newcastle has seen rapid growth in the city centre population over the last two decades.  It has already been shown that between 2001 and 2018 the population grew by 250% while the increase for the region was 5.6%. The age distribution of the population is shown in Figure 4.9.  It illustrates that people between 20 and 29 years old comprise the vast majority of residents, and although those aged between 10 and 19 years make-up 15% of the city centre population, 14% of them are 18-19 years old.  The corollary is that only 13% are over 40.  The growth of the higher education sector and the increase in student population plays an important part in the growth of city centre living. The number of students in Newcastle has doubled since 2001 and the two universities – Newcastle and Northumbria (founded, respectively in 1963 and 1992) have seen notable increases in student numbers over the years.  Both universities attract a high number of students to their city centre campuses. The number of full-time students is about 26,000 for Newcastle University and 27,000 for Northumbria University at the time of the survey.

Data on student accommodation show that a significant number of the student population choose to live in the city centre for their period of study. The increase in the student population has led to an increase in the conversion of existing buildings and a substantial rise in the construction of purpose-built student accommodation in the centre. Delivery of student accommodation in Newcastle has exceeded the objectives in recent years with a cumulative over-target provision of 1,600 dwellings in 2019. By 2017, a total number of 8,000 student bedspaces had been provided. Since then, approximately 3,000 additional bedspaces have been built.  Newcastle is now known as an absorption market for student accommodation where the increase in bedspace provision has not

been accompanied by commensurate growth in student numbers (Feeney & Dyer, 2020).  At the same time, the vacancy rate has risen from 3% in 2016 to 4.1% in 2019 indicating that saturation of supply may have been reached.  The summation of these data is that the huge increase in city centre residents have been mainly students, and that the increase in permanent residents has been very modest.  There is very little ethnic tension.  The most conspicuous group is the Chinese community.  According to the China Town data, the community represents up to 2% of permanent residents, mainly around its spiritual home in Stowell Street as well as the increasing number of overseas Chinese students from mainland China, Hongkong, Taiwan, and many parts of South-East Asia. (Newcastle China Town 2020).  The number of students from the Indian sub-continent, Africa, and Arabia vary in numbers, but their permanent populations are even fewer than the Chinese.
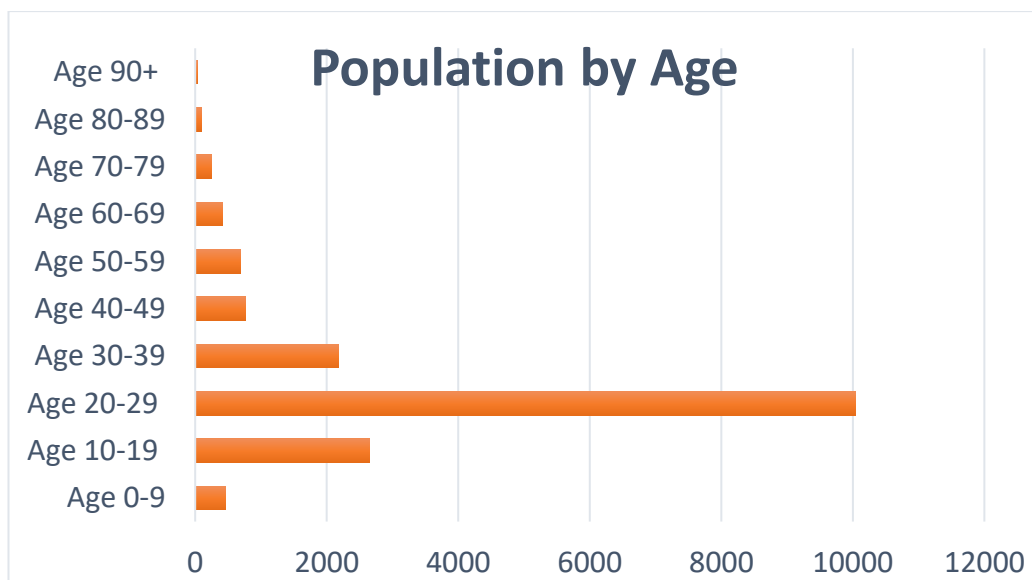


*Figure 4.9: Population by age in Newcastle City Centre (based on data from Office for National Statistics, 2020)*

**Regulars**

This social group comprises users who spend time in Newcastle city centre on a regular basis. The reason can be employment, education, leisure, pleasure, shopping, or a combination of these activities. Newcastle is a regional centre

and many of the services offered in the city centre have a geographical catchment population that goes well beyond the centre.  Compared with 18,000 city centre residents, the city is home to 300,000 people, and there are 800,000 in the metropolitan area.  Newcastle Central Railway Station is located in the city centre.  It serves the East Coast Mainline from London to Edinburgh and beyond, the Tyne Valley Line to Hexham and Carlisle, and coastal routes to Sunderland and Middlesbrough.   The Tyne and Wear Metro, also known as the Newcastle Metro, is a rapid transit system that offers three principal services – the Airport to South Hylton, through the city centre and via Sunderland (20 miles), the City Centre to south Shields (12 miles), and the City Centre to the Coast (10 miles).  Buses cover the whole of the North-East region, as well as inter-city coaches.  These public transport systems provide an average of 118,900 per day – arrivals and departures to and from transport hubs.  In addition, regulars walk, cycle, drive to and from the centre, in varying proportions.  Despite business parks and other out of town developments, a large number of regulars are those whose employment is based in the centre. As seen in Figure 4.10, it is the key employment area in the North-East with by far the highest concentration of jobs.
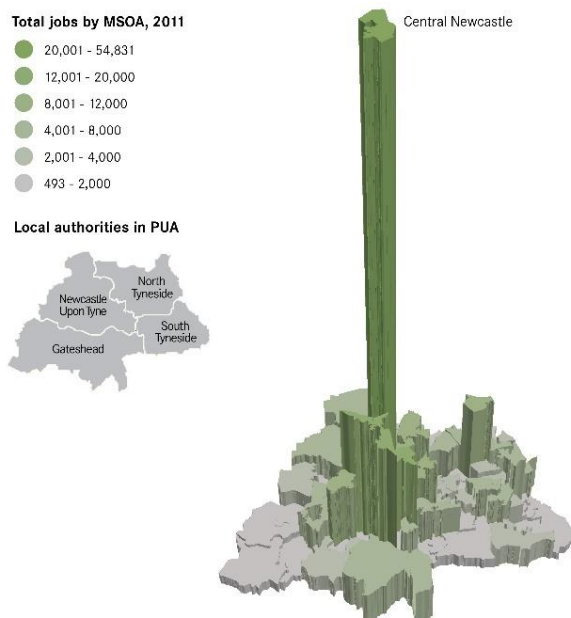


*Figure 4.10: Concentration of jobs in Newcastle (Newcastle - Centre for Cities, 2021)*

Another large group of regulars are those students who live outside the centre. As the two universities currently attract 53,000 students to their city centre campuses, with approximately 13,000 living in the centre, there is the potential for 40,000 students to be travelling-in, each day.  As the regional focus, Eldon Square registers an annual footfall of 36 million people through the shopping centre (Smith, 2022).  The party city centre provides 7,000 jobs and £500 million annual revenue.  The revelry is focussed on Friday and Saturday nights.

**Visitors**

There are approximately 13,000 student residents, 5,000 permanent residents and 5,000 hotel rooms.  Data from the Newcastle and Gateshead Initiative (D. Bowe, personal communication, 26, March, 2021), demonstrates that there are 10 million visits per year to the city centre, in the context of 18.65 million visits to region.  This equates to an average of 27,000 visits a day.  70% are day trips (19,000 people) and 30% include overnight stays (8,000).  The average duration of stays is three nights.  This represents the increasingly popular city breaks.  Thus, the number staying overnight, exceeds the number of permanent residents.  The impact of students and visitors may be disguised by the large number of regulars who come into the city each day.  59% of visitors and tourists are from the North-East England, 34% are from the rest of UK, and 7% from outside the UK.  Only 10% are on their own - all others are with partners, family, and friends.  This indicates that the number of business visits is small. 55% of people have visited the city centre more than 20 times previously.  The available hotel stock is mainly composed of budget, 3 star and 4 star accommodation (see Table 4.4).  A budget hotel offers minimum amenities and services for a lower price than a regular hotel in the area. This type provides clean rooms that are safe and meet the basic needs of a guest.  A 3 Star Hotel provides average amenities, higher quality service and physical attributes.  A 4 Star Hotel delivers above average, deluxe service and experience for the guest. 39% of visitors with overnight stays choose hotels with over 50 rooms and 11% of visitors select hotels of 10-49 rooms.

*Table 4.4: Breakdown of the accommodation stock in Newcastle City Centre in 2019 (D. Bowe, personal communication, 26, March, 2021)*

| Star rating | Properties | Rooms |
|---|---|---|
| 4 star | 11 | 1817 |
| 3 star | 11 | 1505 |
| Budget | 7 | 1142 |
| Serviced apartments | 11 | 423 |
| Total | 40 | 4887 |

The survey shows that the top three main reasons for visiting the city centre are sightseeing, shopping, and viewing art, science and heritage exhibits.  The last of these is particularly significant as it has risen from 5% in 2016, to 16% as a main reason for the visit.  The picture changes when activities in which visitors take part are considered.  Eating out then becomes the outstanding first choice followed by sightseeing and shopping (see Table 4.5).

*Table 4.5: Activities and Participation Rates*

| activity | main reasons for visit % | take part in % |
|---|---|---|
| sightseeing | 23 | 57 |
| shopping | 18 | 50 |
| viewing art, science and heritage exhibits | 16 | 40 |
| watching sport | 13 | 15 |
| eating out | 11 | 73 |
| visiting pubs and night clubs | 10 | 42 |
| others | 9 | multiple |

This is supported by the top visitor attractions, as shown in Table 4.6.

*Table 4.6: Top Newcastle City Centre Attractions for Visitors*

| Top Newcastle City Centre Attractions | |
|---|---|
| The Tyne Bridges | sightseeing |
| Historic Quayside | sightseeing |
| Newcastle Castle | sightseeing |
| Newcastle Cathedral | sightseeing |
| The Old City Chares | sightseeing |
| Grainger Town and Grey's Monument | sightseeing |
| Intu Eldon Square | shopping |
| Laing Art Gallery | art exhibits |
| Great North Museum | science and heritage exhibits |

Nearly half the visitors arrive to Newcastle by car but only one fifth use the car while they are in the centre.  About a quarter come to the city by train, although not surprisingly, only a few uses it after arrival.  More people use the metro within the centre than for travelling to it.  Similarly, more than one fifth of journeys are by taxi within the centre.  Journeys by aeroplane need to be completed by either metro or taxi.  The most striking statistic is that 85% of people walk once they are in the city centre.  The relative percentages are shown in Table 4.7.

*Table 4.7: Travel Options for Visitors*

| travel | to Newcastle % | within city centre % |
|---|---|---|
| car | 49 | 19 |
| train | 26 | 1 |
| metro | 18 | 23 |
| aeroplane | 5 | 0 |
| bus and coach | 4 | 3 |
| taxi | 3 | 22 |
| bicycle | 0 | 2 |
| walking | 0 | 85 |

**Strangers**

The theoretical perspective for this category of social groups revealed that it is formed by collection of individuals who are not yet able to take part in the formal institutions of mainstream society. There are elements of impartiality and detachment among this group and as such there is comparatively little known about them.  A primary section is the homeless and rough sleeper population. Rough sleeping in England has increased by 169%, since 2010 (Wilson and Barton, 2023).  Reasons include poverty, multiple disadvantage, debt and rent arrears.  Over the last 10 years, there has been a 21% fall in housing services and a 59% fall in the supporting people fund (Newcastle City Council, 2018). There is a lack of affordable housing, single person accommodation, and night shelters.  However, the trend in Newcastle does not reflect the trend nationally or across the core cities, both of which show a sustained increase in the rate of rough sleepers in recent years.  Data show a total number of only 65 homeless people in Newcastle each night (Shelter, 2018). The number of these strangers in the city centre is very small compared with other social groups but their presence reveals important characteristics.  They did not previously live in the city centre, but have been drawn to it, by large numbers of people.  Nearly half of them are alcohol dependent and suffer from metal health issues.  A high proportion are involved with drugs and nearly all are offenders.  They are mainly male and young (25-34 years).  In Newcastle, the majority of the support services for this social group are based within city centre. The distribution of these services is shown in Figure 4.11.
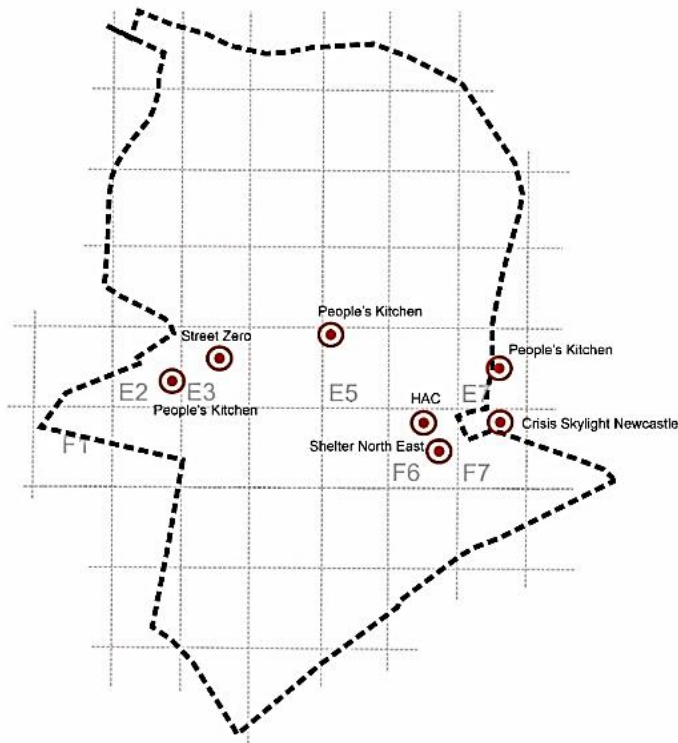
Figure 4.11: Distribution of Homeless Support Services in Newcastle

Another dimension is begging on the streets. There is no correlation between beggars and the homeless. Some people fall into both categories, a number of the homeless do not engage with begging, and some beggars are not homeless. Engaging with countercultures is notoriously difficult, but the perception is that there are more beggars than rough sleepers. The local press claims that 96% of beggars appearing in court are not homeless, and people are intimidated, and businesses affected (Doughty, 2016).

**4.1.4 Economic**

**Introduction**

The significance of Newcastle city centre economy is reflected in its rich history in accommodating manufacturing activities and the major role it played in the Industrial Revolution. The centre has experienced restructuring as a result of changes in the patterns of production and consumption over time and is seen as an economic hub for the wider North-East Region (Savills, 2019). The theoretical section of this study explored the economic perspective of the city centre through the four key themes of income and expenditure, goods and services, supply and demand and the role of economic actors. This section investigates the complex role of these themes in the context of the study area.

**Income and Expenditure**

The Five Sector model can be used in explaining the relationship between income and expenditure (Figure 4.12). In this model, the city centre economy is divided into five sectors covering individuals, and businesses, with financial, government and overseas sectors.
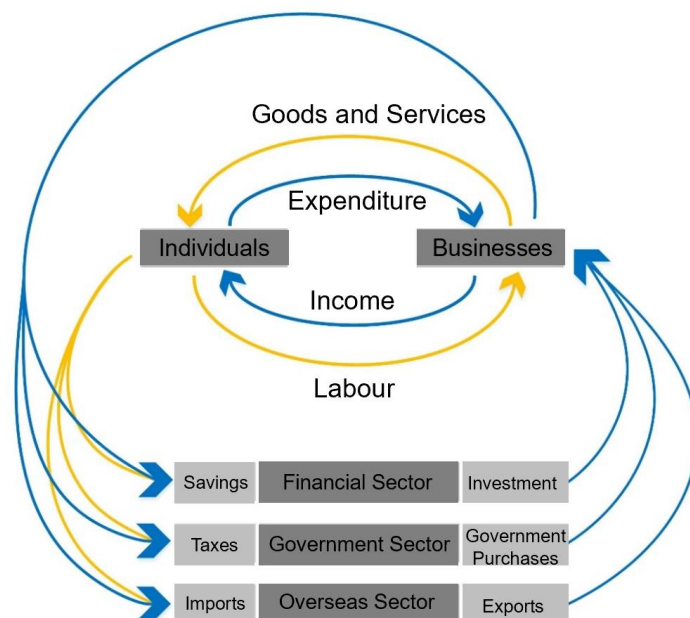


*Figure 4.12: Five-Sector Circular Flow adopted from Gwartney, et al., (2009)*

City Centres supply goods and services to individuals in exchange for an expenditure. Individuals form the labour force and receive income from businesses which may or may not be located in the centre (the only exception will be those who rely on benefits from the central government) and may decide to spend a proportion of that in the city centre. Living in the centre or carrying out economic activity in the centre can only be justified if income is more than expenditure and this applies to both individuals and businesses. Economic interactions involve the other three sectors. Businesses and individuals may decide to save part of their income in the financial sector (e.g., banks or investment companies) who channels this money back into businesses in form of residential and commercial development investments to generate profit. If this investment is in form of deployment of capital from an external source, it is called inward investment. Attracting inward investment is highly desired by Newcastle City Council and as a result, a number of collaborations have been initiated between public and private sectors to attract inward investment (e.g., Newcastle Gateshead Initiative, Invest Newcastle and The Newcastle Ambassador Programme). The number of Foreign Direct Investments in Newcastle has doubled between 1997 and 2019. Table 4.8 provides a summary of recent large investment projects in the city centre.

*Table 4.8: Summary of recent large investment projects in Newcastle City Centre*

| Project | Total Investment | Site Owner/ Partner |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Helix** | £350m | A partnership that was originally between Newcastle City Council, Newcastle University and One North-East (Regional Development Agency). One North-East abolished in 2010 and Legal & General Group (insurance and financial service) invested £65m |
| **East Pilgrim Street** | £200m | Reuben Brothers |

| Stephenson Quarter | £200m | Originally an agreement between Clouston Group and Newcastle City Council. The agreement came to an end in 2019 due to the company failing to make agreed payments. A search for a new developer was launched at the Mipim event (the world's leading real estate convention). An investment of £104m for the second phase has been secured with PfPigloo (collaboration between fund manager, PfP Capital and igloo Regeneration) |
|---|---|---|
| Hadrian's Wall | £46m | High Street Group |
| Whey Aye | £100m | Developer World Wheel Company Newcastle |
| Strawberry Place | £120m | High Street Group |

The UK Central government and Newcastle City Council play an active role in the city centre economy by imposing a tax on individuals and businesses. They are the recipient of tax – Council tax from individuals and business rate from non-domestic properties and businesses. For business rates, there are exemptions for small businesses, empty properties, and listed buildings. Around 30% of the total amount of business rate collected in Newcastle in 2020 is raised within the centre which is approximately £43m (D. Blade, personal communication, June 4, 2021). Since 2017 a new exemption has been introduced for businesses occupying one property with a rateable value below £12,000. Figure 4.13 provides a breakdown of the categories of exemption in the study area which shows Listed buildings and under RV threshold as the main two reasons for most exemptions. In terms of use, 52% of those exempt properties are office spaces and 26% are car parks.
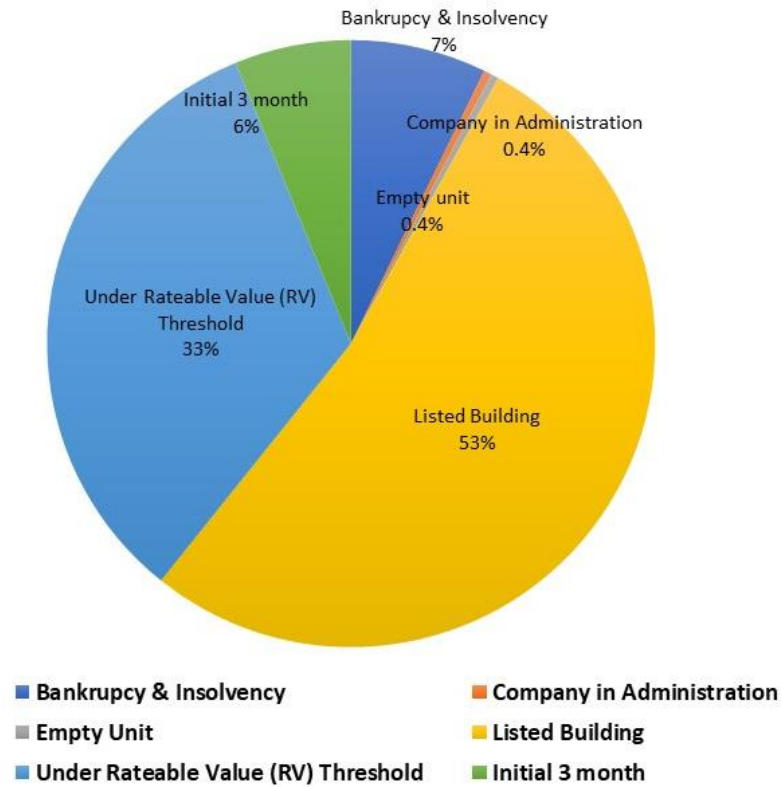
*Figure 4.13: Categories of business rate exemption in Newcastle City Centre in 2019*

The government uses the raised tax in form of government purchases to address the needs of communities using goods and services offered by businesses. There are instances when other levies or contributions are collected in the city centre for provision of infrastructure and services - for example in form of developer contribution or Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL). However, their scale is relatively small when seen in the wider context of the city centre economy. A review of the CIL collected through new planning permissions in the city centre shows that the total figure in 2019 has been £557,000 which is around 45% of the total CIL raised in the city.

Businesses can also be involved in import and export activities which requires involvement with the overseas sector. Businesses can be either local, national, or international. The nature of the business can have implications on the level of income retained or spent within the city centre. A desk study about the background of the companies in Eldon Square shopping centre where retail

and dining activities are more intense, shows that 21% of companies are international, 68% are national and only 11% are local. The survey observations show that the local units occupy significantly smaller floorspace. Heavy reliance on non-local tenants renting larger units puts shopping centres in a fragile position in cases where non-local operators decide to relocate.

**Goods and Services**

Newcastle city centre is the regional capital and the dominant retail centre in the region. It benefits from high levels of accessibility and connectivity. The city centre survey identified buildings offering goods and services. This observation shows that the total number of premises offering services (72%) outweigh` shops (28%).

The retail capacity forecast for Newcastle is 12,750 sq. m. net sales area (DTZ, 2012). The City centre has the largest average floor space at 165 square meters per unit which results in an estimate of £2.1m sales for shops in the city centre. In terms of categories of goods, the majority of retail spaces within the study area seem to be dominated by household goods (72%). This is then followed by essentials (18%) and luxury goods (8%). Online retail sales of household goods are on the rise.

The two universities are the major providers of educational services (with total annual income of £900m) and also the provider of employment in education which is of strategic importance to the region. Royal Victoria Infirmary is the main provider of health services and has an annual income of £500 million. In terms of financial, professional, and business services, the city centre also has the highest concentration of these services in Newcastle and surrounding area.

The concentration of employment in the city centre by businesses covers sectors such as digital, education, financial, professional, and business services, Tourism and culture, sport, recreation and conference and transport and travel and strategic economic plan services.

**Supply and Demand**

The utilisation of buildings and spaces is key to economic activity in Newcastle City Centre. Most Jobs and enterprises are dependent on buildings for the provision of goods and services. The spaces in between buildings also contribute to the character of the place and have the potential to accommodate smaller scale economic activities (i.e., accommodating outdoor markets) and/or support those activities within buildings (increasing footfall by accommodating free and unpaid events). However, it is evident that the economic contribution of those activities taking place within buildings are far more significant than those taking place within spaces in between buildings.

Newcastle city centre is very compact. The major benefit of the city centre in terms of proximity encourages businesses to have presence in the centre even if this requires paying a higher premium. However, businesses can only afford such higher premium if there is a sustainable demand for their good and services generating consistent income.

The current supply of grade A offices is about 126,260 sq. ft which has been portrayed by commercial property companies (i.e., Lambert Smith Hampton and Knight Frank) as critically low. The rental levels have also been on the rise and is about £24.50 per square meter. In terms of demand for retail space, city centre store closures are on the rise showing a challenging retail climate. Newcastle city centre had the highest number of closures in the North-East with 48 outlet closures however the net closure rate was only at 5.8% after further shop opening.

In terms of residential property, the average property price is between £108K and £251K (see Figure 4.14). The total number of property sales transactions does not seem to be high (see Figure 4.15) in the centre.
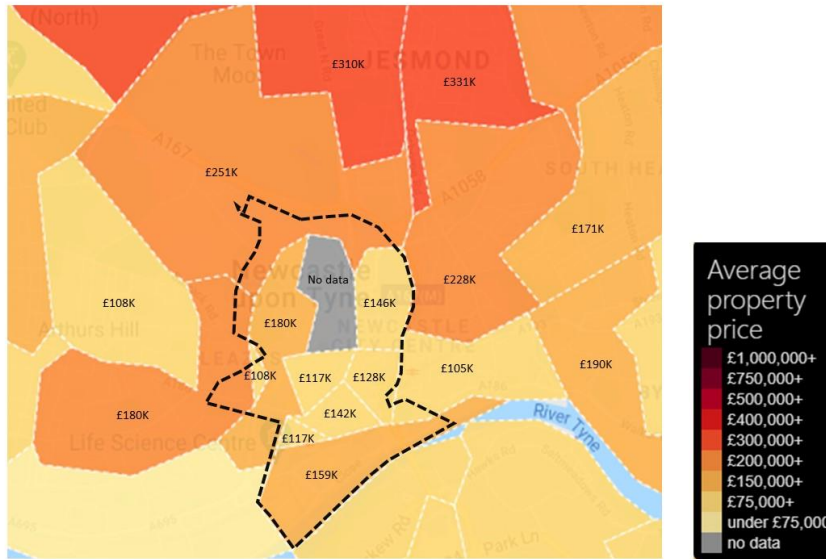
*Figure 4.14: Average Property Price in Newcastle City Centre and Surrounding Area in 2019 (Plumplot, 2020)*



*Figure 4.15: Total Sold Properties in Newcastle City Centre and Surrounding Area in 2019 (Plumplot,2020)*

**The role of Economic Actors**

Insiders

Newcastle city centre can be a source of income and a place of consumption of goods and services for insiders. They are the only social group who have expenditure on long-term accommodation in the city centre. For students using student accommodation, the fee is paid to the private operator or University which is around £335- £715 per month. For private rental market, the average private rental market in the study area is £932 which is higher than the average Newcastle rent (£893pcm). As seen in table 4.9 and corresponding postcode map (Figure 4.16) the vast majority of the study area is covered by NE1 post code which has a rent average of £1,068. Reflecting on the annual household earning figures (See figure 4.17) the rent in the city centre is a significant proportion of insiders' income (40%).

*Table 4.9: Average rent pcm in the city centre post code areas*

| Average rent pcm in city centre post code areas | |
| --- | --- |
| NE1 | £1,068 |
| NE4 | £740 |
| NE2 | £989 |



*Figure 4.16: Postcodes covering the study area*
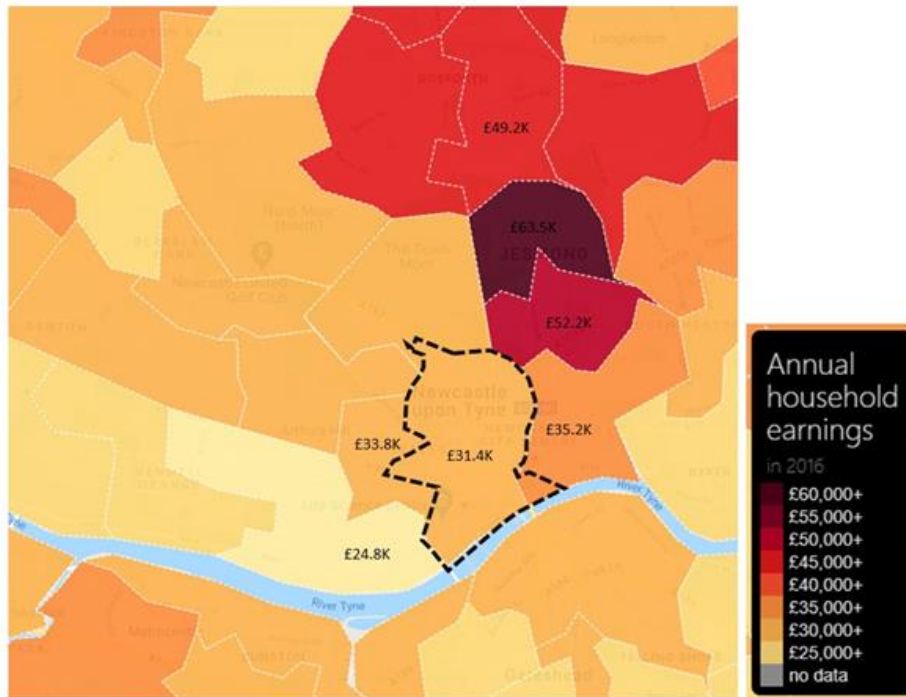
*Figure 4.17: Annual Household Earnings in Newcastle City Centre and Surrounding Area (Plumplot, 2020)*

Residents also contribute to the city centre services through council tax. Among these, those who are fulltime students do not contribute in terms of council tax payment as they are exempt. The high number of the transient population within this social group means their economic contribution as consumers of goods and services and even as labour for businesses is not long-term and can be inconsistent at different times of the year for example during summer holidays when they leave their term time accommodation. 32% of students from Newcastle University and 25% of students from Northumbria University are from other countries in the UK and may decide to spend summer holidays outside the UK. Among English students, a significant proportion who are not from the North-East may also leave during holidays.

Table 4.10 provides the estimated monthly budget for a higher education student in Newcastle. The composition of students' expenditure shows that after paying tuition fees which directly benefits the two universities, the highest expenditure is on accommodation. The average value of spending on other expenses particularly on local businesses is not significant. Food, mobile phone, toiletries and TV license fees are more likely to be paid to non-local

businesses and chains. The potential contribution to local businesses within the centre can be as a result of social activities and personal expenses. These figures reflect that the economic contribution of students is not as significant as it is often portrayed.

| Description | Cost |
|---|---|
| **Accommodation (including Utilities)** | £335-£715 |
| **Food** | £140-£200 |
| **Social Activities** | £125-£275 |
| **Personal Expenses (Haircuts, Clothes, dental costs, etc)** | £75 |
| **Mobile Phones** | £20-£45 |
| **Travel** | £0-£60 |
| **Insurance** | £15-£25 |
| **Toiletries** | £30 |
| **Television License** | £13 |

*Table 4.10: Estimated Monthly Budget for a higher education student in Newcastle (Newcastle University, 2020)*

Regulars

This social group comprise workers, students, shoppers and leisure and pleasure seekers who come to Newcastle city centre regularly. Regulars form a significant proportion of the footfall profile which is a key metric in the economic management of the city centre. The source of income for regular workers is based within the centre. The frequency of their visit encourages them to spend part of that income on goods and services offered in the city centre. As a result of this potential spending capacity, an increase population of regulars in the centre is desired from an economic point of view. This highlights the key role of city centre employment. Major contributors to the city centre economy are the two universities, employment of 10,000 academic, research and support staff, and 50,000 students: and the large NHS hospital- the Royal Victoria Infirmary (RVI) with 7,000 staff (C. Docking, personal communication, July 21, 2021),

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1,500 staff out of 5,000 Newcastle City Council employees (J. Whalen, personal communication, April 20, 2021) are also based in the Civic Centre. The employment trend for all these major employers have seen an increase in the total number of their staff However give the impact of the 4[th] Industrial revolution and the option of home working this increase in the number of employees does not result in higher number of regulars in the city centre.

Visitors

The source of income for visitors is located outside the study area and their economic contribution is through expenditure on goods and services before, during and after their visit. Their economic impact can be either short or medium term depending on the period of their stay. Their visits provide employment and support businesses and produces tax revenues.

Attracting more visitors who spend money seems to be a desired goal by city centre businesses and the local authority. The estimate for the total revenue of the city centre hotel industry is approximately £84.7m per year and the occupancy rate has been between 72.2% and 77.6% between 2013 and 2019 and currently sits at 72.2% which is at its lowest since 2013 (Acorn Tourism, 2021).

Newcastle city centre has a diverse range of destination for tourists and non-tourist visitors. At first glance, the city centre visitor economy is associated with the leisure and retail, however there are other attractions to visitors such as heritage, culture and science, sport, events, business and visiting family and friends.  Main heritage and culture attraction within the study area are Great Northern Museum, Laing Art Gallery, Hatton Gallery and Life Science Centre. These are either owned by Newcastle City Council, Newcastle University or are registered charities. Table 4.11 provides a summary of these attractions and their total annual visitor and ownership status.

*Table 4.11: Summary of heritage, culture, and science attraction in Newcastle City Centre*

| Attraction | Total Visitors (2019) | Ownership | Investment/ Funding |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Great Northern Museum** | 488,806 | Owned by Newcastle University and managed by Tyne and Wear Archives & Museums | Total investment of £26m by Tyne and Wear Museums, Newcastle City Council, the Natural History Society of Northumbria and the Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle upon Tyne and Newcastle University |
| **Laing Art Gallery** | 187,728 | Owned by Newcastle City Council and managed by Tyne and Wear Archives & Museums | The funds to build the gallery were provided by Alexander Laing- a local Businessman |
| **Life Science Centre** | 300,000 | | Registered charity with no public funding |
| **Hatton Gallery** | 26,902 | Newcastle University | £3.8 million for redevelopment through Heritage Lottery Fund |

Another key visitor attraction is St James' park owned by Newcastle City Council. Newcastle United Football Club is the primary tenant of the stadium with a revenue that has almost tripled since 2001 and is currently around £178.5m. Development works in 2017 allows different non-sport events to be hosted. The club attracts 188,000 visitors from people who live outside the region to the city centre with over 13,000 of these from abroad (Ernst & Young LLP, 2019). Their spending on travel, accommodation, retail and food and drink adds £21m a year to the visitor economy. The increase in the patterns of hotel

occupancy up to 92.7% on matchdays provides evidence that matchdays offer a boost to the visitor economy (other examples are the 99% hotel occupancy rate during the Rugby World Cup in 2015 - with 51,000 international visitors, and the three-night average of 98% for Ed Sheeran Concert which is a 32% increase in hotel occupancy). It is not clear how much of this income comes back to the city centre

There is also other economic impact in terms of broadcast and media revenue and significant tax contributions of £70m. The Club's supply chain also has a level of indirect impact on city centre. The income of the Club's employees can also have some induced impact on the city centre. Figure 4.18 provides an overview of these economic impacts.
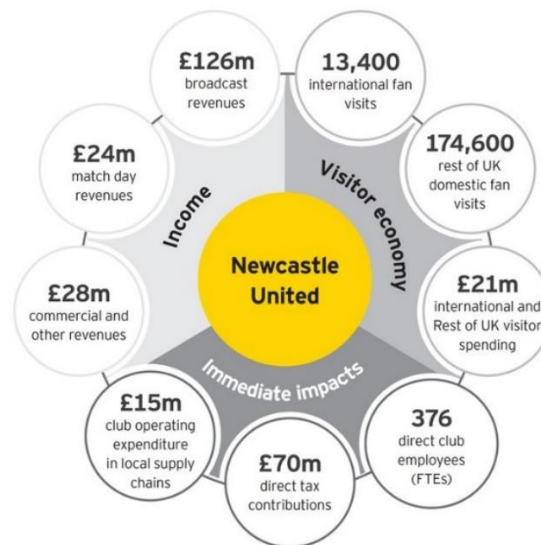


*Figure 4.18: Newcastle United Football Club Economic Drivers (Ernst & Young LLP, 2019)*

In recent years there have been a focus on promoting events in Newcastle city centre to attract additional visitors to the centre. Figure 4.19 provides a timeline of these events. All these events with the exception of the Great Exhibition of the North take place annually and have a continuous contribution over the years. Table 4.12 provides a summary of these contributions. The majority of these events are initiated and facilitated by NE1. Given the economic benefits to adjacent businesses, hosting these events are supported by businesses.
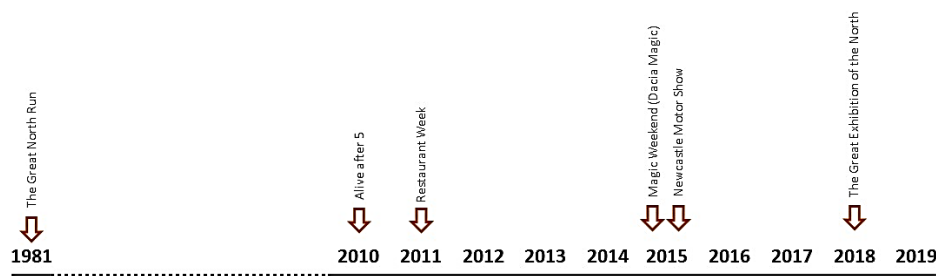
*Figure 4.19: Timeline of Newcastle City Centre Events*

*Table 4.12: Summary of Newcastle City Centre Events*

| Event | Economic Contribution | Organiser/ Facilitator |
|---|---|---|
| **The Great North Run** | £31m boost to the regional economy with hotel bookings increasing by 47% | Simply Health |
| **Alive after 5** | generated 13.7m additional visitors to into Eldon Square and led to an increase in average spend between 2010 and 2013 of 16.3% | NE1 |
| **Restaurant Week** | Attracting over 45,000 diners spending £530,000 during the week | NE1 |
| **Magic Weekend** | £8m | Rugby Football League |
| **Newcastle Motor Show** | Attracting 110,000 people to the city centre for a weekend. The increase in trade for adjacent businesses has been over 70% | NE1 |
| **The Great Exhibition of the North** | £184m to the local economy – 45% of the visitors were from wider north and used hotel accommodations | Newcastle Gateshead Initiative |

Another attraction is the historic core of Newcastle which is a key contributor to the overall appeal of the study area for visitors. Historic buildings such as Newcastle Castle are open to the public and attract around 25,000 visitors (Acorn Tourism, 2021).

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Strangers

This social group can be the recipient of goods and services by the local authority or other governmental and non-governmental organisations. Their income comes either from businesses or through benefit system from the central government. They may contribute to the economy (both formally and informally) by working in invisible roles in the back of restaurants and during anti-social hours (e.g., bars). They can be seen in highly visible roles in public spaces as street vendors. If they get paid cash-in-hand working in informal economy and avoid tax, it would be very difficult to map their economic role thus making the estimate largely uncertain. However, what is evident is that the diversity of the businesses and employment opportunities can attract them this social group to the city centre as part of both formal and informal economy. Despite this attraction, given the low number of the strangers' population in Newcastle city centre, their economic contribution is not considered to be significant when seen in comparison to other social groups.

### 4.1.5 Political

The theoretical perspective identifies that the political landscape is evident at three levels – local, regional, and national. They provide decisions leading to policies that shape the built environment, modify social character, affect economic futures, and change capacity to face challenges.

**Local**

Newcastle City Council is a local government unitary authority. It is composed of 78 Councillors, who are democratically accountable to residents of the 26 wards. The labour party has the most seats and therefore controls the Council. The majority of Monument Ward comprises the city centre (see Figure 4.20). Since 1999, the Council has been operating as an executive style of political management known as the Cabinet and involving only 10 councillors. This results from Central Government's desire to reduce the number of local decision makers. None of the three councillors in Monument Ward are members of the Cabinet and they have no more influence than councillors in other wards. The Cabinet Member responsibilities only specifically note the city centre once, in Employment and Culture (see Table 4.13), who is currently a councillor for Kenton Ward. As shown in Table 4.14, Monument Ward had the lowest number of electors in 2018. Conversely, it had the second highest turnout of 51.11% after Gosforth with 51.28% which is higher than the average turnout of 35% in English local government elections. The Ward turnout represents a small but engaged population. Each ward has its own committee with the claim that it involves local people in decision making. However, the councillors have a low level of influence, and local people are even further down the chain.



Figure 4.20: Outline of the study area and Monument Ward

Table 4.13: Responsibilities of Newcastle City Council Cabinet Members

| Cabinet Member | Responsibilities |
|---|---|
| Cabinet member for Communities | • Leading on Plans to create a Climate Change Convention for the city<br>• Protecting the natural and built environment.<br>• Promoting community safety |
| Cabinet member for Education and Skills | • Integrated support for children, young people and families<br>• Children's Safeguarding and Social Care Services<br>• Relationship with education providers<br>• Skills |
| Cabinet member for Employment and Culture | • Inward investment and promotion of Newcastle<br>• Creating Quality Jobs<br>• Delivery of major investment projects<br>• City centre retail and diversification<br>• Regional Economic Functions<br>• Cultural, tourism and delivering major events, including oversight of key services in support of these events |
| Cabinet member for Health and Social Care | • Adult Social Care<br>• Health and Social Care Integration<br>• Housing with specialised support (in collaboration with other Cabinet members)<br>• Asylum Seekers and Refugees<br>• Promoting mental health and tackling stigma<br>• Armed Forces Champion |
| Cabinet member for Housing | • Housing delivery and management<br>• Leading on Housing policy within the Devolution Deal |
| Cabinet Member for Neighbourhoods and Public Health | • Neighbourhood facilities<br>• Public Health |
| Cabinet Member for Transport and Air Quality | • Delivery of Transport infrastructure<br>• Promoting public transport<br>• Promoting Walking and Cycling<br>• Traffic and Parking Policy<br>• Improving Air Quality |
| Cabinet Member for the Environment and Regulatory Services | • Local Service provision<br>• Leading the Council's response to Waste Commission/ Development of a City-wide Waste Strategy<br>• Licensing and Regulatory issues |

Table 4.14: Local Election results in Newcastle wards

| Newcastle Wards from 3 May 2018 to Present | Electors | Votes | Turnout |
|---|---|---|---|
| Castle | 8681 | 3181 | 36.6% |
| Parklands | 8611 | 4118 | 47.82% |
| Denton and Westerhope | 8413 | 2827 | 33.60% |
| Walkergate | 8249 | 2774 | 33.62% |
| Benwell and Scotswood | 7686 | 2536 | 32.99% |
| Gosforth | 7630 | 3913 | 51.28% |
| Chapel | 7435 | 3577 | 48.11% |
| Dene and South Gosforth | 7322 | 3654 | 49.90% |
| Kenton | 7251 | 2293 | 31.62% |
| Fawdon and West Gosforth | 7145 | 2769 | 38.75% |
| Lemington | 7104 | 2269 | 31.93% |
| West Fenham | 7008 | 2284 | 32.59% |
| Manor Park | 6997 | 2922 | 41.76% |
| Wingrove | 6952 | 2594 | 37.31% |
| Walker | 6929 | 2026 | 29.23% |
| Callerton and Throckley | 6916 | 2309 | 33.38% |
| Heaton | 6882 | 2840 | 41.26% |
| Kingston Park South and Newbiggin Hall | 6818 | 2098 | 30.77% |
| Elswick | 6737 | 2200 | 32.65% |
| Blakelaw | 6446 | 1784 | 27.67% |
| Byker | 6438 | 2028 | 31.50% |
| Arthur's Hill | 4821 | 1422 | 29.49% |
| South Jesmond | 4639 | 1838 | 39.62% |
| Ouseburn | 4629 | 2036 | 43.98% |
| North Jesmond | 4503 | 2031 | 45.10% |
| Monument | 4439 | 2269 | 51.11% |

The theoretical perspective shows that the Local Government Association (2018a) identifies six specific functions in the city centre, under two headings. Amenity services are parking, travel and access; streetscape and the public realm; and planning and property. Off-street parking has not been reduced and additional provision will be demonstrated in the approved planning applications. Public transport also remains the same, but vehicle access is being made more complicated, and carriageways are being increasingly paved for cyclists and pedestrians. There are a number of schemes to promote the public realm. Traditionally, planning applications were determined by a committee of councillors, democratically acting on behalf of the Council and the community. In order to avoid delays in the local authority planning process, the 1990 Town and Country Planning Act introduced delegation to planning officers for small, uncontroversial applications. In Newcastle, more than 90% of planning applications are determined in this way. As the number increases, the community assumes a smaller role. In 2019, only six city centre proposals were referred to the planning committee (see table 4.15) with all the others being decided by planning officers. In reviewing the total number of planning applications submitted in 2019, only 8% of those delegated to officers were refused. Those approved by the committee include substantial residential development, new offices, and hotels with significant additional parking, despite the local authority's intent to dramatically reduce the number of vehicles. The centre is predominantly medium rise and it is noticeable that these proposals range mainly from 8 to 21 storeys.

*Table 4.15: List of Planning applications determined by the Newcastle City Council Planning Committee in 2019*

| Address | Description of the proposal | Decision |
|---|---|---|
| Land at Strawberry Place | 204 new residential dwellings - 21 storeys<br>124 residential dwellings - 10 storeys<br>12,000 sqm of new office space - 12 storeys<br>250 and 220 sqm of ground floor commercial space<br>new 200 bed hotel - 13 storeys<br>70 parking spaces | Grant Conditionally |
| Eastgate House Kings Manor | demolition of office building<br>75 new student bedspaces - 7 and 8 storeys<br>commercial unit at ground floor<br>car parking and cycle parking | Grant Conditionally |
| Newcastle Chronicle and Journal Ltd, Thompson House Groat Market | demolition of Thomson House newspaper office and former Bar Fleet Street<br>new hotel and aparthotel - 8 storeys<br>two storey public house<br>car parking and cycle parking | Grant Conditionally |
| Former Bank of England Site | new office building - 14 storeys | Grant Conditionally |
| The Regional Department Of Psychotherapy, Claremont House Framlington Place | change of use and partial demolition of Claremont House<br>11 new residential dwellings | Grant Conditionally |
| Land at Hanover Square | 10 one and two bedroom new flats - 8 storeys<br>9 car parking spaces and cycle parking | Grant Conditionally |

Facility services involve business support for commercial and retail, hospitality, and night-time economy; place branding and marketing – in particular cultural character and events; and digital technology and data collection for commercial advantage. Commercial and retail are in decline due to remote working, business rates, and internet shopping. Hospitality, in terms of visitors is continuing to develop hotels, which are becoming quite a dominant feature in the centre. Expansion of the night-time economy persists. In 2019, 17 out of 37 (45%) licensing applications were city centre locations, which is a reflection of the concentration of licensed premises. The Council is not especially developing cultural character or digital technology.

Newcastle City Council's income comes from six main sources (See Figure 4.21). The largest source of income in 2019 was from business rates; council tax; and sales, fees and charges. Since 2013, the Council has retained a 48% share of the business rates collected locally. The largest Council expenditure is on adult social care and the least on planning and development services. There seems to be no separate allocation of funds for the city centre.
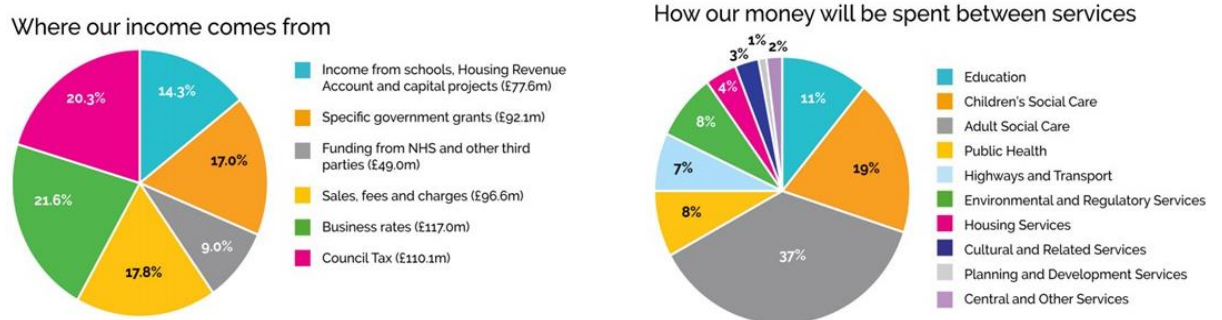


*Figure 4.21: Sources and income and main expenditures (Newcastle City Council, 2020)*

Each ward has funding available for projects that benefit the local community. Monument ward has the sixth highest sum but is still a very modest annual sum of currently less than £12,000.

**Regional**

The objectives of Regional Government are:

- urban identity
- economic functionality to boost economic growth
- policy efficiency
- democratic legitimacy

According to Shaw & Tewdwr-Jones (2017), there is a particularly disorganised approach to the contemporary devolution in the UK. It suffers from constant re-structuring episodes with short lifespans, and it needs longitudinal evidence. As shown in Table 4.16, the structural changes in the North-East Region have been significant. Institutions have been forced to close and some others introduced.

*Table 4.16: Examples of recent local and regional institutional change impacting the Newcastle (Goddard et al., 2015)*

| Closure of key organisations | Development of new organisations |
|---|---|
| ONE North-East RDA Government Office NE North-East Assembly Tyne and Wear Development Company Tyne and Wear City Region | North-East Combined Authority and Metro Mayor North-East Local Enterprise Partnership |

In 2004, the North-East voted against a Regional Assembly and resisted the various incarnations of elected mayors that Central Government would have liked to have imposed (Shaw & Robinson, 2007). In 2010, the Conservative-dominated Coalition Government removed an entire tier of regional organisations including Regional Development Agencies and introduced Local Enterprise Partnerships which appeared as another short-term arrangement (Shaw & Tewdwr-Jones, 2017). Following the Localism Act in 2011 and the

unsuccessful English Mayoral Referendums in 2012, a City Deals process was introduced to give some of England's largest cities increased autonomy to allocate the dividend of local economic growth. In 2014, the North East Combined Authorities was formed as a means of presenting a co-ordinated approach. In 2016, a North-East devolution deal was offered to seven local authorities, but was eventually voted down by Gateshead, South Tyneside, Sunderland and Durham.  Discussions continued and in 2018, the North of Tyne Combined Authority (NTCA) was agreed, which encompasses Newcastle, North Tyneside and Northumberland.

A metro mayor is directly elected as leader of the combined authority.  He chairs a cabinet of two members from each constituent council and a representative of the North-East Local Enterprise Partnership, with the elected members being responsible for a specific portfolio.  This is the decision-making body, with responsibilities for economic growth, skills, housing policy and enhancing the places and communities. It has access to an investment fund of £20m a year over 30 years, which is less funding that many of the other Combined Authority areas in England (National Audit Office, 2016). The mayor is directly elected to the authority.  The turnout in 2019 was 31%, which apparently is quite high in comparison with previous metro-mayoral elections, but hardly seems to be an endorsement by the population.  The authority states that the mayor is committed to creating community hubs to revitalise local life by turning underused buildings into public spaces, but there is no specific focus on the city centre, and currently no evidence of this proposed action.

The North-East Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) is a locally owned partnership between local authorities and businesses.  The LEP plays a central role in deciding local economic priorities and undertaking activities to drive growth and create jobs. It covers the local authority areas of County Durham, Gateshead, Newcastle, North Tyneside, Northumberland, South Tyneside and Sunderland, including the cities of Durham, Newcastle, and Sunderland.  The annual delivery plan does not specifically mention Newcastle city centre.  It has quite a complicated structure of boards and panels, which include the leaders of the seven councils but otherwise everybody is appointed.  The democratic

accountability is therefore quite distant.  It has relevance to the city centre but cannot really be viewed as part of Regional Government.


**National**

There are three members of parliament representing Newcastle in the House of Commons.  All three belong to the Labour Party.  Newcastle Central includes the city centre and has almost 58,000 registered voters.  Even if these MPs were united in campaigning for the city centre, it is unlikely that they would have much very much influence, especially with a Conservative Government majority of 80 seats.  Devolution is now essentially aimed at transferring powers to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, and transfer of powers to cities in England has lost momentum.  Figure 4.22 shows that there have also been drastic cuts in the funding allocation from Central Government to local authorities, while they still retain statutory responsibilities for local services.  The grant which, as part of the post-war consensus, paid for bin collections, school crossings, trading standards, pest control, libraries, social workers, foster parents, street cleaning, tree planting, tourist information, road and pavement repairs, community centres, lunch clubs and much more, has been removed entirely.  In 2019 - 2020, the Council had to save £13.3 million - on top of £254 million that it has been forced to save over the past seven years due to rising costs and cuts in Government grant.  National policies are now enacted at the local level by offers to bid for specific projects.  It seems that in this way, Central Government is exercising direct control on the city centre.  For instance, from 2020, around £2.4 billion of investment in cycling and walking is projected over five years and spending on cycling and walking, outside London, is expected to more than double from around £3.50 per head to over £10 per head during the current spending review period.  It is difficult for the local authority to resist these offers.  Launched in 2018, the Future High Streets Fund is part of the central government's plan to renew and reshape city centres. This includes £675 million (Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, 2018b).  Newcastle was not among the shortlisted local authorities.  No reasons have been made available for its exclusion, but traditional cities are not well represented in successful applications, and evidence shows that the political

complexion of the council could potentially trigger political manoeuvring when it comes to allocation of resources. Evidence illustrates that on average, Labour councils have seen their spending power reduced by 34 percent, while the figure for the average Conservative councils has declined by 24 per cent (Lawrence et al., 2020).
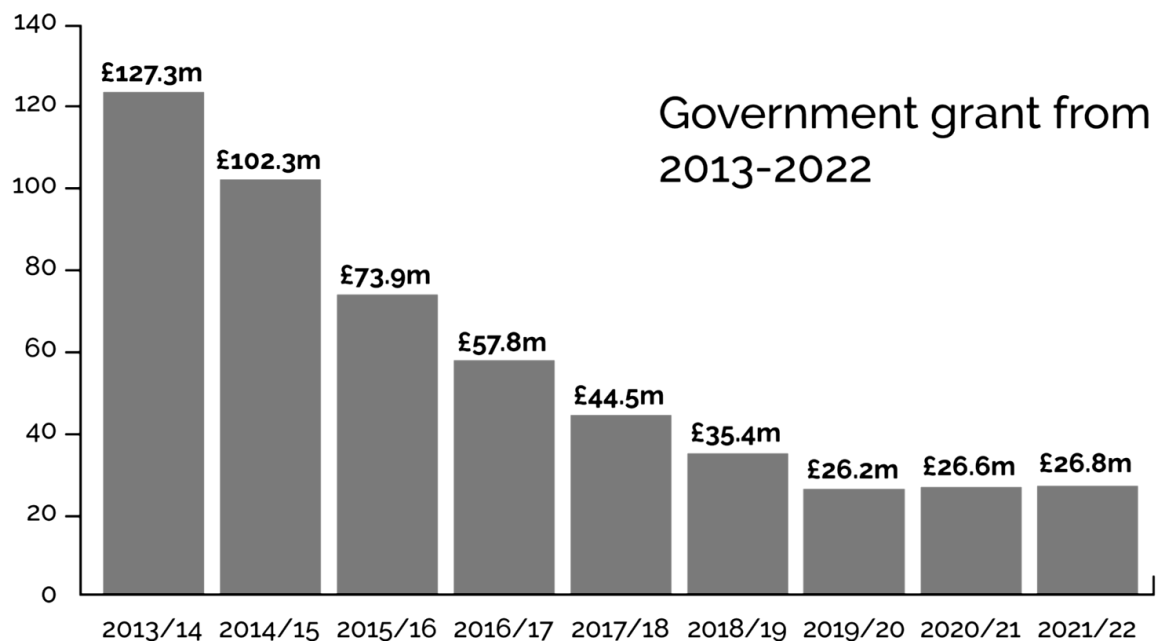


*Figure 4.22: Government Grant to Newcastle City Council (Forbes, 2021)*

Similar to the Thatcher Government of the 1980s, the present Conservative administration is aiming to cut out bureaucracy to get Britain building, while protecting high standards.  It includes the notion that full planning applications are not required to demolish and rebuild unused buildings as homes; and commercial and retail properties can be quickly repurposed to help revive the city centre.  It is not clear how high standards will be achieved.  Certainly, Shelter (2019) believes that residential accommodation developed in this way will be sub-standard.  According to George (2019), delivery of housing has been in the form of studio apartments and one bed homes instead of family houses. As shown in the Environmental Survey, in the case of Newcastle, student accommodation has heavily dominated city centre permitted development

schemes, in the context of pressure from Central Government for local authorities to accept almost any new development proposal.  It is asserted that students make a significant contribution to the local economy.  Yet, their spending patterns are skewed.  For instance, they rarely purchase capital goods, and Government policy states that council tax is exempt on student housing.  The Government also states that some regulation is essential to protect consumers, employees, and competition but too much creates barriers to businesses reaching their full potential. For the tourism industry, it claims that the current system for obtaining planning permission is slow, complex, and hard to predict, making it more difficult for accommodation providers and tourism attractions to expand, as well as adding to costs.  Conversely, a tourism levy, frequently known as a city tax in other countries, is favoured by some cities in the UK.  Newcastle Council has not commented on the possibility and no decision will be made unless the Council has the devolved power to do so.  Given the Government's emphasis on attracting tourists, this seems unlikely in the foreseeable future.  Nevertheless, as many local authorities across the world have recognised, while tourism offers private sector income, it represents a public sector cost.

**Governance**

Urban governance involves a range of actors and institutions.  The relationships among them determine what happens in the city. In managing urban transformations, government (local, regional, and national) need to play a strategic role in forging partnerships with and among key stakeholders.  Urban governance refers to how government and other stakeholders plan, finance and manage urban areas.  It enables residents to access government and engage in decision-making, influencing accountability and responsiveness to citizen demands.  Government is a top-down activity, whereas governance is a balance between top-down and bottom-up.

There has been sporadic attempts to introduce regional government, but it has never really gained traction (Giddings and Rogerson, 2023). The convoluted governance structure arrangements for Newcastle and the North-East is evident in the transition of the City Deal in 2012, to setting up of the North-East

Combined Authority in 2014 and abandonment of the South of the Tyne Local Authorities shortly afterwards, to the creation of the North of Tyne Combined Authority in 2018. Most recent proposals aim for the formation of the North East Mayoral Combined Authority in 2024 (Henederson & Paun, 2023).

The fragmented reshaping of the governance structure in the North East resulted from the piecemeal approach of incremental reform in the UK (Shaw & Tewdwr-Jones, 2017) and is evident in the transition of metropolitan governance in the UK since the election of the Labour Government in 1997. A notable review by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2006) conducted during the Labour government shows limited scope for strategic decision-making stemming from a small number of visible leadership figures across the public and private sectors, and also a weak and fragmented governance structure in Newcastle upon Tyne and the wider North East of England. There is also no indication of a unified and distinctive overarching vision for the future of the city by Newcastle City Council at this time (Vigar, et. Al., 2005). In the subsequent years there has been substantial reform and rescaling of sub-national governance structures and policies in England. In 2010, a new Conservative-led coalition government started implementation of an austerity programme to reduce the national budget deficit that was exemplified by the decision to abolish the regional development agencies introduced by the Labour Government (Pike et. al, 2018). Following this action, the formation of Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) operating with limited statutory and financial powers was encouraged by the central government on a voluntary basis.  Initially the concept covered the whole of the North East, but subsequently Newcastle and Gateshead created a reconfigured North East LEP area that broke away from the southern part of the region (Tees Valley). City Deals and combined authorities were introduced in the post 2010 approach to devolution. In Newcastle, this agreement included a commitment by the City Council to work towards further devolution with the other six local authorities in the North East LEP, laying the foundation for the formation of the North East Combined Authority in 2014.  At regional level, North-East Combined Authority has a cabinet structure, chaired by the Metro Mayor.  There is a representative from the LEP, but it is essentially an exclusive organisation.

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North-East Local Enterprise Partnership itself includes local authorities, businesses, and universities. However, its activities are partial and centred on economics, growth, and jobs. Also, there is no community engagement, and the complicated structure makes it almost impenetrable.

According to Vallance et al (2019), the uneven nature of post-2010 devolution did not fully address the issue of weak and fragmented governance capabilities in Newcastle. A later review of the regional institutional structures by Robinson et al. (2017) identifies persistent democratic deficit associated with non-elected organisations that are made up of relatively small group of appointed people with overrepresentation of middle class professionals and lack of diversity within these structures. Shaw and Robinson (2018) suggest that governance in the English regions has been undermined and weakened by structural changes. These immense changes are the result of the impact of public sector expenditure cutbacks, the demise of long-term strategic planning and the uncertain role of intelligence and an evidence base to inform policy options that create a vacuum for governance.

There are already embryonic partnerships and collaborative working arrangements in the North East. These include Collaborative Newcastle Partnership and Insights North East. Collaborative Newcastle is a partnership between the NHS, local authority, higher education, and voluntary and community sectors focusing on health, wealth and wellbeing. Insight North East is a partnership between Newcastle University and Northumbria Healthcare NHS Trust, Newcastle Upon Tyne Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, North of Tyne Combined Authority and Newcastle City Centre. The partnership aims to build a shared understanding of the knowledge and data within each partner organisation to inform decision making at the regional level (Insights North East, 2023). None of these partnerships appear to be focused on the long-term governance and visioning.

The two universities are actively contributing and performing a key civic role and appear to be interested in shaping a dialogue on urban governance. An example is the Newcastle City Futures pilot project that lasted between 2014 until 2019. The project has performed a number of functions aimed at identifying

and cultivating positive future paths for the city which include long-term trends and scenario-building, providing a regular forum for discussion between local authorities, universities and other partners; and acting as a collaborative platform for 'test-bed' demonstrator projects (Tewdwr-Jones et al., 2015). As a result of the project a semi-formalised committee – the City Futures Development Group was established in 2015 with a brief to promote a long-term vision for the city and support a programme of development activities drawing on academic research capabilities of both Newcastle and Northumbria Universities (Vallance et al., 2020). The group comprised representatives from across two universities, the city council, the Local Enterprise Partnership, and business interests (Tewdwr-Jones et al., 2015). This pilot project reflected the important role of universities in achieving more innovative, holistic and participatory interventions in the future development of cities (Vallance et al., 2020). It established a transferable methodology to embed foresight methods in governance processes through collaborative effort and engaged a range of actors in shaping urban future (Tewdwr-Jones et. al., 2015).

It is important to highlight that such civic engagement activities by universities partially depend on the motivation and capacity of individual academics or teams and are not always a result of a corporate strategy. Kroll et al. (2016) highlights that time and incentives should be granted for these actors within universities, but it would be equally important that other partners including the local authority have enough resources to allocate to such partnerships. In terms of focus on the city centre there is an evident vacuum of a long term and strategic vision. The City Future Development Group developed three detailed scenario options specific to Newcastle. These scenarios are not intended to be predictions about the future but provide a prompt for discussion about the choices and decisions that would need to be made to generate ideas. A review of documents by Newcastle City Council shows a disregard of such approach with the continuation of promising only one scenario for growth.  In some cases unrealistic City Centre projects continue to be promised as one option and then are scrapped when they are challenges by other actors. An example is the proposal to block vehicles from Blackett Street due to objections from bus

operators and complications caused by the redevelopment works on Pilgrim Street (Chronicle Live, 12 October 2022).

In 2023, The City Futures Board was replaced by the Health and Wellbeing Board.  This new partnership arrangement with membership drawn from a range of organisations including Newcastle City Council, the NHS in Newcastle, Health watch Newcastle, the Voluntary and Community Sector and the two universities. This Board aims to improve the wellbeing and health of everyone in the city, with a particular focus on reducing health inequalities. In addition, another partnership has been established (Neville, 2023) that will draw on expertise from different sectors to give better access to good quality jobs and more chances to succeed regardless of a person's situation. The only reference to Newcastle Futures is an organisation that since 2007 have helped over 8000 people in the city into employment. It will become part of the council and its experience will be at the heart of the partnership. In terms of focus on the city centre there is an evident vacuum. These partnerships do not appear to be focused on the long-term governance and visioning and seem based on the expediency of short-term government initiatives. These actions introduce valid questions about the interest of the local authority in the city centre. The new Leader of the Council, Nick Kemp 'has pledged a Newcastle Council 'reset' to shift focus away from city centre' (Chronicle Live, 26 April 2022), and there is no established framework for representation for long-term governance structures in Newcastle upon Tyne (Giddings and Rogerson, 2023).

Alternatively, commerce and the private sector is represented by the Business Improvement District.  Known as NE1 and funded by city centre businesses, its objectives are to provide a stronger voice for business, creating improvements to the city centre environment and generating events.  As seen in Figure 4.23, the geographical boundary is not exactly as the city centre study area but it is substantially the same.

*Figure 4.23: Geographical boundary of NE1 and Newcastle City Centre*

It is filling some of the voids left by the demise of ONE North-East and Tyne and Wear Development Company. The BID works in partnership with the City Council, and there is a view that it is taking over some previous local authority undertakings, especially in relation to the public realm. Most of the components for local governance are therefore in place but not coherently presented. The most complex aspect remains to be resolved, i.e., how the community can be integrated into these arrangements. There is a communities team but it is embedded in the local authority.

## 4.2 Plans

### 4.2.1 Introduction

This section focuses on development plans for Newcastle and their development policies for the city centre. The aim is to identify any direct correlation between development plans covering the study area over time to establish which policies have been applied in a) a consistent way b) inconsistently applied, c) changed or adopted or d) introduced a new policy. This investigation covers the three adopted development plans since 1985 which include:

- City Centre Local Development Plan -1985 (CCLP)
- Unitary Development Plan -1998 (UDP)
- Planning for the Future – Core Strategy and Urban Core Plan for Gateshead and Newcastle upon Tyne -2015 (CSUCP)

Each of these plans have a different structure reflecting the planning practice and imaginative projections and aspirations of their time. Among these the UDP plan covers the whole city while the other two have a focused approach on the city centre and the urban core. This section starts with a review of the major objectives of each plan. Findings on strategic policies are then reframed in the four categories of environmental social, economic, and political.

**Aims, Objectives and Vision**

City Centre Local Development Plan (1985)

All three development plans have a list of major objectives. For City Centre Local Development Plan (1985), these are specific to the city centre. As seen in Table 4.17, objectives mainly cover economic and environmental concerns. Economic objectives are a reflection of strategic plans at higher level (The Tyne and Wear Structure Plan, The Newcastle and Gateshead Partnership and the City Council's own Employment Policy and Programme). They also acknowledge the decline in some part of the city centre through lack of investment and highlight the risk of dereliction and the pressures it may have on public funds. The two other objectives targeting environmental topics mainly

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focus on transport and mainly the conflicts between the transport system and the city centre uses and general enhancement of the physical environmental of the city centre.

*Table 4.17: Objectives Summary for City Centre Local Development Plan (1985)*

| City Centre Local Development Plan Objectives | |
|---|---|
| Objective 1 | The creation of favourable conditions for thriving economic activity and hence the creation of opportunities for employment whilst balancing this aim against any adverse effects it might have on other valued aspects of the centre. |
| Objective 2 | A reversal in the decline of certain parts of the centre, most notably in the south, via measures intended to stimulate investment in both existing and new activities. |
| Objective 3 | To reduce conflict between the various activities within the centre and in particular between the various modes of transport. |
| Objective 4 | The Continued improvement of the physical environment of the city centre: making it a more pleasant place in its own right. |

Unitary Development Plan (1998)

This plan follows 8 key aims which will be achieved through a number of objectives and strategic policies (see Table 4.18). These key aims mainly cover economic and environmental topics for the whole city. As a result, a number of them are not directly relevant to the city centre. Among these only two (Aim 3 and 5) covering shopping and inner area regeneration have a clear focus on the city centre.

*Table 4.18: Aims of Unitary Development Plan (1998)*

| Aims | |
|---|---|
| AIM 1: ECONOMY AND URBAN REGENERATION | to achieve economic growth |
| AIM 2: POPULATION AND HOUSING | To stabilise the City's population at the general level prevailing at the beginning of the Plan period (1st January 1988) i.e., at about 280,000, by providing sufficient land for a wide range of types and quality of housing development. |
| AIM 3: SHOPPING | To strengthen Newcastle's role in providing shopping facilities of both regional and local significance. |
| AIM 4: RECREATION, LEISURE, AND TOURISM | To enhance Newcastle's role in providing for local recreational needs; and add to the cultural, entertainment and recreational facilities which cater for the city, the Region and visiting tourists. |
| AIM 5: INNER AREA REGENERATION | To improve social, economic, and environmental conditions in the inner and other deprived urban areas. |
| AIM 6: SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT | To work towards the long-term goal of sustainability, by progressively reducing both the need for energy and other natural resources, and the environmental impact caused by their use; without compromising the City's economic vitality. |
| AIM 7: ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY | To make Newcastle a more attractive city within which the urban fabric is well maintained and progressively regenerated and to enhance and protect its natural environment. To seek to prevent or limit harm to the environment from potentially polluting new development and seek to reduce the impact of existing polluting development on air, water and land resources. |
| AIM 8: TRANSPORT | To meet the transport needs of the community through the integration of transport modes which improve road safety, alleviate congestion, reduce energy consumption increase efficiency and protect and improve the environment. |

Core Strategy and Urban Core Plan for Gateshead and Newcastle upon Tyne (2015)

This is the first plan that provides a clear vision for the whole city and Gateshead and defines a Spatial Strategy for each character area including the Urban Core. In this vision, the Urban Core is seen as the economic hub of the North-East, fulfilling its role as the leading retail, entertainment, employment and learning centre for Tyne and Wear. It will be a place where businesses choose to locate, with a wide array of investment opportunities and an emphasis on ensuring that everyone shares in the benefits of economic growth. To sustain growth and fundamental to achieving economic prosperity, there will be an appropriate range, mix and quality of employment sites and housing opportunities. The urban core will be a place of choice for doing business, entertainment and living. This vision is followed by 12 strategic objectives that will be delivered by a number of policies (see Table 4.19).

Table 4.19: Strategic Objectives for the Core Strategy and Urban Core Plan for Gateshead and Newcastle upon Tyne

| Strategic Objectives | |
|---|---|
| SO1 | Encourage population growth in order to underpin sustainable economic growth. |
| SO2 | To increase our economic performance, resilience, levels of entrepreneurship, skills, and business formation by promoting Gateshead and Newcastle as the strong regional economic focus and by ensuring the supply of suitable, flexible and diverse business accommodation. |
| SO3 | To increase our competitiveness by improving and expanding the role of the Urban Core as the regional destination for business, shopping, education, leisure, tourism and as a place to live. |
| SO4 | To strengthen Newcastle's position as the regional retail centre. To ensure the provision of quality District and Local centres with a diverse range of shops and services that are accessible to meet the needs of all local communities. |
| SO5 | Expand leisure, culture and tourism providing for all age groups and diversifying the evening economy. |
| SO6 | Ensure that our residential offer provides a choice of quality accommodation in sustainable locations to meet people's current |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | and future needs and aspirations; improving opportunities to live in the Urban Core; and providing a broader range of accommodation including in new neighbourhoods. | |
| SO7 | Manage and develop our transport system to support growth and provide sustainable access for all to housing, jobs, services, and shops. | |
| SO8 | Improve sustainable access to, within and around the Urban Core by promoting fast and direct public transport links to the heart of the Urban Core, increasing walking and cycling and minimising through traffic. | |
| SO9 | Ensure the development and use of land protects, sustains and enhances the quality of the natural, built and historic environment, making the Urban Core a high-quality exemplar for Gateshead and Newcastle, and ensuring our communities are attractive, safe and sustainable | |
| SO10 | Provide the opportunity for a high quality of life for everyone and enhance the wellbeing of people to reduce all inequalities. | |
| SO11 | To reduce CO2 emission from development and future growth while adapting to the issues, mitigating adverse impacts, and taking advantage of the opportunities presented by climate change. | |
| SO12 | Improve the function, usability and provision of our green infrastructure and public spaces by providing a network of green spaces and features which are connected and accessible for all. | |

The majority of objectives in all three plans taken on a dominant position on enhancement of physical condition and economic growth. Policies targeting social aspects see to be increasing after the DUP in 1998.

### 4.2.2 Environmental

The Historic Environment

The overall topic of conservation of historic environment has been well represented through the three plans. They all value the built heritage and special character of the city centre and consistently use policies to cover considerations for development in conservation areas, alterations, and extensions to listed buildings and protection of archaeological sites and their settings. A flexible approach to conservation has been promoted in all plans to

have the built heritage assets brought back into use and have them preserved, protected, and restored. A new policy in Unitary Development Plan (1998) is the one that does not allow development in a group or area of large traditional dwellings from 19 and early 20 centuries with distinct architectural character where it would result in a loss of limited stock of these dwellings. The policy recognised the fact that the stock has already been eroded by redevelopment and conversion to flat or other residential uses and changes of use and as a result seeks to retain them. The Core Strategy and Urban Core Plan (2015) introduces opportunities for the contemporary interpretations of heritage assets including Hadrian's Wall (a World Heritage Site) and associated features.


Design

All three plans promote high standards of design and consistently cover design policies. They all promote high quality design which might be hard to meaningfully apply because good design is vague and difficult to define. The City Centre Local Development Plan (1985) identifies building design, scale and materials as important elements that contribute to the overall quality of the built environment. According to this plan, the character of the city is complex and is subject to change. This plan also recognises the pressures of change and development during the 1960's and 70's and identifies the mediocrity of these modern developments (mainly new office buildings) as the main source of public criticism. The plan refers to the outcome of the public participation exercises showing that the character of the city centre is highly valued and two major concerns raised by residents which are the extensive damage of modern development and the need for retention and restoration of older buildings and areas. To address the topic of rapid rate of change, the plan states that the Local Authority has some influence but no direct control on development. It clarifies that the City Council could control the quality of development proposals through Development Control and preparation of development briefs. The plan also argues that Development Control powers would not necessarily produce good design and only has the capacity to prevent what is considered as mediocre design.

UDP follows the same design principles to highlight the importance of the quality of Newcastle's built environment and its identity but also expand policies to highlight other design elements such as taking advantage of landform, landscape and other site features and calls for adaptability in design and incorporation of hard and soft landscaping and tree plantation as an integral part of design. New Housing design is covered in a policy which requires particular attention to the overall character of the area, good standard of outlook, natural light and privacy, safe, convenient access for people of different age and those with disabilities and inclusion of measures for traffic calming and cycling and measures for designing our crime and measures of energy efficiency. The plan also highlights that the Council does not wish to prescribe any architectural style, however it welcomes development which is visually stimulating and one that respects human scale. It also emphasises on the importance of river and riverside and enhancement of viewpoints especially from main transport routes. The plan also gives consideration to the provision of new works of art within development proposals.

Core Strategy and Urban Core Plan (2015) follows the principles of previous plans and introduces policies that aim to: maintain local distinctiveness, increase the range of activities and uses, improve the design of the built form and public realm, protect and enhance the historic and natural environment and improve the quality of public spaces and routes. All proposed policies reiterate the general points raised in previous plans and provide further detail for each topic. In terms of urban design, there seems to be more emphasis on co-ordinated approach that reinforces and creates linkages to surroundings and providing strong urban frontage and appropriate urban grain reinforcing continuity and enclosure at a walkable urban block scale and ensuring active frontages long primary and secondary pedestrian routes. In terms of materials, their sustainability and durability have been highlighted. Proposed policies on public realm recognises opportunities for temporary spaces and events and provision of flexible and adaptable spaces to a range of uses. Public art has also been identified as a tool for enhancing the character and local distinctiveness for key sites and Development Opportunity sites.

In terms of respecting and managing views within, from and into the urban core, the Core Strategy and Urban Core Plan (2015) has a different approach. Instead of focusing on viewpoints, movement corridors and routeways and also distinctive landmark buildings and structures have been identified (see Figure 4.24). According to proposed policies, there will be a presumption against development proposals that would cause significant harm to important public views. The plan also provides a policy on Gateway and arrival points in and around gateways and improve the pedestrian and cycling environment and experience in and around arrival points.



*Figure 4.24: Distinctive Landmark buildings and structures*

Open space

The topic of open space is mainly covered in the Unitary Development Plan (1998) and the Core Strategy and Urban Core Plan (2015). This new policy in UDP seeks to prevent the loss of open space to development, maintain and improve existing open space and create new open space where opportunities occur in association with new development. the Core Strategy and Urban Core Plan (2015) proposes similar policies to Unitary Development Plan (1998), seeking a network of public open spaces and routes that will be enhanced by development improving the existing public spaces and adaptable to a range of uses.

Movement and Transport

All plans give significant attention to the topic of movement and set out principles for transport policies. For City Centre Local Development Plan (1985) the main movement principle is to have one form of movement given priority over others in certain areas. For central area, road space is given over to pedestrian priority and bus priority. The number of cyclists are considered to be low, however, general reduction in traffic will benefit cyclists. The plan encourages development of public transport and identifies the metro system as an asset that is benefitting the city centre at its focal point. According to the plan about 80% of shopping turn over in Newcastle City Centre comes from people brought to the area by public transport. Heavy traffic at peak hours is a concern which seems to be due to insufficient junction capacity rather than a shortage of road space. The plan includes a number of transport policies which are more transport interventions. These include:

- A ring route will distribute traffic around the city centre will access to the different central area designed to prevent through movement.
- The ring route between Claremont road and Gallowgate will be improved.
- A new junction will be provided at Westgate Road to enable Blenheim street to operate as a 2-way road with Blemheim Street itself widened to provide 2 lanes in each direction.
- Between Westgate Road and Gallowgate a new road will be built to replace Rutherford Street and The North Section of Corporation Street.
- Buses will be removed from Lower Northumberland Street.
- The environment of Pilgrim Street will be improved.
- The area around Grey Monument, including the sections of Grey Street north of Hood Street and Grainger Street North of Nelson Street, will be pedestrianised, buses and access traffic will continue to use Blackett Street.
- Opportunities will be taken as appropriate to secure the incorporation of walkways and to link one development to another by bridges crossing the main road network.

In this plan, parking has been considered as an important aspect in the total transport system. The plan recognised that some business locations suffer from a shortage of operational parking space. To address this issue the Council, seek control of the use of parking spaces in the central area. This control might be achieved by various means including ownership or lease of a site, imposing conditions in a lease given to a private organisation, by conditions attached to a planning permission and through licensing.

This plan confirms that unlike other policies of the plan, the implementation of transport policies is almost exclusively a matter for the public authorities. It also covers the issue of limited availability of finance for future transport schemes.

The Unitary Development Plan (1998) follows the same approach on traffic in the city centre and aims to restrain it to give priority to pedestrians, cyclists, public transport, emergency and service vehicles and those cars essential to its function and viability and to enhance environmental quality. Parking provision will be managed to protect environmental quality and the viability of commercial areas. Some other general aspects include improvement of highway networks and transport infrastructure.

In the Core Strategy and Urban Core Plan (1998), there is more emphasis on promotion of sustainable modes of travel, especially enhancement of cycling infrastructure. The plan provides detailed policies including completion of North Cycleway, improving links to the Newcastle Strategic Network, improvement of cycle routes and cycling priority inside the Urban Core Distributor Route and Development at Science Central, East Pilgrim Street, Forth Yards and the Quays connecting to the Surrounding Cycle Network. The plan has a new policy on freight and servicing that aims to promote sustainable freight movement and minimise the impact on the environment and quality of place.

The transport policies in the Core Strategy and Urban Core Plan (2015) mainly support sustainable development and economic growth. Main policies aim to promote sustainable travel choices, improve the operation of the transport networks and its wider connections and ensuring development has the following characteristics:

- Which generates significant movement is located where the use of sustainable transport modes can be maximised,
- Minimises car trips, promotes and enhances public transport and for major development provides sustainable travel plans,
- Connects safely to and mitigates the effects of development on the existing transport networks,
- Includes charging infrastructure for electric vehicles within major developments,
- Incorporates 20 miles per hour zones and homezone principles, where appropriate,
- Provides cycle parking and supporting infrastructure, and
- Provide for direct, safe, secure and continuous pedestrian and cycling links

Sustainable Development

The topic of sustainable development as an independent strategy, appears in the Unitary Development Plan (1998) for the first time. This Plan states that the City Council will work towards environmentally sustainable development to meet the economic and social needs of the city. A number of policies in this plan aim to have sustainable contributions. The plan identifies reusing vacant and underused urban land to be an important part in achieving sustainable development. Other interventions including recycling building fabric, conservation of historic environment, diversity of land use and potential for reduction in journeys for work, leisure and shopping are among those that have been included in policies to address the sustainability criteria. According to the plan, the city's natural assets and built heritage will be protected, managed and promoted to increase their value and their contribution to achieving sustainable development.

Sustainable development and growth gain more attention in the Core Strategy and Urban Core Plan (2015) and becomes part of the vision and strategy. This is a reflection of the fundamental reassessment of the overall direction of the

English planning system and NPPF which can be seen in the plan through specific requirement for development.

Green Infrastructure

The topic of green infrastructure has only been covered in the last two plans and seems to have gained more attention over time. The Unitary Development Plan (1998) seeks to enhance the quality of City's landscape by protecting areas of great value and tree retentions. The plan does not cover the topic of green infrastructure in the city centre and tends to be focused more on green spaces that are under pressure for development.

Green spaces are covered significantly in the Core Strategy and Urban Core Plan (2015). According to this plan, many green spaces in the area are currently isolated and poorly linked to the wider network of spaces and access to recreational open spaces is a problem in some areas.

Environmental Health Issues

The environmental health issues were first introduced in detail in the Core Strategy and Urban Core Plan (2015). This was mainly in connection with the environmental impacts of development including noise, vibration and emissions into air, land, or water. The majority of these policies on contaminated land, noise and vibration, railway and metro noise have been saved in the Core Strategy and Urban Core Plan (2015).

**4.2.3 Social**

Insiders

All three plans encourage city centre living. According to the City Centre Local Plan (1985), the number of people living in the city centre has been in decline to the point where the contribution to the overall Newcastle City population is minimal. In 1981, the census recorded 2,200 city centre residents - about half of

this total being in hospital or hall of residence. The plan acknowledges that the delivery of recent development projects has reversed the decline in this population. The plan encourages the provision of additional housing accommodation both by new construction and by the conversion of existing properties.

Except for the Leazes area, which has the potential for family housing, most new accommodation will likely be partially one and two-person households with young mobile households as their target group. Many of whom will move out of the centre to bring up children. The plan also identifies the elderly population as a potential group who could find the concentration of amenities and access to transport very convenient. The plan shows confidence in the future of city centre housing and sets out delivery of at least 500 units to the total stock of housing.

The following Unitary Development Plan (1998) refers to the overall decline of population in Newcastle and targets the city centre as one of the key areas for achieving the strategic policies of providing number, range, and choice of dwellings to make a substantial contribution towards the aim of population stabilisation. It also welcomes schemes for the use of upper floors above shops or offices in the city centre.

This is the first plan that acknowledges the significant expansion of student numbers and covers the topic of student accommodation. It encourages further student housing provision and outlines several criteria for this type of housing including proximity to the campus and city centre area has been identified as a key site for such development. Conversion or redevelopment of non-residential premises (particularly conversion of upper floors) and conversion and/or adaptation of local authority housing stock are also seen as options. According to the plan the City Council will assist in identifying suitable sites and bringing forward development proposals including conversion schemes for student housing purposes. The plan does acknowledge the problems of a highly transient population due to a concentration of short term tenanted private properties and encourages less intrusive forms of student accommodation. The plan considers proposals for purpose-built accommodation on vacant sites within or near existing residential areas where appropriate.

Apart from the topic of housing, the plan refers to some social indicators that will be established and monitored including trends in health, crime statistics and progress in achieving equal opportunities. The city council also commits to publish an annual report on the progress in implementing the Development Plan using these indicators.

The latest Urban Core Plan (2015) is more detailed when it comes to the topic of housing for insiders. According to the plan the urban core is already home to approximately 23,000 people and has the potential to grow by providing a range of housing choices to meet market demands. Insiders have been identified to play an important role in ensuring activity and vibrancy in the centre and in stimulating and supporting the evening and weekend economies. City centre living benefits from proximity to leisure, shopping, and employment opportunities. The plan identifies the Urban Core as a key area for growth and aims to provide approximately 3,750 new homes by 2030 to attract and retain economically active residents.

The plan provides a range of homes in a variety of forms including apartments above shops in Grainger Town, and in converted buildings, together with student housing and social housing. Social housing will be delivered outside the city centre boundary. It also aims to provide a range of social infrastructure to meet the needs of the new insider community, including local services and facilities, education provision and access to adequate local health provision.

The wellbeing and health of insiders have been covered concerning their quality of life. The plan identifies the ability of the development and spatial planning to positively influence determinants of wellbeing and health.

Delivery of new homes is expected to happen as part of mixed-use developments in key sites (Figure 4.25) to meet the housing needs. The re-use of properties for housing throughout the urban core including upper floors in historic buildings will be promoted to bring empty floorspace back into use. Grainger Town has been given as a good example where both social and private housing have been delivered.
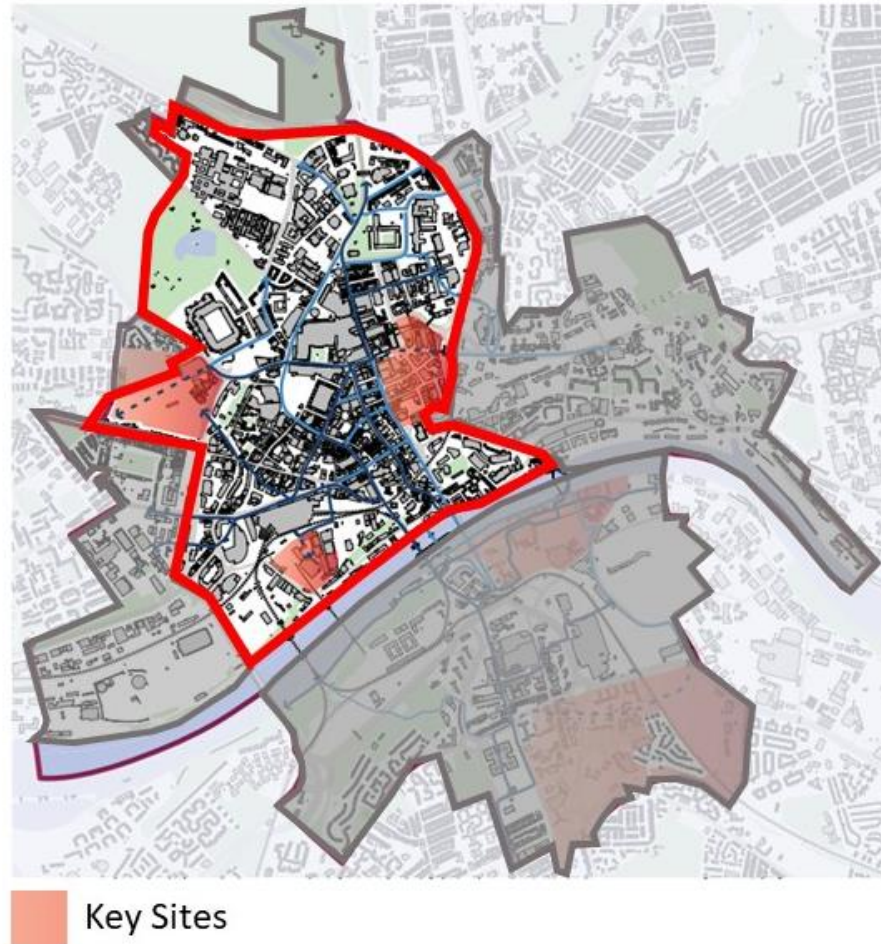
Key Sites

*Figure 4.25: Key Sites in the city centre (Newcastle City Council, 2015)*

This plan supports delivery of purpose-built student housing however it is expected that such developments should not result in loss of family homes through sub-division, change of use or redevelopment and over concentration of shared accommodation should be prevented. The plan acknowledges that a slower rate of growth in the student numbers is envisaged and confirms that it is difficult to have an accurate prediction of growth and how this may translate into demand for student housing. However, it expects a further 2,000 bedrooms to be constructed in the short term.

Newcastle City Council drafted a Supplementary Planning Document on Maintaining Sustainable Communities to improve the range of housing choice in neighbourhood close to the city centre by releasing spacious and good quality housing with good connectivity to the city centre back to family occupation.

They also introduced an Article 4 direction covering high density student neighbourhoods (Sandyford, Jesmond, Heaton, South Gosforth and Spittal Tongues) which means that planning permission is required for change of use from dwelling house to HMOs regulating alterations landlords can make to their properties concerning student letting. By restricting HMOs in these areas, the local authority highlights its position in the promotion of Purpose-built student accommodation within the city centre.

Regulars

All three plans identify the centre as a regular destination for employment, retail, and leisure and recreational facilities. The City Centre Local Plan (1985) is limited in covering this social group and their needs. The main consideration appears to be the transport needs for regulars who come from Newcastle and Gateshead and the provision of adequate parking space for them. The plan does not put a limit on office floor space in the city centre and encourages an increase in office spaces to create as many new jobs as possible for the city (see Figure 4.26). Delivery of a mixture of uses including eating and shopping facilities for office workers is envisaged. Retail, leisure and recreational facilities are also seen as attractions for regulars.
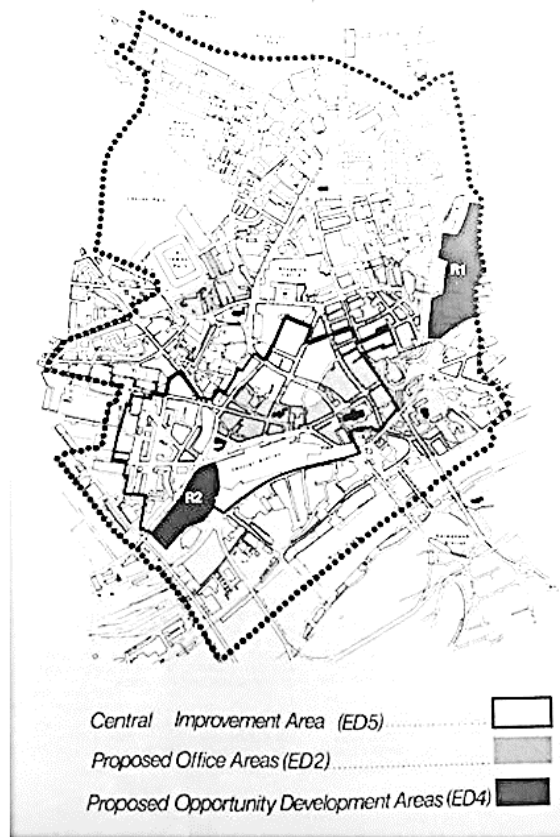
*Figure 4.26: Office Development Policies (Newcastle City Council, 1985)*

The Unitary Development Plan (1998) follows the same approach in identifying the centre as the prime office location in the North-East, with a wide range of financial, professional and administrative services. The plan proposed substantially more employment in the city centre and its fringes. Business and employment are expected to continue to grow over the plan period attracting more regulars. The plan emphasises the role of education facilities in the city centre and promotes further development as part of the University of Newcastle and Northumbria University in their City Centre campuses. Further development of the Royal Victoria Infirmary is expected with new medical facilities and multi-storey car parking space to be developed. Significant consideration has been given to improving transport infrastructure for this social group.

The importance of the city centre as the employment capital (where 75% of office requirements are located) is reflected in the Urban Core Plan (2015) as well. The plans cover the high vacancy rate in office stock mainly in the 1960s and 70s office block and expect further delivery of office space including flexible office space. This will be in form of at least 380,000 square metres of new office space. The education, business, shopping, and leisure facilities are seen as important assets in attracting a large number of regulars to the city centre. Further development in form of clusters of knowledge-based industries, universities, colleges, and hospitals are promoted. The Urban Core is seen as the focus for the majority of office development.

Visitors

The City Centre Local Pan (1985) identifies visitors as an important social group who may visit the centre for shopping, leisure, and recreational facilities. Visitors are attracted to the Urban Core from the region, UK and beyond to see the diverse range of attractions including modern museums, theatres, historic areas, music and nightlife venues and sporting facilities. The plan briefly covers the relationship between visitors and residents and consider the presence of visitors to be beneficial to residents by supporting a wide range of amenities and services such as sports and recreational facilities, restaurants, cinemas, and theatres. The plan does not deal in detail with the development of tourism; however, it provides land-use proposals to manage development policies. The plan aims to increase the range and quality of facilities for recreation and leisure within the city centre and in particular those facilities likely to be of primary interest to visitors within the region.

The Unitary Development Plan (1998) also encourages visitors and aims to increase their visits by marketing and the provision of new accommodation and new facilities. This plan is more detailed in terms of visitor policies. Major events, a variety of heritage and cultural attractions, Quayside and conference facilities and retail, cultural and leisure facilities, good quality hotels are seen as the strength of the centre in attracting visitors. However certain characteristics

including relatively small day trip catchment compared with other major cities, lack of large conference facility, lack of a major museum, shortfall in self-catering accommodation and selected bands of serviced accommodation and the insufficient critical mass of attractions are considered to be weaknesses.

The plan aims to tackle some of the weaknesses through policies including creating interest by making historic streets and shopping areas more pleasant and regeneration of areas of interest to visitors such as Theatre Village, Blackfriars and the Quayside. This is the first plan that covers the concerns because of the increase in visitors' population however these concerns are more focused on environmental aspects and not social perspectives. The plan supports the delivery of visitor accommodation and promotes hosting major events, conference facilities and encourages the provision of new accommodation to meet identified deficiencies including innovations such as dual-use of student accommodation.

The Urban Core Plan (2015), gives significant consideration to the visitors and city centre as leisure, cultural and tourist destinations all year round. According to the plan, The Newcastle Gateshead Initiative (NGI) is the joint leisure, culture and tourism marking company that has raised the national and international profile of Newcastle and city centre attractions. The plan provides a detailed list of visitor attractions in the city centre covering retail, leisure and recreational facilities but also identifies business tourism as another reason for visitors coming to the city centre. The plan highlights the growing interest in a short break destination supported by an expansion in hotel provision and emphasises significant events such as the Great North Run.

The plan aims to ensure a balance between having local facilities to meet community needs and visitor's demands. According to the plan, there is a need to broaden the existing evening economy, increasing the range of facilities so that it is more socially inclusive, making communities feel safe and welcoming.

Development plan policies aim to enhance and diversify visitor attractions by extending the offer across the daytime and night-time to a broader range of visitors through business visitors uses and conference facilities, family-friendly visitor attractions and provision of a range of hotels, supporting proposals to

improve the appearance, use and accessibility of attractions including creating a riverside leisure route.

Strangers

This social group has not been given any consideration in any of the three development plans. The topic of social inclusion has been covered to some extent in the last two plans - Unitary Development Plan (1998) and Urban Core Plan (2015). However, this has been very limited and has been mainly in the context of transport infrastructure. The latest Urban Core Plan (2015) has policies to ensure that social inclusion has been considered in the design and delivery of buildings and spaces however, this seems to be more focused on age and accessibility needs. This approach is also reflected in Supplementary Planning Documents in that none of them covers strangers.

**4.2.4 Economic**

**Introduction**

All three plans reviewed highlight the significant role of the city centre in strengthening Newcastle's economy and the wider Northern Region. They are consistent in focusing on economic development as the main priority targeted through the creation of employment opportunities. Each plan provides a different focus for how this can be achieved. This section investigates proposed economic strategies based on the key themes of, income and expenditure, goods and services, supply and demand and the role of economic actors.

**Income and Expenditure**

None of the plans provides a clear understanding of the relationship between income and expenditure. The 1985 plan refers to local authority led investments such as Inner-City Partnership Funding and Urban Development Grants funded by the Central Government. The plan identifies the economic benefits of conferences and exhibitions as new sources of income.

The 1998 plan refers to the challenges of attracting investment for refurbishment and conversion of vacant properties. It suggests economically beneficial refurbishment of buildings or building groups by selective redevelopment by complementary infill buildings. This does not necessarily suggest de-listing or downgrading the historic assets but encourages the development of unused land within existing development patterns. There is an assertion that additional office space will increase employment.

The 2015 plan aims to expand the role of the city centre as a focus for businesses, leisure, and tourism, and as a regional retail centre. The plan refers to a decline in local authority budget and the emergence of new income sources such as funding available through City Deal that is expected to stimulate the development of key sites through the delivery of office and business development. According to this deal introduced by the central government, the local authority will be able to fund upfront infrastructure needs based on the projected increase in business rates in the defined zone which can be retained

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for 25 years. The plan also aims to allocate resources to support entrepreneurship and business start-ups by promoting the provision of managed workspace and small office units including business incubators and move-on accommodation across the city centre. In comparison with the previous plans, more clarity is provided about investment opportunities for an appropriate range, mix and quality of employment sites as well as housing opportunities. Science central is seen as the key site for the expansion of the knowledge economy which could be the recognition of the decline in office demand. Another common recurrence evident in these plans is the constant changes in central government funding available for local authorities.

**Goods and Services**

All three plans cover the topic of retail. In terms of goods, according to the Unitary Development Plan (1985) , the city centre shopping accounts for 50% of household goods sales turnover within the County. Indications are that the centre as a whole has benefitted from additional shopping facilities and turn over has increased. Eldon Square shopping centre and Northumberland Street are considered to be economically attractive to retailers. The plan encourages the expansion of existing shopping facilities. It is estimated that the shopping proposals in the Local Plan could lead to an increase in net city centre retail floor space up to 5,600 sq.m which would be an increase of 2.5%.

The 1998 plan continues supporting the core shopping area and maintaining its position as the principal shopping location in the Northern Region by encouraging new development, redevelopment, and refurbishment.

Major retail investment in the Core Strategy and Urban Core Plan (2015) plan is to strengthen the role of Newcastle as the regional retail core (there are approximately 37m visits to Eldon Square shopping centre annually which is 75% more than Metrocentre which is the second-largest shopping centre in the UK). The city centre has consistently been identified as the most sustainable location for retail growth and is the sequentially preferable area for major retail development.

None of the plans covers the provision of services and the impact of the fourth Industrial Revolution in reducing demand for certain services. All three plans identify vacant properties as a potential issue but do not provide any explanation for their long-term vacancy or the widespread closure of certain service providers such as banks and building society buildings.

## Supply and Demand

The focus of all three plans appears to be on encouraging new office space and housing including student accommodation. According to the City Centre Local Development plan (1985), there is a shortage of small modern office sites and a trend in organisations moving to new offices from older accommodation within the city centre. Parts of the office area are stagnating particularly at the Quayside due to problems of vacancy and lack of investment. The plan does not consider it appropriate to impose a limit on which office floor space can increase, to encourage as many new jobs as possible. The proposal tends to encourage building new offices and there is no clear strategy for older offices which means there is a risk of a perpetual situation of building new and leaving the old behind. There are considerable uncertainties surrounding the extent to which demand for office space will increase which means the new office buildings may not necessarily be occupied. The impact of new technology on office jobs is unclear, public sector office employment may grow or decline depending on Government Policy.

The plan also refers to a lack of investment for poorer office spaces and properties in less favoured locations. They are particularly in the southern part of the city centre where there is a concentration of vacant, underused and relatively rundown properties. The high concentration of vacant and underused upper floors is leading to neglect and eventually decay in building fabric. To address these deficiencies, an improvement Area Approach is proposed.

The Unitary Development Plan (1998) plan encourages more city centre offices and aims to include a range of sites and continued refurbishment in the historic core.

The Core Strategy and Urban Core Plan (2015) aims to achieve significant change by 2030, science and research-led development at Science Central (Helix) appear to be the highlight of the plan with a mix of uses including residential and higher education. It is anticipated that approximately 75% of city-wide office needs will be met within the city centre. East Pilgrim Street, Science Central and Stephenson Quarter are identified as the main focus for offices and business development. East Pilgrim Street will continue to have a retail focus. For Stephenson Quarter, high-density Grade A city centre office accommodation and more hotel development is proposed.

The plan includes large opportunity sites for mixed-use development (mainly residential and office use) and targets at least 380,000 sq.m of office space. These large-scale development projects will take time to complete, and their completion may extend beyond the plan period. Further support of entrepreneurship and business start-up is promoted. However, the scale of provision of city centre managed workspace and small office units offered to SMEs is not clear.

In terms of demand for residential property, the plans are consistent in supporting city centre living. In the 1985 plan, except for Leazes area which has the potential for family housing, the plan targets new houses for one and two-person households. The plan encourages refurbishment of existing housing stock including upper floor properties over retail premises and aims for the provision of a limited amount of housing accommodation in the Quayside. The plan does not provide much emphasis on student accommodation.

According to the 1998 plan, the student population is expected to grow considerably, generating new demands. The plan refers to the large-scale expansion in student numbers following national policy and encourages further growth. The plan aims to address this demand by conversion of upper floors combined with purpose-built student accommodations recognising potential problems that could occur when there is a concentration of short-term tenanted private properties. The plan states that the policy is to encourage less intrusive forms of student accommodation on vacant sites within or near existing residential areas.

The Core Strategy and Urban Core Plan (2015), offers a range of different housing types from historic townhouses to terraced housing, flats above shops and riverside apartments and purpose-built student accommodations. However, when it comes to attracting families, the plan appears to be too ambitious as city centre living is less attractive to families mainly due to property size. The plan aims for at least 2,000 units of purpose-built student accommodation for the student population that is still expected to grow (albeit at a slower rate).

Another consistent approach is the expansion in hotel provision to support the visitor economy. The 2015 plan particularly promotes hotels to increase the choice and range of provision.

**The role of economic actors**

Insiders

Retaining economically active residents appear to be a common ambition among all three plans. The 1985 plan follows a long-established trend of decline in the city centre population. However, the plan states that several city centre projects have started to reverse this pattern.

Policies on student housing in the 1998 plan, aim to deliver projects close to the campus through conversion or redevelopment of non-residential premises and suitable conversion and/or adaptation of local authority housing stock.

The 2015 plan identifies that students are vital to the local economy and vibrancy of the centre but does not provide an estimate of their contribution. The support of purpose-built student accommodation is continued. The plan also identifies the city centre as a key area for growth and provision of new homes. Conversion of upper floors in historic areas will be promoted to bring empty floorspace back into use for students and young professionals. It is also envisaged that the city centre population can stimulate and support the evening and weekend economies. Apart from the conversion of existing buildings, the provision of housing in form of housing blocks as part of new mixed-use development (i.e., Science Central) is proposed.

Regulars

All three plans are similar in their approach to recognising the economic
contribution of regulars and aim to ensure employment opportunities are easily
accessible for them by public transport. The 1985 plan refers to the
disappearance of the majority of large, industrial employers such as Scottish
and Newcastle Breweries (The largest single manufacturing employer in the city
centre), and many smaller firms, particularly in printing, clothing and
engineering industries. The plan encourages the provision of eating and
shopping facilities and a mixture of these for regulars to enliven the commercial
environment. The following plan (1998) identifies the two universities as two
well-established bodies that will continue to develop over the plan period as a
major economic contributor. New facilities will be required to attract and
accommodate increasing numbers of students. Continuing development of
these institutions may require expansion beyond their current boundaries. The
development of the Royal Victoria Infirmary will continue over the plan period.
New large space development including medical facilities and multi-storey car
parking space will be delivered within the existing precinct. The economic
significance of the two universities and Royal Victoria Infirmary and their growth
is also covered in the 2015 plan. The benefits are the transfer of knowledge and
skills between education, research and industry are identified to be particularly
important and will continue to be promoted. Attracting private investment to
complement these sectors will be key to grow the knowledge economy. The
Science Central site provides a large site for expansion of the knowledge
economy close to Newcastle University. In terms of transport options for
regulars, the metro system is seen as a great asset.


Visitors

All three plans acknowledge the significant contribution of the visitor economy
and aspire to attract more visitors and increase the range and quality of facilities
in primary tourist attractions. While major visitor economy assets including the
wide range of leisure and recreational facilities are identified to be in the city
centre, none of the plans provides a clear estimate of this value. The main

contribution is considered to be through the hospitality sector acting as an important source of employment and a generator of wealth. The 1985 plan highlights the Blackfriars restoration project as a centrepiece for an area of tourist interest that will incorporate housing development, encouraging business, and securing the development of buildings and their environment. Further tourist and leisure uses are introduced for Quayside and Sandhill area which are mainly an expansion of bars and clubs.

The 1998 plan follows a period of growth above the national average in the tourism industry with an estimate of £80 million per annum. Again, the main contribution is seen through job creation. Hospitality jobs are portrayed to be highly valued in terms of economic impact as they provide opportunities at all skill levels and have a good record of offering early advancement for young people based on proven ability rather than qualification. They are also seen as an alternative to replace jobs lost in the traditional sector, however, no information is provided on other aspects of employment in hospitality including employee turnover rate, work condition and job satisfaction. The plan also highlights the success of major events such as the Great North Run and identifies the lack of a major museum, lack of a large conference facility and shortfall and deficiencies in self-catering and serviced accommodations as weaknesses that need to be addressed.

Promoting development will be achieved by encouraging major events, retaining, and enhancing existing attractions, supporting the creation of a wider range of new attractions including a conference centre, a tourist information and an interpretation centre and encouraging the provision of new accommodation to meet demand including the dual use of student accommodation as visitor accommodation when students are on vacation.

According to the 2015 plan, Centre for Life, The Great Northern Museum and St James Park have played a vital role in increasing the attractiveness of the centre. It also identified the popularity of events at the riverside which brings in thousands of visitors. The plan aims to extend the functions across day-time and night-time to a broader range of visitor uses. It makes a brief reference to the possibility of detrimental impact on surrounding areas by further

diversification of entertainment and leisure uses, yet it does not clarify what these impacts could be. Further expansion will be focused on Quayside to promote family-friendly uses and diversify facilities and promote the use of River which seems rather contradictory to the current image of Quayside and the plan for additional bars and clubs. It also recognises the importance of further development around Central Station to enhance the tourism and visitor experience through improving access and public realm improvements.

Strangers

None of the three plans provides a clear understanding of the implications of strangers on the city centre economy. The 1985 plan briefly covers the topic of the high unemployment rate in the city centre and refers to a substantial enforced leisure time imposed on those with no employment. This creates the perception of strangers inhibiting the city centre economy by making the place less attractive. The 1998 plan introduces the test for equal opportunities for development plan proposals to ensure they provide benefits for everyone including disadvantaged groups and aims to monitor the progress. The plan does not provide any detail on what this test covers, however the emphasis concerns development of the economy through the provision of new employment. The plan also commits to addressing the needs of ethnic minorities but does not provide any explanation of what these could be. The 2015 plan also aims to offer equality of opportunity and good service for all and the plan itself has been informed by recommendations of an Equality and Diversity Impact Assessment which follows the requirement of the public sector equality duty according to the Equality Act (2010). In all three plans, strangers are portrayed to be beneficiaries of Development Plans and a potential drain on public sector finances, without any consideration given to their economic contribution which is seen as insignificant in comparison with other social groups.

**4.2.5 Political**

**Introduction**

Local Development Plans are built into the political structure and involve political decisions at various local, regional, and national levels. While detailed policies included in the plans are the results of several political processes, the plans do not provide a clear understanding of the political context. This section investigates the political decisions included in these plans and provides a summary of actors who are engaged in the process of preparation and implementation of the plan and monitoring its development policies.

**Local**

Newcastle City Council, as the local authority had a statutory duty to carry out a public consultation with local actors before the formal adoption of all plans in 1985, 1998 and 2015. The 1985 Plan is unique in that it provides a summary of representations included in the formal plan document. It does claim that considerably more than the minimum requirements of public engagement activities have been carried out. The following two plans (1998 and 2015) also emphasise the importance of public engagement activities with communities, businesses and stakeholders and state that both plans have been informed by public responses. The 2015 Plan states that the adopted plan is significantly different from the initial draft consultation version. This appears to be due to significant changes in the national and regional policy (i.e., The Localism Act in 2011, National Planning Policy Framework) and not necessarily only due to public consultation responses. All three plans provide key milestones in preparation for the plan. Figure 4.27 provides a summary of these timelines for all three plans. As seen in this Figure, the preparation of the plan is a relatively long process with significant gaps between commencement of the plan

preparation, public consultation, and adoption.
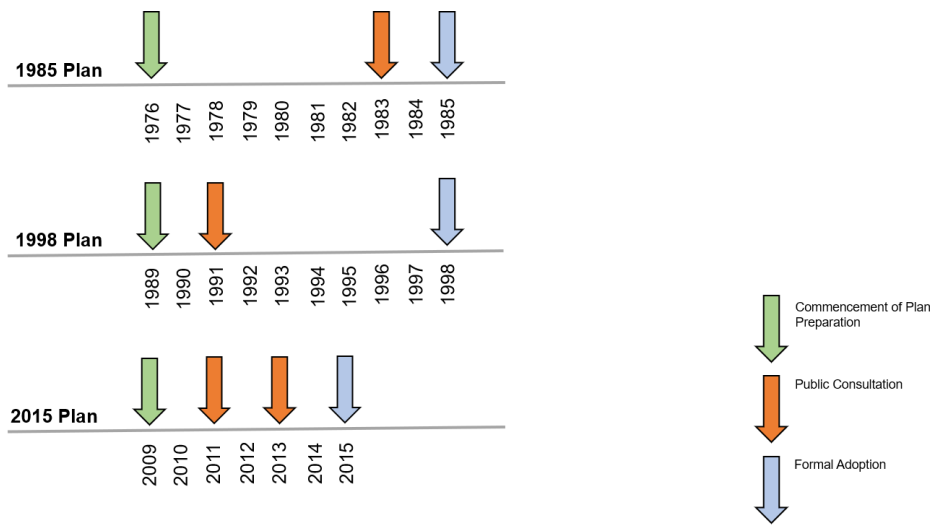


*Figure 4.27: Timeline of Local Development Plan Preparation*

The 1985 plan acknowledges the challenges of the local authority in maintaining a balance between conflicting goals. According to this plan, the local authority has a responsibility for many aspects of the City Centre's appearance, exercised through its power of development control and by preparation of planning briefs for development. It also has a responsibility to maintain employment and secure the City's survival as a major commercial centre. This appears to be pressure in terms of decision making and choices between maintaining certain city centre characteristics and promoting economic growth. The plan does refer to loans and grants offered by the public sector to industry and commerce and gives examples of local authority investment in city centre projects (i.e., Quayside) but also refers to economic circumstances and uncertainties facing local authorities.

The 1998 plan highlights the considerable changes to the role of local authorities over time. According to this plan, in the 1960s and 1970s, the local government was able to take an active promotional role in major developments such as Eldon Square. The key to the implementation of these city centre projects was the availability of financial resources channelled through the City Council. This plan is the only one that mentions international grants available for

local projects. The example provided is the grant aid received from the European Commission to conduct a City Centre transport Study.

When it comes to implementation, the plans are consistent in encouraging local collaboration. This is particularly evident on the topic of housing where partnerships between the local authority and housing associations are highly welcomed. The 2015 plan expands this by identifying additional local actors such as Your Homes Newcastle, registered housing providers and private landlords. This Plan is generally more specific in terms of identifying local actors for the delivery of strategic and Urban Core Policies. It identifies agencies as part of delivery mechanisms for all plan policies. Working with agencies such as Newcastle Gateshead Initiative, NE1 and Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) for development projects in the city centre.


**Regional**

All three plans highlight the regional role of the city centre in acting as the commercial and administrative capital of the North-East and the centre for regional administration and local government. The 1985 plan was prepared in conjunction with Tyne and Wear County Council and refers to regional strategic policies of the Tyne and Wear County Structure Plan. It also acknowledges the funding and grant aids available at the time and offered by the regional government for city centre projects.  Examples include funding available for the restoration of several city-centre buildings and encouraging provision of additional grants, particularly for numerous other buildings in Local Authority ownership.

The role of regional government is covered in the following Unitary Development Plan (1998) plan where the importance of Regional Development Agency is seen in acting as a channel for gap funding and provision of grants and other resources. However, these regional structures no longer exist in the 2015 Plan. One exception is the close collaboration between Newcastle City Council and Gateshead City Council in preparation of the 2015 Plan and defining regional strategic policies for the future of Newcastle City Council (which are mainly focused on the improvement of economic conditions). Since

the demise of the North-East Regional Assembly, the two councils have worked with other local authorities (Durham, North Tyneside, Northumberland, Sunderland and South Tyneside Councils) to co-operate on social, economic and environmental issues. It is expected that they will continue to have a Memorandum of Understanding to address any cross-boundary issues. They are also committed to the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) - which are non-statutory bodies responsible for local economic development, and the combined Authority. The consistent emphasis on regional strategy only appears to be in terms of transport policies where the three plans promote engagement and collaboration between the City Council as the Highway Authority and other regional actors (i.e. Nexus, Network Rail) for delivery of transport infrastructure.

**National**

All plans have been prepared by Newcastle City Council. The responsibility of the local authority in the preparation of the local plan is a statutory duty imposed on them to comply with the law. The plans are consistent in recognising the national strategies and aim to define policies in line with them. These considerations are relatively brief in the 1985 plan and are limited to city centre policies for the promotion of tourism in accordance with the "Planning for Tourism" document prepared by the English Tourist Board. This plan also refers to funding opportunities such as Inner-City Partnership Funding and Urban Development Grant which is a combined approach by both national and local government. The primary objective is to alleviate the chronic unemployed rate and creation of favourable conditions for economic conditions.

The 1998 Plan provides more emphasis on national policies. This is more in terms of sustainable development policies. It is also the first plan to highlight the critical role of implementation and resources and confirms that the City Council's ability to commission new development, improve the environment and provide transport infrastructure has been significantly reduced by the national government financial restrictions. According to the Plan, in the 1980s and 90's the national government chose to progressively reduce resources available to local authorities, while at the same time channelling funding through new

agencies such as the Tyne and Wear Development Corporation and the City Challenge Board. The plan's approach to addressing these limitations is to work in co-operation with the private sector. This is particularly highlighted on the topic of housing where further engagement with housing associations is widely encouraged. The transformed role of the City Council is expected to be a facilitator for the creation of new opportunities for the private sector and regulating new development through the development control process. This means the development policies should be drafted in a way that attracts the private sector investment.

The 2015 Plan has been adopted after the Localism Act (2011) and the plan confirms that this has resulted in significant changes to the planning system with councils having greater local autonomy. Following the Climate Change Act (2008), the plan gives considerable consideration to the topic of sustainable development and the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF4) and delivers the National Government's localism agenda. Climate change considerations are also significant in this plan. Policies seek to encourage the development of low carbon and renewable energy solutions appropriate to the scale and circumstance of the development. Newcastle has committed to reducing carbon emissions. The 1,800 metres bore hole at Science Central will provide the site with geothermal energy and potentially also meet the energy requirements of 11,000 homes and the city centre shopping mall, Eldon Square.

New approaches to funding sources are covered in the 2015 plan. This includes the Newcastle City Deal which is an agreement by the local authority and the national government to create Newcastle-Gateshead Accelerated Development Zone to support city centre growth which benefits both local authorities from new Tax Increment Financing powers, with all growth in business rate income generated within four key development sites (with three of these sites located within Newcastle City Council), covering 80 hectares, ring-fenced by the national government and retained by the two local authorities for 25 years. In terms of leadership and governance, the national government recognises that the option of an elected Mayor was rejected by the people of Newcastle who voted by a large majority to maintain existing leadership arrangements for the city.

The plan appears to be more detailed in terms of identifying other national actors such as the Environmental Agency, English Heritage, and health organisations such as NHS England for implementation of development policies and promote further interaction with them.

## 4.3 Interviews

### 4.3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the views of 10 high-level key stakeholders with an active role in shaping the future of Newcastle City Centre who participated in semi-structured interviews during the data collection of this study. These 10 interviews follow a pilot interview with the Academic Director of the Future of the City Centre Network where the interview schedule (Appendix 6) was tested and amended. Table 4.20 provides more details on the position of the interviewees. It complements the environmental, social, economic, and political findings of previous chapters and focuses on future trends to provide a better understanding of opportunities and challenges.

Table 4.20: Interview details

| Category | Interview 1 | Interview 2 |
|---|---|---|
| **Local Authority** | Director of Place at Newcastle City Council | Research Manager at Newcastle Gateshead Initiative |
| **Business** | Chief Executive at NE1 | Policy Manager at North-East Chamber of Commerce |
| **Academia** | Pro Vice-Chancellor for Business and Engagement at Northumbria University | Pro-Vice Chancellor, Engagement and Place at Newcastle University |
| **Community** | Monument Ward Councillor | Partnerships and Operations Manager at Connected Voice |
| **Planning Consultants** | Senior Director at Lichfield | Director of Planning and EIA at Cundall |

### 4.3.2 Environmental

During the interviews, all respondents identified the city centre as a distinguished entity within the city and elaborated on its physical and non-physical characteristics. This section focuses on these characteristics.

Movement, Activity and Repose

Human activity has been identified consistently as a feature. Layers of different activities at different times of the day and night contribute to the vibrancy of the city centre. Among these uses, the retail function, food and drinks, leisure offerings and the presence of two universities, the NHS site and the Civic Centre contribute to this dynamic system. Events including regular sports matches in the stadium are seen as a significant contributor in this context. It is considered that the combination of these activities and movements is part of the attraction of the city centre.

The Tyne River is seen as an underutilised transport asset where additional movement (i.e., having oarsmen or more boat activities) can be accommodated. One Local Authority interviewee notes that *"many people don't realise it, but the river was historically used for sports and that use can come back."* Such an approach in introducing movement along the river will reinstate the historic image of an active river.

While city centre activity is considered a positive feature, several interviewees highlighted the importance of spaces of repose. It is considered that Monument, Old Eldon Square and Quayside offer spaces for repose, observation, and relaxation to some degree. Respondents identified the constant change in the city centre as a unique characteristic. These include the regular changes in terms of vehicular access and pedestrianisation and also the ongoing development of sites that have become a regular feature.

Streets, Squares and Parks

Streets are identified as significant environmental elements. The North-South axis that facilitates movement from Monument to Quayside is repeatedly mentioned as the city centre artery with unique characteristics in terms of architectural quality. Grey street is particularly seen as a very good example of impressive architectural quality and participants see the pedestrianisation as an enhancement. Northumberland Street attracts mixed opinions. While the retail core is not seen as an attractive environment in terms of architectural quality and the relationship between historic and new buildings due to incremental development, the intense pedestrian activity on this street is seen as an attraction by some interviewees.

The quality of the visual public urban realm is poor, and Northumberland Street is seen as a major opportunity in this respect. One emphasised aspect is the issue of litter and graffiti, and most interviewees make a comparison between Newcastle City Centre and other big English Cities to highlight this issue.

When asked about squares within the study area, Monument is the only one that is mentioned. This area is seen as the focal point of the city centre and is identified as a very important communal space that is widely used by different users.

The lack of urban green space is consistently brought up as a topic for discussion. There is a recognition that there is more demand for green spaces such as pocket parks and urban parks. Eldon Square is identified as a public green space however, there is consensus that this area is being so intensely overused that it no longer offers a pleasant experience for some other users. The green space around the Civic Centre is a pleasant urban green space but it is only mentioned by three participants. Leazes Park is seen as an asset in proximity but there is consensus that this large green space is not located within the city centre boundary. Only one participant refers to the green spaces within the two university campuses.

Despite the lack of green spaces, the river and the Quayside area are seen as valuable public open spaces. Responses are consistent in demanding more greenery and urban realm improvements in this area.

Symbolic and Contextual Buildings

There is consistency in acknowledging the impressive architectural quality of the Georgian and Victorian buildings in Newcastle city centre. Historic buildings and those listed by Historic England (Listed Buildings) are seen as assets and important elements that contribute to the special character of the city centre. One interviewee from the local universities highlights: *"Newcastle city centre has an impressive architecture and Grey Street is a fantastic example of that".* The history and architectural quality of both symbolic and contextual buildings contribute to a sense of pride for many citizens. Highlighted symbolic buildings include the Stadium, Grainger Market, Theatre Royal, Grey's Monument, and the Civic Centre. The main concern with symbolic buildings is their future maintenance and the viability and sustainable re-use of them.

The way contextual buildings are perceived by interviewees goes beyond their appearance and their role in acting as a background for symbolic buildings. They are seen as assets for the city centre and there is a common acknowledgement of the challenges and opportunities in the future conversion of them. Conversions are seen as very complicated from a viability point of view and also planning process and there is not much discussion about innovation in city centre conversions and the use of technology (i.e., solar panels and even the using the river for energy generation). This is particularly evidenced by the opinion of one planning consultants who states that *"conversions are not attractive for developers and the mindset to consider the embodied carbon of a building in future planning of a site is currently not present in the market among developers. Hopefully this will change in the future".*

Preserving and conversion of historic buildings also have their challenges. Stakeholders agree that there is a need for better discussion to take place on managing change. It is far easier and more profitable for developers to build something new instead of dealing with an existing building. There is also no incentive to encourage the developers to change their mindset in the interest of sustainability. Another interviewee representing consultants highlights that "previously *Housing Associations were interested in these units when there was a more generous grant available in the city centre however heritage funding*

*sources appear to be limited or insufficient for Georgian and Victorian buildings."*

Land Ownership

The common perception is that apart from large organisations such as NHS, Northumbria University, Newcastle University and Network Rail, the other large landowners in the city centre are venture capitalists, large local developers, pension funds and remote landlords. It is not expected that city centre land ownership sees any significant change in the future. It is agreed that engagement with local owners is far easier. In terms of non-local ownership, the local authority's feedback is that certain public realm improvements (anything that improves the owner's yield) in the area could be beneficial in attracting these owners to participate in discussions on the future development of these assets. The local authority is currently working on a review of empty properties that will feed into a publicly available database that will contribute to the identification of opportunity sites.

City Centre Boundary

Even though the city centre is perceived as a distinct entity, stakeholders were less sure when asked about its boundary. All agree that the Tyne river to the south and the motorway to the east and north act as a very clear physical boundary but the boundaries to the north-west and west and south-west are more blurred.

Access and Transport

The city centre is very compact which makes it walkable and cyclable. However, certain areas are very steep, and this makes the city centre less attractive for those who are less able. As such transport options can be difficult for certain groups including elderly people and those with mobility issues. The constant

change in the city centre in terms of road closures also makes it difficult for car users to remember what is happening in the centre and put them off from driving there. The common perception is that road closures including experimental ones will become permanent, so these closures and pedestrianisation trials are seen as parts of an irreversible pattern. There are mixed opinions about pedestrian priority zones.

Three participants consider pedestrianisation positive interventions and would like to see more of this approach to have the cars in the periphery and limit vehicular access to only emergency services and disabled users. Conversely, one participant criticises the process in which vehicles are being deterred from the centre and believes these interventions are being carried out without a decent discussion on vital improvements on public transport services or recognition of the fact that cars are still the first choice in the North-East region for people (unless they live near a metro line). According to a community representative *"the proposals are not realistic for businesses and older people and those with mobility issues or those who do not live in close proximity to the metro line will struggle to get to the city centre and may decide not to visit the city centre."*

In terms of cycling, the issue of safety has been highlighted. There is a perception that the city centre can be difficult to cycle because it is rainy and too hilly in certain areas. Some locations in the city centre do not have cycle lanes. There are also examples where cycle lanes end abruptly. There are concerns about the relationship between cyclists and other users including those who use e-scooters. One feedback raises concerns about the narrow width of cycle lanes that do not offer a pleasant or safe experience for e-scooter users and cyclists when they share these infrastructures. The common response is that the existing cycling infrastructure is well behind European cities and foresees significant room for improvement.

In terms of transport options to the city centre, facilities are patchy. Access to the metro is a great asset. Other transport options such as busses (despite recent and ongoing upgrades in their services) are less direct and far less attractive to users. There are concerns about the affordability of both buses and

metro passes and the cost-effectiveness of public transport against driving cars, especially for families. Varying fees (for the same journey) by different bus companies are also questioned by stakeholders.

Environmental Health

There is an agreement that there will ongoing discussions about environmental health factors such as air quality and noise and that these two elements will impact future developments within the city centre. There is consensus that technology has the potential to find solutions for both of these challenges. However, other factors appear to be disruptive in dealing with these challenges. This includes different stakeholders not being on the right track for change- as such a level of discussion is required to align competing agendas between these stakeholders.

Air quality

The topic of air quality is tied in with Net Zero ambitions. There is consensus that recent interventions have significantly improved air quality in the city centre to a degree that the majority of the stakeholders do not identify air quality as a problem anymore. Only one participant raises concerns about existing air quality challenges in certain locations within the city centre and that is limited to areas such as public car parks near residential accommodations. There is an agreement that with the move from fossil fuels, the city centre is on the right track towards a solution and the issue of air quality will be dealt with and addressed naturally. One participant highlighted the importance of using accurate data in this regard for monitoring purposes and adjusting interventions if necessary.

While recent interventions have been focused on deterring motor vehicles from the city centre in the interest of air quality, there are concerns about extreme measures that aim to retain cars in the periphery. These concerns follow the result of consultation activities with disability groups and engagement with

elderly communities revealing that imposing significant restrictions on the city centre is not welcomed by them. There are competing motivations and conflicts of interest among different stakeholders that are difficult to manage especially for proposals such as the Clean Air Zone (which will impose more restrictions on the city centre by introducing additional charges for polluting vehicles). It is perceived that the city centre transformation plan is a long process, and these interventions are not considered to be realistic for businesses. It is considered that the solutions offered so far do not address these concerns.

Restricting vehicles and deterring cars from the city centre without improving public transport services does not appear to be offering options for many users whose first travel choice is their private car. Consultants also believe that supply of goods and services in the city centre will require a level of vehicles in the city centre and that there should always be a place for cars because some members of the society will take cars to the city centre, and this is more common for those who do not live near a metro line. The local authority, on the other hand, acknowledges that this shift will require a cultural change and believe that the work of certain partners including the Healthcare Trust and NHS and universities helps to justify these interventions in the interest of public health.

One issue that has been highlighted in the interviews is that the consequences of these air quality improvement measures need to be clearly communicated to locals as part of net-zero targets, so they know what to expect. These engagements need to be part of a wider transformational conversion that looks at best practices and potentials in construction, conversion, and public transport. Examples are policies in New York and Manhattan where regulations such as the Sustainable Roof Law required most new buildings and also buildings undergoing major roof reconstruction to include a sustainable roofing zone on 100% of the available roof space. The idea of having a greater level of innovation to have environmentally sustainable places is well supported by the two universities.

Noise

The element of noise is seen as a feature of the city centre that will be present in any future scenario. The common view is that there will always be a level of noise in the city centre and this needs to be managed in terms of harmony of uses when noise detrimentally impacts certain uses such as residential ones. From a technical perspective, it is agreed that building technology offers techniques for noise control in buildings and that city centre conversions need to benefit from these advancements. However, participants agree that different stakeholders including developers, occupiers, policymakers, Planning Service and Building Control are not on the right track for change and a new approach, and their priorities do not align. One stakeholder highlighted the challenges of the impact of noise complaints to the local authority when new residential uses are impacted by noise from long-established uses in the city centre and how these complaints can impact the operation of these businesses.

**4.3.3 Social**

**Introduction**

One of the key characteristics of the city centre highlighted by key stakeholders during the interview is its ability to accommodate a concentration of different social groups and absorb diversity. This section covers stakeholders' perceptions concerning social aspects of the city centre for the four categories of insiders, regulars, visitors, and strangers.

**Insiders**

Promotion of city-centre living and increasing the population of insiders is widely welcomed during the interviews. Access to services, leisure, public transport and better connectivity are among the benefits of city-centre living. In terms of the existing insider population, university students are seen to form a significant proportion. There is an agreement that the two universities attract a diverse range of international students and contribute to cultural diversity. This is explained by an interviewee representing the local community that *"Newcastle has always traded with the world, and links with North Sea countries has attracted people from different backgrounds and geographies. Now education is giving us that diversity."* There are concerns about community cohesion and more specifically about self-contained purpose-built student accommodations in the city centre that cut off students from the locality and the impact this may have on the mental health and wellbeing of students. Both interviewees from the two universities confirm that purpose-built student accommodation are mainly used for international and first-year students and there is evidence that students move out of these accommodations to have options to interact with others.

While the concentration of students in the city centre is welcome, it is agreed that the city centre has failed to attract other groups and the existing balance is not right. The real challenge appears to be creating mixed communities within the city centre with the right balance of various groups with different spending powers including students, young professionals, families, and elderly populations, otherwise, there is the risk of gentrification. Attracting different

groups of insiders will significantly add to the vibrancy of the city centre. The main barrier to city centre living appears to be the lack of the right type and mix of accommodation. This is seen ironic when seen in connection with the high rate of vacant properties (mainly upper floors) in the city centre.

There is an agreement that the upper floors units are only attractive to the student population. Consultants believe there is a demand for more build-to-rent schemes to attract young professionals. Development such as Helix and small developments in form of flats are considered attractive for young professionals. With the Helix project, there is an ambition to have a mixture of accommodations such as buy-to-rent, and different tenure models. The current activities of Newcastle in testing their Future Home project in Helix (investigating how these housing models can adopt over time with occupier's need including mobility requirements) is seen as positive in attracting and retaining an elderly population of insiders. Three participants believe there should be more activities to promote city centre living among elderly residents. The presence of the UK National Innovation Centre for Ageing and its ongoing projects is seen as an asset that can trigger more innovation in this context. However, one of the barriers to such an approach is the wider perception of the city centre as a place only for students or a noisy area with anti-social behaviour. The reputation of Newcastle as a party city is also detrimental in convincing certain groups to consider city centre living.

Families with children are not attracted to the city centre living because the types of accommodations that are on offer are not family friendly. This is not just due to the number of bedrooms within a property but also other aspects such as their desire for the low-density type of dwelling with garden space, storage, garage, and also other amenities such as access to school and medical centres that would impact their location choices. There is agreement that the area along the Quayside has the potential to accommodate housing for families and also young professionals. The master plan for the Forth Yard acknowledges this potential and aims to deliver housing for young families.

Consultants believe that the existing planning and building control standards that are expected for the city centre conversions do not recognise the choice of

lifestyle for people. One of the Planning Consultants states that "*we assume that all future occupiers expect the same standard from the city centre living which is not the case and many cities have moved away from that approach*". According to this view, these standards should be specific to city centre locations. Looking at international case studies, certain qualities such as views into alleyways are accepted in certain countries and these challenges should not be a barrier in city centre conversions. These technical challenges including common city centre issues of noise and ventilation add to the complexity of conversion projects. There is an agreement that there are technical solutions available for soundproofing properties that would allow for the harmony of uses and residential use and night-time economy to work next to each other. However, the existing challenges and the different agendas of different stakeholders have resulted in a situation where upper floor conversions are not attractive for developers.

**Regulars**

Employment and education are seen to be the two important attractions for regulars during the day. City Centre is seen as an important employment hub for the region for both the private and public sectors. The two universities, NHS and the Civic Centre are also seen as important employers. It is considered that the hybrid working pattern would have an impact on the number of regulars commuting to the city centre, however, recent news about office moves (i.e., 9,000 staff from HMRC moving to the city centre) could impact the number of regulars.

There are mixed opinions in terms of demand for future office space. Community representatives are sceptical about future demand for large office spaces. On the other hand, consultants believe existing vacant units do not offer the space qualities that large companies (with 200-500 staff) want. In their view, the aim should be to attract large companies and offer new-build modern office facilities in the market.

In terms of access to the city centre, there is unanimity in that the existing transport services to the city centre need to be improved in form of offering an

integrated transport system. Metro and bus companies are seen as competing operators where they should be working together. The priority should be a further extension of transport connections to the west. There is also scope for the provision of better facilities for regulars such as Park and Ride and safe parking options for those who want to park outside and cycle to the city centre.

**Visitors**

City Centre is seen as a major attraction for visitors. Increasing their number is widely welcomed as they are seen to bring additional energy. Newcastle has a reputation for parties. However, it is agreed that the visitor attraction policies should target a broad range of visitors.  From a strategic point of view it is noted that many of the visitors do not necessarily return for a second visit. Stakeholders believe that future interventions should create an environment that offers an experience for families. One of the interviewees representing the business community states that "*evidence shows if you build your city for the experience of families, then it will work for both visitors and insiders. Newcastle is at the start of that journey.*" Generally, events even those that are hosted outside the city centre boundary attract a large number of visitors and it is expected that the trend will be for new experiences and events to attract visitors in the future. In this context, the stadium is seen as a great asset not just for sports but also for other events such as concerts and gigs.

In terms of visitor accommodations, it is perceived that there has been a high number of hotel developments in the last few years. When it comes to availability and diversity of accommodations, there are mixed views. One participant believes that despite hotel numbers, there is a lack of options for visitors while another view confirms that the city centre hotel accommodations offer a range of different budgets. It is agreed that due to the limited residential stock in the city centre, the number of serviced apartments and Airbnb units has been limited. If the residential stock increases, then it is likely that there will be a surge. With a hybrid working pattern, it is more likely that this increase will be in terms of Airbnbs rather than serviced apartments. Before the pandemic, purpose-built student accommodations have been previously used as hotel

accommodations while the students were away, however, they never had a remarkable occupancy level.

It is expected that there will be a level of growth in the hotel development in the coming years. One view is that these are likely to be a replacement and small-scale projects. Another opinion is that there will be further development in from of delivery of 5-star hotels (which is currently lacking). There is an assumption that the recent investment in the local football club by Saudi investors may result in a demand for 5-star visitor accommodations. It is also expected that there is wider demand for the re-invention of more independent and new diverse operators. There is also scope for the expansion of conferences and business events to attract business tourists, however, the hybrid working pattern may have an impact on the frequency and intensity of business travels in the coming years.


**Strangers**

Stakeholders acknowledge the importance of the city centre in acting as a neutral space for different identities. However, there are mixed opinions on the social interactions between strangers and other social groups. Identified groups of strangers include beggars, the homeless population, drug users and some leisure seekers (large group of drunk females and males) are also perceived to belong to this group. Their visible presence in the city centre is immediately seen as a result of a vacuum in enforcement in the city centre. This is linked with the issue of lack of support resources but also lack of a political will to have interventions which are due to the sensitivity of some of these topics and associated issues.

The presence of strangers in the city centre brings up the topic of safety for city centre users. While there are no significant safety concerns, views are consistent in demanding further improvements by better policing, additional lighting, and further supervision (i.e. by night shift taxi drivers) to ensure that the city centre is safe and pleasant to use for everyone. There is also a demand for more support available for strangers in the city centre. However, stakeholders believe these supports should be well planned. The presence of some of the

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support delivery mechanisms has been problematic for some other users (i.e. location of a soup kitchen close to an office building). Support should be available, but the majority of the stakeholders (excluding community representatives) do not want to have them near other active uses in the city centre. This is despite the recognition that many of these challenges are relevant to mental health and professional support can make a big difference. It is also recognised that public buildings including libraries and churches have the potential to work in partnership to create a network of support.

Community representatives demand an increased presence of charities and third sector organisations in the city centre, however, based on existing trends they believe that this is unlikely to happen. They believe the city centre should be a hub for these organisations, their volunteers and those who need support and see the vacant building stock as a potential. The barrier appears to be the issue of affordability and the capacity of charities to compete with other uses. Previously there have been arrangements where charities and voluntary organisations have negotiated (through a coordinator) to have access to vacant building blocks while a new proposal was being developed for the same property (examples include Kelburn House on Mosley Street and Broadacre House on Market Street). These arrangements have worked within the short/medium terms for 5-8 years, however, with the implementation of development plans for these sites, these charities were forced to move out from these premises and the majority of them have moved out from the city centre. It is considered that not having a presence in the city centre would have an impact on their services as the city centre is the most accessible location for strangers. This is following the same approach that tends to sweep away the visual presence of strangers.

**4.3.4 Economic**

**Introduction**

One of the most emphasised characteristics of the city centres in the interviews is their economic significance. Stakeholders consistently acknowledge the vital role of Newcastle City Centre in the economy of the North-East Region and recognise both people and businesses as key contributors. This section provides details of stakeholders' economic perceptions based on the key themes of, income and expenditure, goods and services, supply and demand and the role of economic actors.

**Income and expenditure**

It is agreed that Newcastle city centre draws the income from a wide area and functions for the whole region. However, it is unclear how much of this significant economic value is retained in the city centre. Stakeholders consistently acknowledge that despite its importance, they are unclear about this proportion. It is recognised that given the shortage of resources, certain income generated in the city centre may have to address the management of deprivation elsewhere. Stakeholders believe more income should be retained and invested locally because the more effective the city centre is, the more other locations can benefit from it.

Participants believe the only income that is clearly retained and spent directly in the city centre is the amount collected by NE1. While all participants encourage retention of more income in the city centre, the majority believe this amount should not be through further contribution by businesses. They also demand more of the business rates to be retained locally. Participants believes what businesses receive in return for their business rate is minimal. One of the representatives of the business community believes "*all businesses get in return for their business rate is collection of their bin and a couple of Christmas lights. It is unbelievable to see how little they get in return.*" According to the local authority representative, the amount businesses pay as the business rate is not fair to them but acknowledges that the local authority has no control over the amount and has no flexibility in waving or amending it in special circumstances.

Participants believe the concept of a local tax (similar to one in the United States of America) could be a helpful mechanism that assures part of the income is retained locally. However, due to the existing power structure, they consistently believe this is unlikely to happen in the UK. One participant believes any additional retained income needs to be invested directly in supporting local small and medium-sized enterprises to encourage more economic activity. One participant from the education sector identifies student's contribution as another example of income retained in the city centre. However, the examples provided including spending on local businesses, shops and taxis do not necessarily show retention of economic value and are more part of the income generated within the city centre.

In terms of income generated by the retail sector, the city centre continues to be a regional shopping attraction. Participants believe with the decline in non-local retailers, the city centre will be left with more locally based companies and with them, it is more likely that the income generated will be reinvested locally. One re-occurring example is Fenwick (a locally rooted company) investing £40m in their Newcastle store with proposals by a local architect. One of the consultants states that *"Fenwick is a very good example of a locally rooted company with strong retail presence. They see a future in department store at this tough times."*

On the topic of inward investment, the majority welcome it and consider it beneficial to the regional economy. Supporting persistent activities and initiatives to attract continuous investment is widely supported. Newcastle Gateshead Initiative is actively seeking inward investment by looking at available assets and trying to convince major international employers to choose these assets. It is considered that certain cities are losing major international companies due to rising costs, and this is an opportunity for Newcastle City Centre. One participant believes attracting large businesses will contribute to the liveliness of the city centre and will attract more people. It will ultimately result in increased economic activity. The two participants representing the local

community are the only ones who are unconvinced about inward investment and demand for a localised strategy on inward investment that is more selective. These two participants are not against inward investment but believe not all types are beneficial for the city centre and request more clarity on what the city centre gets back in return. One of these representatives from the local community states that *this careful approach to inward investment will be a difficult choice for the local authority because with further budget cuts they are left with no choice but to accept any kind of investment."*

## Goods and Services

The common perception about retail function is that the pandemic accelerated the expected change in the retail sector. One consultant highlights that the retail experienced a 10-year change within 2 years; as a result, we are facing an oversupply of midrange retail space, shrinkage of the sector and contraction of national brands. Despite the decline in the sales of goods, it is agreed that city centres will continue to have a role in offering retail activity. This will be in form of more compulsive purchase and comparison goods and will result in more local and independent businesses including start-ups. Consultants believe Northumberland Street is still performing fine in comparison with many other high streets in the UK context and believe the retail sector will adapt over time. The online shopping and out-of-town options will continue to impact the city centre retail. However, there will be more variety offered by local operators, but this will be a slow process. Stakeholders believe supporting local operators is critical from an economic point of view. Losing even one business can have a detrimental impact on other businesses locally.

Most participants believe shopping combined with other activities and experiences will continue to be appealing to certain people. While stakeholders acknowledge that there is still scope for growth of a niche market for local independent operators, they believe it is unlikely that these changes are seen in large shopping centres like Eldon Square because these spaces continue to be unaffordable for these operators. The expected trend for local retailers will be to start slow and over time turn into multiples and this will take time. Local retailers

can invest in their units and shopfronts as such their presence can be transformational.

Stakeholders agree that the city centre will continue to be a leisure destination and a place for experience. These experiences including events will generate significant income if they are unique to Newcastle. Large vacant units such as Debenhams, offer opportunities for a variety of diverse experiences (i.e. indoor skating) and reinvention of creative new services. Participants believe in terms of other public services- some operators such as banks, building societies and post offices- there should be a place for them in the city centre even if other branches are closed down. Certain industries still rely on face-to-face interactions (such as the legal sector), and they will continue to have a presence. Other public facilities such as the library offering services and small-scale events to different social groups (parents and kids) will continue to be active.

**Supply and Demand**

There is consistency among participants in acknowledging that there is a large stock of vacant units in the city centre. One consultant believes the value of properties in the city centre is mainly defined by the value of retail floor at ground level and the upper floors are seen as the difficult part in terms of value and future development. Housing associations were previously interested in these units where a more generous grant offer was available. However, heritage funding sources appear to be limited for the historic building stock. There are different opinions when it comes to future demand. Some believe there is still a need for flexible office space as we move forward with a hybrid flexible working. Participants believe the city centre is seen as an anchor place where meetings and first impressions take place and as such, some form of presence in the city centre is seen as an economic advantage for businesses in the North-east Region. However, consultants believe not all these vacant units are attractive as future office spaces for the developers.

When it comes to future residential use, participants identify these units only suitable for students and young professionals. They believe the quality and type

of accommodations (as well as the availability of education and medical centres) on offer are not yet attractive to families. One consultant believes there will be a limited role for residential use in the retail core and these spaces should be safeguarded for community and educational uses. It is commonly agreed that the economic viability of a new build project appears to be far more straightforward for developers in comparison with conversions that have a high level of economic uncertainty both in terms of Planning and Building Control implications.

For retail units, the demand has fallen significantly. However, stakeholders believe this low point will be for a short time and demand will come back to a degree by independent local operators. One other consultant believes there is a risk in the push by the government to have alternative uses. This is particularly critical for ground floor levels where there is a need for active frontages and should be resisted.


**Economic Actors**

Insiders

There is consensus that the increase in city centre living will contribute positively to the city centre economy. Among insiders, students are seen as most significant contributors but some participants are sceptical on this topic and raise concerns about their exemption from council tax or living in self-contained student accommodations that are fully isolated from the city centre economy. Several participants raise concerns about the brain drain of graduates and young professionals (mainly to London) and believe the focus should be on the retention of this population as important economic contributors. Participants also believe attracting the elderly population to the city centre as insiders will maximise the economic potential. This group has access to pension resources and wealth and has time to spend in the city centre.

Regulars

There is agreement among stakeholders that regulars have a significant positive contribution to the city centre economy. As a result, attracting more of this social group is widely welcomed. One re-occurring response among consultants is that there is a need for attracting larger professional firms to increase the numbers of regulars who come to the city centre for employment purposes. It is agreed that regulars can benefit from food, drinks, and retail offerings within the city centre during their break and post-work socialising and shopping. Large employers including the two universities, the Civic Centre and NHS are considered to continue to attract a larger number of regulars to the city centre. Universities are particularly seen to have strong financial resources (Helix is identified as an example), and their investment can transform the city centre. However, stakeholders highlight that it is critical that they are seen as contributors and not just investors.

Visitors

Stakeholders are consistent in considering visitors as significant economic contributors. It is considered that the majority of Newcastle visitors choose to stay in the city centre and the strategy for the city is to promote accommodating visitors within the boundary if the reason for their travel is outside the city centre.

One aspect of the visitor economy has been its fragility during and after the pandemic and the importance of a local resilient supply chain is now evident. The supply chain was hugely disrupted and damaged by Covid-19. Newcastle Gateshead Initiative is currently working with local suppliers to create a local portal for an innovative supply chain for the hospitality sector to future-proof the sector and retain some economic value locally. If successful, this will increase the income from the visitor economy. Newcastle Gateshead Initiative is also working on digitalising processes to allow visitors to book complimentary activities and experiences while booking accommodation.

In terms of future trends, stakeholders agree that retail and culture will continue to be an attraction for the visitor economy, however, the trend will be for new experiences and events. One of the weaknesses is seen lacking a major tourist attraction. Events are critical for visitors, and this is welcomed by all participants. However, as highlighted by Newcastle Gateshead Initiative, they need to be carefully scheduled and introducing new events is not necessarily the only option for maximising their economic benefits. It is considered that some of the existing events are taking place too close together and this results in a situation where city centre businesses cannot benefit from the full capacity of these events. From an economic point of view, careful planning of these events will benefit the city centre, so they are well spread in the calendar, so they take place when businesses are struggling due to seasonal issues. Otherwise, events will be a missed opportunity for the city centre. One local authority interviewee notes that *"when existing events are taking place too close together, the city centre and businesses does not benefit from the full capacity of the event because there will be spillage"*. The feedback from the local authority is also positive about events and their economic contribution. However, they believe large scale events puts pressure on some of their resources including waste collection.

Strangers

The majority of stakeholders do not identify strangers as economic contributors. The common view is that these social groups only benefit from services and that they are a burden on public sector finances. Whilst there are some varieties in opinions, it is widely accepted that strangers are attracted to the city centre to benefit from access to a wide range of support services and city centres should continue to provide such access. Paradoxically, the majority of stakeholders believe the presence of strangers particularly those who deal with mental health issues, homelessness, alcohol and drug-related issues can be off-putting for other social groups and can detrimentally impact their economic contribution.

### 4.3.5 Political

**Introduction**

Stakeholders give substantial consideration to the power structure and the processes of decision-making on planning, financing and management of the city centre. This section focuses on these political perceptions at the three levels of local, regional, and national government.

**Local**

The role of Newcastle City Council as the local authority is identified to be critical in the future of the city centre. Stakeholders consistently acknowledge that like any other local authority in the UK, Newcastle City Council is fighting with little capacity with other adult and social care priorities. According to one of the interviewees from the local universities *"Newcastle City Council is already burdened with adult and social care responsibilities and are already firefighting with little capacity".* It is considered that the current tight budget streams do not offer any room for manoeuvre for local authorities. There is consensus among participants when they demand a high level of flexibility at the local level. In terms of planning for the future of the city centre, the Core Strategy and the Urban Core Plan are not seen as a strong holistic plan with a clear ambitious vision by most stakeholders other than the local authority representative. One highlighted issue is that these plans fail to address many of the social issues that the city centre is facing and are mainly focusing on the delivery of housing.

Stakeholders who represent businesses believe that monitoring the plan at the local level is not well communicated with the rest of the city centre stakeholders. An example provided is the progress of the delivery of promised infrastructures (i.e., cycling routes). A significant part of this issue is identified to be due to the pattern of funding distribution that imposes limitations on cities and city centres as a result. According to one of the participants *"this is an Oliver Twist approach that does not allow cities to draft and provide strategic plans, because of the uncertainties with future scenarios".* On the other hand, local authorities cannot demand more resources if they have not quantified their needs in advance. Two of the participants highlight that certain cycle lanes that abruptly stop are a good

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example of the consequences of this approach. Another participant states that the local authorities do not challenge the central government, because any modification to the current working pattern, may result in even more duties for them but not necessarily brings additional resources.

Participants also raise concerns about the impact of the long period that is involved in the preparation of these plans and the risk of ending up with outdated policies at the time of formal adoption. To address this, one of the consultants suggests the introduction of action plans for the city centre. These placed-based approaches were previously used as a tool for town centres. There will be an insignificant cost associated with using them. The process will be 2.5 years in which the private sector will be highly involved in the delivery of the plan and there will be penalties for delays. This process should start with a study, followed by issues and options that will be consulted and a development plan. This will be a short document in comparison with the existing Urban Core Development Plan. This process will attract owners and address the problem of disengagement because at the moment they see no direct impact on their assets as part of the delivery of the Urban Core Development Plan. However, these action plans will be focused on immediate change and will repeat every 2.5 years enabling them to focus on practical consequences and reflect on important topics such as real-time data. The same participant remains sceptical when it comes to the possibility of having such a mechanism in the future because it is believed that regardless of the willingness of the local authority for change, it is unlikely that the central government changes its approach, and this puts city centres in a difficult position.

All stakeholders ask for the allocation of more funding at the local level to support projects. Additional funding will allow more initiatives to support the transformation of the city centre. Participants believe the existing funding structures force local authorities to compete for funding. This is not an easy task for local authorities because they need to constantly adapt to new structures and the risk with navigation with quick changes is that this approach kills any opportunity for innovation. That is why they consistently demand a local approach. Feedback from interviews confirms that dealing with a short-term funding stream (regardless of which political party is in charge) with limited

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flexibility is one of the biggest challenges at the local level, particularly in terms of annual funding where any amount that is not spent goes back to the national government. This has proven to be very difficult in the last few years when there have been various uncertainties including Brexit, Covid-19 Pandemic, the war in Ukraine, etc. and the local authorities have to deal with their consequences. In regard to other sources of income, according to one of the interviewees representing the Local Authority *Newcastle City Council* is *left in a very difficult position where we need to maximise the amount of business rate collection but at the same time, we really need to support businesses and this is particularly difficult because the local authority has no discretion to reduce them"*. The common perception is that these challenges at the local level in Newcastle are no different from other local authorities (excluding London) and the only difference is their scale.

**Regional**

Stakeholders believe the North-East regional structures have an important role in the future of the city centre. This could be in form of allocation of regional funding and improvements in transport infrastructures. The majority of participants share the opinion that the abolishment of earlier regional structures has been damaging. These cycles of change have happened so often that many of the practitioners are not even aware of the previous structures because they were so short-lived. Only one participant (representative of the business community), believes the removal of some of the regional structures was positive for the city centre because it reduced the number of actors involved in decision-making and that is easier to make decisions and implement projects with fewer organisations involved.

Stakeholders believe the existing approach by the central government has resulted in the regional competition for neighbours and this may result in city centres ending up with less funding. Members of the Parliament may be able to push for projects that are important to them but are not able to achieve projects that create significantly more jobs and contribute to the economy. An interviewee from the local universities argues that *"the current structure aims to*

*give more power to regions while the focus should be on core cities"*. The existing North-East Combined Authority structure is seen to be very weak by the majority of participants in comparison with other regions. The consensus is that the concept of Combined Authorities is not the right structure for the North-East Region. One reoccurring comment is that the proposed model works best in London with the established role of the London Mayor. In other locations, such an approach disregards the regional variations and does not offer the ability to different bodies to deal with fragmented issues at the regional level. One consultant believes the preparation of strategic plans at the regional level similar to Regional Spatial Strategies reduces competition between different local authorities to attract more funding to the region. The presence of other regional structures such as regional banks and additional financial power and flexibility at the regional level is also considered positive.

**National**

Stakeholders believe there are disjoint arrangements at various levels of local, regional, and national and that the ambitions that are defined and talked about by the central government turn out to be very different at the lower levels of power. Despite plans, the gap between the North and the South is still very evident. One common criticism is that the Levelling up proposal that aims to spread opportunities across the UK will be highly challenging because it has a total disregard for the skills and resources that are needed at the local level for adaptation and delivery. It is commonly agreed that the framework prescribed by the national government is too tight for the local level to fit in.

The consensus is that there is huge scope for improvement. However, there is no political will to support that change in the central government. The opinion from the local authority and members of the community are that despite the decline of many English cities, the current government does not see them as key drivers of growth and avoids any meaningful discussion on them to have them connected. It appears that most of the focus in this context is on towns instead of cities. Participants do not see city centres as a priority for the central government and believe the national policies for the city centre currently do not

work. They also agree that it is more likely that the approach of the central government will stay the same.

Stakeholders identify the role of the national government in the future of the city centre to be critical. One reason is that many of the challenges at the local level for example mitigations that are currently required for building conversion in the city centre by Building Control or the Planning System are controlled by the central government in form of national policies. One of the representatives from the business community believes some of these regulations need to acknowledge the unique characteristics of the city centres (i.e., statutory noise nuisance laws and the complexity and consequences of noise complaints received from new residential uses in the city centre because of established businesses) and their enforcement could have an impact on local businesses. All stakeholders highlight the crucial need for incentivising the reuse of city-centre buildings as a priority.


**Governance**

Stakeholders raise significant concerns about the future governance of the city centre. It is considered that there is a need for a genuine devolution with a local civic leadership role and less involvement at the national level. One consultant believes that the local authority does not have sufficient resources to encourage change to happen. This is because, in terms of the implementation of projects, there are practical challenges that require significant resources such as fragmentation of ownership and use. On the other hand, it will be difficult to gather enough private sector actors to see change, so the local authority needs to be heavily involved in any solution.  Most participants believe NE1 is currently filling this vacuum and acts as a facilitator for businesses that want to see change locally. Their contribution is seen as very positive. However, as highlighted by community representative participants there is scope for other actors from the education sectors, charities and thirds sectors, NHS and community groups to be involved in meaningful partnerships and sharing risks in the future for real collaboration with the opportunity to feedback on proposals at different stages. Among these actors, universities are seen to have the

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potential to take on a bigger role given their ability to introduce innovation in the process. The majority believe the role of universities in this process is critical and that the full capacity of local research institutions including the National Innovation Centre for Data and Newcastle Aging Research Centre should be captured. One interviewee representing the business community believes that universities should be seen *"as investors and contributors with more authority and not just as project partners".* Again, all participants highlight that such a structure requires a political will at the national level to give flexibility for structures at the local level.

## Conclusion

Many of the stakeholders believe as a country there is no clear vision for the future, and this is reflected in any future planning on a smaller scale in the city centres as well. There is consensus that we are not optimistic enough when it comes to foresight. Stakeholders believe the current power structures do not allow for creativity and believe the legacy of the pandemic has resulted in ongoing confusion and uncertainty about the future. One re-occurring issue is that ongoing challenges such as the rise in the cost of living will increase pressure on resources and will impact the capacity of actors to look at the future. With these risks in mind, stakeholders state that city centres need to be future-proofed. What actors need to do is to have a discussion about the potential of the future. While resources are under pressure, it is not clear what the intention of the national government is on environmental policies and more specifically town planning.  One frequent feedback by stakeholders is that all actors involved in the future of the city centre at the local level are busy firefighting with emerging and legacy challenges.

# 5.0. Analysis

## 5.1 Environmental Perspective

### 5.1.1 Introduction

This section reviews the environmental findings from surveys, plans and interviews to provide an analysis of the physical form and characteristics of the city centre and covers structure and movement, spaces, and buildings and how people interact with them.

### 5.1.2 Structure and Movement

An important feature of the city centre is incremental growth. While this has prevented radical changes in the city centre, it has not improved the quality of the spaces. There is no evidence that suggests an existing financial or regulatory capacity for the introduction of radical change and the focus is on the redevelopment of key underutilised sites. The ongoing pattern of developing brownfield sites through the demolition of the old buildings and structures and delivery of new builds raises important questions in terms of sustainability. This is both in terms of their embodied energy and most importantly about the sustainable use of the new replacement buildings in the future. These developments are designed with the intention of serving specific uses and user groups without consideration or expectation of any significant changes in their lifetime. It is evident that building conversions and the introduction of alternative uses to replace declining demand in retail and commercial activities continue to be a significant challenge due to technical limitations such as restricted internal layout. The long-term adaptability of these new buildings does not appear to be an emphasis. The changing socio-economic and environmental conditions are highly likely to have an impact on the users' needs and these buildings need to evolve to respond to these likely regular changes.

The adaptability of buildings is particularly important. In recent years there has been an increase in relaxation of planning regulations for residential conversions and this has already resulted in the delivery of sub-standard and

poor-quality housing that could adversely impact the health, wellbeing, and quality of life of future occupiers and have failed to offer housing options that can positively contribute to city centre living. The ongoing delivery of new buildings has also contributed to the major issue of leaving a large number of vacant buildings behind. Evidence shows that the issue of the high building vacancy rate was a pre-existent problem before the Covid-19 pandemic and that the policies and interventions trialled have failed to control this problem.

Land Ownership

Land and property ownership in the city centre continues to impose significant challenges on land use, land management and public access. This is a complex matter because land ownership is not a unified matter in the UK and is a collection of different rights (i.e., right to control or right to use), There is also the issue of publicly available information on this topic. While the public sector, local government and universities are obliged by the Freedom of Information Act (2000) to provide information about land ownership, there is a deficit of publicly accessible information and a lack of transparency in terms of ownership and details about the terms of use of land for many of the city centre sites. It is more likely that these assets with unknown or unregistered ownership status are in private ownership. Landowners who are seeking the highest price for their investment site who are happy to wait in hope of a better future return could be a barrier to any kind of public interest-led approach to land use.

Escalation of privatisation of public spaces raises major concerns about safeguarding citizens' rights within these spaces and has significant implications on any response to the clear demand for the provision of attractive public spaces. The pattern of private land disposal has resulted in a situation where citizens cannot question land use and exclusions. This should be seen in connection with the limited opportunities that are available in the city centre and the parameters that are required for the creation of successful public spaces (i.e., proximity to symbolic buildings). If the current trend in the increase of private ownership of city centre sites continues, it would be very difficult and highly unlikely that appropriate sites could be secured for the creation of these

open spaces such as public urban squares. The provision of public open spaces for a variety of experiences through temporary and flexible use for a range of activities appears to be a consistent demand and aspiration. However, it is unclear how these plans could initiate change in terms of the delivery of these spaces when suitable sites are not publicly owned, and private landowners have no motivation in this respect. With limited financial resources available, it is unlikely that a pattern of increased publicly owned ownership emerges.

City Centre Boundary

The identification of the city centre boundary is debated based on personal experiences, but there is an agreed interpretation of the start and end of the city centre. There is particularly consistency in terms of the southern boundary which is delineated by the River Tyne.

Movement, Activity and Repose

The notion of human activity will continue to be a key characteristic of the city centre. This element is seen as an attractive feature that contributes to vibrancy. However, there is also a call for spaces of repose and observation. It is considered that the availability of spaces of repose could encourage the presence of a wider range of users with different abilities and preferences. City Centre interventions on movement have been mainly in form of restricting vehicular access and further expansion of pedestrianisation to encourage walking and cycling. The majority of interventions introduced have been implemented on the existing roads. In most cases, pedestrians and cyclists have been allowed to occupy the former streetscape and this has been complemented with the delivery of public realm enhancement works. Existing structural conditions may impose limitations on what can realistically be achieved. This sequenced approach has formed insufficiently continuous networks and no hierarchy of transport options. There is a need for a comprehensive approach toward delivery of strategic network planning and continued expansion of such networks in the long term.

Transforming existing roads into public spaces through pedestrianisation aims to create environments that support active travel (walking and cycling) as well as economic development and social interaction and improved aesthetics. The ability to support outdoor activities is also seen as a potential with positive benefits. However, there should be more emphasis on the frequency of these activities as most of them are time related. The performance of a pedestrianised street (i.e., Northumberland Street) during the operating hours of the surrounding shops along the street is drastically different after the closing hours of them.

Successful pedestrianisation is also heavily reliant on the presence of efficient, reliable, and affordable public transport infrastructure. One implication of recent pedestrianisation works has been deterring certain groups including elderly users and those with mobility issues who are highly dependent on cars. Significant emphasis on walking and cycling and further plans for pedestrianisation and restrictions on bus access on a number of roads also give the impression that decision-makers see the city centre as a place only for those who are young and fit.

A review of strategies for parking provision in the new developments for the three key sites does not indicate a decrease in the parking capacity in the city centre as these developments continue to promote vehicular use for their users (i.e., hotel and commercial). This is seen to be contradictory to the wider transport approach that restricts vehicular access for other city centre users. However, with the decline in commercial spaces, there may be a decrease.

The transport strategies that have been implemented appear to be more of road interventions instead of wider strategies. This is reflected in the experience of road users who are confused by the introduction of regular changes in road access. With more road restrictions expected to be implemented, there are concerns about the provision of clear routes. This will require careful planning and communication of interventions. There is also a demand for well-positioned visual signals to reduce the existing confusion for all road users such as delivery drivers, emergency service vehicles, taxis and groups who are unable to travel using public transport.

Another aspect of the topic of activity is the potential for animating underused areas. River Tyne is seen as an underutilised transport asset that could accommodate more activity. This could reinstate the historic image of an active river and add to the vibrancy of the city centre.

### 5.1.3 Spaces

It is evident that the delivery of new buildings has been a priority rather than designing and creating of spaces. The provision of attractive public open spaces is not a highlight in the defined visions of any of the key sites. These projects have an element of public realm works in form of open spaces however these are dominated by excessive hard surfacing with limited planting that read more as spaces between buildings rather than spaces with particular identities defined by coherent buildings. Even in cases where there is an organised space design (i.e., Helix), the quality of the spaces provided, and the mix of uses offered within the surrounding buildings are not successful in attracting members of the public to use these spaces (Figure 5.1). When there is private land ownership it is unclear how open spaces are managed to promote public access and activity.



*Figure 5.1- Example of open space provision in Helix (Google, 2021)*

The limited number of urban squares and their quality is not appealing to people and there is significant demand for the creation of attractive and adaptable urban squares and integration of them with other open spaces. There is also a lack of green spaces and there is a need for delivery of additional green space within the city centre boundary. These could be of different scales. Even small green spaces such as pocket parks are valued by users. Open spaces included in the hospital, and the two universities are not widely used by members of the public and as expected only serve the immediate education and healthcare users.

Escalation of privatisation of public spaces raises major concerns about safeguarding citizens' rights within these spaces and has significant implications on any response to the clear demand for the provision of attractive public spaces. This should be seen in connection with the limited opportunities that are available in the city centre and the parameters that are required for the creation of successful public spaces (i.e., proximity to symbolic buildings). If the current trend in the increase of private ownership of city centre sites continues, it would be very difficult and highly unlikely that appropriate sites could be safeguarded for the creation of these spaces such as public urban squares. While the provision of public open spaces for a variety of experiences through temporary and flexible use for a range of activities including events is encouraged, it is unclear how these aspirations could initiate change in terms of the delivery of functional spaces when suitable sites are privately owned, and private landowners are not motivated in this respect.

Another environmental issue is the problem with litter (i.e., food and drink packaging) in the city centre which appears to be associated with customer behaviour mainly from leisure seekers in their interactions with food and drinks venues. This is evident in the operation of takeaway shops and how they provide food on-the-go service for these users as part of the night-time economy. This is directly linked with the promotion of the city centre as an exclusive place for young leisure seekers and students who are the main users of the night-time economy.

### 5.1.4 Buildings

Symbolic

The concentration of buildings with symbolic value and architectural quality is identified as a strong characteristic of the city centre which contributes significantly to the place's identity and is vital to the future of the urban core. While there is a strong sense of pride associated with these buildings, there are concerns about the little attention that has been given to the setting of these buildings and limited public realm improvements implemented in this respect. One area of concern is the challenge of maintenance of these symbolic buildings and the associated costs with that in the long term.

Contextual

It is widely recognised that the construction of large-scale commercial and retail buildings has damaged the city centre structure in the 20th Century. The demand for these uses is in decline, however, there is a significant focus on the delivery of new buildings. There are major issues with the scale, design quality and anonymity of what is being delivered and a lack of respect for the local character and details that interest people. There is no indication that any of the new builds are seen to have a symbolic value for people. The market force remains an important driver in determining the form of the development. The limited number of refused applications and the pattern of reversing planning decisions by the Planning Inspectorate in favour of developers shows that the local authority could not prioritise design and refuse applications on design quality grounds.

The high vacancy rate of the upper floor units continues to be a challenge. Conversion of upper-floor vacant units has not attracted significant interest and with the decline in demand for retail and commercial space, there is scope for significant structural changes to have these buildings replaced with public open spaces. Such remodelling may indicate that the overall square footage of declining retail and commercial spaces are lower in the future.

Historic Buildings

Newcastle city centre has an identifiable historic core and landmarks that are significant cultural assets. 6 out of 11 buildings at risk in Newcastle are located within the city centre boundary and 4 out of these 6 buildings are or have been in ecclesiastical use. A change of use of these buildings is likely to happen. Sensitive management of change in the historic environment is perceived to be an onerous task both in terms of financial viability and available resources but also in terms of complying with building standards. There are challenges with physical interventions (i.e., for improving the thermal efficiency or improved access) to these buildings and the impact of physical interventions on the special character and architectural features of these buildings.

## 5.1.5 Microclimate and Air quality

Microclimate

The quality of outdoor spaces is closely linked with how these spaces are used. The level of comfort and functionality of these spaces including temperature, solar access and provision of shading, planting and water is increasingly important. Maximising ways to maintain comfortable climatic conditions throughout the year would have a significant contribution to the attractiveness of the city centre for various users. It is unclear if sufficient consideration is given to microclimate strategies, particularly during the design of open spaces. Climate change will continue to impose pressure on the city centre climate (i.e., heat waves) and therefore it would be possible that there is more demand for shading.

Air quality

Restriction of diesel and petrol vehicles has improved the air quality of the city centre and further pedestrianisation proposals will address the air quality issues over time. While further restrictions are expected for polluting vehicles, there is

a clear demand for non-polluting cars to cater for the needs of those who are not able to access the city centre through walking, cycling, or using public transport due to physical ability. These green plans appear to promote eco-ableism and focus on young and fit users, leaving behind those who are less able. There are also a variety of uses in the city centre that are highly dependent on efficient delivery of goods and services. There is scope for achieving this using zero-emission vehicles.

## Noise

Noise pollution and its impact on health and wellbeing have not received the same attention as air pollution. While the noise from traffic and congestion have been addressed by the introduction of significant restrictions for vehicles, there are ongoing challenges in terms of the night-time economy and the noise from leisure seekers on uses such as residential use. Relaxation of permitted development rights in terms of commercial to residential change of use has resulted in a complex situation in terms of noise conflicts where an increase in noise complaints is more likely to happen. These persistent challenges continue to have a negative impact on city centre living. Despite the presence of technical noise mitigation options for properties (i.e., triple glazing and mechanical ventilation), there is no evidence that suggests testing and trialling of good practice in the city centres.

## 5.1.6 Conclusion

Analysis of environmental findings from surveys, plans and interviews indicate the demand for a more focused approach to urban design rather than the delivery of isolated, single-use buildings. The aim should be to provide a comfortable, safe and attractive city centre that can draw in a wide range of people with different abilities for different reasons including high environmental qualities.

## 5.2 Social Perspectives

### 5.2.1 Introduction

This section reviews social findings from surveys, plans and interviews and presents issues related to the accommodation of a mixed and balanced population of insiders, regulars, visitors and strangers in the city centre and the facilitation of social interactions between them and the surrounding built environment.

### 5.2.2 Social Groups

**Insiders**

The young population aged between 20-29 comprises the majority of the residents. Among them, students are most visually dominant. Despite the rapid growth in the city centre population in recent decades and consistent promotion of city centre living policies, it is evident that so far interventions have not succeeded to attract a balanced mix of insiders from different backgrounds and maintaining a substantial non-transient population. Developing a heterogeneous population of insiders is identified to be the main issue and there is scope for increasing the number of non-student insiders from a range of age groups including young professionals, young families and those with children, and the elderly population.

The main approach adopted in the promotion of city centre living has been the focus on housing provision both through new construction on brownfield sites and residential conversions with existing buildings. However, as it appears, except for students, the current type of housing on offer has not been attractive to a wide range of potential insiders. Various factors contribute to this limited appeal. Design, scale and limitations in layout, outlook, and lack of access to private outdoor green space could be among contributing factors. There are also significant challenges in terms of provision of an acceptable level of residential amenity and achieving building standards (i.e., fire and noise separation, improving thermal efficiency and ventilation) within these housing options. Mitigation of city centre noise and tenure are identified as important

factors. Tenure models and affordability are also impacting residential location choices. In some cases when the building or the surrounding area has historic significance (either listed or in a conservation area) alterations within existing buildings without detrimentally impacting the historic or special character of the buildings can add to this challenge.

Most importantly, the wider perception of the city centre as a safe and comfortable living environment will be a determining factor. Very few focused and collective interventions have been carried out to change the perception of the city centre as an attractive place for living. While the concentration of amenities and access to transport options continues to be an enticement, there are real challenges in changing current perceptions for many potential insiders and creating city centres that are family-friendly, age-friendly, and accessible for all.

One important aspect of the insiders' age distribution is the scope for increasing the modest contribution of the over 40s population (currently 13%). Identification of this group as target insiders is not a new topic. However, other than recent research projects defined by local universities, there is no other evidence of focused systematic activities implemented to attract over the 40s population. Recent interventions have not portrayed such an inclusive image and have only managed to introduce changes that continue to present the city centre as a place only for those who are young and fit. Recent interventions in restricting vehicular access have not depicted the city centre as a welcoming place for the elderly population or members of the disability groups. On the contrary, these projects have identified these groups as minorities with requirements that should be addressed through the provision of mitigations (i.e., relocation of bus stops). The mitigations suggested by decision makers are considered to be impractical for these minorities and do not address their concerns. This approach highlights the need for a focus on the interactions between social and spatial constructs for the older and less able population so they are not seen as a problem and instead are seen as part of the solution in future scenarios that can help to revive the city centre. This is particularly important with the ageing population and their substantial contribution to the total population.

Increased employment opportunities are seen to be an attraction for young professionals. There is scope for retaining students in the city centre as young professionals by offering graduate opportunities once they graduate to address the issue of outflow of graduates which is particularly strong towards London. Attracting young families is currently being pursued by the local authority through Masterplans (e.g., Forth Yard). Some areas including Quayside are seen as a suitable location for family-friendly developments. However, the expectation is that even if families choose to live in the city centre they will move out after a few years. This is rooted in the types of accommodation on offer in the city centre (mainly apartments) but also access to school and other facilities that are valued by families as well as vehicular accessibility for car owners. The only area that has been continuously seen as potential family housing is the Leazes Area with the existing stock of good size dwellings.

With the majority of international students living in the city centre accommodation, students are seen to be important contributors to cultural diversity. There are concerns about the high student population and their dominance when seen in relation to imbalance numbers from other social groups. There is also significant room for manoeuvre for better integration of students with other social groups, particularly other insiders. Most importantly, there is scope for achieving a better balance in terms of the proportion of students and other groups of insiders. The number of students is not expected to grow significantly in the coming years. This is reflected in the market for purpose-built student accommodation which has almost been saturated in recent years. One important contributing factor to the dominance of the student population is the consistent focus on controlling the impact of purpose-built student accommodation to prevent the loss of family homes outside the city centre boundary from subdivision and change of use. While these impacts have been managed by creating a level of protection for the target residential areas outside the city centre, there has been little focus on achieving meaningful social interaction between students and the rest of the city centre because of the imbalance in the number of these two groups.

**Regulars**

This social group is comprised of various sub-groups who travel to the city centre for several reasons. Among these motivations, employment, education, leisure and entertainment, food and drink and shopping are the most highlighted attractions for these regulars. These attractions result in the presence of different regulars at various times of the day and night. The common approach is to support the increase in the number of regulars but also to encourage them to spend longer periods within the city centre boundary and to have them engage in activities other than the main reason for their visit. This will require the creation of a comfortable and inviting environment in the city centre and the provision of an easy, affordable, and appealing travel experience. There is consistency in recognition of the ability of the centre in providing opportunities for social interactions for regulars and such characteristics can also be seen as an attraction. Despite these strengths, different regulars may have varied experiences and different feelings about their reception which can be both positive and negative.

Most of the policy interventions for regulars have been focused on improving the efficiency of the transport options for serving a regional catchment area to increase and maintain an increased number of regional users who are the most frequent users of transport options. Among transport options, the metro system is perceived as a good service, however, there is a clear demand for improving access to the west of the city. Given the practical constraints in terms of the existing urban fabric and extension of the metro line, improved access may involve considering alternative solutions such as the introduction of street trams. The transport options on offer are being delivered through different transport operators and as a result, services are disjointed. An integrated transport option can enhance users' experience by linking networks and modes.

The growth in the flexible working including homeworking and hybrid working, the population and frequency of regulars visit who come to the city centre for employment purposes may see changes in (e.g., fewer people on Mondays and Fridays). A flexible working pattern is particularly practical and a popular choice for regulars with caring responsibilities who may have personal obligations

outside the city centre boundary. There is currently a limited number of nurseries operating in the centre. The provision of childcare facilities could impact working pattern choices by regulars. The contribution of major employers in the city centre who rely on face-to-face social interactions including NHS, Newcastle City Council, the two universities and the retail and hospitality sector may see a decline. Some of these employers such as Newcastle City Council have already experienced enormous shrinkage and others such as retail are experiencing it. These changes could have implications on the overall number of employed regulars in the city centre in the medium and long term.

Despite the shrinkage of the retail sector, shopping will attract regulars within the region due to its advantages in terms of immediate access to goods and social face-to-face interaction during the purchase. Combination of shopping and other experiences mainly leisure opportunities available in the city centre including culture and entertainment or eating or drinking will contribute to the retail experience. The two universities will support a considerable number of regulars who travel to the centre for education, leisure, and employment purposes.

**Visitors**

Visitors are portrayed as significant contributors to the vibrancy of the city centre. As a result, policies and interventions continue to encourage the attraction of a higher population of this social group. Such an approach is rooted in their economic contribution without significant consideration of the social issues associated with a high number of visitors to the city centre. There are significant disparities between the number of visitors and other social groups. The limited number of non-transient insiders means the problems of a high number of visitors and impacts on these residents may have not been well investigated or communicated. The high number of average daily visitors (approximately 27,000) and those who stay overnight (8,000) currently outnumbers the population of insiders. These high figures combined with their short stay (average of 3 nights per visit) raise important questions about the

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impact of the dominance of this transient group on the image and perception of the city centre. This perception has been detrimental in achieving the right balance of social groups in the city centre and has negatively impacted the presence of certain groups such as families or the elderly people. The visibility of the leisure seekers is not due to their high population as seen in the activities and participation rates (visiting pubs and night clubs only forms 10% of the main reasons for visit) however, even a small proportion of this group could have sizable impact. One contributing factor to the dominance of this group is that the majority of them choose to walk in the city centre and as such their presence in the public spaces is highly visible to other users.

There is little evidence that suggests this social group engages in any meaningful social interaction with any other social group during their short stay. Such detachment results in behaviour that is perceived as inappropriate by the insiders. A high number of visitors has also justified the major delivery of hotel accommodation that attracts very little interest for insiders, regulars, and strangers. The visual dominance of the transient population of visitors and visitor accommodation can be linked to a loss of a sense of community for residents and a reduction in the overall appeal of the city centre in attracting potential insiders.

City centre events continue to be promoted due to their attraction to a significant number of visitors. Such an approach raises questions about the influx of a large number of visitors attending these events regardless of the positive media coverage around their success. Small-scale events that happen more frequently would be easier to manage and will provide more engagement of insiders and regulars. These events should also be capable of attracting other social groups other than visitors including regulars and insiders.

Policies continue to target an increased population of business visitors which is unlikely to happen. It is evident that the number of business visits was declining even before the pandemic. With the impact of the fourth industrial revolution and remote working possibilities, business visitors are not going to have a significant contribution to visitor numbers. There are indications that the number of visitors who come to the city centre for science and heritage exhibits is on the

rise. Culture can be seen as a key element in this respect but similar to other topics there will be powerful lobbies and competing influences in this regard. Insiders and regulars have more empathy for their local culture and an emphasis on this key element can positively impact the perception of the city centre. This creates opportunities to attract visitors from different backgrounds to attract a wide range of visitors to manage the dominance of leisure visitors.

**Strangers**

Despite the unique characteristics of the city centre in accommodating strangers, there is very little known or planned about the future interaction of this group with other social groups. There is also limited information about how they experience the city centre. They have a very modest contribution to the city centre population but are deemed highly visible by other city centre users. Among strangers – rough sleepers, the homeless population, and beggars are considered to be most visible, however, there is recognition that some members of this social group can be invisible. The issue of detachment from insiders, regulars and visitors is significant and there are strong feelings when it comes to their presence in the city centre. Although there is no significant security concern, it is evident that other social groups and businesses are intimidated by the visibility of strangers, and this has already resulted in some groups being deterred from the city centre. This is particularly evident in cases where there is drug or alcohol misuse.

With the increased cost of living, the number of strangers may increase. The limited recommendations that are available for them are too general and do not address the complexities that are associated with the provision of support for this social group. There is also a decline in the funding available for them. Addressing the existing issues is not simply a matter of provision of short-term aid such as temporary accommodation. A longer-term and more holistic approach such as enforcement and long-term mental health care is required. Given the sensitivities involved in this topic, it is not expected that future interventions for this social group may see a significant change. As a result, it is important to acknowledge that strangers will continue to be present in the city

centres and with this realistic approach, public spaces should be designed to allow for the coexistence of this social group with others. There is scope for the formation of a package of provisions including improvements in the built environment such as street lighting to improve the perception of safety for other groups but also create a safer environment for vulnerable strangers.

While the city centre is identified to be the most accessible location in the city for this social group, the emerging trend in the displacement of charities from the city centre is raising concerns. This pattern follows issues on the affordability of commercial units and termination of agreements after a period of meanwhile use. This is raising significant anxieties for charities and the third sector organisations with a long history of city centre presence who are expecting a rise in the number of strangers as a result of the cost-of-living crisis and consider the city centre as the most suitable location for creating a hub for the provision of care for this social group. The concentration of charities and third sector organisations can also contribute to the number of regulars through the attraction of staff and volunteers although this may not be significant. There are major concerns about the consequences, implications, and effectiveness of having these service providers pushed outside the city centre boundary and how this trend can trigger additional problems in the future resulting in further detachment and frictions between the social group and others. Any future scenario for this social group is closely linked with difficult questions on the right to the city centre and where and how to provide for them so they could move into other social groups. The presence of religious buildings, libraries, charities, and other third-sector organisations creates an opportunity to complement services by sharing responsibilities. This would require the formation of a network and a facilitator organisation. These service providers could also be seen as potential beneficiaries for some of the existing vacant building stock however, market force and land ownership could be barriers in this regard.

### 5.2.3 Conclusion

Analysis of social findings highlights the need for a focused approach to amending the current perception of the city centre as an exclusive location for

limited social groups. This will be a prerequisite for achieving a heterogeneous and intercultural residential population and creating an attractive, safe, and comfortable city centre that creates opportunities for social interactions between various social groups.

## 5.3  Economic Perspective

### 5.3.1 Introduction

This section provides a review of the findings from surveys, plans, and interviews and provides an analysis of the city centre economy based on the key themes of income and expenditure, goods and services, supply and demand and the role of the city centre economic contributors.

### 5.3.2 Income and Expenditure

Despite the significant economic value generated within the city centre, the relationship between the city centre's income and expenditure is not clear. There is no indication that any significant effort has been made in mapping and communicating this value. Notwithstanding ongoing investments including a significant contribution from the two universities, foreign and local investment, and collection of 30% of Newcastle's business rate, there is a strong demand for an increase in the creation of income-generating opportunities and most importantly retention of a bigger proportion of this income in the city centre. There are however inconsistencies in terms of identification of these potential income sources. Events and implementation of mixed-use developments are increasingly being identified as desired options, however, there are issues with these aspirations. In terms of holding events, there is not a specific strategic plan focused on the city centre events programme. While Newcastle Gateshead Initiative is seen as an active facilitator for the visitor economy, the direct role of the local authority in organising and initiating these events is not very clear. One aspect of the economy of events is the consideration of financial resources they may require from the local authority who is already under pressure with budget cuts. There are also concerns about the way these events which are mainly large scale are planned and promoted. Careful scheduling of the existing events and consultation with businesses has the potential to maximise their economic benefit and it is suggested that this approach is adopted before the introduction of new events to avoid simultaneous ones. Small events that take place more

often are more likely to be economically beneficial to the city centre businesses as there will be less economic spillage outside the boundary.

When it comes to mixed use-developments, policies assert that the provision of new office space has the potential to generate income through increased employment opportunities. However, the provision of new office space can only result in the movement of staff and in most cases, it is a matter of leaving previous units vacant rather than the creation of new jobs.

There is limited evidence about the retention and the proportion of the economic value that is generated within the city centre boundary. This could be due to the lack of a focused approach to the unique economy of the city centre and that some of the income generated in the city centre may be redirected to address deprivation elsewhere and that these issues are seen as more urgent priorities that need to be addressed by the central government. One exception in this aspect is the information about inward investment. There is an ongoing desire, particularly in terms of attracting large-scale inward investment. While inward investment can be a positive and important element in a heterogeneous economic system, it should not be seen as a panacea. However, the competitive business of attracting inward investment has resulted in a situation where the attraction of such investment is perceived to be positive at any cost. Such investments have encouraged new-built developments but their long-term contribution to the city centre economy and what they get in return is ambiguous.

Given the complexity and the high concentration of transactions in the city centre, it would be very difficult to have an accurate image of the overall economic model of the city centre. However, the availability of further information about the relationship between income and expenditure is perceived to be beneficial for the city centre in the long term as it could justify further retention of a higher proportion of this income. The financial model of NE1 in which there is clarity in terms of source and amount of income and expenditure on projects is seen to be a very good example to demonstrate and quantify the tangible economic benefits.

### 5.3.3 Goods and Services

The provision of city centre services (72%) outweighs its retail function (28%). Evidence shows that the rate of change in the retail sector was accelerated as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic. This sector was experiencing an evident over-supply of midrange retail space with household goods being most dominant. It is anticipated that shrinkage and contraction of national brands are likely to happen. This may allow for the emergence of more independent local operators who have the potential to grow over time under the right circumstances. Business support for these operators will be a key factor in their future performance. These emerging businesses have the potential to take over a proportion of vacant units if incentives are provided. The maintenance and upkeep of these units could be transformational. Shopping centres were also experiencing significant challenges before the pandemic and shutdowns have been accelerated since then. The high concentration of non-local and international retailers has resulted in a situation where there is very little or no control over the decisions when it comes to unit closures.

Notwithstanding challenges, shopping centres are unlikely to give significant floor space to small-scale independent local operators. Despite uncertainties about the future of department stores and a decline in their sale, there are exceptions. Fenwick- the local department store with strong local ties, is performing well and is still planning for growth. This could be due to its strong local roots and also the incorporation of opportunities for complementary experiences to the retail function in its business plan. The combination of shopping with other experiences appears to be a trend on demand by users. In terms of retail activity, the core shopping area continues to function as a regional retail core and the continuity of such function is promoted.

Among services, food and drink providers are the most dominant uses and despite the frequent changes in service providers within this sector, their overall performance is likely to continue. Higher education and health services offered by Newcastle University and Northumbria University and Royal Victoria Infirmary are also important services that will continue to have a significant role in the economy of the city centre. Other service providers such as the

Newcastle Civic Centre have been hugely impacted by a significant reduction in its budget but also the inevitable shift this has caused towards the provision of adult social care services.

One visible trend in the city centre is the disappearance of certain service providers such as banks and post offices. While this is related to the impact of the 4th Industrial revolution and the reduction of demand for certain services, there is no clear explanation of the causes and consequences of such widespread closures and a large stock of affected vacant units in the policies. While the low economic performance of these services may be the reason for these closures there are linkages between the important presence of these services and the functionality of the city centre for an increased population of insiders and regulars.


### 5.3.4 Supply and Demand

Evidence shows a high number of vacant units in the city centre which is consistently identified as a major issue in future scenarios. These vacancies mainly cover vacant shops, upper floor units and abandoned sites. The high rate of vacancy is not a single-issue problem and is a result of various factors accumulated over time. There are complexities involved in any solution to bring them back in use including technical challenges (Building Control and Planning Process) and financial viability and legal issues such as private ownership and multiple owners.

In terms of demand for purpose-built student accommodation, the city centre has already reached its limit and the market is showing signs of saturation. While plans encourage further development (albeit at a slower rate), no further large-scale development is justifiable. The feedback on existing self-contained developments also means that any future development for student accommodation should provide better opportunities for integration with the wider city centre economy.

There are inconsistencies in the supply and demand for office spaces. Development policies widely promote further delivery of grade 'A' office space

and encourage the delivery of new office spaces as part of mixed-use developments in the interest of economic growth. These policies fail to address the issue of the units that are left vacant once occupiers move to new offices. The impact of the 4th Industrial Revolution on future demand for offices is not reflected in policies and no long-term strategy or incentives are offered to deal with the issue of vacant office stock. The long-term strategies that identify entrepreneurship and business start-ups as potential economic contributors do not provide a projection and an estimate of the types of support that are required. There is also no progress report that shows the rate of conversions or refurbishment of offices within the city centre boundary.

In terms of residential properties, it is agreed that further supply of appropriate housing accommodations can promote city centre living among other non-transient social groups. Despite the promotion of conversions, the current housing stock has not created significant demand. However, it is not clear if any of the lessons learned from previous schemes have been taken on board. There are some indications that the conversion of upper floor units in the retail core to residential use should be redirected to safeguarding these units for community and educational uses instead. The latest approach that promotes more variety of housing is seen to be too ambitious in attracting families.

The demand for retail space has declined, however, despite the high number of closures, the net closure rate is balanced with further shop openings which still shows a transition period for the retail sector. With less demand for the retail sector, discussions are emerging on alternative uses of large vacant retail units (i.e., vacant department stores) and there might be a trialling phase for new leisure uses within these units. With smaller units, there is potential for increased demand by smaller independent operators.


### 5.3.5 Economic Contributors

**Insiders**

City centre living could result in economic benefits through spending on goods and services. An increase in the population of insiders can also enhance the perception of city centres and this will have its indirect economic benefits.

However, the increase in the population of this social group is directly linked to the quality, availability and affordability of accommodation options which requires significant investment in city centre housing. Retention of economically active residents has been a long-standing ambition in policies. However, defined policies and interventions have only managed to attract a high number of transient students and have failed to achieve a desired diversity of insiders. Even for the student population, it is not clear if there is a strategy for long-term retention of them after graduation and to address the issue of loss of graduates to other locations. Increasing the number of non-transient insiders and promoting a diverse background, particularly from different age groups is considered to be positive in terms of sustainable economic contributions. This is due to non-students spending power which is a missed opportunity for certain groups (i.e., the elderly population) but also the impact of their location choice and their presence to change the perception of the city centre as a place that is not exclusive to students and an area that could cater for a diverse background. Evidence shows that despite common perceptions about their high economic contribution, students' spending pattern is inconsistent at different times of the year and the rate is not as significant as it is often portrayed. It is also highlighted that certain details including the council tax exemption for full-time students mean their presence does not result in an increased income for the local authority.

It is considered that one of the barriers to city centre living for non-transient insiders is the type of accommodations that are currently on offer. What is currently available has not been successful in attracting young professionals. This is particularly evident in terms of the availability and quality of converted upper floors but also the affordability of new-build housing options. City Centre rents are still a significant proportion of insider's income.

**Regulars**

The 4th Industrial Revolution has already led to a shift in the city centre by promoting home working and online shopping. Home working and hybrid working patterns appear to be most popular among those with high earning jobs

so a decrease in their number means substantial less spending in the city centre. While larger employers including the two universities, Royal Victoria Infirmary and the Civic Centre continue to attract many regular employees to work from city centre offices, it is evident that the demand for small and medium-sized offices has already declined. Provision of what regulars demand including the provision of eating and shopping facilities is thought to be an encouragement for regulars to consider working from city centre offices. For retail, the introduction of complementary services and experiences is seen to positively attract shoppers. Students who come to the city centre for educational reasons are a significant population who are attracted to the food and drink and leisure offerings of the city centre. However, a review of their spending shows that despite the high proportion of spending on social activities in comparison with other spending, the amount of this contribution is not significantly high.

Maintaining a considerable and consistent number of regulars in the city centre requires ongoing investments in the transport infrastructure to ensure services are efficient, affordable and of high quality.

**Visitors**

Attracting visitors is considered to be beneficial to the city centre economy due to their spending on goods and services and support of employment. The emphasis on the job creation aspect of the visitor economy has a limited focus on the number of positions and fails to provide details on the full characteristics of these employment opportunities such as the high turnover rate, minimal career growth opportunities, lack of flexibility and unsociable working hours for staff.

The common perception is that visitor spending can cover some of the spending gaps by insiders and regulars. However, this may result in a situation where certain services and goods are solely defined based on the needs of visitors with little ability to be of interest or use to insiders and regulars. This exclusivity can make the sector fragile to external shocks when there is a significant drop in visitor numbers (i.e., the impact of the pandemic lockdown measures on hotel industries). One aspect of the hospitality sector that could be economically

beneficial to the city centre is an increased focus on the importance of establishing a strong local supply chain that will contribute to the resilience of the sector as well.

The city centre is seen to be the preferred option for accommodation of visitors even if the main reason of their visit is located outside the city centre boundary. Such preference both by visitors and businesses works well with the concentration of transport options. Short and medium-length stays are likely to continue to be most popular for visitors. While the current trend does not show a high rate of returning visitors, the aspiration is to attract returning visitors while securing a steady number of first-time visitors. The 4th Industrial Revolution will continue to impose new trends within the tourism industry. This could be in form of impact on the need to travel for business (i.e., decline in demand for business trips) but also in terms of facilitation, communication, and integration of marketing of goods and services to increase their transactions before, during and after visitor's journeys.

In terms of reasons for travel, while leisure and retail continue to be an attraction, there is an increased interest in cultural attractions. This brings economic opportunities for the owners of these cultural assets which are mainly the local authority, local universities, and charities. The stadium is seen as a great asset to the visitor economy, however recent major investments have raised important questions about local identity. In terms of future assets for the visitor economy, the River Tyne is seen to have the potential to contribute to the visitor economy. There seems to be a focused approach to attracting one major visitor attraction. Such fixation on large-scale development will come with its long-term risks and should be replaced with an aspiration to deliver a variety of smaller-scale attractions to entice a range of different visitors.


**Strangers**

The is no indication of significant economic contribution by this social group. Despite the visible presence of strangers in the city centre, their economic role (either formal or informal) appears to be invisible. Particularly the plans fail to provide a clear understanding of the implications of the presence of this social

group on the city centre economy. There seem to be anxieties about the presence of strangers in the city centre. The common perception is that their visibility can have a detrimental impact on the economic contribution of insiders, regulars, and visitors. There are also seen as a drain on the economy and a burden on public finances and there are concerns that with the ongoing and emerging financial uncertainties and social challenges, the number of strangers may be on the rise which may result in even more pressure on the provision of social care services for them.

### 5.3.6 Conclusion

Review of economic findings highlights the significance of the economic value generated in the city centre and shows the demand for retention of a higher proportion of this economic value within the boundary of the city centre. It also shows the significant gap in mapping the economic data exclusively for the centre.

## 5.4 Political Perspective

### 5.4.1 Introduction

This section reviews the political findings from surveys, plans and interviews and provides an analysis of the power structures at different levels of local, regional, and national level and the involvement of a wide range of public and private actors in the decisions that shape the future of the city centre.

### 5.4.2 Local

One of the major issues at the local level is the significant pressure from persistent and emerging challenges experienced by Newcastle City Council and how these pressures impact the ability of the local authority to make decisions on how to plan, finance and manage the city centre. The combination of limited financial resources with a long list of outdated statutory duties and challenges such as managing conflicting agendas and the need for adaption to constant changes in the government structure and funding patterns has created a complex situation for the local authority. This has turned into a more difficult situation as the City Council continuously has to respond to shocks and their impact which leaves very little capacity for innovation and creativity. There is significant scope for improvement at this level and the local authority will have a critical role to play in the future of the city centre. However, there are clear barriers and most importantly, the existing level of control by the central government is the one most evident.

Another major issue is the need for additional funding and flexibility in spending power. Newcastle City Council has been pushed to make considerable savings through the elimination of non-statutory activities and reduction of services and such an approach has resulted in a drop in the general satisfaction of the communities with the local authority. Apart from budget cuts, the local authority has been required to constantly navigate through new structures and adopt its scarce resources and skills to secure these funds. The most recent one is the bids for the Levelling-up Fund, the new pattern of funding proposed by the central government which requires prioritising a few individual projects. The

bidding process itself is arguably not a suitable process for allocation of vital resources to communities. Despite the fact that the scale of these funds for individual projects is portrayed to be a significant amount, there is no indication of the willingness of central government for provision of increased funding to the point that covers the disproportionate spending cuts at the local level.

It is also unlikely that the pressures from statutory duties will ease in the short and medium term. This is going to be even more challenging once seen parallel to the shocks and their consequences in recent years including Brexit, the Covid-19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine and the rise in the cost of living. The reality of dealing with ongoing conflicting agendas is also likely to remain unchanged as many of these challenges are rooted in the way power structure is constructed between the local and national governments. There is significant demand for genuine devolution of power, however, what has happened so far shows little influence at the local level when it comes to critical decisions.

Limited resources available to Newcastle City Council have resulted in formation of policies that stimulate new build and promote development without significant consideration of the wider detrimental impacts they may have in the long term. There is a demand to introduce change in the structure and objective of development plans so that communities have the opportunity to shape them. There seems to be scope for action plans with smaller and more realistic targets that could safeguard tangible achievements in the city centre. It is considered that the accumulation of these little victories could be transformational.

There are issues with community representation at the local level. There is very little space for substantial influence from local councillors and the city centre constituency. Despite the unique character of the city centre, the current power structure with a total of three councillors is no different from any other ward in the city. The low number of non-transient insiders within the Monument Ward could result in a situation where the opinion and needs of city centre communities are not highlighted when seen in comparison with other wards with a higher residential population that might be more vocal. The modest number of electors in local elections and the high number of turnouts in the Monument Ward show that despite the lack of a robust community group, these insiders

are engaged in the future of the city centre. However, there are very few opportunities for meaningful engagement and the introduction of further limitations such as changes to the scheme of delegation for determination of planning applications by the Planning Service, have impacted the involvement of these communities in the planning process. Consultations also appear to be reactive and offer very little opportunity to communities to shape plans in a proactive way. The control of the local authority by the Labour party also means they are probably given less protection of spending powers from the Conservative government.

### 5.4.3 Regional

The frequent significant structural changes in the North-East have been damaging in terms of the influence on power structures and their effectiveness and also the perception of the regional structures. The impact so far has been considerable confusion as well as a detrimental impact on the perception of the possibility of having a stable and efficient power structure at the regional level. Some of the previously abolished structures had positive impacts on the city centre, particularly in terms of acting as a channel for gap funding and provision of grants that were used for the restoration of historic buildings. Despite the criticism towards the efficiency of the power structure at this level, there is consistency in acknowledgement of the importance of the city centre as a bold element in the North-East Region.

The gap between the North and South is quite substantial and the imposed models on the regional level have too much reliance on the London model which is unique and very different from the North-East Region and are all dependent on the central government. The existing structure appears to be very random and is not suitable for the North-East region. The anxieties about the most recent structures and low interest in the current regional debate have been expressed on multiple occasions including the vote against a Regional Assembly and the low turnout in the Mayor's election. A review of the process of formation of the North of Tyne Combined Authority shows that the current devolution agenda lacks a clear framework. The existing structure also appears

to be weak in comparison with other combined authorities. The reason can be tracked down to artificial geographies built around an unclear economic area that makes little or no sense to the local population. This boundary is too small and appears to be more of a political fix between the other two power structures at the local and national levels. There are major problems with this geography as many of the existing regional relationships go beyond this boundary so it cannot be seen as a functional economic area that reflects real local identities.

There is also the issue of limited funding offered to the regional structure by central government. The level of funding available is only a fraction of the sum that is given to other local authorities and this amount does not make up for budget cuts and reduction of services that have already happened at the local level. There is no indication that this budget will be targeted towards city centre projects in the future. There is also no evidence that the existing regional structure has benefitted the city centre in any form other than improvements in the wider transport options. The focus of the majority of regional strategies and partnerships continues to be on transport connections and in this context, the links to and from the city centre receive attention. Even on the topic of transport, it is considered that the existing regional structure has limitations in addressing the region's transport infrastructure needs. This is again reflected in the lack of powers and the discrepancies in the defined geography of the North of Tyne Combined Authority and the difference it has with the boundary of the Tyne and Wear transport authority.

The promise of national government appears to be giving more power to the regions, and this could assist the process, and accountability of the central government but is not beneficial for the city centres. The current structure does not empower the Region because of the level of competition involved in securing funding between neighbouring local authorities in one region and lack of strategic plans at regional level. Instead of city regions, the focus of the national government could be on core cities.

### 5.4.4 National

The devolution promise by the central government has not been a genuine decentralisation of power and there is still significant direct control retained centrally over decisions and decision-making processes at the local and regional levels. This is particularly evident in the allocation of resources to the North-East. While no additional funding has been offered to the lower power structures, the complexity of funding remains to be a significant issue. It has already been shown that the allocation of funding to local authorities has seen a drastic cut in recent years and the funding process has been replaced by a bidding mechanism where proposals need to be justified to the central government in advance. This is contradictory to the notion of devolution as it gives direct control over selection and funding of local projects. This approach has resulted in substantial uncertainties at the local level and has resulted in a clear emphasis on short-term and medium-term objectives. This process also requires a promise of financial returns on government investment which cannot be guaranteed. There are also concerns about the practicalities of such an approach. This is mainly due to skills and resources that are required at the local level. There are indications that the local authorities will be more efficient if they could maintain their expertise in the provision of support, instead of being heavily involved in the process of securing funds. The current funding pattern also puts pressure on local structures and encourages them to accept any form of funding as they will have no choice but to accept any development opportunity regardless of their long-term consequences. These challenges have not been considered and acted upon by the central government. The pressure on the local authorities does not appear to be a priority at the national level. Central government has not reviewed and updated the statutory duties of local authorities while introducing new roles in the context of reduced budgets.

The current focus of the national government appears to be on towns and not so much on core cities. This is evident in major funding allocations (e.g., Future of High Street Project) where traditional cities are not among the successful applications. A clear focus on cities (not city regions), would be beneficial to neighbouring towns however a focus on towns might not contribute to the future

of cities. The current approach of the national government could be political and related to the role of voters living in towns.

There have been some efforts by the central government in simplifying the planning process. However, some recent interventions, such as the relaxation of permitted development rights have not benefitted the city centre. As evidence shows, these relaxations have resulted in the provision of sub-standard housing accommodation that have failed to attract a variety of non-transient social groups to the city centre. There has been a significant reduction in the allocation of local grants and local funding support for the conversion of the existing vacant units. This will require significant support from the central government both in terms of funding and flexibility in spending but also a focused review of policies when it comes to the conversion and maintenance of the existing building stock.

There are disjointed arrangements at the different levels of local, regional, and national and the source of the issue is rooted in the approach of central government. The current relationship between these levels particularly between central government and the other two levels is limited to financial transactions. The role of the national government in the future of the city centre is critical and requires significant flexibility by central government in form of a true devolution of power.


### 5.4.5 Governance

It is not clear if different decision makers and communities are aware of or moving towards a shared long term vision. The biggest challenge in terms of the governance of the city centre is the top-down structure of government without the presence of a heterogeneous composition of local people. There is demand for local people (including local businesses, insiders, and regulars) to have a meaningful role in defining future policies and actions. While the greatest potential for transformation remains at the local level, opportunities for communities are minimal and reactive. As such, weak and fragmented governance structure, with a lack of vision appears common over the last two decades. Where attempts have been made in the North-East to form

governance structures, these groups have focused on regional or at best the wider city scale, are driven by a particular focus, lack diverse representation and can often be fleeting in existence and impact. Certainly, in Newcastle there is lack of governance that delivers long-term strategic focus towards the city centre. Even where scenarios have been developed, these are not seen to fruition, and act more as a talking piece rather than a distinct plan. There is also a clear conflict between the priorities of the public and private sectors that could be involved in governance. NE1 which represents the private sector is most interested in public spaces. However, Newcastle City Council is focused on property development though inward investment and there is clearly little interaction with the local community. It could therefore be argued that the concept of a governance structure in the city centre that is primarily constructed of the public sector, private sector and the community, is becoming more distanced, especially with the Council's current lack of interest in the city centre.

There are small, isolated community groups focused on individual topics that may partially cover the city centre (i.e., cyclists), however, the current political system of representation at the local level has not resulted in the formation of a robust, diverse, and representative community group of insiders and regulars who are actively concerned about the multiple aspects of the future of the city centre. This evident void can explain the gap between the opinion and aspiration of the local people and the city centre interventions implemented by decision-makers but also raises important questions in terms of effective engagement and interventions. The current structure with three elected members and no formal active community group shows that the existing political system is not ambitious about securing local community views. There are significant challenges in moving towards genuine engagement and involving the community in the governance of the city centre. This will require a culture change at the local authority level but also among city centre developers to understand that time invested in meaningful early engagements will pay dividends later in the process. There are also significant resource implications, particularly in terms of the planning system that is already overstretched. These challenges impose the risk of further frustration and disappointment among communities.

The lack of a robust community at the local level also raises anxieties about the role of local institutions that are out of practice in terms of effective participation skills. There is potential in terms of collaboration and building strengths in this regard. The current working model of NE1 is an example that could be seen as successful and efficient. There is no ambiguity about the source and destination of their funds as these are raised and directly spent in the city centre. Their clear focus on the city centre improvements is seen as a great asset. The objectives and the scale of NE1 projects have been defined with realistic expectations and meaningful engagements with the business community. Other structures such as the Newcastle Gateshead initiative also appear to be filling some of the voids that were previously covered by the local authority, particularly in terms of the public realm and support of businesses. Despite the presence of these two organisations, which represent the business community and tourism sector, there are other voids in the city centre that need to be addressed. This is particularly evident in terms of social voices that need to be heard and the voluntary sector's demands for such representation. NE1 and NGI are working with limited staff and budgets and are working with uncertain futures. This level of uncertainty has been beneficial in terms of added accountability for these organisations as the continuation of their projects depends on a positive vote by the city centre businesses. Renewing such a mandate requires the successful implementation of projects with positive tangible outcomes that could be communicated with decision makers and social groups. However, the requirement for an established positive reputation to attract support can also be harmful because it can result in a form of fixation with large-scale interventions. These projects and the associated inward investment can make headlines and attract the media's attention.

Evidence from Newcastle City Futures also highlights the potential of Newcastle University and Northumbria University to have a bigger role in emphasising foresight and unconstrained thinking particularly in terms of promoting a long term vision which is currently missing from the fragmented and short term governance structures. They can directly facilitate discussions on future scenarios and add intuition and imagination which are currently missing from the existing processes. This is particularly important as many of the public,

private and third sector decision makers at the local level are already dealing with day-to-day challenges to an extent that they have very little capacity to develop creative future-based frameworks. They can also address the need for more reliable forms of intelligence and research evidence in governance structures. The two local universities and their current partnership can bring together the collective power and knowledge of 10,000 staff and 50,000 students for the benefit of the local people. This partnership and engagement with a range of partners in the public, private and third sector opens the possibility for a transition from government into governance with the academic leadership co-ordinating the balance of political, business and community leadership.

## 5.4.6 Conclusion

Analysis of the political findings reveal conflicts at the three levels of local, regional, and national levels that are clearly detrimental to the future of the city centre. It is critical to determine which of these power struggles will be determined at each level. The current political system should evolve into governance with the local government joined by the private sector and the community.

# 6.0 Commentary and Framework for the Future

## 6.1 Introduction

Previous chapters provided a comprehensive investigation of Newcastle city centre. This section follows the analysis of the findings and provides the culmination of this research in the form of a proposal and framework for the future of Newcastle upon Tyne. The proposal and resulting framework address the future environmental, economic, social, and political perspectives for city centres and may be applicable to other English cities. The commentary and the framework for the future should be read together. The chapter begins by providing a commentary for the four perspectives.

## 6.2 Commentary

### 6.2.1 Environmental Perspective

The future city centre should have a unique character with an attractive and accessible public realm that is legible and easy to move through. It should be an adaptable place with buildings and spaces that can respond to changing conditions. Any proposed intervention, regardless of scale, should be seen as an opportunity to enhance the overall environmental quality. It is evident that the property industry has not positively impacted the city centre in terms of the quality of the environment and sustainability. As such, future development should be carefully planned so that redundancy of buildings is avoided.

In terms of movement, there needs to be an emphasis on a hierarchy of transport options and most importantly, a continuous spatial network within and outside the city centre boundary. Pedestrianisation should go beyond interventions to prevent vehicular access or simply occupying of the former streetscape. It must be seen as an opportunity to create attractive public spaces functioning as new networks that accommodate social and economic activities with carefully thought-out functions at different times of the day and night. Public transport needs to be integrated, efficient and affordable to ensure it offers a comfortable experience. Those who are physically less able with more

dependency on cars should be able to use private non-polluting vehicles to come to the city centre.

With the current level of privatisation of public spaces, it is imperative to define a mechanism that guarantees free access and use of these spaces. This could be in the form of a charter of rights to control the management implications associated with these open spaces including public access. This should be complemented by focused activities to bring transparency to land ownership so that communities and individuals have easy and free availability of up-to-date information which enables them to find out who has a controlling interest in the city centre locations. Key changes to the UK's Economic Crime Act 2022 (Transparency and Enforcement) which represents a shift in disclosure requirements for foreign companies who hold property interests in the UK, provides a timely opportunity for demanding more clarity on city centre land ownership to address the issue of anonymity regarding the beneficial ownership of land. There should be further emphasis on transparency on land ownership and lessons must be learnt from other UK countries. For example, in Scotland a new Register of Persons Holding a Controlled Interest in Land has been introduced. This register provides key information about owners, including oversea entities and trusts who ultimately make decisions about the management or use of land. The provision of this register in the UK shows that it is legally possible to move towards more clarity on land ownership.

While movement and activity will continue to be important elements, spaces of repose and observation should be delivered to serve a wider range of users with different abilities and preferences. Decision-makers need to think more sensitively and imaginatively about urban design as a priority with a clear focus on making places for people instead of developing individual buildings. The topic of design value remains underappreciated and there is demand for review and identification of critical points in the process of planning, design, and delivery of city centre projects where a commitment to design can lead to better urban design outcomes. With scarce resources, the issue of design deficit at the local authorities is unlikely to be addressed in the short and medium term. This highlights the need for a new structure for the formation of urban design groups

involving universities and local communities in accordance with an urban design strategy.

The provision and integration of green spaces throughout the city centre will be essential. These spaces can be of different scales. Evidence from this study shows that the demand for and access to green spaces should be seen as a priority. With the decrease in demand for commercial and retail activity, there are opportunities to experiment with the replacement of some of the vacant buildings and derelict sites with these spaces. Greening city centres will bring various environmental benefits including improving air quality and reducing summer temperatures as well as mental health benefits for different social groups. Rethinking underutilised assets either geographical (e.g., rivers) or heritage and cultural, will contribute to the overall quality of the city centre environment.

The current pattern of demolishing the old and replacing them with new buildings may not be sustainable. For new builds and conversions, ongoing research and the trial of new approaches and technologies should be part of the delivery process to ensure new projects can achieve an acceptable level of amenity in terms of privacy, sunlight/ daylight, natural ventilation, and noise levels for future users and to assure flexibility and adaptability in the future. The two processes of Building Control and Planning should adjust to promote feasibility studies for conservation, adaptation and reuse of existing buildings and should be complemented with incentives that make these interventions economically viable. The provision of updated guidance will continue to be beneficial. Appropriate routine management and maintenance of the heritage assets will contribute positively to the distinctive character of the city centre. For symbolic buildings, enhancement of their settings delivered through Business Improvement Districts and Community Ownership Funds will be particularly important.

External spaces should be designed with careful consideration of microclimate aspects so they could be used more intensively. The objective should be to maximise the number of days when the temperature is up to 25°C and reduce strong and unpleasant winds to around 4mph, arising to 8mph as the

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temperature rises. Noise levels should be kept to no more than 65db(A) at night in the vicinity of residential areas.

### 6.2.2 Social Perspective

The future city centre should be a safe, inviting, and pleasant space where a balanced mix of people feel welcome. It is crucial that users are seen as social groups and not only as economic contributors by decision makers. The aim should be to invite a diverse population from different social groups, promote and increase opportunities for social interactions and avoid the dominance of certain groups such as students and visitors, which may cause social divisions. This mixed balance will positively impact on the desirability of the city centre particularly concerning the presence of citizens. Diversity will also change the perception of the centre as an exclusive playground for the young. It is necessary for decision makers to have a clear focus on changing the perception of the city centre and initiate collective interventions that portray an inclusive image of the city centre for different social groups.

The provision of a variety of housing developments that are affordable and offer different tenure options can entice a higher number of insiders from more diverse backgrounds. There are practical limitations in city centre living for families with children and downsizers. However, availability of suitable services including schools or open spaces, along with appropriate housing options, can encourage these groups to consider city centre living so they contribute to the formation of a heterogeneous population. The high number of young and transient insiders is one of the most important obstacles to the creation of a robust community in the city centre. The aim should be to attract a heterogeneous population of different ages, backgrounds and ethnic compositions and create a less transient population of insiders.

Students form a significant population of insiders. This includes a high population of international students who live in purpose-built student accommodation in the city centre who could contribute to the cultural diversity. However, it is necessary to scrutinise the opportunities this accommodation offer in terms of facilitating meaningful social interactions with other social

groups. The student population is unlikely to have a considerable increase in the future and this is reflected in the purpose-built student accommodation market which is near saturation. Any future development of student accommodations should be justified against student population projections and address the issue of isolation of students from other social groups. Universities and businesses should make an effort to retain students in the centre as insiders or regulars after graduation to address the issue of loss of graduates to the south of England.

The pattern of regulars is likely to change. This will be particularly evident with fewer regulars visiting for shopping purposes. With the consequences of the 4th Industrial Revolution and the integration of digital communication in the workplace and increased access of employees to the technology they need to work from home, the number of the employees visiting the city centre is also likely to decrease. The likelihood of working from home is higher if the jobs are not location specific or highly dependent on face-to-face interactions or physical activity. This pattern had started before the Covid-19 pandemic and was accelerated as a result of the lockdown and should not be seen as a consequence of the pandemic. The flexibility of working from home means that these employees will not necessarily follow a fixed or consistent pattern of visiting the city centre. Provision of affordable childcare facilities in the centre could encourage those regulars with childcare responsibilities to consider working from office premises instead of homeworking.

The influx of visitors and the exclusivity of destinations and experiences can impact the quality of life of insiders and regulars, and result in a situation where the locals feel like strangers in their own city centre. The uncontrolled growth of visitors due to their economic contribution must be balanced against the wider social and environmental impacts. New attractions should not be designed exclusively for visitors and should have the capacity and characteristics to serve and host the local communities and promote interactions between different groups. The increased presence of the local communities in visitors' attractions could potentially contribute to responsible tourism. The increased opportunities for interactions between the locals and the visitors can have a direct impact on

the experience of visitors as well as their behaviour and can potentially minimise negative social impacts.

Strangers will continue to be of different types. It is important that this group including those who are not much visible are acknowledged as a social group in decision makings to avoid social exclusion. Creating opportunities for social interactions may reduce the feeling of detachment experienced by this group. For some of the most dominant subgroups of strangers, including the homeless population and rough sleepers, the city centre will be the most appropriate option for the concentration of charities and third-sector organisations for the provision of support. The affordability of premises will have a direct impact on the long-term presence of these service providers in the city centre. Creative approaches including meanwhile-use and incentives for city centre conversions would be beneficial for this sector. The provision of support for some strangers should recognise the critical role of the delivery of consistent mental health support services particularly in terms of alcohol and drug use as well as homelessness. A meaningful partnership between local authorities, Health Services and NHS, local third-sector organisations and charities will be necessary to move support delivery in terms of housing options, employment opportunities and mental health support more into upstream preventions as opposed to focusing on the crisis end of homelessness and rough sleeping.

### 6.2.3 Economic Perspectives

Given the complexity and intensity of transactions in the city centre, one of the most difficult economic conundrums will be presenting a clear model for the city centre based on the current pattern of availability of economic data. There is an urgency for more transparency and availability of publicly available information on this topic. Economic value mapping tools for documenting and reporting city centre economic data could help in this regard. A variety of these general tools are already available for UK cities however further development and modification of them is needed so they can provide exclusive and focused reports based on city centre indicators. The reports from these tools will be particularly useful when compared with the city-wide data. For example, they

are likely to show a considerable contribution to business rate but low council tax income. Such insights can help cities in the central-local debate to negotiate to retain a proportion of the business rate that is generated within the city centre boundary so it could be reinvested back in form of business and entrepreneurship support in the centre. Re-directing such additional funding towards locally owned enterprises is likely to be more financially beneficial to the city centre by locking the income into place.

It is evident that the current economic norm which requires the local level to be in constant competition with others to secure resources controlled by the central government has not addressed the regional imbalances and the North-South divide. Issues such as lack of strategic governance continue to be a barrier to boosting deprived areas. The present economic circumstances and the instabilities as a result of the impact of the Covid-19 crisis, Brexit and the war in Ukraine mean the funding from the central government is likely to be stretched even further and fewer resources will be made available for local people. It is essential that the challenges of the current difficult time are not perceived as the norm and steps are made to outline what needs to be done in a scenario in which the economy recovers from these shocks. Such an approach will require reconsideration of the pattern of public funding, so city centres are seen as direct beneficiaries of resources.

Systematic efforts should be made to change the perception of the city centre's economic development with recognition of the transformational ability of little victories where smaller local firms become integral to the functioning of the city centre economy instead of a limited emphasis on identifying large-scale inward investment as the key driver of growth.

There is scope for more emphasis on the adoption of people-centred approaches to the local economy such as community wealth building in decision-making. Examples of this can already be found in the UK on a city-wide scale and can be experimented on a smaller scale in the city centres. This approach requires fundamental shifts in the economic structures to re-circulate the wealth that exists in the city centre as opposed to only focusing on attracting large-scale capital. Where the financial and social gain is harnessed by citizens,

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the function and ownership of local assets by local communities should be strengthened through the promotion of various models of enterprise ownership. As part of these changes, public sector procurement and commissioning should be utilised to develop dense local supply chains of businesses that are likely to support responsible employment practices and to retain work locally. These employment practices respond to increasingly precarious situations including the rise of in-work poverty, zero-hour contracts and erosion of job security through offering Real Living Wages, good employment charters and recruitment from hard-to-reach groups. While these issues are not exclusive to city centre, improving them as part of a people-centred approach will have positive contributions to city centre economy.

Dealing with land ownership and multiple owners will continue to be a huge practical challenge with legal complexities for decision-makers and community groups when change is proposed. The high vacancy rate of upper floor properties in the city centre shows that Development Plans adopted by local authorities have not succeeded in attracting property owners when a change of use or other physical interventions are necessary to bring a building back into use. With reduced funding for local authorities, existing mechanisms to acquire rights over land including Compulsory Purchases by local authorities from disengaged owners are unlikely to be fit for purpose in the future. These mechanisms require both a significant level of funding for purchasing land or properties and staff resources due to long and complicated processes involved. Small-scale interventions with clear, measurable, and tangible benefits are more likely to attract interest among these owners.

With the implications of the 4th Industrial Revolution and the reduced demand for office space, further delivery of new office buildings should be thoroughly investigated to show if they genuinely result in the creation of new employment opportunities and a positive economic value in harmony with the initial aspirations of the development plans. Further investigations will be necessary to ascertain if future delivery of office space result in the relocation of staff and potentially an increase in redundant office space.

The shrinkage of the retail sector and exit of operators in overpopulated categories mainly in terms of household goods while adapting to the market forces may impact the availability of city centre shop units and could make them affordable for some independent operators. Providing local business support can potentially help these small operators to grow and become stronger at least in the short term but they still face respond to the wider challenges faced by the retail sector. These supports are not limited to provision of funding and can cover advice and guidance.

Events appear to be increasingly desired by decision makers as a tool for economic growth. Events should be organised through collaborations between local communities, business improvement districts and other partner organisations. Public subsidies should only be used if there is evidence that the local communities directly benefit from these events. The economic contribution of events should be regularly communicated to local people and businesses. It is considered that careful planning of events has the potential to maximise their economic contribution. Smaller-scale events that take place more often are more desirable by local communities and businesses.

Culture continues to be in demand by different social groups and has the potential to contribute to the city centre economy. There is scope for further involvement of the local community in taking ownership of cultural assets and initiating ideas and implementing new schemes, so the local population is seen as the beneficiary of these interventions. There is a need for defining clear strategies for city centre events in consultation with the local community, businesses and other actors including the local authority.

In terms of economic role of different social groups, there are opportunities in terms of increasing the activity of certain groups. Among potential insiders, an increased population of over 40 are seen as a target group that can bring economic benefit to the centre. They currently have a very modest presence in the city centre as insiders. Seniors, in particular, are seen to be a valuable source of consumption in the local economy as they are increasingly in demand of up-to-date goods and services. Careful provision of an accessible and age-friendly environment as part of development projects can facilitate their

presence in the city centre. Students are portrayed as significant economic contributors. However, as shown in this research, this is not an accurate narrative. Students' contribution to the wider city centre economy in terms of their spending on goods and services should be balanced against other economic aspects including their exemptions from council tax. It should also be noted that further strengthening the dominance of one group such as students can deter the economic activity of other groups.

### 6.2.4 Political Perspectives

The existing political structure in the UK is top-down. This approach has resulted in a situation where the lack of power being held in English cities is no longer tenable. The system has failed to take broader democratic considerations into account and does not guarantee a strong voice and representation of local communities and businesses at the local level. This democratic deficit is particularly important when it comes to urban futures. This includes recent interventions including the Levelling Up Fund which continues to be a top-down and centrally managed and determined intervention. The UK must move from government to new forms of local governance systems where the local community and voluntary groups and businesses are actively engaged in decisions with local authorities and other public-private partnerships and universities to plan for a desirable future and preferred outcomes.

City centres do not appear to attract a considerable level of political attention from the central government. The lack of a clear political ambition for city centres is not necessarily due to a lack of resources as there is a clear political emphasis on other spatial entities such as ports or town centres in the UK by the central government. This situation highlights the need for a major change of approach in the political structure that must be acknowledged by central government to recognise the significance of city centres. Further development of collective consortiums of cities similar to Core Cities Group can intensify the national debate and lobby central government on city centre futures. A genuine devolution and transfer of power and resources by the central government could be highly beneficial to the city centre.  This requires the political arrangements

at the different levels of local, regional, and national structures to be addressed. Evidence shows ongoing conflicts between these layers of government. There are questions about decisions at the national level and consequences of them at the regional and local level and how these have detrimentally impacted city centres and made them vulnerable to the central state cuts. Lack of flexibility in spending power has also impacted the resilience of the local level to shocks including unprecedented and contemporaneous economic and political instabilities including consequences of Brexit and Covid-19.

Lessons must be learned from the repeated major reform of regional structures and how these have resulted in constant adaptation at the local level and increased pressure on their scarce resources to the detriment of local autonomy. The current pattern of funding does not allow the local and regional level to quantify their needs and delivery of what is truly required at these two levels instead of taking part in a reactive competition for resources orchestrated by the central government. Proper devolution and the development of clear regional strategies can reduce the rivalry that is going on between regions for securing development funds. The issue of policy ambiguity, confusion and contradictions at the regional level must be addressed with conceptual and operational clarity in any future regional structure respecting regional geographies, identities, and economies. This approach can promote local economic growth by joining strategic transport and spatial planning which can benefit city centres. If future structures allow more control at the regional level, such structures can top-up and balance some of the inequalities as they will have more real insight into regional and local issues.

Central government should review the current statutory responsibilities of the local authorities to remove outdated roles and merge others to lift the burden of bureaucracy and provide a clear picture of the expectation from the local authorities.  This includes a review of the statutory duty for the preparation of local development plans to address concerns about the long preparation period, their scope, and their effectiveness in terms of promoting transformational actions. Such a review is highly likely to suggest that local plans will not be the most effective tool for planning the future of the city centres. This may require the introduction of smaller-scale and more focused tools such as action plans to

promote change. Communities and businesses should have an active role in generating these action plans to ensure a diverse range of community-led and enterprising activities will be incorporated.

The current significant void in terms of community representation should be filled by promoting city centre living for a range of non-transient insiders. The discussion on the future of the city centre can be the connection for making an active and engaged community in decision-making processes. Partnership projects and involvement of local communities can create a strong connection and a shared value between communities and other public and private actors. The issue of community representation at the local level requires to be addressed as an urgent priority. There is a demand for a robust community to be actively involved in decision-making processes. One major challenge will be maintaining the balance in community representation to ensure those who are most vocal do not skew it. This will require significant facilitation from mediators with expertise in participatory approaches. Universities, charities, and third-sector organisations could be involved to provide support and insight into the process. Public consultations should go beyond a reactive exercise on previously defined and drafted projects and must allow different social groups to actively shape the future. These interventions should be clear in terms of challenges, and resources available so expectations are managed, and recommendations and preferences are relevant. Part of the funding which is available for public consultations should be spent on the provision of support and capacity building for communities to promote realistic expectations and acknowledgement of practical limitations while exploring local complexities.

The consequences of inward investment will continue to be a major issue for the local community. The door needs to be kept open for investment as part of a diverse economic system but at the same time, local communities and businesses should have control and a level of screening over the process of attracting investment to the city centre. This will require a rigorous and transparent mechanism that enables communities and businesses to protect what is valued by them, avoid unintended consequences such as loss of local identity and reduce the uncertainty in terms of what these investors receive in return This can only take place as part of strong local governance.

Local universities should have a key role in the future governance of the city centre. Universities can be involved in the processes to review and verify decisions and interventions. They can also offer best practices, investigate failures, and offer solutions to challenges. The future political structure should have a focus on learning and experimentation and allow for the testing and trailing of innovative ideas and new approaches.

## 6.3 Framework

This section provides a framework for the future based on the main issues identified. This framework is based on the four categories of environmental, social, economic, and political perspectives and is applicable to English city centres.

## Framework for the Future

### Environmental Perspective

**Objective 1: Enhance public realm**

| Action point | Why? |
|---|---|
| Re-focus on urban design as a priority | To focus on design outcomes and above all the relationship between buildings and spaces instead of individual buildings |
| Design accessible and legible spatial networks | To facilitate the presence of various social groups in the city centre |
| Provide integrated green spaces of different scales | To benefit from various environmental and mental health advantages of greening |
| Consider pedestrianisation as an opportunity to create attractive public spaces with functions at different times of the day and night | To enhance the continuous spatial network within the city centre |
| Rethink underutilised environmental, heritage or cultural assets | Unlocking the potential of these assets to accommodate new use and activities |
| Enhance the setting of symbolic buildings through public realm improvements | To promote the use of symbolic buildings for local communities |
| Maximise thermal comfort of external spaces with an appreciation of microclimate criteria in design | To intensify the use of external spaces |
| Encourage participation in urban design and generate urban design strategy | To address the issue of design deficit at the local level |

**Objective 2: Support resilience and promote sustainability**

| | |
|---|---|
| Support delivery of adaptable and flexible buildings and spaces that can respond to change | To ensure continuous use of the buildings in the interest of sustainability |
| Adjust the Building Control and the Planning to promote feasible conversion, adaptation, and reuse of existing buildings. | To promote and facilitate the re-use of existing building stock |
| Balance the environmental and social benefits of projects against presumed economic benefits | To avoid substandard outcomes and ensure an acceptable level of amenity in terms of privacy, sunlight/daylight, natural ventilation, and noise levels for future users |
| Provide updated guidance for conversion of the existing vacant building stock | To address the high vacancy rate of upper floor properties |

**Objective 3: Create inclusive spaces**

| | |
|---|---|
| Allow non-polluting cars to serve those who are physically less able | To create an accessible city centre for all including those who are not fit or young |
| Control the escalation of privatisation of public spaces | To address the ambiguities caused by privatisation and allowing citizens to dwell and occupy |
| Provide transparency on land ownership details | To enable communities and individuals to find out who has a controlling interest in the city centre locations to influence future use and adaptation |
| Develop and promote a charter of public spaces rights to facilitate public access | To facilitate public access |
| Provide spaces of repose and observation | To serve a wider range of users with different abilities and preferences |

| Social Perspective | |
|---|---|
| **Objective 1: Promote inclusivity** | |
| **Action point** | **Why?** |
| Introduce city centre users as social groups instead of only economic contributors | To positively impact the desirability of the city centre where a balanced mix of people feel welcome |
| Promote and increase interaction between social groups | To reduce the feeling of detachment experienced by some social groups including strangers |
| Develop heterogeneous residential populations of different ages and ethnic compositions | To create a robust and representative city centre community |
| Deliver a variety of affordable housing developments with different tenure options along with suitable services including schools and open spaces | To encourage a higher number of insiders from different backgrounds including families and downsizers |
| Offer free and affordable events and activities | to ensure the presence of a diverse background regardless of income status |
| Provide affordable childcare facilities | To encourage regulars with childcare responsibilities to consider working in the city centre instead of home working |
| Acknowledge strangers including those who are not visible as a social group | To avoid social exclusion and address the issue of detachment |
| **Objective 2: Avoid attenuation of identity** | |
| Develop visitor attractions and experiences that can be enjoyed by the local community | To address the exclusivity of destinations for the transient population |
| Manage the uncontrolled growth of visitors and their economic contribution | To acknowledge the social and environmental impacts and manage the perception of the city centre for local citizens |
| **Objective 3: Avoid social division** | |
| Ensure the presence of third-sector organisations and charities to provide support for strangers | To retain provision of support in the city centre, which is the most likely location for them |
| Scrutinise the opportunities for meaningful social interaction with other social groups in purpose-built student accommodation | To avoid the issue of isolation of students from other social groups |
| Develop an increased non-transient population | To avoid dominance of transient populations such as students and visitors which may cause social division |
| Create opportunities for interactions between the locals and visitors | To enhance the experience of visitors and positively impact on their behaviour to minimise negative social impacts |
| Form meaningful partnership between local authorities, health services and NHS, local third-sector organisations, and charities for provision of support for the homeless and rough sleepers | To focus on prevention rather than the outcomes of the lack of housing, employment, and mental health issues. |

| Economic Perspective | |
|---|---|
| **Objective 1: Enhance city centre economy as means of engaging citizens and businesses with future development** | |
| **Action Point** | **Why?** |
| Provide transparency on city centre economic information | To help an improved understanding of the economic model of the city centre |
| Modify existing economic value mapping tools for reporting city centre data | To generate reports based on city centre economic indicators to allow monitoring and comparison between centres and other urban areas |
| Retain a proportion of the business rate generated in the city centre to invest it back in local businesses and entrepreneurship support | To ensure the city centre benefits from the economic value generated within the boundary and locking income into place |
| Replace the current funding system with a people-centred approach | To address the North-South divide and recirculate wealth that exists in the city centre as opposed to only focusing on attracting large-scale capital |
| Create cultural attractions to address both local and non-local interest | To ensure the local population is the beneficiary of these interventions |
| Define clear strategies for city centre events in consultation with the local community and businesses | To maximise their economic contribution to the city centre and ensure local communities and businesses directly benefit from these events |
| Consider the historic environment as an asset for growth and involve communities in their future management and conservation | To initiate ideas and implement new schemes for keeping them in use or find an appropriate new use for them |
| **Objective 2: Generate small scale development and business opportunities** | |
| Ensure appreciation of the transformational potential of small victories | To change the perception of the city centre's economic development and address the emphasis on large-scale inward investment as the key driver. |
| Involve property owners through interventions with clear, measurable, and tangible benefits | To involve disengaged property owners and facilitate change and address the high vacancy rate of upper floor properties |
| **Objective 3: Rethink existing economic potentials** | |
| Provide a variety of suitable and affordable housing options to attract an increased non-transient population | To increase the population of non-transient insiders as an important source of consumption of goods and services |
| Offer new activities to attract and maintain a balanced population of regulars | To maintain the presence of regulars as important economic contributors |
| Increase the population of over 40s (particularly seniors) as a target group | To facilitate the presence of a valuable group in the local economy as they consistently demand consumer goods and services. |
| Introduce a careful review of the events schedule and have small-scale events more often | To maximise the economic contribution of events to the city centre, and manage socio-economic consequences for local communities and businesses |
| Investigate the impact of further office delivery on genuine creation of new employment opportunities | To avoid the continued increase in redundant office space |

| Political Perspective | |
|---|---|
| **Objective 1: Demand a genuine devolution of power and resources from central government** | |
| **Action Point** | **Why?** |
| Form a consortium of cities to lobby central government and act as an accelerator for a national debate with a focus on the city centre | To emphasise the need for acknowledgement of the significance of the city centre |
| Support the formation of regional structures that respect regional geographies, identities, and economies | To encourage genuine devolution and transfer of power and resources and address the rivalry between regions, and explore the ambiguity, confusion, and contradictions at this level. |
| **Objective 2: Increase efficiency and maximise impact at the local and regional level** | |
| Demand for a review of statutory responsibilities of local authorities | To provide a clear picture of the expectations of local authorities |
| Review the effectiveness of local development plans for future planning of the city centre | To identify effective tools for exploring urban futures including more focused tools for city centres |
| Allow more control at the regional level | To top-up and balance some of the inequalities as it has more insight than central government in regional and local issues |
| **Objective 3: Move from government to governance** | |
| Address the top-down political structure and lack of power in English city centres | To take local democratic considerations into account and guarantee a strong voice and representation of communities and businesses at the local level |
| Engage local community, voluntary groups and businesses in decisions with local authorities and other public-private partnerships, and universities | To form new governance systems to plan for the future |
| Create a robust city centre community through promotion of city centre living | To address the current void in community representation in decision making processes |
| Provide training and facilitation to ensure public engagements are both meaningful and impactful | To maintain a balance in community representation to ensure those who are most vocal do not skew it |
| Rethink public consultations to allow different community groups to actively shape future interventions | To avoid reactive exercises on previously defined and drafted projects |
| Provide clear communication on challenges and limited resources | To keep recommendations and preferences relevant while exploring local complexities |
| Manage the consequences of large-scale inward investment through a rigorous and transparent mechanism for screening investment | To enable communities and businesses to protect what is valued by them, avoid unintended consequences such as loss of local identity and reduce the uncertainty in terms of what investors may demand in return |
| Involve local universities in a pivotal role for future governance of the city centre including review and verification of decisions | To benefit from untapped expertise and capabilities |

# 7.0 Conclusion

## 7.1 Responses to objectives

The aim set out at the beginning of this study established the need to critically review the transition of English city centres through the case of Newcastle upon Tyne and develop a conceptual framework for the future. This chapter concludes the research by responding to the objectives, before identifying the contribution to knowledge, and discussing future research opportunities.

**Objective One: To establish a theoretical position based on environmental, social, economic, and political perspectives**

The response to this objective was to establish the significance of the city centre and create a comprehensive understanding of the concept. The environmental perspective demonstrates the importance of changing patterns and recognises land ownership as a critical theme in the future shape of city centres. It investigates the topic of usage as determined by movement, activity, and repose as fundamental to the future fulfilment of centres. Buildings and spaces are identified to have considerable influence on how the future will unfold. This part of the study also highlights the importance of generating comfortable conditions within the city centre by careful consideration of microclimate factors and enhancing air quality. The social perspective focuses on unique characteristics of the centre in form of accessibility, symbolism, diversity, a mix of uses, and activities for people that distinguishes it from other urban areas.

This thesis uses Unruh's work on the categorisation of social worlds (1980) as a tool for the identification and investigation of the complex social dynamics of different social groups in the city centre i.e. insiders, regulars, visitors, and strangers. This classification has provided successful means of conceptualising and drawing analytical boundaries around the four identified social groups. It has created the capacity to manage the complexity and distinction of the subgroups that use the city centre without the risk of fragmentation, overlaps and double counting that could result from alternative approaches that focus on

unique characteristics of city centre users like age, gender, culture, status, and ability. The findings of the study also fully fit into these four categories, with no data sitting outside this structure, further indicating the adequacy of Unruh's categorisation of social groups as a successful means for the categorising city centre users.

The economic perspective acknowledges the advantage of economic activities located in the city centre and identifies the key themes of income and expenditure, goods and services, and supply and demand; and investigates the role of different economic actors and the relationship between them to identify how they influence the local economy. It reveals the challenges of retaining and maximising income for deployment within the city centre and reflects on important economic mechanisms such as business rates. The review of the political perspective uncovered the discrepancies between the ambition of central government for the future of city centres, and the resources and capacity at local level for a meaningful and impactful contribution towards these aspirations. It also highlighted the need for a governance model where the public, private and community could come together to generate their own local structure. These four perspectives establish a comprehensive theoretical position of the city centre and highlight the core challenges for the future.

**Objective Two: To develop a methodology to examine the theoretical perspectives through data collection in Newcastle upon Tyne**.

Multi-methods were necessary for collecting different kinds of data to investigate the overall patterns of environmental, social, economic, and political perspectives. To guide the future, it is necessary to understand the major issues, the obstacles, and to explore alternatives. To achieve this objective, the study distinguishes three types of data - uses within Newcastle city centre, local authority plans, and informed stakeholders' views on the future of the major issues. The selection of Newcastle upon Tyne city centre as the study area is based on its role as the regional capital of the North-East of England. It is one of the most iconic cities in Britain and epitomises a bounded mono-centric compact centre.

A survey established spatial patterns of building uses and vacancies by objective measurement. It could not illustrate trends but is a snapshot of the current situation in the centre of how buildings are used at different levels of the ground floor, first floor and second floor. The survey required the definition of a clear boundary. A review of policy maps from the late 20th Century to the early 21st Century allowed for a consensus of the boundary to be generated. Plans from 1985 to 2015 were examined to review the intent and policies of the local authority for the future of the urban core, and an extensive analysis of the documents was carried out. Semi-structured interviews were undertaken with two representatives from each of - local authority departments, business improvement agencies, pro-vice chancellors at both universities, planning consultants, and community members, for reflections from different sectors on the trajectory of city centre development. These interviews focused on determining underlying reasons for current and future trends. All three methods of data collection investigated the four key dimensions of environmental, social, economic, and political perspectives. An important aspect of these multi-methods was to cross-reference the findings in the form of triangulation. This enabled an evaluation of consistency and differences between the data.

**Objective Three: To explore the environmental, social, economic, and political data in the city centre of Newcastle upon Tyne, collated through surveys, plans and interviews which can be triangulated.**

The response to this objective is developed in the findings sections of the thesis, in terms of survey, plans and interviews. Each section explored the issues through the four key themes of: environmental, social, economic, and political perspectives.

The environmental survey maps the numbers and distribution of city centre uses and vacancies. The pattern shows a significant vacancy rate of approximately 15% of floor space. Six visualisations including one on solids and voids were created to study the spatial distribution of buildings and uses. Two maps were generated to identify ownership of land for buildings and spaces.

The most significant aspect of these maps is that the local authority owns less land than indicated in previous documents.

The social survey investigated the unique characteristics of the populations of insiders, regulars, visitors and strangers and the impact of the dominance of certain demographic groups. The survey shows the dominance of a high transient population of young people aged between 20-29 and a low proportion of over 40s. It also indicates that the number of visitors can dominate the number of permanent residents. Given the limited information on strangers due to their impartiality and detachment, the survey focuses on the homeless and rough sleeper population but also provides viewpoints on other groups that might be perceived as strangers. Data shows a small number of only 65 homeless people in Newcastle each night, but their presence reveals important characteristics in terms of alcohol and substance misuse and mental health issues.

The economic survey provides findings on the complex relationships of income and expenditure, goods and services, supply and demand and the role of economic actors. It highlights that around 30% of the total amount of business rate collected in Newcastle, is raised within the centre and amounts to approximately £43m per year. It demonstrates that the economic contribution of students is not as significant as it is often portrayed. The economic impact of events and the focus on their promotion to attract visitors to the city centre was also investigated. There are insights on the economic contribution of strangers despite the general perception that they are insignificant when seen in comparison with other social groups. The economic survey further indicated that there is a lack of city centre data in terms of how much of the income generated in the city centre is re-invested there.

The Political survey reviews the landscape at the three levels of local, regional, and national. At the local level, the study shows a small but engaged population with a low level of influence by elected members in political decisions and limited opportunities for community representation. The constant restructuring of the regional structures and the imposed current structure that has little relationship with the local population does not seem beneficial to the urban

core. Devolution also appears to have lost momentum in terms of meaningful transfer of power to English cities. These findings lead to the topic of governance and the process by which other actors could also plan, finance, and manage city centres. This part of the thesis shows that the greatest opportunity for city centre governance is at the local level. The most complex aspect to be resolved is the integration of the community into these arrangements.

The next part of the study involved a rigorous and systematic review of development policies for Newcastle upon Tyne through the analysis of local development plans since the second half of the 20th century.


The review of the plans from an environmental point of view shows the consistency in applying certain policies including a flexible approach towards the conservation of the historic environment and the intent to promote a high standard of design. However, such an approach highlights the challenges of meaningful application of policies due to vague descriptions such as 'high-quality design'. One important element is the significant attention to movement in all plans and the shift from imposing road interventions and demand for additional parking space to a clear emphasis on the promotion of sustainable modes of travel and the introduction of limitations to vehicular movement in the centre. Another evident shift is the additional weight given to the topic of sustainable development and the provision of green infrastructure. The surveys had previously shown that these interventions had not taken place. In terms of social aspects, a review of the plans shows that the topic of city centre living has been consistently encouraged since 1985. Significant expansion of the student population first appears in 1998 which acknowledges the problems of a highly transient population and the promotion of purpose-built student accommodation as a solution. For regulars, the common emphasis is on transport needs and the promotion of retail, leisure, and recreational facilities to attract regulars and further development of office spaces. The plans also portray visitors as a group that is high in demand due to their economic contribution but provide no information on potential interactions between them and other social groups. Strangers are not given consideration in any of the plans. In terms of economic perspectives, it appears that the plans fail to

provide a clear understanding of the relationship between income and expenditure. There is consistency in making reference to the constant decline in the central government funding to local authorities. Promotion of retail in the city centre and maintaining its position as the principal shopping location in the region is consistently noted but none of the plans acknowledges the provision of services and the impact of the fourth industrial revolution. While vacant properties are identified as a potential issue, there is no explanation of the reasons for their long-term vacancy. On the topic of supply and demand, emphasis appears to be on further provision of office space and student accommodation; and expansion of hotels to support the visitor economy. While a common theme among the three plans is retaining economically active residents as insiders, and increasing the number of regulars and visitors, there is no explanation of the implications of strangers on the city centre economy. In terms of political perspective, the plans fail to provide a clear understanding of the political context. This part of the study provides insights into the political decisions included in these plans and provides a summary of actors who are engaged in the process of preparation and implementation of each plan.

The last part of the findings chapter includes the interviews presenting views of the 10 key participants with an active role in shaping the future city centre. The interviews provided a better understanding of opportunities and challenges and complement the findings from surveys and plans. During the interviews, all respondents identified the city centre as a distinguished entity within the city and elaborated on its physical and non-physical characteristics. These interviews also covered the social aspects for the four categories of insiders, regulars, visitors, and strangers. Promotion of city centre living and developing a heterogeneous population of insiders were consistently raised in interviews. There are concerns about retaining the attraction of the city centre for regulars. The perception of visitors is rooted in their economic contribution, but their large numbers are seen as a concern. Interviewees confirmed the major issue of detachment of strangers from other groups. In terms of economic significance, the interviewees consistently acknowledge the vital role of the city centre in the economy of the region and recognise both citizens and businesses as key contributors. The retention of economic value generated within the city centre

being reinvested in it, consistently occurred in responses. Reflections on inward investment identified it as an important aspect of the economy but raised questions on the suitability of all types of inward investment for the city centre. Interviewees give substantial consideration to the power structure and the processes of decision-making on planning, financing and management. One important reflection was the lack of a clear vision. They also acknowledged the significant pressures on local authorities and re-emphasised the demand for genuine devolution of power and resources to regional and local levels. One highlighted aspect was the absence of local and business community representation in decision-making.

**Objective Four: To analyse the data from surveys, plans and interviews to obtain confirmation of findings through corroborating evidence from primary and secondary data gained from the three adopted methods of data collection.**

The analysis of the data demonstrates that with the influence of the fourth industrial revolution disrupting the stable position established from the middle 20th century, it is a crucial time to focus on the future of the city centre.

The environmental analysis indicates the demand for a more focused approach to urban design and highlights the importance of provision of comfortable, safe and attractive city centres that can draw in a wide range of people. The social findings promote a balanced population of insiders, regulars, visitors and strangers and the facilitation of social interactions between them. Analysis of social perspectives indicates the need for a focused approach to amend the current perception of the city centre as an exclusive location for limited social groups. There is a necessity to achieve a heterogeneous and intercultural resident population and create a safe and comfortable city centre that creates opportunities for social interactions. The economic findings are based on the key themes of income and expenditure, goods and services, supply and demand and the role of the city centre's economic contributors. This part of the study shows the significant economic role of the city centre and emphasises the call for the retention of more of the income generated in the city centre. It also

addresses some inaccurate assumptions about the economic contribution of certain social groups including students, who have an inconsistent pattern of spending. Analysis of the political perspectives reviews the findings about the power structures at the different levels of local, regional, and national levels and the involvement of a wide range of public and private actors in the decisions that shape the future of the city centre. It reveals detrimental conflicts at the three levels of local, regional, and national, and the importance of which aspects will be determined at each level. The current political system should evolve into governance with the local government joined by the private sector and the community. However, there is the issue of representation and the lack of a robust community group in the city centre.

The final product of this research is the Framework for the Future, based on the analysis and explained in the commentary. It provides recommendations for decision-makers and identifies crucial points that need to be considered by public and private actors. This outcome of the study can be applied to other English city centres. The Framework for the Future distinguishes the main objectives for the four key perspectives and presents action points in support of these objectives. The framework also identifies the main issue targeted by each action point. It does not identify the actors responsible for each action point because it is considered that none of these interventions can be delivered in isolation, and it is only through the involvement of the local community, voluntary groups, businesses, local authorities, other public-private partnerships, and universities working together that these objectives could be met.


## 7.2. Reflections on Literature

The links between the key findings of this thesis and the theoretical perspective can be reflected upon through the four lenses of environmental, social, economic, and political perspectives:

In terms of environmental objectives the proposed framework for the future of city centres, the findings support the identification of the city centre as a

distinctive anchor point, as identified by scholars including Lynch (1960) and Alexander (1987) and the dramatic effect of the concentration of the main symbolic buildings in the city centre argued by Unwin (1909). It also echoes the significance of the ongoing analysis of the city centre layout highlighted by Lynch (1960) to create a clear and appropriate structure. Analytical and predictive information can offer enhancement in the public realm, and digital city models can help in this respect. One of the key points in the literature on the future life of buildings is the notion of flexibility for re-use. This has been emphasized in the works of both Alexander et al. (1977) and Lee et al. (2022) as they discuss the criteria for flexibility. This study reiterates this significant feature to support the resilience of buildings to promote sustainability. The thesis also highlights the implications of land ownership in the city centre as a key factor for the creation of inclusive spaces, and the paucity of literature and other evidence is noted. One of the outcomes is a call for added transparency on this essential issue. This is in line with Carmona (2022) who demonstrates how scarce the available data is, when it comes to the systematic sale of public space in the UK. This research also contributes to a better understanding of the complexity of city centre activities, including their timelines, as identified in the work of Bromley et al. (2003); and expands this notion to recommend the provision of spaces of repose and observation, to serve a wider range of users. These breathing places are expected to be integrated green spaces of different scales, and their provision is supported by various scholars including Gandy (2002), Shuyler (1986) and Wunderlich (2013). The recommendations also support the work of Giddings et al. (2011), and promote the important aspect of comfort conditions around developments to enhance microclimate and air quality.

From a social perspective, this thesis builds on the work of Lefebvre (1991), Worpole (1993), Chaney (1994), and Simmel and Levine (2015). It acknowledges the city centre as a place for social interaction. It also provides a significant focus on the identification and understanding of the different social groups and their characteristics and the interactions between them. In addition, it addresses the gap in the literature identified by Teller and Elms (2010) and Hart et al, (2013), due to particular social groups being considered in isolation;

and as a result expands the work of Whyte (2009), Teller et al. (2010) and Gehl (2011).  The recommendation in the framework to offer free events and activities is in line with what Tonnelat (2010) sees as an opportunity for social learning and a move towards diversity. The research also identifies the risk of attenuation of identity among visitors. It includes the unexplored dimension of the type of visitors who are using particular spaces, as identified by Zandvliet and Dijst (2006). This aspect also provides a response to the work of Heap and Dickinson (2018) and their acknowledgement of the limited research on the topic of new frontiers of intolerance, exclusion and marginalisation. This study focuses on the visibility of social groups and expands the work of Madanipour (2010) in terms of the process of inclusion and exclusion. This thesis validates the use of the concept of social worlds by Unruh (1980) and adopts it as an appropriate tool to understand the complex social dynamics of different social groups in the city centre. A key output from adopting this categorisation has been uncovering the significant neglect of strangers in the urban debate. One of the key social objectives of the framework for the future resulting from this study, is the promotion of inclusivity. This objective highlights the critical role of the city centre to offer weak social ties for strangers as a vulnerable group of society. It strongly supports the argument of Madanipour (2010) and Wilson (2012) in that these weak ties are vital for everyday life and their integration and if diminished can result in detrimental social isolation.


The literature on the economic perspective of the city centre, such as the work of Sassen (2006), examines the structural advantages of the city centre for economic activity. These unique characteristics are considered in various publications including the work of Hernandez and Jones (2005), who identify the city centre as the focus for consumption. While these characteristics have been extensively reviewed in the literature, there appears to be limited literature on the economic model of the city centre and mapping the economic flow in and out of its boundary. Authors, such as Anderson et al. (2018) and Paddison and Hutton (2015), acknowledge the complexity of this system and the challenge of analysing these processes. To start to address this deficiency, the thesis investigates four key themes of income and expenditure, goods and services,

supply and demand and the role of economic actors to create a foundation for a better understanding of the city centre economy. Given the limitations of the two-sector model developed by Knight (1993), in disregarding the economic role of the government, the research adopts the five-sector model developed by Gwarthney, et al (2009) to provide an improved understanding of the city centre economy. The first economic objective of the framework to enhance the city centre economy as means of engaging citizens and businesses with future development, and includes several action points focused on increased transparency and better mapping and reporting tools, to justify better allocation and retention of economic resources. Another objective that demands small-scale development and business opportunity, supports the work of Clarke et. al (2003) in highlighting the ability of consumption to actively reconfigure buildings and spaces, and the transformational role of little victories. The last economic objective to rethink existing economic potential relies on the information from the economic activity of different social groups. The investigation of this activity provides significant insight into creating a better picture of a complex economic system. This is particularly important and follows Keynesian economic theory Keynes (1936, 1937) in arguing that the city centre economy and financial decision-making are driven by social conventions.

Regarding the political perspective, this research confirms the significant challenge of delivering a genuine devolution of power and resources from central government, which is in line with the arguments of the issues of the appropriate scale of decentralisation reflected in the literature (i.e. the work of Colomb and Tomaney, 2015). The framework also suggests increased efficiency and maximising economic impact at the local and regional levels. The research acknowledges the challenges of bringing more control at the regional level that echo the work of Gash et al. (2014) and Norris and Adam (2017) reiterating concerns about government bureaucracy and the obstacles imposed by the centralised political and media culture of the UK, but still identify the regional level as an important scale for balancing inequality. This thesis also identifies discrepancies between the aspiration of the central government for the future of the city centre and the resources and capacity at the local level and supports the work of Beauregard (1996) and Stone (1993) in recognising the

limitations of the local government to deal with guiding the evolution of the city centre. This research also highlights the significant influence of the central government in terms of taxation regimes and policies that are no longer fit for purpose as outlined in various reports i.e. Communities and Local Government Committee (2019). The thesis highlights the recommendation for the move from government to governance to create new ways for bringing public, private and community together to address the political issues of unequal power, democratization, representation and public participation. The recognition of such change from managerialism to entrepreneurism where the power of local government decreases relative to private actors like business associations, management consultants and nongovernmental organisations supports the work of Harvey (1989) and Koch (2012). Another key aspect is the identification of potential for universities to actively perform a civic role, strengthening the partnerships around key future challenges as proposed by Tewdwr-Jones et al. (2015). The research reiterates the work of Cruz et al. (2018) and Sweeting (2002) in presenting the little evidence of power democratization in the UK.

## 7.3 Contribution to Knowledge

This thesis makes a timely contribution to the future of English city centres by presenting a comprehensive commentary and Framework for the Future of the English city centres for the first time. These two documents that should be read together, go beyond just the physical structure to recognise the key dimensions of environmental, social, economic, and political perspectives in the future visioning and planning of the city centre. The Framework highlights the priority of focusing on the relationship between buildings and spaces, instead of delivering individual buildings, and identifies flexibility and adaptability as critical characteristics of future buildings. The evidence points to a faster turnover of uses in the future. The research also identifies action points that can contribute to the creation of inclusive spaces. These include allowing non-polluting cars for those who are physically less able and controlling the privatisation of public spaces and providing increased transparency on land ownership. The Framework also recognises the importance of considering city centre users as social groups as well as economic contributors. Such an approach will allow for

increased interactions between different social groups to positively impact the desirability of the city centre and develop a heterogeneous population through the provision of appropriate housing and a comfortable environment, and the formation of culturally diverse hubs. In terms of economic perspectives, the research shows that retention of economic value is of great importance and that it is vital for centres to benefit from the economic value generated from within their boundaries. This research identifies the move from government to governance as a critical political issue in any future scenario for English city centres. The accessible format of the Framework for the Future avoids the technical language that might be solely targeted at policymakers and provides guidance for the four key perspectives and can be used by a wide range of participants who might shape the future of the city centre.

## 7.4 Future Research

This study has created opportunities for future research. In the English city centre context, more extensive data collection in other cities will expand the database and add more detail to the Framework. It can also be made increasingly robust by testing and evaluation in different parts of the country. There could be regionally based studies in South-East, North-West, East of England, West Midlands, South-West, Yorkshire and the Humber and East Midlands and even London, although the Capital would introduce further complexities. These studies could provide greater insight into future scenarios and provide an opportunity for comparisons between different regions.

The research could expand into other UK countries: Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales. These countries have their own primary legislation with different demographics, which means that despite some similarities, there are variations that can result in distinct implications for their city centres. It might therefore be necessary to develop a specific aspect of the Framework in each of these countries, and open possibilities for comparative studies between the four UK countries to enrich the discussion on the future of the city centre. Research could be undertaken as a more detailed investigation of each of the key perspectives across UK cities. The environmental data collected during the

survey in this study provides a baseline for future research on the trends of building uses and vacancies in Newcastle city centre. There is scope for focused research on the patterns of social interactions between insiders, regulars, visitors and strangers in the city centre, their quality and future challenges. The findings of this thesis also highlighted a significant gap in the availability of the city centre's economic data and the challenges of creating a clear overview of the economic model. Further theoretical and empirical research may include systematic and ongoing mapping of the economic functions of other UK city centres. Focused research on city centre politics in different cities could provide a better picture of decision-making processes to show common trends in the composition and dynamism of models of city centre governance and differences between them.

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# Appendices

## Appendix 1: List of 51 English Cities and their local authorities

| | City | City Council |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Bath | Charter Trustees |
| 2 | Birmingham | Local government district (Metropolitan borough) |
| 3 | Bradford | Local government district (Metropolitan borough) |
| 4 | Brighton and Hove | Local government district (Unitary) |
| 5 | Bristol | Local government district (Unitary and County) |
| 6 | Cambridge | Local government district (Non-metropolitan borough) |
| 7 | Canterbury | Local government district (Non-metropolitan borough) |
| 8 | Carlisle | Local government district (Non-metropolitan borough) |
| 9 | Chelmsford | Local government district (Non-metropolitan borough) |
| 10 | Chester | Charter Trustees |
| 11 | Chichester | Civil Parish |
| 12 | Coventry | Local government district (Metropolitan borough) |
| 13 | Derby | Local government district (Unitary) |
| 14 | Durham | Charter Trustees |
| 15 | Ely | Civil Parish |
| 16 | Exeter | Local government district (Non-metropolitan borough) |
| 17 | Gloucester | Local government district (Non-metropolitan borough) |
| 18 | Hereford | Civil Parish |
| 19 | Kingston upon Hull | Local government district (Unitary) |
| 20 | Lancaster | Local government district (Non-metropolitan borough) |
| 21 | Leeds | Local government district (Metropolitan borough) |
| 22 | Leicester | Local government district (Unitary) |
| 23 | Litchfield | Civil Parish |
| 24 | Lincoln | Local government district (Non-metropolitan borough) |
| 25 | Liverpool | Local government district (Metropolitan Borough) |
| 26 | City of London | Local government district (sui generis and county) |
| 27 | Manchester | Local government district (Metropolitan Borough) |
| 28 | Newcastle Upon Tyne | Local government district (Metropolitan Borough) |
| 29 | Norwich | Local government district (Non-metropolitan borough) |
| 30 | Nottingham | Local government district (Unitary) |
| 31 | Oxford | Local government district (Non-metropolitan borough) |
| 32 | Peterborough | Local government district (Unitary) |
| 33 | Plymouth | Local government district (Unitary) |
| 34 | Portsmouth | Local government district (Unitary) |
| 35 | Preston | Local government district (Non-metropolitan borough) |
| 36 | Ripon | Civil Parish |
| 37 | St Albans | Local government district (Non-metropolitan borough) |
| 38 | Salford | Local government district (Metropolitan borough) |
| 39 | Salisbury | Civil parish |
| 40 | Sheffield | Local government district (Metropolitan borough) |
| 41 | Southampton | Local government district (Unitary) |
| 42 | Stoke-on-Trent | Local government district (Unitary) |
| 43 | Sunderland | Local government district (Metropolitan borough) |
| 44 | Truro | Civil Parish |
| 45 | Wakefield | Local government district (Metropolitan borough) |
| 46 | Wells | Civil Parish |
| 47 | Westminster | Local government district (London borough) |
| 48 | Winchester | Local government district (Non-metropolitan borough) |
| 49 | Wolverhampton | Local government district (Metropolitan Borough) |
| 50 | Worcester | Local government district (Non-metropolitan borough) |
| 51 | York | Local government district (Unitary) |

# Appendix 2: Ethical Approval

Dear MRS Sepideh Hajisoltani ,

<u>Project No.</u> 0185

<u>Project Title:</u> The Future of English City Centres: The Case for Newcastle upon Tyne

**Confirmation of Ethical Opinion**

The above application has now been approved by the Faculty Research Ethics Committee at Northumbria University. The approval date is 29/11/2022.

**Good Research Practice and Responsibilities**
The ethical approval for this project is conditional on adherence to the project scope and documents, covered within the application. Researchers must comply with Northumbria University's policies, procedures, guidance and standard operating procedures. These can be found on the https://www.northumbria.ac.uk/research/ethics-and-integrity/

**Maintaining your Approvals**
Amendments: If you wish to make a change to this approved application, you will be required to submit an amendment in the Ethics Online System, before instituting any change. The ethical amendment form is a sub-form of your online application and can be created at any time.
We wish you every success with your project.
On behalf of Research Ethics Committee,

Faculty of Engineering and Environment
Northumbria University

**Northumbria University**
**NEWCASTLE**

## Appendix 3: Information Sheet and Consent Form for Participants

**Northumbria University NEWCASTLE**

*Project Title:*

*Future Scenarios for UK City Centres: The Case of Newcastle upon Tyne*

*Researcher:*

*Sepideh Hajisoltani*

You are invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide you need to understand why the research is being done and what it would involve for you. Please take time to read the following information carefully. Please ask questions if anything you read is not clear or if you would like more information. Please take time to decide whether or not to take part.

This study is funded by Northumbria University and aims to critically review the transition of UK city centres through social, environmental, political and economic perspectives; and develop a conceptual framework involving future scenarios. The project seeks to enhance the understanding of connections and logical sequence in the transition of UK city centres, thus determining how future scenarios my unfold. It will also evaluate the perceptions of individuals and organisations that are shaping the future of city centres and will inform decision making at local and national levels, so as to assist the strategic development of UK city centres and will assess how policies and plans for future scenarios may be delivered.

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary and you may withdraw at any time. To follow you will be asked to sign a consent form to show you agree to take part. You are free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason.

No risks are anticipated beyond those experienced during an average conversation.

As a participant taking part in this study, you will be offered anonymity and within this research will be referred to by your respective job title only. You will not be identified in any of the information we get from this study or in any of the research reports and/or publications.

Thanks for reading this information sheet.

If you are willing to continue with being a participant, please complete and sign the Research Participant Consent Form and return it to the above email address.

**Further information and contact details:**

Sepideh Hajisoltani
Sepideh.hajisoltani@northumbria.ac.uk
07748975165

**Northumbria University NEWCASTLE**

*Project Title:*

*Future Scenarios for UK City Centres: The Case of Newcastle upon Tyne*

*Researcher:*

*Sepideh Hajisoltani*

• I agree to participate in the interview carried out by Sepideh Hajisoltani of Northumbria University, to aid with the research of Future Scenarios for UK City Centres: The Case of Newcastle upon Tyne.

• I have read the information sheet related to the research project and understand the aims of the project.

• I am aware of the topics to be discussed in the interview.

• I am fully aware that I will remain anonymous throughout data reported and that I have the right to leave the interview at any point.

• I am fully aware that data collected will be stored securely, safely and in accordance with Data Collection Act (2018).

• I am fully aware that I am not obliged to answer any question, but that I do so at my own free will.

Printed Name ......................................................................

Participants Signature ........................................................... Date...................................

Researchers Signature ..............*Sepideh Hajisoltani*....... Date......*21/04/2022*...........

**If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study, please contact:**

Sepideh Hajisoltani
Sepideh.hajisoltani@northumbria.ac.uk
07748975165

## Appendix 4: Categories of Use Classes for the Environmental Survey

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Shops | S1 | Essentials |
| | S2 | Householder |
| | S3 | Luxury |
| | S4 | Department Stores |
| Financial, professional and business services | F1 | Banks & Building societies |
| | F2 | Professional Services ( estate agents & recruitments agencies) |
| | F3 | Offices |
| Personal Services | P1 | Beauty Services |
| | P2 | Repair & cleaning services |
| | P4 | Other services (Travel shops, funeral directors, etc.) |
| Food and Drink | FO1 | Bars |
| | FO2 | Fast food |
| | FO3 | Cafes & restaurants |
| General Industries & Storage | G1 | Industrial |
| | G2 | Storage |
| Hospitality | H1 | Hotels |
| | H2 | Hostels |
| Residential | R1 | Dwellings |
| | R2 | Student accommodations |
| | R3 | Care homes |
| Recreation | RE1 | Sports |
| | RE2 | Entertainment |
| | RE3 | Culture |
| | RE4 | Gambling |
| Education | E1 | University & College |
| | E2 | Schools |
| | E3 | Pre-school |
| Health | HE1 | Hospitals |
| | HE2 | GP Surgeries |
| | HE3 | Specialists |
| Other public buildings | PB1 | Religious |
| | PB2 | Public Services |
| | PB3 | Law courts |
| Transport | T1 | Stations |
| | T2 | Car Parks |
| Vacant | V1 | Vacant Units |
| Unknown use | U1 | Unknown Use |
| Construction Sites | X1 | Construction Sites |

# Appendix 5 – Sample of Environmental Survey
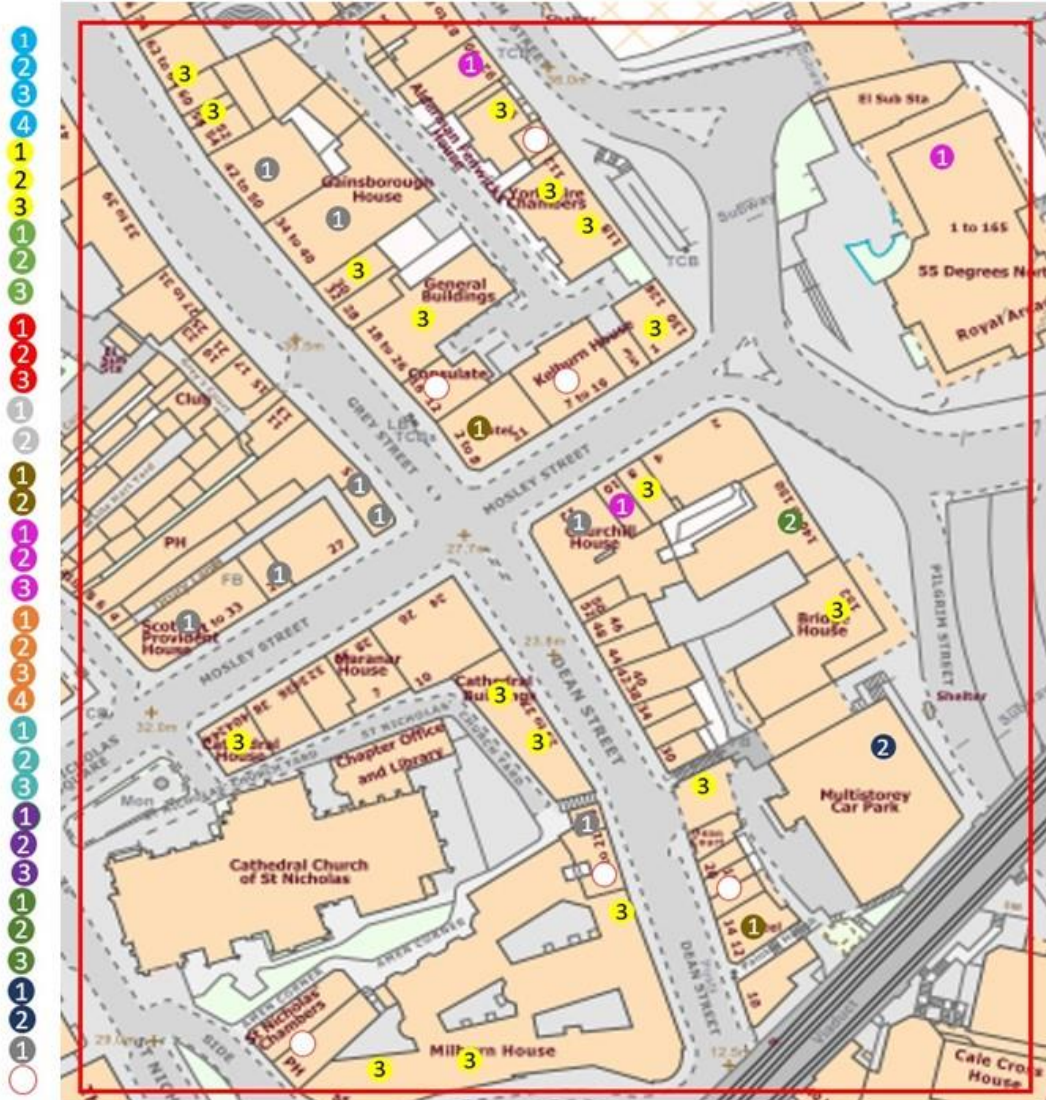
**Block F6:** Street Level
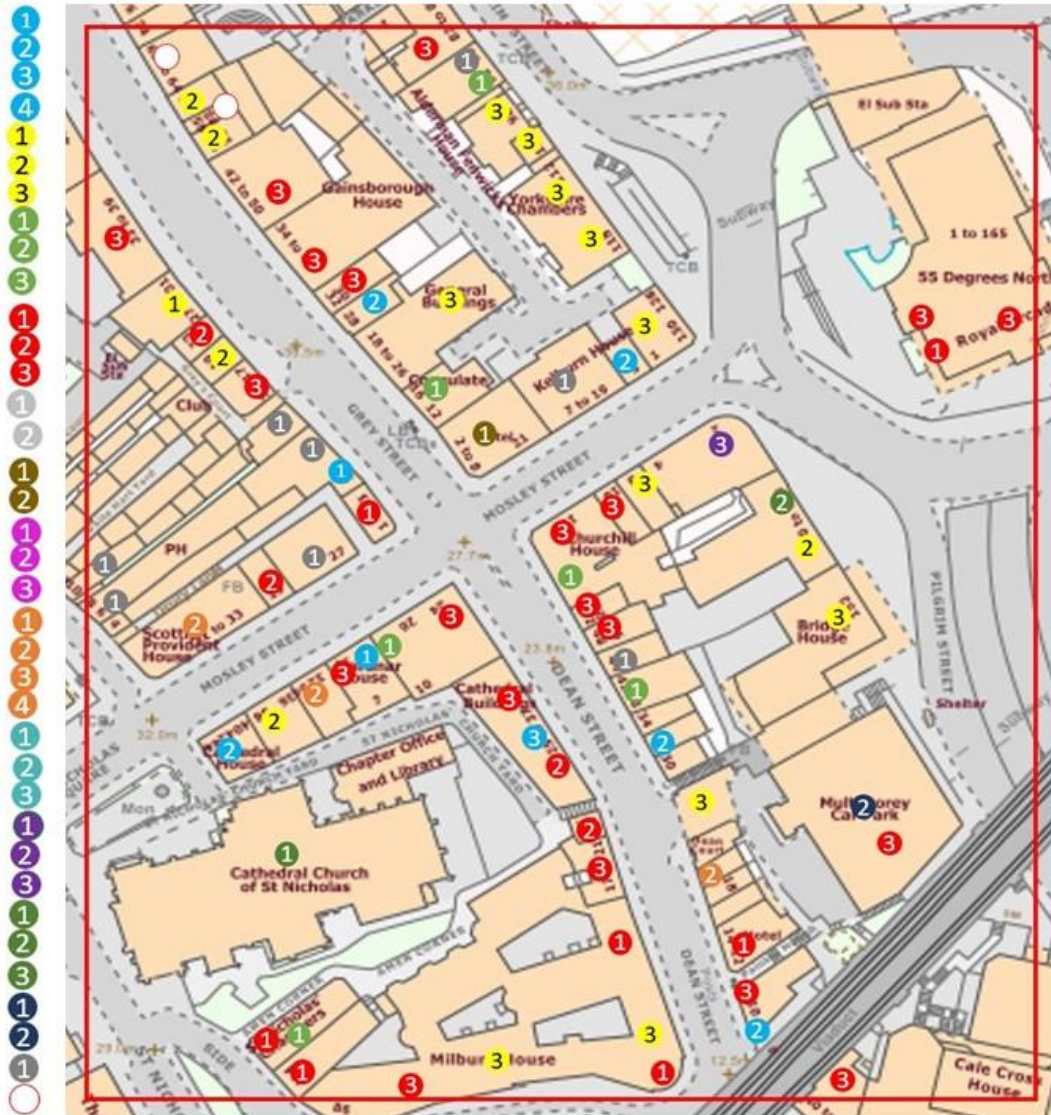
**Block F6:** First Floor
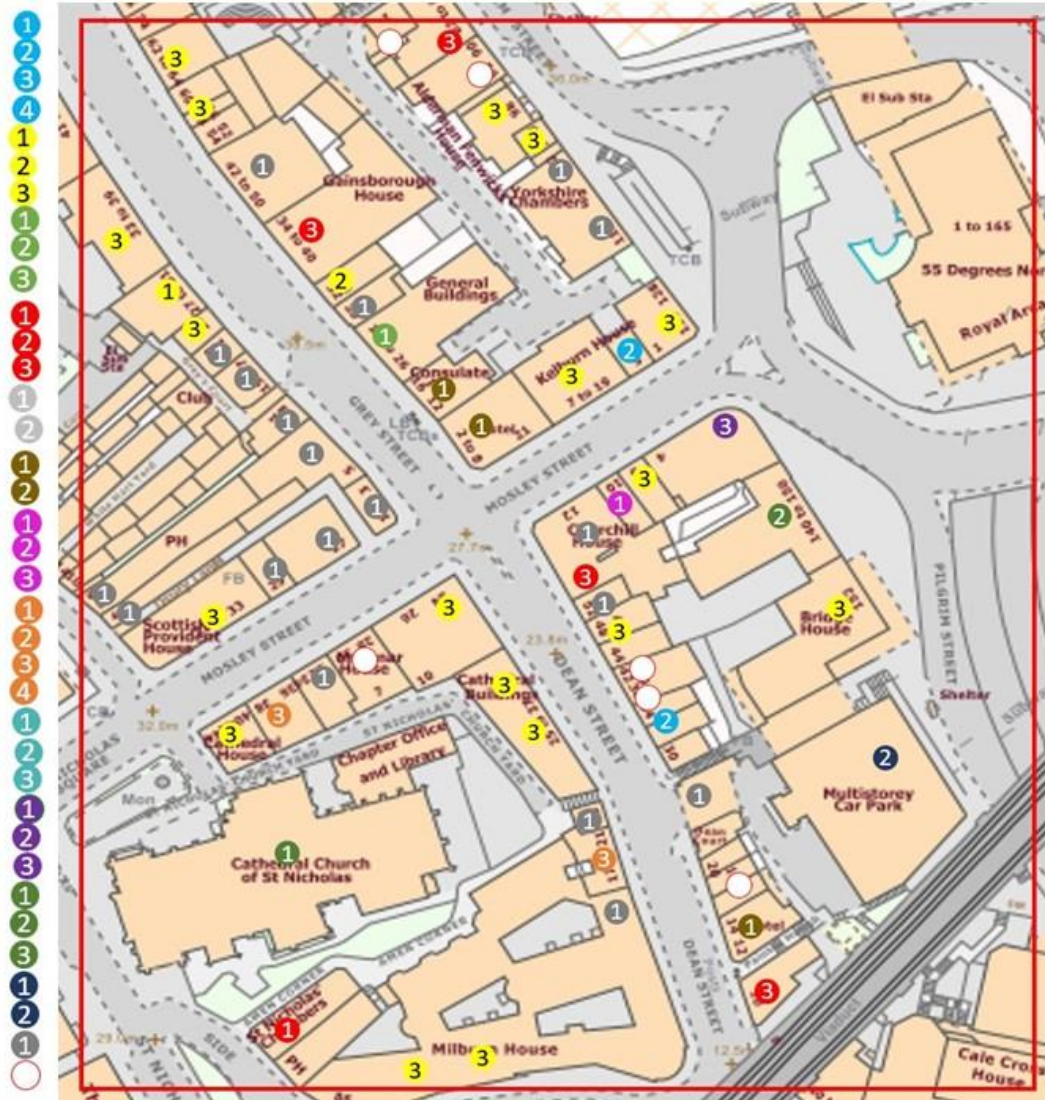
**Block F6:** Second Floor
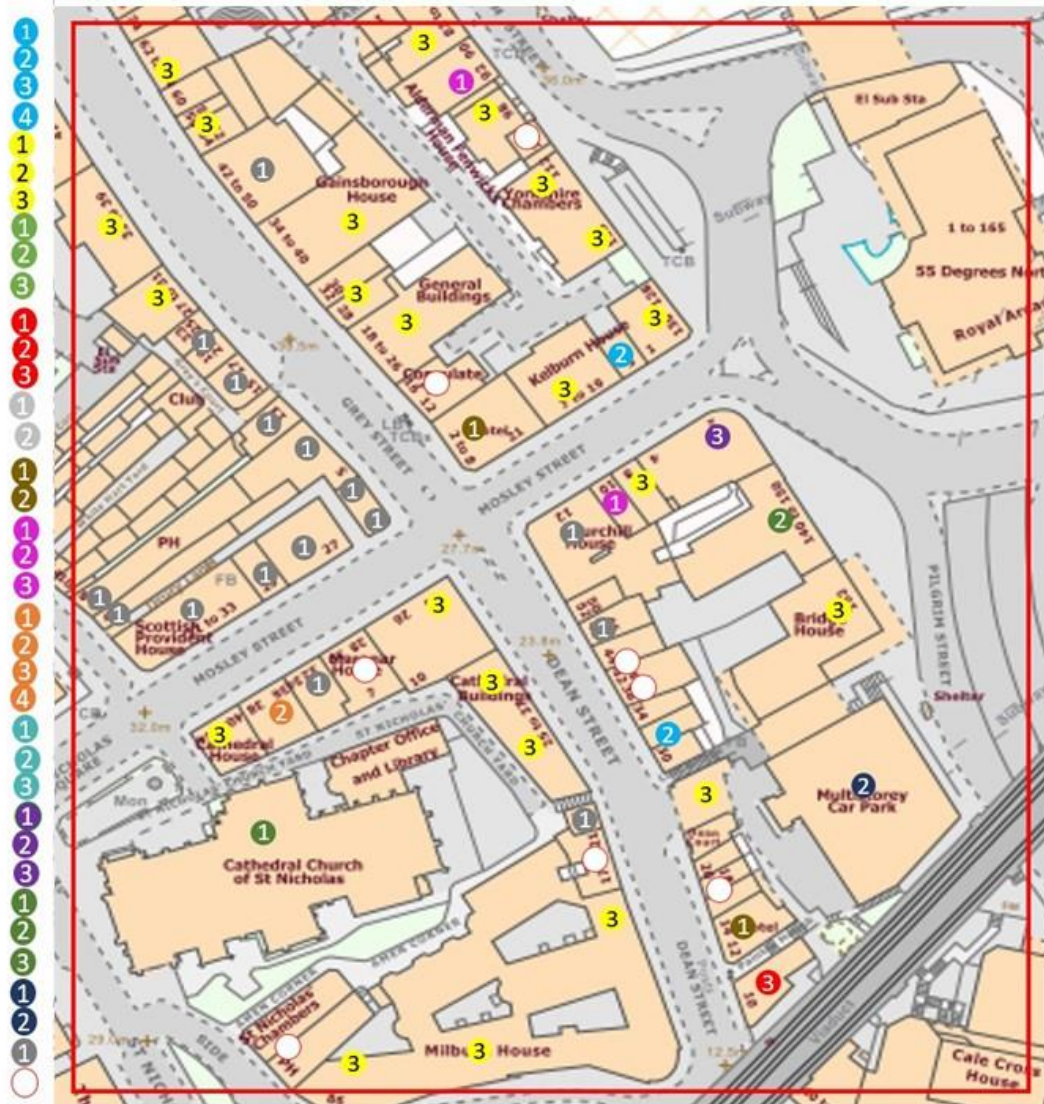
**Block F6:** Third Floor



**Note:**

The full survey data can be found on www.FutureofEnglishCityCentres.com

## Appendix 6 - Interview Schedule – trends and the future, not past and present

| Issues | Topics for Respondents |
|---|---|
| **Environmental Perspective** | |

| Issues | Topics for Respondents |
|---|---|
| Structure and Movement<br>Land Ownership<br>Buildings | physical structure of the centre, its ownership and movement around the centre |
|     Symbolic Buildings<br>    Contextual Buildings<br>    Historic Buildings | future development and use of buildings |
| Spaces<br>    Streets – vehicles, cycles, pedestrians<br>    Squares and Parks | attractiveness and usefulness of spaces |
| Air Quality and Noise | improving air quality and minimising noise |

**Social Perspective**

| Issues | Topics for Respondents |
|---|---|
| Insiders<br>    size and density of population<br>    residential demographics<br>        10 year bandings<br>    student numbers<br>    student residents<br>    vacancy<br>    city centre community<br>        strong and weak ties<br>        ethnic communities eg Chinese | potential and barriers to people living permanently in the city centre |

| Issues | Topics for Respondents |
|---|---|
| Regulars<br>    catchment area<br>        employment, leisure and entertainment, shopping, culture<br>            intensity and diversity of activities<br>        virtual and physical<br>    transport and accessibility<br>        train, metro, buses<br>        walk, cycle, drive<br>    students | attractiveness of city centre to residents in the region, and ease of travelling to it |

| Visitors<br>  visitors and tourists populating<br>  the city centre<br>  day trips and overnight stays<br>  business trips<br>  hotels<br>  visitor attractions<br>  travel<br>    to the city centre<br>    within the city centre | pros and cons of large numbers of visitors and tourists from other parts of the UK an internationally |
| --- | --- |

| Strangers<br>  social inclusion<br>  homeless and rough sleepers<br>  beggars<br>  night shelters<br>  alcohol dependency and drugs<br>  mental health<br>  offenders<br>  gender and demographics<br>  safety and perception of crime | social inclusion, safety and people on the streets |
| --- | --- |

**Economic Perspective**

| Income and Expenditure<br>Income<br>  Individuals – employment<br>  Businesses – sales and services<br>  Local Authorities – income for<br>      Services<br>  Inward Investment<br>Expenditure<br>  Individuals<br>    Buildings - rent, mortgage<br>      utilities<br>      council tax<br>    Transport<br>  Businesses<br>    Buildings - rent, utilities<br>      business<br>    rates | income<br>  individuals<br>  businesses<br><br>expenditure<br>  individuals<br>  businesses<br><br>pros and cons of inward investment |
| --- | --- |

| | |
|---|---|
| Goods and Services<br>Producer Goods<br>    Investment in buildings and<br>    spaces<br>        health, education,<br>        recreational, professional,<br>        hospitality, transport<br>Consumer Goods<br>    essentials – residents<br>    household – department stores<br>    luxury<br>Knowledge-based services<br>    face to face contact | investment in buildings and spaces<br><br>retail activity – essentials, household,<br>                luxury<br><br>service activity – types<br>            level of activity |

| | |
|---|---|
| Supply and Demand<br>    capacity of the market to deliver<br>    goods and services<br><br>    goods and services desired by<br>    customers | balance between capacity and demand for:<br><br>goods<br>services |

| | |
|---|---|
| Role of Economic Actors<br>    Insiders<br>        economic contribution<br>            consumer goods<br>            property market<br>            council tax<br>            employment<br>            spending power<br>        transient populations<br>            students – no<br>            council tax, cost<br>            young professionals<br>    Regulars<br>        workers, students, leisure,<br>        culture, hospitality,<br>        commuter network<br>    Visitors<br>        real contribution to the city<br>        centre<br>        cost – effect on local<br>        needs<br>        recreation and hospitality<br>            seasonality<br>    Strangers<br>        homeless | economic contributions + deficits for:<br><br>insiders<br>regulars<br>visitors<br>strangers |

| | |
|---|---|
| perceived negative effect on economy | |

**Political Perspective**

| | |
|---|---|
| Local Government<br>  Reducing democracy<br>    cabinet, Monument ward<br>    councillors, mayors<br>  Attention to the City Centre –<br>  only one ward<br>  Business rates, council tax,<br>  sales, fees and charges<br>Regional Government<br>  Effectiveness<br>  Future development<br>  Local enterprise partnership<br>    value to city centre<br>National Government<br>  Reducing local finance<br>  Taking more proactive role in<br>  city centre – local authority<br>  bidding for central government<br>  schemes<br>  How to be supportive rather<br>  than usurping local democracy<br>Governance<br>  Potential<br>  Who would be involved<br>  How will the community to be<br>  represented and heard<br>  Roles of BID and Universities | future roles of:<br>Local Government<br>Regional Government<br>National Government<br>for the city centre<br><br>Potential for moving to Governance |

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