

City centre future - Newcastle upon Tyne, UK

In November 2017, the City Council of the north east English city of Newcastle upon Tyne launched what was claimed to be an ambitious proposal to ‘kick start the transformation of the city centre’ making it into a globally renowned shopping and leisure destination. Collaborating with other partners, especially the local business improvement district (BID) company NE1 Limited and its neighbouring city council of Gateshead, the plan approved earlier in 2015 follows a well-trodden path where the economic and social regeneration of the central part of the city is built around compact growth. It seeks to reinforce notions of the traditional economic role of the city centre as one where economic ideas and innovation emanate (increasingly in conjunction with educational partners) and provides the majority of leisure and retailing for the regional population serviced by a radial transport network. It also views the city centre (Figure 1) as offering residential living for a small, but growing cohort of population, extending the socio-demographic profile through affordable housing and student rented accommodation.

14. Urban Core

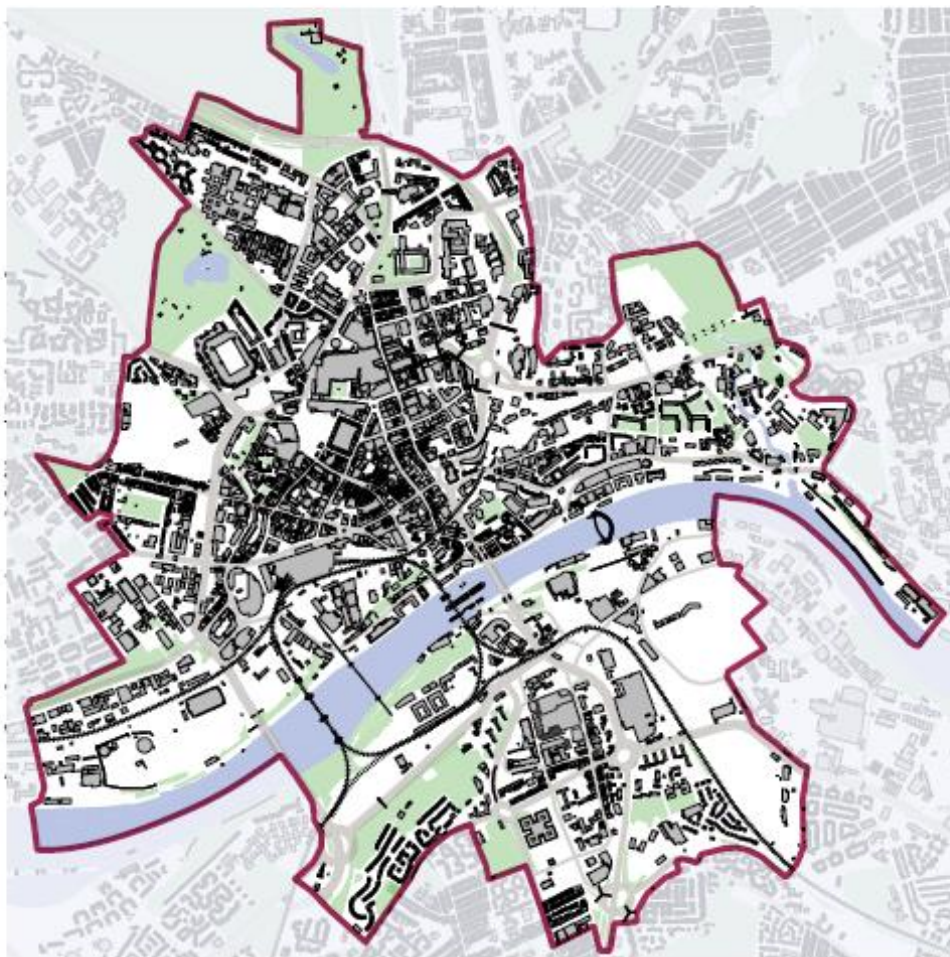


Figure 14.1 Urban Core Area

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Figure 1: Compact city regeneration infill, Newcastle Upon Tyne, UK (Source: Newcastle City & Gateshead Councils, 2015)

In the absence of both fiscal and regulatory capacity to respond more radically to the acknowledged pressures on the city centre, Newcastle upon Tyne City Council and its partners continue to implement a compact city model. Under this, the scope for transformational change is limited and indeed the underlying theory of change is incremental rather than radical.

At the core of 2030 vision is a city centre maintaining a balance between economic and cultural activity, between pedestrians and vehicles, and between public realm and private spaces. It is one able to attract people (and their wealth) from the local area for leisure and retailing and from further field through tourism. The limited funding committed by the two municipal authorities is primarily set aside to enhance streetscapes and pedestrianisation, to capitalise on the city's already strong network of public transport, improving sustainability (Table 1).

Table 1 – Newcastle upon Tyne Urban Core future development

Future contributors	Vision	Priorities
Office and business development	Provision of at least 380,000 m ² new office space	5 large scale office development in mixed-use sites
Leisure, culture and tourism	Enhance and diversify offering, both daytime and night time	Extend conference & business facilities, new hotels, family-friendly attractions + enhance riverside access
Homes	Diversify housing offer and develop c3750 new homes	1000 new homes, allocate home space in 5 mixed use sites (as above for offices), Support conversions of upper floors for homes
Sustainable transport	Promotion of sustainable transport modes and safe, better linked areas	Priority to sustainable modes on designated primary pedestrian routes; creation of direct routes to 5 mixed-use sites (as above); enhanced public transport by bus priority lanes, and re-invigoration of Metro
Other transport	Minimise impact on environment and quality of place	Focus traffic on defined urban core routes; minimise car parking for developments; promote short stay over long stay parking
Urban design and Heritage	Deliver higher quality locally distinctive places	Presumption against development which cause significant harm to views; maximise opportunities to sustain and enhance heritage assets; provide strong urban frontages, especially along pedestrian routes
Urban Green infrastructure	Protect and enhance network	Fill gaps and linkages in network
Public Realm and Public Art	Enhanced network of public and open spaces, and use public art to enhance their character	Improve add new public spaces which are flexible for use; incorporate durable materials; make provision for temporary use and events by the private sector

Source: Planning for the Future: Core strategy and urban core plan 2010-30, Newcastle City and Gateshead Councils (2015)

Most emphasis, however, is placed on reversing long-term economic and social trends afflicting the urban core. Despite evidence of a sharp fall in demand for commercial and retail properties, the Newcastle plan argues that “there is still significant growth potential in the Urban Core” (Newcastle & Gateshead City Councils, 2015, 122) with its strategy being to “reinforce its continued success by bringing new businesses, particularly in science, retail, digital, creative and tourism sectors to the area” (p122). To this end, the strategic focus is on re-development of key, under-utilised interstices (geographically defined) within the existing built environment. It assumes that private sector investment alongside cityscape improvements provided by the civic authorities can strengthen the economic and social fabric of the city. Socially, the generation of an urban buzz underpins this economic growth. Based on intensifying social interactions in a compact urban space, the plan envisages continued re-profiling of the demography of city centre users through the processes of studentification and commodification of the student experience (Chatterton, 2010; Mulhearn and Franco, 2018), and the use of planning regulation to encourage use of vacant spaces for rented and owner occupied housing.

Newcastle and Gateshead Councils vision document claims to be a product of “active conversation with our communities” (p10), setting out an agenda for future action, recognising that processes of urbanisation are impacting negatively on the functional logic of the city centre. The underlying logic remains however of a city centre more compact and lively, generating positive externalities and fostering an environment that reinforces density, proximity, and connectivity, whilst also being a driver of economic growth for the city as a whole and the urban region.

References