

Crook Masterplan Update



Durham County Council

November 2016

Context for Masterplan Update

Masterplans are being developed for the majority of the main towns in County Durham. This one for Crook provides an update to the 2012 Masterplan, showing what has been delivered across Council services in the recent past. The update also sets out key activities for the future in and around the town centre.

Key priorities:

- Develop the role of the centre as an employment and enterprise hub;
- Develop a high quality and distinctive and attractive town centre environment;
- Improve movement patterns in an around the town centre; and
- Support the retail offer in the town to increase the catchment area.

Profile

Crook is a designated market town in the South West of the County. Although one of the smallest towns in County Durham serving a population of approximately 9,000 people, it acts as a service centre for the rural hinterland communities.

Crook dates back to 1795 where it developed as an agricultural village. Later when coal was discovered, the town expanded quickly and the economy and population increased. However, when mining began to decline this had a negative impact upon manufacturing industry. In the mid-20th century the town's economy was based on textiles.

This historical context has resulted in a rich and varied built heritage and in 1975 led to the designation of Crook Conservation Area covering an area of 51 hectares in the centre of the town. The health and vitality of many market towns has declined in recent years due to changing lifestyles and economic patterns and this has impacted upon Crook.

Those towns which have adapted to the changing circumstances, have continued to provide a quality retail and service offer have developed a renewed and clear economic rationale. The challenge for Crook is to continue to meet the needs of its residents and the wider area.



Town Centre

Crook has previously benefited from a programme of capital investment through Government and European funding which served to improve some areas of the town centre. This included a phased physical improvement plan upgrading the Market Place and North Terrace. Improvements to some buildings with heritage significance were undertaken. The area to the front of the Civic Centre was improved and now offers an attractive open space enhanced by seating and landscaping.

Transport

Crook is located 10 miles from Durham City and 5 miles from Bishop Auckland and a couple of miles north of the River Wear. The main arterial routes are the A68, which is one of the main routes to the borders and Scotland and the A1 (M) and the A690 which links to Durham and Sunderland and the A691 which links to the North Pennines (designated an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty) and Cumbria.

What has been delivered?

Housing

The average house price in Crook in 2014 was £86,900, this is a fall of 15.3% since 2008. Prices in this area are 31.3% below the County average. Recent completions of affordable housing include developments at:

- **Greenside Place:** 17 2-bed affordable homes developed by Dale and Valley Homes completed December 2011
- **Park Avenue:** Close sheltered accommodation comprising 48 2-bed apartments and 4 bungalows completed June 2012.
- **Weavers Croft:** 33 3-bed and 1 2-bed homes developed by Derwentside Homes for Rent to Buy

A higher proportion of the population (15.8%) in Crook live in the top 10% most deprived lower super output areas (LSOAs) nationally, than across County Durham. There were 1,223 housing benefit claims in February 2016 in the Crook area, representing an estimated 25.4% of all occupied households in the area. There has been a 4.6% fall in housing benefit claims since December 2012.

Economy

Crook has some significant employment sites, including Castle Close Industrial Estate and Thistleflat Extensions 1 & 2 and Beechburn Park. The latter is a long established estate located to the south of Crook off the A689 towards Bishop Auckland.

In the 2011 Census 12,522 residents in Crook and surrounding area were recorded as employed with 6.1% employed (working) in the area. A further 72.4% worked elsewhere in the county. 17.3% worked elsewhere in the North East and 4.2% worked in other parts of England and Wales).

In February 2016 15.7% (960 people) of the working age population (aged 16 to 64) in Crook were claiming key out of work benefits, compared to 12.4% in the county. This is a fall of 11.1% in the number of claimants since May 2013 compared to falls of 16.6% in the county. 55 residents of working age have been helped into apprenticeship schemes through the Employability Team.

Business

With the exception of the Civic Centre, the main office provision is located at Crook Business Centre. Current facilities available include 14 offices and a meeting room, which can accommodate 20 people for training events. The Business Centre typically runs at 100% occupancy.

Retail

The centre comprises of a mix of traditional terraced properties along with more modern commercial units. Crook has a high percentage of small independent retailers with only a few national or regional retailers or franchises.

The town centre is dominated by service uses, which account for around half of the 91 units. These include a number of takeaways, cafes and restaurants, hair and beauty salons, travel agents, estate agents, solicitors and banks. Comparison goods retailing comprises a further 25% of units consisting of small scale independents selling clothing, pet supplies, fishing tackle, hardware goods and gifts.

Other significant occupiers include Durham County Council, PCT Health Facilities, the Library and Police Station. The town secures an extremely limited share from its immediate catchment given the limitations of the towns comparison retail offer with most residents travelling to other places such as Bishop Auckland and Durham City.

Given current investor interest within the town centre, there are a number of key strategic issues that need effective intervention to allow the town centre to redefine its offer and establish a strong and distinctive range of complimentary uses and activities.

- Support the retail offer in the town to increase the catchment area
- Support the development of the food retail site on Queen Street
- Promote an evening economy to capitalise on the growth of restaurants and cafes in the town
- Encourage and promote specialist retail and franchise opportunities to improve the retail offer
- Develop the offer of the market

The retail performance of the town particularly in respect of convenience shopping is currently in transition with the former CO-OP store on New Road demolished and a new Lidl store under construction. The new store (1424 sq. m) is due to open in late 2016. Public consultation has recently been undertaken in September 2016 in respect of an Aldi foodstore being developed at Queen Street in the town centre.

Tourism Leisure and Recreation

- **Peases West Sports centre.** The centre is to be developed and the facilities expanded by Crook Community Leisure who successfully secured public support through the Councils participatory budgeting process and small grants fund for £500 000 of funding to improve the facility.
- **Glenholme Park** The future of Glenholme Park has been subject to consultation and work to improve and develop the park has started which includes the installation of a new £85,000 skate park funded through County Councillors Neighbourhood Budget and Section 106 contributions from previous housing development around Crook.



This includes the installation of Multi Use games Area (MUGA) lighting for sports activities.

- **Parklife Project.** A three year Parklife project has been operating offering a range of weekly physical activity opportunities delivered by Durham County Council Culture and Sport with funding been jointly provided by the council, the 3 Towns Partnership and Sport England. A number of cultural events have been funded through the 3 Towns Partnership including 2 youth music events and in 2016 Durham Brass Festival.

Town Centre

Improvements in the town centre include:

- The provision of secure and safe cycle racks to encourage sustainable travel. Cycle parking was provided in March 2013 outside of the Civic Centre
- The implementation of a coordinated approach to improving and updating signage Ensure improved route ways to the town centre from neighbouring areas
- The relocation of the library together with the Customer Access Point in 2014 into the former Crook Civic Centre releasing land for retail development. The Coroner's office has also been relocated into the Civic Centre
- Improvements to paving, railings and dropped crossing points at the corner of Commercial Street and Elliott Street.
- Improvements to pedestrian access links to town centre retail outlets. Encompassing the relocation of two pedestrian crossing points (38 sq. mtrs - 0.0038 hectares of tactiles and paving). Removal of excess street furniture. The installation 4 bollards to restrict vehicle overrun.
- The completion of targeted business improvements in Hope Street at Bar 56, Crook Hotel, Mini Mart and the Freezer Shop and Copper Mine Public House.
- The relocation of Fire Station has been completed giving an additional community facility.
- Engagement and support for new business to trade from a vacant unit in the centre This activity saw the creation of 9 full time equivalent jobs for the town centre
- Working with businesses, a scheme helped to fund major improvements to the frontage of a prominent building in the heart of the retail centre.



Transport

Regular services also provide direct access to Bishop Auckland and Durham City. The Durham County Council Transit 15 Programme supported the upgrading of bus shelters and stops along the Crook-Durham corridor estimated cost (£95 000).

The bus stands in Crook Market Place, provide regular bus services to settlements including Tow Law, Wolsingham, Stanhope, Billy Row, Stanley Crook, Roddymoor, Howden le Wear and Willington.

A Civil Parking Enforcement scheme was introduced in order to improve traffic movement and increase the turnover of available parking spaces. The aim of this scheme was to improve the business environment.

Education

There are three primary schools which serve Crook. Crook Primary has 318 pupils, Hartside Primary with 188 pupils and St Cuthbert's RC School. Nursery provision is provided by Local Authority Nursery School which provides places for up to 78 pupils on a part time basis. Private provision is catered for by Kidzone and Emerald nurseries.

There is no Secondary School in Crook. The majority of pupils from the area attend Parkside Sports College at Willington, though some attend Wolsingham School and Community College and St John's School and Sixth Form College, a Catholic Academy in Bishop Auckland.

In 2014/15 82.2% of KS2 pupils living Crook achieved level 4 or above in reading, writing and maths. This is higher than the 81.7% recorded across County Durham. In 2014/15 66.7% of KS4 pupils living in Crook achieved 5 or more grade A-C GCSE's. This is higher than the 65.3% recorded across County Durham.

Health

Within the town there is provision of:

- Crees (based on the Australian "men's sheds" model).
- Healthy Living Pharmacies.
- The Social Prescribing Programme which is available across the County and there is a centre in the town.
- Contraception and Sexual Health Services.

The following countywide provision is also being delivered within the town:

- If U Care Share are based in Great Lumley and provides support for people affected by suicide.
- Wellbeing for Life, which targets the most deprived areas in County Durham and does work in some MSOAs in/around the town. This geographically targeted work is supported by the programme via outreach and work with particular groups of people such as the LGBT community.

What will be delivered in the Future?

3 Towns Area Action Partnership (AAP) Initiatives

The AAP has been working on and investing in a number of key priorities voted for by the public over the last four years. The priorities for investment are identified as:

- Children and Young People
- Health and Wellbeing
- Regeneration and Safety of towns and villages
- Employment, job prospects, education and training.

The 3 Towns Partnership has invested in a number of employment initiatives over the last four years including careers development at Parkside Academy, community employment projects and the Councils Employability Team which has resulted in over 250 residents over the last four years successfully securing employment, apprenticeships or self-employment.

Education

- Works to replace windows, the boiler and heating distribution system at Crook Primary school are programmed in summer 2017 at a cost of approximately £935,000

Leisure and recreation

- Installation of a new skate park and lighting for the multi-use games area (£85 000)
- Expansion and improvement of the Peases West sports facility (£500 000)

Retail

- A new Lidl supermarket opening in December 2016 on the former COOP site
- A new Aldi store at the planning consultation stage to be developed on the former Queen Street depot