

**CHESTERFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL LOCAL PLAN**  
**COMMENTS BY CHESTERFIELD AND DISTRICT CIVIC SOCIETY**  
**FEBRUARY 2017**

**SUMMARY OF MAIN SUGGESTIONS**

- Improve air quality on Chatsworth Road and Derby Road.
- Avoid house-building on green-field land at Dunston if possible.
- Do everything possible to sustain the open market and town centre shops.
- Ensure a high standard of design for new public buildings in the town.
- Extend the existing conservation area to include more of the Victorian middle class housing west of the town centre.
- Remodel the station arrival area and re-establish Corporation Street as an approach to the station.
- Solve the problem of the derelict Chesterfield Hotel and Clifton Hotel.
- Improve parking at the station and eliminate commuter parking on residential streets nearby.
- Improve the bus service to and from the railway station, and introduce a service to Chatsworth.
- Build a spectacular circular multi-storey car-park at Holywell Cross to replace the existing surface and multi-storey car-parks.
- Replace the former district council offices on Saltergate with new housing as impressive as The Terrace of 1845–7 elsewhere on the same street.
- Replace Markham House with a much better ‘Southern Gateway’ building.

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**0     **Introductory comments****

**0.1**     Chesterfield and District Civic Society was established in 1964 as an educational charity whose objects are to encourage a sense of civic pride and a high standard of design in the built environment. Its work extends over the modern Borough of Chesterfield (including Staveley and Brimington) and several civil parishes in North East Derbyshire District which were townships in Chesterfield ancient parish. The society currently has about 60 members (a number which is rising as the society has become more active in recent months) and four affiliated organisations (Chesterfield Canal Trust, Chesterfield Cycle Campaign, Friends of Spital Cemetery and North East Derbyshire Industrial Archaeology Society). Alongside individual membership, the society is seeking to become an umbrella organisation for all the voluntary groups in the area interested in the built environment. The Civic Society has traditionally offered comment to the local authority on planning matters, and welcomes the opportunity to do so in the case of the latest Local Plan.

**0.2**     It may also be useful to emphasise what the Civic Society is not. First, it is not a ‘preservation society’, a ‘heritage society’ or an ‘amenity society’, much less a local history society. It does not oppose the demolition of old buildings simply because they are old, nor any other kind of change in the built environment. It recognises that all settlements, especially towns the size of Chesterfield with a long history that has created a complex urban environment, are constantly evolving. This entails the demolition of some buildings and the erection of new ones, as well as the reorganisation of urban space in other ways. Its concern is that such change should be for the better, not worse, and should take account of Chesterfield’s past as well as its future. It also seeks to preserve features that make Chesterfield unique, or different

from other towns of similar size and history. Second, the Civic Society does not believe that it is somehow a repository of knowledge superior to that of a local authority. It is a voluntary association of individuals with an informed lay interest in the built environment, some of whom may have professional expertise in fields allied to the work of a district council planning department. It recognises that a local planning authority is made up of democratically elected members who act on the advice of professionally qualified officers in discharging important powers and duties laid on them by Parliament. The role of a civic society is to offer reasonably well informed comment on its work.

- 0.3** We feel that it is important to make clear how these comments have come to be compiled. In the time available it has not been possible to consult the whole of the Civic Society's membership. On the other hand, this paper is not a statement of the views of one or two officers, to which the rest of the committee have put their name without having any input. An initial draft was discussed at a committee meeting (including representatives of the affiliated organisations) held following email exchanges about the text, and a revised draft was circulated to all committee members before the text assumed its final form. It therefore genuinely represents the views of the whole committee. On the other hand, to avoid giving the impression that our comments have been endorsed by the membership as a whole, we have tended to use the word 'We' rather than the phrase 'the Civic Society' in the text.
- 0.4** We also wish to preface our comments by saying that we strongly support all the general aspirations of the Local Plan, and much of the detailed policy contained in a very full and informative text, which we feel is clearly written and accessible to lay people. Detailed comments on a limited number of matters follow, using the same section numbers as the Local Plan. One minor presentational point we would make is that, for people not familiar with the large number of abbreviations used by professional planners, it might be helpful in future documents to include a glossary at the front. Some of the terms are defined in the text when they first occur, some are not, and for some there are links to websites where they are explained. An alphabetical list in one place might be useful.

#### **1–4 Vision and Strategic Objectives; Spatial Strategy; Infrastructure Delivery; A Changing Climate**

We endorse all the general policy objectives set out in these sections, some of which are considered in more detail later in the Plan.

#### **5 Environmental Quality**

Our only observations under this head, made without specialist knowledge but in the light of comments made by members at an open discussion we held last December, is to ask (a) whether the volume of traffic, much of its slow moving or stationary, on Chatsworth Road, an important secondary shopping area, with housing and a growing number of food and drink outlets, means that this should also be declared an Air Quality Management Area and efforts made to reduce pollution; and (b) whether Derby Road between the Lordsmill Street roundabout and Langer Lane, where similar considerations apply (and there are two primary schools on this route), should be considered for the same treatment.

#### **6 Homes and Housing**

We accept the calculations showing how many new houses (and other dwellings) are likely to be needed in the borough between now and 2033, and appreciate the amount of work that has gone into identifying housing sites, most of which are on previously used land. We hope very much, however, that the ‘Potential Reserved Sites’ will only be used in the last resort. All the land in question is at Dunston, in open country on the north-western edge of the built-up area, and we would urge that if possible it be not developed. This land is estimated to accommodate 952 houses, or 10.74 per cent of the total of 8,863 for which sites have been identified. We feel that, however carefully housing need over the next fifteen years has been estimated, there must be a margin of error in any such estimate. Both social and economic changes can affect housing demand in a given area in ways that are difficult to predict over half a generation. If the estimate proves to be too high, there should be no need to release this rural land for development. Developers might well prefer to build on this land instead of rehabilitating previously used land, but we feel that rural land should be held back for as long as possible and other sites listed in the Local Plan used first.

## **7 Jobs, Centres and Facilities**

We support all the policy objectives set out, including the imperative need to sustain the historic position of Chesterfield town centre as a sub-regional shopping destination, while at the same time seeking to improve facilities in smaller centres. Other sections of the Local Plan rightly stress Chesterfield's advantages as a good base from which to explore the Peak District, which it is, but we feel that it is important to get more visitors to spend time in the town itself. Good shopping facilities in a traditional, compact town centre, focused on one of the largest open market places in England, should be exploited as an attraction for visitors. If it becomes clear that stalls in the open market will never again fill such a large market place (Richard I's retail consultants can hardly be blamed for not foreseeing what would happen eight hundred years later), thought could be given to using some of the space on market days for live entertainment to draw people in. A brass band playing for charity is a simple example that might work. It is increased footfall and spending by people from outside Chesterfield's usual travel-to-shop area that will help to sustain the market traders and independent retailers in the town centre.

## **8 Design and the Built Environment**

**8.01** We endorse all the comments made under the subheading 'Design', and would merely add that it is worth remembering the small number of buildings (other than the parish church) in the town centre dating from before 1700. These include the two 16th-century box-frame houses (the Royal Oak in the Shambles and the Peacock, also on Low Pavement); the jettied and pillared former Falcon inn on Low Pavement, which appears to have an encased box frame; and the Post House restaurant on Holywell Street. There may be others buried beneath later accretions which have yet to be recognised. Of those dating from since 1700, perhaps the most striking (and numerous) are the 'black and white' buildings of the 1920s and early 1930s which merit (and in some cases urgently need) careful conservation. Chesterfield may well have a larger stock of this type of building than any other town in England. It is also important to stress that the 'timber framing', although not structural, is archaeologically very accurate and often very carefully detailed. A 'trail' leaflet on these buildings has proved very popular and more remains to be discovered of how

the designs came to be chosen and the architects responsible. In the meantime, it is important that the stock is not diminished by demolition or degraded by neglect. We would also stress that the Town Hall of 1938 (as well as the Market Hall of 1857, which seems to attract more attention) is important as a statement of civic pride in the inter-war period, when Chesterfield pressed (unsuccessfully) its strong case for county borough status. The setting of the Town Hall was not improved in the 1960s, when the gardens originally laid out around it were converted into car-parks. What is left of the vision of the 1930s of a Civic Centre should be retained and if possible enhanced.

**8.02** The Local Plan emphasises the need for new buildings to contribute to the local townscape, in terms of their design, use of materials etc. We are not convinced that the current fashion for large, flat-roofed non-domestic buildings, as exemplified in Chesterfield by the medical centre on Ashgate Road or the justice centre on Tapton Lane, is helpful in this respect. The new shops on Vicar Lane fit in much better. We accept that Chesterfield needs new buildings, but they should complement, rather than detract from, its older stock and avoid following what may prove to be transient fashion. Both Burlington House and Markham House were seen as promising signs of ‘the future’ in the 1960s but neither has many friends today.

**8.03** Also under the subheading ‘Design’, the plan briefly refers to the town’s archaeological heritage. It was unfortunate that none of the evidence for the Roman fort revealed by excavation in the 1970s was suitable for public display, as has been done in some towns with similar origins. It might be useful to install an information board, perhaps in Rykniel Square, showing where the walls of the fort lay in relation to the modern street plan, to give residents and visitors an idea of how the settlement at Chesterfield originated.

**8.04** We support all the policies outlined under the subheading ‘Historic Environment’ and feel that there may be a case for designating at least one more Conservation Area, to protect the character of the Victorian residential area of Lower Newbold. Indeed, it may be desirable to reconsider the future treatment of the entire wedge of building between West Bars and Sheffield Road (including parts of Saltergate and Newbold

Road). This area was developed in stages between the 1830s and the First World with middle class and lower middle class housing, and also includes some historically important public buildings (Holy Trinity, the Catholic Church and Schools, Trinity Institute and the Board of Guardians offices). More generally, we would be happy to suggest buildings (not statutorily protected) elsewhere in the borough which might be included in the Local List of Heritage Assets, supported by notes on their history.

## **9 Travel and Transport**

- 9.01** We support all the policy statements made under this heading, and feel that more could be made of Chesterfield's excellent long-distance rail services, which are as good as those of any town of its size and better than most. Even without HS2, Chesterfield has a frequent and fast service to London, and direct trains to most major provincial cities. Combined with relatively cheap housing and lack of pressure in the labour market, this ought to be a major selling point in encouraging businesses to relocate to Chesterfield.
- 9.02** We strongly support the proposal to insert a new link road between Hollis Lane and the railway station, which would considerably improve access to the station. If this was built, it might be possible to close vehicle (but not pedestrian) access to the station via Piccadilly Road and Crow Lane, neither of which was designed to carry such traffic. At the same time, we hope that Corporation Street can be restored closer to its historic role as the main approach to the station from the town centre. It may not be practicable to reinstate it as a motor-road, but the widening of the bridge over the A61 would improve its appearance.
- 9.03** The improvement of this area should also aim at solving the problem of the two derelict hotels which currently disfigure Corporation Street, neither of which is likely to reopen as a hotel.
- (a) The former Clifton Hotel might have a future as a bar and restaurant, although there is significant competition nearby, but we hope the borough council can bring pressure on the owners to find a solution of some sort. One possibility, although it would involve both capital and (probably) revenue expenditure by the council, would be for the property to be added to the adjoining Pomegranate estate. The building could be used (for example) for additional

temporary exhibition space for the museum (especially for art exhibitions), more extensive catering facilities for the theatre, and perhaps a small ('studio') performance area, which might in turn enable the theatre to do more work with schools or youth groups than it can at present.

- (b) The former Chesterfield Hotel is a more serious problem. It is a much bigger, more prominent building and has been an important element in the town's history for over a hundred years. The three older portions of the building (the original central block at the junction of Corporation and Malkin Street and the two on either side, which may or may not be contemporary) have some architectural unity, although the modern extension at the Malkin Street end greatly detracts from its appearance. We are aware of anecdotal evidence that the property is encumbered by debts greater than the value of the site, but we feel that it is important, for the appearance of this part of the town, seen by visitors arriving by train, that something be done as soon as possible. If, as we have also been told, the existing building is too poorly laid out to meet modern access requirements (and presumably has other shortcomings), it may prove impossible to retain, but if the site is redeveloped we feel strongly that it should be with a high quality building appropriate to its position. One possible use (achieved either by converting the existing buildings or rebuilding from scratch) might be as high-status apartments, perhaps traditional 'service flats' with catering and leisure facilities provided on a club basis. Such a development might attract young professional people working in Sheffield or further afield, who could not afford similar accommodation in a more expensive area but would be prepared to commute by train. Such flats would, after all, be within two hours' travelling time of central London and could be sold at far less than similar accommodation within not a great deal less travelling time.

- 9.04** We also hope that, if rail travel from Chesterfield continues to increase, the problem of commuter parking in adjoining residential areas is tackled. At present, all-day parking on Piccadilly Road makes it impossible for traffic to move freely in both directions at the same time, and residents of the adjoining Riverside Estate are suffering loss of amenity through inconsiderate parking. We feel that there is a good



case for introducing a residents' parking scheme on this estate, as we understand was intended when planning permission was first granted. We would also like to see Network Rail convert part or all of the surface car-park on the site of the former station goods yard into a two-storey car-park to increase its capacity on the existing footprint. Thanks to the steep bank which bounds this site on the west, such a car-park need not be visually intrusive.

- 9.05** We would also like to see improvements to the bus service to the railway station. We accept that it is not possible for Chesterfield, unlike some towns, to have a seamless 'interchange' between bus and rail, but if the area in front of the station was remodelled, it should be possible for more buses to call there. This should encourage commuters who at present bring their cars to the station (or, more commonly, to surrounding streets where they can park all day free of charge) to come by bus. Routes which might be extended include those from Bolsover, Clay Cross and North Wingfield (which have no railway service) and Matlock (which is only on a branch line), as well as parts of the borough beyond walking distance to the station, or adjoining villages like Wingerworth, Temple Normanton and Sutton Scarsdale. This would be particularly useful in the case of routes serving the poorer eastern areas of the borough, where fewer people have cars. A better bus service should lead not only to fewer car movements to and from the station, but also greater use of the railway, thus helping to ensure that Chesterfield retains its present excellent service.
- 9.07** One new bus service that could be established without any rebuilding at the station would be a direct link between Chesterfield and Chatsworth. At present it is only possible to make this journey using two buses, changing at Matlock. Chesterfield has traditionally been seen as the 'Gateway to Chatsworth' and a limited-stop service from the station, via the town centre, could be marketed to people who wished to visit Chatsworth from some distance without having to drive or pay £4 to park when they arrive. This would also boost use of the station, and a proportion of such visitors would probably spend some money, or even stay overnight, in Chesterfield. There is to be a special shuttle bus from the station for the Royal Horticultural Society's new flower show at Chatsworth in June 2017: it would be a great step forward if a permanent service could be established on the same route.
- 9.08** Finally, we support the time-worn plan (which goes back to at least the 1940s) for a

Brimington–Staveley bypass to relieve pressure on those communities and improve the link between Chesterfield and Junction 30 of the M1. Such a road would also facilitate the introduction of new employment into this stretch of the Rother valley and help to regenerate the poorest communities in the borough. It should not, of course, prejudice the full restoration of the Chesterfield Canal, which also follows the valley floor at this point.

## **10 New Policies**

**10.01 Regeneration Priority Areas.** We strongly support the council’s emphasis on regenerating the very poor former mining villages in the east of the borough, not least through the building of new houses to broaden their social structure and widen housing tenure in what were historically (and largely remain) one-class communities dependent on public housing. It is also important that the county council, as the education authority, does its utmost to improve the schools serving these communities (including the secondary schools at Staveley, Bolsover and Clowne), so as to widen opportunities for children growing up there.

**10.02** The use of the terms ‘hamlet’ and ‘demesne’ in the reference to Woodthorpe may have been misunderstood. Woodthorpe was a quasi-manorial tenement and small hamlet within the large manor of Staveley, which was purchased by Elizabeth, Countess of Shrewsbury (‘Bess of Hardwick’) in 1599. The bulk of the Chatsworth Settlement Trust’s holdings in Staveley were acquired in 1661, when the 3rd Earl of Devonshire bought the lands of Lord Frescheville, following his death without a male heir but with a large debts. Woodthorpe Hall Farm probably stands on the site of the main house on the medieval estate. There may be some scope for landscape archaeology in that area, but no more than there is elsewhere in the rural parts of Staveley parish, in which several large freeholds were established in the middle ages. At the same time, it is certainly true that much of the eastern side of the borough has been made archaeologically sterile by opencast coalmining, as well as earlier industrial activity and railway building.

**10.03 Chesterfield Canal.** We strongly endorse the borough council’s support for the restoration of the Derbyshire section of the canal and hope that the entire route can be reopened in the not too distant future. Every canal reopening since the 1950s has

brought benefits, economic and social, to the area served and, in the case of the Chesterfield Canal, in addition to those accruing to the town itself, it is the poorer eastern parts of the borough that should gain most.

## **11. Making Great Places**

### **11.01 Chesterfield Town Centre**

We generally support the proposals set out for the seven ‘character areas’ identified in the Town Centre Masterplan of 2015, and also for the Chatsworth Road Corridor, Chesterfield Waterside & the Potteries, Markham Vale and the Staveley & Rother Corridor.

**11.02** In the case of the Northern Gateway, we note that the council has abandoned plans for a retail-led development, which seems wise, given the way in which retailing is rapidly changing and the need to sustain the shopping centre around the Market Place. However, we wonder whether some of this land might be released for housing, by extending the site, already earmarked for housing, that is currently Allen & Orr’s timber yard, perhaps with a frontage to Newbold Road. This would have the desirable result of increasing the number of houses close to the town centre, enabling more people to live within walking distance of workplace, shopping and entertainment, and also the railway station.

**11.03** We would also like to suggest a way of redeveloping the Donut roundabout at Holywell Cross, so as to retain parking but get rid of the existing, visually unappealing, surface and multi-storey car-parks. Why not build a new multi-storey car-park within the Donut itself, in the shape of a circular drum, with helical access to all floors? This would be both striking and easy to find for visitors; it could even have a café or restaurant on the top floor offering excellent views over the town and adjoining countryside. More prosaically, this would make good use of an awkwardly shaped site which can hardly be used for housing (since few people wish to live on a roundabout) or retail (since that would drain footfall from around the Market Place). If a large car-park was built in the middle of the roundabout, the old multi-storey car-park behind Saltergate could be demolished and more land made available for new housing.

**11.04** Developing this point further, we note that the former North East Derbyshire district council offices are marked as a potential housing site. We support this idea, since the

existing buildings (a block dating from the 1930s built by Chesterfield rural district council, augmented in an unsympathetic way in the 1970s by North East Derbyshire) have little to commend them. With its lengthy frontage to Saltergate, and proximity to the Town Hall, this is a sensitive site that deserves special attention. Inspiration might even be drawn from the past. In 1845–7 William Rooth, the timber merchant who owned what is now Allen & Orr’s yard and lived at 81 Saltergate, built a row of houses on the street frontage next to his home. The outcome was ‘The Terrace’ (69–79 Saltergate), an impressive building that stands out from the plainer early 19th-century terraces elsewhere on Saltergate and on Marsden Street. The redevelopment of Saltergate west of Marsden Street would be an opportunity for another landmark residential scheme, also visible from some distance because of the way in which Saltergate follows the crest of the ridge running north-westwards from the parish church and the early medieval market place. Houses here could be aimed at better-off families who wished to live close to the town centre, rather in the same way that Tennyson Avenue nearby was laid out just before the First World War with better-class housing than West Park on the other side of Saltergate.

**11.05** For the Station Arrival area, we have already stated that we favour a comprehensive redevelopment scheme, improving access to the station, increasing (and requiring) off-road parking, enhancing the appearance of Corporation Street, and either restoring or replacing the Chesterfield Hotel.

**11.06** The Local Plan does not discuss the Markham Road area, but the bird’s eye view taken from the 2015 Masterplan shows Markham House as a potential redevelopment site. This we feel would be an excellent idea. This building has not worn well. It is an example of local fondness in the 1960s for exposed concrete framing and coloured infill panels, as at Burlington House and Brookfield School, and is just as unattractive as its two less conspicuous contemporaries. It is a poor advertisement for Chesterfield for those arriving by car from the south. If the site was cleared, it should be possible to erect a much better looking ‘Southern Gateway’ building more in keeping with the red-brick tradition of post-1700 Chesterfield.