



# CHESHAM REGENERATION STRATEGY





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# FOREWORD

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As Leader of Buckinghamshire Council and Deputy Cabinet Member for Town Centre Regeneration, we are delighted to introduce our strategy for regenerating Chesham town centre. This strategy is one of a suite of documents that follows **Regeneration Bucks - Transforming for the Future**, our Buckinghamshire-wide regeneration framework.

We are clear on our ambitious plans for growth in Buckinghamshire, including fostering a collaborative 'place-based' approach. With place-specific strategies for our three priority towns of Aylesbury, Chesham, and High Wycombe, we are now driving forward our plans, determined to support vibrant, diverse, and thriving towns.

Working closely among partners informs the way Buckinghamshire operates. The Buckinghamshire Growth Board and partnership groups meet regularly to review strategies and deliver plans for regeneration. There are also bespoke local partnership groups in place for Aylesbury, High Wycombe, and Chesham to support the regeneration of these towns. This strategy provides the detail of how regeneration will be taken forward in Chesham and showcases all the exciting and dynamic opportunities for investment in the town.

This strategy will enable us to build on the town's rich culture and heritage, position Chesham as a home for creative industries, and support community events and innovation. Our regeneration programme in Chesham will ensure that Chesham continues to be a town centre people want to spend time in, be this as a resident, visitor or business.

The enthusiasm and engagement with which stakeholders and the community have approached the development of this regeneration strategy demonstrates a commitment to improve the town and to capitalise on what makes Chesham special. In working with our partners in Chesham we have a rich insight into the opportunities and challenges we face.

These are exciting times for Chesham. This new strategy, which has been shaped by key local stakeholders via the Chesham Regeneration Group, sets a clear way forward for realising our ambitions in Chesham together. This publication is for residents, businesses, public sector partners, and private investors who want to get involved in transforming Chesham and enabling it to be the best place it can be. By working together, we can ensure that Chesham can realise its full potential.



Cllr Martin Tett  
Leader of  
Buckinghamshire Council



Cllr Rachael Matthews  
Deputy Cabinet Member for  
Town Centre Regeneration

# BUCKINGHAMSHIRE

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## ECONOMY

worth **£17.4 billion**

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## BUSINESSES

home to **31,355 businesses**

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## CONNECTIVITY

fully integrated with the London tube network and rail, hosting two underground stations at Chesham and Amersham

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## EDUCATION

**76% of schools** are rated **“Good”** or **“Outstanding”** by OFSTED





# REGENERATION BUCKS

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***Regeneration Bucks - Transforming for the Future*** is our Buckinghamshire Regeneration Framework. It introduces an ambitious agenda for our town centres and high streets and articulates the role people and places can play in achieving the Buckinghamshire vision for growth.

## Regeneration vision for Buckinghamshire

The regeneration of our towns will celebrate local identity, create prosperity, and achieve our ambitions for communities and local businesses in Buckinghamshire.

***Regeneration Bucks - Transforming for the Future*** identifies two interdependent guiding aims for regeneration activities:

- To create vibrant and characterful town centres which celebrate local culture and heritage and offer high quality inclusive public realm where people will want to live, work, visit, shop and relax.
- To create fertile conditions for enterprise and skills to support the launch of new businesses and create the conditions for them to succeed.

Whilst the two priorities underpin town centre regeneration, how the priorities will be delivered, areas of focus and the actions and interventions required will vary by place.

***Regeneration Bucks - Transforming for the Future*** also identifies ten principles to guide change:

1. To ensure the creation of a strong network of towns in Buckinghamshire.
2. To create multi-purpose hubs of activity and experiences in our main towns and transform our high streets to encourage people to spend more time locally.
3. To foster town centres as opportunities for business hubs.
4. To create a network of high quality, well planned road networks with attractive streets and spaces, and cycling routes that are safe to use, well connected and accessible.
5. To maximise the county's natural capital through its network of waterways and green spaces.
6. To provide a high-quality, well-maintained, and managed environment.
7. To enhance strategic connectivity opportunities.
8. To ensure a greener and more carbon neutral future.
9. To enhance Buckinghamshire's cultural and heritage legacy, celebrating the unique characteristics, diversity and identity of our towns and communities.
10. To prioritise skills and development opportunities.

***Regeneration Bucks - Transforming for the Future*** sets the tone for our 'place' strategies and paves the way for leveraging Chesham's distinct identity. The Chesham Regeneration Strategy has been developed in accordance with this county-wide framework so that we can achieve place-based growth and long-lasting change in the best way possible.

# CHESHAM

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## WELL CONNECTED BY ROAD

good connections to the neighbouring towns of Amersham, Berkhamsted and Hemel Hempstead via the A416. It is also well placed to access the M25 and M40 motorways



## HIGHER AND FURTHER EDUCATION

Buckinghamshire New University is located within nearby High Wycombe and is well placed to serve the educational needs of Chesham and other Buckinghamshire towns



## PEOPLE

**23,689** population (2021)



## URBAN MEETS RURAL

Chesham provides the best of urban living, nestled in beautiful accessible woodlands, the River Chess and beautiful AONB countryside



## WELL CONNECTED BY LONDON UNDERGROUND

direct links from London on the Metropolitan line. Trains in Chesham connect to stations such as Kings Cross and Baker Street around every 30 minutes

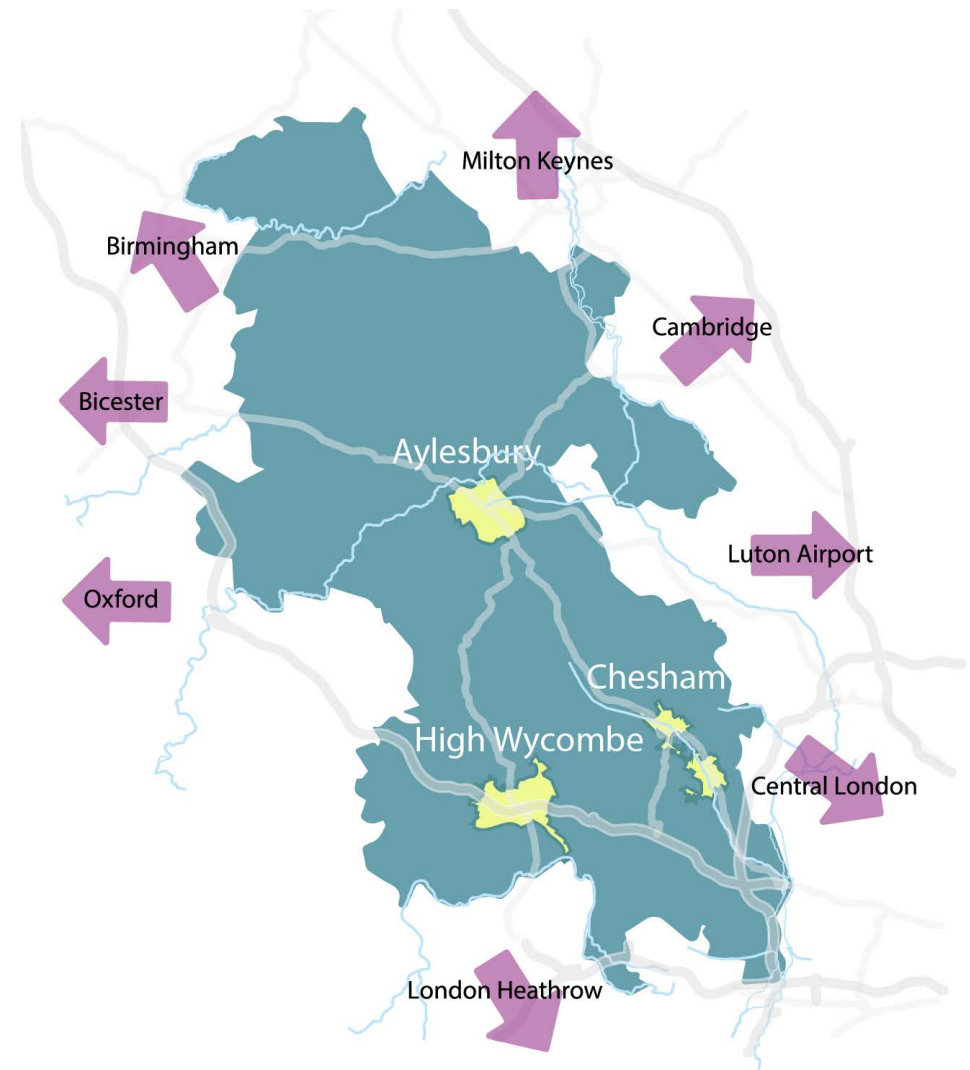


# WHY CHESHAM?

Chesham, the third largest town in Buckinghamshire, sits within the Chess Valley – an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Situated within the London commuter belt, it benefits from easy direct access on the London Underground. Chesham provides an important regional centre for its residents and surrounding rural villages, with a good offer of commercial, leisure, and community opportunities. The town has a number of vibrant independent retailers and hospitality businesses, bringing the best of urban/rural living together with the countryside on its doorstep.

The town offers something for families and those of all ages, with excellent schools (a number rated outstanding by Ofsted), active community groups and a range of cultural and historic amenities. The Elgiva Theatre is a key cultural asset with the potential to support the regeneration of the town by providing a focal point for cultural activity and stimulating the night-time economy. The theatre was the winner of three industry awards in 2022, and hosts both local and national shows. The town centre also includes the Chesham Museum which offers various activities to raise awareness and celebrate the town's heritage.

# CHESHAM LOCATION MAP



Map 1

West of the town centre, Lowndes Park provides a welcoming green space with the potential for further improvement and additional facilities.

Chesham has an array of greenery around the town with several streams from the River Chess and also boasts England's only spring fed lido at the Gym and Swim. It also has direct links to a variety of Chiltern walks and ancient woodlands

The town is home to over 1,200 businesses, collectively supporting over 6,500 jobs. Creative industries are a growing sector, with many local creatives and artists setting up businesses. House prices are above the Buckinghamshire and national averages; the town centre has seen some recent residential development.

Events and festivals are popular in Chesham, including the annual Chesham Carnival, The Hats Off Festival, Peace in the Park, and Christmas in Chesham.





# WHAT IS THE OPPORTUNITY?

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Regeneration activities in Chesham are vital to support the town to grow and to realise its potential. The growth trends in town centre living provide the basis to rethink Chesham from an urban living perspective. Redevelopment of brownfield sites in the town centre reduces pressures to meet housing needs through greenfield site development.

We want Chesham to be a thriving community and a great place to live, work and visit. Building on a historical legacy, Chesham's potential as a local hub for independent and creative retail, urban living, social interaction, community and economic activity makes for an exciting future for the town centre. Chesham has beautiful surroundings which means it is a popular location for visitors and tourists who want to enjoy the scenic countryside, culture, and heritage of the place. Chesham has the potential to be a multi-use town, expanding its tourism capability, embracing opportunities to become an overnight destination.

One of the greatest opportunities for Chesham is its rail connection to London's underground network. It lends itself well for those who want to visit or relocate their businesses outside of central London as well as residents who wish to work or visit London.

This strategy seeks to build upon, learn from, and progress work already undertaken by local partners, including Chesham Town Council, Chesham Community Board, and local community groups. The Town Council in its development of the Neighbourhood Plan, has been instrumental in progressing the future planning and setting an exciting vision for the whole of Chesham.





# WHY NOW?

In establishing a framework for the regeneration of Buckinghamshire, we have made a clear commitment to transforming our county, which starts with advancing our strategies for our three larger towns, including Chesham.

Strong partnerships already exist in Chesham and across Buckinghamshire. These partnerships support Chesham's continued growth as a key market town and creative hub. Local Chesham stakeholders have well-developed partnerships in place. The Town Council plays a leading role in setting the vision for the future of Chesham and other local businesses and residents are actively engaged through groups like the Chesham Chamber of Commerce and others.

Buckinghamshire is also an 'aligned county', with a shared geography between the Council, Healthcare NHS Trust, Buckinghamshire Business First and a place-based partnership for Buckinghamshire with the Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West Integrated Care Partnership.

These strong partnerships mean Buckinghamshire has an excellent track record of delivery as well as strong, aligned leadership turning ambition into action.





Chesham is an ambitious town. It is already recognised as a strong creative and community town, represented by many, artists, musicians, and other creatives, many of whom come together through events for arts, culture and celebration. This strategy looks to capture this momentum and explore opportunities to see how culture and the creative sectors can be leveraged to drive regeneration forward.

This strategy sits alongside the *Opportunity Bucks – Succeeding for All Framework*, which outlines an approach to creating equality of opportunity for all residents and communities. The focus is upon the ten most deprived wards, of which Chesham is one. The Opportunity Bucks framework identifies five key themes - education and youth engagement; jobs, careers and skills; quality of our public realm; standard of living; and health and wellbeing. The delivery of these themes will enable the town centre to support the needs of a range of individuals and communities.

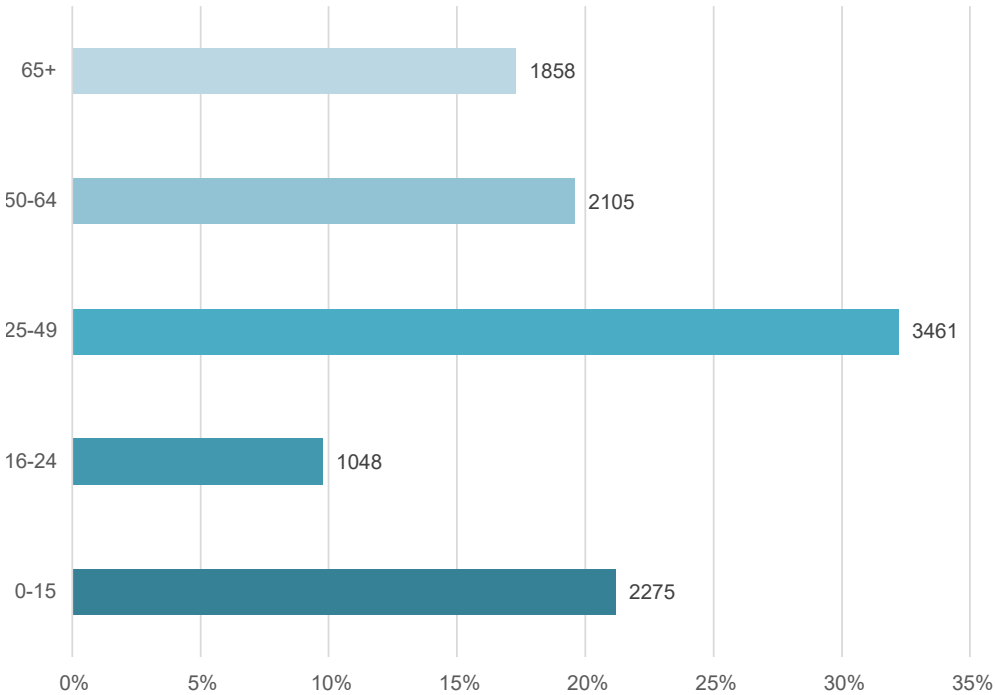




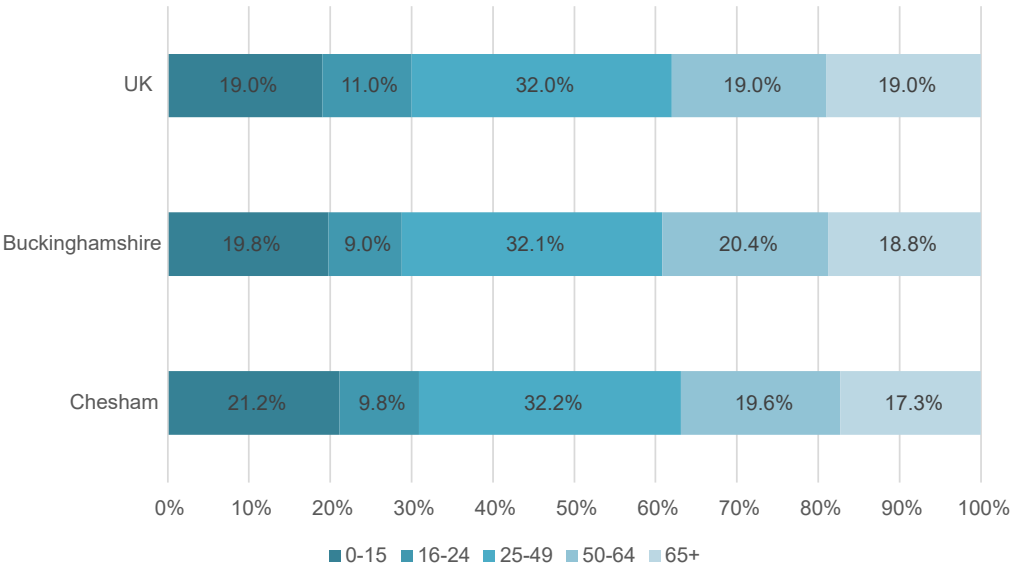
# LOCAL ECONOMY AND DEMOGRAPHICS

According to the national census, Chesham had an estimated population of 23,056 in 2020, an increase of 7.1% over the decade. This compares to an increase of 7.4% for Buckinghamshire. The Chesham population then increased as per the 2021 census data to 23,689, a further increase of 2.8%.

Graph 1 breaks down the population into various age bands with Graph 2 showing that Chesham has a younger population 0-15 at 20.4%, comparatively with Buckinghamshire and the rest of England but with high numbers in age the age population group 25-49 at 34.1%.



Graph 1: Percentage of age groups in Chesham - Source: ONS 2021



Graph 2: Age groups percentages compared - Source: ONS 2021

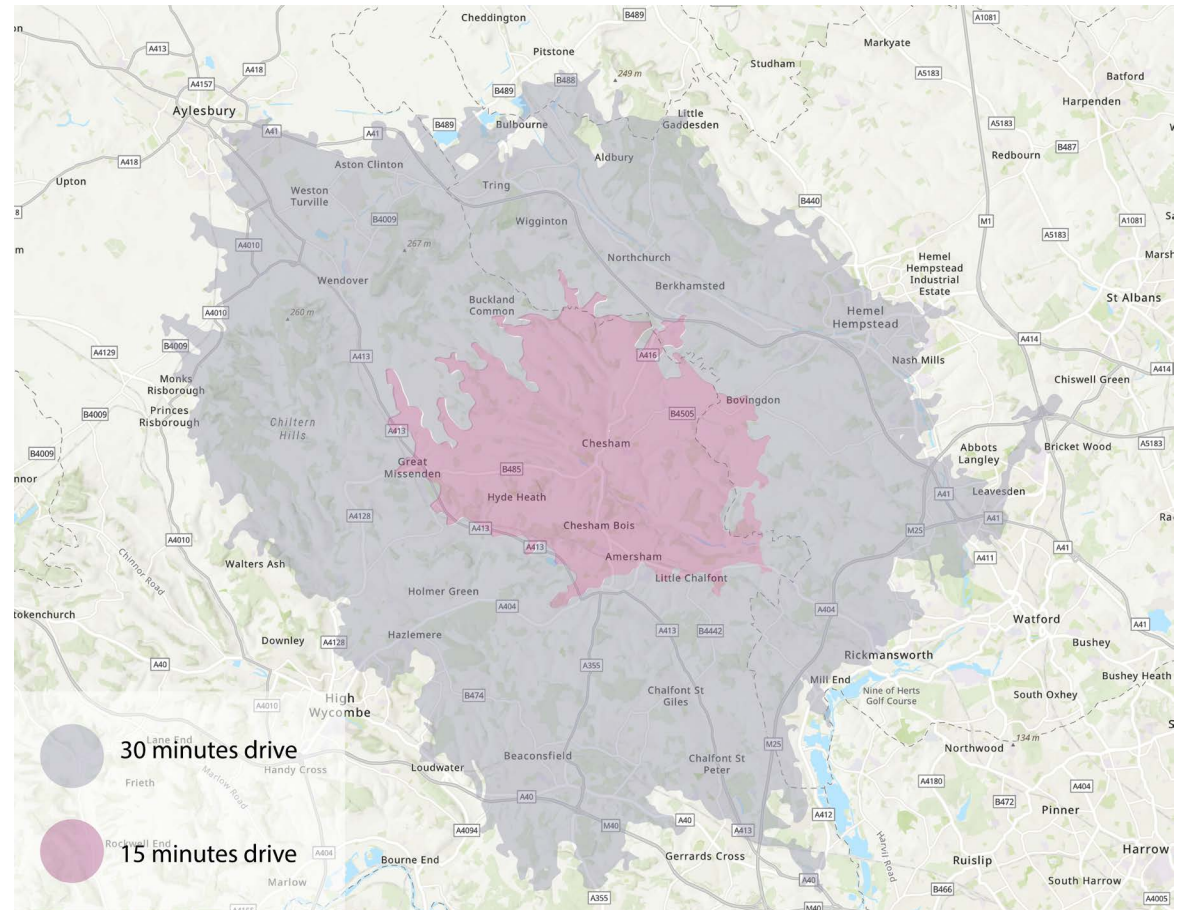


# RETAIL CATCHMENT AND HOUSEHOLD EXPENDITURE

Retail is the dominant sector in Chesham town centre with 44% of the units being used in this manner. The two largest units in the centre are supermarkets – Sainsbury’s and Waitrose.

While offerings from nearby Amersham, Hemel Hempstead, Berkhamsted and Watford may be strong, Chesham, with its growing independent retailers, offers something different to other market towns in the area.

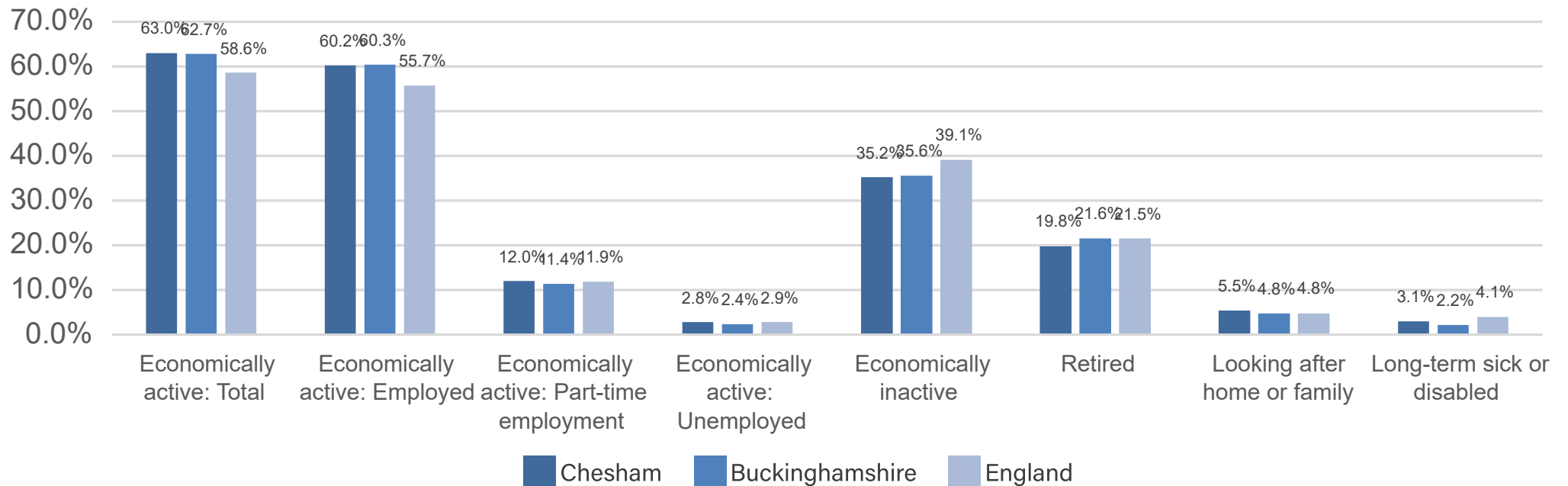
Footfall data for Chesham town centre shows an average of 51,700 visits a week which is above pre-Covid levels. The busiest days are Saturday, Friday, and Wednesday (with Thursday not far behind) with an average of 7,750 to 8,600 visits a day. The busiest period is between 9am to 5pm. 74% of visits are over 20 minutes with 29% of visits having a dwell time of 20 to 40 minutes. Longer visits and visits as part of the night-time economy are areas of opportunity to explore.



Map 2: Chesham retail catchment area

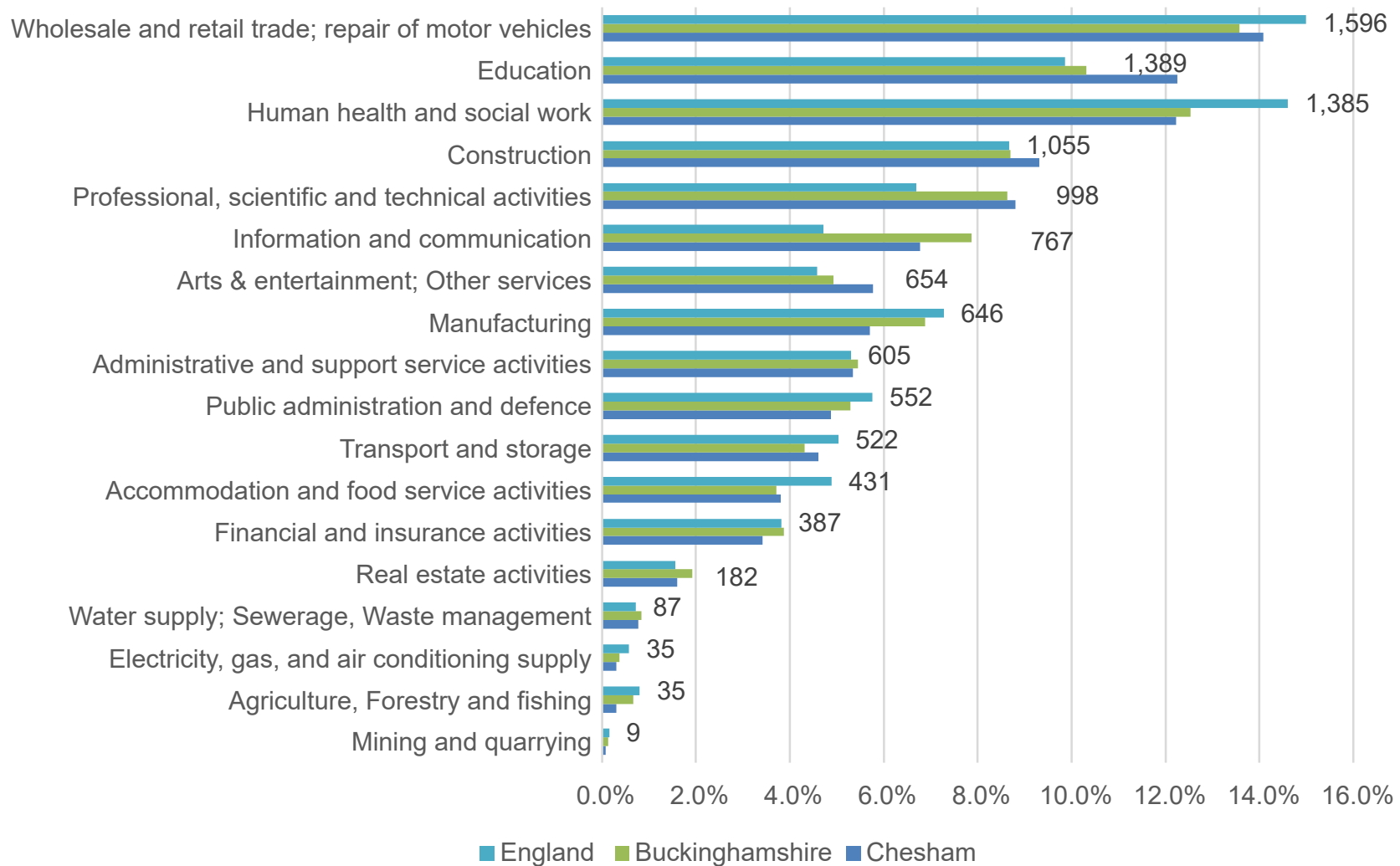
# THE LABOUR MARKET

Chesham has a highly educated and strong labour market, which is demonstrated within Graph 3 below. Chesham's education rates are slightly higher than the national average.



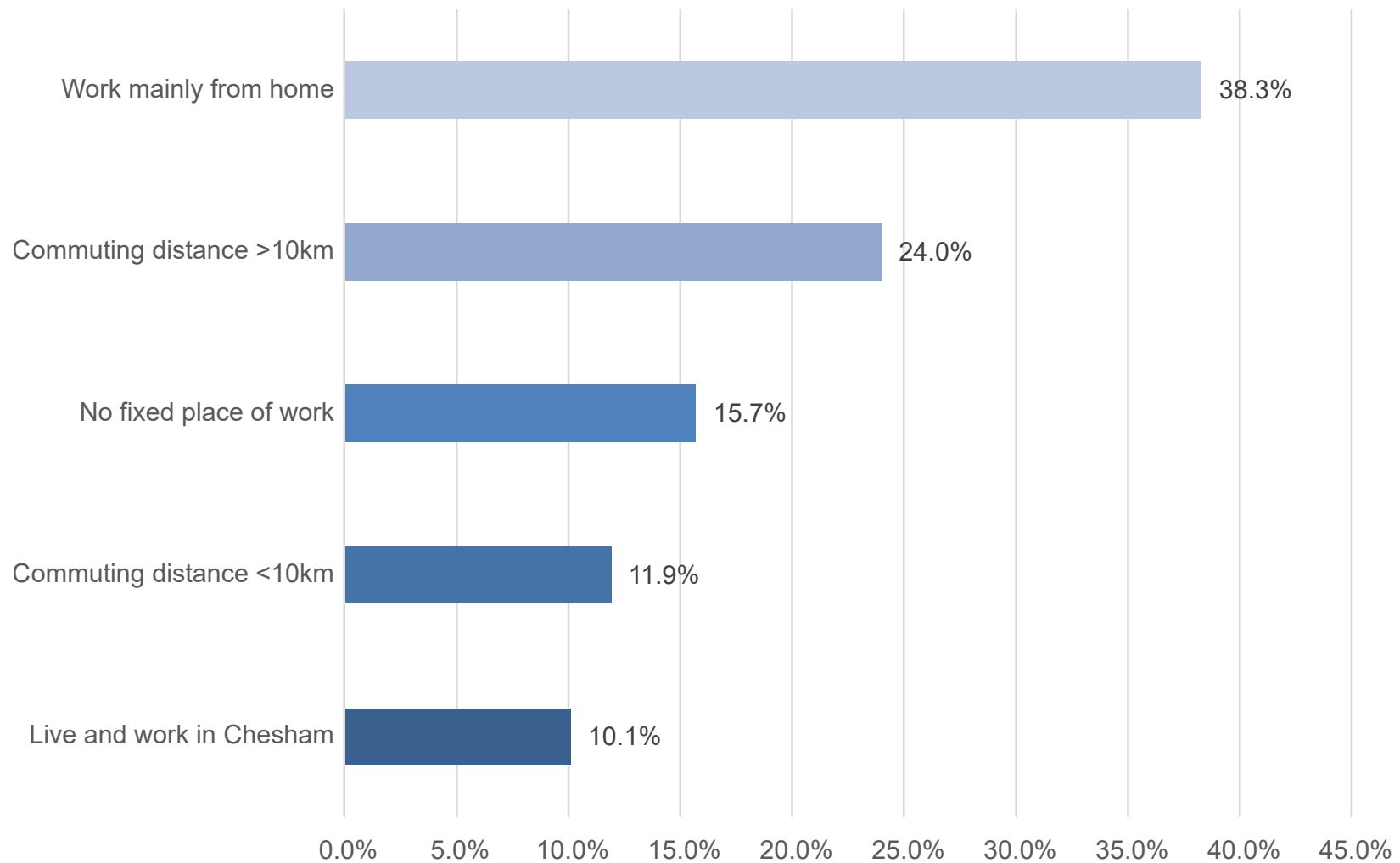
Graph 3 - Source: ONS 2021





Graph 4 - Source: ONS 2021

Graph 4 shows the percentage of employed residents by industry, for Chesham, Buckinghamshire, and England. Absolute figures of employed residents in Chesham are shown for each sector. Chesham has a notably higher number of residents employed in the education sector, and within the creative industries when compared to national figures. Source: ONS 2021.



Graph 5 - Source: ONS 2021

Graph 5 shows the working patterns of Chesham residents. The proportion of people working from home has significantly increased following COVID-19. Around a quarter of residents are commuting out of the area (over 10km) for work. A similar proportion live and work in the town or nearby. Source: ONS 2021.



# LAND USES

Over the last five to 10 years, Chesham has seen a shift towards a higher level of town centre residential land use.

In terms of retail space, as well as the national supermarket providers, the high street has several national chains including Boots, Savers, and Waterstones. There are also a broad mix of independent providers, particularly within the café, food and beverage.

There are a number of different car parking sites in Chesham including several surface level car parks which are owned and managed by Buckinghamshire Council. These are Water Meadow, Albany Place, Star Yard, and East Street.

There are a few gaps for land uses in the town centre including an absence of a central hotel offering on or near the high street. Chesham also lacks sufficient civic, arts, and community space. While the Elgiva Theatre is an important local venue, there are no other comparable sized options or larger venues in town. The Chesham Museum does not have a permanent location.

Different parts of the town centre are sometimes not well connected. For example, the High Street and station in Chesham sit on the opposite side of St Mary's Way to Lowndes Park. This severance inhibits the flow of pedestrians and reduces access to the greenspace from the high street. St Mary's Way also creates a separation between the Elgiva Theatre and the rest of the town centre.





# PRINCIPLES TO GUIDE CHANGE

## REGENERATION PRINCIPLES FOR CHESHAM

Foundational work and stakeholder and community engagement identified several opportunities and challenges for Chesham. To capitalise on the opportunities and address the challenges, a number of relevant principles from the *Regeneration Bucks - Transforming for the Future* framework will be deployed in Chesham to support a thriving and successful town centre:





## **To create multi-purpose hubs of activity and experiences in our main towns and transform our high streets to encourage people to spend more time locally**

For Chesham, this means improving the food, beverage and accommodation offer and increasing demand for the night-time economy. Options that explore new events and pop-up street food vendors will be developed.

For the retail sector on the High Street, there will be a focus on exploring ways to encourage and expand the independent offer. This includes identifying ways to utilise the Chesham Market and market traders to nurture and support new businesses.

Chesham has also seen a recent trend towards residential growth in the town centre and this is likely to continue. New housing development in the High Street will be most successful if it comes forward as mixed-use commercial proposals that keep the street level active.

We will monitor the collective offer of the businesses on the High Street and in times of turnover, proactively use those opportunities to play a role in brokering the best replacement tenants/owners.

## **To foster town centres as opportunities for business hubs**

For Chesham, this means that development in the town centre supports existing businesses so that they can grow and evolve as well as provides the premises needed to attract new business investment. Exploring options for further development of business incubator

models like business hubs, subsidised empty shop-front initiatives, and links with the Chesham Market is a priority, particularly where this can be targeted to creative sectors.

## **To provide a high-quality, well-maintained, and managed environment**

In Chesham, there is a need to address some areas of poor-quality public realm. For example, the entrance to the town from the railway/tube station is an underwhelming experience, with little indication to a visitor how nearby the High Street is located. Options for improving wayfinding, hygiene, and improved 'coherence' to the look and feel of the town centre should be explored.

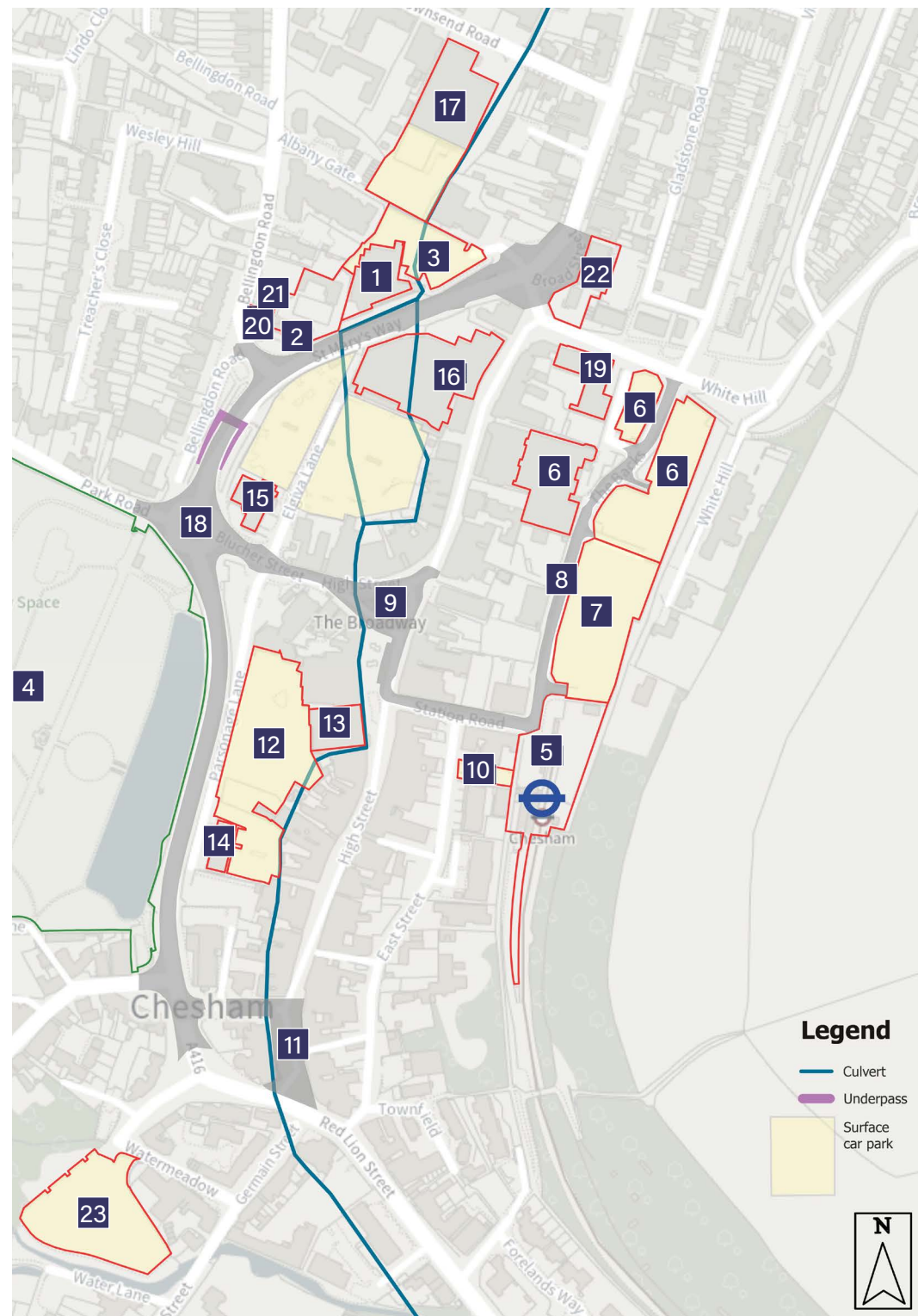
Enhancements to the natural environment through more tree planting, sustainable planting and improving bio-diversity in the town centre will be prioritised where possible.

## **To enhance Buckinghamshire's cultural and heritage legacy, celebrating the unique characteristics, diversity and identity of our towns and communities**

Chesham has rich local heritage, a number of important cultural partners, and an active arts community which should be supported and developed in line with any regeneration programme. Developing the 'cultural offer' in Chesham can provide a catalyst for investment and delivery.

# SITES

1	Elgiva Theatre - 991.5 sqm
2	Chesham Youth Centre - 264.3 sqm
3	Albany Place Car Park - 1,822.8 sqm
4	Lowndes Park and Skottow's Pond - 134,110 sqm
5	Train Station - 797 sqm
6	Waitrose and Car Parks - 4,102.9 sqm
7	Transport for London Station Car Park - 4,102.9 sqm
8	The Backs - 1,887.8 sqm
9	The Broadway and Station Road - 2,041.8 sqm
10	East Street Car Park - 636.2 sqm
11	Market Square - 267.3 sqm
12	Star Yard/Catlings Car Park - 5,405.3 sqm
13	M&Co - 128.2 sqm
14	Chesham Town Hall - 338.7 sqm
15	Chesham Library - 535.6 sqm
16	Sainsbury's Car Park - 3,276 sqm
17	Wickes - 2,052.2 sqm
18	St. Mary's Way - 9,657.3 sqm
19	UK House - 857.9 sqm
20	Quaker's Buildings - 113.7 sqm
21	All Spring Media - 128 sqm
22	Broad Street Gateway - 1,088 sqm
23	Water Meadow Car Park - 3,992.9 sqm



Map 3 - Site reference map



# CHESHAM 'CLUSTERS'

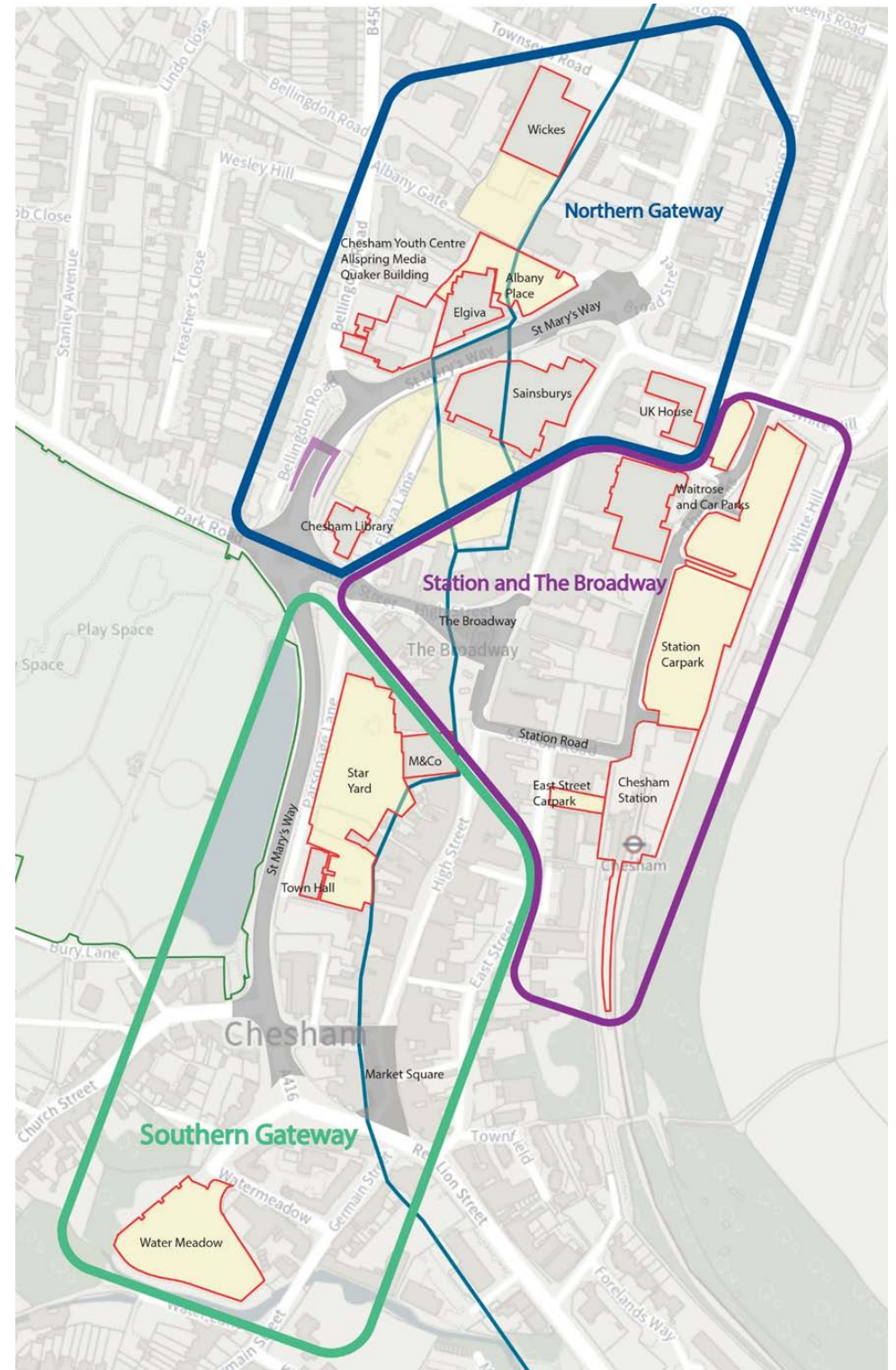
The town centre can be considered as having three 'clusters' each with its own strengths and challenges that need to guide and shape potential interventions. Whilst activity in each cluster will support delivery of this strategy, how this is delivered, and the type of interventions will vary based upon need, funding, and appraisals.

## The Northern Gateway

Starting at the northern end of the town centre is the 'Northern Gateway', the location of the Elgiva Theatre and the cultural heart of Chesham. This area includes the north end of the High Street, which is home to the weekly town market. The Northern Gateway cluster touches the north-eastern corner of Lowndes Park and also includes the Chesham Library.

This cluster can feel disconnected to the rest of the town centre and far from the station even though the distance from the theatre is five minutes on foot. St Mary's Way is a busy road, which contributes to this feeling of severance as a pedestrian.

There are a few sites in this cluster that have long been discussed as development opportunities and in taking these forward there is a need to ensure plans support the cultural offer in the area.



Map 4 - Site clusters



## The Station and The Broadway

This cluster is the central part of the town centre. Within it are the tube station and main drop off points for buses, taxis, and private transport, which serve as an important entrance point for the high street. 'The Broadway' is the central point between the northern and southern sections of the High Street where the street widens and creates a small public realm area.

Behind the northern section of the High Street is an access road called 'The Backs' which connects the supermarkets, a few car parks, and the station. Opportunities to invest in and improve this area should be explored.

## The Southern Gateway

This cluster is an important location for Chesham's night-time economy. The pedestrianised Market Square provides a space for outdoor dining and for events, including a monthly themed market. It is home to several independent retail and hospitality businesses, which already collaborate and work together.

Recent new painting and other public art additions have improved the attractiveness of routes into the town centre and have created new focal points promoting some businesses to introduce new outdoor seating areas.

The regeneration activities for this cluster should prioritise initiatives which generate footfall and support the night-time economy.





# NEXT STEPS: TAKING THE STRATEGY FORWARD AS A PARTNERSHIP

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Town centre regeneration is a top priority for the Buckinghamshire Growth Board, which has established a sub-board for Regeneration as part of its governance. A local Chesham Regeneration Group is in place to drive this strategy forward and feed up into the Regeneration sub-board of the Growth Board.

The key priorities for the Chesham regeneration programme in the short term will focus on pedestrianised spaces by clarifying access, improving wayfinding (including improvements initially on Station Road), and other options to introduce more public art. The programme will also include exploring options to increase high street activity through additional events, specialty markets, and street-food pop-ups. Active monitoring is in place to pursue opportunities that may emerge to broker the right type of occupancy turnover on the high street. Work is underway and will progress in exploring options for the redevelopment of council owned sites such as the ones in the 'Northern Gateway' cluster, including the Library (enhancing the offer and improving access), sites adjacent to the Elgiva Theatre and the East Street Car Park near the Tube station in the 'Station and Broadway' cluster. The council will work with the Chesham Town Council in the development of the Neighbourhood Plan.

Establishing and delivering the regeneration programme for Chesham requires a collaborative, partnership approach. Buckinghamshire Council will continue to build on the relationships developed with key local stakeholders and will work with partners including Chesham Town Council and the active business community, and residents, to take forward proposals. The Chesham Regeneration Group, made up of the council alongside key local stakeholders is the strategic steering group for delivering this strategy and the regeneration programme for Chesham. It forms part of the wider Place Based Growth Board governance and reports into the Regeneration Sub-Board.







CHESHAM

Free school meals  
for primary  
school children

For unlimited  
all day travel,  
thank you  
£8.10