

3. KEY ISSUES FOR PENRITH TODAY

This section of the PNDP sets out the key issues facing Penrith today. These have been identified through stakeholder consultations, questionnaire surveys and from an assessment of available evidence contained in our Planning Policy Assessment and Evidence Base Review available on the Town Council website:

<http://www.penrithtowncouncil.co.uk/neighbourhood-plan/>

3.1 Sustainable Development

3.1.1 The key theme that emerged during consultation was the need to promote sustainable development through the PNDP:

- **Nature** – Protect and provide greenspaces, trees, hedgerows, wildlife.
- **Heritage** – Conserve the Town's history, character, views, landscape.
- **Air quality and climate change** - Improve air quality and support the transition to a low carbon future.
- **Water** – Reduce water consumption, maximise surface water collection and reduce the impact of flooding.
- **Housing** – Provide affordable homes with a range of high-quality community and social facilities.
- **People** – Recognise and respond to the needs of all, especially families, young people and our growing older population.
- **Wellbeing** – Increase individual and community wellbeing by providing high quality community facilities, greenspaces, and facilities for walking and cycling.
- **Inclusiveness** – Create places that foster inclusiveness and are accessible to existing and future communities..
- **Employment** – Encourage better paid jobs, support local and small businesses, and help improve skills and training.
- **Infrastructure** – Encourage renewable and low carbon energy, reduce waste and promote sustainable transport and other infrastructure.

Sustainability runs through all the key issues identified in the Regulation 16 Submission Draft PNDP and as a "golden thread" through the planning policies that have been developed in the plan. This theme will link all the policies to our vision for Penrith.

3.1.2 Sustainability is particularly important given the national commitment, through the Climate Change Act 2008 (as amended in 2019), to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 100% from 1990 levels by 2050 and thereby to reduce the risk of major disruption to the global climate, characterised by increasingly extreme weather events and the long-term implications this would have for water supply, food production, biodiversity, landscapes and flood risk. The latter is particularly significant given recent flood events in Cumbria, such as those in 2015.

3.2 Housing

- 3.2.1 Whilst we have this “golden thread”, the main sustainable development issues facing the town are those of managing the scale and effect of recent and future housing development, whilst ensuring the delivery of infrastructure to serve current and future needs.
- 3.2.2 This is particularly important given that few new properties are being constructed to the highest sustainability standards that can be achieved. For example, all large developments feature heating systems fuelled by fossil fuels rather than renewable sources.
- 3.2.3 On a positive note, a recently approved development of 149 homes on land off Carleton Road states that 36 of the entire stock on site (24%) would be compliant with [Building Regulations Requirement M4\(2\)\(Category 2 – Accessible and Adaptable Dwellings\) \(Planning Application Reference No: 19/0426\)](#).
- 3.2.4 Housing delivery across Eden has been well below the previous Core Strategy (2010) target of 239 homes per year. Between April 2003 and March 2015, a total of 1,916 dwellings were completed, resulting in an undersupply of 713 properties or more than 25%. An estimated 1,554 new homes are to be built in the town over the plan period (**Appendix II, page 78**).
- 3.2.5 Delivering an appropriate housing supply is fundamental to maintaining the workforce necessary to support the economy. The Eden Local Plan (ELP) 2014-2032 (Policy LS2 – Housing Targets and Distribution) identifies that 2,178 new homes, 50% of new housing in the District, should be concentrated in Penrith with much of this in large scale, new developments to the east and north of the town. A key issue is to ensure that this housing is appropriate in terms of size, type and tenure (**Appendix V, page 84**).
- 3.2.6 House prices in the Eden district are amongst the highest in Cumbria. A combination of high house prices in relation to incomes (**Appendix VII, page 88**) is making it difficult for many, particularly the young, to buy their own home. The average house price in Eden is 6 times the average gross annual income of those in full-time employment for Penrith and the Borders (Source: EDC August 2018).
To put these ratios in context, 20 years ago house prices were about 4.4 times average annual income. A shortage of high value jobs means that people may seek employment and housing elsewhere.

- 3.2.7 441 households (source: Penrith Housing Need Survey 2018 – Cumbria Choice Based Lettings) are on the waiting list (June 2018) for social housing in Penrith. (**Appendix III, page 81**)
- 3.2.8 Most households in need are singles or couples without children, with demand mainly for houses followed by flats. The Housing Need Survey 2018 and public consultation identified need for 1, 2 and 3 bedrooomed accommodation.

Property Type Needed/Wanted														
House					Bungalow					Flat/Apartment				
1 Bed	2 Bed	3 Bed	4 Bed	5 Bed	1 Bed	2 Bed	3 Bed	4 Bed	5 Bed	1 Bed	2 Bed	3 Bed	4 Bed	5 Bed
4	38	40	19	2	5	35	15	1	1	7	6	0	0	0

- 3.2.9 Average rents represent as much as 23% of the net income of those at the lower end of the wage/salary scale (Appendix VI, page 85).
- 3.2.10 Public consultation identified that there is a need to provide affordable housing for younger people to enable them to remain in the area and for a housing offer for older people that is appropriate to their needs, e.g. one to two bedrooomed bungalows and ground floor flats (**Appendix III, page 81**).
- 3.2.11 Currently, many older people are living in properties that, if vacated, could become available for young families (Housing Need Survey 2018).
- 3.2.12 Some recent housing developments in Penrith are not considered to reflect local character. It is important that the design of new housing is of high quality and complements the local vernacular.
- 3.2.13 During consultations, members of the public commented that developers are building houses too densely. Residents of affordable housing complained that gardens and greenspaces are inadequate for their wellbeing, particularly those with young families. Flats and apartments in the town centre were not in proximity to play areas.
- 3.2.14 Consultation responses from the public stated that they believed that where garages are built, the majority on new developments are too narrow to accommodate some modern cars.
- 3.2.15 There are no national standards for the number of parking spaces provided for individual properties on new developments. Consequently, developers may plan for the minimum (1.3) parking space as recommended by CCC, rather than the number needed relative to the size of the prospective household.



3.3 Greenspaces

- 3.3.1 A key issue is to protect important greenspaces, play areas, more formal outdoor sport and recreation areas and facilities. These are important not only for the open space they provide, but also for the opportunities they offer for all forms of recreation and relaxation that support the continued health and wellbeing of the town.
- 3.3.2 All public open greenspaces provide an opportunity for exercise, whether it be for walking, jogging, or children's play. Some areas include more formal equipment such as that at Wetheriggs Country Park (outdoor gym) and Frenchfield (jogging track) whilst goal posts are located at Frenchfield, Carleton, Fairhill, Castletown and The Crescent.
- 3.3.3 The town is expanding. There are few developed land sites available centrally to meet economic and residential development needs, and as a consequence some greenspaces may be at risk of development unless protected (**Appendix VIII, page 89**).



3.4 Culture and Leisure

- 3.4.1 Penrith Leisure Centre is an important asset in the town, however, the consultation identified that there is a concern that the needs of young people are not being met, particularly during the evening. Respondents to the PNDP questionnaire survey felt there was a need for more indoor facilities, such as a bowling alley or venue for live music. There was also felt to be a need for areas for young people to congregate, such as a BMX track. (**Appendix IX, page 116**). Other than the Leisure Centre, existing facilities are limited. There is a small skate park to the rear of Penrith Leisure Centre.
- 3.4.2 Many of those consulted also expressed the view that the cost of using existing Leisure Centre facilities (swimming pool; gym; climbing wall) and the tennis courts is unaffordable, particularly for young people.
- 3.4.3 Penrith Leisure Centre is also the largest multipurpose building in the town and is able to host either a 570 seated or 1,000 standing audience for live music events, exhibitions or plays although these events are very rare. Other venues include the churches which have capacity for 330 persons (Methodist Church) and 500 (St. Andrew's Church) and Penrith Playhouse which has a capacity of 160.
- 3.4.4 Penrith also offers several public houses, a three-screen cinema which also offers live screening of cultural events, restaurants and fast food outlets (**Appendix X, page 119**).

- 3.4.5 The Rheged Discovery Centre at Redhills, 2 miles from Penrith town centre and located outside the Neighbourhood Area, is the main ‘cultural’ attraction. The venue offers current films, live screenings of cultural events staged in London and other major centres, art exhibitions and lectures. The theatre has tiered seating for 258 people. In addition, there are meeting rooms and an exhibition venue with the capacity to accommodate from 10 to 250 people. The centre offers free parking for 200 cars and is served by an hourly bus service to and from the town. (**Appendix XII, page 130**)
- 3.4.6 Although Penrith is on a national cycle route, there are few designated cycle lanes in the town (**Map B, page 137**).
- 3.4.7 The only designated outdoor exercise areas, the jogging track and football pitches at Frenchfield and the outdoor gym at Wetheriggs Country Park, are to the south of the town.
- 3.4.8 The town hosts a number of public events such as May Day, Penrith Goes Orange, Artists in Penrith, Penrith on a Plate and Penrith Sparkle as well as the nationally recognised Winter Drowsing.



3.5 Wellbeing

- 3.5.1 Currently Penrith benefits from two medical practices and a community hospital with an assessment unit for minor injuries. However, all three primary healthcare facilities are located on one site to the south of the town so are not easily accessed by communities located to the north of Penrith, other than by private car or the town bus (**Appendix XII, page 130**).
- 3.5.2 There is some capacity in one of the two existing health centres to accommodate new patients, however, there is more capacity in practices adjoining the parish and whose catchments extend into the parish boundary (**Table 1**).

Table 1. Penrith General Practitioners

General Practice by distance from Town centre	Total patients	Doctor: Patient ratio	Capacity for new patients
Birkbeck Medical Group Miles 0.8	14652	1:1803	Yes, according to recruitment and retention of doctors
Lakes Medical Practice Miles 0.8	10020	1:1670	No
Glenridding Health Centre Miles 13.3	754	1:754	Yes
Temple Sowerby Medical Practice Miles 7.7			No information
Kirkoswald Surgery Miles 8.8	2482	1.5: 2482	Yes
Court Thorn Surgery (High Hesket) Miles 10.6			No information

Source: Questionnaire to GPs Practices (June 2018)

3.5.3 Currently, there are 5 dental practices serving the population but at the time of writing (September 2019), none has capacity to offer care under the NHS or privately (Table 2) for adult patients.

Table 2. Penrith Dental Practices

Dental Practice	NHS patients accepted on referral	New adult NHS patients accepted	Adults entitled to free NHS care accepted	Children accepted as new patients	Urgent NHS dental appointments accepted
Penrith Health Centre				No Information	
My Dentist Gloucester Yard	No	No	No	No	No
Skirsgill Dental Practice				No Information	
Ghyllmount Dental Practice	No	No	No	No	No
Stricklandgate Dental Practice	No	No	No	Yes (up to 18 yrs)	No
Victoria Road Dental Practice	No	No	No	No	No

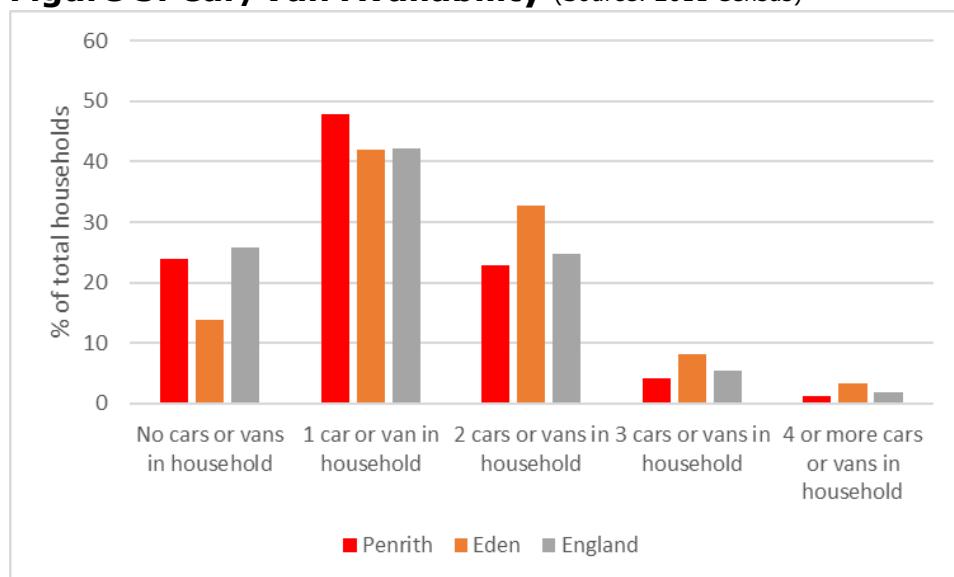
Source: Questionnaire to Dental Practices (June 2018) and NHS Website

- 3.5.4 There is no specific 'drop-in centre' for socialising, counselling and community meetings in the town and indoor provision such as the Youth Zone facility that can be found at Carlisle, is lacking.
- 3.5.5 On some of the more peripheral housing areas such as Pategill, Raiselands, Scaws and Wetheriggs there is a lack of immediate access to community facilities.

3.6 Car Parking and Public Transport

- 3.6.1 Figures from the 2011 Census show that the average number of cars/vans per household is 1.1:1, as it is nationally (England). In 2011 21.9% of households did not have a car. Despite this the number of multicar households and the poor provision of off-road car parking means that car parking is considered to be a major problem in Penrith, particularly in the town centre and the nearby older residential areas that were not built to accommodate cars. (**Figure 5**).

Figure 5. Car/Van Availability (Source: 2011 Census)



- 3.6.2 The development of areas that previously served as car parks (Southend Road - 440 spaces) alongside the infilling of individual spaces in the town and the building of more houses has resulted in increased demand for car parking but with fewer spaces to serve this demand. (**Appendix XI, page 120 and Map C: Parking in Penrith, page 138**)
- 3.6.3 Lack of affordable long-stay car parking for those working in the town has resulted in drivers leaving their cars in the residential streets near the town centre which causes a problem for residents and vehicles accessing these areas.

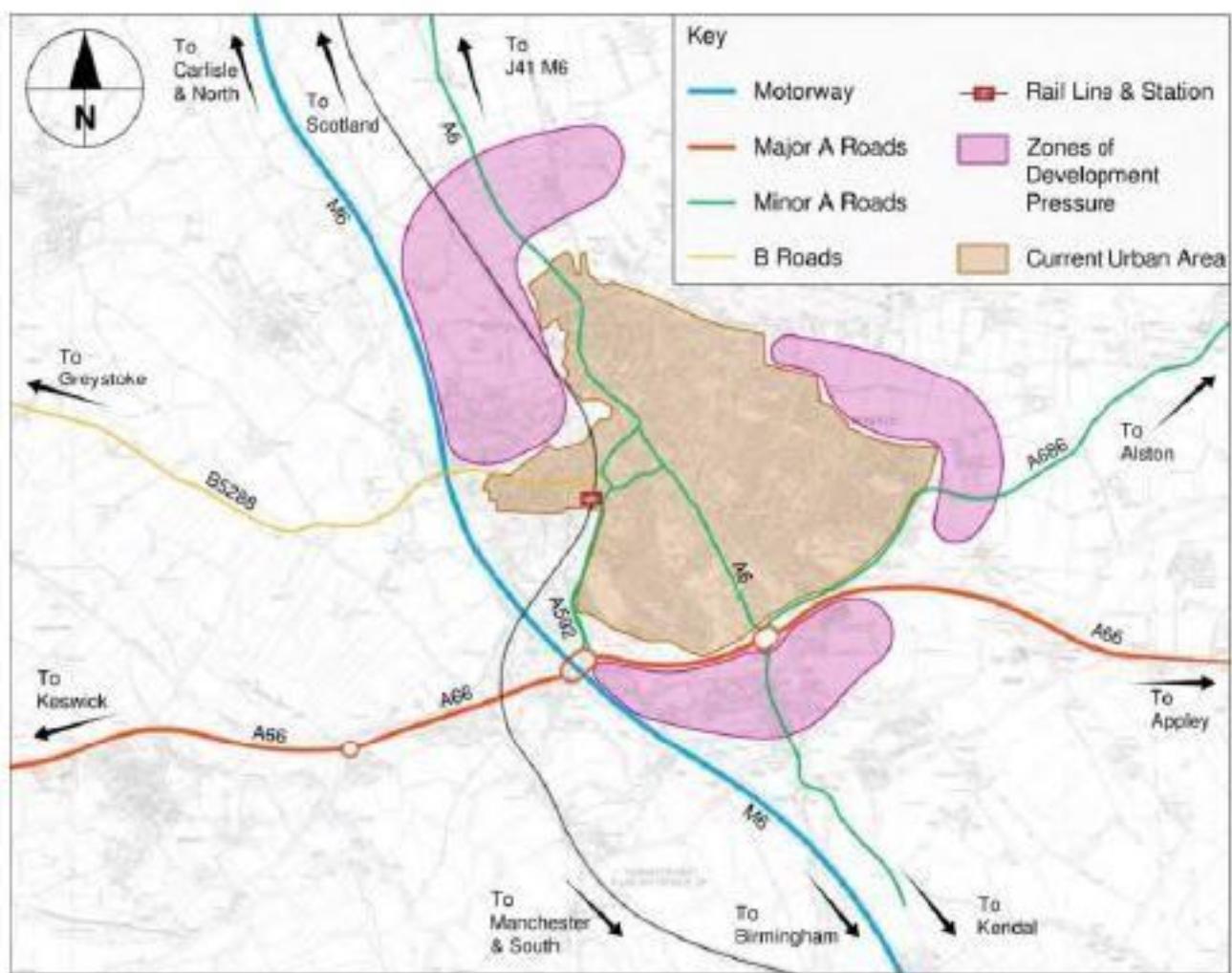
- 3.6.4 There is some on-street car parking which is free-of-charge and time limited and some short-stay free car parking (1 to 3 hours) within supermarket car parks, however this is insufficient to allow time for exploring the town, shopping and enjoying a meal or coffee. Longstay car parking is available within pay and display car parks. Season ticket parking is very limited, and there is a long waiting list. It must be paid fully in advance with no option to pay monthly. Many people employed in the town are in low paid jobs/on short term contracts or part time, this means that buying a parking permit is not an option (**Appendix XI, page 120**).
- 3.6.5 Parking in the 'New Streets' has reduced the width of these roads, in part, to a single carriageway impeding access by emergency vehicles.
- 3.6.6 Some blocks of garages, on estates such as Scaws are used for additional storage rather than parking.
- 3.6.7 There is limited car parking in the town centre for blue badge holders which is accessible to local shops and facilities.
- 3.6.8 Visitor numbers are compromised because of the lack of parking for tour buses, campervans and cars towing a caravan.
- 3.6.9 Currently, only Booths offers an electric charging point within the town. None of the town's corporate car parks offer charging points for electric powered cars although charging points are planned within the town. Charging points (2) are also available at the Rheged Discovery Centre 2 miles outside the town.
- 3.6.10 The decline in public transport connections to outlying communities has resulted in increased car use both for shopping and employment purposes. The town and outlying villages are poorly served by local bus services, creating challenges for employees and employers.
The town benefits from a regular bus service provided by a national company to/from Carlisle and to the west coast (**Appendix XII, page 130**). The Fell Runner voluntary bus service which provides transport from local villages also comes into Penrith (**Appendix XIII, page 131**).
- 3.6.11 Penrith is served by a local bus company and services run Monday to Saturday 5-8 times per day with 15 stops throughout the town. The services commence at 9.30am and finish approximately 4pm daily.

This is particularly an issue for those travelling to and from work or school and others who do not have access to a private car as the services do not run during peak times or in the evenings (**Appendix XII, page 130**).

3.7 Traffic Management

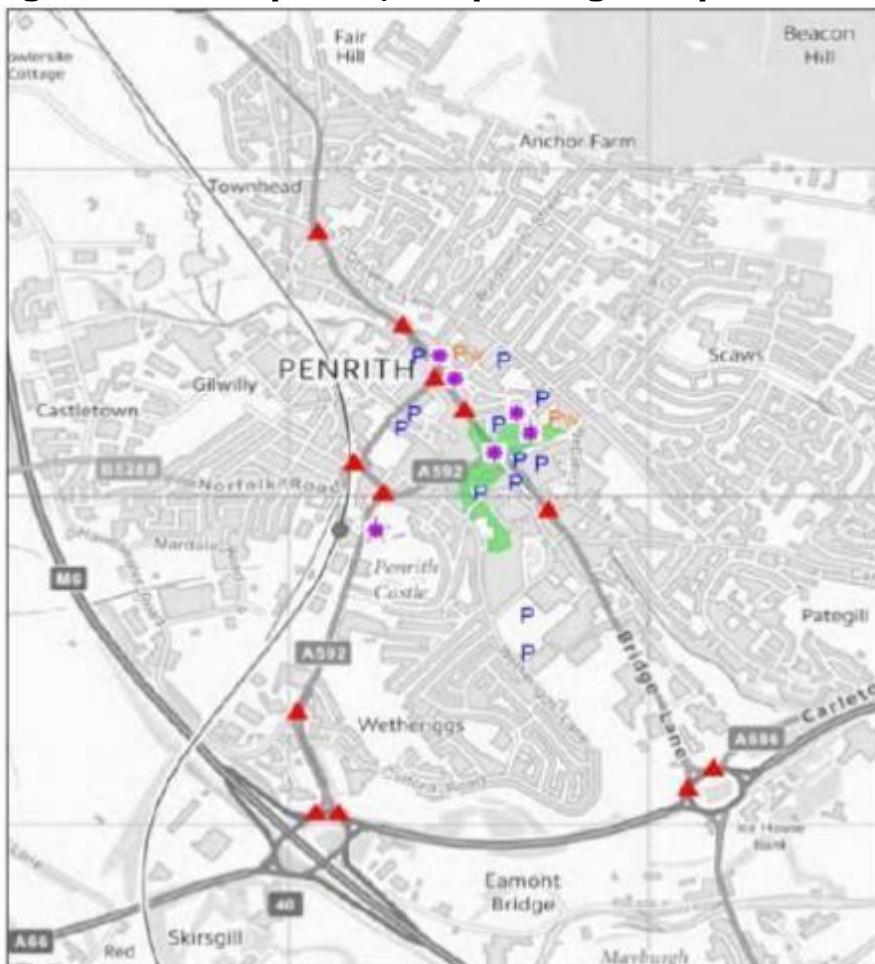
- 3.7.1 To reduce traffic congestion there is a need to divert through traffic using the A66, A6, M6, away from the town centre. However, this needs to be achieved without discouraging visitors to the town by using appropriate signage and possibly a Park-and-Ride scheme (**Figure 6**).

Figure 6. Strategic Road Context (Source: Penrith Transport Improvements Study 2015)



3.7.2 Interruption to traffic flow on either the M6 or A66 results in traffic displacement, and severe congestion, on the approaches to Penrith and in the town itself (**Figure 7**). There is a need for improved connections that divert through traffic, in particular HGVs, away from the town.

Figure 7. Pinch points, car parking and public realm



(Source: Penrith Transport Improvements Study 2015)

Key

- P Parking
- PW Parking (Weekend Only)
- Public Realm
- Historical or Heritage Site
- Pinch Points

- 3.7.3 There is a need for improved connections between Penrith and the surrounding villages, including increased capacity on Junction 41 of the M6 motorway.
- 3.7.4 Junction improvements have been made to ease traffic flows to the Gilwilly Industrial Estate and Eden Business Park from Junction 40 of the M6.
- 3.7.5 Highways England have agreed to the dualling the A66 (2024 to 2032) and are considering improvements at the junction of the A66 with the A6 (Kemplay Bank).

3.8 Penrith Town Centre

- 3.8.1 A major element of the character of the town is red sandstone and stucco, the predominant materials in which the town's older buildings were constructed.



The town is at risk of losing some of this character as an increasing number of buildings are being constructed with other, often inappropriate and unsympathetic materials, for example UPVC windows and other synthetic materials where previously they would have been timber.

- 3.8.2 Penrith is a historic town, but many shop fronts are out-of-keeping with their setting, this puts Penrith at risk of appearing to look like 'just another town'.



- 3.8.3 Other than during "Penrith in Bloom", the centre of the town and its approaches are almost devoid of vegetation, and in particular trees.

- 3.8.4 During the day, the town centre can be congested with traffic creating dirt and noise pollution which has a negative impact on the pedestrian experience. Much of the street furniture is in a poor state of repair (e.g. damaged seating). Visitors unfamiliar with the town need signage to direct them to banks, retail outlets (by specialism) and places to eat and drink.
- 3.8.5 With online shopping continuing to grow, consumers are redefining what is regarded as a good shopping experience. Penrith, like all town centres, is having to face up to this significant challenge. As more people shop online there is an opportunity to create alternative retail offerings such as antique shops, local artisans selling their products and local coffee houses/places to eat (e.g. locally sourced food products, gifts) which will attract visitors and locals alike.
- 3.8.6 Penrith has a good mix of local shops (**Appendix XIV, page 132**), but public consultation has revealed that the absence of outlets selling, for example, clothing for women, older teenagers and children, results in other local businesses losing footfall to Carlisle and Kendal. While Penrith's retail offering needs to satisfy local needs, as well as those of visitors, the footfall is insufficient to attract specialist national companies and department stores (**Map D: Penrith Shops and Services, page 139; Map E: Penrith Retail Offer, North, page 140; and Map F: Penrith Retail Offer, South, page 141**).
- 3.8.7 Empty shops (11.4%), particularly in New Squares, considered to be a significant issue and detract from vitality of the town centre.
- 3.8.8 Penrith Farmers' Market appears to have decreased in size from some dozen stallholders to currently five.
- 3.8.9 Respondents to the public consultation suggested that the town centre is not geared towards pedestrians and their safety. Specific examples cited are the very narrow pavements at The Narrows and the popular crossing points at Little Dockray (Skipton Building Society to Newcastle Building Society) and between the banks (NatWest and HSBC).
- 3.8.10 The town approaches or gateways are being considered by many as areas in need of improvement. Specific examples cited are Castlegate, Sandgate and Bridge Lane immediately after the Kemplay Roundabout.



3.9 Employment

- 3.9.1 Penrith supports a largely low wage economy with a high proportion of younger workers employed in the hospitality sector. Unemployment is low (58 persons in March 2018 [source: Cumbria Observatory]) which is thought to be due to the high demand from hotels for housekeeping and waiting staff, as well as younger people moving out of the area to find accommodation and better-paid employment. However, the low figure for those unemployed and claiming benefits disguises, to some extent, the fact that there are vacancies for professionals (e.g. doctors, nurses, solicitors) who are not attracted to the area.
- 3.9.2 Penrith is in the lowest quartile (nationally) for wages. The dominance of jobs offering the minimum wage alongside a lack of opportunities that attract and retain, economically active lower skilled residents, has resulted in an imbalance in the job market.
- 3.9.3 To grow the local economy and meet the needs of employers there is a need to raise and retain the proportion of young people achieving higher level skills. In England, in the year after taking an A level or equivalent at Key Stage 5, overall 89% of students were in education, employment or apprenticeship destinations, i.e. for at least six months, at both age 16 and after they take A level or equivalent qualifications, in the academic year 2016/17 according to the Department for Education. In 2017/18 the figure, provided to us by the schools in Penrith, was only 76%.
- 3.9.4 Alongside tourism, service businesses, such as warehousing, distribution and skilled manufacturing to supply the nuclear industry, should be encouraged.
- 3.9.5 There is a need to ensure that local employment opportunities are provided to support the sustainability of the town. Graduates should be a particular target, both in terms of retaining graduates from higher education establishments and attracting back those young people who have grown up in the town but left to study in other towns and cities.
- 3.9.6 The accessibility of the town by key road links (in particular the M6 / A66 junction), the West Coast Main Line and the bus service to/from Carlisle and west along the A66 makes Penrith an attractive location for both new and existing businesses. The Eden Local Plan (ELP) 20142032 allocates strategic employment sites to seek to capitalise on these strengths.

3.9.7 The newly re-opened Carlisle Lake District Airport (approximately 25 miles from Penrith) presents opportunities for the future. Commercial passenger flights are available to and from London Southend Airport, Belfast City Airport and Dublin Airport.

3.10 Tourism

- 3.10.1 During the year, there are several events that take place in the town that attract visitors from Cumbria and beyond;
- Marmalade Festival and Penrith Goes Orange (Spring).
 - Mayday (May).
 - Penrith on a Plate (July).
 - Cumbria in Bloom (Summer).
 - Britain in Bloom (National BID Gold 2017, Large Town Silver Gilt Winner 2018, and Large Town Gold Winner and Growing Communities Discretionary Award 2019) (Summer).
 - Artists in Penrith (Summer).
 - Winter Drowsing (October/November).
 - Christmas Events (December).



- 3.10.2 The tourism sector can provide many jobs for local people if the skills are there. Askham Bryan College at Newton Rigg Campus provides courses in tourism as well as land-based courses and Kendal and Carlisle Colleges provide courses in catering.
- 3.10.3 Coach Companies have advised the PNDP that there is little provision for the parking of tour buses or incentives for drivers (meal vouchers etc) with the consequence that many tour companies now omit Penrith from their itinerary.
- 3.10.4 Penrith is an attractive market town that has an interesting place in history and several historic buildings that could be used in marketing Penrith as a visitor destination and generating benefits from heritage tourism. For example, by making more town trails linking historic locations such as the castle, the yards, the Two Lions and Dockray Hall.

- 3.10.5 The town does not offer any wet weather attractions other than shops, the small museum, the cinema and Penrith Leisure Centre. Signage both to and within the town is inadequate.
- 3.10.6 The Tourist Information Centre is located on the edge of the shopping area and is open 7 days a week during the main season.