Introduction
Welcome to this exhibition of our Vision and emerging Masterplan for Chesham, prepared by the Chesham Renaissance Community Interest Company (CRCIC). The CRCIC has collaborated with masterplanners Allies and Morrison, transport consultants PJA and key stakeholders including the District, County and Town Councils to explore how Chesham can best accommodate new homes; how these can be balanced with decent and appropriate employment space; and how this process can be used to rejuvenate the town centre’s public spaces and civic infrastructure.

Next steps
Following your feedback on the emerging ideas for Chesham, we will continue to develop the masterplan, to identify opportunities for much needed new homes that are balanced with employment provision, and to establish a long-term framework for a sustainable and healthy future Chesham. We will review all your comments and take these into consideration when further developing our ideas. We will be sharing our masterplan report for ongoing consultation in early 2018.

Planning policy context
Chiltern and South Bucks District Councils are preparing the Local Plan to guide development in the area up until 2036. The Issues and Options consultation for this was held in early 2016 and the Draft Local Plan is due in early 2018. We have asked that the Local Plan allows for future place-specific planning guidance for Chesham, such as a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD), and to consider a mix of uses at development sites. The emerging ideas in the CRCIC exhibition can inform this process.

How to comment
Respond to the questionnaire on the CRCIC website: www.cheshammasterplan.org
Or complete a printed copy available in the November edition of your Chesham or at consultation meetings.
Send an email to info@cheshamcic.org
Feel free to speak to directors & staff of CRCIC
A historic market town

Chesham has significant roots as a market town, receiving its market charter in 1257. The High Street and Market Place are still visible today and form the bone structure of the town centre - a strong linear centre, with ‘backs’ either side.

Some buildings may have changed, but the historic view of the High Street is familiar today. Many historic buildings remain, giving Chesham a strong identity and palette of materials, such as red brick, flint, and the cobbled yards and passages that lead from the High Street. These offer cues for new development in the town, and new homes can respond to the town’s character without having to imitate it.

The Conservation Area, flood zones and Air Quality Management Zone are all important considerations for new development in the town.

Chesham’s role

Chesham is in the enviable position of being within the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and also on the London Underground network. This makes the town appealing, but places it under pressure from people commuting to London via the town from surrounding areas.

The town has a long history of craft and industry, with factories and mills adapted to new industries as tastes changed. Chesham remains a centre of small business and entrepreneurialism. Accommodating these will be important to the town’s economic future.
Chesham in Context

A tightly bound settlement

Chesham is tightly enclosed by Green Belt and the Chilterns AONB also bounds the settlement. This has made it very difficult for the town to expand to accommodate new homes and jobs. The District Council is reviewing potential to release Green Belt land to the north east of the town for new homes. We would like to take the pressure off this by accommodating new homes on brownfield land and other sites within the town boundary, and to explore whether some of this land could accommodate jobs rather than just homes.

Cradled by the Chilterns

Chesham’s dramatic topography in the Chilterns explains its distinctive shape. It also gives the town a beautiful setting which must be protected by retaining clear space between rooftlines and the horizon, as shown in the sketch at the top of the board.
Vision and principles

Overarching vision

Chesham will continue to be a characterful market town, nestled in the Chilterns - a gateway to the beautiful AONB.

It will have good commuter links to central London, but will also have its own gravity and appeal, with high quality shops and restaurants, thriving independent businesses, and an appealing cultural offer.

The town centre will be reunited with Lowndes Park, and existing and new residential neighbourhoods will be connected to the station and town centre through comfortable and sustainable walking and cycling links.

The town will provide a good quality of life for all ages, and will consequently have a diverse and vibrant community.

Principles for growth

Town life

Key priorities: integrating the theatre with the centre, focusing retail, creating a cultural/civic cluster, relocating HGV industries, but retaining SMEs in the centre, and temporary pop-up activities.

Character

Key priorities: work with Chesham’s historic grain, re-establish the historic approaches, rejuvenate the yards and passages, reflect the palette and retain the skyline.

New homes

Key priorities: Prioritise homes in the town centre using backland areas, make use of former industrial sites, reuse historic and redevelop poor quality buildings.

Streets & spaces

Key priorities: Consolidate parking, change the character of St Mary’s Way, strengthen walking and cycling links from surrounding neighbourhoods.
Emerging masterplan

The emerging masterplan sets out where we think homes, civic, commercial uses and parking could be located in the town centre and the areas close to this. The masterplan sets out a strategic approach, that could be used to guide future development at other sites in Chesham. Other sites in the town centre and beyond are also being reviewed but do not yet have sketch schemes.

Movement patterns

New cycle links are proposed from neighbourhoods to the centre, away from main roads. The road network and topography make links to the north east tricky.

New walking routes are proposed to better connect neighbourhoods, and to provide good links to the theatre and to Lowndes Park, with a new central entrance to this.

Strategic approach

We proposed that new homes should be prioritised in the centre, and work space that relies on HGVs be moved to strategic routes en route into the town. This will promote more sustainable movement options for residents, and help limit the number of HGVs that may need to drive through the town centre. Options are being considered to retain existing employment by change of use for specific sites within Planning Policy Guidelines.
Propositions

We have developed sketch proposals for key sites, to explore the priorities for these sites and demonstrate how development might come forward. These are set out over the following boards.

Star Yard and St Mary’s Way

New homes are proposed to front towards Lowndes Park and help change the character of St Mary’s Way. The number of road lanes could be reduced to three and the impact of this will be tested through traffic modelling. New access from St Mary’s Way will avoid cars being funnelled via The Broadway and provide servicing access to the High Street. The removal of the roundabouts will improve walking links to the park and give St Mary’s Way more of a town character. A new civic/community building could be provided. Star Yard car parking is relocated to a multi-storey car park to the north, which is bookended by new buildings. Better walking links are provided to the theatre.

Replacing roundabouts with signalled junctions can restore the historic approaches to the town centre and improve walking links between the High Street and Lowndes Park. Similar recent interventions have worked well. Traffic modelling would be used to test the feasibility of the concept as the detailed design is developed.

Although the road side of the Elgiva Theatre could be enhanced the removal of the planters is likely to be counterproductive. Better links to the Elgiva Theatre could be provided.

Consolidated car parking, with buildings at each end

Replacement of roundabout with signalled junction

Better links to the Elgiva Theatre

Shared cycle/footway

Access from St Mary’s Way

Replacing roundabout with signalled junction

New homes facing onto St Mary’s Way

Environment Agency’s de-culverted water way and planting

A new entrance to Lowndes Park

Access from St Mary’s Way

New homes proposed to front towards Lowndes Park
A transport interchange is proposed for Chesham Station, with a new Station Square transforming the arrival experience to the town. Space for taxis and bus interchange space, substantially increased cycle parking and covered car parking are all proposed. Potential to make White Hill one-way from The Broadway and consequently widen the pavements is being reviewed with the County Council.

At The Broadway, public realm improvements maintain bus access but extend the pavements in front of the shops, to give these breathing space, and simplify the materials so that the historic buildings stand out.
At Chesham Yards, historic industrial buildings can be retained, either as employment space or adapted as warehouse style apartments. Between these, mews style development can provide a mix of uses and open up an attractive north-south walking link between the town centre and Sonnyvale Road, avoiding the Air Quality Management zone of Broad Street. Development can help create a series of interesting spaces, with potential for cafes/bars close to the theatre, at the southern end.

At The Water Meadow, some public parking is retained to serve the southern part of the High Street, but it is possible to provide some homes in this area. Some of these are within the flood zone and would have undercroft parking spaces to ensure there are no habitable rooms on the ground floor.

A stronger walking link is proposed between Old Town and the High Street, with a wide raised table crossing for pedestrians, which reintegrates the Red Lion pub with Market Square, making the historic square feel like one space again.