



Future Chard Strategy 2021 -2035

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Introduction

Chard is an historic industrial and market town, situated within the beautiful hills and rolling countryside of South Somerset. It is one of four primary market towns serving the South Somerset area together with Crewkerne, Ilminster and Wincanton as well as the principal settlement of Yeovil; just 17 miles to the east. Chard is the second largest settlement in the district comprising around 8% of both the total population and district wide employment base, as shown below.

Table 1: South Somerset Settlement Hierarchy

Location	Population (2011)	%	Employment (2019)	%
Yeovil	45,800	28.4	30,500	46.9
Chard	13,100	8.1	5,300	8.2
Crewkerne	7,800	4.8	3,100	4.8
Ilminster	5,800	3.6	2,500	3.9
Wincanton	5,400	3.3	2,600	4.0
South Somerset	161,200	100	65,000	100

Source: ONS Population Census (2011), Business Register Employment Survey (2019)

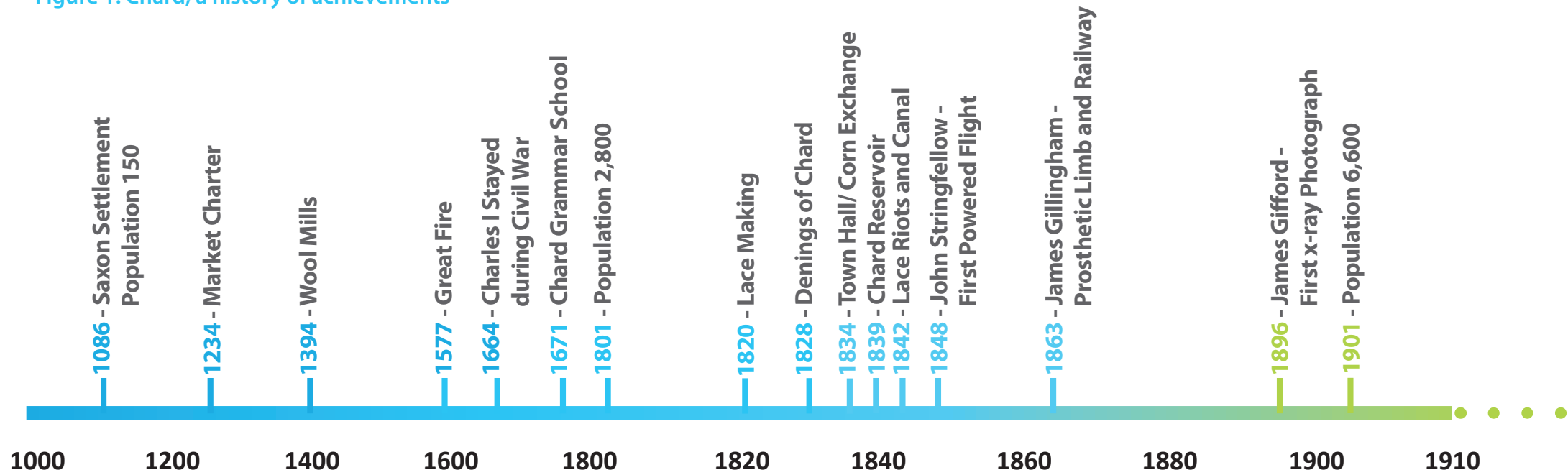


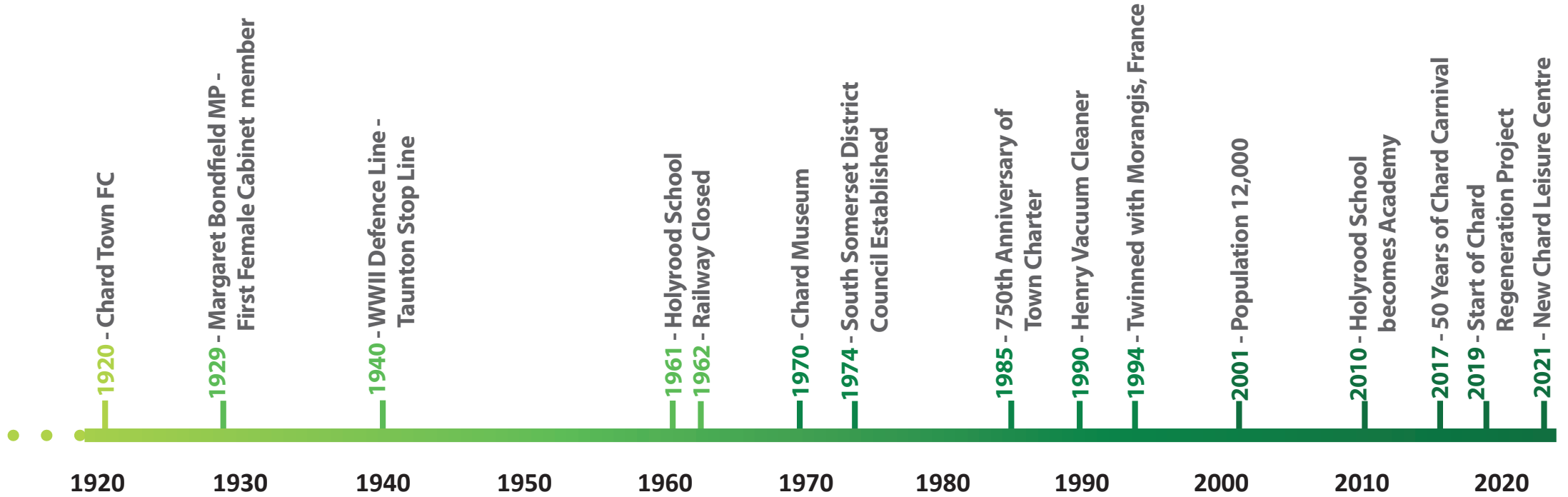
The town is well connected to the regional road network with the A30 and A358 both running through it, connecting on to the A303 and the M5 at J25 near Taunton within 25-minute drive. Chard is just 7 miles from the main line rail stations at either Crewkerne or Axminster over the Devon border.

Chard is designated a Strategic Growth Area in the adopted South Somerset Local Plan (March 2015), providing around 12% of the total district housing needs to 2028 and provision for around 10% of forecast employment. This compares with Yeovil’s expected growth accommodating around 46% of the total housing allocation and nearly 50% of future employment.

The plan proposals are designed to sustain Chard’s role as a balanced place to both live and work and reflect the town’s long history as an important centre of manufacturing and industrial innovation. From its market charter in 1683, Chard was known for its Wool Mills and then lace making and later iron foundry and engineering. Since 1990, Chard has been home to world renowned Henry vacuum cleaner manufacturer, Numatic International.

Figure 1: Chard; a history of achievements

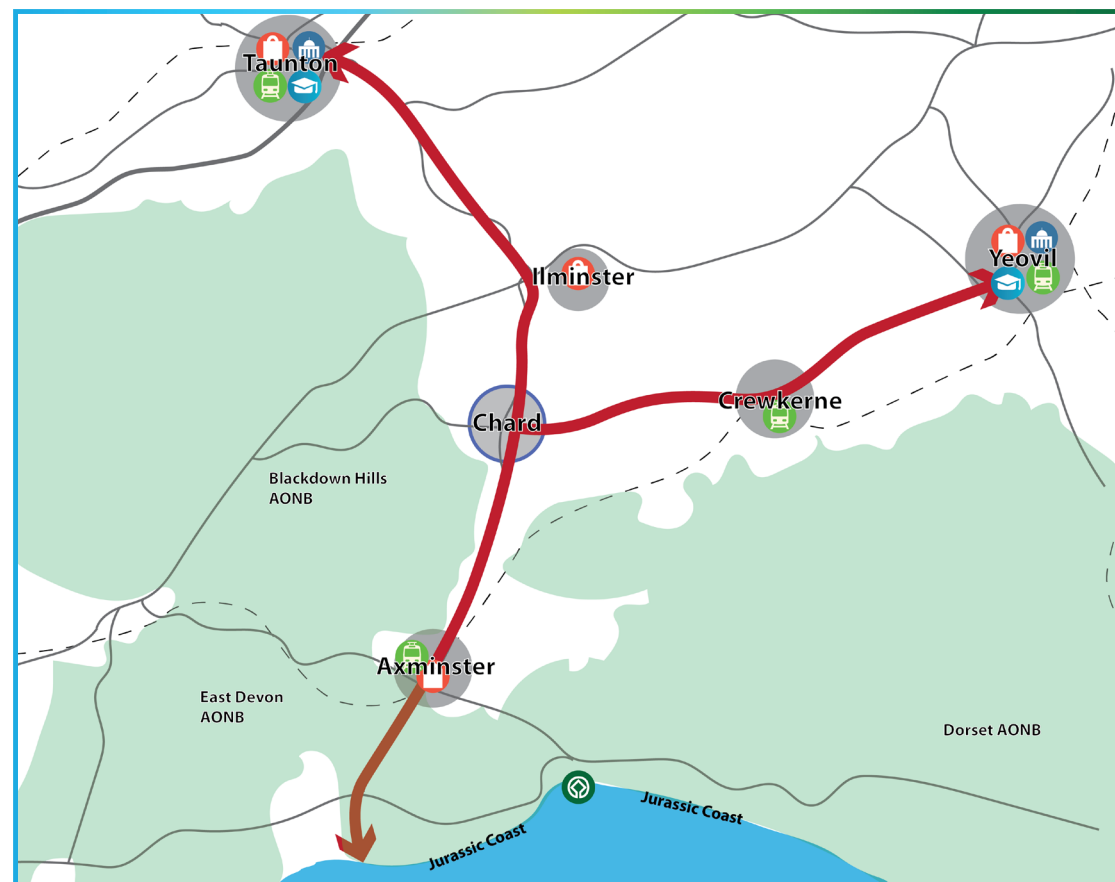




The physical regeneration and growth of Chard has been guided over the past decade by the Chard Regeneration Plan (LDA Design September 2010). This has framed the critical priorities for the town centre improvements, delivery of new housing growth and sports and leisure provision. Work continues to see improvement to local transport movement and economic growth.

Whilst Chard has benefitted from strong levels of employment within the town, reducing the need to travel, most employment is relatively low skilled and of low pay. There are significant challenges of urban deprivation with several areas within Chard falling within the 20% most deprived nationally for education and skills, as well as concerns around income deprivation both due to age dependency on state pensions and low-income families. These are the challenges this Strategy seeks to tackle.

Figure 2: Chard Strategic Location



Source: based on Ordnance Survey data under SSDC Licence agreement

Purpose of Strategy

Whilst there is considerable investment underway in the physical infrastructure and growth of Chard there is also a need to take a step back and take a wider, holistic, view of the future e for Chard – the place and the community. That is the purpose of this document, the Future Chard Strategy takes a long-term view from 2021 to 2035 and sets out a clear pathway for social, economic and community well-being, consistent with the overarching Council Plan and Vision for South Somerset.

The desired changes for Chard identified in this strategy are not necessarily easy nor in the control of any one organisation or community group. Success will demand concerted effort and collaboration, as well as continued community engagement. A range of actions are identified to tackle the challenges facing the people, the economy and the environment of Chard which are designed to build local capacity and drive change. Further actions will continue to be developed, gathering momentum as the Strategy evolves to meet the long-term ambition and vision for the Future of Chard.



Photo: Arup



Photo: Chris Jones Regeneration



Photo: Microsoft

“ Council Plan 2020 – 2024

Our Vision for South Somerset:

A naturally beautiful and sustainable environment, which also allows business to flourish and good homes to be delivered. A place where our communities are safe, vibrant and healthy and have access to exceptional cultural and leisure activities.

- South Somerset District Council



Vision for Chard

Our ambition is for Chard to realise its true potential as a strong community and economic service centre.

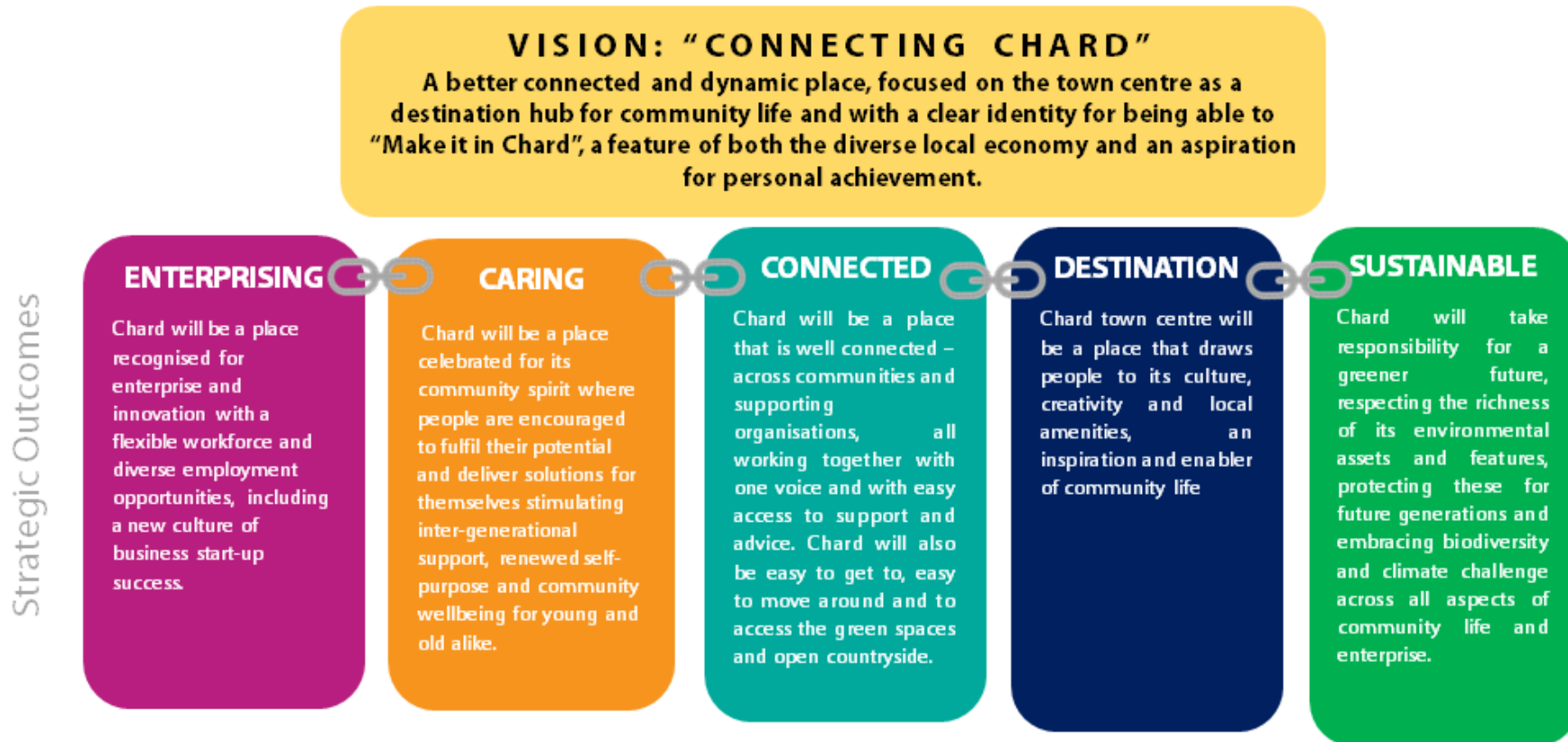
The Vision for Chard is:



A better connected and dynamic place, focused on the town centre as a destination hub for community life and with a clear identity for being able to “Make it in Chard”, a feature of both the diverse local economy and an aspiration for personal achievement



Figure 3: Chard Vision and Strategic Outcomes



This vision is based on the challenges identified in Chard from research and community engagement and an understanding of the underlying potential and future opportunities for change.

The outcomes which will support the vision are set out overleaf and in the diagram below.

The issues for Chard today and what can be done to tackle them are developed further in the rest of this document.



Chard Desired Outcomes - 2035

The key outcomes we want to achieve for Chard as a result of this Strategy are set out below:

ENTERPRISING: Chard will be a place recognised for enterprise and innovation with a flexible workforce and diverse employment opportunities, including a new culture of business start-up success.

CARING: Chard will be a place celebrated for its community spirit where people are encouraged to fulfil their potential and deliver solutions for themselves stimulating inter-generational support, renewed self-purpose and community wellbeing for all ages.

CONNECTED: Chard will be a place that is well connected – across communities and supporting organisations, all working together with one voice and with easy access to support and advice. Chard will also be easy to get to, easy to move around and to access the green spaces and open countryside.

DESTINATION: Chard town centre will be a place that draws people to its culture, creativity and local amenities, an inspiration and enabler of community life.

SUSTAINABLE: Chard will take responsibility for a greener future, respecting the richness of its environmental assets and features, protecting these for future generations and embracing biodiversity and climate challenge across all aspects of community life and enterprise.

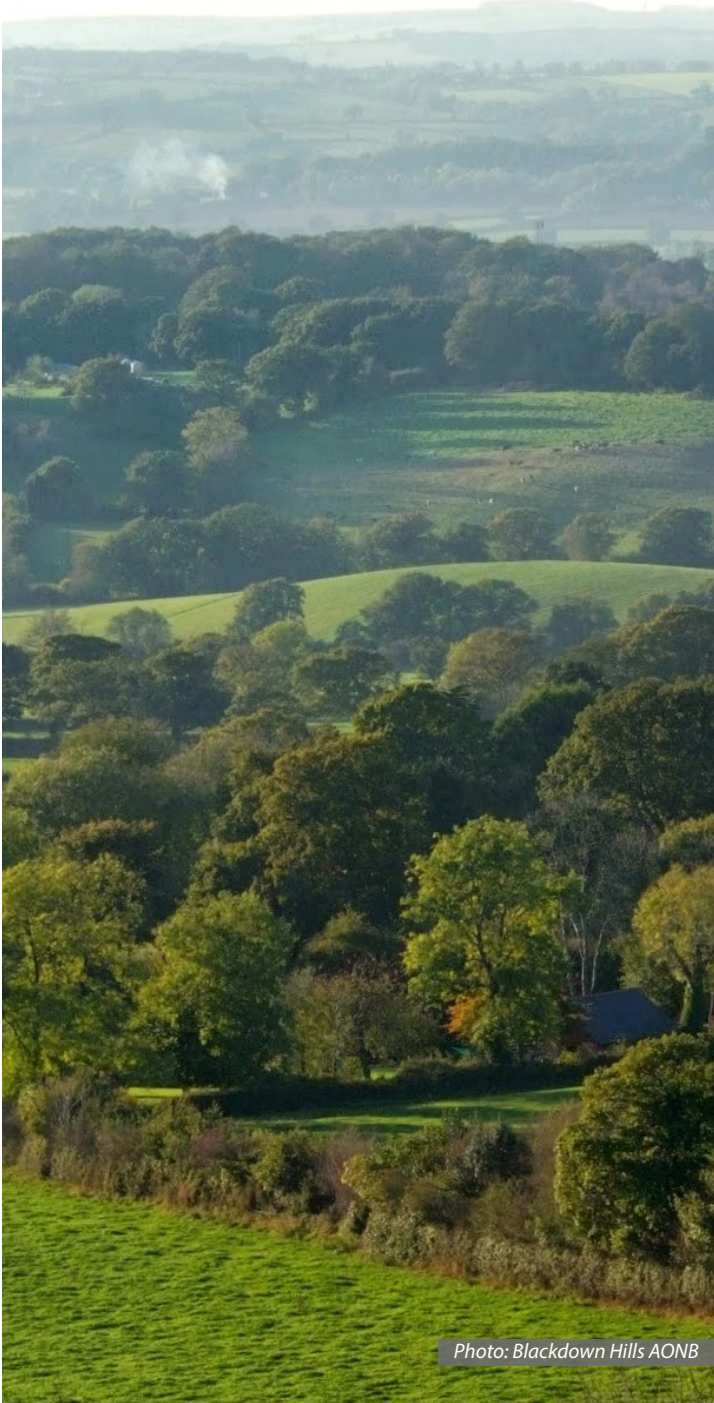


Photo: Blackdown Hills AONB

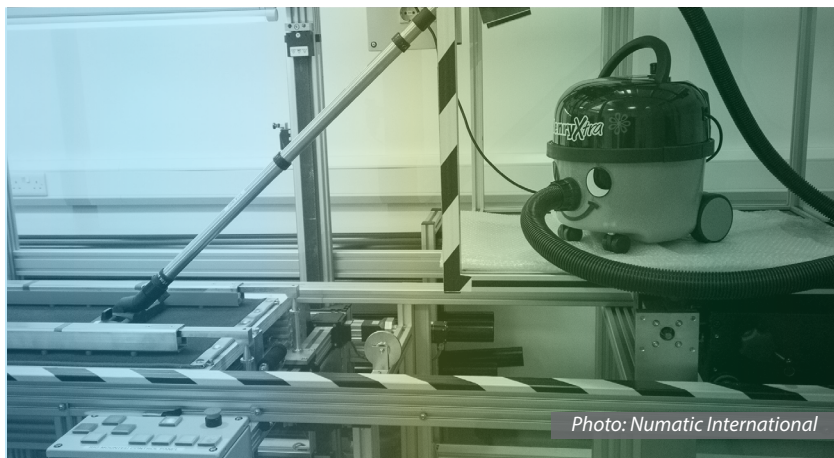
Understanding Chard

Chard demonstrates all the hallmarks of an industrial town albeit set within the stunning Somerset countryside. Whilst its origins draw from the land as an historic market town it quickly evolved as a manufacturing centre, first in the woollen mills and then in lace production (before Nottinghamshire excelled) and latterly in engineering and food processing. Manufacturing success has encouraged population growth and migration to Chard, now with strong local Polish and Portuguese communities alongside the wider Somerset heritage and traditions. Although some residents keep to themselves, there is no sense of alienation but rather a strong cohesive local community spirit characterises the people of Chard.

The dominance of the strong manufacturing presence in the town has provided generations of near full employment with Chard remaining largely self-contained as an employment centre with very little need for people to look outside the area for work. This can, however, in turn limit expectations for better employment prospects, with a presumption of readily available but low paid work perpetuating low educational attainment limiting local aspiration for change and constraining social mobility.

Recently, unemployment in Chard has been rising, exacerbated by the Covid-19 global pandemic and further compromised with the announcement of closure of Oscar Mayer food processing plant.

The combined effect of recent events put a different perspective on the previously self-contained identity of Chard and the distribution of services covering an increasingly wider region. Indeed, the close spatial connectivity between different centres across Somerset would ordinarily support a strong hierarchy of service provision with Chard expected to easily connect with larger centres.

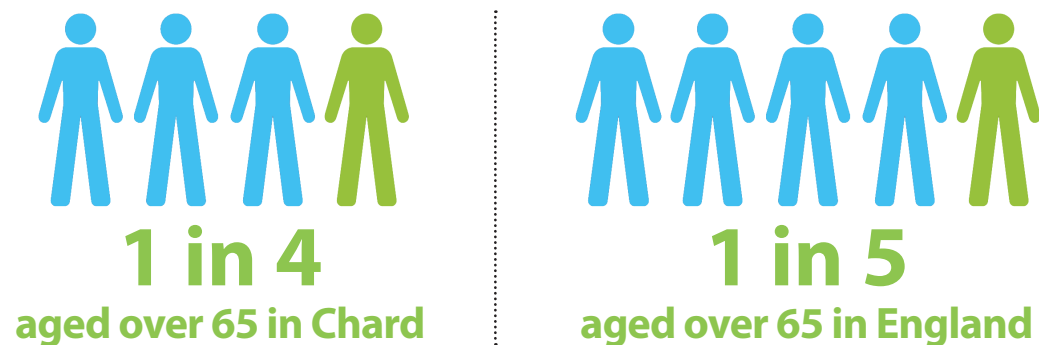


This works for those with access to private cars but disconnects with those in greatest need and reliant on public transport which has eroded over the years throughout rural communities as public subsidies are curtailed.

Further details of the socio-economic context of Chard and the findings from the community survey and local conversations are set out in the accompanying technical appendix. The key findings from the research are summarised below:

High proportion of residents over retirement age

There were around 13,900 residents living in Chard in 2019, a +3% increase (+300 residents) in the last five years.



Chard also has higher rates of all age groups above 50 years compared to England signaling continued ageing of the population.

High proportion of residents over retirement age

Although data is only available at the local authority level, there is a higher proportion of residents across South Somerset (8%) with no qualifications compared with 6% nationally and a much lower proportion with level 4 qualifications (degree level and above), 26% in South Somerset compared with 25% across Somerset and 43% for England overall. This reflects other evidence available at the Chard level, such as a high proportion of employment in sectors that do not require level 4 qualifications (such as manufacturing, hospitality and retail) and areas of Chard falling in the top 20% most deprived for education and skills.

Low levels of income

Average household incomes in Chard are around £26,200, lower than the average for South Somerset (£30,300), South West Region (£27,500) and England (£31,600). Furthermore, low income is a particular issue in the west of Jocelyn ward near the town centre, north of Hollyrood ward near the town centre, and in the ward of Combe. Low incomes reflect the sector mix in Chard, with a high proportion of lower paid jobs such as manufacturing, retail and hospitality. It also demonstrates a lack of opportunity for residents to access higher paid jobs, for social mobility and improving prosperity.

High dependence on manufacturing sector

Manufacturing is the largest sector in Chard, with an estimated 2,150 jobs in 2019 (the latest period available) and there is a concentration in just a small number of employers. This accounts for 43% of all local jobs, nearly 6 times higher than the proportion of jobs in England.

Employment was declining pre-covid

Employment in Chard was declining in the years before the COVID pandemic and prior to the announced closure of the Oscar Mayer plant. In 2019 (the latest available date), there was a total of around 5,025 people employed in Chard, a decline of -825 jobs (-14%) compared to 2014. This is despite +3% growth in employment in South Somerset overall and across the Heart of the South West LEP area, and +5% in England over the same period.

Age-related and income deprivation concentrated around central Chard

The prosperity and life opportunities of residents living in Chard is unequal, with large differences in deprivation scores found across the town. The maps alongside show the different domains of deprivation by small geographical areas (Lower Super Output Areas), as provided by the ONS.

The indices of multiple deprivation cannot be aggregated to the local ward levels, but the maps below have been presented with the ward boundaries for easy comparison. The key issues arising from the deprivation indices are:

- The town centre area, west of the Jocelyn Ward, falls within the top 20% most deprived across all domains, excluding barriers to housing and services and the living environment.
- The west area of the Holyrood Ward falls within the top 10% most deprived for education, skills and training deprivation, whilst the east area falls within the top 20% most deprived, reflecting low skills attainment and lack of opportunities.

- The northeast area of the Crimchard Ward falls within the top 10% most deprived for barriers to housing and services, reflecting issues relating to affordability and homelessness.
- Employment, education/skills and crime challenges are the greatest issues across the whole town area when compared to other deprivation indicators.

Figure 4: Chard: Indices of Deprivation 2019



Deprivation Decile (where 1 is most deprived 10% of LSDAs in England)

<Most deprived **1** **2** **3** **4** **5** **6** **7** **8** **9** **10** Least deprived >

Source: MHCLG, English Indices of Deprivation, 2019.

Chard Town Centre... community service focus

The core town centre is relatively compact and focused around Fore Street and Holyrood Street. The town centre vacancy rate has increased closer to the national average at the start of 2021 (12.4%) although new investment is taking place with the recent arrival of Home Bargains. The town currently retains three banks or buildings societies which are often at risk following national trends.

Comparison shopping still dominates the town centre offer at around 30% of all units, although lower than the national average of 39% and with fewer national operators and a more limited range than larger, destination, town centres.

Chard provides a much higher level of retail services (hairdressers, opticians etc) occupying nearly 21% of all town centre units compared to 12% on average across the UK, reflecting the strong community-oriented role of Chard town centre.

Town centre food shopping is slightly lower than the national average provision and includes a Sainsbury's supermarket off Bath Street as well as a number of specialist (Polish) food outlets, local butchers and bakeries. Further food shopping is available outside the town centre with a large Tesco store and Lidl serving the wider Chard area.

The food and drink and social scene – including nightlife - lacks depth and sometimes quality with an opportunity for an enterprising culture to fill gaps in the market and potential to re-enforce its rural setting and connection with food and farming.



For reference purposes. Not to scale.

Table 2: Chard Town Centre Ground Floor uses

Use	Chard		UK
	Number	%	%
Convenience (Food)	10	7.3	8.0
Comparison Shopping	41	29.9	39.0
Retail Service	27	19.7	12.0
Retail Leisure	23	16.8	18.0
Business	19	13.9	10.0
Vacant	17	12.4	13.0
Total	137	100	100

Source: SSDC Retail Monitoring (January/February 2021)

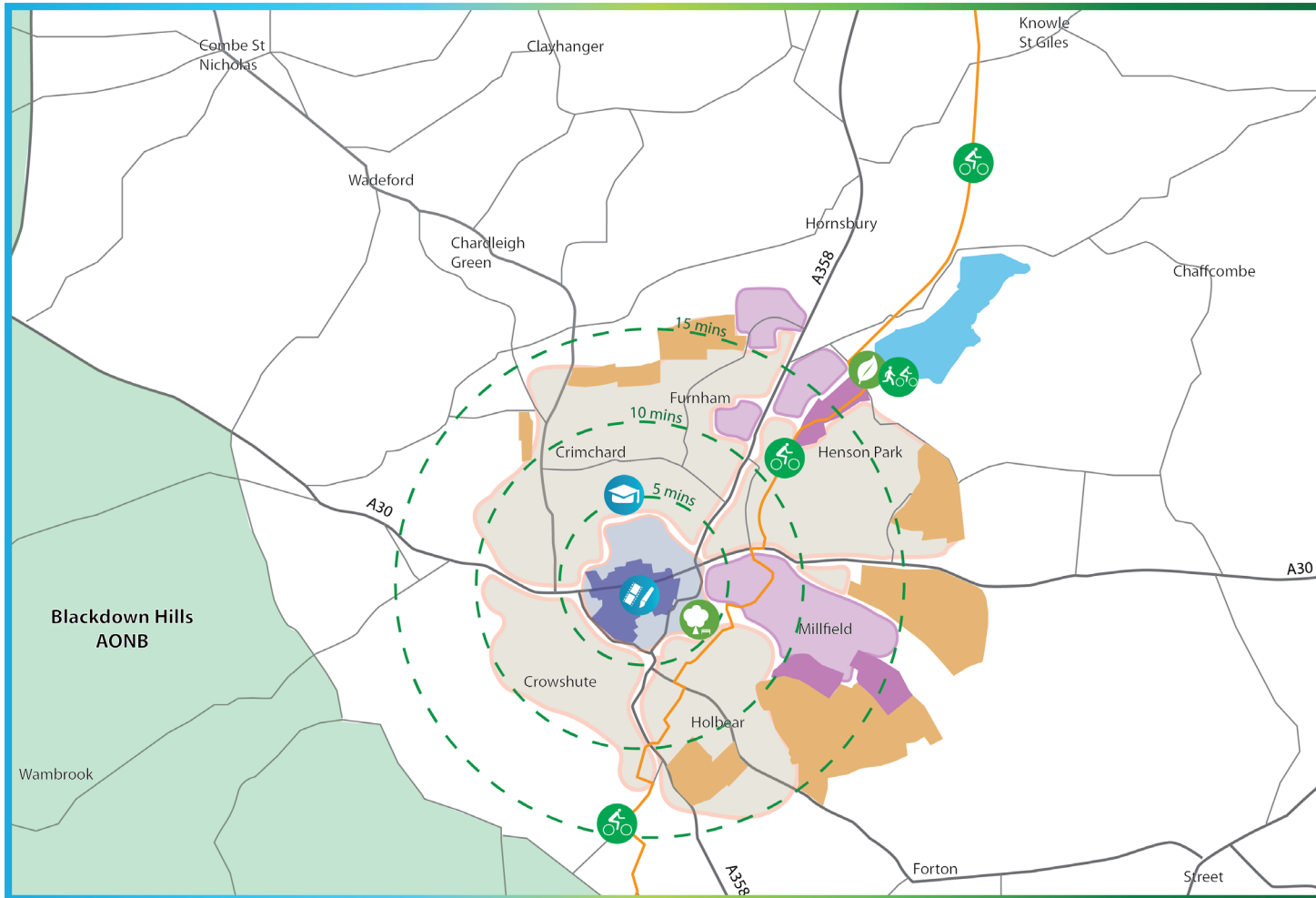
Reflecting on Chard's Potential

The table further on highlight the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats that will shape the future potential of Chard over the next fifteen years and more.

It is vital for Chard to address the issues of low income and low skills which is constraining social mobility, expectations, and aspirations for the future across much of the community but especially younger people.



Figure 5: Chard: Key Features & Assets



Source: based on Ordnance Survey data under SSDC Licence agreement

Chard must use its key strengths in terms of its strategic location, exceptional community spirit and fabulous green spaces to capture economic investment and growth whilst capitalising on the potential of the town centre arising from the regeneration and public realm improvements, including development of the new Chard Leisure Centre.

The compact nature of Chard means most of the town is technically within a 20-minute walk catchment, although the practicality of some routes and improved safety measures may still be required.



People

Strengths

- Many diverse and active community groups committed to Chard.
- Blend of people born in Chard and those that have chosen to live here.
- Known for invention and industry, such as powered flight, artificial limbs development and the home of Henry vacuum cleaners.
- Sense of pride and satisfaction from local people and strong community cohesion.



Place

- The town is compact and mostly walkable.
- Town centre's Fore Street has some notable civic buildings set within a strong Conservation Area.
- There is a variety of green areas such as parks, amenity areas, sports, recreation and nature reserves and paths/trails which are all well-loved.
- Housing is affordable and a draw to new residents.
- Clear signs of local investment will boost confidence with the completion of the new leisure centre and active and ambitious museum.

Weaknesses

- Higher proportion of older age residents constrains the labour market capacity.
- Lower than average earnings with employment concentrated in manufacturing, retail, and hospitality sectors.
- Unemployment has doubled since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic.
- Employment, education & skills, and problems with crime are the greatest deprivation issues across Chard Work.
- Communication and integration between local organisations and community groups, as well as lack of community-owned space, could be constraining local potential.
- Lack of adult learning provision in the town.
- Lack of cohesive arts or cultural scene.
- Further Education/Higher Education provision is not locally accessible.
- Poor public transport provision tends to isolate people when expected to access public services further afield such as Taunton or Yeovil.
- Concerns over traffic congestion in the town centre.
- Night-time economy is very limited.
- No local business representation to stimulate networking and sharing ideas or nurturing a dynamic business spirit.



People

Opportunities

- An active older population can also stimulate strong social capital through local volunteering and community support.
- SSDC can provide stronger place-based community leadership working with Chard Connect Forum and supporting a stronger community role for the Town Council.
- Opportunity to explore integrated service delivery through place-based community solutions.
- Economic growth potential with further expansion of Numatic International to help counter short-term impact of Oscar Mayer closure.
- Opportunity to create a culture of local ambition and “can-do” mentality through visible role models, celebrating local achievements and making business start-ups a realistic and accessible prospect, including local artisan trades.



Place

- Potential to build on Chard’s environmental and location assets situated between the Blackdown Hills AONB and the Coast.
- Town positioning – need to develop brand and story that respects its history and develops a positive future to stimulate a stronger destination and diversity of local offer.
- The new Chard Leisure Centre has the potential to generate a significant stimulus and excitement for the town centre with more linked activity and interaction.
- The High Street Heritage Action Zone (HSHAZ) with more than £2m investment in town centre buildings and public streets/space will reinforce the town centre linkages and enhance the sense of place.
- Potential to maximise the visitor appeal of the Stop Line and promote Chard as a service destination along this long-distance coast-to-coast walking and cycling route.

Threats

- Loss of major employer – Oscar Mayer with over half of the town’s manufacturing base disappearing. Proactive engagement underway to support those losing their jobs and encourage positive development solutions for the town centre site.
 - Continued risk of low ambition and aspiration may constrain future potential.
 - Apparent history of over-consultation and concerns about actions not being delivered. Need continuous communication as strategies and solutions evolve whilst managing local expectations and funding constraints.
 - Worries over new housing not matching local infrastructure and facilities development. Need to re-engage on Chard’s growth story demonstrating confidence in delivery and cohesive community development.
 - Concerns emerging around the lack of local focus on Chard following establishment of unitary authority. Formal adoption of this strategy to support the long-term future of Chard will provide the platform for successor bodies and maintain the local community voice.
-
- Narrow employment base with a high dependence on manufacturing sector.
 - Perception of green space and rural setting being eroded by housing development.
 - Risk of future traffic growth not being managed effectively.
 - Negative impact of redundant mill sites.

Ambition for Chard

This Strategy sets out an ambitious future for Chard and lays the foundations for future prosperity and wellbeing.

Realisation of the Vision and Strategic Outcomes for Chard will be driven by local actions for change. There are four priority themes for intervention, wrapped around the central priority of forging a stronger community identity for Chard, all of which also embrace new ways of collaborative working as illustrated in the diagram opposite and described overleaf. Each priority theme also reflects the overarching challenge of climate change, providing an integrated response to realise a long-term sustainable outcome for Chard.

Crosscutting Theme: Make it in Chard – New Identity

Crosscutting Theme: New Way of Working

Priority Theme: Economy

Priority Theme: Community, Health & Wellbeing

Priority Theme: Town Centre Destination

Priority Theme: Housing & Connectivity

The priority themes respond to Chard's key challenges and opportunities identified from the data research and endorsed by the local community and stakeholder consultation.

The key actions, which local partners can deliver, are highlighted alongside each intervention theme below. The links between the intervention themes and the Vision outcomes are also illustrated at the end of each theme.

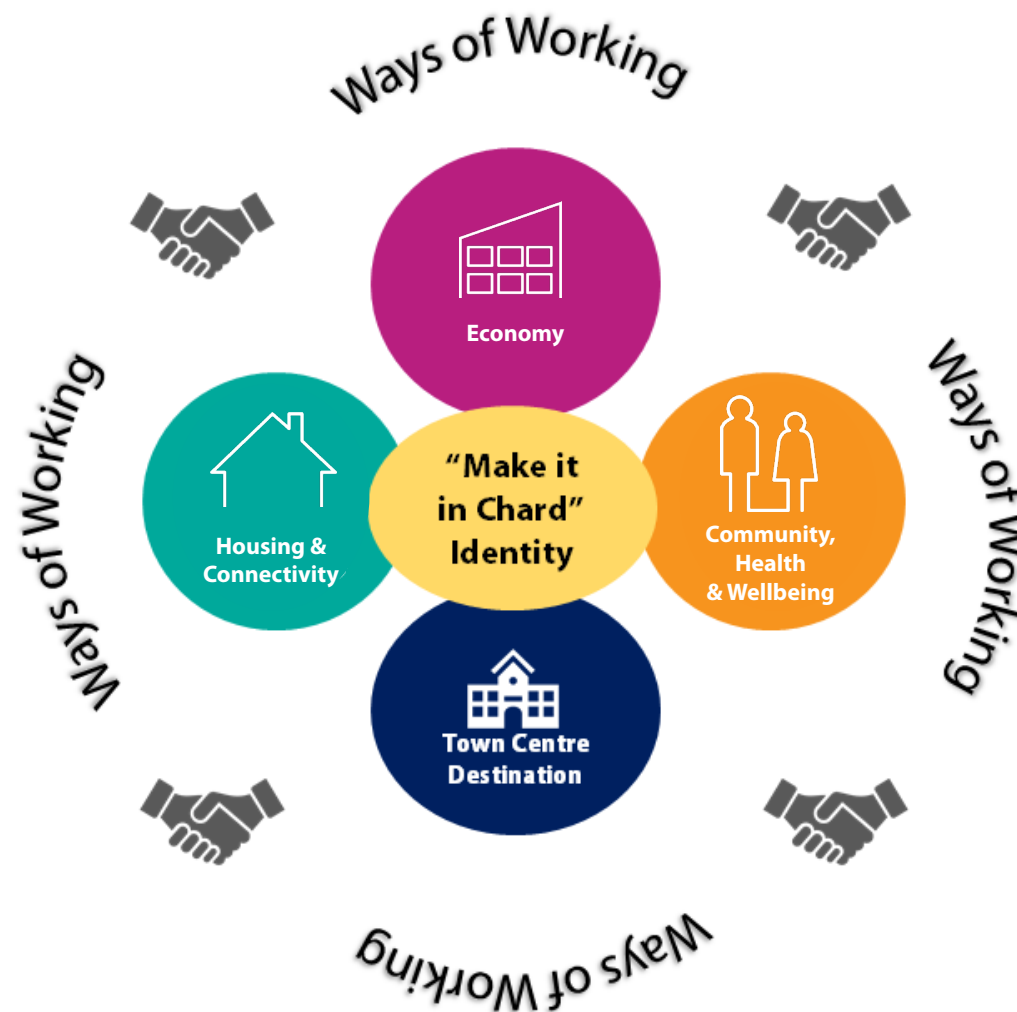


Figure 6: Priority Themes for Intervention

Cross Cutting Theme: Make it in Chard – a new identity

There is a lack of a coherent identity that Chard can focus on, organise around, and use to promote its Unique Selling Points whether this be to future residents, visitors, and investors (big and small). Its local attractions and assets are fragmented and don't contribute to one cohesive Chard experience, with no co-ordinated approach to online visitor information or physical signage/information/interpretation or use of digital media.

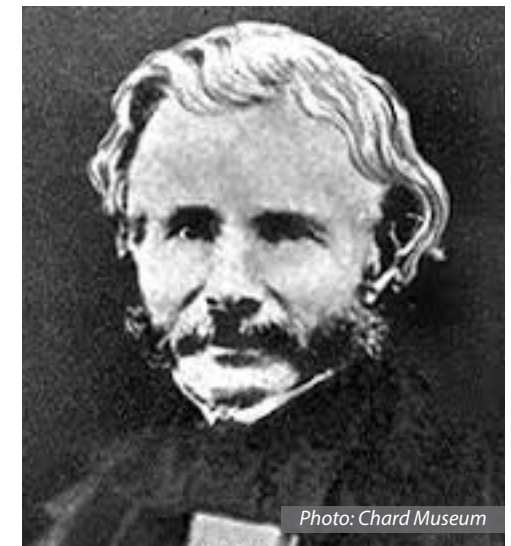
The principle of the 'Make it in Chard' campaign was first promoted in the 2010 Regeneration Vision as an idea encapsulating making your life in the town, and as an exhortation to businesses to invest and develop. This still rings true for Chard today.

A place brand campaign, however, needs to be more deeply owned by the town and reach across all aspects of the local identity. The Chard story needs to be part of a conversation that is the talk of the town, instils pride and promotes community confidence. Some of this will be digital, in a print medium and manifest through a physical presence in the town as well as through the people of Chard, local products, interpretation, events, festivals and more.

Make it in Chard

A community led place brand needs to be created that is owned from within Chard rather than imposed. This strategy has highlighted how the story of Chard and its future identity is truly holistic in nature, and needs to be embedded and celebrated across all the priority themes, converging on a single proposition – "Make it in Chard".

There is need for a clear storyboard and messages that provide direction on how the place identity is nurtured whilst also encouraging local businesses and community groups to express themselves within the overall Chard story. A supportive communications and marketing plan needs to guide such a process and should form part of any future way of working in the town.





Physical Markers

Chard needs to be known and announced to first time visitors and create a sense of pride and belonging for its residents. Strategic and local gateways need to be considered that make people aware of Chard and its identity with tourism signage, sculptures and other devices that are physical markers aligned to the wider town identity.

Events and Festivals

Events and festivals are a good way for the community to come together and showcase something unique about the town. For example, Hay on Wye is known for its annual literary festival, Henley for its regatta, Ludlow for its food festival amongst other known festivals. They tend to support a town's identity, its story, sense of place and develop skills from within a community and confidence in where people live.



Photo: Microsoft

Ambition for Chard's Identity – The Outcome

Establish a strong, positive identity for Chard as a place that stimulates and celebrates success. People can “make it” in Chard regardless of their background and previous life chances and local business have a strong reputation for quality produce and products reflecting the Chard brand and identity.

There will be a sense of pride, community cohesion and confidence among Chard residents and business. Chard town centre will be known as a destination of choice with a reputation as a welcoming place, having a strong local feel, a common purpose, clear identity and personality.

Key Measures of Chard's Identity – The Output



A clear, community owned place brand identity for Chard established and articulated through local signage and events.



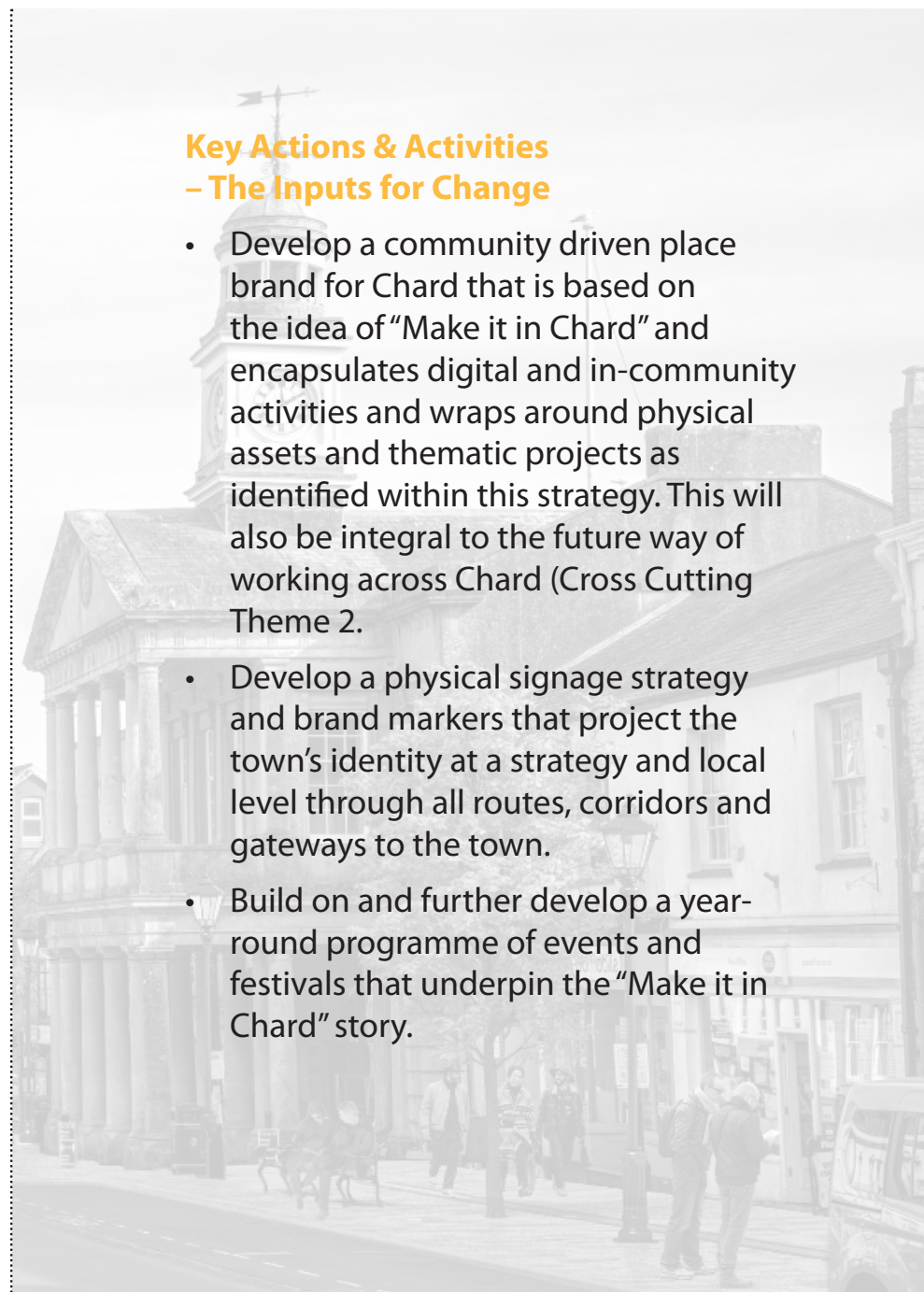
Positive feedback on changing perceptions of Chard from local residents, businesses and further afield.



Improved community confidence demonstrated through further engagement and active involvement in community life.

Key Actions & Activities – The Inputs for Change

- Develop a community driven place brand for Chard that is based on the idea of “Make it in Chard” and encapsulates digital and in-community activities and wraps around physical assets and thematic projects as identified within this strategy. This will also be integral to the future way of working across Chard (Cross Cutting Theme 2).
- Develop a physical signage strategy and brand markers that project the town’s identity at a strategy and local level through all routes, corridors and gateways to the town.
- Build on and further develop a year-round programme of events and festivals that underpin the “Make it in Chard” story.





Contribution to the Chard Vision:

Cross Cutting Theme: Make it in Chard – New Identity



Enterprising

Stimulating a strong identity for Chard will promote Chard as an attractive and accessible business location fostering and supporting an enterprise culture.



Caring

Stimulating a strong identity for Chard will create a place where people belong, feel cared for and are part of the community. Happiness, satisfaction levels and worthiness are valued with people looking out for one another.



Connected

The “Make it in Chard” story and identity links across all aspects of community life through physical place making campaigns and local conversations.



Destination

Make it in Chard underpins the story of the town centre presenting an experience that is local, productive, animated with a sense of heritage and a community owned place.



Sustainable

The identity for Chard is based on sustainable values of local, accessible and green which maximises the potential of the local community through social capital involvement and a commitment to low carbon; supporting future generations.

Cross Cutting Theme: New Way of Working

There are many community organisations that want the best for Chard but would be much stronger and effective if there was a common ground for sharing, promoting local issues and co-developing and delivering local solutions.

Build on the Community Response to Covid

During 2020, residents came together to respond to Covid. Over 200 volunteers supported over 1,000 residents directly with daily chores, shopping and building supportive social networks. In 2021, whilst the immediate pressure has reduced, local relationships are still being maintained with conversations ongoing through forums such as Chard Connect.

There is a wealth of transferable knowledge and skills that can further support ongoing community led action with the opportunity to align some of this human capital and energy to tackle many of the challenges facing Chard now and in the future.

Place Leadership

Building on the Covid-19 response and also the need for a more integrated approach to delivery in Chard, a number of stakeholders have identified whether a unified programme of place-based leadership would help understand everyone's respective skills, resources, assets, capacity and funding and how this can be pooled.

Whilst respecting individual organisations' roles and responsibilities, a Place Forum for Chard would help not just deal with management and governance but both technical and cross-sectoral place based solutions.



Photo: Microsoft

Ambition for Ways of Working – The Outcome

The local community and partner organisations are empowered to drive change through effective communication, networking and strong collaborative working.



Key Measures for Ways of Working – The Outputs



An effective partnership forum established providing a strong, and coherent community voice for Chard.



A place based resource management and delivery approach is developed.

Key Actions & Activities – The Inputs

- Develop a Place Forum with partners as conduit for discussion, ideas and co-delivery of initiatives and projects arising from this strategy.
- Develop a place-based leadership programme for local partners to enable a common approach to local delivery. This can draw on previous good practice such as the LGA's Leading Places programme and also track MHCLG's current pilot programme "Partnerships for People & Place".
- Establish a parallel youth based forum to contribute to future leadership and strategic priorities from a young person's perspective.



Contribution to the Chard Vision:

Cross Cutting Theme: New Way of Working



Enterprising

Developing new ways of working will create an environment for collaboration and partnership that bridges business with community helping to promote the Chard brand and engendering opportunities for social enterprise and innovation.



Caring

Developing new ways of working will establish a forum and network that has wellbeing of local people at its heart with activities centred on support and community development.



Connected

Developing new ways of working will provide a common ground that brings together individual groups and organisations with similar agenda ideas and solutions connecting the whole of Chard.



Destination

Developing new ways of working will make for a stronger community sense of belonging and commitment, stimulating renewed vibrancy and sense of place focused on the town centre as a stronger destination.



Sustainable

New ways of working will embrace sustainable development principles through more efficient use of resources, localised management of facilities and more local access to services.



Priority Theme: Economy

Chard needs to diversify the local economy and deliver economic opportunities for a constrained labour market, and fulfil its role as a place for enterprise, learning and prosperity.

Chard is largely dependent on a handful of large employers and needs to broaden the employment base and stimulate a greater variety of economic opportunity in the town. Whilst there is a proud manufacturing history, there is a need for greater diversity of jobs that the existing workforce can transfer to as well as appeal to those young people who are working towards vocational qualifications.

Ways of stimulating new sectors and clusters include partnerships with existing employers into growth areas such as innovation, research and development, establishing community and social enterprise models and development of short supply chains within Chard's rural hinterland.

Enterprising - The Outcome

Chard will be a place recognised for enterprise and innovation with a flexible workforce and diverse employment prospects, including a new culture of business start-up success.

Key Measures of Chard's Identity – The Output



New businesses established and growing in Chard which support a broader employment base.



Strong local business network established in Chard, supporting each other, and encouraging new business enterprise opportunities.



Greater variety of school leaver outcomes including new enterprise starts by young people and locally based vocational and adult learning opportunities.



New business space delivered providing range of accommodation from pop-up, test venue, flexible work space, start-up and established business space.



Photo: Microsoft

Key Actions & Activities – The Inputs

- Establish Chard local employment hub delivering locally based employment services and advice.
- Explore potential to extend the hub facility as central training and advice provision and further extend into Flexible Work Hub in central location.
- Deliver Chard Enterprise Centre with Somerset County Council at Beeching Close Industrial Estate for new and fledgling businesses.
- Encourage local business network to establish – across Chard and with a sub-group focused on the town centre which could, in time, evolve into a formal Business Improvement District operation.
- Nurture new enterprise and artisan culture under “Make it in Chard” branding working with schools and colleges and other community partners to highlight business start up as realistic option alongside employment for new entrants to labour market and those seeking work opportunities.



Contribution to the Chard Vision:

Priority Theme: Economy



Enterprising

Interventions in the economy will develop a more enterprising community culture, stimulate new business opportunities and open up new pathways for employment all helping to broaden the local economy.



Caring

Interventions in the economy will create local job opportunities leading to improved economic and social wellbeing and broader social outlook for residents supporting a more inclusive and caring community.



Connected

Interventions in the economy will support development of new, flexible business space which are connected to communities and benefit from enhanced digital infrastructure and stronger local supply chains.



Destination

Interventions in the economy will stimulate economic potential and business culture with the town centre, especially, being recognised as a place to live and work with wide range of stimulating activities fostering an enterprise culture.



Sustainable

Interventions in the economy will support opportunities for new employment in the green economy, create more flexible working spaces which make use of renewable energy and are better connected by means of sustainable travel options, including walking and cycling.

Priority Theme: Community, Health & Wellbeing

Chard needs to enhance its community potential, health, wellbeing, and local life chances. There are long standing challenges of low social mobility, low income, and poor health indicators within several areas of Chard according to the national index of multiple deprivation. Localised disenfranchisement, especially among young people, expose communities to increased risks of crime and antisocial behaviour. General health and wellbeing are also affected in areas of poverty with additional risks of obesity locally and isolation; especially among those living alone.



Photo: Sustrans

There are clear disparities within Chard and more generally in the long-term life outcomes for residents compared with the wider South Somerset and South West area. Parts of Chard are identified as being in the 20% most deprived locations across the whole of England with particular issues related to employment, education & skills, income, health & disability and crime challenges. Indeed, parts of the Holyrood Ward of Chard are highlighted as being in the 10% most deprived areas in England for education, skills and training.

National research demonstrates child poverty often leads to premature mortality and poor health outcomes as adults in later life. Actions which reduce the number of children experiencing poverty are shown to help improve the longer-term adult health outcomes in time.

Similarly, there are significant gaps around education achievement, progress and aspiration within the most deprived communities and the least engaged individuals in an area.

It is clear that while education and good quality jobs are crucial in 'getting ahead', many individuals are held back by a complex set of often inter-related factors such as low household income, housing issues, poor physical and mental health or disability along with poor transport and digital communications – all of which feature strongly in Chard.



Caring – The Outcome

Chard will be a place celebrated for its community spirit where people are encouraged to fulfil their potential and deliver solutions stimulating local connection, inter-generational support, and a renewed shared purpose and community wellbeing for all ages.

Key Measures – The Outputs



Increased economic activity rates across the whole community.



Improved social mobility, personal development and confidence, as well as a sense of achievement whether in terms of employment, earnings or community involvement.



Increased social engagement in community life leading to reduced social isolation, reduced anti-social behaviour and improved mental health.



More people adopting more active lifestyle choices, improving physical and mental health.

Key Actions & Activities – The Inputs

- Increase local access to adult learning and wider FE provision through digital learning and a hub-style facility.
- Explore emerging insights and good practice locally with Abri to extend similar provision and access to community support throughout Chard.
- Draw on wider social mobility initiatives with strategic partners to develop a Chard focused pilot programme with local residents.
- Introduce Chard Youth Achievement Awards to stimulate local role models and raise local aspiration and potential.
- Co-ordinate and promote access to sports and recreation provision across the town to meet current and future population growth.
- Enhance and promote active travel routes and corridors through delivery of Local Cycling & Walking Investment Plan (LWCIP) – see also Priority Theme 6.
- Encourage healthy eating through links to local agriculture and opportunities for community growing.
- Work in partnership with others to facilitate expansion of local GP and community health services and wellbeing in the town centre and work with partners to retain and enhance the quality and range of locally delivered community and urgent health services in Chard.



Case Study: Abri Community Investment Plan 2021

Abri is the main social housing provider in Chard, with over 1,100 properties. They are committed to investing in people and supporting local communities integral to their housing role. Targeted community support is provided across three strategic community priorities of:

Employment – helping to make their tenants ‘work-ready’ and raising ambition through training.

Health & Wellbeing – helping to tackle social isolation as well as drug and alcohol dependency.

Community Empowerment – working with community ambassadors to help engage with tenants, respond to their issues when raised and encourage community activity and integration.

Collaboration with Abri will encourage further community integration and access to support from their tenants whilst there are also strong lessons to be learned from the Abri approach that can benefit the wider Chard communities toward greater social cohesion.





Contribution to the Chard Vision:

Priority Theme: Community, Health & Wellbeing



Enterprising

Tackling community disadvantages will strengthen the local labour market, increasing business capacity, skills and enterprise culture.



Caring

Improvements in community, health and wellbeing will engender a broader social outlook, ambition and aspiration for residents supporting a more inclusive and caring community.



Connected

Interventions will support a more inclusive and supported community throughout Chard. All neighbourhoods will contribute to future success and be part of a better connected Chard physically and emotionally and with a stronger community voice.



Destination

A healthier and engaged community will stimulate local ownership, commitment and pride in the sense of place that is Chard which in turns captures wider interest and inspires others to invest.



Sustainable

Greater social inclusion and personal wellbeing is integral to the long term social sustainability of Chard.

Priority Theme: Town Centre Destination

Chard's town centre needs to continue to repurpose itself adding value to the physical regeneration investment and reinforcing the town centre as the hub for community life.

The town's identity has been a constant area of focus with a need to be more expressive and positive about the heritage of the town and project its sense of place and confidence going forward. Identity isn't about a logo and a strapline but about how the town's story is presented within its physical fabric and talked about on the streets of Chard.

The town centre can help support this narrative through good design principles that use local materials, colour palette, signage typeface and opportunities for local interpretation and use of artwork.

Initiatives such as the HSHAZ can begin to stimulate opportunities for others to animate empty or underused buildings by channelling local products, activities and enterprise that celebrates the best of Chard and its rural hinterland. This will help develop Chard town centre as a living and working neighbourhood that meets

a diversity of community needs. Through for example repurposing upper floors to provide more town centre activity and provision of co-working space for micro and SME business all of which lead to a town centre that has a strong sense of community and activity.

Markets and events such as the carnival are also important in terms of animating streets and spaces, contributing to the atmosphere and spirit of the place and user experience.

Delivery of the new Chard Leisure Centre is about placing key generators of activity

within the core town centre that have a mutual benefit for residents and local businesses and lead to a cycle of related growth and activity.

As part of ensuring the town centre has a community focus and residents can easily access local services and advice, the need for a central hub building has been identified through consultation. This needs to provide a flexible series of spaces that are adaptable, practical and accessible to all and can evolve with different functions through the day and on into early evening activities.





Destination - The Outcome

Chard town centre will be a place that draws people to its culture, creativity, and local amenities. An inspiration and enabler of community life.

Key Measures - The Outputs



More diverse uses and activities in the town centre – vacancy rate below the national average.



Increased footfall with visitors returning more often, spending more and staying longer.



Chard town centre will have a distinctive and diverse nighttime economy that celebrates local food and drink, arts and culture and has spaces for events and activities appealing to a wider range of community interests and ages.



Investment and activity in the town centre will create a visitor experience that is safe and leads to an engaging atmosphere.

Key Actions & Activities – The Inputs

- Maximise the benefit of a town centre located leisure centre with with strong linked or complementary activity, integrated business opportunities, clear physical linkages and joint marketing of town centre activities
- Test the potential for a community hub building including facilities for younger and older members of the community.
- Develop town centre business network as part of wider engagement with longer term potential to form a Chard Business Improvement District.
- Develop plans to animate and activate key places and spaces created from the Town Centre public realm improvements.
- Support interim, meanwhile uses for unoccupied properties.
- Provide retail mentoring scheme to support existing town centre businesses develop and refresh skills in merchandising etc, encouraging more proactive and responsive business environment.
- Develop markets and events programme which complements the “Make it in Chard” place branding.
- Develop broader nighttime economy through encouraging flexible and diverse uses of places and spaces for evening entertainment, wider cultural events and activity to stimulate evening footfall and attraction.
- Effectively manage and curate the visitor arrival and destination experience through reduced traffic congestion, gateway signage, clarity of parking locations and options and improved walking and cycling pathways and links to local amenities and spaces as part of the wider Chard experience.
- Address the redundant mill sites when external funding becomes available.

Contribution to the Chard Vision:

Priority Theme: Town Centre Destination



Enterprising

Interventions will create a stronger town centre environment which promotes new enterprise opportunities, encourages new business starts in the town centre and provides a conduit for rural goods and produce.



Caring

Interventions in the town centre will create a vibrant place that is inclusive and welcoming to all, providing community services that support the wellbeing of individuals and groups.



Connected

Interventions will create a town centre that is strongly connected to its neighbourhoods, is easily accessible to all both physically and digitally stimulating a strong sense of local belonging and identity.



Destination

Interventions in the town centre will create a stronger identity for the town, providing a breadth of activity appealing to all users and visitors.



Sustainable

Interventions in the town centre will create a place that has sustainability embedded into its core offer, experience and identity, promoting low carbon accessibility and embracing local services and supply chains.



Priority Theme: Housing & Connectivity

Chard needs to carefully manage its planned growth in an inclusive and sustainable manner, ensuring all areas are connected (physically and emotionally) creating a great place to live which respects its community and environmental assets.

New Homes Need to Belong to Chard

Further work is underway to review the issues and options for delivering the planned Eastern Relief Road, the outcome of which will need to be clearly communicated with residents. Furthermore, the Local Plan review provides the opportunity to refresh the overall housing delivery programme and re-engage the community. The wider implications for local traffic will also need to be addressed in a comprehensive manner through a joined-up review of local connectivity, walking and cycling routes and response to the issues highlighted within a sustainable transport and management plan for the whole of Chard which will also help tie the urban extensions into the wider social and community fabric of the area by reinforcing important connecting corridors and desire lines/routes.

As new housing is delivered every opportunity should be taken to raise awareness among new residents of the local community capacity and facilities across Chard. Delivery of new schools and enhanced provision of playing fields will have a vital role to play to integrate the urban extensions as belonging to Chard as a whole.

Chard Needs to Become a Series of Connected Neighbourhoods

The location of Chard in South Somerset presents strategic benefits as it looks to the rural countryside and out to the south Dorset coast. This also brings challenges, however, as traffic and transport are perceived by the local community to be key issues as the A30 and A358 traverse directly through to the town.

These trunk roads contribute to severance within places like Chard as neighbourhoods are contained and lack permeability, leading to an imbalance in the hierarchy between vehicles and people.

This severance does not lead to Chard being a cohesive place resulting in residents having no option but to use their car for mostly short trips to destinations such as the local schools, health centres and other local services. This in turn results in a traffic-dominated town centre.

There is, therefore, a need to adopt a “hub and spoke” approach to Chard that ensures accessibility within its neighbourhoods but also provides accessible and legible routes into the town centre that are as direct as possible, work with the local character to retain and improve local biodiversity and also promote walking and cycling for all ages through development of a Local Cycling & Walking Investment Plan (LCWIP).

Connected – The Outcome

Chard will fulfil its growth objectives, creating a sustainable, connected and joined up community benefitting the whole of Chard. Chard will also be easy to get to, easy to move around and to access the green community spaces and open countryside.

Key Measures - The Outputs



Delivery of planned new housing and infrastructure across Chard by the development industry, in line with the Local Plan, to include flood mitigation.



Provision of active travel routes and corridors and other local safety improvements.



Reduced town centre traffic and delivery of a range of alternative sustainable transport options for local travel.

Key Actions & Activities – The Inputs

- Re-engage the local community with the plans for housing growth and clarify delivery proposals, building community confidence through the Local Plan Review and preparation of the Infrastructure Delivery Plan.
- Continue to work proactively with the development industry to deliver the planned new housing growth and explore options for delivering the Chard Eastern Relief Road.
- Bring partners together to understand and address flooding issues.
- Develop an active travel network (LCWIP) with priority links and routes responsive to community demand and needs.
- Prioritise safer walking and cycling within the highway network into and through the town centre.
- Promote and enhance the Stop Line (Sustrans Route 33) as a key resident and visitor corridor with improved legibility through the town centre and opportunities for local business.
- Explore funding opportunities with partners to support development of green transport options for Chard. Eg, community based, “on-demand” bus service and promotion of low emission / cycle friendly regional bus services to attract visitors.
- Promote provision of electric vehicle charging points at strategic locations in the town.
- Explore potential for innovative solutions to retain local spending and connectivity through, for example electric-cargo bikes as part of a local shopping service, local e-commerce and carbon-neutral last-mile delivery service.



Contribution to the Chard Vision:

Priority Theme: Housing Connectivity



Enterprising

New housing growth is integral to furthering Chard's economic prosperity attracting new residents, new skills and enhancing the local labour market capacity. Connecting housing with sustainable transport options ensures all neighbourhoods are easily linked to local employment sites and the town centre.



Caring

Connecting local housing will create strong neighbourhoods as places to live that feel a part of Chard with infrastructure designed to support mobility and access to health and other community facilities.



Connected

Local housing will feel connected and part of Chard with strong linkages providing choice of active travel, green routes and spaces that connect and engage with community life opening up creative opportunities for all.



Destination

Connecting local housing and neighbourhoods will enhance the overall sense of place and identity that is Chard as place to live, work and celebrate success. Residents will look to Chard town centre as first choice destination for shopping, local services, arts, culture, work and evening entertainment.



Sustainable

Integrating green and low-carbon travel choices and options as part of the town's infrastructure will ensure Chard continues to develop in a sustainable manner contributing to local biodiversity, productive landscapes and the long-term health and wellbeing of both people and place.



Image: Element Urbanism



Image: AHR Architects

Action Plan & Delivery

The detailed actions and initiatives for realising the strategic ambitions for Chard are presented in the accompanying Technical Appendix and summarised in the tables overleaf.

The planned actions are intended to build on existing projects and commitments which will contribute to the future success of Chard.

Some of the proposed actions are already included in operational programmes and are budgeted for. Others will need to be developed further and delivered in partnership with other stakeholders.

Yet more will be subject to further collaborative work and feasibility testing and will inform future funding bids to government and other partners. Other project ideas will also emerge over time with decisions taken on how best to proceed based on the contribution to the overarching vision and strategic ambition for Chard's Future.

Chard Future Strategy 2021-2035 - Action Plan Framework		Programme			Vision & Outcomes				
		2021 - 23	2023 - 28	2028 - 35	Enterprising	Caring	Connected	Destination	Sustainable
Cross Cutting Theme: Identity									
I1	Develop community driven place brand "Make it in Chard" community driven place brand "Make it in Chard"								
I2	Develop signage strategy and brand markers to promote the Chard identity								
I3	Develop year-round events and festivals programme celebrating the Chard identity								
Cross Cutting Theme: New Way of Working									
WoW1	Develop virtual "Place Forum" connecting Chard partners and community organisations								
WoW2	Develop place-based leadership programme								
WoW3	Establish a Chard Youth Council or Young Citizen Forum								
WoW4	Establish Chard community organisation data-base and knowledge bank								
WoW5	Explore opportunities for joint service delivery								
Priority Theme: Economy									
E1	Maintain the Oscar Mayer task-force support for people back into employment								
E2a	Pilot the local "employment hub" as a central location for information and advice								
E2b	Develop broader range of local services as Employment & Training Hub - linked to TC2								
E3	Develop a Chard Business Network - linked to TC2								
E4	Develop "Make it in Chard" programme with schools and business - pathways to business								
E5	Consider intense enterprise facilitation programme throughout Chard								
E6	Develop rural business cluster with relationship to Chard - showcase "Make it in Chard"								
E7	Deliver Chard Enterprise Centre as part of the Somerset Enterprise Network								
E8	Deliver Flexible Work-Hub in town centre - multi-use facility (linked to E2b)								
E9	Explore the Young Somerset Project - stimulate youth enterprise activity								

Chard Future Strategy 2021-2035 - Action Plan Framework		Programme			Vision & Outcomes				
		2021 - 23	2023 - 28	2028 - 35	Enterprising	Caring	Connected	Destination	Sustainable
Priority Theme: Town Centre Destination									
TC6	Provide a retail mentoring scheme to support local traders	●	○	○	●	●	●	●	○
TC7	Develop markets and events programme on Made in Chard theme	●	●	○	●	○	●	●	●
TC8	Promote night-time economy - initially through pop-up events to build market confidence	●	●	○	●	●	○	●	●
TC9	Develop arrival management plan and circuit encouraging dwell time	●	●	○	●	●	●	●	○
TC10	Implement town parking proposals from the Transport & Movement Appraisal	●	●	○	●	○	●	●	●
TC11	Develop stronger town centre walking circuit - connecting key assets and destinations	●	○	○	●	●	●	●	●
TC12	Address the redundant mill sites when external funding becomes available	●	●	○	●	●	●	●	●
Priority Theme: Housing & Connectivity									
HC1	Produce Chard LCWIP and develop active travel network including initiatives to manage demand	●	●	●	○	○	●	●	●
HC2	Enhance walking and cycling safety along the A358	●	○	○	●	●	●	●	●
HC3	Develop cross-town linkages and key routes	●	●	○	●	●	●	●	●
HC4	Further develop Stop Line as primary route and destination facility	●	○	○	●	●	●	●	●
HC5	Develop green transport infrastructure including community bus and EV charging facilities	○	●	○	●	●	●	●	●
HC6	Promote e-cargo bike service for local delivery/last mile connections	●	○	○	●	●	●	●	●
HC7	Re-engage community with housing growth plans and delivery programme	●	○	○	○	●	●	●	●
HC8	Bring partners together to understand and address flooding issues.	●	●	●	○	●	●	○	●

Figures



Figure 1: Chard; a history of achievements

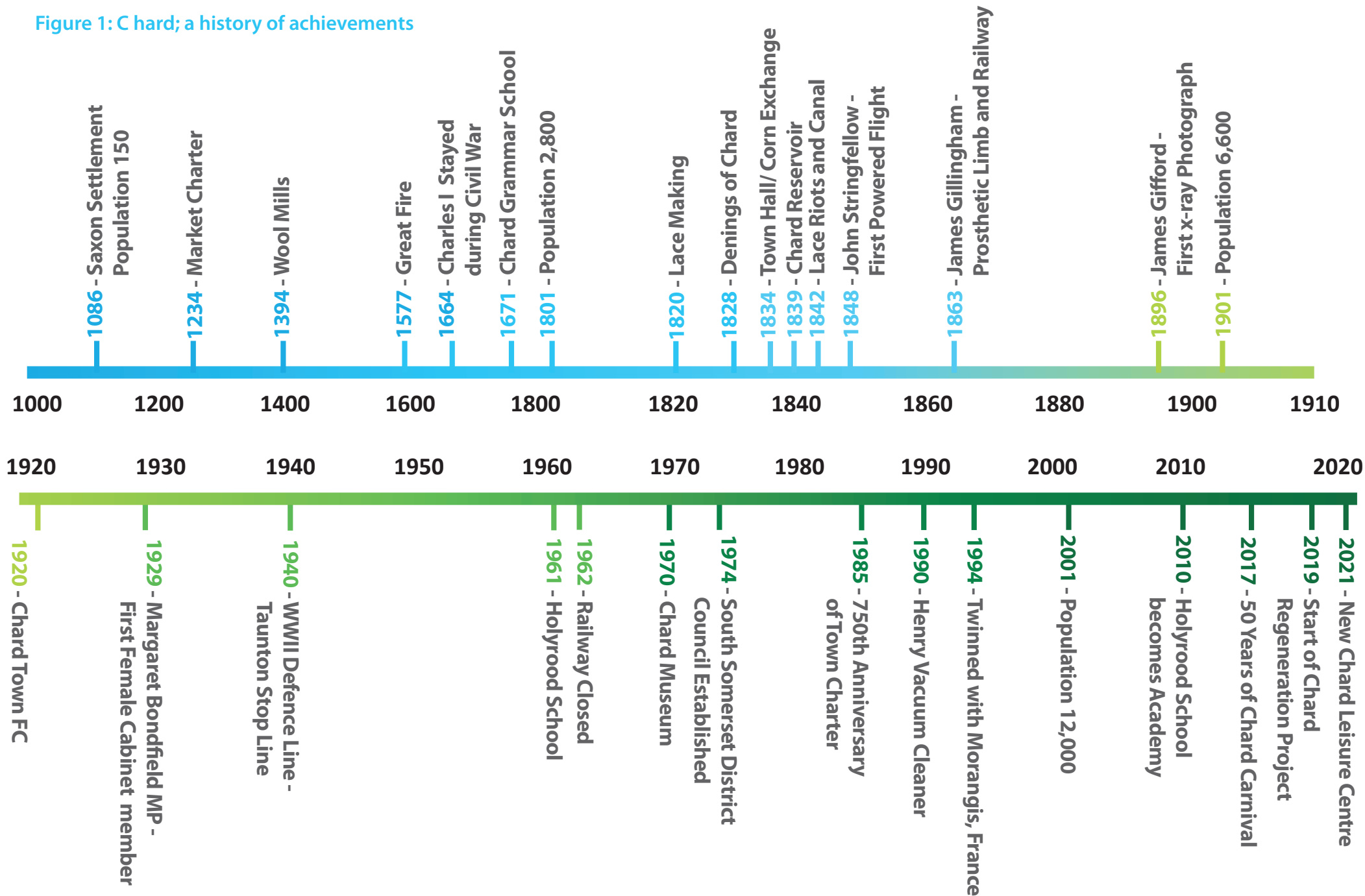


Figure 2: Chard Strategic Location

Source: based on Ordnance Survey data under SSDC Licence agreement



Figure 3: Chard Vision and Strategic Outcomes

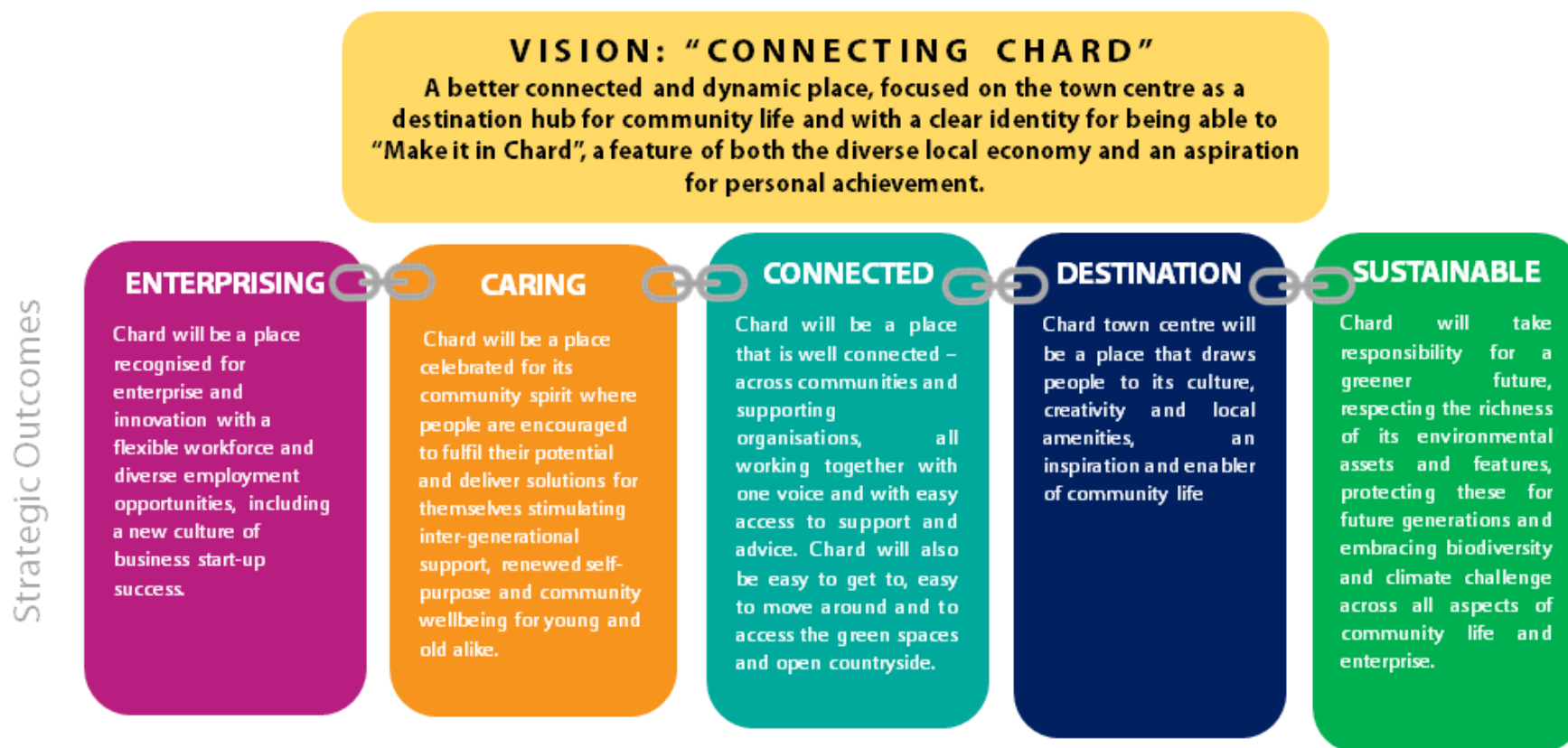
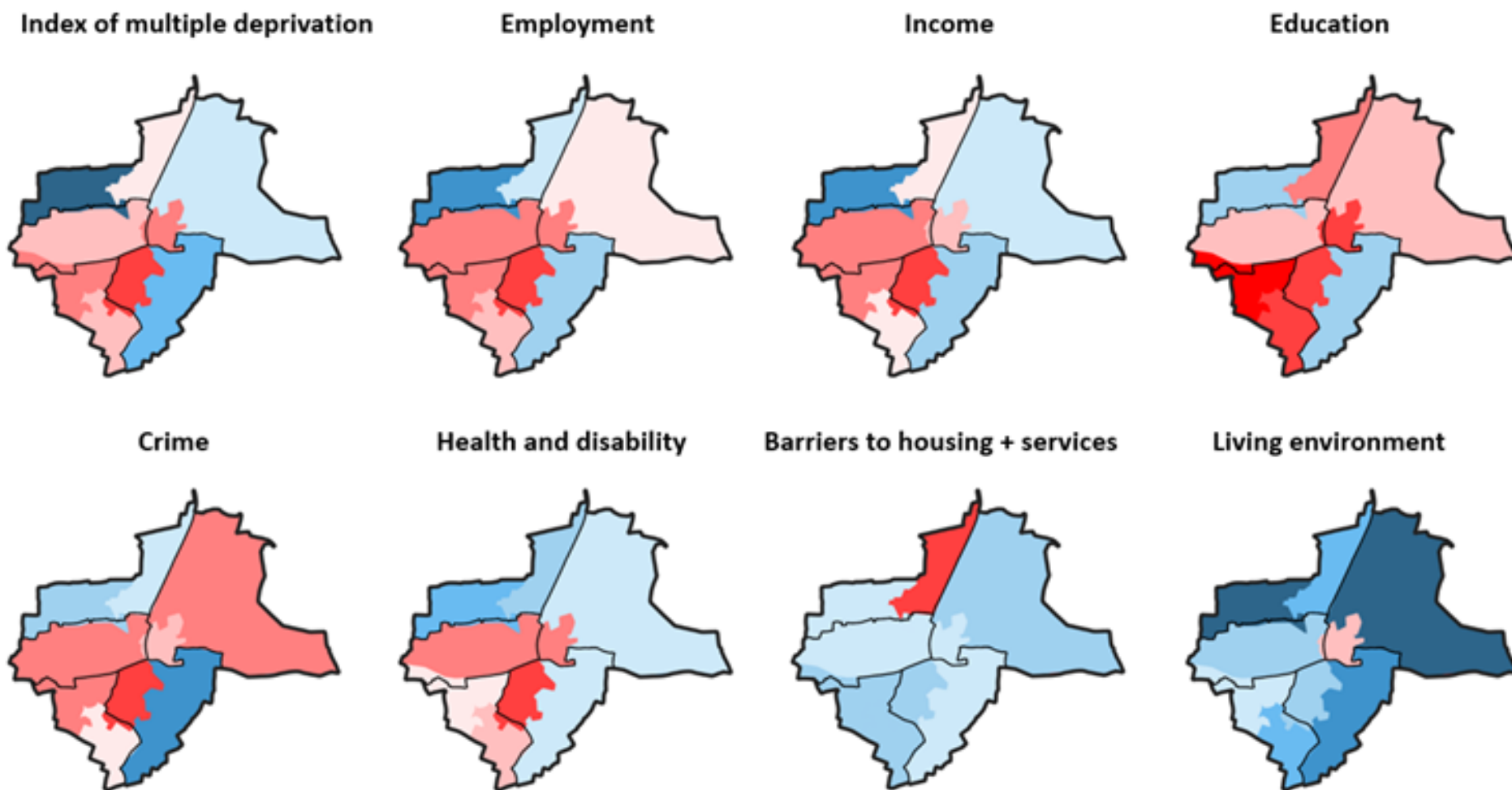


Figure 4: Chard: Indices of Deprivation 2019



Deprivation Decile (where 1 is most deprived 10% of LSDAs in England)



Source: MHCLG, English Indices of Deprivation, 2019.

Figure 5: Chard: Key Features & Assets

Source: based on Ordnance Survey data under SSDC Licence agreement

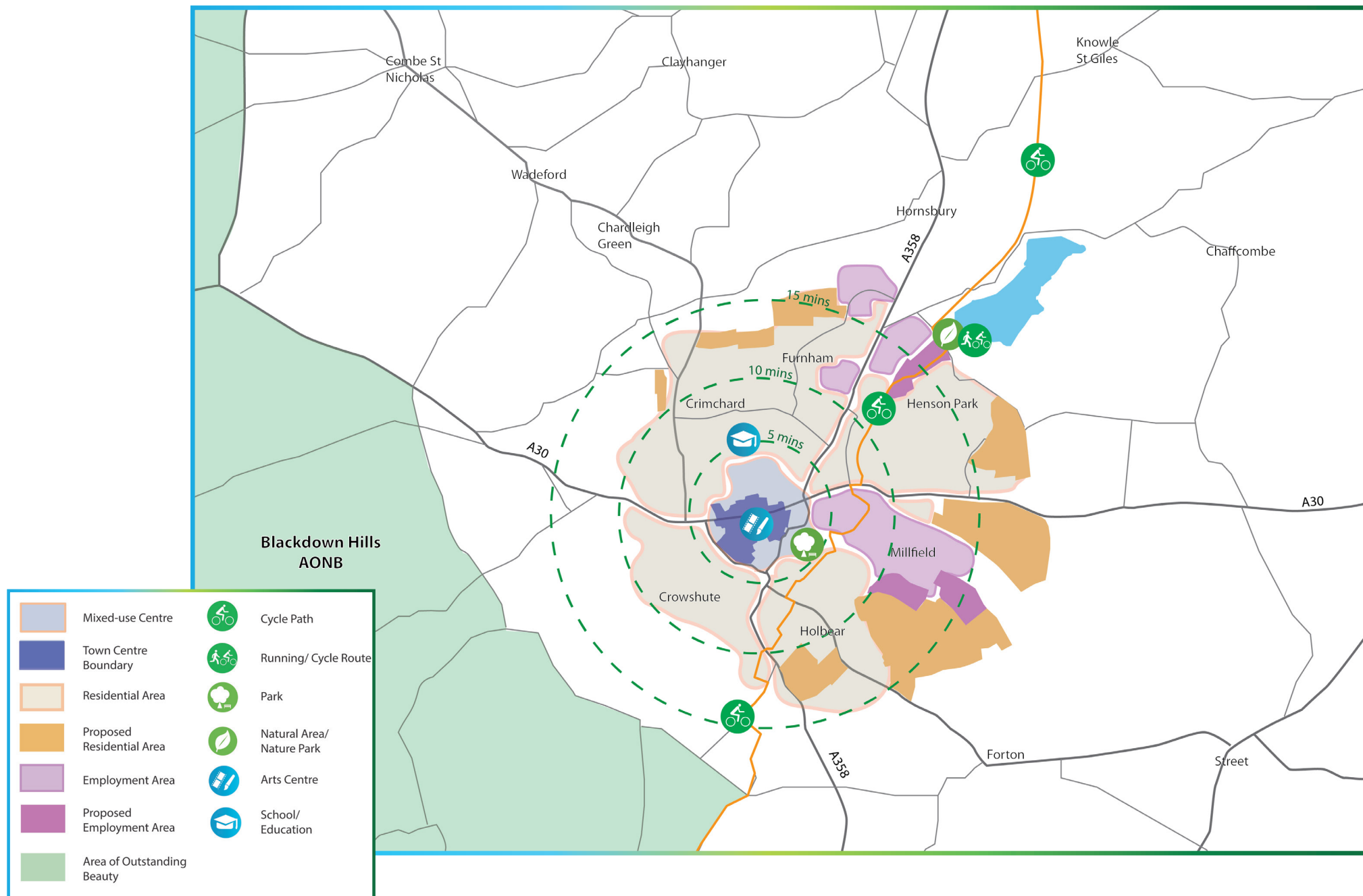


Figure 6: Priority Themes for Intervention

