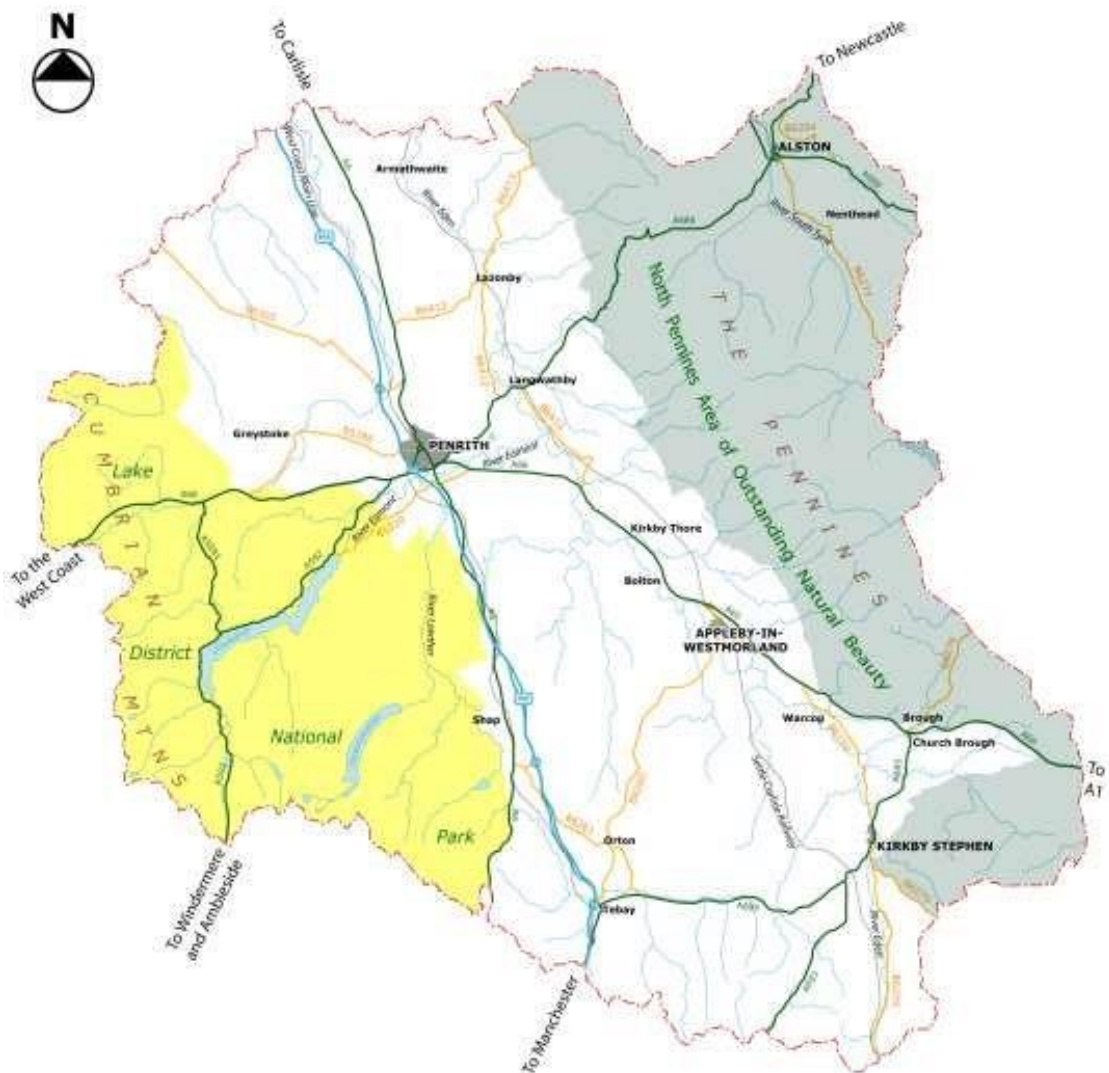


2. Penrith: An Historic Town

- 2.1 Penrith is strategically located in the north of England just off the M6 motorway (the main north-south route) at its junction with the A66 (the main east-west trunk road) and is also served by the West Coast Main Line railway. The town lies on the edge of the Eden Valley between the River Eamont and River Petteril, in an area of undulating countryside.
- 2.2 Penrith is the main town serving the Eden Valley and lies less than 3 miles outside the boundary of the Lake District National Park, so serving as a gateway to the Lakes and the North Pennines Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The town is about 20 miles south east of the city of Carlisle and 20 miles east of Keswick (**Figure 4**).

Figure 4. Strategic Context (Source: Eden Local Plan Submission Version, 2015)



- 2.3 Penrith's historic legacy has arisen from its crucial positioning on an axis of roads across Cumbria, from east to west, north to south. Strategically, over the centuries the settlement became a focus for invasion and, too often, destruction. Yet the Crown, Penrith's longstanding patron, favoured the town, with its rich nearby manors.
- 2.4 Prior to the Roman invasion of Cumbria in 79AD, what is now the town, was in an area controlled by Brythonic (British Welsh/Cumric speaking) tribes, with Pictland (part of modern Scotland) being north of the line between the Clyde and Forth rivers.
- 2.5 There is considerable archaeological evidence of the Roman occupation of this area (TC Bell (2012)). After 331 years of occupation, in around 410AD, the Roman legions were withdrawn and many British small sub-kingdoms established themselves, of which "Rheged" was to become the name for an area centred, at the time, on the Lyvennet Valley. Subsequently, the kingdom of Rheged can be identified as having moved to what is now Dumfries & Galloway.
- 2.6 In the mid sixth century Rheged was ruled by Urien and later his sons. The area around Penrith was eventually conquered by German Angles (Saxons) based in Northumbria in around 616AD and remained under their control for the next 424 years. During this period there was some settlement by Norwegian Viking allies, who had been expelled from Ireland, as well as hostile raids and invasion by Danish Vikings.
- 2.7 In 927AD, at Eamont Bridge just outside Penrith, a meeting of five major kings took place, one of whom was the "King of Strathclyde and Cumbria", with Strathclyde not being part of Scotland at the time. The "King of the Scots" was also present. This date is taken as the founding of the present "Kingdom of England" of which Penrith was then a part. 18 years later in 945AD the last "King of Cumbria" was defeated in battle at Dunmail Raise, near Grasmere, and Cumbria was granted to Malcolm I of Scotland for the next 147 years.
- 2.8 In 1092 the Normans travelled north and ended the Scottish occupation by capturing Carlisle. Cumbria was reincorporated into England, but the kingdom of Strathclyde was not.
- 2.9 In the 1100s Penrith was granted back to Scotland, and in 1133 St. Andrew's Church was established in Penrith. Evidence of the town's Scottish heritage is carried on the original 12th Century brass Town Seal which bears a saltire-like symbol and is housed in Penrith Museum.



- 2.10 In 1223, Penred (later Penrith) was acknowledged as a market centre, when Henry III granted the village a market charter giving it the right to hold a market, the source of Penrith's commercial prosperity over the subsequent centuries. By doing this, it allowed villagers the chance to purchase necessities as well as catching up with local news and other locals in the village of Penred.
- 2.11 Little documentary evidence exists for the occupation of Penrith before the 12th Century. However, St Andrew's Church stands within an oval enclosure that may indicate pre-Norman settlement. It is possible that Devonshire Street, De Whelpdale Lane and St Andrew's Place define the remaining extent of a pre-urban fortified enclosure.
- 2.12 In 1223 Henry III also instructed Brian de Insula to supply with timber those who had come to live in Penred, and who were willing to take up burgage plots (land rented from the King). The timber was for building burgages (houses) and shops and Burrowgate seems likely as the original site of the market.
- 2.13 At the time of the Conquest (1066), Penrith was in Scottish hands, but had been seized by the Normans in 1086. Penrith continued to be claimed by the Scots but in 1242 a compromise was brought about whereby Penrith was recognised as a Scottish possession, one which the Scottish King (Malcolm III) held as tenant-in-Chief of the English Crown. This situation was to last until 1295, when Edward I seized back Penrith and restored it to the jurisdiction of the English Crown. Edward's determination to impose English rule on Scotland was responsible for much hatred between the two Nations. It seems likely that the ferocity of subsequent Scottish raids on Penrith, which destroyed the town a number of times, notably in 1297 and 1345, during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, was motivated by the desire to avenge the atrocities of Edward.
- 2.14 In 1308 the tenants of Penrith petitioned the King, complaining that their lands, tenements and corn had been destroyed by the Scots. The present layout of the town may reflect those troubled times, with several open spaces into which cattle and goods could be brought for safety. This is why there are so many alleyways (ginnels) leading from the fronts to the rear of buildings. The conflict was not resolved until the Union of 1603.
- 2.15 By the mid fourteenth Century the town was in decline which may have been due to the attrition by the Scots. However, this was a period of recession in the country as a whole, not helped by outbreaks of plague (Black Death).



2.16 In the fourteenth Century William Strickland, later Bishop of Carlisle, diverted the River Petterill to bring a supply of water into the town by building the 'Thaka Beck' (now Thacka Beck), which runs through the centre of Penrith. Brook Street runs along the line of Thaka Beck. The beck was covered over in the late eighteenth or early nineteenth Century.

2.17 Penrith Castle was built at the end of the 14th century by Ralph Neville, who played a key role in the defence of the Scottish border. Ralph Neville (about 1364–1425) was granted the manor of Penrith in 1396 and built the castle soon afterwards. As warden of the West March, he was responsible for the defence of this area against the Scots. Contrary to what might be expected, the castle was not built at the highest point of the hill, which lies 170 metres away. Its location was chosen because it was probably the site of an old Roman fort, the banks and ditches of which could be conveniently re-used for their defensive function. The castle demonstrated Ralph's powerful position and his dominance over this area of Cumbria.



His son Richard, 16th Earl of Warwick and 6th Earl of Salisbury, made it his headquarters, probably building the 'Red Tower' and improving the entrance defences.

2.18 In 1379 and 1399 William Strickland was granted licences to build a fortified tower which may have referred to Hutton Hall, a 14th-century pele tower near St Andrew's church.

2.19 Following the death of Richard Neville ('the Kingmaker'), in 1471, the castle was granted to Richard, Duke of Gloucester who later became King Richard III. The future king resided at the castle for periods between 1471 and 1485, as he held the position of Sheriff of Cumberland. His role was to secure the county against the Scots and keep rival local families under control. Richard carried out alterations at the castle, transforming it into a suitable residence. Large windows, probably to light private apartments, were inserted in a raised external wall. A new gatehouse and a tower were also constructed at this time.

2.20 After Richard became king, the castle remained Crown property, but it was not used again as a permanent residence. Surveys from the mid-16th century describe the castle as having begun to fall into disrepair and it was being used as a source of building material. Therefore, the threat from Scotland must have abated by this time.

2.21 After brief use during the Civil War as the headquarters for the Parliamentarian general John Lambert, the castle was further dismantled (1648). Various farm buildings and a house were cleared from the site before Castle Park was laid out in 1920.

2.22 Dockray Hall dates from about 1470 but, today, is mainly late sixteenth century construction. This is the traditional home of the Duke of Gloucester, later Richard III.



2.23 The Two Lions building was originally constructed C15 as a middle-class merchant's dwelling that was transformed, by Gerard Lowther, into a nobleman's mansion. Gerard Lowther was married to Lucy Dudley, of Yanwath, second cousin to Queen Elizabeth I's favourite, and possible lover, Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester.

2.24 Penrith had become a thriving and prosperous settlement and by 1687 was one of the most important market centres in Cumberland, having the best markets for corn, salt, wool and meat as well as being good for cloth and hemp. The markets were made up of farmers, who transported their goods using horse and cart. During the markets the horses were put into stables behind the inns. At its peak Penrith had 57 public houses. These public houses were not only used for drinking, but also gave locals space to sell their goods on market days.

2.25 Prosperity in the late 17th Century was also accompanied by an important phase of rebuilding.

2.26 The town contains a number of important buildings from this period, such as St Andrew's Parish Church which was erected in 1720.



2.27 Throughout the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries Penrith underwent a period of constant rebuilding with the result that much of the built fabric of the town dates from this period. This rebuilding took place broadly within the existing medieval street pattern.

2.28 The coming of the railway also contributed to Penrith's prosperity, promoting tourism and assisting in the carriage of goods and the distribution of farm produce. The line from Lancaster to Carlisle opened in 1846, followed by the Eden Valley Railway in 1862 and the Cockermouth, Keswick and Penrith Railway in 1865.



2.29 A Westmorland-wide outbreak of cholera in 1848 drew attention to the town's insanitary state. Thacka Beck was still used as the main sewer and livestock were slaughtered in the middle of town which left the streets running with blood and offal. Consequently, in 1851, the Penrith Local Board of Health was formed and a scheme was adopted to form a new waterworks to abstract water directly from the River Eamont (1854).

2.30 The late nineteenth Century marked the start of an era of rapid development with the advent of Penrith Urban District Council in 1894. Local subscriptions financed the building of the Jubilee Cottage Hospital on Beacon Edge which was succeeded, in 1987, by the present Penrith Hospital. In addition, townsfolk raised money to build a drill hall and concert hall in Portland Place which served as Penrith's social and recreational centre for 70 years, latterly staging hugely popular Saturday night dances, as well as hunt balls, marathon jives and beauty contests until it was destroyed by fire in 1963. The site is occupied currently by Voreda House formerly a tax office and now home to Cumbria Partnership NHS Foundation Trust. In 1890, the golf club took over the race course site off Salkeld Road to the north of the town.

2.31 In 1905 to 1906 two eighteenth Century houses were converted to create Penrith Town Hall which, thanks to pressure from locals, retains much of its original facade. The Alhambra in Middlegate opened in 1910 as a roller-skating rink, theatre and public hall and later became the town's first cinema. In subsequent years the telephone was introduced and the Urban Council took measures to provide the town with electric lighting. The Council also brought in a new and pure water supply from Hayeswater, improved the sewers and provided a sewerage treatment works at Whinfell.

2.32 Against much local opposition the Urban Council created Castle Park, the recreation ground adjacent to Penrith Castle which was opened in 1923. Another large area for recreation was formed in 1928 when Kilgour's field was purchased to create a football pitch extended in the 1930s by the addition of the adjoining Foundry field to form the home of Penrith Football Club until 2002. Today the site, together with a former car park, is home to retail premises and residential accommodation known as Penrith New Squares (opened 2013).

- 2.33 The 1920s saw building of the first council houses, mainly on an area of land called Scumscaw, now the Wetheriggs Estate. Building continued after the Second World War with the construction (1949) of many more houses on Flatt field to the north of Folly Lane, now Scaws housing estate, and at Pategill. Residential development at Carleton commenced in the 1960s and continues today.
- 2.34 The Gilwilly Industrial Estate, located in the Castletown area, was developed in the 1940s and today houses more than 60 local, county and national firms and continues to expand. The 'Penrith bypass' section of the M6 Motorway was opened in 1968 which contributed to the growth of the Gilwilly Industrial Estate. Ghyll Mount Penrith 40 Business Park, was developed in the mid-1990s and has been home to the regional office of the Environment Agency since opening in 1999. Today, Ghyll Mount is home to the Environment Agency and some ten other businesses from professional services to dentistry.

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