

3 Key Issues for Penrith Today

This section sets out the key issues facing Penrith based on those raised during the stakeholder consultations, the questionnaire survey 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 previous consultations was the need to promote sustainable development. Development in Penrith that contributes to the following:

Sustainable Development in Penrith

- **Nature** - greenspaces, trees, hedgerows, wildlife
- **Heritage** - the town's history, character, views, landscape
- **Air quality and climate change** - traffic levels through the town and impact on air quality, use of fossil fuels, poor adoption of renewable energy
- **Water** - surface water collection, flooding
- **Housing** - affordable homes, community/social facilities
- **People** - families, young people and a growing older population
- **Wellbeing** - healthcare facilities, greenspaces, facilities for walking and cycling
- **Inclusiveness** - the disabled; ethnic minorities; growing population of older people; employment - better paid jobs, local/small businesses; skills and training
- **Infrastructure** - energy, waste, road networks, public transport, schools

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

3.2 Housing

- 3.2.1 Whilst we have this “golden thread” the main sustainable development issues facing the town area 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 constructed to the higher sustainably standards that can be achieved. For example, all large developments feature heating systems fuelled by gas rather than air source or ground source heat pumps or biomass-based community heating systems.
- 3.2.3 Similarly, at a smaller scale, few homes of the very highest sustainability standards, or ‘Eco’ homes, are built or planned. On a positive note, a recently approved development of 110 homes has provision for a small number, 9, passively ventilated properties.
- 3.2.4 Housing supply across Eden has been well below the 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. An estimated 1,554 new homes are to be built in the Town over the plan period (**Appendix I**).
- 3.2.5 Delivering an appropriate housing supply is fundamental to maintaining the workforce necessary to support the economy. The emerging Eden Local Plan indicates that new housing should be concentrated in Penrith with much of this is 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 II**).
- 3.2.6 Housing affordability is a major concern, with a high ratio between house prices and average income (almost 6:1 with the exception of Penrith West (4.8:1)) which presents difficulties, especially for younger people. As a consequence, housing affordability and supply is a significant constraint on the local economy (**Appendix III**).
- 3.2.7 An estimated 441 households (source: Eden District Council) are on the waiting list (March 2018) for social housing. In part this reflects the trend to relocate from surrounding villages to live nearer to Penrith’s employment opportunities. The majority of households in need are singles or couples without children, with demand mainly for houses followed by flats. There is an identified need for 1 and 2 bedroomed accommodation. Average rents represent as much as 23% of the net income of those at the lower end of the wage/salary scale (**Appendices II and III**).

3.2.8 As identified through early public consultation, there is a particular need to provide affordable housing for younger people to enable them to remain in the area. A need has also been identified for a housing offer for older people that is appropriate to their needs, e.g. one to two bedroomed bungalows and groundfloor flats (**Appendix II**). Currently a large number of older people are living in properties that, if vacated, could become available for young families.

3.2.9 Some recent housing developments in Penrith are not considered to reflect local character, (e.g. new house styles that are generic and can be found all over Cumbria and into Lancashire). It is important that the design of new housing does not harm the distinctive character of Penrith.



3.2.10 During consultations, members of the public have commented that developers are building houses too densely with the consequence that residents of affordable housing in particular, complain that gardens and greenspaces are inadequate for their wellbeing, particularly those with young families. Flats and apartments in the town centre do not have easy access to play areas.



3.2.11 Where garages are built, the majority on new developments are too narrow to take a modern car so adding to on-street parking and potentially creating a problem for the future.

3.2.12 As there are no specified standards for the number of parking spaces, those provided for individual properties on new developments are frequently the minimum (1.3) rather than the number needed relative to the number of car owners that may live in, for example, a 4-bedroom house.

3.3 Greenspaces

- 3.3.1 The town is expanding and as there are few previously developed land sites available centrally to meet economic and residential development needs, some greenspaces may be at risk of development unless protected (**Appendix IV**).
- 3.3.2 A key issue is to protect important greenspaces, play areas, and 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.



3.4 Culture and Leisure

- 3.4.1 Penrith Leisure Centre is an important asset in the town, but our early consultations show that there is a concern that the needs of young people are not being met, particularly during the evening. Respondents to the survey felt there was a need for indoor facilities, such as a bowling alley, a venue for live music and areas for young people to congregate such as a BMX track. (**Appendix V**). Beyond the Leisure centre existing facilities are limited. There is a small skate park between the Leisure Centre and Ullswater Community College.
- 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 by many, particularly young people.
- 3.4.3 Penrith also offers a number of public houses, a three screen cinema which also offers live screening of cultural events, an occasional small theatre (seating capacity 160), restaurants and fast food outlets.
- 3.4.4 Penrith Leisure Centre is also the largest multipurpose building that can host either a 570 seated or 1,000 standing audience for live music events, exhibitions or plays. 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.
- 3.4.5 The Rheged Discovery Centre at Redhills, 2 miles from Penrith town centre, is the main cultural attraction outside Penrith. The operators offer live screenings of cultural events staged in London and other major centres, art exhibitions and lectures. The theatre has tiered seating for 200 persons. 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.

- 3.4.6 Although Penrith is on a national cycle route, there are few designated cycle lanes in the town (**Map B**).
- 3.4.7 With the exception of the newly refurbished play area at Fairhill and a recently opened one at Carleton, many of the existing play facilities are in need of refurbishment.



- 3.4.8 There are no designated outdoor exercise areas such as a jogging track or outdoor gym.
- 3.4.9 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 Droving.



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 do not favour ease of access by communities located to the north of Penrith other than by private car or the town bus (**Appendix VII**).
- 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 catchment extends 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 0.8 miles	14652	1:1803	Yes, according to recruitment and retention of doctors
Lakes Medical Practice 0.8 miles	10020	1:1670	No
Glenridding Health Centre 13.3 miles	754	1:754	Yes
Temple Sowerby Medical Practice 7.7 miles	No information		
Kirkoswald Surgery 8.8 miles	2482	1.5: 2482	Yes
Court Thorn Surgery (High Heskett) 10.6 miles	No information		

3.5.3 Currently, there are 5 dental practices serving the population but at the time of writing (March 2018), none has capacity to offer care under the NHS or privately. (**Table 2**).

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

- 3.5.4 There is no specific 'drop-in centre' for socialising, counselling and community meetings.
- 3.5.5 On some of the more peripheral housing areas such as Pategill, Raiselands, Scaws and Wetheriggs there is a lack of, or relatively poor access to community facilities.

3.6 Education

- 3.6.1 There is insufficient capacity within existing primary schools to accommodate new pupils in any great numbers with the consequence that the scale of new development proposed is an issue.
- 3.6.2 The only primary school at the north end of Penrith is St Catherine's Roman Catholic School which, as a voluntary aided school, has specific entry requirements with admissions determined by the Governing Body. Where there are more applications for admission than the school has places, there is a strictly followed entry criteria detailed in the schools' admissions policy.
- 3.6.3 Of the two secondary schools in the town, Queen Elizabeth Grammar School (QEGS) is selective and is currently at capacity with 32 students per form with four-year groups per year up to year 11 (128 students per year). A large number of students attend the school from outside the district. In September 2018 the school is increasing to a 5-form entry with 30 pupils per form (150 students) although it will remain selective. Class sizes will be maintained at 30 or below. If the proposed levels continue through to year 11, the school will be at capacity. The school would need to invest to maintain expansion. The Sixth Form does have the capacity to increase from the current level of 240 to about 300 but again would require investment for new buildings.
- 3.6.4 The other secondary school in the town, Ullswater Community College (UCC), has a capacity of 1,540 pupils based on classroom provision. Current pupil numbers are 1,385. Future intake may be impacted by planned increased uptake by QEGS.
- 3.6.5 Newton Rigg College (Askham Bryan College) offers apprenticeships in agriculture (Levels 2 and 3), gamekeeping (Level 2), land based engineering (Levels 2 and 3), horticulture (Levels 2 and 3) and hairdressing (Levels 2 and 3) across the north of England. The college currently has 236 apprenticeships enrolled. In addition, an L4 higher apprenticeship in Agricultural Management has also commenced and will continue to develop over the next few years. For 2017/2018 the college is offering apprenticeships in animal care, equine management and will be expanding its offer into childcare. Further developments are also underway and the college will be responsive to local demand and seek to provide the apprenticeship offer required by local employers. The college also offer full-time courses in a wide range of subject areas across a variety of sectors, from agriculture and land management to outdoor activities and health & social care (**Table 3**).

Table 3. Student Numbers 2017-2018 (source Newton Rigg College)

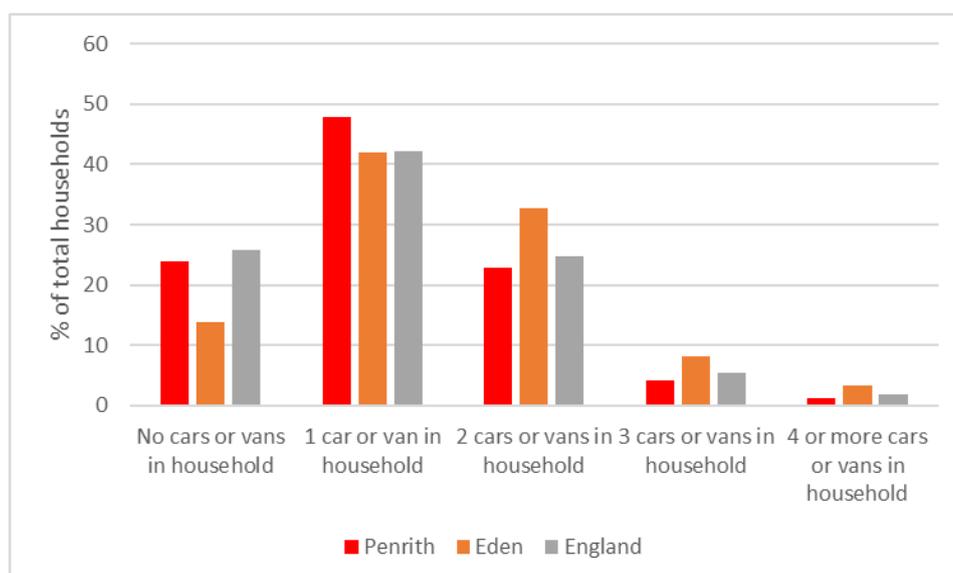
Course Type	Student numbers aged 14-15	Student numbers aged 16-18	Student numbers aged 19+	Totals
FE Full time	0	565 - 24% Eden, 45% Other Cumbria, 31% Outside Cumbria	70 - 21% Eden, 56% Other Cumbria, 20% Outside Cumbria	635
FE Part time	26 (100% Eden valley)	63 - 21% Eden, 22% Other Cumbria, 57% Outside Cumbria	114 -25% Eden, 49% Other Cumbria, 25% Outside Cumbria	203
Apprenticeships	0	209 - 22% Eden, 30% Other Cumbria, 46% Outside Cumbria	102 -14% Eden, 33% Other Cumbria, 53% Outside Cumbria	311
HE Part time	0	0	12 -100% Eden	12
Total	26	837	298	1161

3.6.6 Cumbria, like most rural counties, is under-provided with Higher Education: the University of Cumbria has 10,000 higher education students the majority of whom are Carlisle based.

3.7 Car Parking and Public Transport

3.7.1 Figures from the 2011 Census show that the average number of cars per household is 1.1 and that many residents do not have access to a car or van. Despite this, 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)



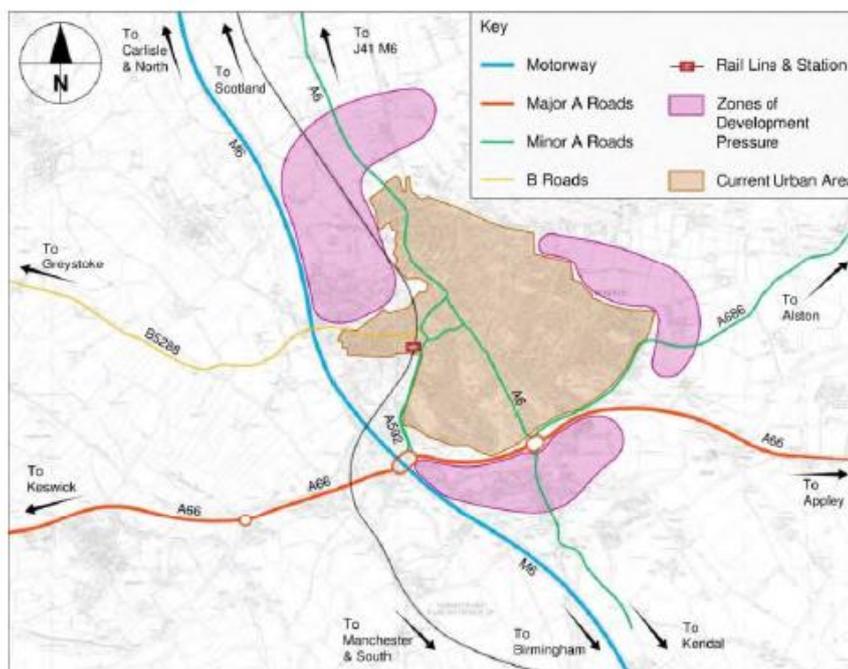
- 3.7.2 The development of areas that previously served as car parks (Southend Road - 440 spaces) alongside the infilling of individual spaces in the town and the building of more houses has resulted in increased demand for car parking but with fewer spaces to serve this demand. (**Appendix VI** and **Map C: Parking in Penrith**)
- 3.7.3 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.
- 3.7.4 There is some on-street parking which is free-of-charge and time limited and some short-stay free parking (1 to 3 hours) within supermarket car parks, however this is insufficient to allow time to be spent exploring the town/shopping and enjoying a meal or coffee. Long-stay car parking is available within pay and display car parks. Season ticket parking is very limited, has a long waiting list, and has to be paid fully in advance with no option to pay monthly, which, as many people employed in the town are in low paid jobs and/or on short term contracts buying a permit is not an option (**Appendix VI**).
- 3.7.5 Parking in the 'New Streets' has reduced the width of these roads to a single carriageway thus effectively rendering them 'one way' and impeding access by Emergency vehicles.
- 3.7.6 Some blocks of garages, on estates such as The Scaws, are too narrow to accommodate a modern car and, as a consequence, are used for additional storage rather than parking.
- 3.7.7 There is limited car parking in the town centre for the disabled, i.e. accessible to local shops and facilities.
- 3.7.8 Visitor numbers are compromised because of the lack of parking for tour buses, campervans and cars towing a caravan.
- 3.7.9 During the summer months, when visitors are at a maximum, they are discouraged from spending time in the town by the lack of low cost long-term car parking. Currently none of the town's car parks offer charging points for electric powered cars. The nearest charging points (2) are at the Rheged Discovery Centre.
- 3.7.10 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 but the town benefits from a regular bus service provided by a national company to/from Carlisle and to the west coast (**Appendix VIII**). The Fell Runner voluntary bus service which provides transport from local villages also comes into Penrith (**Appendix VII**)

3.7.11 The town of Penrith is served by a local bus company and runs Monday to Saturday 5-8 times per day with 15 stops throughout the town. The services commence at 9.30am and finish at 3.23 to 3.50pm. This is particularly an issue for those in the town who do not have access to a private car: in 2011 21.9% of households did not have a car (**Appendix VIII**).

3.8 Traffic Management

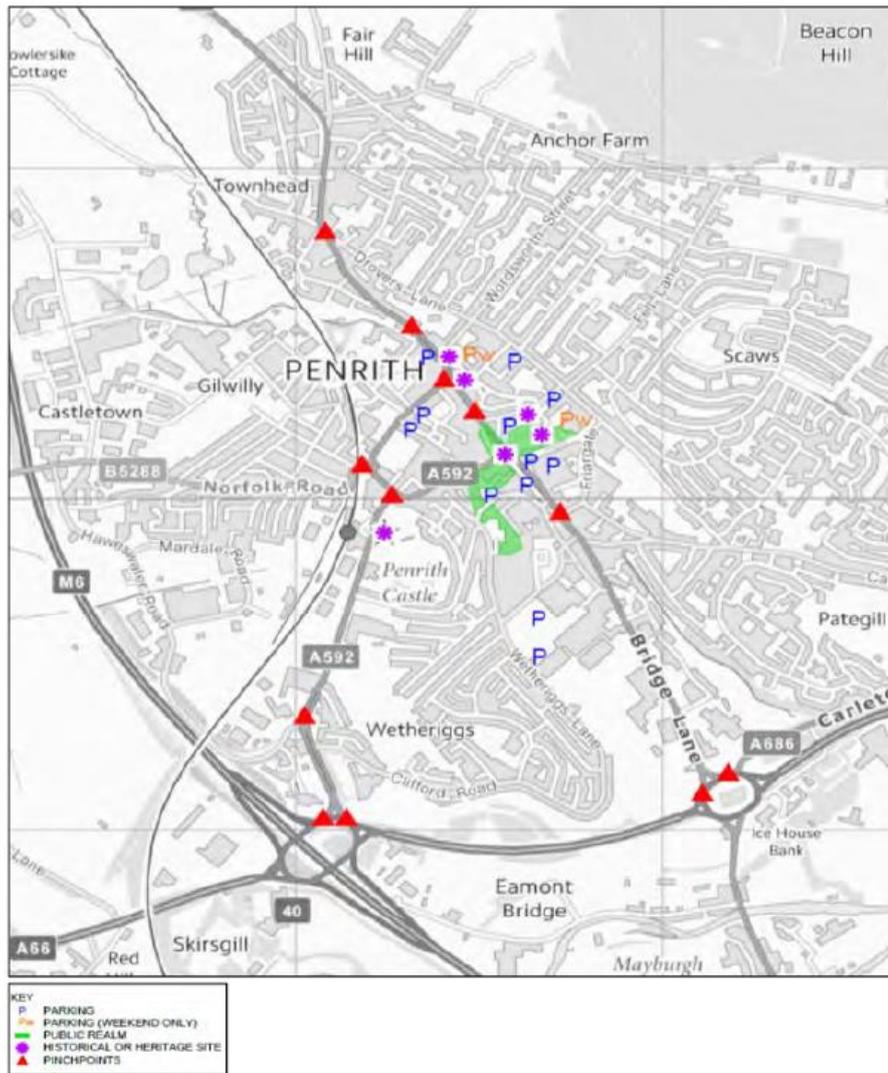
3.8.1 To reduce traffic congestion there is a need to divert through traffic, using the A66, A6, M6, away from the town centre. However, this needs to be achieved without discouraging visitors to the town e.g. by using appropriate signage and possibly a Park-and-Ride scheme (**Figure 6**).

Figure 6. Strategic Road Context (Source: Mott Macdonald, 2015)



3.8.2 Interruption to traffic flow on either the M6 or A66 results in traffic displacement and severe congestion on the approaches to Penrith and gridlock in the town itself (**Figure 7**). Therefore, 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: Mott MacDonald, 2015

- 3.8.3 There is a need for improved connections between Penrith and the surrounding villages and Junction 41 of the M6 motorway.
- 3.8.4 The single site access to Gilwilly Industrial Estate is a constraint to its expansion and, therefore, development of highway improvements on the corridor between Gilwilly Industrial Estate and the M6 are required.
- 3.8.5 Highways England will be dualling the A66 (2024 to 2032) and has mooted constructing a flyover at the junction of the A66 with the A6 (Kemplay Bank). Although the Town Council are fully in favour of the dualling it has objected to the suggestion of a flyover which was felt to be environmentally and economically disastrous for the town.

3.9 Penrith Town Centre

3.9.1 A major element of the character of the town is the red sandstone and stucco the predominant materials in which the town's older buildings were constructed. However, the town is at risk of losing some of this character as an increasing number of buildings are being constructed in other, often more incongruent materials.



3.9.2 Penrith is an historic town but many shop fronts are out-of-keeping with their setting which puts Penrith at risk of becoming 'just another town'.



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

3.9.4 During the day the town centre is congested with traffic which creates dirt, noise and air pollution. Much street furniture is in a poor state of repair and is no longer functional (e.g. damaged seating). Visitors unfamiliar with the town need signage to direct them to banks, retail outlets (by specialism) and places to eat/drink.

3.9.5 With online shopping continuing to grow, consumers are redefining what is regarded as a good shopping experience. This presents an opportunity for a mix of 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) that will attract visitors and locals alike.

3.9.6 The town has a good mix of local shops (**Appendix IX**), but public consultation has revealed that the absence of outlets selling, for example, clothing for women 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 (**Maps D,E,F Penrith Shops and Services; Retail Offer North/South**).

3.9.7 Empty shops (2.6%), particularly in New Squares, are considered to be a significant issue and detract from the attractive appearance and vitality of the town centre.

3.9.8 Sainsbury's have consolidated their retail operations at their New Squares site with the consequence that the large premises on Middlegate, previously occupied by Argos, has become vacant. B&M is also understood to be planning to consolidate its operations at the out of town Bridge Lane site which benefits from a large car park. The consequence of this could be that their large Middlegate premises will also fall vacant. The re-location of two large stores could have a serious impact on Middlegate.



3.9.9 On a positive note was the Post Office to relocate to a more central location, this could help generate footfall in the town centre (**Appendix X**).

3.9.10 Penrith Farmers' Market has shrunk from some dozen stallholders to five whereas the small village of Orton has a renowned and consequently thriving Farmers' Market.

3.9.11 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 (Nat West and HSBC).

3.9.12 The approaches to the town and the town centre in particular are considered by many to be unattractive, specific examples cited are the run down appearance of Castlegate and Sandgate; Bridge Lane immediately after the Kemplay Roundabout and the developments opposite Penrith Castle and next to the Rail Station both of which are listed.



3.10 Employment

- 3.10.1 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 skilled professionals.
- 3.10.2 Penrith is in the lowest quartile (nationally) for wages. The dominance of lower skilled jobs alongside a lack of higher paid opportunities, that attract and retain higher skilled, economically active residents, has resulted in an imbalance in the job market.
- 3.10.3 There is a need to raise the proportion of young people achieving higher level skills particularly as forecasts (Source: Action with Communities in Cumbria) suggest that the number of school leavers is expected to fall over the next decade.
- 3.10.4 Service businesses, in particular warehousing and distribution space, and skilled manufacturing supplying the nuclear industry should be encouraged while not overlooking the importance of tourism to the local economy.
- 3.10.5 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 those from the University of Cumbria and attracting back those young people who have grown up in the town but left to study in other towns and cities.
- 3.10.6 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.
- 3.10.7 The proposed opening of Carlisle Lake District Airport (approximately 25 miles from Penrith) presents opportunities for the future. Commercial passenger flights are due to commence in September 2018 to and from airports including Southend, Dublin and Belfast.

3.11 Tourism

3.11.1 The tourism sector can provide many jobs for local people if the skills are there. Newton Rigg College provides courses in tourism and the outdoors and Kendal College provides courses in catering.

3.11.2 There is little provision for the parking of tour buses or incentives for drivers (meal vouchers) with the consequence that many tour companies omit Penrith from their itinerary.

3.11.3 Penrith is an attractive market town that has an interesting place in history and a number of historic buildings that could be usefully employed in marketing Penrith as a visitor destination.

3.11.4 During the year, there are a number of 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)
- Penrith / Cumbria in Bloom (National BID Winner 2017) (Summer)
- Artists in Penrith (Summer)
- Winter Droving (October/November)
- Christmas Events (December)



3.11.5 The town does not offer any wet weather attractions other than shops, the small museum, the cinema and the Leisure Centre. Signage both to and within the town is inadequate and visitors need inexpensive long stay car parking.

3.11.6 The Tourist Information Centre is located on the edge of the shopping area and is open 7 days a week during the main season for visitors.