

1. Understanding

An aerial photograph of a town, showing a grid of streets, numerous buildings, and parking lots. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent blue filter. The text '1. Understanding' is written in a large, orange, sans-serif font at the top left.

It is important to understand the history of a town and how its urban form has changed over time. In this section we therefore start with the historical development of the town before describing the structure and form of the town today.

1854



1894



1948



Development

Huddersfield's history as a town dates back to 1559 when it was purchased from the Crown as a manor by William Ramsden. However it was in the Victorian era that the town grew and prospered on the back of the wool trade when much of the current town centre was laid out and developed.

The original town grew up around the parish church and the Beast Market at the junction of Northgate, Southgate and Westgate (as their names suggest). The town received its market charter in 1671. However it was not until the late 18th century that the town started to prosper as a woolen centre. This followed the completion of the Huddersfield Broad canal to Hull in 1774 and the Narrow canal to Ashton in 1794 and then to Liverpool in 1811. This gave the town access to international markets and allowed woolen business to grow. These

conditions led to the exponential growth of the town and its trade following the opening of the railway in 1846. For the second half of the 19th century Huddersfield prospered rivalling the great textile centres of Bradford and Manchester.

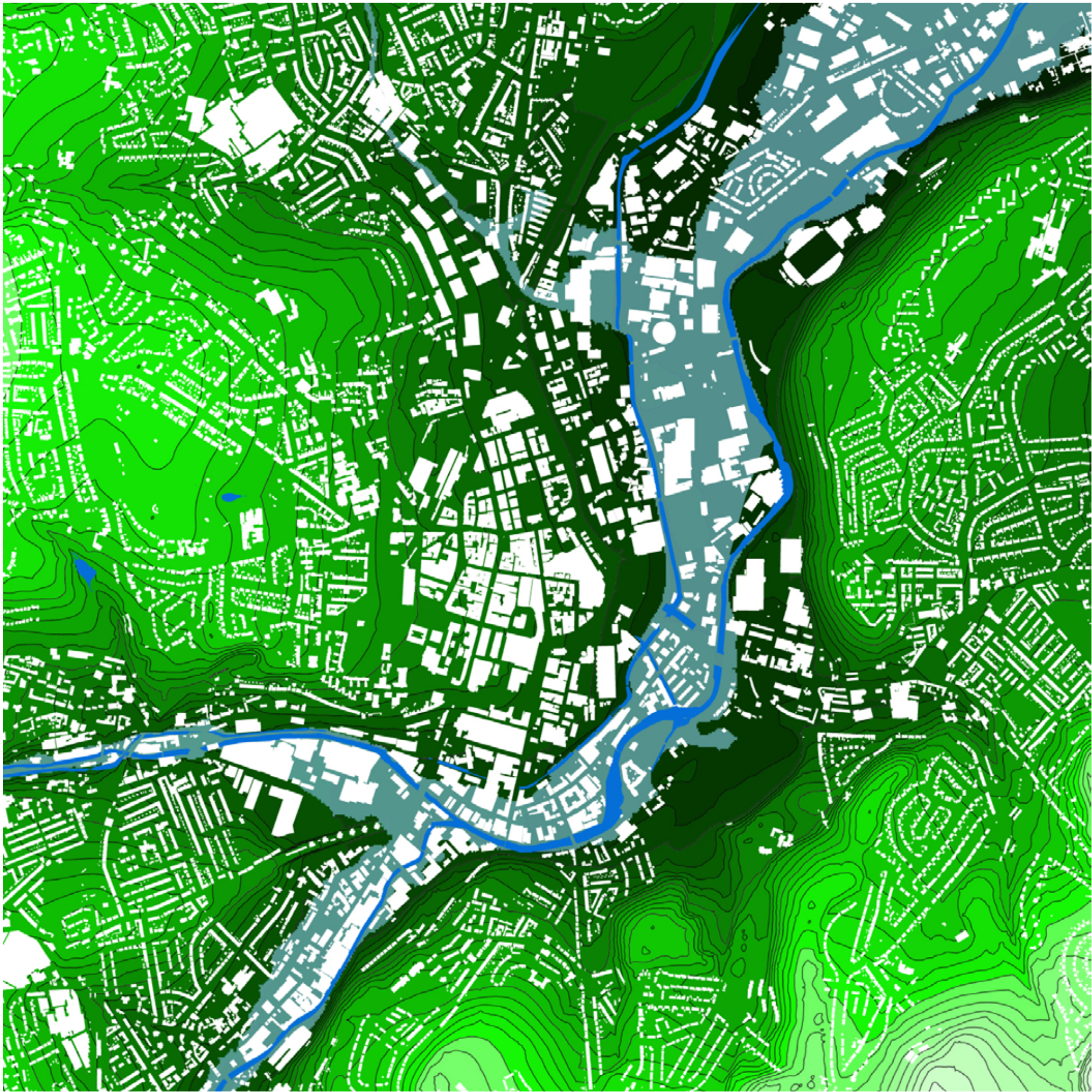
Much of the wealth created was channelled into buildings and a new town was created to the west of the original core. A grid of streets was laid out north of Westgate leading up to a new square in front of the railway station. A further grid of streets was laid out to the south west

which has been less well preserved. Civic institutions were developed on a grand scale including the Town Hall, a circular Piece Hall (long since demolished) and the Technical School to train mill managers (that was to become the University). Equal quantities of civic pride were poured into private buildings such as banks, merchant's offices and shops.

The council was incorporated in 1888 and the town continued to develop into the 20th century becoming the first municipality to own its own tramway system which operated until 1968. Throughout this period of growth much of the land in Huddersfield remained part of the Ramsden Estate. In 1920 the Council acquired this estate becoming the 'town that bought itself'. Because of this Kirklees Council still has very significant land holdings in the town.

Modern development has been less kind to the town. The Ring Road was completed in the 1970s before which all of the traffic between Leeds and Manchester passed along New Street. The ring road has subsequently become a focus for modern development, particularly on Northgate. The core of the town however escaped the worst of the 1960s and 70s redevelopments and retains its Victorian character.





Form

Huddersfield was built at the confluence of the rivers Colne and Holme. The town sits on a spur of land at the meeting of two deep valleys which are prone to flooding. Historically the town therefore developed to the west with industry on the valley floor.

The Holme Valley sweeps from north to south through the town with a broad flood plain and steep slopes to the east. It is joined from the south by the steep sided Colne Valley and itself becomes more deeply incised.

Huddersfield town centre sits on a spur of land to the west of the Holme valley. It was built just above the flood plain on land that slopes gradually from the west. The surrounding neighbourhoods of Springwood, Highfield, Thornton Lodge and Dalton Fold sit above the town centre - enjoying views across and along the valleys. These traditionally have been the most desirable parts of the town.

The flat valley bottom was developed for industry and this area remains within the flood zone shown in light blue on the plan. However very little of this lies within the highest risk flood area (Zone 3).

The figure ground plan shows the buildings of the town over the contour plan. This contrasts starkly with the plans on the previous page showing the extent to which the urban form of the town has been eroded since 1948. There remains a largely undamaged area of urban form in the heart of the town centre. This however has become an island of well defined streets surrounded by a sea of low density development and poorly defined space. Whereas on the historic plans the town centre merges seamlessly into the surrounding neighbourhoods and suburbs, it is now separated from them.

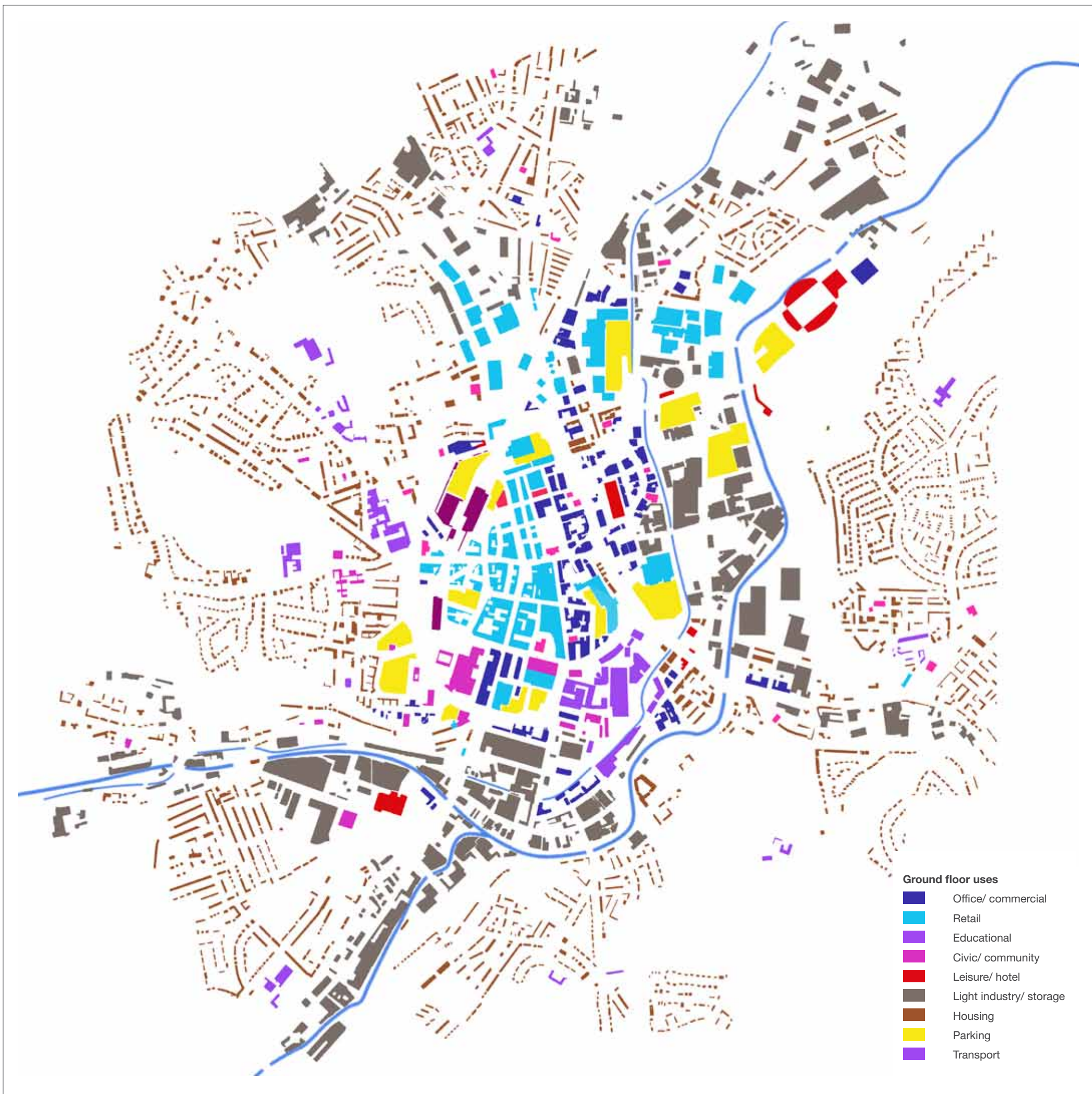
This is due to a number of factors; the damage done by the ring road, the decline of traditional industry, 'big-box' retailing, modernist development from the 1960s and 70s and surface parking. This has created what is known as a 'shatter zone' around the centre curving it off from its hinterland, giving

people a very poor impression of the town from the Ring Road and severing historic routes. The implications of this on the street network are explored in more detail in the following section.

The most coherent area of urban form is the New Town grid. The grid of streets remains visible on the plan. The buildings are largely built to the back of the pavement so that they clearly define the streets. The grain of development is generally fine grained (made up of a large number of small buildings). However the larger footprints of the Queensgate and Kingsgate shopping centres together with the Tesco store to the north disrupt this pattern. The urban structure of the suburbs of Springwood, and Highfield is also strong with the lower density structure of the Victorian suburbs still clearly visible on the plan.

Elsewhere the urban structure of the town is poorly defined. This includes the large floorplate retailers along Leeds and Bradford Road, the industrial uses in the valley bottom, the large blocks on Northgate and Southgate and the surface parking along Castlegate.





Activity & Legibility



Huddersfield is legible in terms of activity and land use when viewed from the centre. It has clear patterns of land use and character areas. However the dominance of surface parking and roads makes it more difficult to understand when arriving by road.

The clearest patterns of activity are residential, office/ commercial and retail. Residential use dominates those areas at the edge of the ring-road and the wider hinterland. Office/ commercial and retail are both quite tightly clustered within the ring-road. Retail dictates most activity on the westerly side of the town centre and commercial/ office the more easterly and northerly areas. Both these uses can be found scattered as smaller pockets of use along key roads such as the Beck Road retail estate.

clever vistas. Topography and church towers and other landmarks also aid this intuitive understanding. However, those arriving by road are offered a confusing and negative impression of what is in fact a beautiful and lively market and university town. Passing through, impressions are worse still - a series of heavily engineered roads, roundabouts and concrete canyons dominated by placeless buildings - providing little or no animation, and poor public realm at key gateways.

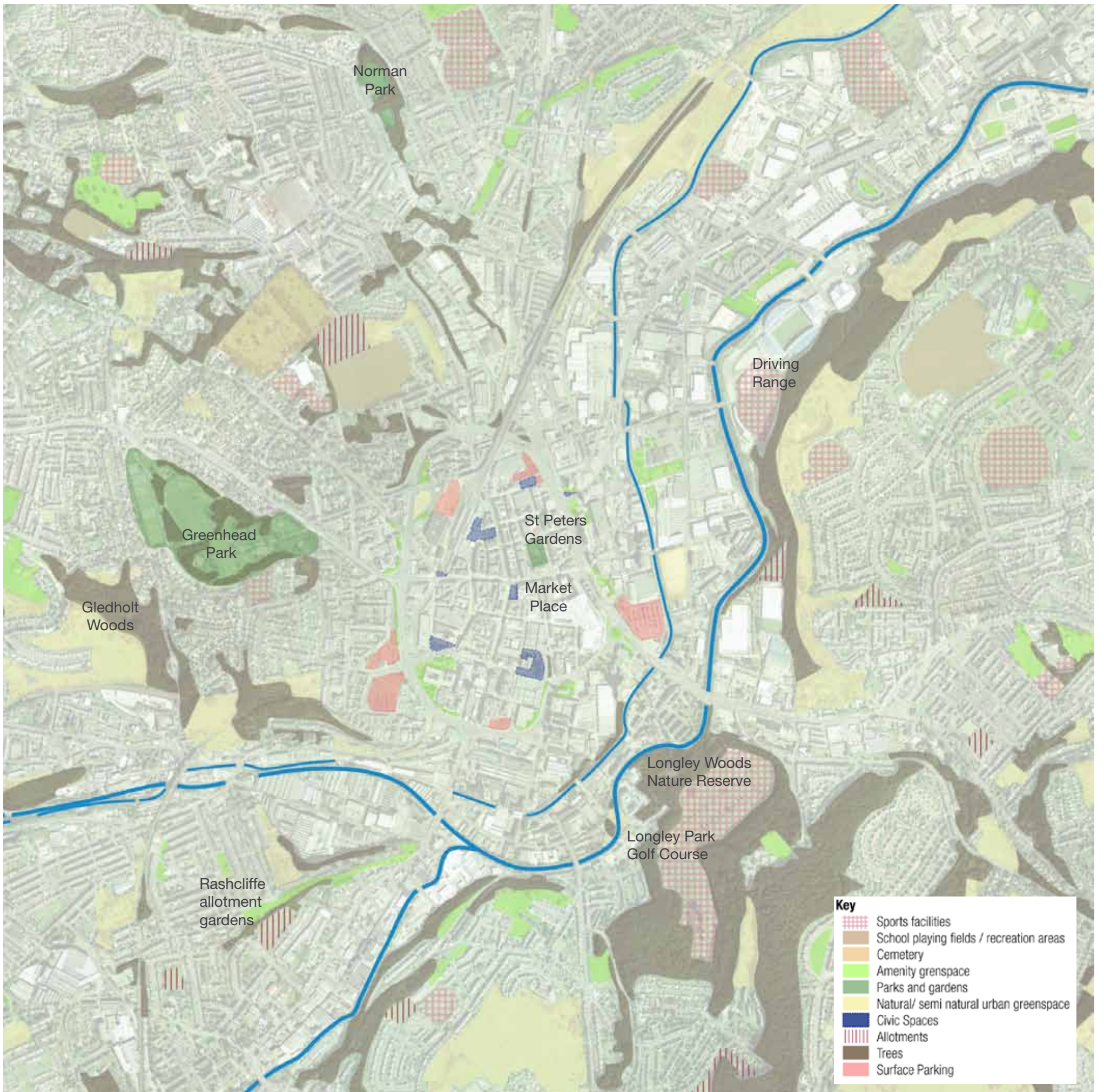
Light industry and storage uses tend to be huddled along or close to the rivers. With the exception of the University Campus most educational buildings are fairly scattered - as are civic and community. The majority of leisure/ hotel and transport buildings are - as expected - situated quite centrally.

Except in glimpses there is little sense from the through routes of the town's exceptional quality - little sense of the 19th century parks, villas and classical commercial architecture - the general positive activity taking place amongst the many attractions such as theatres, pubs and restaurants.

In terms of legibility of form, the historic areas of Huddersfield are, at times, beautifully legible, with a clear grid and



Excellent partial termination of vista with St Peters Church



Public Realm

Huddersfield has a rich patchwork of open spaces, including considerable volumes of woodland, natural and semi-natural areas which ‘finger’ their way into the edge of the centre.

Kirklees Council, as part of its LDF evidence base has completed a PPG17-compliant Open Space Study. The study provides an audit of quality and quantity of open space, sport and recreation facilities with key recommendations. Key outcomes included:

Parks and Gardens

- There are a number of catchment gaps in the provision of parks and gardens - particularly Huddersfield North;
- Over 50% of sites are of low quality.

Natural and Semi-natural Greenspace

- There is good coverage with few catchment gaps;
- Quality is fairly average with woodlands highlighted as the main sites that need improving.

Green Corridors

- Off-road bridleway routes are considered insufficient but the cycle network is good quality;
- Poor quality sites are common.

Amenity Greenspace

- There are some large gaps in provision but the settlement areas of Huddersfield are well serviced;
- In general amenity spaces are high quality;
- Demand has been expressed to improve functionality through installation of play areas and seating.

Provision for Children

- There are still catchment gaps in Huddersfield;
- Play areas away from busy areas attract anti-social behaviour;
- Significant variation in quality.

Allotments

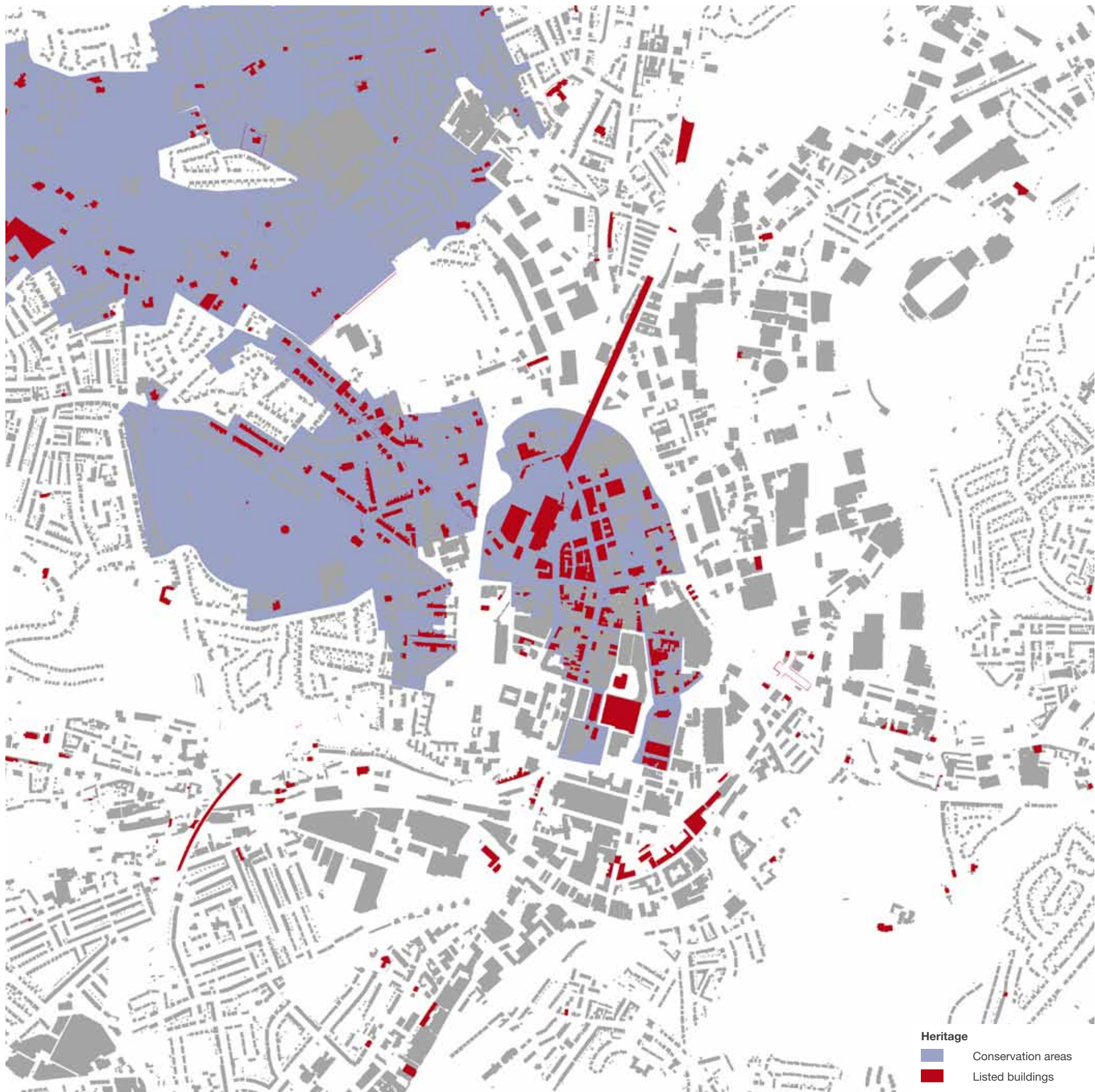
- Provision of allotments sites exceeds demand in Kirklees. However, this may be because of poor condition of vacant plots;
- Quality and maintenance is good.

Cemeteries and Civic Spaces

- Civic spaces need to host events better and provide public art;
- There are many left-over spaces created by the ring-road which add little or no functional value;
- Half of cemeteries are high quality.

Huddersfield hosts a substantial quantity of allotments, sports facilities/ recreation grounds. The town also has a golf course on its door step. These spaces, including Greenhead Park, all lack a unifying network or coherence between each other and the town centre. The canal, rivers and semi natural features present opportunities to link these assets.





Character

The Core of Huddersfield is one of the jewels of Yorkshire and one of the best examples of a Victorian mill town in terms of its layout and stock of buildings. While this is let down by the quality of buildings around the edge there are some examples of good modern buildings that are changing the image of the town.

The centre of Huddersfield is one of the best-preserved examples of a Victorian Mill town. The structure of the town's streets and public spaces remain largely intact and the quality of the stock of Victorian buildings is exceptional. The plan to the left shows the extent of the town covered by conservation areas and the 360 listed buildings that rival places like Bath. This experience of the town as one of the jewels of Yorkshire is best experienced when arriving by train (the only Grade 1 Listed station in Yorkshire) and walking into the centre.

This contrasts to the experience of arriving in the town by car. The quality of buildings on most of the approach

roads and much of the ring road is poor not just, as we have described, in their urban form but also their appearance and architectural quality. As a result, people who don't know Huddersfield get a very misleading impression of the town as being dominated by large concrete towers and low steel frame sheds.

There are exceptions to this including some very good modern buildings such as the facade of the market building, the Media Centre, the new University Creative Arts Building. These illustrate how modern development can address the Ring Road and create a much stronger image for the town.





Ground floor uses

- Remaining Victorian streets
- Streets that have been lost/severed

Street Grid

Huddersfield's traditional street network is made up of a grid of streets, inherited from the Victorian townscape, that continue to allow people to move around the centre with ease. There are three important beneficial aspects to this street pattern: legibility, permeability and street hierarchy.

The street grid is what gives a town its shape and structure as well as being the arteries allowing people to move around. The two plans below contrast the street grid of Huddersfield as it was at the start of the 20th century with the position at the end of the century. During this time the street grid was damaged – indeed all of the dark blue routes on the plan to the left were broken during this period. This impacts on the appearance of the town as we have described, as well how people find their way around (legibility) the ease of moving around (permeability) and the

relative importance of different streets (hierarchy).

Legibility: The street grid on the historic plan below was easy to navigate. Pedestrians and vehicles shared the same streets and even a stranger could intuitively understand the town. Today the separation of vehicles and pedestrians and the intrusion of the ring road have made the centre much more confusing especially for the pedestrian. There is a need to reintroduce a clarity to pedestrian circulation.

Permeability: The ability to move round easily by a variety of routes is called permeability. This relates to the size of the blocks within the town and the number of public routes. The permeability of the centre has been much reduced due to the shopping centres, the difficulty of crossing the ring road and the lack of routes through the university. This has the effect of creating pedestrian dead areas where there is little activity which therefore feel unsafe and are unable to support shops.

Street Hierarchy: The traditional structure of the town consisted of high streets where the most important buildings were to be found (and which once carried the through traffic), secondary streets and minor streets. The ring road has taken through traffic off high streets such as New Street (which was once the A62) and formed a new level to the hierarchy – the boulevard. The street hierarchy in Huddersfield is largely intact and should be reinforced through this strategy.





Streets and traffic

- █ Main traffic routes (with number of vehicles per day)
- █ Pedestrian areas
- █ Secondary traffic routes
- █ Minor streets

Traffic

The Ring Road performs an important role in taking traffic out of the centre and allowing it to flow more easily. However traffic levels are not as great as in similar towns, partly because of the effect of the M62.

The movement of traffic in and around Huddersfield town centre has been shaped over the last 40 years by three significant interventions:

- 1) The ring road was built in the 1970's diverting traffic around the city centre but cutting the central area off from its surrounding settlements and severing parts of the traditional road hierarchy;
- 2) Areas of the town centre adjacent to the main shopping district have been pedestrianised to create safe pedestrian facilities, thus reducing vehicle permeability around the centre;
- 3) Traffic measures have been introduced to limit access at the interface between the ring road and the traditional street grid

of the town centre to allow better traffic conditions and reduce congestion on the ring road. Many secondary and minor routes have been severed by the ring road where access has been restricted.

These changes have influenced the road hierarchy and traffic flows around Huddersfield. The plan on the facing page shows the road hierarchy today and the volumes of traffic on the busiest routes. Traffic is currently diverted around the ring road and away from the town centre but even without their traffic the high streets, secondary streets and local streets of the town centre retain their distinctive historic character which relates to the width of the street, the scale of the buildings, the mix of uses and degree of enclosure.

Weekday traffic level averages peak at 43,500 on the ring road but much of the ring road accommodates nearer 35,000 vehicles a day. Daily weekday traffic flows on the primary highway network show that traffic levels around the town are not as high as many other comparable towns, partly because much of the through traffic now uses the M62. However the physical severance formed by the ring road is significant. The introduction of the ring road to the highway network has allowed Huddersfield's traffic to flow more easily around the town, which is important for the success of the city – but the areas around the town centre, especially close to the ring road, have become more difficult to navigate by other means and connectivity between the town centre and its surrounding areas is poor.



