

North Tyneside Council

**Retail Centres
Regeneration Study**

Forest Hall and Whitley
Lodge Position
Statement

Final

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Regeneration Study**

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Lodge Position
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1 Introduction

Arup in association with Matrix, DTZ, and GENECON were commissioned by North Tyneside Council to undertake the North Tyneside Retail Centres Regeneration Study in March 2009.

The commission involved the delivery of Regeneration Strategies for North Shields and Whitley Bay Town Centres. Both Regeneration Strategies have been informed by a higher level of analysis of the retail issues facing the borough as presented in the final reports.

At the start of the commission we were asked to produce a Position Statement for the neighbourhood centres of Whitley Lodge and Forest Hall. This document sets out:

- A review of the key issues facing each centre informed by detailed analysis;
- A retail centre health check for both centres;
- Recommendations on the future regeneration of both neighbourhood centres; and
- Place Quality Analysis (Appendix 1).

2 Whitley Lodge

2.1 Context and Analysis

This section will outline the context and analysis of Whitley Lodge. Further information can be found in Appendix 1: Place Quality Analysis.

2.1.1 Spatial Arrangement

Whitley Lodge is a compact, focused centre with single access in and out (one-way). The shops focus inwardly away from the adjacent streets and onto a car dominated forecourt. The development 'turns its back' on surrounding residential areas and is poorly integrated.

2.1.2 Public Realm Quality

Generally, the public realm in the centre is poor with tarmac the main material used. The public realm is also dominated by traffic movement and parking which is unattractive for shoppers. The landscaping of the centre is weak, with little planting and under-used open spaces. The use of the rear of retail units for delivery and rubbish collection conflicts with residential amenity space and access.

2.1.3 Local Character

The architecture of the area is reminiscent of the New Town character, whilst the overall quality of buildings is low.

2.1.4 Movement and Access

Access to the neighbourhood centre is currently a peculiar one-way arrangement that requires principal access via the 'back door'. There is potential to reconsider this arrangement. The traffic/parking dominated forecourt reduces the quality of experience for pedestrians/cyclists. There are also weak links into adjacent residential areas which reduces the accessibility into the centre and the safety of access at night.

2.2 Retail Centre Health Check

This section provides an analysis of the health of Whitley Lodge neighbourhood centre. It surveys the diversity of uses, out of centre floor space, potential capacity for expansion, retailer representation, vacant street level property, pedestrian flow, accessibility, customer views and behaviour, perception of safety and crime and the environmental quality of the centre.

Figure 1 Whitley Lodge neighbourhood centre**2.2.1 Diversity of Uses**

There is a wide diversity of uses within the neighbourhood centre, including a range of convenience, service and financial/professional units. Uses include a restaurant, takeaways, convenience supermarkets convenience store, hairdressers, tearooms, physiotherapist, gym, clothing repairs, betting shop, soft play, blind shop.

2.2.2 Potential Capacity for Expansion

The centre has limited potential for expansion due to the compact character of the centre. It is also bounded by residential properties which prevents the expansion of the centre.

2.2.3 Retailer Representation

Whitley Lodge has a reasonable amount of national representation for a neighbourhood centre, with quality chains such as Tesco Express and Boots located in the centre. The rest of the offer is primarily independent provision of average quality

2.2.4 Vacant Street Level Property

There are two vacant shops within Whitley Lodge. Both shops are small in scale and in prime location next to Tesco Express.

2.2.5 Pedestrian Flows

Pedestrian flow in the centre was quiet, with only a small amount of individuals arriving at the centre by foot. The majority of visitors arrived by car, spending 10- 20 minutes in the centre.

2.2.6 Accessibility

The centre is accessible by car, with a number of car parking spaces available for shoppers. However, the number of spaces fails to meet the demand of car borne shoppers, with the car park being full for most of the day. The centre is not visible from the road, and lacks signage. The centre is also accessible by foot and car to Whitley Bay town centre which has a wider variety of larger shops and services, which attracts many local individuals.

2.2.7 Customer Views and Behaviour

Overall, customers feel the centre has a decent range and amount of shops for their everyday needs, providing a range of convenience, service, and professional/financial services. However, shoppers feel the convenience goods (particularly Tesco) in the centre are expensive and prefer to shop elsewhere. The centre is also in of Whitley Bay Town Centre/ Park View which has a wider variety of shops and services, which attracts many individuals to the town centre rather than to Whitley Lodge.

2.2.8 Perception of Safety and Crime

Whitley Lodge is a car dominated neighbourhood centre. There is potential to improve the layout of the centre by reconsidering the one way arrangement which is confusing for shoppers. Perceived crime levels were relatively low, but may be more of an issue on an evening due to the lack of evening activity such as pubs and restaurants and the inward looking character of the centre, which is not visible from the road.

The layout of the car parking could present some potential issues for the safety of pedestrians and other car users who are difficult to see by reversing cars.

Figure 2 Car parking in Whitley Lodge



2.2.9 Environmental Quality

The overall environmental quality of the centre is poor. The centre has little greenery and landscaping and is dominated by unsympathetic and unpleasant concrete. The shop frontages are and upper buildings are also poor

Figure 3 Character of Whitley Lodge



2.3 The Opportunity

2.3.1 Spatial Arrangement

Change should be focused on gateways, public realm and select buildings to improve the appeal of the centre to shoppers.

2.3.2 Public Realm Quality

The centre would benefit from extensive public realm treatment and select building interventions to improve the environmental quality of the centre for shoppers.

2.3.3 Local Character

There is a need to better integrate built forms (scale, massing etc.) and open spaces which are somewhat isolated.

2.3.4 Movement and Access

There is potential to reconfigure access into the centre to enhance attractiveness and create a gateway. Links to the adjacent residential areas could also be improved to increase accessibility and improve safety for the local community.

3 Forest Hall

3.1 Context and Analysis

This section will outline the context and analysis of Forest Hall. Further information can be found in Appendix 1: Place Quality Analysis.

3.1.1 Spatial Arrangement

The arrangement of the neighbourhood centre is a long linear 'high street' with shops either side. The gateways to the centre are weak, including a poor southeast corner. A level change to the south 'conceals' the centre, making it difficult to see for visitors. The setback of shops on the southern side of the centre weakens the high street character. The centre would benefit from landmark feature to make the centre more attractive and more visible for shoppers.

3.1.2 Public Realm

The public realm in Forest Hall is generally dominated by traffic movement and parking. The centre also suffers from weak landscaping/planting with bland surface treatment. The southern edge of the forecourt is of poor quality and is dominated by the presence of recycle bins. Comprehensive streetscape enhancements would increase the attractiveness of the centre for shoppers.

3.1.3 Local Character

The character of the centre varies between the northern and southern built edges. The north of the centre is more consistent in a traditional high street style, whilst the southern is unappealing though greater scale provides sense of enclosure to the centre. The varied shop front and signage approach in the centre is somewhat chaotic and disorganised.

3.1.4 Movement and Access

The centre has a good through movement and high local footfall. The proximity to an 'A' class road is strength for the centre. However, the pedestrian environment is generally poor and north-south crossing is not encouraged. Links into adjacent residential areas are poor, and there is also scope to improve the parking arrangement in the centre.

3.1.5 Retail Environment

The centre has a range of small, independent traders appropriate for a local convenience centre. There are no less than four estate agents which is a positive aspect for the centre. However, the Sainsbury's Local is likely to impact on the viability of the adjacent shops, with one unit currently vacant in the centre. The presence of hot food outlets is reducing the vitality of the centre during the day with their shutters pulled down.

3.2 Retail Centre Health Check

This section provides an analysis of the health of Forest Hall neighbourhood centre. It surveys the diversity of uses, out of centre floor space, potential capacity for expansion, retailer representation, vacant street level property, pedestrian flow, accessibility, customer views and behaviour, perception of safety and crime and the environmental quality of the centre. The key findings are presented below:

3.2.1 Diversity of Uses

There is a wide diversity of uses within the neighbourhood centre, including a range of convenience, service and financial/professional units. Shop uses include a bank, restaurant, takeaways, two convenience supermarkets, hairdressers, betting shop, solicitors, estate agents, financial advice, florists, charity shops, pub, post office and pharmacy.

However, there is a lack of quality pubs and restaurants in the centre which could create a stronger day and night time economy for Forest Hall's offer.

Figure 4 Forest Hall diversity of uses



3.2.2 Potential Capacity for Expansion

The centre has limited potential for expansion due to the compact character of the centre. The centre is bounded by residential properties and the railway line, which prevents expansion.

3.2.3 Retailer Representation

Forest Hall has a reasonable amount of national representation for a neighbourhood centre, with quality chains such as Sainsbury's and Boots located in the centre. Barclays and Subway can also be found in the centre, with the rest of the offer being primarily independent provision of average quality.

3.2.4 Vacant Street Level Property

There is only one small shop vacant within Forest Hall, indicating that the centre is performing well.

3.2.5 Pedestrian Flows

Pedestrian flow in the centre was quiet, with only a small amount of individuals arriving at the centre by foot. The majority of visitors appear to arrive by car, spending 20 – 30 minutes in the centre as part of short 'top up trips'.

3.2.6 Accessibility

The centre is accessible by bus, with a bus stop located nearby on Station Road, to the west of the centre. The centre is also accessible by car, with a number of car parking spaces available for shoppers. However, the number of spaces fail to meet the demand of car borne shoppers, with many forced to illegally park on the side of the road. The centre is visible from the road, but lacks appropriate and clear links to metro and signage.

Figure 5 Car parking in Forest Hall and low architectural quality of building

3.2.7 Customer Views and Behaviour

Overall, customers feel the centre serves the local catchment well, providing an average range of convenience, service, and professional/financial services. However, shoppers feel that there is a lack of restaurants and drinking establishments, which should be of higher quality than those currently located in the centre. It was also felt that there are too many takeaways in the centre. Further suggested improvements include improving the pedestrian environment and including upgrading of street furniture.

3.2.8 Perception of Safety and Crime

Forest Hall is a car dominated neighbourhood centre, with only a small number of pedestrian crossings. There is potential to improve the safety of the centre by installing speed reducing measures and perhaps shared surface style street treatments, which would assist shoppers to cross the road safely. There is also an issue for servicing retail units, as goods vehicles are using customer parking, or parking on the roadside, limiting the views of pedestrians and motorists. Perceived crime levels were relatively low, but may be more of an issue on an evening due to the lack of evening activity such as pubs and restaurants.

3.2.9 Environmental Quality

The environmental quality of the centre is good, with decent architectural quality evident in some older buildings and greenery. However, the more recent additions (Sainsbury's and pub) do not fit with the local architectural character of the area.

The shutters of the hot food takeaways were down during the day, giving a negative impression and lowering the vitality of the area. Improvements could also be made to the gateways to the centre to provide a more positive first impression.

3.3 The Opportunity

3.3.1 Spatial Arrangement

There is opportunity to improve the gateways to the centre and introduce a landmark feature in order to make Forest Hall more attractive to shoppers.

3.3.2 Public Realm

The centre would benefit from comprehensive streetscape enhancements to increase the environmental quality, making it more attractive to shoppers and traders.

3.3.3 Local Character

The centre would benefit from a shop front and signage strategy to make the centre more coherent and attractive to shoppers and traders.

3.3.4 Movement and Access

There is opportunity to encourage crossing from north to south of the centre. The links to adjacent residential areas could also be improved to attract shoppers from the local area. The parking arrangement in the centre could also be improved to make the centre more attractive and safer for shoppers.

3.3.5 Retail Environment

There is opportunity to adopt appropriate policies to limit the number of hot food takeaways in the centre to prevent the conversion of retail units.

4 Summary

Forest Hall and Whitley Lodge are performing well as neighbourhood centres, providing a range of shops and services to the local population. Vacancies in both centres are low, suggesting that businesses are doing well. Each centre is accessible by foot, car and bus, however both are dominated by car movement and parking which detracts from the vitality of the centre, and makes them potentially dangerous to shoppers. It is recommended that each centre improve the environmental quality to make them more attractive to shoppers, whilst continuing to meet the needs of the local population. The following sets out recommendations specific to each centre.

Forest Hall:

- The further conversion of retail units to hot food takeaways in Forest Hall should be discouraged to prevent the vitality of the centre decreasing;
- Prevention of good servicing to the front of properties within the centre;
- Installation of traffic calming devices and additional pedestrian crossing facilities;
- Improvement to the aesthetics of low quality buildings; and
- Improvement to the gateways into the centre.

Whitley Lodge:

- The further conversion of retail units to hot food takeaways in Whitley Lodge should be discouraged to prevent the vitality of the centre decreasing;
- Improvement to the landscaping and greenery of the centre;
- Improvement to the gateways into the centre;
- Improvements to the aesthetics of low quality buildings; and
- Consideration to altering the one way system and parking layout.

A1 Place Quality Analysis



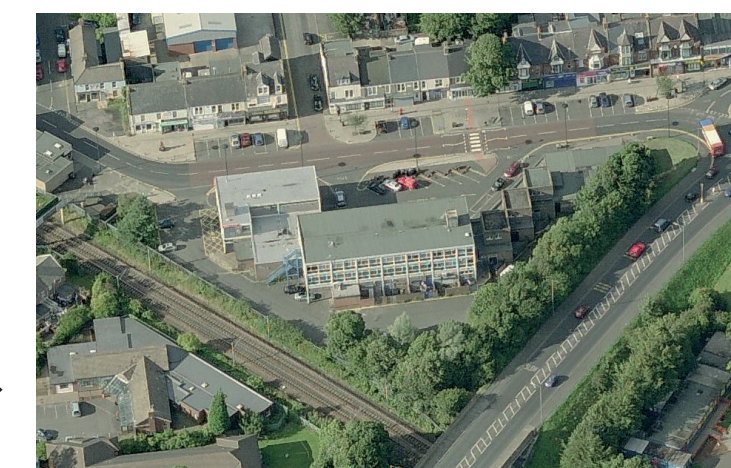
Whitley Lodge



Whitley Bay



North Shields



Forest Hall

Neighbourhood Centre Issues

Whitley Lodge

Spatial Arrangement

A compact, focused centre. Single access in and out (one-way). Shops focused inwardly away from the adjacent streets and onto a car dominated forecourt. Development 'turns its back' on surrounding residential areas - i.e. poorly integrated. Focus effort at gateways, public realm and select building interventions



Public Realm Quality

Generally poor quality 'tarmac' public realm dominated by traffic movement and parking. Weak landscape/planting and under-used open green spaces. Backs of retail (rubbish/delivery) conflict with residential amenity space and access. Need for extensive public realm treatment and select building interventions.



Local Character

Definitive set-piece style architecture reminiscent of the New Town character (eg Stevenage/Harlow). Poor quality built form generally, low specification building. Need to better integrate built forms (scale, massing etc.) and open spaces (the latter somewhat isolated).



Movement and Access

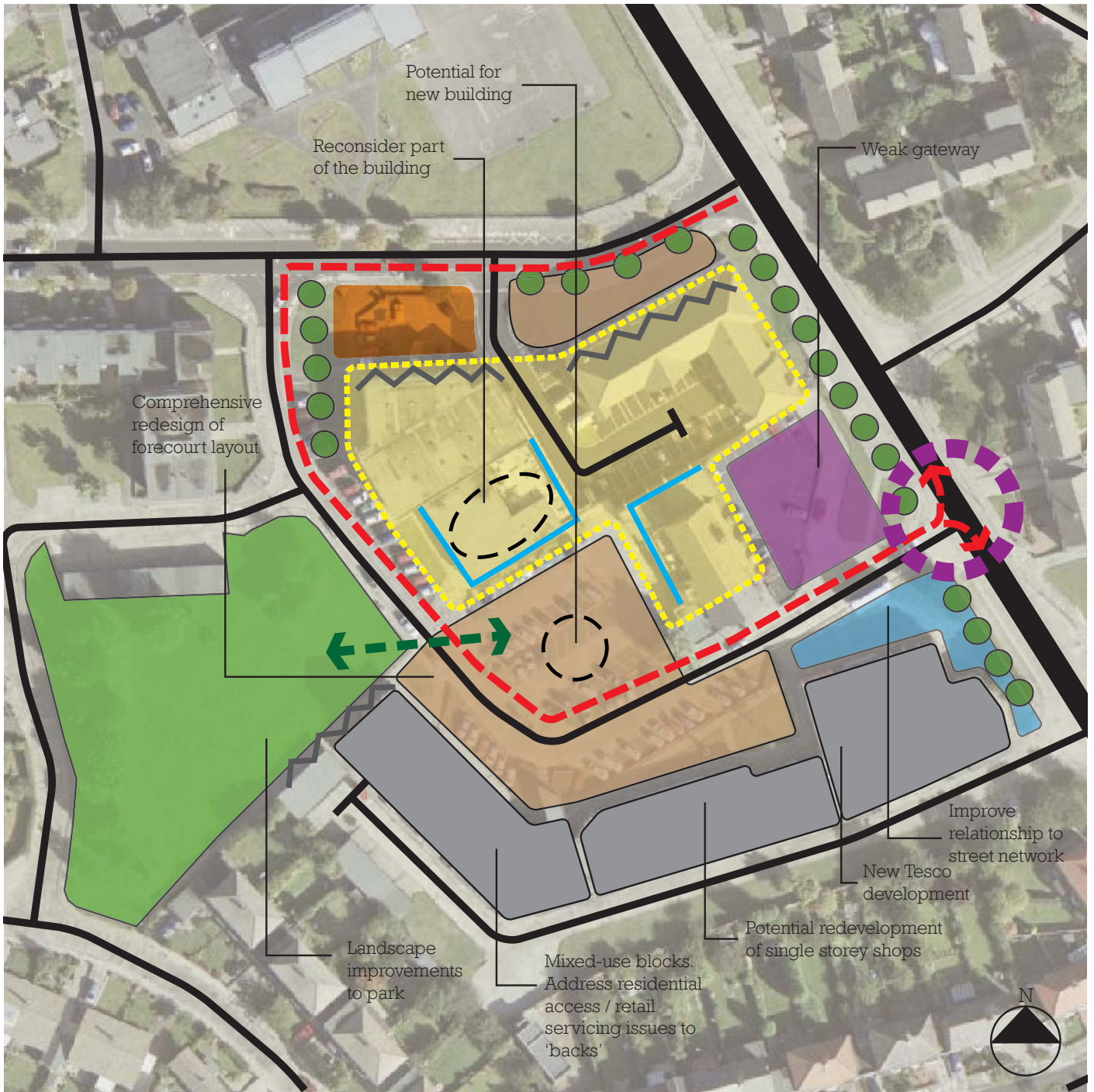
Peculiar one-way arrangement that requires principal access via the 'back door'. Potential to reconsider this arrangement. Traffic/parking dominated forecourt reduces the quality of experience for pedestrians/cyclists. Weak links into adjacent residential. Safety of access at night potentially an issue.



Retail Environment

Recent arrival of Tesco both supports the centre whilst potentially drawing trade away from independent stores. Local convenience focus suggests limited retail role catering for 'walk-ins' and some vehicular trips. Unlikely to support major retail growth due to competing locations elsewhere.





- Potential development site
- Potential public realm improvements
- Poor spatial arrangement of buildings
- Potential new tree planting to improve street edge
- Gateway enhancements
- Poor quality building frontage

- Improve relationship to open space
- Reconsider need for one-way vehicular network
- Development 'backs' exposed to open space / street
- 'A road' network
- Minor road network

Neighbourhood Centre Issues

Forest Hall

Spatial Arrangement

A circa 120m long linear 'high street' type arrangement with shops either side. Weak gateways to each end and poor southeast corner. Level change to the south 'conceals' the centre (not easily visible). Would benefit from landmark feature. Southern side set-back weakens high street character.



Public Realm Quality

Generally public realm dominated by traffic movement and parking. Rather bland surface treatment with weak landscape/planting. Southern edge forecourt of poor quality dominated by recycle bin locations. Consider comprehensive streetscape enhancements.



Local Character

Character varies between the northern and southern built edges. North is more consistent in traditional high street style. Southern is unappealing though greater scale provides sense of enclosure to the centre. Varied shopfront and signage approach is somewhat chaotic.



Movement and Access

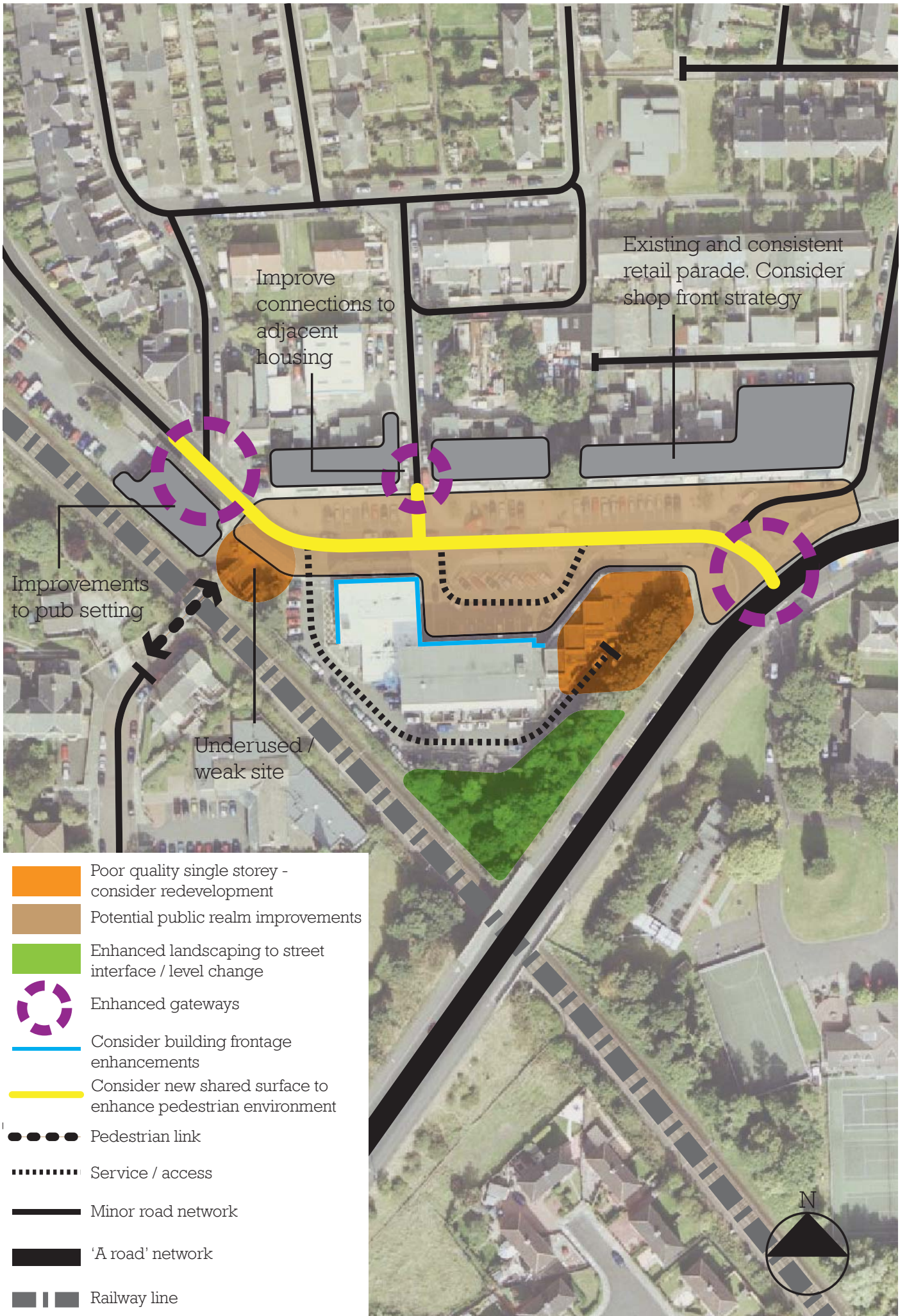
Good through movement and high local & global footfall. Proximity to 'A' road a strength. Pedestrian environment generally poor and north-south crossing is not encouraged. Improve links into adjacent residential areas. Improve parking arrangement.



Retail Environment

A range of small, independent traders appropriate for local a convenience centre. Note: no less than 4 estate agents (a good sign!). Sainsbury's Local likely to impact on the viability of adjacent shops. Some poorer quality provision. Hot food outlets result in 'shutters down' during the day. One vacant unit.





Improve connections to adjacent housing

Existing and consistent retail parade. Consider shop front strategy

Improvements to pub setting

Underused / weak site

- Poor quality single storey - consider redevelopment
- Potential public realm improvements
- Enhanced landscaping to street interface / level change
- Enhanced gateways
- Consider building frontage enhancements
- Consider new shared surface to enhance pedestrian environment
- Pedestrian link
- Service / access
- Minor road network
- 'A road' network
- Railway line



Initial Thoughts

Whitley Lodge



The images above show a 'before' and 'after' refurbishment scenario to the backs of the mixed use (residential/retail) 3 storey block at Whitley Lodge. The current block exhibits a poor arrangement of residential access to flats alongside the rear service areas of the ground floor retail. The ideas above indicate how select refurbishments can be achieved within the boundary of the existing plot.

Forest Hall



'Before'



'After'

Forest Hall will require selective treatment/intervention to both the built form and public realm, particularly the streetscape. The images above indicate this type of approach employed by Matrix in Sunderland (Hendon neighbourhood centre). Achieving a consistent, quality street frontage through sensitive intervention at key locations led to successful enhancement of the retail environment and a more attractive public realm experience.