The previous section explored the principal characteristics of the town centre and the main opportunities and strengths to be exploited in preparing the ADF.

In summary, Dudley town centre’s main assets are:

- A fascinating history and unique legacy of historic buildings and streetscapes
- A strong sense of community and sense of place
- A compact and walkable environment.
- Good accessibility by bus, car and in the future by Metro
- A strong civic function.
- Vibrant leisure and education activities and potential for growth in these sectors
- A thriving market at the heart of a resurging retail core
- A buoyant and innovative residential renaissance

Critically there is significant interest from the private sector in investing in Dudley. Regeneration strategies for Dudley have come and gone; many have failed to harness investment and deliver meaningful change. The difference now is that there is real optimism in key commercial sectors within the town centre; investor confidence is high and there is competition to exploit opportunities. There are clear indicators that a window of opportunity exists to deliver substantial change through market led investment.

Growing confidence in the market and a degree of certainty about the prospects for change does not in any way diminish the need for the ADF. The public consultation process has revealed and confirmed a number of problems which people face in using the town centre and a number of potential pitfalls if change is not carefully managed. Three main challenges are the focus for action in the ADF.

3 Turning challenges into opportunities
Challenge one

To define a clear and positive role for Dudley town centre, complimentary to other centres across the borough and the region

Dudley has been through a painful period of adjustment to changing economic circumstances. Within the community there remains a degree of scepticism and negative opinion about the prospects for the future. There are also very encouraging signs that Dudley can now turn the corner; but this depends upon pursuing realistic objectives and not raising false hope.

First, it is essential to dispel the preoccupation with what the town centre has lost, particularly its status as the principal retail location within the borough and much of the heavy industry on which it was founded. It is also necessary to accept that which the town is not likely to have in the foreseeable future, such as a large scale, private sector office function.

Instead the ADF focuses on exploiting the market opportunities that do exist. The UDP and the work of the Civic Trust provides the foundation for asserting, through the ADF, a more positive image of the town and the role it can perform; refined through the market appraisal which have informed preparation of the ADF.

The emphasis should shift to promoting Dudley for high quality urban living with strengthened retail, civic, evening entertainment and cultural/tourism components along with all the essential services to support a growing population. New residents of the town centre may well hop on the bus or metro to work at Merry Hill or in the centre of Birmingham, which is now the reality of life within the conurbation. The important thing is that they will come home to Dudley. If they can find what they need to meet day to day needs to shop, eat, exercise and be entertained right on their doorstep the town centre will prosper and reassert its strategic status.
Challenge two

To restore a balanced urban structure, pattern of activity and car parking

In many respects Dudley is at present a town centre of two halves.

The most attractive environment (in terms of a fine network of streets, public spaces and good quality buildings) and the activities that attract the greatest number of people to the town centre are around the Market Place and north of King Street. This fine grained and more traditional pattern of development integrates seamlessly into adjoining residential neighbourhoods.

To the south, in contrast, slum clearance (followed by only partial redevelopment), construction of the bus station, under-used and over-engineered road infrastructure, willful destruction of the historic street network and the impact of the by-pass have created a very different environment. It is characterised by a number of weaknesses:

- a much more disjointed and sporadic pattern of land use
- restricted, counter-intuitive and confused patterns of traffic movement
- higher levels of vacancy and dereliction
- a perception of isolation and severance within communities just beyond the by-pass to the south-east
- a very poor pedestrian environment
- congestion on some key routes into and just beyond the town centre

The last of these problems is compounded by the fact that the majority of the town centre parking is concentrated on the south side of the town and much of the activity it serves is on the north side. This results in unnecessary car movements through the town centre.

The area south and east of Flood Street, is Dudley’s greatest weakness. It is also represents one of the most significant opportunities. The existence of a substantial, relatively unconstrained, under-utilised and failing segment of the town centre provides the scope for large scale, comprehensively planned, new investment to be grafted into the centre. If appropriately designed, new development would fully integrate with and replicate the attractive characteristics of the ‘old town’, restoring the urban structure that once existed in Dudley. This would create a complete
‘concentric’ pattern of urban quarters clustered around and connected into the Market Place as the central hub of the town centre. Within this restored structure it will be possible to cultivate a more balanced distribution of activity, movement and car parking.

Meeting this challenge requires quite a significant change to the distribution of parking around the town centre. The public consultation process revealed a degree of anxiety about maintaining parking and the quality of provision. It is clear that the framework must ensure no overall loss in the number of spaces and an improvement in the quality and accessibility of car parks.

**Challenge three**

**Managing and Co-ordinating Change**

There is renewed confidence and optimism amongst developers and investors. Significant new development proposals are emerging, being progressed through the planning process and implemented in every quarter of the town. Proposals in the pipeline have helped shape the ADF.

Harnessing private sector investment is the key to success of the ADF strategy, but it is not to be invited at any cost; new investment must make a positive contribution to delivering the overall vision. If change occurs which fails to embrace the key principles of good town making, examined in section 4 of this report, not only will the opportunities that exist have been wasted but new development may in fact have a detrimental impact on existing functions within the town centre.

By providing guidance on co-ordinating and managing change the ADF can help to meet this challenge and ensure the widest possible benefits.
4 Framework: key aims and objectives

Meeting the challenges and exploiting the opportunities within Dudley town centre reveals a number of key themes and related objectives, which influence the potential for development. The ADF is essentially focused upon physical development and land use but these objectives are also relevant considerations for the council and the new town centre regeneration partnership in prioritising investment across a range of other activities which will impact upon the centre and its population. In particular, priority needs to be given to addressing the following:

- A licensing regime which supports the control and management of activities within public spaces and nurtures the nighttime economy
- A ‘design code’ to achieve a consistent quality of streetscape across the town centre (addressing matters including paving, street furniture, public transport infrastructure, landscaping, lighting and signage). This must be agreed and adopted by all organisations who undertake works within the public realm including the highways department, Centro and utility providers

The broad aim is sensitively nurture the town centre as an exceptional place in which to enjoy the best of urban living. This means managing change, protecting existing character and replicating the fine qualities of the best of the historic environment in master planning new development.
In summary the key objectives are to:

1. Establish a clear ‘concentric’ urban structure for the town centre which respects the historical urban context.

2. Design and manage the streets and urban spaces of the town as places of equal importance to the buildings.

3. Seamlessly integrate the urban quarters, connecting together the principal attractions within and immediately adjoining the town centre.

4. Cultivate the right conditions, in terms of the quality of the environment and the range of facilities and services on offer (from good education, health and leisure provision to bars and restaurants) to attract people to live in the centre of the town. Deliver a balanced range of housing types and tenures.

5. Renew, reconfigure and consolidate the retail offer.

6. To foster the civic function within the town and establish criteria for the location and configuration of new investment in accommodation for council functions to ensure it acts as a catalyst for broader change.

7. To seek to sensitively integrate Midland Metro as an integral feature of the townscape so it is regarded as an asset and can provide a further catalyst for change.

8. To carefully manage access by car to encourage visitors, redistribute parking, relieve congestion black spots and minimise unnecessary through traffic.

9. To build upon the good track record of consultation, information dissemination, events and celebrations which reinforce the sense of community and positive aspirations. The vision for the town centre must be shared along with the responsibility for its realisation.

10. Co-ordinate strategies for marketing, management and maintenance within the town centre to reinforce the message of ‘Come Home to Dudley.’