

Local Priorities

Engagement with key stakeholders and the wider public has been undertaken to help understand the key local priorities for Carlisle.

- This has included:
- Public 'Issues and Options' drop in sessions - October 2025.
 - Public online-survey – February 2026.
 - Stakeholder focus group meetings – March 2026.

Headline findings are set out below.

What is good about Carlisle

People & community – A friendly city with strong community spirit and a family feel.

Shopping & markets – A strong retail centre with national chains and local independents.

Compact & walkable – a city scale that's easy to navigate with everything close together in the city centre.

Arts & culture – A growing evening economy, arts scene and events programme.

History, heritage and character – the Castle, Cathedral, Citadels, Roman and Viking history, and general historic environment.

Cultural assets – Tullie and Sands Centre, as well as a smaller venues and community facilities..

Natural environment in the city and access to the countryside – Bitts Park, Rickerby Park, the rivers, the coast and Hadrian's Wall National Trail and Hadrian's Cycleway.

National connectivity – good connections via the WCML and M6.

Land availability – capacity to invest and grow businesses.

Affordability – housing is affordable for most people.

Energy capacity – strong, reliable energy infrastructure ready for growth.

What Carlisle needs

Stronger promotion of the city as a place to invest and do business.

More and a broader range of events and activities to attract people to the city.

Making more of Carlisle's heritage as a visitor attraction.

Housing choice and quality – potential for more city centre living and affordable apartments.

Finding uses for larger vacant buildings.

Community facilities – to meet the needs of a growing and aging population, particularly healthcare.

Reduced severance between the city centre and the Castle.

Larger cultural venues - to enhance its cultural offering e.g., touring shows.

More sustainable travel options and reduce congestion.

Activities for younger people.

More and better shopping offer.

Growing the night-time economy.

Strengths and Challenges

Strengths

- Distinctive historic character and identity.
- Significant heritage assets.
- Natural assets and proximity to countryside and coast.
- A retail and service centre which 'owns' its region.
- High economic activity and low unemployment.
- Economic strengths including national connectivity and the energy sector.
- Growing industrial base at Kingmoor Business Park.
- University focussing on growing local skills and specialisation.
- Regeneration momentum.

Challenges

- Perceived limited cultural facilities.
- Perceived lack of good quality housing and choice.
- Changing retail patterns and loss of anchor retail units in the city centre.
- University presence and visibility.
- Declining working age population, workforce contraction and difficulties in recruiting.
- Flood risk effecting potential development areas.
- Significant vacant buildings and development viability challenges.
- Major roads and highways in the centre severing the city centre.
- Edge of centre brownfield land and light industry detracting from city centre environment.

Opportunities

- Drawing on the city's strategic location in relation to transport, energy to support inward investment and economic development.
- Leveraging the completion of the CSLR to transform how traffic moves around the city, improve regional accessibility and reduce the impact of traffic on the city centre.
- Growing the role and presence of the university in the city.
- Making the most of the city's many assets and proximity to rural destinations to create a more active visitor economy, including better accommodation.
- Continuing the momentum for public realm enhancement to transform the rest of the city centre.
- Developing brownfield sites and low-intensity uses to provide new uses which complement the city centre and help to deliver new homes.

Summary

Carlisle is a quietly successful city with many assets, which has the opportunity to build on its strengths and realise its full potential.

The city has a strong regional retail and service centre which has resisted out-of-town competition, but faces many of the challenges as other centres in terms of changing retail habits.

It has many of the qualities of internationally recognised visitor destination cities, but does not currently fully realise the opportunities that they bring.

It has a good level of economic activity, but a need to create higher value jobs which can support an uplift in local income.

The city has an ageing population and shrinking workforce, and needs to be able to attract and / or retain a young and skilled demographic to remain economically sustainable.

The physical isolation of the city means it must act a centre for the region, meeting as many of its local needs as possible.



English St, Source: Cumberland Council



Devonshire St, Source: Cumberland Council