

Sustainability Appraisal of Wigan's Central Area Action Plan

What does sustainability appraisal involve?

In this leaflet we have summarised the key issues for Wigan central area's environment, communities and economy. We will be using this information to help us write a new plan for shaping development in the fourteen square kilometres covered by the Wigan Central Area Action Plan.

Development in Wigan central area

The way we want the centre of Wigan to develop between now and 2026 will be set out in our Wigan Central Area Action Plan. This plan will identify where we want new development to go and what infrastructure (such as new roads and cycleways) will be needed to support the new development. The plan will influence decisions about transport, jobs, community and leisure facilities, health and education.

It is very important that we make sure the Wigan Central Area Action Plan will help us to protect the environment, whilst helping everyone to have a better quality of life, and strengthening the economy.

Trying to get the balance right between environmental, social and economic issues is often referred to as "sustainable development". If we are to make our activities more "sustainable" then we need to know the effects of what we are doing or plan to do. Sustainability appraisals are a useful tool for this.

Why carry out this sustainability appraisal?

Carrying out a sustainability appraisal helps us to check the effect of the plan on the environment, the economy and our lives in general. It also helps us to compare different options to see which are the most sustainable overall. We are required by law to carry out sustainability appraisals on certain documents which form part of our Local Development Framework, such as the Wigan Central Area Action Plan.

The sustainability appraisal process has several parts, starting with the 'scoping' stage. This stage involves gathering information about the issues we face, so that we know what things we need to focus our attention on. We have now completed this stage for our sustainability appraisal of the Wigan Central Area Action Plan.



What have we done so far?

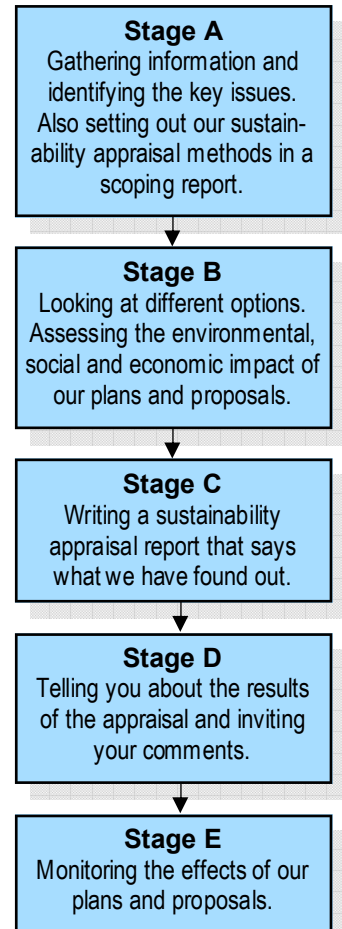
We gathered evidence about the environmental, social and economic conditions relevant to the Wigan central area. This enabled us to identify the sustainability issues which need to be addressed. We devised a sustainability framework of objectives, questions and indicators which will enable us to check that the Wigan Central Area Action Plan, as it develops, addresses the key sustainability issues we have identified on the basis of the evidence.

What will we do next?

We will use the sustainability framework which takes account of the sustainability issues for the Wigan central area to examine in detail the effects of our Wigan Central Area Action Plan and test its sustainability.

As well as this summary leaflet, we have produced a Scoping Report, which contains much more detail about what we have done so far and what will happen next. We will also publish an Evidence Paper shortly, which will contain more detail about the existing conditions which are relevant to the Wigan central area, and any related issues.

The full Scoping Report, and the Wigan Central Area Action Plan Evidence Paper once it is published, can be found on the council's website at the following address: www.wigan.gov.uk/wigancentralactionplan



Sustainability Issues

We identified the sustainability issues facing the Wigan central area by:

- reviewing relevant plans, policies and other important documents
- collecting data held by the council and other organisations
- asking environmental bodies and organisations to comment.

Health and wellbeing

Reduced life-expectancy and multiple health problems affect the Wigan central area (but are a more significant issue in surrounding areas).



Open space, sport and recreation

The quantity, quality and function of public open space in the town centre area needs to be enhanced, and barriers to physical activity removed. In particular, linkages to other open space, sporting and recreational facilities such as Greenheart, Mesnes Park and Robin Park need to be improved as part of the functional green infrastructure network of the borough .

Retail and leisure

There is currently a very narrow range of leisure, culture and community facilities. More alternative and more accessible activities are needed, both in the daytime and in the evening when access to retail areas is closed off.

Opportunities to fulfil any additional capacity within the town centre for retail space need to be explored to ensure vitality and viability. Town centre vacancy rates are below average. Vacancies are concentrated mainly in the Galleries and Marketgate shopping centres.

Natural resources and pollution

Road traffic generated by new development could produce additional emissions of NOx, PM10 and CO2 which may affect health, impact on climate change and adversely affect existing air quality management areas.

Climate change increases the existing risk of flooding in the Wigan central area, the main threat being from the River Douglas, though some mitigation measures have recently been undertaken.

Education and learning

Future expansion of the education sector in the central area, particularly through higher and further education, would increase the benefits to the area by raising local skills levels and by supporting a range of retail and other services.

Many of the buildings in connection with the two major educational establishments within the area (Wigan and Leigh College and the Deanery High School) are now outdated and do not meet future requirements.



Built environment, heritage and design

Cleanliness and environmental quality are key issues for people in the Wigan central area. Derelict sites such as the Old Town Hall have a negative effect on the area's image and public perceptions.

The area needs to respond to and plan for climate change by ensuring sustainable drainage, design and construction in all developments and reducing emissions.

The historic quality and character of landscapes, townscapes and buildings need to be preserved and enhanced as appropriate and the streetscape needs to be of higher quality.

Wigan Area Action Plan



Housing

New dwellings need to be sustainably designed and energy efficient, and the existing housing stock must continue to be upgraded and retrofitted.

To achieve sustainable neighbourhoods in the area, housing development should be supported by the provision of services and infrastructure.

Economy and Employment

The area needs a wider range of employment opportunities to be created in the area, and under represented sectors to be developed (such as financial and business services, research and development and the low carbon economy).

The Queen Street / Wallgate and Wigan Pier Quarter areas provide employment facilities but opportunities to redevelop and modernise existing facilities need to be explored.

Multiple deprivation affects the Wigan central area, as well as the surrounding areas such as Scholes, Ince and Newtown.

Waste

The area produces high volumes of waste. There is a need to improve facilities for dealing with waste streams (and waste transportation) more sustainably and to maximise opportunities for waste reduction and recycling.

Wildlife

Natural environmental assets in the area are limited and need to be protected and enhanced because of their strategic importance for wildlife habitats and species, recreation, resilience to climate change, health and wellbeing.

Energy

Current patterns of energy use in the Wigan central area are unsustainable. Renewable and low carbon energy generation needs to be expanded and full advantage taken of national initiatives such as feed-in tariffs and renewable heat incentives.

Opportunities to increase decentralised low carbon energy generation in the borough have been identified but need to be developed.



Accessibility

Afternoon peak period traffic congestion in and around the Wigan central area is a problem.

The town centre ring road acts as a physical barrier and can discourage sustainable forms of transport such as walking and cycling.

The physical separation of the two railway stations and bus station and the barriers between them can create difficulties for public transport users.

Community

The perception and experience of crime and anti-social behaviour are too high in some parts of the area.

Sustainability Appraisal

Sustainability Objectives for the Wigan central area:

The proposals and policies that make up the Wigan Central Area Action Plan will be appraised against the sustainability objectives listed below. These objectives take account of all the evidence we have gathered and the sustainability issues outlined in this leaflet.

Each objective is supported by more detailed questions that will help us to focus the appraisal on the most important issues. These questions and the evidence we gathered can be viewed in the full Scoping Report and in the Wigan Central Area Action Plan Evidence Paper once it is published. Both documents can be found on the council's website at: www.wigan.gov.uk/wigancentralactionplan

1. Health and wellbeing:

Tackle deep-seated short and long-term health problems especially those linked to deprivation in the locality and surrounding area and contribute to increased life expectancy.



3. Retail and leisure:

Develop and enhance the retail and leisure offer across the locality to provide varied, vital and viable retail and leisure opportunities and tackle vacancy issues including vacant and underused land and properties



5. Education & Learning: Improve and/or develop the quality and fabric of educational facilities within the plan area so that they can deliver an educational offer covering skills relevant for the future to a broad range of people.



7. Housing:

Improve current housing provision and develop new / maximise current infrastructure to support quality housing within the locality and surrounding areas.



9. Accessibility:

Ensure the Wigan central area tackles congestion and capitalises on its location by ensuring it is accessible by all modes of travel, especially sustainable modes, for all sectors of society.



11. Energy:

Ensure security of energy supply to enable development including maximising the opportunity for low carbon, renewable and decentralised energy.



2. Open space, sport and recreation:

Improve the quality and quantity of public open space and improve access to locations for physical activity and leisure facilities.

4. Community:

Reduce crime and reduce fear of crime, and promote community cohesion.

6. Economy & employment:

Increase employment opportunities and develop a more diverse employment offer in the Wigan central area, including supporting under-represented sectors and future high-growth sectors.

8. Built environment, heritage and design:

Ensure high quality sustainable design of all developments and streetscape whilst respecting, enhancing and capitalising on the area's historic environment.

10. Wildlife

Protect and enhance biodiversity and wildlife habitats in the locality and surrounding area.

12. Waste:

Address the waste hierarchy by helping the Wigan central area minimise waste as a priority, then reuse, recycle and recover for energy, before disposal as a final resort.

13. Natural resources and

pollution: Protect and enhance local air quality and safeguard access to natural resources.