

4.0 Improving Accessibility

The Current Position

- 4.1 The baseline analysis highlighted a number of issues with regard to accessibility within and around Leigh Town Centre. The historic traffic management system, with a high number of one way roads, currently dominates vehicular accessibility around the Town making navigation difficult, particularly to those visiting from outside of the area. The lack of a well defined signage and routing strategy further amplifies this issue.
- 4.2 The pricing, availability and quality of car parking within Leigh are also a key concern for Town Centre users and businesses alike. Demand for parking is high and previous studies have shown that given the types of uses and floorspace currently available in Leigh, there is an undersupply of parking in the Town Centre. In addition to quantity, to be of adequate provision, the quality, pricing and location of parking must also meet the various needs of the different groups of Town Centre users including both shoppers and workers.
- 4.3 Leigh does not have a rail station, however bus transport is well utilised and the Greater Manchester Passenger Transport Executive (GMPTE) is reportedly encouraging service providers to utilise the remaining available bus departure slots with additional services. However, congestion in the Town Centre and pressure on existing bus infrastructure, in particular around the existing bus station, would mean that the routing of new services would need to be carefully considered.
- 4.4 Market Street, Spinning Jenny Way and the Bridgewater/Leeds-Liverpool canals currently sever routes to Leigh Town Centre from the surrounding areas. In order to encourage sustainable modes of transport and relieve pressure on the highway network, vehicular dominance in the town will need to be reduced and the impact of these barriers diminished.

The Prospects

- 4.5 There are a considerable number of improvements which can be made to improve accessibility and movement. In order to ease access to the Town Centre, making it a more attractive location for both existing and potential visitors, Leigh will need to:
- Ensure that the parking provision meets the needs of all Leigh Town Centre's users in terms of number, quality, location and price, whilst also taking into consideration future parking requirements
 - Build upon the Town's locational advantages by reinforcing clear, well sign posted routes to strategic locations in and around the Town
 - Ease vehicular movement around the Town whilst reducing the dominance of traffic and removing barriers for pedestrians and cyclists
 - Encourage public transport and sustainable travel through improved linkages, connections and signage
 - Support proposals for a guided bus-way route linking Leigh to Manchester City Centre

The Action Plan

4.6 The following actions intend to overcome the accessibility issues in Leigh:

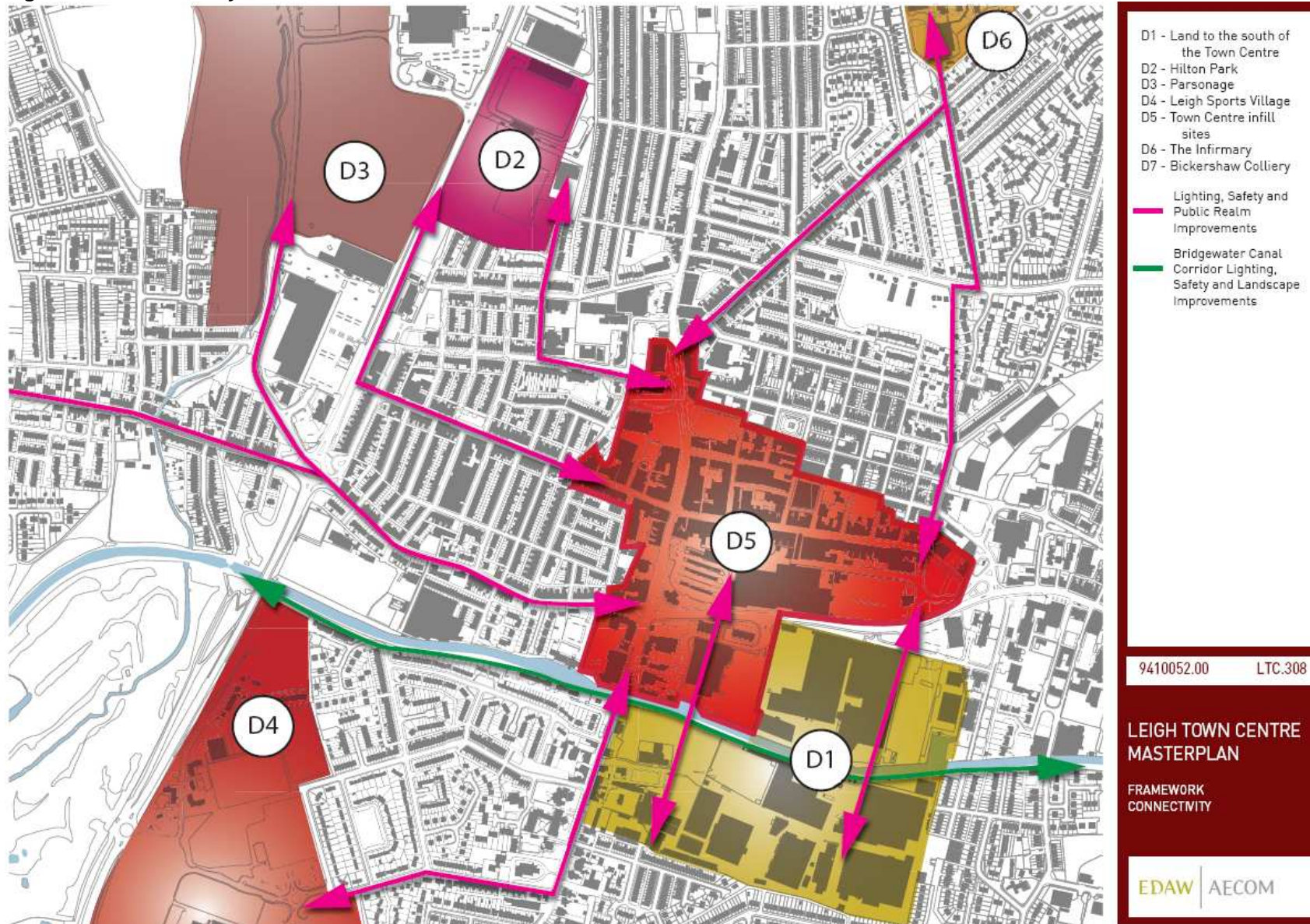
- Enhance parking provision and quality
- Improve accessibility in Leigh
- Encourage sustainable travel
- Improve public transport

Enhance Parking Provision and Quality

- 4.7 A new strategy for car parking is currently being prepared by the Council for the whole of the Borough. It is critical that its recommendations respond to the issues identified in this study. The strategy needs to factor in the capacity to accommodate future parking requirements, particularly in light of the wider Town Centre proposed improvements.
- 4.8 The strategy will need to ensure that there is sufficient parking in the right locations including short to medium stay car parks located in closer proximity to the Town Centre for shoppers and those 'dropping in and out' of the Retail Heart and Civic Quarter, and longer term parking for people working in the Town Centre who require full-day provision.
- 4.9 It is critical that the existing schedule of pricing is reviewed. In the vicinity of the retail heart, the existing pricing schedule starts with 80p for three hours of parking. Local residents popping into the centre do not need or want to stay for three hours and resent paying to do so. A shorter pricing option should be introduced, for example 50p for up to an hour.
- 4.10 There is also the opportunity to improve access and awareness of the most suitable car park locations in Leigh, through the establishment of a logical signing strategy directing drivers, dependant on the user-type and direction of arrival, to the most suitable car park. This would have the additional advantage of reducing the number of vehicles 'circling' the Town Centre in search of a space, again easing congestion.



Figure 4.1 Connectivity Framework



- 4.11 On top of these improvements, there is also scope to improve the environmental quality of Leigh's car parks, an action which could additionally go some way to alleviating security concerns in some parking locations, such as Bengal Street multi-storey. The continued use of low quality in-fill parking would undermine any future parking strategy, and should therefore be phased out.

Improve Accessibility in Leigh - Traffic Management and Signage

- 4.12 Leigh is relatively well located in terms of its positioning within the intersections of the M6, M61 and M60 motorways and is closely by-passed by the busy A580 East Lancashire Road, which connects Manchester and Liverpool. The A579 Atherleigh Way also provides a north-south route to the west of the Town Centre but the lack of permeability from the local road network has meant traffic is often displaced on to parallel routes, including through the Town Centre. Local access to the Town Centre, car parks and facilities is further made difficult by poor signage and a confusing traffic management layout.
- 4.13 There is considerable scope to reinforce the main routes into Leigh through improvement of route legibility and introduction of a well defined signage strategy. Through traffic should be encouraged onto Atherleigh Way, again through improved signage and engineering measures to enhance connectivity, in order to reduce congestion along Market Street. These actions would relieve congestion and improve accessibility into Leigh, therefore making the Town Centre a more attractive destination to potential visitors. In addition to general traffic, a comprehensive signing and access strategy for freight traffic should also be introduced.
- 4.14 Reducing vehicular dominance and in particular road severance created by Spinning Jenny Way and Market Street, will play an important role in improving conditions within the Town Centre. Improved crossing facilities at key junctions and strategic locations are desirable and would have the added benefit of improving safety through targeting collision hot spots. It is understood that the junction of Lord Street and Market Street is to be signalised with the removal of the staggered crossing this year.
- 4.15 Market Street currently forms a barrier to movement between the proposed Civic Quarter and the main retail core. With the proposed removal of through traffic onto the Atherleigh Way, opportunities arise for improvements along Market Street. A number of bus priority measures are currently located along Market Street, with lower traffic flows these could be removed and bus traffic could join the main car flow without incurring unnecessary delays. This would reduce the amount of road space needed to be dedicated to vehicles, and could be potentially reallocated to reduce the severance between the Civic Quarter and the Retail Core. Footpaths could be widened reducing crossing distances, with improved crossing facilities along the length of the road. The option to remove the central reserves is a possibility due to the widened footpaths, or the improvement of the public realm through tree planting and the creation of a boulevard style treatment could be introduced if the central reserves remain. Proposals for Market Street should also consider infrastructure for cyclists.
- 4.16 Further accessibility improvements could be achieved through a more efficient and straightforward highway layout for the Eastern Gateway, and a review of servicing in the Town Centre, in particular for the Spinning Gate Shopping Centre. There is potential to build over some of the existing car park, which would be relocated to the Eastern Gateway, and hide the servicing within the shopping centre structure.

Encourage Sustainable Travel

- 4.17 Existing physical constraints and barriers, such as heavily trafficked roads and the canal, can impede journeys by sustainable modes in and around the Town Centre. Recent improvements to the canal towpath and new cycle routes, as well as proposals being brought forward for the Greenheart Regional Park project, are helping to increase the number of routes available for pedestrians and cyclists. However, further enhancements are vital to ensure that access to the Town Centre and connections to edge of centre developments and the greenspaces that surround the Town Centre are improved. These measures should be complemented by the continuation of improvements to way finding and strategic provision of facilities for cyclists at key destinations.
- 4.18 Leigh Sports Village is an important destination for the economy of the Town Centre. Linkages to the site must be strengthened. Improved pedestrian and cycle routes and links through the local residential areas will help this. The Hospital also forms an important link to the Town Centre and pedestrian and cycle routes should be improved to make best use of the site's close proximity.
- 4.19 Further improvements to access along the Leeds-Liverpool and Bridgewater Canals are also desirable. Through additional and upgraded crossing points and accesses, greater permeability onto and across the canals could be achieved. This should encourage more walkers and cyclists to use this asset. Ongoing improvements to the canal towpath should be encouraged, and new routes from the canal, such as to Leigh Sports Village via Pilling Street, identified.



Public Transport Improvements

- 4.20 There is a long term aspiration in Leigh to provide a guided busway linking the Town Centre to Salford and Manchester City Centre. The route of the proposed bus way is safeguarded within the Local Development Framework and enters the Town Centre from the north east. In mid-May 2009, it was announced that the AGMA leaders had reached a unanimous decision that would seek to deliver a £1.5 billion package of measures based on a Greater Manchester Transport Fund, including a re-profiled and accelerated Regional Funding Allocation (RFA), a 40% top slice of the Local Transport Plan (LTP) and an additional 3% increase on the annual levy over a six year period. The Greater Manchester Transport Fund will deliver priority major transport schemes across Greater Manchester, a list which includes the LSM Guided Busway. Whilst the commitment of additional funding is positive, the LSM Guided Busway would still have a number of years of design and development before implementation would be possible.

- 4.21 Facilitation of the busway should be actively encouraged by this Strategy and Wigan Council, owing to the accessibility benefits it would create, and the potential to help reduce car journeys to the Town. The proposed route would also improve the opportunity to attract shoppers and visitors to the Town Centre. Leigh must therefore ensure that the Town Centre offer is sufficiently strengthened in advance of the busway development, in order to maximise the potential benefits.
- 4.22 The proposed busway would enter Leigh at the Eastern Gateway to the Town. This gateway is currently ill-defined and underutilised, providing an opportunity to create a high quality gateway incorporating an eastern public transport hub through the provision of super bus stops; including improved waiting facilities and information provision. As well as improving transport provision in the Town Centre, this would, particularly if delivered in association with new development, improve accessibility and footfall to the quiet eastern end of Bradshawgate (see Section 3 for further details).
- 4.23 The new transport hub would facilitate the reorganisation of existing bus services in the Town Centre. As well as relieving pressure on the existing bus station and the surrounding roads, this part of the Town Centre would benefit from an improved environment which encourages regeneration. The rationalisation of bus provision in the Town Centre, also presents the opportunity to improve services to surrounding developments, in particular Leigh Sports Village and the Infirmary.
- 4.24 Public transport to and between some of the key new investments around the Town, including Leigh Sports Village and the Infirmary is currently limited. Innovative ways are being investigated to resolve this issue including using community transport.



The Outcomes

- 4.25 Delivery of the proposed actions identified above, should provide the following outcomes:
- Improve accessibility and legibility in Leigh Town Centre for all modes of transport and therefore a wider potential population base
 - Increase the number of shoppers and visitors to Leigh Town Centre and the surrounding developments thus increasing spend
 - Enhance the sustainability of the Town Centre and the quality of the environment for Leigh's residents

5.0 Public Realm Improvements

The Current Position

- 5.1 Leigh benefits from a number of strong environmental and heritage assets that give it natural advantages over and above similar sized and surrounding town centres.
- 5.2 High quality buildings edge the central Civic Quarter and there are four conservation areas within or close to Leigh Town Centre that provide a number of locally important buildings (including the Edwardian Baroque Town Hall and key buildings along Bradshawgate) built to the designs of James Caldwell. A lot of these inimitable buildings are not showcased to their full potential.
- 5.3 Leigh also benefits from many environmental resources such as the Bridgewater Canal Corridor, Pennington Country Park and the surrounding greenbelt. Again, the Town does not currently fully capitalise on these assets. The canal is hidden and acts as a barrier to north-south movement, whilst linkages and access to Pennington Country Park and the surrounding green belt are limited and under-utilised on account of their condition and the perception that they are unsafe. The difficult pedestrian and cyclist access to Leigh Sports Village were repeatedly highlighted at the recent consultation events.



- 5.4 Within the Town Centre itself, there is a lack of high quality public realm and the existing ill-defined gateways do not create the feeling of arrival that make visitors want to explore the rest of the town. These issues detract from the overall character of the Town Centre.

The Prospects

- 5.5 There is considerable scope to improve the public realm quality of Leigh Town Centre for the benefit of visitors and residents alike. To this end Leigh needs to:
- Capitalise on its significant environmental and heritage assets
 - Enhance the quality of the public realm and key character areas including the Civic Quarter
 - Improve the Town Centre experience through an enhanced Town Centre circuit and the creation of gateways to provide a sense of arrival and build upon Leigh's unique identity

The Action Plan

5.6 The proposed interventions to improve the environmental quality of Leigh Town Centre are:

- Creation of key gateways/sense of arrival
- Public Realm Improvements
- Stronger guidance on quality of design expected in future developments

Creation of key gateways/sense of arrival

5.7 The gateways to Leigh Town Centre are currently ill-defined providing a poor sense of arrival to those visiting the Town. There are three main gateways to Leigh Town Centre, each of which provide an opportunity to create a new gateway with clear signage and a hub of activity to indicate arrival and give a positive first impression of the Town, whilst also portraying an element of Leigh's unique character. The three key gateways are:

- Civic Quarter - public realm improvements should take into account and reinforce the special character of the area, enhancing the setting of key buildings and creating a balanced atmosphere
- Eastern Gateway - improvements should be undertaken in light of the potential development opportunities. As a comprehensive access point, this gateway should provide a positive first impression to the Town on entering from the east
- Southern Gateway - a sense of arrival from the South can be created through enhancing public realm and capitalising on natural assets. This will enable better permeability from this direction - something currently hampered by the canal and unclear access routes



5.8 Associated with these improvements is the need to improve the public realm along the following key routes:

- Market Street
- Spinning Jenny Way
- Bradshawgate
- Railway Road

5.9 Improvements will include better signage, tree planting and general greening and new street furniture.

Public Realm Improvements

5.10 Bradshawgate forms a key route through the Town Centre. It is partly pedestrianised and contains a number of interesting buildings. Some of the more recent infill developments however detract from the street scene and a number of units in key locations (within the vicinity of the Boulevard canopy) appear to be vacant. The entrance beneath the canopy is currently boarded up and is a blemish on

the general charm of the street. Thought should be given to advice in the new government initiative *'Looking after our Town Centres'* which provides practical guidance on the innovative use of empty retail space e.g. temporary conversion of empty shops into social enterprises, local art displays or learning centres.

- 5.11 The urgent need to improve pedestrian circuits through the Town Centre has already been raised. The 'Boulevard site' given its current condition and location may provide an opportunity to address this particular issue. In this respect, the creation of a more direct link between Bradshawgate in the east and the bus station/shopping centre area to the west of the Town is desirable - especially if it formed part of an improved quality shopping environment. This would create a better flow of pedestrian movement through the town and create connections that support the holistic improvement of the Town Centre offer.
- 5.12 More comprehensive design proposals to improve the public realm and raise the image of Leigh could be developed by incorporating part of the service yards of the Spinning Gate Shopping Centre - and potentially - areas of the bus station, subject of course to wider discussions and testing of the design options.
- 5.13 Public realm improvements should be delivered through S106 Agreements as part of the delivery of Leigh's development opportunities. A coordinated contemporary palette of colours, street furniture, streetscape pavement materials and signage, should be used to reinforce the area's special character, defining the key routes towards the improved retail heart of Leigh and enhancing the overall quality of the public realm to ensure that Leigh becomes an overall more attractive place in which to live and visit.

Stronger guidance on quality of design expected in future developments

- 5.14 Stronger guidance on the quality of design expected in future developments should be provided to improve the setting and appearance of the Town's listed buildings, and protect the distinctive character of the Conservation Areas. This should be enshrined in local policy. There may also be opportunities to introduce supplementary design guidance for key quarters of the town and beyond the Conservation Areas, which if applied would help to protect the Town's special character, whilst also improving the quality of experience for shoppers and visitors to Leigh Town Centre. The guidance should advise on the opportunity to create a more distinctive townscape - utilising a coordinated and vibrant range of shop fronts, street furniture, streetscape materials and signage.
- 5.15 Design guidance will help to retain the Town's unique sense of place but if utilised in the correct way, will also from an economic perspective, boost the perception of Leigh as a top destination for good quality local independent shops (a key asset of the Town).
- 5.16 Future development proposals also need to be carefully considered from an urban design perspective if the mistakes of the past are to be avoided. Key development opportunities identified in the Strategy must be configured to address the weaknesses identified in the baseline - and in particular the poor sense of arrival, which is a consequence of poor design and layout. Individual developments must not be designed in isolation. On the contrary, designs should be brought forward to follow an established set of urban design tactics and principles, established through a design guide or by adopting a stringent design review process.

The Outcomes

- 5.17 Delivery of the proposed environmental actions should provide the following beneficial outcomes to Leigh Town Centre:
- Improve the quality of the Town Centre environment
 - Enhance the Town Centre offer as a retail and leisure destination
 - Raise the profile and image of Leigh and make it a more attractive Town to visitors thus increasing spend

6.0 Maximising the Benefits from Development Opportunities

The Current Position

6.1 Leigh has seen major investment in recent years around the edge of the Town Centre which has significantly raised its profile. These include:

- **Leigh Sports Village** - the largest investment in public sports, recreational and educational facilities in the Borough. Leigh Sports Village includes a 150 bed hotel; a 10,000 seat stadium; a new building for Leigh Sixth Form College; an athletics track and sporting pitches; and an indoor sports centre incorporating swimming and fitness facilities. Additional office, leisure, food and drink development is proposed



- **Parsonage Retail Park** - a 'big box' retail development occupied by a number of national bulky goods multiples including Curry's, Comet and Halfords. There is also a Sainsbury's on the site
- **Leigh Commerce Park** - this predominantly industrial employment site has recently seen some successful speculative office development. Planning permission has been granted for additional office space

The Prospects

6.2 There remain a number of further development opportunities in Leigh. In bringing these sites forward the focus should be on maintaining Leigh as a location for quality investment in order to improve the quality of life of local residents through improved employment, housing, health and leisure opportunities.

6.3 Action is now required to ensure that investment is also made within the Town Centre to enhance its viability and vibrancy and enable Leigh to compete with other key centres in northern Greater Manchester.

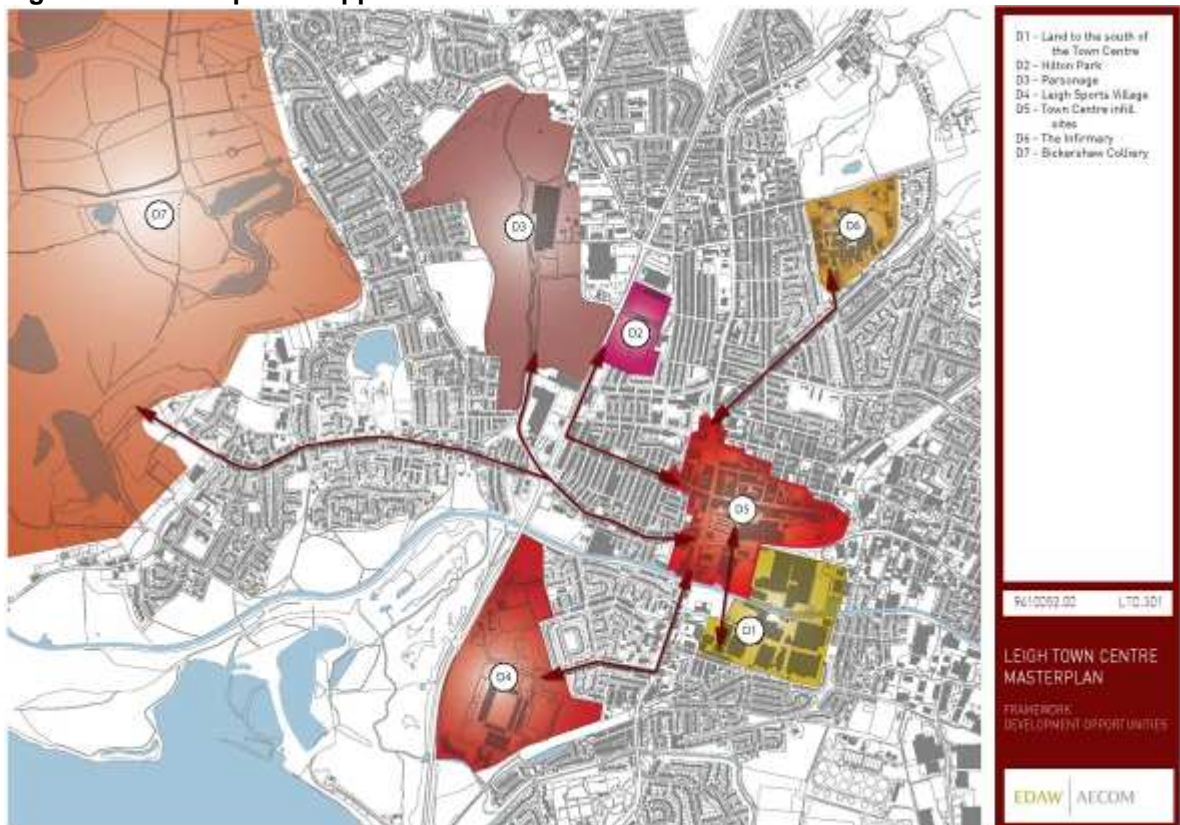
6.4 Given the current issues with access to finance, the level of activity by the private sector in Leigh, as with most other locations, is likely to be limited for the imminent future. However, there is ongoing dialogue on a number of sites and activity will eventually return as the markets begin to recover and function more normally. This Strategy will guide investment decisions to ensure opportunities are maximised for Leigh.

The Action Plan

6.5 Figure 6.1 identifies the development opportunities around Leigh. The type of development proposed and permitted on these sites should not detract from the Town Centre but provide a broader, well connected offer across the wider Leigh area. The development sites which require consideration have been identified as:

- Land to the south of the Town Centre (see Section 3 for specific details)
- Hilton Park
- Parsonage
- Leigh Sports Village
- Town Centre infill sites
- The Infirmary
- Bickershaw Colliery

Figure 6.1 Development Opportunities



Hilton Park

- 6.6 Wigan Council recently lost an appeal against residential development at Hilton Park (the former Leigh Centurions Rugby League site). This site is therefore likely to be developed for residential use.
- 6.7 The southern part of the site is allocated for retail development (larger units) complementing the successful Parsonage Retail Park. This ensures that there is additional land available in the area for those retailers who require larger stores which are not currently available within the Town Centre.



Parsonage

- 6.8 This large site to the north west of Leigh has the potential to significant future employment opportunities for local residents close to the Town Centre. The site is located on Atherleigh Way and as such has good links to the A580 and therefore the wider road network. It holds the greatest potential in the area to attract industrial and office occupiers and is therefore an important driver for the future prosperity of Leigh. There are currently some issues with contamination and accessibility to the site which need to be resolved in order for the site to be developed and thus the delivery of new employment opportunities.



Leigh Sports Village

- 6.9 The development of Leigh Sports Village has raised the profile of the area and established it as an important sporting location within the North West. The development has generally been welcomed by local residents. Its long term success depends on maximising the usage of the facilities by the community and those from further afield. The location of the school and the hotel already reinforce this relationship but this needs to be enhanced through:
- The “completion” of the rest of the scheme
 - A clear primary pedestrian route between the Town Centre which is well signposted, well lit and safe
 - A targeted campaign to promote the facilities on offer at Leigh Sports Village

- 6.10 Ideally future development on the rest of the site should retain a leisure focus reinforcing the critical mass of activities already on the site. The owners are currently in discussion with Morrison's about the development of a large supermarket, petrol filling station, parking and smaller retail units including fast-food outlets.
- 6.11 Many local residents are keen to see the development of a cinema and bowling alley, in the case of the former to replace to Town Centre cinema which closed down. Ultimately the market will determine whether there is considered to be sufficient demand to support such uses. However, where planning guidance supports them the planners need to be upholding the vision for Leigh Sports Village to deliver a unique opportunity, rather than it becoming a general development site for edge of town uses.
- 6.12 Any potential planning gain already obtained from the development, or future development, must be used to improve pedestrian and vehicular access between the site and the Town Centre and surrounding residential areas. As already stated, pedestrian links need to be established to provide a quick route between the west of the site and the Town Centre. These should be supported by good quality signage (stating the walking time in minutes) and potentially way-marked using studs in the pavement. Pathways also need to be created along Atherleigh Way.

Infill sites in Town Centre for retail uses

- 6.13 Within the heart of the Town Centre there are no significant development sites waiting to be developed. The few smaller key sites are:
- Former cinema/B&M store on Railway Road - planning permission has been granted for office development. This could be developed as part of a more comprehensive scheme to open up the linkages from Railway Road to the Civic Quarter
 - Former Boulevard site off Bradshawgate - the site has the potential to provide a larger retail store in the heart of the Town Centre
 - Queen Street Triangle site - bounded by Brown Street South, Spinning Jenny Way and Queen Street, the site is owned by Wigan Council and as such could be used to develop, in conjunction with the proposed busway, to create a new gateway to the Town (see Section 3). The Council invited expressions of interest for the redevelopment of the site about 4 or 5 years ago. The site is not currently being marketed. The future of the existing viaduct would need to be determined as part of working up development options for the site. It is currently used for infill parking which creates a poor gateway to the Town. Some of the other sites around this area are currently used for uses which are not appropriate for a key Town Centre arrival gateway. Land in the area is also safeguarded for the proposed busway

Infirmary

- 6.14 Despite the relocation of the A&E Department to Wigan Town Centre, the Infirmary site remains an important health facility for the area providing a range of services and facilities to meet local health needs.

- 6.15 Work has recently started on site to prepare for the development of Wigan's largest Lift Centre. The 6,000 sq m Centre will include a pharmacy, walk-in centre, sexual health centre, GP suites, weight management centre, children's centre, a dental suite, a clinical assessment treatment centre and the second largest physiotherapy centre in the Borough. There are also long term plans for modernisation and new health development on the remainder of the site.
- 6.16 Investment to reinforce and improve health facilities on this site is welcomed and it should remain the primary focus of health provision within the area. In order to support this role, pedestrian and public transport linkages need to be enhanced and supported with good signage to improve accessibility.

Bickershaw Colliery

- 6.17 The redevelopment of the former Bickershaw Colliery is considered a priority to support Leigh. The redevelopment of the southern site for in the order of 650 quality homes will significantly increase the catchment of Leigh Town Centre and therefore support the Vision of the Town. The focus should be on quality to ensure that the existing housing stock is complemented by modern, quality housing to allow better choice across the area which will also support economic growth.
- 6.18 The HCA released funding in August 2009 to enable work to begin of the first phase of Bickershaw South. The investment will provide a new spine road into the colliery site and prepare the site for development under a programme of land remediation which will tackle the contamination from its former use as a coalmine. It is hoped that future funding will be secured to progress later phases of the development.
- 6.19 In establishing detailed proposals for the site it is critical that strong pedestrian and vehicular links with Leigh Town Centre are established. If accessible links are created between the proposed residential area and the Town Centre, the role of Leigh as the key local centre for the settlement will be reinforced and spending increased.

Maximising the Benefits

- 6.20 In negotiating detailed planning consents with potential developers, the following will be required:
- High quality development with supporting site-specific masterplans
 - Support to enhance public transport (bus) links to the Town Centre
 - Better pedestrianised links to the Town Centre and between key sites
 - Investment in the public realm including the creation of more greenery in the Town
 - Improved use of the canal (where applicable)
- 6.21 As such the Strategy will be an important negotiating tool to set out Leigh's priorities and expectations to ensure new development maximises the benefits to local residents.

The Outcomes

6.22 Redevelopment by the private sector in the medium to long term will provide a range of development sites capable of delivering the following outputs:

New retail floorspace:

- Former Leigh East RLFC - will be able to accommodate larger retail units, complementing the offer at Parsonage Retail Park and providing space for expanding town centre retailers
- Land to the South of the Town Centre - development schemes could provide a level of ancillary retail provision to meet the needs of the developed area
- Leigh Sports Village - proposals exist for additional out of town retail and leisure provision
- Town Centre - scope exists to infill some small key sites with retail

New employment floorspace:

- Land to the South of the Town Centre - is currently allocated for employment use. Employment will be of a type and quantity suitable to the development potential of the site
- Parsonage - has the potential to deliver new employment space and attract industrial and office occupiers given its excellent location
- Leigh Sports Village - proposals for 35,000 sq ft of offices
- Town Centre - permission has been given for a new office development on Railway Road although this has not been developed so far

New residential units:

- Land to the South of the Town Centre - planning application has been submitted to provide a sustainable new residential development of homes on the site south of the Canal
- Hilton Park - will be largely developed for residential use
- Bickershaw Colliery - redevelopment of the southern site for up to 650 zero-carbon homes

New leisure and health provision:

- Land to the South of the Town Centre - redevelopment of the site will enhance and open up the canal, increasing the leisure opportunities associated with it. The development schemes also have the potential to provide an element of public open space
- Leigh Sports Village - has already raised the leisure provision for Leigh and has the potential to do more through completion of the final phase of the scheme and a stepped up marketing campaign
- Bickershaw Colliery - the northern part of the site is set to be transformed into a nature reserve with additional leisure facilities to compliment the residential development in the southern part
- The Infirmary - will provide Wigan's largest LIFT centre, reinforcing health facilities in Leigh

7.0 Raising Leigh's Profile

The Current Position

- 7.1 Following Wigan, Leigh is the second most important centre in the Borough. The Town Centre benefits from a strong independent retail sector offering a wide range of goods whilst the tightly surrounding residential areas provide a large target population within a reasonable walking distance.
- 7.2 Significant retail investment in other centres such as Warrington, the Trafford Centre, Bolton, Wigan and Manchester City Centre is considered to be attracting spend away from Leigh. Whilst the scale of Leigh Town Centre may prevent it competing directly with the much larger centres, the offer must be sufficient to reduce the volume of spend leaking out of the Borough.
- 7.3 Leigh has one of the most successful Indoor Markets in the Borough. However, the Outdoor Market is underperforming and is considered to be in an unsuitably exposed location.

The Prospects

- 7.4 There is considerable scope to strengthen the offer of Leigh Town Centre for both visitors and residents alike. In order to enhance its potential Leigh needs to:
- Build upon its uniqueness particularly to retain and enhance its independent retail offer
 - Enhance the cafe culture and evening economy through the improved provision of food, drink and leisure choices
 - Deliver a step change in terms of the quality of offer to ensure that the wealthier residents within its catchment area choose to spend a greater proportion in the Town
 - Attract more younger people into the Town to spend in the shops and support a wider range of retailers

The Action Plan

- 7.5 The proposed interventions to strengthen the Town Centre are:
- Creating a cafe society
 - Expand programme of major events
 - Creation of "What's on offer in Leigh" brochure listing all businesses
 - Service excellence
 - Refurbishment of the Turnpike Centre

Creating a cafe society

- 7.6 Leigh has a very loyal customer base, but on these tend to be older whilst middle aged and younger residents, particularly those with access to a car, are using other centres for their regular and specialist shopping. Leigh needs to attract more of these young and wealthier shoppers to support the existing retailers and attract a wider range of shops. This will in turn support visits from more shoppers who are able to get more of what they want in the Town Centre.
- 7.7 The Town's retail offer needs to be supported by a better range of services such as cafes and restaurants. This will not only extend the length of time visitors stay in the Town and their opportunity to spend, but also extend the opening hours of the Town broadening its appeal. The creation of a cafe and eating culture is crucial to attracting a wider audience into the Town. This will integrate users rather than segregating them into specific times of day and reasons to visit - beyond shoppers by day and drinkers by night. The Council is currently preparing guidance on using outdoor space for use by cafes and bars, with the aim of encouraging vibrancy in Leigh Town Centre.
- 7.8 It is not easy to change the profile of shops or eating and drinking establishments in a town as it ultimately requires investors to decide to open these establishments and this in its self will be determined by a complex set of subjective and objective decisions. However delivery of this Strategy should improve the likelihood of investment in Leigh.

Expand programme of major events

- 7.9 The current Christmas Lights Switch On Event and the annual Beach Event create a buzz in the Town. This programme of events needs to be extended so that every couple of months there is an extra reason to visit Leigh rather than its competitors. The ideal location for these events will be the Town Square but linkages need to be made with the core shopping area through spin off events for example in the Spinning Gate Shopping Centre. This is already happening with the existing events and should be expanded upon.



Creation of “What’s on offer in Leigh” brochure listing all businesses

- 7.10 Leigh sells a wide range of specialist goods. This is not the case in many other towns of a similar size which tend to provide the same high street offer as any other town. Leigh is unique in the range of shops it has and it needs to raise awareness of this and promote what is on offer, particularly on Railway Road. One way to do this is through a brochure funded by advertising from local retailers. A cheaper alternative may be to run a campaign in the local press which promotes “themes” over a period of time, for example furniture shops one week and food shops another.

Service excellence

- 7.11 One of the major differentiators between local centres with a strong independent presence and larger centres dominated by multiples, is their ability to focus on customer care and service excellence. This is a strength of Leigh that has been identified through the consultations and an area which should be built upon to establish a further reason as to why shoppers choose to visit the Town. Local businesses should ensure their staff are trained and should liaise with public service partners to find out about available training opportunities.
- 7.12 The ongoing discount loyalty scheme for customers is an important initiative in these difficult times and should be extended to more shops and further promoted through the online directory that contains details of more than 5,000 local shops and businesses. This will not only retain and improve the customer base, but also ensure more local businesses survive in the current economic climate.

Refurbishment of Turnpike Centre

- 7.13 Wigan Leisure and Culture Trust is investigating the potential of extending and repositioning the Turnpike Centre as a cultural and community resource. This initiative is fully supported by the Strategy as it holds the potential to broaden the appeal of Leigh beyond its existing retail role offering another reason to visit the Town. Creating a wider offer in the town will attract new visitors, extend the length of visits and support multiple trips creating a step change in the perception of the function of the Town. Discussions with the Heritage Lottery Fund has found that they are unable to fund the project but did feel that it was very worthwhile. Feasibility and design work is still ongoing with John McAlsan and Partners.



The Outcomes

7.14 Delivery of the proposed actions to strengthen the Town Centre offer in Leigh should provide the following outcomes and objectives:

- Improve the retail and leisure offer within Leigh Town Centre
- Increase the number of shoppers and visitors to Leigh thus retaining and attracting shops and businesses
- Increase the amount of spend in Leigh
- Raise Leigh's profile and image for both residents and visitors

8.0 Quality of Life

The Current Position

- 8.1 Whilst local environmental assets and the recent development at LSV provide new and on-going opportunities for an improved quality of life for local residents, the baseline analysis highlighted a number of socio-economic challenges within Leigh and the wider Wigan Borough which may be considered to be perpetuating and negatively impacting upon the local quality of life.
- 8.2 Despite a near average working age population, unemployment is high and rising, particularly amongst the young, many of whom are leaving the Borough for higher education or employment elsewhere. Poor health is also negatively impacting upon local quality of life in Leigh and is a major barrier to economic growth across Wigan. Low incomes, skill levels, and employment opportunities further perpetuate inequalities in quality of life indicators.
- 8.3 The current economic climate is likely to pose a continued negative threat on improving quality of life, heightening the challenge for Leigh to maintain if not improve its prospects for future economic growth.

The Prospects

- 8.4 The successful delivery of the Strategy will do more than secure physical improvement in the area. It will also contribute towards overcoming the socio-economic challenges, improve quality of life for local residents and ensure the long term future of Leigh by creating a sustainable community where people want to live and work.
- 8.5 To this end Leigh needs to:
- Encourage the working age population, and in particular the young, to remain in the Borough through enhanced education and employment opportunities
 - Continue to diversify its economic base towards the knowledge based sectors through the improvement of skills and the provision of suitable infrastructure (including suitable buildings)
 - Strengthen the retail offer to ensure that the range of goods needed by all demographic groups are met locally
 - Maximise opportunities for development to improve health through enhancing access to leisure and recreation opportunities, but crucially through access to employment
 - Improve public transport and sustainable travel provision to improve access to health, leisure and employment opportunities, particularly for those socially excluded
- 8.6 In doing this, Leigh will meet the diverse needs of existing and future residents, be sensitive to their environment, and contribute to a high quality of life. It will be safe and inclusive, well designed and offer equality of opportunity and good services for all, thereby promoting social inclusion and economic prosperity.

8.7 The changes will also ensure that Leigh will be given the opportunities envisaged in 'Vision 2026' - Wigan's Sustainable Community Strategy:

- Opportunities within the local economy that ease access to jobs and services - increased retail, tourism and bringing forward development on employment sites
- Opportunities that support and encourage the decision to live healthier - Leigh Sports Village and Canal enhancements
- Opportunities to realise aspiration through equipping people of all ages with the right skills and qualifications employers need - enhancing Wigan & Leigh College environment and links to the town centre
- Opportunities to get involved in the community to ensure that there is a strong sense of being capable, as a community, of shaping the future of Leigh - community events and inclusive participation in leadership

The Action Plan

8.8 In addition to the physical improvements, the Masterplan will deliver improvements to the quality of life of Leythers justifying the pride they feel for the Town and community.

8.9 The proposed interventions to improved the quality of life of local residents are:

- Local Economic
- Health and Wellbeing
- New Homes
- Enhancement of the Community Focal Point
- Improvements to the Retail Heart

Local Economy

8.10 The suggested improvements across the Town, from enhancement of the public realm, improvement of route legibility and the strengthening the retail offer would as a whole, increase the number of shoppers and visitors willing to come to Leigh. The newly defined Town Centre circuit should ensure visitors flow more easily around all parts of the Town, visiting the historic quarter, the retail heart, the green fringe and surrounding areas. Aside from enhancing the animation of Leigh across the board, these actions have the potential to boost the tourist pound in the local economy (retail, restaurants, and leisure activities), generating jobs, thereby improving the quality of life for those who work and live in Leigh. In the long term, this strengthened economic environment will improve Leigh's chance as an area for private investment and ultimately provide employment opportunities.

8.11 The redevelopment of key sites will deliver new job opportunities. To ensure that they can be taken up by local residents, Wigan Council and other education providers need to raise the awareness of local residents to these job opportunities and to local training initiatives to ensure they have the necessary skills to be able to access them.

Health & Wellbeing

- 8.12 Improvements to the Bridgewater Canal Corridor (canal towpath, cycle routes, way finding) would provide a 'Green Edge' to the Town, bringing to the fore a natural and sustainable leisure resource to be enjoyed by Leythers. It would provide them with a gateway to the countryside and activities encouraging a healthy lifestyle set around the canal itself, sporting leisure, industrial heritage and the surrounding woodlands and wetlands.
- 8.13 Proposals to increase access through the potential development sites to the south of the Town Centre should encourage residents living in this area to walk into Town. Improved signage and pedestrian routes should also encourage more walking and thus support local residents to live healthier lifestyles by improving their level of physical activity.
- 8.14 Proposals being brought forward for the Greenheart Regional Park project will also help increase the number of routes accessing the adjacent green spaces that altogether will enhance the quality of the environment for Leigh residents. This wide range of environmental initiatives brought together in the area is also likely to enhance the economic prosperity of Leigh, attracting a wider borough audience to enjoy the new range of recreational activities. Improved connections to Leigh Sports Village via sustainable travel and public transport would also increase the accessibility of the facilities needed to keep residents healthy and happy.

New Homes

- 8.15 The greatest potential to deliver new homes in Leigh Town Centre is at the Bridgewater Canal site, although undoubtedly sites will emerge over the Strategy lifetime. The principles that should underpin the consideration of new homes include:
- Focus on providing greater choice of housing in the area, rather than adding more of the same
 - Housing design should ensure they integrate well with existing communities
 - Layouts should link to key destinations, minimise opportunities for crime and anti-social behaviour and maximise opportunities for pedestrian movement

Enhancement of the Community Focal Point

- 8.16 Enhancement of the Civic Quarter would enable the reconfiguration of the Town Square into a focal point that balances community needs with Leigh's aspiration to attract visitors.
- 8.17 The improved public realm could form pleasant breathing space for residents in the middle of more dense development and provide leisure activities that give Leythers the opportunity to indulge in cultural activities such as the Turnpike Art Gallery that they previously had to go elsewhere to enjoy.
- 8.18 With the Town Square also refocused as the main public events area, Leigh residents would benefit from a venue that warrants an expanded events calendar, with spin off events in the Spinning Gate Shopping Centre, ensuring that there is more of a buzz right across the Town Centre. Coverage from these regular events will raise Leigh's profile and if conducted on an annual basis would attract visitors back year on year.

Improvements to the Retail Heart

- 8.19 A strengthened retail offer in Leigh would finally provide Leythens with the extensive range of goods they need, reducing the necessity for them to travel elsewhere. With the development of more modern retail units, more contemporary retailers are likely to locate in Leigh, ensuring that the whole demographic of Leigh - from young to old - is catered for, a high quality goods offer is maintained and spend is retained in the Leigh economy. A complementary cafe culture could complete a holistic shopping experience for Leigh residents.

The Outcomes

- 8.20 Delivery of the proposed actions to enhance the quality of life for local residents should provide the following outcomes:
- Improved health and wellbeing including longer life expectancy
 - Improved retail and leisure offer within Leigh Town Centre
 - Enhanced access to quality employment through new opportunities and improved transport infrastructure
 - Improved sustainability of the Town Centre and environmental quality for the benefit of local residents and visitors alike
 - Strengthened community cohesion

9.0 Delivering Change

- 9.1 This Implementation Strategy provides guidance on realising the transformation of Leigh through the delivery of the Leigh Town Centre Masterplan. It sets out the key projects required within a 15 year time frame, funding opportunities and delivery vehicles.

Delivery

Private Sector Led

- 9.2 The private sector will take a pivotal role in the delivery of any town centre regeneration initiative. In spite of the current economic recession and in particular difficulties in accessing finance, there are a number of sites where developers are actively pursuing proposals. These include:

- Former Barlow Radiator site
- Former BICC site
- Parsonage

- 9.3 However, there is always the potential for proposals to stall. Ultimately it must also be acknowledged that the development market always operates in cycles, and that whilst surviving developers are likely to be more cautious in their investments and critically find it difficult to access finance, when we emerge from the current financial turmoil, in the medium to long term confidence and subsequent activity will return to the market. This is a long term strategy for the area which needs to be set within the current climate but be flexible enough to respond to the changes that will inevitably occur in the market.

Public Sector Enabling and Steering

Wigan Council

- 9.4 In commissioning this Strategy, Wigan Council has already demonstrated their commitment to overcoming the challenges that are facing Leigh Town Centre. The Council has also demonstrated its commitment to partnering with the private sector to deliver significant investment in Leigh demonstrated most obviously at Leigh Sports Village.

- 9.5 The Council's key roles in driving the delivery of this Strategy for Leigh Town Centre will include:

- **Delivery** - the Council will lead the delivery of the Strategy and Action Plan
- **Partnering** - Wigan Council should work closely with the private sector to support appropriate development and to look to innovative ways to drive forward investment in Leigh
- **Accessing Funding** - there are a number of critical ways in which the Council can support funding, these include using their assets to drive forward delivery; fronting bids to funding partners; and ensuring appropriate levels of planning gain are obtained from development schemes to support delivery of the Strategy

- **Disseminating** - to ensure local residents, businesses and investors are kept informed about the outcome of the commission and importantly updated on progress made

9.6 Recommendations in terms of the personnel required to oversee the delivery of the Strategy are identified below:

- **Provision of a part time Economic and Regeneration Manager for Leigh** to oversee the delivery of actions for the Town Centre and strategically, the wider Leigh area. The individual should be a specialist in planning and/or economic development with an in-depth understanding of the development process to enable them to be able to negotiate from a position of strength with the private sector. The role could potentially be provided by an existing member of the Planning or Economic Regeneration Team who would have this role added to their current job specification
- Continue regular **consultations and partnership working with the Township Forum and Town Centre Management Group**. These bodies represent an important cross-section of local representatives who are willing to commit time to work alongside the Council, to test ideas and identify solutions for the town centre
- Ongoing input from the **Town Centre Manager** as a key link with local businesses

9.7 In addition to the Council there are a number of other key partners who are active in Leigh and will continue to be key players in the future. These include:

- Wigan Leisure and Culture Trust (WLCT)
- Wigan and Leigh College
- Greater Manchester Passenger Transport Executive (GMPTE)
- Ashton, Leigh and Wigan Primary Care Trust (PCT)

Priority Actions and Phasing

9.8 The aim of the Strategy is to guide investment and development within the Town Centre over the coming 15 years. Table 9.1 identifies the Priority Areas of the Leigh Town Centre Strategy. In terms of phasing, the following has been assumed:

- Short - 1 to 3 years
- Medium - 3 to 10 years
- Long - 10 to 15 years

9.9 Before any of the priority actions can be delivered, a number of immediate, high priority actions will need to be undertaken by the Council in order to facilitate and prepare for their implementation. These immediate actions should be commenced within the next six months in order to maintain the momentum of the Strategy, and are detailed in the table below.

Table 9.1 Prioritisation of Immediate Actions

Action	Priority	Lead	Phasing
Sign off the Masterplan	High	Wigan Council	August/September 2009
Leigh Town Centre Launch Event	High	Wigan Council	August/September 2009
Agreement of Priority Projects - establishment of appropriate Task Groups and project champions	High	Appropriate Decision Making Group within the Council	September/October 2009
Appoint a Town Centre Regeneration Manager for Leigh	High	Wigan Council	By end of 2009
Agree brief for detailed investigation in respect of the Eastern Gateway, including transport and potential development sites	High	Wigan Council/GMPTE	By December To meet agreed timetable for TIF bids
Review of Strategy Actions in context of LDF preparation	High	Wigan Council (Planning)	From September 2009
One-to-one meeting with developers	Medium	Town Centre Regeneration Manager	Ongoing
Detailed review of parking provision, movement and signage	Medium	Wigan Council	Ongoing
Investigate and arrange appropriate programme of events	Low	Town Centre Regeneration Manager/ Township Forum	Ongoing
Produce promotional brochure for Leigh	Low	Wigan Council (marketing)	October 2009
Implement monitoring system	Low	Town Centre Regeneration Manager	October

Resources

- 9.10 Ultimately it will be dependent upon the private sector to drive forward major development on the key sites. However, to ensure that the benefits of this investment are maximised for local residents and businesses, the public sector will need to drive a number of the critical actions particularly in terms of improving accessibility, public realm and the profile of the area. Investment in these enabling works will ensure that Leigh has the best chance of attracting investment.
- 9.11 Where resources allow, undertaking some of the enabling works during the downturn will make areas more readily available and attractive to developers when the market becomes more “normal”. Innovative ways of working to share and minimise risk will also need to be investigated on a site by site basis. For example, land swaps and the creation of a joint venture partnership
- 9.12 Potential sources of public sector funding to support the delivery of the Action Plan include:
- Northwest Regional Development Agency (NWDA) - although the focus of their future investment is likely to be focused on supporting economic growth and businesses rather than physical intervention
 - Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) - with a focus on housing and “place making”
 - Greater Manchester Passenger Transport Executive (GMPTE)
 - Big Lottery Fund

- Futurebuilders - government backed fund offering support and investment to third sector organisations to deliver public services

Potential Outcomes

9.13 Successful delivery of the Strategy should result in the following outcomes:

Strengthening the Town Centre Offer and Raising its Profile

9.14 Delivery of the interventions to strengthen the Town Centre offer in Leigh should provide the following outcomes and objectives:

- Improve the retail and leisure offer within Leigh Town Centre
- Increase the number of shoppers and visitors to Leigh thus retaining and attracting shops and businesses
- Increase the amount of spend in Leigh
- Raise Leigh's profile and image for both residents and visitors

Improving Accessibility

9.15 Delivery of the proposed actions to improve accessibility in Leigh should provide the following outcomes:

- Improve accessibility and legibility in Leigh Town Centre for all modes of transport and therefore a wider potential population base
- Increase the number of shoppers and visitors to Leigh Town Centre and the surrounding developments thus increasing spend
- Enhance the sustainability of the Town Centre and the quality of the environment for Leigh's residents

Public Realm Improvements

9.16 Delivery of the proposed environmental actions should provide the following beneficial outcomes to Leigh Town Centre:

- Improve the quality of the Town Centre environment
- Enhance the Town Centre offer as a retail and leisure destination
- Raise the profile and image of Leigh and make it a more attractive town to visitors thus increasing spend

Maximising Benefits from Development Opportunities

9.17 Redevelopment by the private sector in the medium to long term will provide a range of development sites capable of delivering:

- Employment opportunities
- Improvements to access of health opportunities and therefore the health and well being of local residents
- Retail opportunities to meet the requirements of modern retailers
- High quality housing
- Planning gain to support improvements in the public realm and accessibility

Quality of Life

9.18 Delivery of the proposed actions to enhance the quality of life for local residents should provide the following outcomes:

- Improved health and wellbeing including longer life expectancy
- Improved retail and leisure offer within Leigh Town Centre
- Enhanced access to quality employment through new opportunities and improved transport infrastructure
- Improved sustainability of the Town Centre and environmental quality for the benefit of local residents and visitors alike
- Strengthened community cohesion

Monitoring Success

9.19 Headline indicators that the partners should monitor to measure the success of the Action Plan should be closely aligned to the overarching objectives of the Masterplan, and are as follows:

- Increase in pedestrian footfall within the Town Centre
- Increase in visitor numbers to Leigh
- Increase in the amount of spend
- Reduction in Town Centre vacancy levels
- Increase in the population

Dissemination and Communication

Launching the Strategy

9.20 The successful delivery of the Action Plan will depend upon the commitment of a wide range of partners. Many of the partners have already been contacted and consulted during the preparation of the Strategy.

9.21 To maintain the momentum gained through this commission it will be crucial to hold an early meeting with key partners to gain sign up and commitment from them to delivering the Action Plan.

- 9.22 As a priority feedback to the Leigh Town Centre Management Group and Township Forum will be crucial to ensure that they are kept up to date with progress. Ideally this should take place once an agreement has been made in terms of delivering the Action Plan. At the same time the Strategy should be presented to the PACT and Area Managers Group.
- 9.23 It would also be worth considering setting up a public exhibition in Leigh Town Hall. This launch event should ideally be linked into an announcement of some early wins for example linked to the improvements in local convenience and changes to the car parking pricing.
- 9.24 Additionally, it is recommended that the following key partners are engaged with:
- Private Sector - town centre businesses, local developers
 - Public Sector - Leigh LIFT Company, Ashton/Leigh and Wigan PCT, Wigan and Leigh College, NWDA, HCA
 - Council - Councillors

Task Groups

- 9.25 To ensure the delivery of key projects a series of task groups should be established with membership from the public and private sector. These will be formed with a particular goal for example to access monies for the refurbishment of the Turnpike Centre. Each group will have a specific terms of reference and report to the Leigh Town Centre Regeneration Manager.

Leigh Town Centre Management Group and Town Centre Forum

- 9.26 The Leigh Town Centre Management Group should continue their role providing a key link between the Council and local businesses and residents in Leigh. The Group should also take an active role in the delivery of relevant actions, particularly around developing the Civic Quarter as the focus for a calendar of events. Regular meetings with the Leigh Town Centre Regeneration Manager will provide an opportunity to assess and provide feedback against progress.

Meetings with Developers

- 9.27 A series of one to one meetings with the key developers pursuing proposals in Leigh should be held by the proposed Town Centre Regeneration Manager or Economic Development Officer from Wigan Council, in order to present the masterplan to them and demonstrate the council's commitment to regenerating Leigh.

The Time for Action

- 9.28 The completion of the Strategy is not the end of the process but the start of the action. The commitment of local residents, local businesses and other stakeholders to the preparation of the Strategy should ensure that momentum is maintained and action delivered to ensure that the Leigh of tomorrow is a better place than the Leigh of today.