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Leigh Town Centre

Strategy and Action Plan



August 2009

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Quality Assurance Record	
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1.0 Leigh Today

- 1.1 Leigh is the largest town in the east of the Borough of Wigan. In recent years there has been significant investment in the area surrounding the Town Centre including Leigh Sports Village, Parsonage Retail Park and Leigh Commerce Park. Wigan Council commissioned DTZ, in association with AECOM and EDAW AECOM to prepare a masterplan and advise on how Leigh Town Centre should build upon these opportunities to enhance its vitality and vibrancy.
- 1.2 This Strategy for Leigh is based upon the findings of a detailed economic baseline, and sets out how the Town can build upon its assets and overcome its challenges in order to better serve its local catchment area, as well as playing an important role in the transformation of the Borough.

The Current Role of Leigh Town Centre

- 1.3 The current functions that Leigh Town Centre performs are as follows:
- **A shopping centre:** As the Borough's second largest town, Leigh is the main shopping centre for the east of Wigan. It is largely comprised of independent retailers, including the town's strong indoor and outdoor markets, but is also anchored by the 11,000 sq m Spinning Gate Shopping Centre (with a number of comparison good retailers), three anchor convenience stores and 'big box' retail at the out-of-town Parsonage Retail Park



- **A service centre:** Leigh currently provides its residents with a number of services including banking, healthcare in the form of the 85 bed Leigh Infirmary and the Turnpike Centre library. Leigh still, however, lacks some advice services, to get these Leythers must travel to Wigan Town Centre
- **A learning centre:** The recent investment in Wigan and Leigh College facilities has done much to boost the potential level of attainment and personal development for those educated in Leigh and its surrounding catchment area. This could be further enhanced if the College succeeds in gaining University status. Leigh also has two mainstream secondary schools (educating between 1,500-2,000 students) and eighteen primary schools
- **An employment centre:** Leigh acts as an employment centre for its residents, but is limited by the small amount of commercial floorspace per working age population. Its main employment locations include Leigh Commerce Park, Orford Park, Moss Industrial Estate and Parsonage, with additional smaller sites within the Town Centre. Employment opportunities are likely to be boosted by the new office space within Leigh Sports Village, and anticipated schemes in Parsonage on sites to the south of the Town Centre

- **A cultural destination:** Cultural activities within Leigh are centred around The Turnpike Centre in the Civic Quarter. The enclosed Turnpike Gallery is regarded as one of the best small art galleries in the North West and it engages with a wide audience through contemporary art exhibitions, learning and outreach projects

1.4 These functions provide for a residential catchment which is predominantly made up of owner-occupiers, particularly in the north west and south west of the town, with a high concentration of private rented households (primarily terraced properties) around the Town Centre and socially rented housing to the south. House prices in Leigh stood at around £111,000 in 2008, down 6% on the previous year and below the Borough and Regional average. The number of residences within Leigh may be boosted by further new dwellings proposed at Leigh Sports Village and the Bickershaw South Colliery.

Leigh's Assets

- **Strategic Location:** Leigh has an excellent strategic location in terms of access to both the Borough and wider region. It is well linked to Wigan town, the administrative centre for the Borough. Moreover, located within 2 miles of the A580 (East Lancashire Road), a high quality link road between Liverpool and Manchester, its geographic proximity to the Manchester City Region (forecast to be the main location for economic prosperity over the next 20 years) places it, potentially, in a better position than Wigan town itself
- **Pride & the Community:** Leigh's community is an asset in itself. Leigh residents ('Leythers') are passionate about Leigh. They are proud of its heritage and want to preserve this as the Town Centre develops. They are loyal shoppers, helping to sustain the independent retail environment and as a whole, are committed to ensuring that the Town thrives in the future. The Town also enjoys strong levels of involvement from local businesses to the Township Forum and Leigh Town Centre Management Group. These committed partnerships will be critical to driving the delivery of the Strategy forward
- **Spatial Priority Area:** In preparing the Wigan Local Development Framework, Wigan Council's Preferred Option (currently under consultation) focuses on the 'east-west core' of Wigan and identifies Leigh as one of four spatial priority areas in the Borough (along with Wigan Town Centre, Wigan South Central and Ashton). This planning policy allocation will see nearly all new employment development and around 90% of new housing up to 2026 be focused in the east-west core. This will reinforce Leigh Town Centre as the main centre in the east of the Borough and boost existing development proposals in the area
- **Leigh Retail Structure & Provision:** Leigh is second only to Wigan Town Centre in the Borough's retail hierarchy. Across Greater Manchester many of the larger competing centres are dominated by multiples. Leigh's retail strength lies in its independent retail core that sells a wide range of specialist goods. This retail characteristic has served Leigh well in the economic downturn, which has seen a proliferation of national multiples go into administration, leaving critical voids in many towns' retail structures. Leigh is also well provided in terms of convenience floorspace within the Town Centre and on its edge (Asda, Sainsbury's, Netto, Lidl and Aldi) with access to more mainstream multiples at the out-of-town Parsonage Retail Park



- Recent Investments:** In recent years, there has been significant investment in and around Leigh, including Leigh Sports Village, Parsonage Retail Park and Leigh Commerce Park. This is only set to continue with development proposals based around Leigh Turnpike Centre, Bickershaw Colliery, the LIFT (health) Centre and the final phase of Leigh Sports Village. Completion of these projects will enhance Leigh's current function as a retail, cultural, employment and service centre. Leigh also has a number of other key sites with the potential to cement this role if and when they are brought forward in the future
- Heritage Assets:** Leigh has four conservation areas within the Town Centre and iconic buildings, including the Baroque Town Hall and St Mary's Church, which dominate the Civic Quarter and create an attractive historic quarter for the Town. These unique heritage assets attract the community and visitors alike



- Environmental Assets:** Leigh is home to significant environmental assets that have the ability to provide a major leisure and educational resource. Of particular note is the canal adjacent to the Town Centre, the flashes to the south (Pennington Country Park) and the Greenheart Regional Park Proposal which will provide easy access to the countryside for the people of Leigh. The local community are the key beneficiaries, but the assets could also help project a more positive image of Leigh, drawing visitor expenditure into the Town

Leigh's Challenges

- Access & Connectivity:** Movement in and around Leigh is hampered by a number of issues. Traffic navigation is difficult due to the complicated one way system and poor signage, resulting in congestion and confusion. Pedestrian flow is also awkward and sometimes unsafe because of the severance caused by major roads and poorly placed crossing facilities. Resolving these issues would help improve the animation of Leigh Town Centre as a whole and remove a potential deterrent to visitors

- **Transport & Car Parking:** The pricing, availability and location of Leigh's car parking is one of the Town Centre's biggest challenges. Despite significant demand, the quality of the car parking infrastructure is poor and made more frustrating by poor signage and access. There is also the feeling that free or cheaper short stay parking is underprovided, detracting from the Town Centre as a 'local centre'. Public transport connections between Leigh Town Centre and key locations such as the Infirmary site and Leigh Sports Village are poor
- **Image and Perception:** Residents who are aware of Leigh's assets are frustrated by those outside who perceive the Town as depressed, unsafe and with little to offer. Leigh has lost ground in terms of its current functions and effort must be made to re-establish its profile to increase visitors, private investment and also retain the younger population who currently consider that Leigh offers little to meet their needs



- **Environment & Public Realm:** Leigh Town Centre's appearance is detracted from by ill-defined gateways and areas of poor public realm. This does little to contribute to attracting visitors or investors
- **More than a Retail Centre:** If Leigh is to attract more shoppers and visitors, it must extend its remit beyond its current role as essentially a shopping centre. It must offer a wide range of experiences to persuade residents to choose Leigh over the many other options within easy reach of the Town. As such, the focus must be on offering attractive places to eat and drink and extending the Town's hours of operation beyond the '9 to 5'
- **Leigh as a Destination:** Leigh has few visitor attractions and therefore the capacity to pull in and retain significant tourism numbers and spend to the Town Centre. This problem is exacerbated by limited visitor information services
- **Quality of Life:** Significant proportions of Leigh's residents continue to suffer from heightened socio-economic deprivation levels, including poor health and skills. This situation is not helped by the poor physical environment and limited employment offer of Leigh

Local Views of Leigh

- 1.5 That Leigh has strong assets, yet faces various challenges has been confirmed by the views of key stakeholders, local residents and town centre users. The actions set out in this document are first and foremost developed on the basis of these local views. In particular, the following views have been influential in shaping the way forward:

- Perception of Leigh as having a unique identity within Wigan Borough which needs to be preserved
- Desire to ensure that the investment in out of town sites does not detract from the Town Centre but increases its usage
- Aspiration to stay loyal to Leigh retail, but practical necessity to look towards other centres for some types of shopping
- Concern regarding the retention of younger population in Leigh and improving their perception and use of Leigh Town Centre
- Pride in the Civic Quarter heritage assets and desire to see a more attractive Town Centre in general
- Ambition to create a better environment for private sector investment, to attract visitors and boost local businesses

2.0 Leigh's Potential

Leigh Town Centre Vision

- 2.1 It is hoped that in fulfilling its potential Leigh Town Centre will achieve the following overarching vision:

Leigh Town Centre is a unique and attractive Town Centre serving the needs of local residents whilst also attracting visitors to its shopping, historic, environmental, cultural and sporting assets

The Future Function of Leigh Town Centre

- 2.2 Achievement of the Vision will mean that Leigh Town Centre is:

- **A vibrant shopping centre** - Leigh's strong independent retailers will continue to provide local residents with an extensive range of goods. Quality will be the focus for both the goods sold and customer care. More shops will cater for the demands of young people. The development of new larger retail units in the vicinity of the Spinning Gate Shopping Centre will enable Leigh Town Centre to accommodate the needs of modern major retailers
- **An excellent service centre** - residents will be able to access a wide range of services in the town including public services, banking, library, health care, training and other advice
- **An employment and learning opportunity centre** - an enhanced retail centre will deliver more job opportunities, as will more investment in the office and industrial opportunities in the wider area. Investment in Wigan and Leigh College and Leigh's schools will ensure that educational attainment increases and enhances opportunities for young people specifically, as well as older residents
- **An accessible destination** - visitors will be able to get to Leigh conveniently by car (A580 and M60). There will be clear signage to ensure that visitors are able to find their chosen destination easily. Those who do not have access to a car will be able to use the frequent reliable bus service terminating in attractive gateway locations. The Town's car parks and bus stops will be linked to the Town's offer by attractive paths and well marked cycle routes
- **A cultural attraction** - the refurbished Turnpike Centre, will be the focal point of cultural activities in Leigh providing an attractive location for plays, exhibitions and other activities
- **A vibrant visitor attraction** - investment in Leigh will mean that it attracts a wider range of visitors including sports, cultural and environmental enthusiasts coming to the Town for day trips or weekend breaks, staying at one of the many hotels in the area including the Park Inn at Leigh Sports Village
- **A pleasant place to visit for all ages** - improvements in Leigh's streets and public places will ensure that it is a much more pleasant place to be, providing the opportunity to walk along tree lined boulevards or to sit outside in the Town's cafes, or to reach Leigh's wider environmental assets including Pennington County Park on foot. The Bridgewater Canal

Corridor will become an important feature linking the town to Leigh Sports Village and Pennington Country Park

- **A sustainable community** - achieving the Leigh Town Centre Vision will most importantly create a sustainable community in Leigh. It will be a safe attractive place that people genuinely want to live in, with a range of housing, jobs, services and facilities including schools, doctors, local shops, cafes, pubs and play spaces. All of which will be easily accessible by walking, cycling, or public transport, thus helping to reduce to contributions to climate change

2.3 These new and enhanced roles will improve Leigh Town Centre's draw as the primary centre serving its surrounding population.

Objectives

2.4 We will know that the Vision has been achieved if we are able to meet the following objectives:

- Increase the number of shoppers and visitors to Leigh
- Increase the amount of spend in Leigh
- Raise Leigh's profile and image
- Improve the quality of life of Leigh's residents

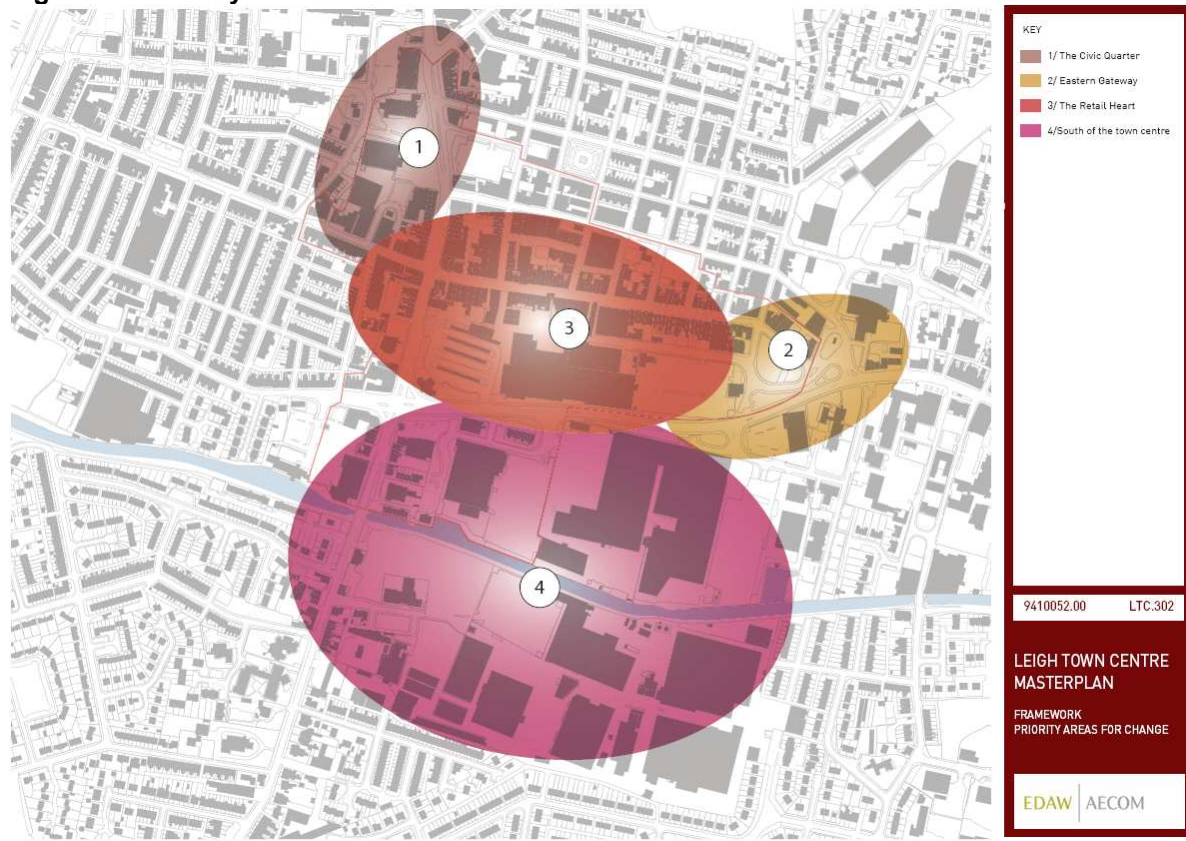
Priority Intervention Areas

2.5 The Masterplan Framework for Leigh identifies four priority areas for intervention and five cross cutting themes. These are:

Priority Areas for Intervention

- The Civic Quarter
- The Eastern Gateway
- The Retail Heart
- South of the Town Centre

Figure 2.1 Priority Areas for Intervention



Cross Cutting Themes

- **Improving Accessibility** - visitors must be able to get to where they want to go, safely and conveniently by foot, cycle, car or bus
- **Public Realm Improvements** - the public realm needs to be updated and made more attractive and “green”. The experience of being in Leigh needs to be taken to a new level through a clear plan rather than a series of individual uncoordinated changes
- **Maximising Benefits from Development Opportunities** - further development opportunities in the area surrounding the Town Centre need to be maximised to enhance the Town Centre itself, strengthen its attractiveness and deliver new opportunities in the heart of Leigh
- **Raising Leigh’s Profile** - if Leigh is to attract shoppers and visitors to the Town, it must compete favourably with neighbouring shopping centres, including the Trafford Centre, Bolton and Manchester. It cannot compete on size and so must offer alternative reasons by building upon its strengths - its uniqueness, the range of its offer, its heritage and its customer care
- **Quality of Life** - the successful revitalisation of Leigh Town Centre needs to support wider benefits to the lives of local residents

2.6 Each of the four priority areas for intervention is considered in detail in Section 3 and the five cross cutting themes in the subsequent sections.

3.0 The Masterplan Framework

3.1 The Masterplan Framework (Figure 3.1), illustrates the priority interventions that are proposed for the four priority areas and the five cross cutting themes. This section considers each of the four priority areas in turn and identifies the actions required to maximise their potential.

- The Civic Quarter
- The Eastern Gateway
- The Retail Heart
- South of the Town Centre

The Civic Quarter

3.2 The Civic Quarter forms the historical heart of Leigh. The iconic buildings within it, including the Baroque Town Hall and St Mary's Church edge a generous Town Square, forming an attractive heritage setting that pulls in visitors and gives resident's pride in the Town.

3.3 With its high quality buildings and edge of centre location, the Civic Quarter is also a striking gateway to the Town, providing an attractive welcome to visitors from the north by guiding them through one of Leigh's conservation areas and onwards down Market Street, with some of the most attractive original feature shop fronts in Wigan.

3.4 Whilst the Civic Quarter and high quality buildings within it are a great asset to Leigh, this area feels isolated from the retail heart due to the severance created by Market Street. However, there is potential to reinstate the importance and heighten the usage of the Civic Quarter by re-defining the Town Square as a unique public events space thereby reinforcing its relationship with the retail core and extending the length of stay and consequently potential spend in the Town.

3.5 The Town Square, already hosts a regular series of events across the calendar year¹. Scope exists to expand this programme and also accommodate a series of speciality markets. These events would attract a wider customer base, who will also be encouraged to shop in the retail heart of the Town, again encouraging extra visitors stay and spend.

¹ The Township Forum is currently working on expanding its programme of events, including working with the Wigan Heritage and Culture Trust to arrange a heritage weekend in September



Figure 3.1 Leigh Town Centre Masterplan Framework



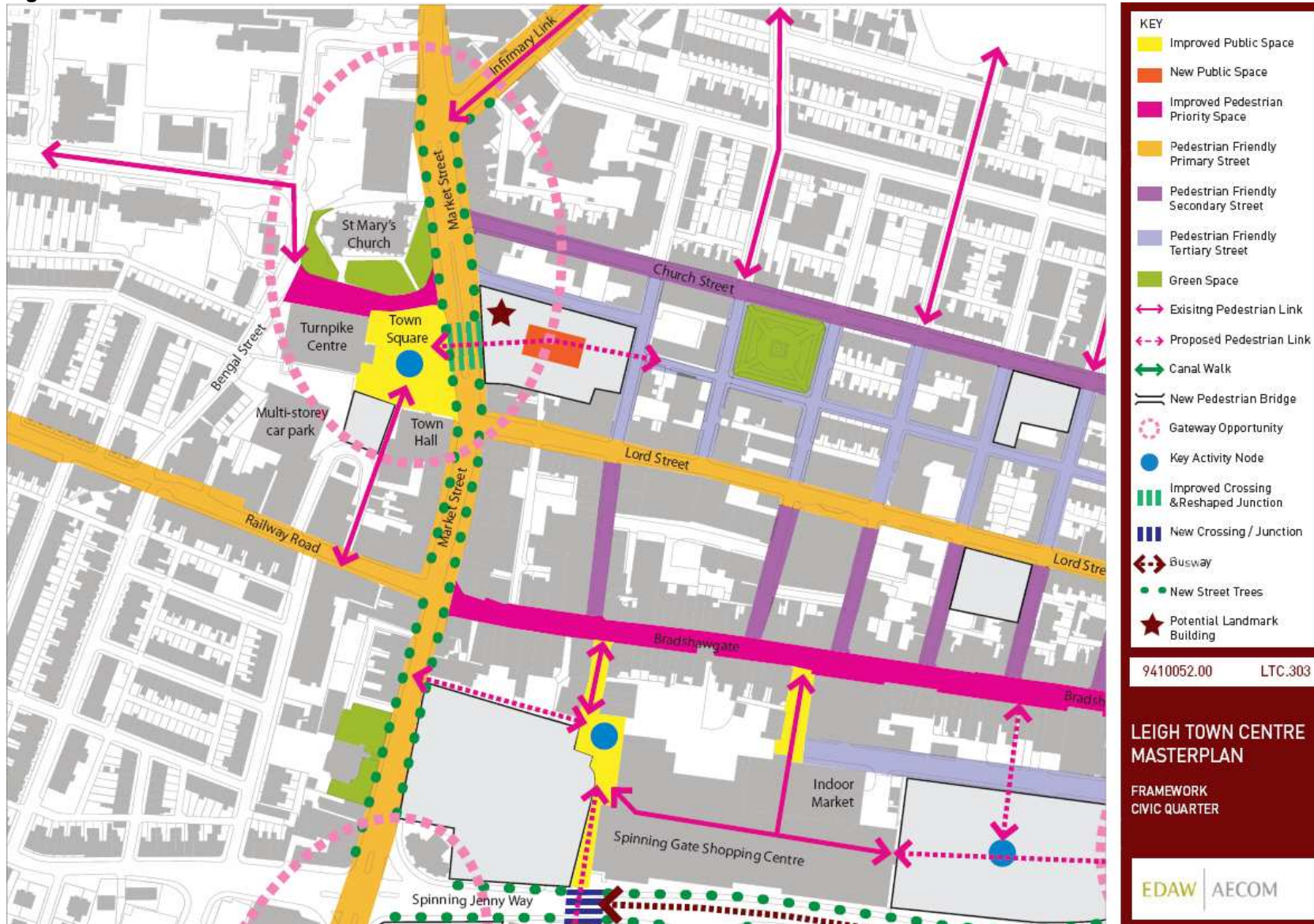
- 3.6 The key issue with developing the Town Square as a public events space is the potential conflict with existing uses, including weddings at the Town Hall and noise issues for the Library. These events should be planned for well in advance and be well marketed, not only to ensure a positive turn out, but also to help manage these potential clashes.
- 3.7 Proposals to refurbish the Turnpike Centre, will create a modern building that stands in striking contrast with its historical setting, yet provides an equally impressive town landmark. The improvements will establish the Civic Quarter as the main cultural and community resource, comprising of library, art gallery and theatre. The Turnpike Centre holds appeal across a variety of age groups and extends the offer of Leigh beyond its existing retail role, providing additional reasons to visit the Town. St Mary's Church is also willing to extend its programme of music and other events to enhance the town's cultural offer.



- 3.8 Improvements to street furniture, streetscape pavement materials, and signage would be required to reinforce the area's special character. The photographs below provide examples of the type of environment which could be created. The Township Forum have recently secured funding for tree planting on Market Street. This and well maintained greenery throughout the Civic Quarter will enhance the setting of the key buildings and create an atmosphere that accommodates a range of activities, from a pleasant space in which to spend time and observe comings and goings, to a visitor hub of activity. In the long term, there is scope to complement this more pedestrian friendly atmosphere through the removal of traffic and car parking (specifically in the road between St Marys Church and the Turnpike Centre).



Figure 3.2 Civic Quarter Framework



- 3.9 Increased usage of the Civic Quarter will also need to be supported by well defined routes and improved pedestrian connections to the retail core and rest of the Town. In the longer term scope exists to develop stronger linkages between the Civic Quarter and Railway Road through the redevelopment of the former cinema site and potentially a more comprehensive redevelopment of the area to the west of the Town Hall.
- 3.10 As the level of activity increases on the Square, there will also be scope to consider the development potential of the Daisy Nook car park to create additional quality frontage onto Market Street, with the possibility of developing links through to the pavilion War Memorial.
- 3.11 Support services will also be a key provision for visitors to the Civic Quarter. Proposals to refurbish Bengal Street toilets will help with this, as will consideration given to improving the attractiveness of the Bengal Street Car Park through improved access, signage, pedestrian links, and greening the facades.

The Eastern Gateway

- 3.12 Investment in the Eastern Gateway offers the potential to create a sense of arrival for visitors entering from the north and east and create a positive first impression, encouraging further exploration of the Town.
- 3.13 The proposal for a guided bus way linking Leigh to the centres of Salford and Manchester is set to run along the former railway line and enter Leigh at the Eastern Gateway. This transport initiative is understood to be third in a short list of potential GMPTE projects and provides the real motivation to create an eastern public transport hub through the provision of a super bus stop.
- 3.14 The Eastern Gateway holds the potential to be a comprehensive access point, able to accommodate pedestrians, cars and public transport users thereby improving the quality of movement down Lord Street, Spinning Jenny Way and Bradshawgate. Creation of an Eastern transport hub also has the potential to help ease pressure on the existing bus station and the roads around it.
- 3.15 Whilst the bus way in itself will not provide huge investment in Leigh, it will facilitate a significant number of further opportunities elsewhere in the Town for this reason.
- 3.16 With regards to the creation of a transport node approach at the Eastern Gateway, potential options include:
- Terminating the Greater Manchester Passenger Transport Exchange, the Leigh-Salford-Manchester Busway (LSM) at the Eastern Gateway along with other bus services coming in from the east. This is likely to be problematic due to interchange issues with the services at the main bus station site. Wigan would have to convince GMPTE and operators that this arrangement would work for them and not create passenger issues for those wanting to interchange. There is also the issue of creating bus layover facilities and turning facilities for buses within the Eastern Gateway which would need a significant amount of space and therefore would take up a lot of developable land, removing some of the economic gain from the site
 - Take the LSM route through the gateway site - this could create a real focal point for the site, but would be expensive and would again remove developable land, reducing the attractiveness of the site for a developer

- Extend the gateway site to span across Spinning Jenny Way in addition to the triangle of land containing the viaduct. The LSM would then stop on the main carriageway (Spinning Jenny Way), but would be within the gateway. Other bus services would also stop in this location creating the super stop. The bus stop facilities would be of a high quality as with the rest of the LSM with branding and enhanced information, there is not a problem with normal services stopping at these stops as with other locations along the route. Under this option there would only be a need to ensure enhanced pedestrian crossing facilities from the southern side of Spinning Jenny Way over to the Town Centre. With this approach the buses would continue to route through to the existing bus station to terminate

3.17 Detailed investigations will be required but the third option is at this stage the preferred option (see Figure 3.4).



3.18 An efficient and straightforward highway layout will rationalise traffic circulation and make navigation easier for vehicles. A traffic management strategy will discourage unnecessary journeys into/around the eastern area, thereby easing congestion. Clear signage will provide pedestrians with legible and safe continuity routes into the various town quarters, and is currently being designed as part of the Local Transport Plan programme.



3.19 The public sector land assets in the area should be used as a catalyst to stimulate private sector investment at this key gateway, establishing a new destination which will stimulate greater footfall and spend down the quieter eastern end of Bradshawgate. Thought should also be given to the development potential of the historical Railway Arches in the area, which could be reconfigured through either conservation or redevelopment to reinforce the gateway. In the long term, there is scope for the consideration of full pedestrianisation of Bradshawgate if new activities are delivered at the Eastern Gateway.

Figure 3.3 Eastern Gateway Framework

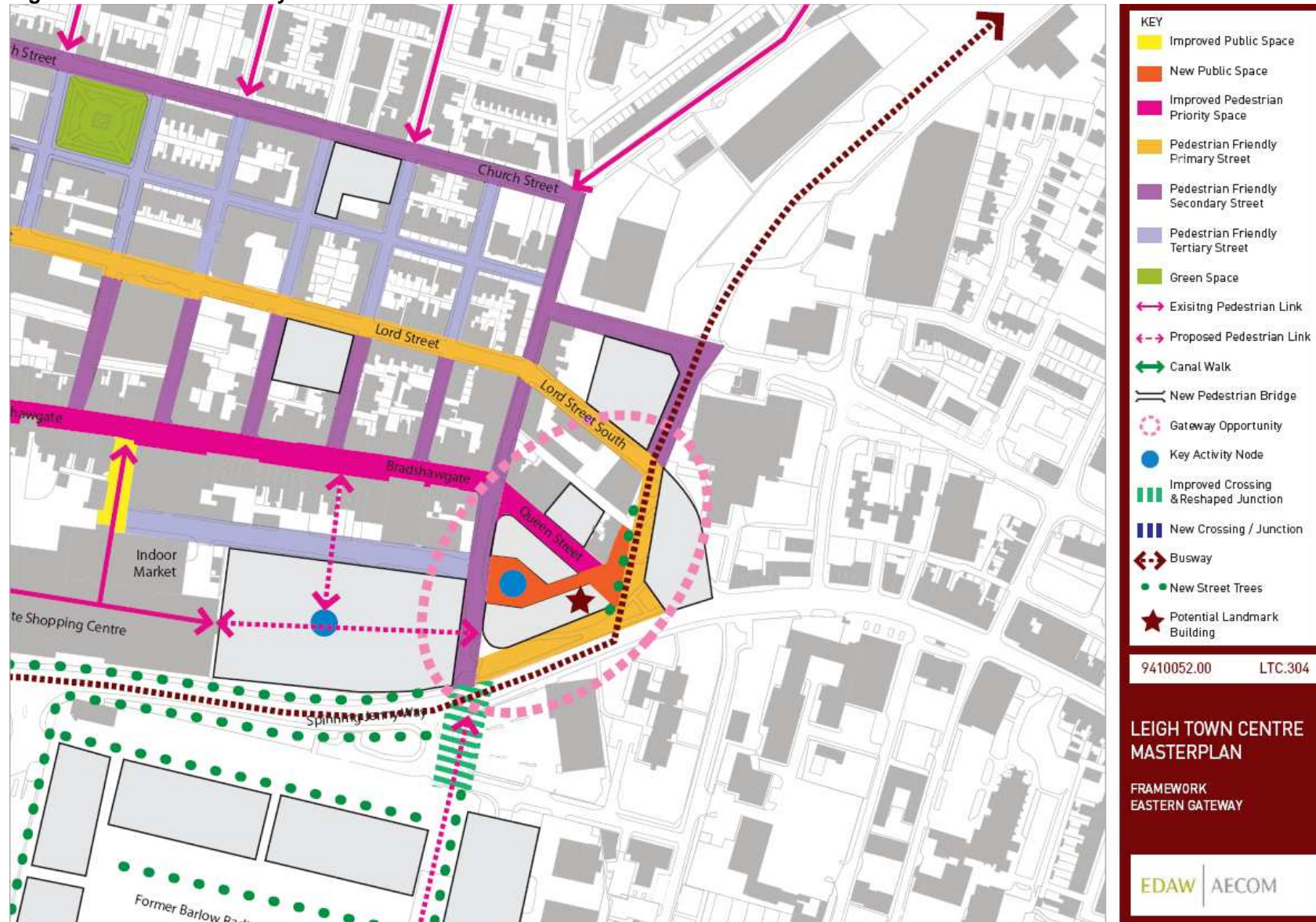


Figure 3.4 Vision and Objectives of the Eastern Gateway Framework



Vision & Key Objectives Eastern Gateway

- 1) High quality eastern gateway - accommodating town centre destined buses
- 2) A modern, new arrival square - inviting, safe and comfortable with ample seating and spill out space offering easy access to ancillary retailing and a welcome café stop
- 3) Easy access to public transport facilities and services - set within a coordinated public realm including contemporary street furniture, lighting, CCTV, tree planters, and improved signage
- 4) Pedestrian friendly streets
- 5) Generous crossing points integrated as part of the overall design concept

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LEIGH TOWN CENTRE MASTERPLAN

FRAMEWORK EASTERN GATEWAY

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The Retail Heart (Bradshawgate/Spinning Gate Shopping Centre)

- 3.20 The Retail Heart of Leigh Town Centre comprises the part-pedestrianised Bradshawgate and Spinning Gate Shopping Centre. Within close walking distance, these two retail areas provide contrasting yet complementary shopping experiences characterised by a strong independent specialist offer on Bradshawgate (which continues onto Railway Road) and the more multiple-dominated Shopping Centre offer.
- 3.21 Although the retail heart of Leigh Town Centre is focused on Spinning Gate and Bradshawgate, Railway Road also has an excellent mix of shops and serves demand to the west of Leigh Town Centre. With the improvements proposed in the Civic Quarter and local parking facilities, there is great potential for the area to harness increased visitor numbers and spend by expanding and improving the range of existing services including cafes, restaurants and retail offer. This, along with improved public realm as seen along Bradshawgate, will better integrate Railway Road and ensure that the pendulum does not swing too far away from the west of Leigh Town Centre.
- 3.22 Whilst the edge-of-centre Parsonage Retail Park has, in recent years, delivered larger retail units and Hilton Park has the potential to offer more, with the exception of the recently developed Wilkinsons Store and the Spinning Gate Shopping Centre, there has been very little development of modern retail units within the Town Centre itself.
- 3.23 In the medium to long term, scope does exist to deliver some new retail units within the Town Centre. However, it is essential that any proposals to extend the retail provision in the Town Centre are worked up in consultation with the Shopping Centre Management and local retailers, to ensure that the scale and type of new development diversifies and supports the existing offer rather than competing with it. The focus of any new development must be within the heart of the Town Centre.
- 3.24 Greatest scope exists therefore at the following locations:
- Extension of the Spinning Gate Shopping Centre east onto the car park in association with the development of a multi-storey car park
 - Extension of the Spinning Gate Shopping Centre focused on the existing service yard area. A new gateway onto Bradshawgate could be created through the former Boulevard site with new development to the rear. The scale of development would be constrained by requirements to allow access to utilities around the existing entrance to the service yard
 - Development of new retail units to the south of Spinning Jenny Way as part of a comprehensive redevelopment of the former Barlow Radiator site. Strong development guidance would need to be set for the redevelopment of this existing employment site². The focus should be on developing links with the Bridgewater Canal Corridor and increasing access to the Town for residents from the south of the Town Centre

² Wigan Council's view is that any mixed use development on this site should be primarily employment led in line with its UDP designation as a Primary Employment Area under Policy EM1A. Small scale 'ancillary' retail may be acceptable as part of this development



3.25 The extensive range of goods made available to Leythers and visitors is boosted by Leigh’s thriving Indoor Market - the most successful in the Borough. Located within the Shopping Centre, the market is renowned for its quality goods and vibrant atmosphere. Selling goods unavailable in the typical town centres surrounding Leigh, the Indoor Market gives Leigh’s retail offer the edge it needs to compete and bolster Leigh’s second place position in the Borough retail hierarchy. By contrast, Leigh’s Outdoor Market is not achieving the same “pull”, nor achieving the success of some of the markets across Greater Manchester. The Outdoor Market is adjacent to the Indoor Market but current stalls generally offer lower end goods and its location within a wind tunnel creates an uninviting atmosphere.

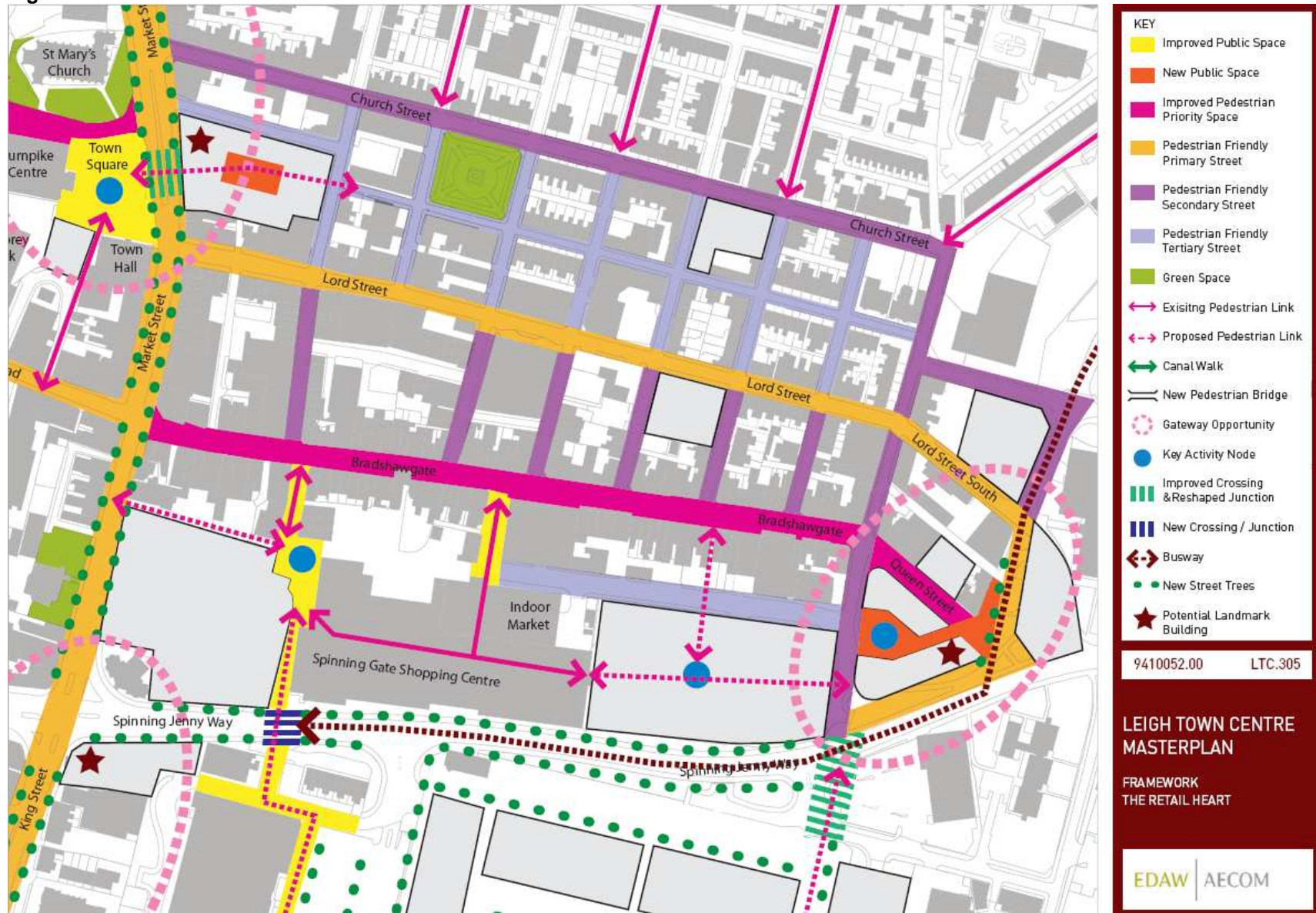
3.26 Reducing the number of days of the Outdoor Market may actually result in more people visiting Leigh. By establishing a limited number of ‘market days’, shoppers will not presume they can visit any day of the week - but potentially not getting round to it - and be motivated to make a trip to Leigh on these specific days.

3.27 Such a strategy would need to be co-ordinated with a drive to improve the quality in the Outdoor Market’s offer so that like the Indoor market, it is providing an additional reason to visit Leigh over and above existing shops. In this vein, themed market days should be considered, creating an event like atmosphere when specialist stall holders come together on a particular day.



3.28 The Outdoor Market should also be supported through the creation of separate speciality markets at specific times of the year, for example Christmas, farmer’s and craft markets. These specialist markets should be located in the attractive Town Square, providing the opportunity to showcase the attractive historic and cultural assets in Leigh’s Civic Quarter. These types of markets will need to be promoted as events, so that a wider audience can be targeted and drawn into the Town. It is recommended that a programme of at least four specialist markets per year is established to ensure that there is a critical quantity of events encouraging repeat visits, rather than visitors simply trying the town once and then reverting to their normal shopping habits. If these changes increase the viability of the Outdoor Market, consideration could be given in the longer term to relocate it to a more attractive location.

Figure 3.5 The Retail Heart Framework



- 3.29 In addition to improvements in the retail offer, the attractiveness of the linkages between Bradshawgate and Spinning Gate Shopping Centre should also be improved. Better signage and clarified pedestrian routes will allow potential visitors to circulate with more ease between the two main shopping districts and ensure better overall footfall and spend. Creating this greater connectivity will also improve the viability of the mixed use areas located along Lord Street and Railway Road, which provide a home for businesses and essential services serving the Town and local residents.
- 3.30 In the same vein, linkages to the surrounding residential neighbourhoods should also be improved. Recent investment in the urban renewal areas (such as the Bedford area) to the east of the Town Centre has included a number of environmental improvements. There is an opportunity here to improve the adjoining/linking streets and bring the routes together under one seamless network.
- 3.31 To ensure that the town centre circuit is not only an easy and safe route to follow, but also a pleasant walk, improvements to streetscape materials, funded through new private sector investment in the Town can help lift the quality and image of Bradshawgate and create a safe and comfortable traditional street for shoppers. These improvements could also include the removal of the canopy and the introduction of better lighting.



- 3.32 Physical improvements should be reinforced by enhanced greenery, in particular the planting of more trees to soften the built form. Officers are currently looking at the feasibility of planting more trees down Market Street with the aim of also installing infrastructure to enable them to be lit up. This initiative can be further enhanced by the Wigan in Bloom Initiative, which aims to enhance the local environment by creating year round floral displays in the Town Centre. Local councillors, business and community groups have already used this initiative successfully to plant flower beds off Spinning Jenny Way and organise floral displays in the Town Square. Along the same lines, efforts should continue on preparing guidance on the use of street furniture in order to reduce unnecessary street clutter whilst not compromising statutory requirements.
- 3.33 Improving the town's retail offer should also be supported by improvements to parking, conveniences and other services such as cafes and restaurants. Together these provide the more holistic leisure experience required to ensure that residents and visitors choose Leigh over the other retail centre options within easy reach of the Town.

- 3.34 In particular, the lack of public toilets has for many years been a major cause for concern for retailers and shoppers. The Council are currently considering three potential options to address this issue - the refurbishment and reopening of the Bengal Street toilets, the upgrading of the current GMPTE Bus Station facilities and the conversion of the existing brick structure on the Spinning Jenny Way car park into a new toilet block. This investment is crucial as shoppers demand this level of convenience and know that it is provided in other competing centres.

Land to the South of the Town Centre

- 3.35 The land to the south of the Town Centre is currently allocated for employment uses. The area comprises two large “sites” split by the Bridgewater Canal Corridor, comprising the Bridgewater Business Park to the south and the old Radiator Factory site to the north. Although currently part occupied by employment uses, it is anticipated that both sites will become available in the medium to longer term for redevelopment into areas of activity that are well integrated into the Town Centre. The area currently acts as a major barrier to accessing the Town Centre from the residential areas to the south.



- 3.36 Despite the severance of the land by the canal, these two areas should not be considered in isolation. Together they represent a highly sustainable location, within close walking distance of the Town Centre and well embedded in the urban area of Leigh. As such, it has the potential to significantly contribute to the vitality of the Town Centre. The northern site has the greatest potential to provide complementary uses to the Town Centre and the southern site has potential to create employment and new housing as part of a mixed use development in the vicinity of the Town Centre
- 3.37 Developers are actively interested in the sites:

- **Bridgewater Business Park** - an application has just been submitted in respect of the Bridgewater Business Park, proposing to redevelop the 25 acre site into a mixed use development that includes employment, residential, small scale retail units and public open space. The proposal has the potential to transform the whole area from a underutilised industrial estate to sustainable community that will create approximately 300-500 new jobs and up to 320 new homes. Discussions are ongoing with the applicants of the southern site to agree an appropriate amount and balance of employment and residential uses.

Redevelopment of the sites will not only improve the visual appearance of the area to the south of the Town Centre but importantly in these difficult times create jobs and thus generate extra spending power.

- **Barlow Radiator Factory Site** - discussions are also taking place with a potential developer with interests in the Barlow Radiator Factory site.

- 3.38 There are a number of principles which any proposal for these sites must demonstrate:
- Mixed use to ensure the long term sustainability of the site, including modern employment uses; residential and other uses complementary and supportive of the Town Centre (particularly on the northern part of the site)
 - Good design of layout, buildings and landscape to ensure quality development and tight integration into surroundings
 - Improve existing site access, to allow genuine accessibility for the public and to accommodate any development - ideally by establishing another canal crossing to the south of Spinning Gate Shopping Centre
 - Enhance the quality of the environment and setting of the Bridgewater Canal Corridor by protecting and improving the fabric and controlling and reducing pollution, danger and eyesores
 - Reinforce improved linkages to Leigh Sports Village and Pennington Country Park
 - Open up access to and across the Bridgewater Canal
 - Uses need to complement not compete with existing uses in the Town Centre
 - Establish stronger links to the Town Centre
 - Create new linkages *through* the site between the Town Centre and the residential areas to the south
 - Enhance the Town's public open space provision and tree planting
- 3.39 The Canal itself, which previously represented a major barrier, isolating the southern site and surrounding residential areas from the Town Centre, could be made permeable by the introduction of additional and upgraded crossing points. Far from acting as a severance to the Town, it could be reconfigured into an asset that eases north-south movement across the canal and helps to synergise the two areas with the core of the Town Centre.
- 3.40 This would be particularly boosted by the introduction of a pedestrian crossing to the south from the retail heart (through Spinning Gate Shopping Centre) and the Eastern Gateway (linked into the new transport hub). If these sustainable connections are forged, the wider regeneration benefits that flow from the redeveloped sites in the long term will have a greater impact on the Town Centre. Planning contributions could help deliver these improvements.

Figure 3.6 Land South of the Town Centre



- 3.41 The Canal also represents a major environmental resource for Leigh Town Centre - its proximity is a unique asset, providing access to leisure opportunities that cannot be matched elsewhere in the Borough. Introduction of a focused strategy to improve the canal and its towpath would ensure that the canal provides a 'Green Edge' to Leigh that complements the economic hub of activity in the heart of the Town Centre and links it to the town's surrounding environmental assets creating another distinct attraction giving visitors an extra firm reason to extend stay and spend in Leigh.

