



Wigan Borough Local Plan

**Review of Local Centres in Wigan  
Borough - Report**

April 2025

## **1. Introduction**

1.1. Local centres are an important part of the community infrastructure in the borough. They provide convenient local shopping opportunities, other commercial and community services, and places to meet and interact with people and take part in activities, that are accessible by a short walk, wheel and cycle from where people live.

1.2. Supporting local centres to thrive and be sustainable will help fulfil the missions at the heart of 'Progress with Unity', an action for change for the decade ahead in Wigan Borough. These missions are:

- Create fair opportunities for all children, families, residents and businesses

"Together, we will break down the barriers that create financial, health, education and environmental inequalities in our borough."

- Make all our towns and neighbourhoods flourish for those who live and work in them

"Together, in genuine partnership with our residents and businesses, who know our communities best, we will help each town and neighbourhood in the borough to celebrate and maintain their identity whilst understanding and helping to achieve what is needed to thrive."

1.3. Clearly, as focal points within neighbourhoods, local centres will be a key asset for flourishing neighbourhoods and a reflection of their strengths in the coalescing of investment and activity. Strong local centres will also provide equitability to opportunities for local communities in terms of the facilities and services they provide.

1.4. Local centres were identified in the development plan for Wigan Borough initially through the Replacement Unitary Development Plan (2006) and, subsequently, the Wigan Local Plan Core Strategy (2013), however these were only the larger local centres. In recognition that smaller centres can also have a significant role, we set out to identify all of the potential local centres that we have in the borough and assess them to see how they are performing.

1.5. This process has informed proposed policy TC12 'Local centres supporting thriving communities' in the Wigan Borough draft Local Plan. It proposed to ensure, as far as possible, that there are an appropriate mix of uses and that local centres are protected from inappropriate uses; that underperforming centres are targeted for

improvement; and that wider investment is focused on local centres to improve accessibility, road safety and the environment.

- 1.6. The purpose of this report is to set out the reasoning and the findings from the review and assessment of local centre function across the borough, and how it has influenced content in the Local Plan.

## **2. The study**

- 2.1. To commence the study, a thorough assessment of potential additional local centres was undertaken using business rates data and other intelligence and identifying what was on offer.
- 2.2. Ultimately, the baseline that was established was lower than had been applied for the 26 local centres currently identified in the development plan. A threshold of 4 shop-type units was concluded as appropriate for determining whether a location is a local centre for the purposes of the Local Plan. This was on the basis that a higher threshold would exclude some valuable, or potentially valuable, centres, such as on large housing estates, whilst a lower threshold would include locations with too few services or facilities.
- 2.3. A local centre might reasonably include one or more of the following:
  - a convenience store
  - a hairdressers / barbers shops
  - food uses such as a café, sandwich shop or hot food takeaway
  - professional services such as an accountancy or estate agent
  - pub or bar
  - community or advice centre, and
  - health care provision.
- 2.4. The threshold of 4 shop-type units is lower than that envisaged in the National Planning Policy Framework (Annex 2 Glossary, 2024), which states that “small parades of shops of purely neighbourhood significance” are not to be regarded as local centres.
- 2.5. This does not reflect the position in Wigan Borough, however, where there are ten town centres and other main centres in settlements, but also many other suburban centres that provide valuable services to their residents, without which people would not have such services within a short walk, wheel or cycle from where they live. It is considered important to recognise these shopping facilities especially where they serve disadvantaged communities.

## **The local centres**

- 2.6. In total 47 Local Centres have been identified as having 4 or more shop-type units. The largest centre is Swinley, close to Wigan town centre, with 55 units. The former local centre at Worsley Mesnes has been removed from the local centres list as it now only contains 2 shop units.
- 2.7. A mix of uses were identified, including:
- convenience stores
  - other food shops such as bakeries, greengrocers or butchers
  - other shop uses such as motorcycle parts and hobby shops
  - food and drink uses including cafes, restaurants, hot food takeaways, bars and public houses
  - other commercial services such as hairdressers, pharmacy, funeral director, betting shop, accountant and nursery, and
  - health and community services such as doctors' surgeries and health centres, dentists, libraries, community centres and places of worship.
- 2.8. The catchment area for each local centre was also considered and is set at 600 metres radius from a centre point within each centre as this is considered to be a reasonable walking, wheeling and cycling distance to/from a destination. This is comparable to 400 metres, which is an established reasonable walking distance to/from a bus stop with a frequent bus service, as unlike a local centre, a bus service is not itself a destination. Most households within the catchment area would be closer to the local centre than 600 metres and a longer distance would typically be reasonable for someone wheeling or cycling.
- 2.9. Within each catchment area the number of resident households was recorded and the socio-economic profile of the area was assessed using the Government's Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) 2019 and 2024 data from Acorn Research. The population categories that Acorn identifies are extensive, including age, marital status, family status, financial position and tenure of accommodation.
- 2.10. Overall, there were three categories identified by Acorn Research:
- Affluent – primarily where households, or a significant majority of households, are not in areas within the 0-30% bands of the most deprived communities in England, according to indicators used in the 2019 IMD index. These locations include those identified as affluent elderly, older owners, rising young families, retired social

renters, contented families and couples, and house-proud pensioners.

- Financially Stretched – where large numbers of households are in areas within the 0 to 30% bands of the most deprived communities in England, according to indicators used in the 2019 IMD index. These locations include those identified as squeezed couples, single and young families, struggling social renting families, post-industrial pensioners and elderly in flats, semi-detached estates, young private and social renting in adversity, deprived elderly singles, and deprived younger families.
  - Mixed areas – where one-third to one-half of households are in areas within the 21 to 30% bands of the most deprived communities in England, according to indicators used in the 2019 IMD index. These locations include those within financially stretched categories while one-third to one-half of households are within comfortable communities or affluent categories.
- 2.11. The presence of employment areas was also recorded as potentially offering different opportunities for retail and other businesses in the local centre, such as during lunchbreaks and on the way to/from work.
- 2.12. The presence of other retail, community and commercial uses within the catchment areas was recorded as competition for uses within the local centre. This was extended to 300 metres beyond the catchment area boundary for larger convenience stores (over 400 square metres floorspace) as a household sited 300 metres inside the catchment area would therefore be within 600 metres of that facility.
- 2.13. The local centre role within our town centres was also considered as they have functions that are found in local centres and have a larger offer which can be more attractive to customers. This role is particularly significant outside of the town of Wigan which has a concentration of local centres. An 800 metres catchment was identified for the local centre role of our town centres. The larger catchment is reflective of their larger offer and potential for multi-purpose trips, and their greater accessibility by bus services compared to most local centres.
- 2.14. Overlapping catchment areas were taken into account when considering the actual catchment potential of a centre, including which local centre somebody with a choice might favour. Obstacles to access were also considered, such as a river, canal, railway or busy

main road which may prohibit walking, wheeling or cycling to a centre.

- 2.15. Access to the local centres by walking, wheeling, cycling, public transport or car, including the availability of parking, was also assessed. A particular concern was the barriers to access including hard engineering features, whether access is flat or inclined to and from the centre, and the extent of car parking and its location within the external environment.
- 2.16. Local centres might not all be accessed by public transport but if a centre is on a bus route or close to a railway station it can pick up passing trade from people who live locally but are travelling further afield, and this could extend the local catchment. Similarly, if located on a main road a local centre can benefit from passing trade by car.
- 2.17. The quality of the environment was also assessed, including the condition of the buildings and their surroundings and the number of vacant units or premises. The condition of buildings and the environment are often a good guide to the health of a local centre, with those in better condition and well maintained often providing better services to residents. Higher vacancy rates are indicative of a lack of demand and shuttered or boarded up shops can have a negative impact on the how the centre is perceived.

### **3. Summary of findings**

- 3.1. The strengths and weaknesses of the local centres were set out together with a summary of improvements that would be beneficial. The centres were also scored to give an overall ranking.
- 3.2. The criteria used were the number of units, vacant units, convenience stores, takeaways, building condition, the environment (landscape), community provision, community groups, the socio-economic position of the catchment area, pedestrian access, cycle access, cycle parking, accessibility for disabled people, public transport access, car access, and car parking.
- 3.3. The number of units in a centre is significant in the scoring, with larger centres scoring higher. However, this could be countered if there are a lot of vacant units and/or hot food takeaways, as these are scored negatively.
- 3.4. The 47 centres were assessed and ranked as summarised below with the full details set out in Appendix 1.

### **Good local centres in terms of services, facilities and environment**

- 3.5. 10 local centres were found to be good. These are Shevington, Orrell, Winstanley, Parr Bridge, Aspull, Borsdane (Hindley), Clapgate Lane (Goose Green), Stour Road (Astley), Marsh Green and Higher Ince.
- 3.6. These centres contain a range of convenience stores and other comparison shops, food and drink outlets, and private and public services. All but one have community buildings and all have active community groups.
- 3.7. The condition of buildings is good at all of these centres with good or reasonable pedestrian access and car parking and all are accessible by local bus services. Most have reasonable disability access although there is room for improvement to wheeling and cycling, and cycle parking infrastructure is available at nearly all.
- 3.8. Seven of these centres are located in affluent or mixed financial catchments and three are in financially stretched communities.
- 3.9. The priority for these centres is to retain their good provision and condition and to make incremental improvements where required.

### **Reasonable local centres in terms of services, facilities and environment**

- 3.10. 25 local centres were rated as reasonable. These are Church Lane (Lowton), Mesnes Road, Norley Hall, Woodhouse Lane (Beech Hill), St Paul's Avenue (Goose Green), Hawkley, Whelley,, Oaklands Road (Lowton), Slag Lane (Lowton), Springfield, Swinley, Newtown, Appley Bridge, Poolstock, Sale Lane (Tyldesley), Blackmoor Road (Astley), Worsley Hall, Higher Folds, Orrell Post, Gidlow Lane (Beech Hill), Mosley Common, Atherton Road (Hindley), Scholes and Bolton Road (Atherton).
- 3.11. These centres have a convenience offer, a range of food and drink units, and public and private services. Over a third of them have community buildings.
- 3.12. Buildings are in an acceptable condition, as is the surrounding hard and soft landscaping, however, repairs and improvements would enhance their attraction to local residents.
- 3.13. Works were also needed to improve accessibility by walking, wheeling and cycling.
- 3.14. Car access and parking provision is often good or reasonable and all had bus services nearby.
- 3.15. The resident catchments covered affluent, financially stretched and mixed financial communities.

- 3.16. What separated the highest ranked of these centres from the 10 that were ranked as good was the pedestrian, wheeling and cycling provision and the surrounding environment, which was often compromised by car access and parking.
- 3.17. What separated the lowest ranked in this category from the 12 in the poor category was reasonable walking, cycling and wheeling access, buildings that are in a better condition, and reasonable car parking provision.
- 3.18. This is a large category which includes centres that need relatively small improvements to become good local centres and centres that need a wider range of improvements to stop them becoming poor local centres. There is considerable scope for improvement across all 25 reasonable centres.

### **Poor local centres in terms of services, facilities and environment**

- 3.19. 12 local centres were ranked as poor. These were Ashbourne Avenue, Beech Hill Avenue, Aspull Scott Lane, Warrington Road (Leigh), Kitt Green, Ormskirk Road, Conway Road (Stubshaw Cross), Derby Street (Atherton), Hag Fold, Shakerley, Wigan Road (Leigh) and Lower Ince.
- 3.20. Most of these centres had a convenience shop and all had at least one hot food takeaway and a hairdresser. Only one had a community building though the majority did have community groups active in their area.
- 3.21. The buildings and the environment were in poor condition with facias and canopies to shops often needing repair.
- 3.22. There were blank or shuttered frontages to buildings and a hard landscape dominated by tarmac and paving to the front of the shop units.
- 3.23. Pedestrian, wheeling and cycling access was often compromised by car parking in front of the shop units.
- 3.24. Car access and parking was varied and seven had good or reasonable car access and parking. Those that had poor car access tended to have a main road frontage with restricted stopping. Access was often compromised in these locations with owners / tenants parking cars on the pavement to the front of their units.
- 3.25. All but two of these centres are in financially stretched communities.

### **Gaps in Provision**

- 3.26. In assessing the local centres and their catchment areas, several gaps in provision have been identified across the borough. The map attached at Appendix 2 shows these gaps which, broadly, are:

- Shevington Moor and North West Standish
- North Wigan and South Standish
- Hindley Green
- South west Atherton
- Bickershaw
- Westleigh and Pickley Green
- Plank Lane / Firs Lane, Leigh
- Pennington, Leigh
- East Lowton, and
- South-central Astley

3.27. These locations do generally have provision, but it is limited to single shops, or two or three shops adjacent, which is below the threshold that has been used to identify local centres. There are opportunities to provide local centres in some of these locations where significant development is proposed. In other areas it would be beneficial to support the improvement of provision in appropriate circumstances.

3.28. Though Worsley Mesnes was removed from the list of local centres, it does have two new convenience food stores including a Heron Foods and One Stop shop, and there are schools and community uses within the vicinity of the new shops. However, the catchment area is overlapped significantly by a combination of the catchment areas for Hawkley, Goose Green (St Pauls Avenue), Poolstock, and Newtown local centres, so the area is relatively well served.

## **Conclusions**

3.29. The assessment shows that most local centres are reasonable in terms of services, facilities and environment. Only 10 of our 47 local centres are rated as good, meaning there is considerable scope for improvement across most of the centres to enable them to provide good services and facilities in an attractive environment for their neighbourhoods.

3.30. There are 12 local centres that are rated as poor in terms of services, facilities and environment. Over a quarter of all our local centres need significant improvement and support to make them sustainable, and the majority of these are in our more disadvantaged neighbourhoods.

3.31. Many of our local centres are in private ownership and some are in multiple ownership. Margins will often not be enough to incentivise significant investment in either shop condition or the immediate environment. In the centres where there is a need for environmental

improvements and there is no service managing organisation this will be a challenge. One opportunity could be for public investment to improve centres, or through a wider regeneration approach that looks at both the centre and its catchment area.

- 3.32. There are a significant number of community buildings across the local centres and many community groups. These are considerable assets to each local centre as a core reason for people spending time there and as a 'way-in' to engaging residents on what they would like to see happen and what would make them use their local centres more. They might also enable opportunities to lever in investment from the community sector.
- 3.33. Access by walking, wheeling and cycling needs to be improved in the environs of most of the local centres, this includes small scale improvements such as dropped kerbs, tactile paving and cycle parking, to more significant works that would change the balance between cars and other users. This will be fed into the process to secure transport funding.
- 3.34. There are gaps in provision where residents do not have reasonable access to a local centre by walking, wheeling or cycling, and access to convenience shopping is more ad hoc.

#### **4. Proposed policies in the Local Plan**

- 4.1. Following the review of local centres and the associated gap analysis of areas outside local centre catchment areas, draft policies have been prepared to help support the sustainability and vitality of local centres and to plug the identified gaps in provision.

##### **TC12 Local Centres supporting thriving communities**

- 4.2. This proposed policy seeks to focus main town centre uses of a scale to serve a local catchment, together with corresponding community services, in local centres so that those services and facilities that provide for people's day-to-day requirements are available collectively, in single combined trips, close to where they live. This would include a strong food shopping role and a wider function, where practicable, that provides a balance of complementary retail-type uses such as hairdressers, cafes, public houses or bars, hot food takeaways, financial and professional services, and other shopfront uses, a range of community services such as a library, health centre, community hall, religious building and school, and an attractive environment with seating and planting where people can spend time and socialise.

- 4.3. It seeks to make local centres safe and convenient to access by walking, wheeling and cycling, and improve access from bus stops where centres are served by local bus services. Part of this will be to better manage the provision of car parking and servicing to reduce conflicts with walking, wheeling and cycling.
- 4.4. Improving the environmental quality of centres through encouraging owner and business investment in buildings, including shop front and signage improvements, upgrading paving, landscaping, boundary treatment, and street tree planting, will help the centres to function better and attract the local catchment to shop and use the facilities located there.
- 4.5. The policy targets underperforming local centres for improvement when resources allow and states that the council will seek to coalesce public and community assets around these centres, with funding and partnership action as far as is possible.

#### **TC13 Gaps in the provision of Local Centres**

- 4.6. This proposed policy relates to the gap areas highlighted above and what retail provision would be considered. It also identifies a number of opportunities to address gaps through an existing allocation in the Places for Everyone Plan and proposed allocations in the Local Plan.

#### **TC14 Convenience shops outside of designated centres –**

- 4.7. This proposed policy sets criteria for considering the provision of convenience shops in locations outside of designated Local Centres and Town Centres to ensure that they don't undermine the role of established centres in the heart of their neighbourhoods. It also specifically identifies a site in north Wigan that would help address the gap in local centre provision in that area.

**Appendix 1: Assessment and ranking of the Local Centres**

Centre	Rating	Score	Position	Units
Shevington	Good	12	1	33
Orrell	Good	12	1	12
Winstanley	Good	11	1	16
Parr Bridge	Good	11	4	5
Aspull	Good	10.5	5	19
Borsdane	Good	10	6	5
Goose Green (Clapgate Lane)	Good	10	6	11
Stour Road (Astley)	Good	9	8	8
Marsh Green	Good	9	8	7
Higher Ince	Good	9	8	35
Church Lane(Lowton)	Reasonable	8.5	11	19
Mesnes Road	Reasonable	8	12	6
Norley Hall	Reasonable	8	12	8
Woodhouse Lane (Beech Hill)	Reasonable	7.5	14	10
Goose Green (St Paul's Ave)	Reasonable	7.5	14	7
Hawkley	Reasonable	7	16	11
Whelley	Reasonable	6.5	17	6
Oaklands Road (Lowton)	Reasonable	6	18	9
Slag Lane (Lowton)	Reasonable	6	18	7
Springfield	Reasonable	6	18	27
Swinley	Reasonable	6	18	55
Newtown	Reasonable	6	18	24
Appley Bridge	Reasonable	5	23	5
Poolstock	Reasonable	5	23	4
Sale Lane (Tyldesley)	Reasonable	5	23	28
Blackmoor Road (Astley)	Reasonable	5	23	12
Worsley Hall	Reasonable	4.5	27	7
Higher Folds	Reasonable	4.5	28	10
Orrell Post	Reasonable	4	28	12
Gidlow Lane (Beech Hill)	Reasonable	3	30	14
Mosley Common	Reasonable	3	30	10
Atherton Road (Hindley Green)	Reasonable	3	30	4
Scholes	Reasonable	3	30	19
Bolton Road (Atherton)	Reasonable	2	34	5
Bryn	Reasonable	2	34	30
Ashbourne Avenue (Whelley)	Poor	1.5	36	4
Beech Hill Avenue	Poor	1	37	9
Aspull Scot Lane	Poor	0	38	8
Warrington Road (Leigh)	Poor	-0.5	39	5
Ormskirk Road	Poor	-0.5	39	10
Conway Rd, Stubshaw Cross	Poor	-1.5	41	4
Kitt Green	Poor	-1	42	7

Centre	Rating	Score	Position	Units
Derby Street	Poor	-2	43	6
Hag Fold	Poor	-3	44	4
Shakerley	Poor	-3	44	4
Wigan Road (Leigh)	Poor	-3	44	6
Lower Ince	Poor	-3.5	47	9

