

## Frequently asked questions: The Galleries regeneration

In 2018, Wigan Council purchased The Galleries Shopping Centre following years of decline. Previously, The Galleries (including the market) were privately owned.

Ownership now gives the council greater control over the future of Wigan town centre, ensuring that redevelopment plans become a reality and so it is positioned as a place where people want to live, work, visit and invest.

The council is now seeking a development partner that will help shape the plans for The Galleries, in consultation with retailers, traders and residents.

### **Q. How will the council pay for the regeneration of The Galleries Shopping Centre?**

A. The Council has seen significant cuts in the budget it receives from central government. As a result, we are increasingly reliant on business rates and council tax for our income. This income is crucial in funding key council services including adult social care, libraries, road maintenance and parks.

We know from our Big Listening Project that people said an improved town centre that delivers civic pride, provides jobs for local people and the services and facilities that they want to see in the town, is a big priority for them. We are therefore working hard to deliver on this.

Whilst funding is always a challenge, we cannot afford to stand still as a town, despite the challenges. That's why we are engaging with retailers, traders and the public to develop plans for The Galleries and a new market that will improve the town centre for business and local people. If the town centre performs well, it will also deliver an improved income stream for the council to invest in services.

In addition, funding for regeneration projects comes from different sources - we will not be taking funding from budgets for key services for redevelopment.

### **Q. With retail becoming increasingly uncertain, how will the new Galleries be sustainable?**

A. Wigan isn't alone. Retail is on the decline across the country because of changes to the way we shop. It's because of this trend that we need to take action now to ensure we have a town centre offer that is viable and fit for the future. We've taken the first step by purchasing The Galleries, putting us in a unique position to take control of our high street and ensuring that any new model has the best chance of success. This means looking at the needs of the modern consumer and producing a town centre offer that is more diverse and doesn't rely on retail alone. A better leisure and **culture offer for example could attract more visitors.**

**Q. What are the timescales of The Galleries project?**

A. It is anticipated that a preferred partner will be identified in 2020, with development agreements likely to be finalised in 2021, before work can begin on site in late 2021 or 2022.

The Council has to comply with procurement legislation designed to ensure there is a fair and open process to select a development partner. This takes time. Once a development partner is selected, we then have to negotiate the final contract before work can begin.

An official notice asking for expressions of interest from potential development partners to help the council work up its plans has now been published, with a preferred partner expected to be identified in 2020. Agreements are likely to be finalised in 2021, before work can begin in late 2021 or 2022.

We want to use the next eight months to gather views and ideas about the development so will be working closely with retailers, traders and residents to ensure these can help shape the design.

**Q. Will the market stay where it is?**

A. Over the next eight months or so, up to a preferred development partner being chosen, we will be working with the market traders to discuss ideas about the future of the market. As part of the soft market testing process we did identify alternative locations for the market, including Marketgate off the main high street, which would position it in a more prominent place with the opportunity to get more footfall. Moving the market to a more accessible location in the town centre is something that we feel will benefit traders and their businesses, but no decisions have been made yet.

**Q. What will happen to The Fire Within?**

A. Earlier this year we launched our five-year arts and cultural strategy for the borough. This strategy is one of our most important priorities as we know the huge economic and social impact the arts can have on a place and its people. During the Big Listening Project residents told us they wanted to see more cultural opportunities in the town centre so this will be explored during this process.

**Q. What about other town centres? How are they going to benefit?**

A. The redevelopment of The Galleries forms part of a much wider [strategic framework](#) for Wigan town centre, which sets out the short, medium and long-term ambitions for Wigan. We are now in the process of finalising a similar framework for Leigh, which we will share once complete.



Wigan, Leigh, Ashton-in-Makerfield and Atherton also have their [town centre plans](#), which outline what their current offers include and how they can be built upon.

Earlier this year the leader of Wigan Council committed £600k for improvements to all of the borough's district centres through the Our Town initiative. Find out more [here](#).

