Wigan Allocations and Development Management Local Plan: Initial Draft Plan

Wigan Borough Retail and Centres Evidence Paper

October 2015

1. Introduction

1.1. The National Planning Policy Framework sets out the government's aim to ensure the vitality and viability of town centres, and the role of local plans in achieving this aim.

1.2. In this regard, the Wigan Borough Local Plan includes the adopted Local Plan Core Strategy and the Allocations and Development Management Local Plan (draft Allocations Plan for short), once it is adopted.

1.3. Policy SP2 in the Core Strategy identifies the retail hierarchy within the borough and sets out the council's policy objectives within these areas. The hierarchy covers:

- Principal town centre – Wigan
- Main town centres – Leigh and Ashton-in-Makerfield
- Smaller town centres - Atherton, Golborne, Hindley, Pemberton, Standish and Tyldesley
- Local and neighbourhood centres.

1.4. The policy identified that there was a need to review our existing local centres and consider the need for an additional tier of smaller 'neighbourhood' centres to ensure important local community facilities can be safeguarded. This review has now been completed.

1.5. Policy SP2 supports the key role of town centres, directing town centre uses to these areas, and also sets out the council's approach to out of centre development.

1.6. The policy also identifies the key issues that need to be addressed through the Allocations Plan within Wigan, Leigh and Ashton town centres. Since the adoption of the Core Strategy, further development work has been carried out on a number of key projects, which will help to address these issues, and which will be supported through the draft Allocations Plan.

1.7. The draft Allocations and Development Management Local Plan builds on the established Core Strategy policy by:

- Reviewing the boundaries of town centres and Principal Shopping Areas. In line with national policy, the latter have now been redesignated as Primary Shopping Areas. After considering our individual centres, it is proposed that Primary Shopping Areas are only designated within the Principal and Main Town Centres, where it is more important to retain a central retail 'core'. Within the smaller centres, removal of the existing Principal Shopping Areas will facilitate a more flexible approach, in line with national policy.
- Setting policies which make clear which uses will be permitted in these areas.
- Allocating a range of sites to meet development needs, as applicable.

- Identifying sites or areas for a range of infrastructure and public space improvements to make our centres more accessible, attractive and competitive.

1.8. The new policies and site allocations within the draft Allocations Plan have been informed by a review of relevant evidence, updated town centre health checks and town centre project development work which is taking place in tandem with the plan's preparation. This information has been considered in detail and its key findings and conclusions are summarised within this Evidence Paper.

1.9. This evidence has helped develop policies and specific allocations that will promote town, local and neighbourhood centres in accordance with national policy and the adopted Core Strategy. This will ensure that we create viable centres that are fit for purpose and meet the needs of the community.

2. Key evidence

2.1. A comprehensive evidence review of retail policies, strategies and plans was carried out to inform the strategic policies within the adopted Core Strategy. This Evidence Paper focuses on any new key relevant evidence, current or emerging proposals and projects and information which relate to specific town, local or neighbourhood centres, or individual sites within these.

2.2. At a national level, the updated Online Planning Practice Guidance on 'Ensuring the Vitality of Town Centres' is the most important 'new' evidence. This replaces the previous PPS6 guidance on retail and centres. The guidance supports councils in planning effectively for new development supporting town centres, and advises councils to set out a positive vision for town centres, articulated through the local plan.

2.3. At the borough wide level, the most important piece of new evidence is the Wigan Retail and Leisure Study 2014, prepared on behalf of the council by Nathaniel Lichfield and Partners. This provides an up to date evidence base covering shopping patterns, retail need and capacity, potential threats to existing centres, and an analysis of leisure provision. It updates, and provides a useful comparison with, the 2007 Retail and Leisure Study (and 2009 capacity update).

Retail and Leisure Study 2014 Findings

2.4. The general conclusions of the study are:

- The economic downturn and consolidation is still having a significant impact on the retail sector. The assessment of future expenditure levels needs to take account of the downturn and the slow rate of recovery. In this context, a return to previous levels of growth is unlikely to be achieved.

- The growth in internet shopping alongside the economic downturn means that relatively cautious growth and retail floorspace projections for the borough’s centres are appropriate.
- There have been some important changes to store formats, with smaller formats being introduced in both the convenience and comparison sectors.
- Several leisure sectors are experiencing growth, including Indoor Play Centres and Health and Fitness. Conversely, there is limited short term growth potential for ten-pin bowling and bingo.
- There is potential latent demand for a town centre cinema in Wigan, accessible by public transport.
- The borough retains a high proportion of retail expenditure (91% of convenience spend and 66.5% of comparison spend).

2.5. The specific conclusions relating to individual town centres are identified in their respective sections below, whilst the capacity projections are summarised within Tables 8.1 and 8.2 of the study.

2.6. In addition, there are a number of other important pieces of evidence relating to the borough as a whole or covering more than one centre:

- A series of face to face ‘In Street Surveys’ were carried out across 8 town centres during May 2014 by the council. These surveys help to provide a broad understanding of retail and leisure patterns, perceptions and aspirations. The findings are summarised within Section 4 of the Retail and Leisure Study.
- Crime statistics have been analysed for the various town centre to examine if there any specific issues that need to be addressed as part of the plan.
- Up-to-date health check surveys have been carried out during 2015 by council staff. These provide data on vacancy levels, diversity of usage and an understanding of the physical condition of these centres. This work has also helped inform potential boundary changes.
- A number of major road schemes or physical infrastructure works are planned or underway, which will affect the role and potential of a number of centres. The impact of these works has been considered within the individual centre sections below. Similarly, the potential impact of any proposals for out of centre retail and leisure facilities has also been considered.

3. Wigan

3.1. Wigan town centre is the largest centre in the borough and is the principal centre for shopping, services and employment. It primarily serves the west and centre of the borough, but its influence and catchment extends into the eastern part of the borough and into parts of Chorley and West Lancashire.

3.2. The Core Strategy, informed by an Issues Paper of 2011 for the formerly proposed Wigan Central Area Action Plan, identifies that the Allocations Plan will need to address a number of issues, namely:

1. Respond to the shift in activity eastwards within the town centre as a result of the development of the Grand Arcade and the 'Wigan Life Centre', in order to maintain its vitality and viability and its successful function as a large ‘market town’.
2. Better integrate the town centre with surrounding areas.
3. Better integrate the provision of rail services between the two stations and with other forms of transport, notably bus services.
4. Improve the quality of the town’s streets and spaces, including the planting of street trees.
5. Make it a more attractive location for economic development.

3.3. The site allocations and policies for Wigan town centre focus on these issues.

3.4. The table below sets out the current position regarding uses and vacancies from the 2015 health check and from previous years. The centre is dominated by comparison retailing, although the total number of shops in the centre has steadily declined since 2008. There is a limited convenience and family leisure offer but the number of restaurants has increased markedly over the last two years. Vacancy levels have increased, but have remained relatively stable in recent years and are concentrated within the Galleries / Marketgate Centre and, to a lesser degree, around the periphery of the centre. The higher vacancy levels in 2015 reflect shop leases in the Galleries that have not been renewed, pending redevelopment of the combined shopping centres. Vacancy levels within the more recent Grand Arcade centre, opened in 2007, are much lower. In this context, and in line with national policy, the new Primary Shopping Area boundary has been reduced to cover the area where retail development is concentrated. These changes are shown on the draft updated Policies Map.

Table 1 – Wigan town centre uses

		Number of commercial properties							
Class	**Category**	**2008**	**2009**	**2010**	**2011**	**2012**	**2013**	**2014**	**2015**
A1	Shops	261	245	241	241	245	243	232	216
A2	Financial and professional services	51	53	54	57	60	53	54	50
A3	Restaurants and cafes	21	25	25	24	24	30	35	42
A4	Pubs and bars	33	37	35	33	30	14	20	17
A5	Hot food takeaways	18	18	17	18	20	20	15	14
B1(a)	Offices	15	18	17	17	22	10	10	10
B2	General Industrial	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1
C1	Hotels	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
C3	Residential dwellings	7	7	7	7	7	14	16	18
C4	Houses in multiple occupation	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
D1	Non-residential institutions	14	14	14	13	5	13	16	18
D2	Assembly and leisure	4	4	4	4	10	3	3	4
Other	Sui-generis uses	1	1	1	1	10	25	20	18
	Total vacant	94	100	109	107	105	114	120	142
	Total units	520	523	524	522	538	539	542	551
	% of vacant units	**18%**	**19%**	**21%**	**20%**	**19%**	**21%**	**22%**	**26%**

3.5. The Retail and Leisure Study 2015 identifies some capacity for additional convenience and comparison floorspace in Wigan town centre in the short, medium and longer term. It recommends that the council encourages the provision of additional comparison retail floorspace in larger modern formats to meet contemporary requirements of high street retail operators, whilst remaining appropriate to the scale of the town.

3.6. The 2011 Issues Paper identified that the layout and format of the Galleries / Marketgate Centres is unsuitable for today's retailers and not fit for purpose. The high vacancy levels within the shopping centre support this conclusion and a report in 2014 by Estate Agents Tushingham Moore (Wigan Town Centre Retail Intelligence 2014), identifies that these vacancy levels are likely to increase beyond 2015, as a number of leases within the centre are due for renewal.

3.7. A planning application for the comprehensive redevelopment of these centres for retail and leisure development was approved by the council on 11 November 2014 (reference A/14/79428). The supporting information with the application identified unmet demand within Wigan town centre, from a number of retail and leisure operators that the scheme can accommodate. The Design and Access Statement also set out how the scheme will provide a simpler, more efficient layout with unit sizes better suited to modern retail and leisure operators. The development will help to create a more balanced town centre, against the successful Grand Arcade and Wigan Life Centre developments to the east.

3.8. In October 2014, the council's Cabinet approved funding for a major public realm improvement at Market Place, Wigan, which is due to commence in 2017. The report to Cabinet identified that these works will provide a more flexible public space that is 'fit for purpose' and will attract visitors into the area.

3.9. Significant investment is proposed within the town centre's established Learning Quarter. The refurbishment of Wigan and Leigh College is ongoing, as is the refurbishment of the Deanery High School on its existing site. The former Drumcroon building at Parsons Walk is being incorporated into the adjacent Wigan Youth Zone. The previous Area Action Plan work recognised that these facilities make a positive contribution to the town centre economy and they should be supported through the draft Allocations Plan.

3.10. Further investment is also planned for the transport infrastructure within and around Wigan town centre. Over £16 million has been secured through Transport for Greater Manchester for the redevelopment of the existing bus station on its current site. This scheme will provide improved public spaces and connections to the retail centre and Learning Quarter. Outside the centre, planning permission has been secured for the A49 Link Road from Goose Green to Westwood Park and initial works have commenced. These works will significantly improve access to the town centre and will make it a more attractive location for economic development.

3.11. Within the town centre, the highest crime recordings are based around the King Street area associated with the night time economy. Discussions with Greater Manchester Police, local businesses and other agencies have identified King Street as a priority area to reduce levels of crime and anti-social behaviour. A number of potential actions have been identified:

- Improve east-west connections, including future links to the rail stations.
- Diversify uses within the area, supporting a daytime and early evening economy in addition to the night time economy.
- Improve the historic fabric of the buildings.
- Create some open space and introduce greenery into the area.

3.12. The 'Eastern Gateway' on the fringe of the town centre has considerable potential for redevelopment, refurbishment and improvement which could strengthen the economic role of the town centre. The area contains a number of vacant sites and development opportunities in a very prominent location either side of Chapel Lane / Riverway. This 4-5 lane road currently forms a barrier to pedestrians and the complexity of the highway network makes it difficult to navigate and traffic dominates the environment. Together with the simplification of the road layout, for which funding has been secured through the Transport for Greater Manchester Minor Works Programme, the area is ideally placed for mixed-use development to support the town centre. The recent conversion of the old police station to a hotel has led the way.

3.13. The town centre is served by two rail stations at Wigan Wallgate for local services and Wigan North Western Station on the West Coast Main Line for UK wide travel. Although these two stations are relatively close, their separation is confusing for rail passengers and visitors. Customer facilities within the stations are basic with a poor retail and food and drink offer. As identified in the council's Transport Strategy, there is an opportunity towards the end of the plan period to create a new single transport facility on land to the south of Wallgate, with improved facilities for passengers and stronger connections to the town centre.

3.14. The Civic Centre is an obsolete office building on Millgate that is now surplus to requirements. The site would benefit from redevelopment for commercial uses to support the existing retail and leisure facilities in this part of the town centre.

3.15. The 2011 Issues Paper identified that the connections between the town centre and Robin Park sports complex and the DW Stadium are poor and traffic congested. The route has seen some improvements in recent years as part of the construction of the Southgate road. However, further improvements are needed to reduce the impacts of traffic and to make this a more welcoming route for visitors.

3.16. A number of the buildings fronting Wallgate have been improved with support from the Townscape Heritage Initiative. However, the backland area in between the two railway lines is largely used for surface car parking. It is an underutilised area that has potential for development, albeit that there are amenity issues arising from the proximity of the railways.

4. Leigh

4.1. Leigh town centre is the second largest centre in the borough and is designated a main town centre within the Local Plan Core Strategy. It primarily serves the east of the borough.

4.2. The Core Strategy identifies that the Allocations Plan will need to address a number of issues, namely:

1. Bring about an urban renaissance in Leigh to raise its profile and image and create a thriving and prosperous centre.
2. Improve the range of services and opportunities for people in the east of the borough.
3. Increase the number of shoppers and visitors, encourage people to stay longer and increase consumer spending in the town centre.
4. Improve accessibility overall, including linkages between the town centre and surrounding areas, prioritising delivery of the Leigh-Salford-Manchester Busway.

4.3. The draft site allocations and policies for Leigh town centre focus on these issues.

4.4. The table below sets out the current position regarding uses and vacancies, from the 2015 health check and from previous years. The centre is dominated by Class A1 shops, the majority of which are smaller units, although there are 3 discount supermarkets within or adjacent to the current town centre boundary. The number of shops has noticeably increased in 2015 compared to previous years and the family leisure and restaurant offer has been strengthened by the construction of 'The Loom' development, which includes a multi-screen cinema.

4.5. Vacancy levels have decreased to 13% in 2015 which is below the North West regional average of 19% and the national average of 13%. Vacancies are higher in peripheral town centre streets, including the eastern end Bradshawgate and Railway Road. Vacancy levels within the Spinning Gate Shopping Centre are relatively low.

4.6. To reflect recent changes, including the construction of The Loom and the Lidl store at Derby Street, the town centre boundary has been extended to include these areas. This change is shown on the daft updated Policies Map.

Table 2 – Leigh town centre uses

		Number of commercial properties							
Class	**Category**	**2008**	**2009**	**2010**	**2011**	**2012**	**2013**	**2014**	**2015**
A1	Shops	178	173	187	189	170	151	159	173
A2	Financial and professional services	34	35	37	37	40	33	35	36
A3	Restaurants and cafes	17	18	19	19	19	17	21	23
A4	Pubs and bars	14	13	14	13	13	13	10	9
A5	Hot food takeaways	11	11	13	13	11	13	11	11
B1(a)	Offices	5	5	6	5	6	3	7	8
C3	Residential dwellings	6	6	1	6	19	27	24	29
C4	Houses in multiple occupation	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
D1	Non-residential institutions	10	8	9	9	8	9	8	8
D2	Assembly and leisure	4	4	4	4	4	2	4	4
Other	Sui-generis uses	0	0	1	0	4	8	10	11
	Total vacant	25	31	28	25	30	41	43	40
	Total units	304	304	319	320	324	317	332	353
	% of vacant units	**8%**	**10%**	**9%**	**8%**	**9%**	**13%**	**13%**	**11%**

4.7. The Retail and Leisure Study identifies only limited capacity for additional retail floorspace in Leigh town centre over the plan period. This reflects the recent opening of a number of supermarkets around the town centre, which have helped to achieve a strong retention rate for retail expenditure within the borough. It recommends that the council should consider encouraging some additional comparison retail floorspace, to be provided in larger modern formats to meet contemporary requirements of high street retail operators, whilst remaining appropriate to the scale of the town.

4.8. In October 2014, the council's Cabinet approved funding for a major public realm improvement at Albion Street / Bradshawgate, Leigh. The report to Cabinet identified that these works will provide a more attractive home for the outdoor market, removing an unsightly canopy structure and providing a better entrance to the Spinning Gate Shopping Centre. This area for improvement on the draft updated Policies Map.

4.9. The works to construct the Guided Busway into Leigh town centre are substantially completed and this transport link will provide both quicker journey times into Manchester and improved access into Leigh from Atherton, Tyldesley, Mosley Common and Ellenbrook. The busway will make Leigh a more attractive location for development due to its improved accessibility. It will create opportunities for development within and around the town centre, including the former Railway Arches site at Queen Street and the land between East Bond Street and Platt Fold

Street, which are adjacent to the busway terminus, and along the Leigh Canal Corridor. South of the town centre, the Leeds-Liverpool Canal and Bridgewater Canal corridor provides some major opportunities for development in order to take advantage of this improved accessibility. These opportunities include the vacant Mather House at Mather Lane, and the substantially vacant former BICC site at West Bridgewater Street.

4.10. Beyond the town centre, development is taking place or is proposed that will help to support the role of the centre. This includes new housing at Bickershaw South and proposed housing-led development at North Leigh Park and Parsonage.

4.11. A number of improvements have been carried out to car parks at Bengal Street and Queen Street. Within the town centre there are over 550 car parking spaces on council-owned car parks and over 500 spaces at The Loom, which are available for up to 4 hours. On-street parking is also available at various streets around the centre. Overall, the centre is well served by car parking spaces.

4.12. The highest crime recordings in the town centre are around King Street / Market Place, associated with the Leigh's night time economy.

5. Ashton

5.1. Ashton town centre is the third largest centre in the borough and is designated a Main Town Centre within the Local Plan Core Strategy. It primarily serves the south-west of the borough but its catchment extends into parts of neighbouring St. Helens Borough to the west.

5.2. The Core Strategy identifies that the Allocations Plan will need to address a number of issues, namely:

1. The need to claw back expenditure to achieve more sustainable shopping patterns.
2. Strengthening Ashton's position as a Main Town Centre.
3. Reducing the impact of traffic and improving environmental quality.

5.3. The site draft allocations and policies for Ashton town centre focus on these issues.

5.4. The table below sets out the current position regarding uses and vacancies within the centre, from the 2015 health check and from previous years. The centre is dominated by Class A1 shops, the majority of which are smaller units, although there are two smaller supermarkets within the current town centre boundary. There are a number of pubs, restaurants and takeaways also, which benefit from the presence of the nearby Haydock Racecourse.

Table 3 - Ashton-in–Makerfield town centre uses

		Number of commercial properties							
Class	**Category**	**2008**	**2009**	**2010**	**2011**	**2012**	**2013**	**2014**	**2015**
A1	Shops	110	111	111	108	103	105	106	101
A2	Financial and professional services	21	22	22	24	28	21	18	18
A3	Restaurants and cafes	10	10	11	12	14	10	14	13
A4	Pubs and bars	12	11	11	11	11	11	11	11
A5	Hot food takeaways	9	12	12	13	11	11	11	11
B1(a)	Offices	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
C3	Residential dwellings	17	17	18	16	17	19	18	19
D1	Non-residential institutions	3	3	3	2	3	5	5	4
D2	Assembly and leisure	3	2	2	2	3	2	1	0
Other	Sui-generis uses	0	0	0	1	1	3	1	1
	Total vacant	17	17	17	16	13	19	21	26
	Total units	202	205	207	205	204	206	206	205
	% of vacant units	**8%**	**8%**	**8%**	**8%**	**6%**	**9%**	**10%**	**13%**

5.5. Ground floor vacancy levels have increased steadily in recent years to 10% but remain below the regional and national averages. Vacancies are higher in peripheral town centre streets, including Wigan Road. The Gerard Centre is well occupied and its car park is popular with town centre visitors.

5.6. Ashton has received less investment recently than many other town centres.

5.7. The town's established outdoor market, situated on land between Gerard Street and Garswood Street, has declined in recent years and currently operates only two days per week. There are a number of unsightly storage containers used by market traders. Otherwise, the space is used for free, informal car parking. The east-west pedestrian connections across this area are also poor, although some recent repairs have been carried out to the Gerard Street steps. The area is not used to its full potential and represents a major opportunity for development. This could include an improved market offer and upgraded parking facilities as part of the wider regeneration of the area.

5.8. The Retail and Leisure Study identifies additional capacity for convenience and comparison good in Ashton town centre. To meet this capacity, planning permission was granted in 2013 (reference A/13/78618) for an extension to the Gerard Centre, to provide an addition retail unit and improvements to the car parking and landscaping. The extension to the Gerard Centre is identified in the draft Allocations Plan.

5.9. The gateway into the town centre on Bolton Road needs to be improved. There are gaps in the street frontage, informal car parking areas and poor quality buildings, contributing to a poor street environment. Opportunities to improve this gateway will be explored and this is identified as a priority in the draft Allocations Plan.

6. Atherton

6.1. Core Strategy policy SP2 defines Atherton as a smaller town centre within the borough's retail hierarchy.

6.2. The table below sets out the current position regarding uses and vacancies from the 2015 health check and from previous years.

Table 6 – Atherton town centre uses

		Number of commercial properties			**Floorspace (sq.m)**	
Class		**2012**	**2014**	**2015**	**2014**	**2015**
A1	Shops	69	73	80	9,708	10,318
A2	Financial and professional services	19	17	18	1,927	2,133
A3	Restaurants and cafes	9	7	12	499	928
A4	Pubs and bars	7	7	8	1,304	1554
A5	Hot food takeaways	13	12	12	692	704
B1(a)	Offices	1	4	4	1,211	1211
B2	General Industrial	0	1	1	170	170
C3	Residential dwellings	2	10	13	439	643
D1	Non-residential institutions	1	3	3	998	998
D2	Assembly and leisure	5	3	3	725	725
Other	Sui-generis uses	5	8	7	907	842
	Vacant	31	24	14	2,633	1,633
	Total Units	**162**	**169**	**175**		
	% of vacant units	**19%**	**14%**	**8 %**		

6.3. Atherton is a successful smaller town centre. The number of shops, restaurant and cafes has increased noticeably in 2015 and the vacancy level has dropped significantly, from 14% in 2014 to 8% in 2015.

6.4. Market Street is the main thoroughfare. Part is pedestrianised, between Bag Lane and Crab Tree Lane, but is accessible to buses. There is scope to soften the hard surfacing and street furniture along the pedestrianised route with environmental improvements.

6.5. The vacant shops tend to be located towards either end of the town centre, away from its core.

6.6. Improved bus services are proposed to connect Atherton town centre with the Leigh Guided Busway in Tyldesley, when the bus route opens in early 2016.

6.7. The 2014 Retail and Leisure Study reported that there is no further capacity for additional convenience retail floorspace in Atherton over the plan period, as the town centre is already served by existing Asda and Tesco stores. It also reported that there is limited capacity for additional comparison floorspace, which could be accommodated by extensions to existing premises or improvement within the town centre.

7. Golborne

7.1. Core Strategy policy SP2 defines Golborne as a Smaller Town Centre within the borough's retail hierarchy.

7.2. The table below sets out the current position regarding uses and vacancies, from the 2015 health check.

Table 9 – Golborne town centre uses

		Number of commercial properties			**Floorspace (sq.m)**	
Class		**2012**	**2014**	**2015**	**2014**	**2015**
A1	Shops	32	34	36	2,873	3,036
A2	Financial and professional services	7	7	6	733	673
A3	Restaurants and cafes	2	2	3	251	329
A4	Pubs and bars	1	1	1	200	200
A5	Hot food takeaways	7	8	8	760	760
B1(a)	Offices	1	2	2	140	140
B2	General Industrial	4	3	3	400	400
C3	Residential dwellings	4	0	4	0	422
D1	Non-residential institutions	7	8	8	1,746	1,746
D2	Assembly and leisure	0	0	0	0	0
Other	Sui-generis use	2	1	1	64	64
	Vacant	17	15	13	1,232	1,051
	Total units	**82**	**81**	**85**		
	% of vacant units	**21%**	**19%**	**15%**		

7.3. Golborne town centre has performed less well than the other smaller town centres. Vacancy levels have fallen, from 21% in 2012 to 15% in 2015. Nevertheless, the town centre has the highest vacancy levels compared to the other smaller town centres.

7.4. Golborne is served by a Lidl on High Street and an out-of-centre Asda at Edge Green Lane. The 2014 Retail and Leisure Study reported that there is an immediate capacity for an additional 995 square metres of convenience retail floorspace in Golborne, rising to 1,569 square metres in 2026, which could be met by a medium sized store.

7.5. Planning permission was granted in 2011 for a Sainsbury store at Millingford Industrial Estate, Bridge Street in Golborne. The proposed store would meet the additional convenience retail floorspace capacity identified in the Retail and Leisure Study. However, the prospective operator has withdrawn from the project and it is anticipated that the permission will lapse.

7.6. The study also reported that there is very little capacity for additional comparison retail floorspace over the plan period, which could be accommodated by extensions to existing premises or improvement within the town centre.

7.7. Golborne benefits from a number of independent shops and restaurants, including a butchers and Italian restaurant.

7.8. Over the last few years, planning permission has been granted for residential developments at the northern end of High Street and Railway Road, on the fringe of the town centre. The town centre boundary has been slightly amended to exclude these properties from the town centre in the draft Allocations Plan.

8. Hindley

8.1. Core Strategy policy SP2 defines Hindley as a smaller town centre within the borough's retail hierarchy.

8.2. The table below sets out the current position regarding uses and vacancies, from the 2015 health check and from previous years.

Table 8 – Hindley town centre uses

		Number of commercial properties			Floorspace (sq.m)	
Class		**2012**	**2014**	**2015**	**2014**	**2015**
A1	Shops	56	56	56	10,748	10,755
A2	Financial and professional services	14	15	16	1,492	1,589
A3	Restaurants and cafes	7	6	6	1,010	1,010
A4	Pubs and bars	5	5	5	959	959
A5	Hot food takeaways	11	12	13	781	851
B1(a)	Offices	2	2	1	304	207
B2	General Industrial	1	0	0	0	0
C3	Residential dwellings	16	10	13	608	760
D1	Non-residential institutions	10	12	13	2,567	2848
D2	Assembly and leisure	5	3	3	1,338	1338
Other	Sui-generis use	4	4	5	949	1079
	Vacant	21	14	11	1,155	634
	Total Units	**152**	**139**	**142**		
	% of vacant units	**14%**	**10%**	**8%**		

8.3. The strength of the centre has continued to improve in 2015. Vacancy levels have decreased and the total number of units in the centre has increased.

8.4. There is a Tesco Extra Store in the town centre and a smaller Asda at the edge of the centre. The 2014 Retail and Leisure Study reported that a great majority of convenience retail expenditure in Hindley is directed to the Tesco store, whilst the Asda store underperforms slightly. The study reported that over the plan period there is capacity for an additional 839 square metres of convenience retail floorspace, which could be met by a small-scale standalone supermarket or extensions to existing stores. Over the same period there is a capacity for 405 square metres of comparison retail floorspace, which could be provided by high-street format units or extensions to existing units.

8.5. Improvements have been completed to some of the town centre’s buildings under the recent Townscape Heritage Initiative, which brought vacant units back into use.

9. Pemberton

9.1. Core Strategy policy SP2 defines Pemberton as a smaller town centre within the borough's retail hierarchy.

9.2. The table below sets out the current position regarding uses and vacancies, from the 2015 health check and from previous years.

Table 5 – Pemberton town centre uses

		Number of commercial properties			**Floorspace (sq.m)**	
Class		**2012**	**2014**	**2015**	**2014**	**2015**
A1	Shops	63	62	64	6,293	6,647
A2	Financial and professional services	11	7	7	1,074	1,074
A3	Restaurants and cafes	3	3	2	446	236
A4	Pubs and bars	3	2	2	489	489
A5	Hot food takeaways	8	12	12	1072	1,072
B1(a)	Offices	1	1	1	58	58
C3	Residential dwellings	10	20	21	1,115	1,164
D1	Non-residential institutions	2	2	2	283	402
D2	Assembly and leisure	1	0	1	0	62
Other	Sui-generis uses	1	4	4	653	653
	Total vacant	7	9	6	871	535
	Total Units	**110**	**122**	**122**		
	% of vacant units	**6%**	**7%**	**5%**		

9.3. Pemberton has maintained its position as a successful smaller town centre. It has a low vacancy rate which has slightly decreased in 2015.

9.4. The town centre boundary has been slightly amended to exclude a recent housing development at the corner of Normanby Street and Wardley Street, and to include new commercial buildings at the corner of Fleet Street and Orrell Road. This is shown on the Policies Map.

9.5. The 2014 Retail and Leisure Study reported that there is limited scope for growth in both the convenience and comparison retail sectors in Pemberton.

9.6. The proposed M58 Link Road will reduce traffic congestion along Orrell Road and improve the shopping experience in the town centre. It is anticipated that the planning application for the link road will be submitted in early 2016.

10. Standish

10.1. Core Strategy policy SP2 defines Standish as a Smaller Town Centre within the borough's retail hierarchy.

10.2. It is a relatively healthy and busy centre, with low vacancy levels and a number of independent shops and businesses. Recent investment has taken place, including the conversion of the former Co-operative store to an Aldi Foodstore and the opening of the Albion Ale House at High Street. There are 2 current planning approvals for edge of centre supermarkets, at High Street and Preston Road.

10.3. The table below sets out the current position regarding uses and vacancies, from the 2015 health check and from previous years.

Table 4 – Standish town centre uses

		Number of commercial properties			**Floorspace (sq.m)**	
Class		**2012**	**2014**	**2015**	**2014**	**2015**
A1	Shops	44	43	43	4,722	4,695
A2	Financial and professional services	12	13	13	933	933
A3	Restaurants and cafes	2	5	5	418	494
A4	Pubs and bars	1	1	2	194	254
A5	Hot food takeaways	9	9	10	725	853
B1(a)	Offices	0	0	0	0	0
C3	Residential dwellings	5	8	8	282	282
D1	Non-residential institutions	4	4	3	185	149
D2	Assembly and leisure	1	3	3	859	859
Other	Sui-generis uses	1	3	3	899	899
	Total vacant	5	5	4	497	270
	Total units	**84**	**94**	**94**		
	% of vacant units	**6%**	**5%**	**4%**		

10.4. The 2014 Retail and Leisure Study identifies limited capacity for new retail development based on current market shares. However, the Retail Statements submitted with the recent planning applications for new supermarkets in Standish, highlighted the significant leakage of expenditure from Standish, primarily to out of centre stores in Wigan. The provision of a larger food store as proposed by these schemes would help to address this leakage and provide more sustainable shopping patterns. The site at High Street is a proposed retail allocation. However the Preston Road site is not allocated. The planning application was approved in outline which means that a detailed design has not been approved. It will be necessary for developers to show at the reserved matters stage that a retail store on the site could be successfully integrated into the town centre and wider area.

10.5. The Local Plan Core Strategy identified a broad location for new housing development at Standish, providing for approximately 1,000 new houses on safeguarded land over the plan period. Recent planning appeals for new housing development have been allowed and will increase the number of new homes to be built on safeguarded land in Standish to around 1,400 over the plan period. This growth will strengthen Standish's role as a town centre, providing a range of services to local people.

10.6. A Neighbourhood Plan for Standish is being prepared by the Standish Voice Neighbourhood Forum. The Plan will explore further opportunities for development or improvement within the centre.

10.7. No changes are proposed to the town centre boundary. Within all the smaller town centres it is now proposed to remove the existing principal shopping area designations in line with NPPF advice on primary shopping areas. Unlike the larger centres, within the smaller town centres typically there is no need for a clearly defined primary shopping area.

11. Tyldesley

11.1. Core Strategy policy SP2 defines Tyldesley as a smaller town centre within the borough's retail hierarchy.

11.2. The table below sets out the current position regarding uses and vacancies, from the 2015 health check and from previous years.

Table 7 – Tyldesley town centre uses

		Number of commercial properties			**Floorspace (sq.m)**	
Class		**2012**	**2014**	**2015**	**2014**	**2015**
A1	Shops	61	51	59	6,404	6,956
A2	Financial and professional services	13	13	16	980	1,347
A3	Restaurants and cafes	8	7	10	808	955
A4	Pubs and bars	6	4	4	620	620
A5	Hot food takeaways	11	11	12	742	878
B1(a)	Offices	3	0	1	0	78
B2	General Industrial	1	0	0	0	0
C3	Residential dwellings	15	22	22	1,008	1008
D1	Non-residential institutions	6	6	7	954	1064
D2	Assembly and leisure	4	2	1	193	115
Other	Sui-generis use	3	6	6	1,897	1897
	Total vacant	20	23	13	1,915	1189
	Total Units	**151**	**145**	**151**		
	% of vacant units	**13%**	**16%**	**9%**		

11.3. Tyldesley maintains its strength as a smaller town centre serving the south-east of the borough. Vacancy levels have decreased significantly, from 16% in 2104 to 9% in 2015.

11.4. A bid has been submitted to the Heritage Lottery Fund for a Townscape Heritage Initiative scheme for Tyldesley town centre. If successful, it will bring in external funding to improve some of the buildings on the main street through the centre.

11.5. Currently, there are no major opportunities for new development in the core of town centre, although vacant shops and premises are located towards the fringes. In the longer term, the potential to improve the current B and M Bargains building and adjacent sites, could be considered to improve the town centre offer and the setting of the town square.

11.6. The Leigh Guided Busway route will pass through Tyldesley to the south of the town centre. It is due to open early in 2016 and will improve access across the east of the borough and into Manchester City Centre.

11.7. The town centre square has been upgraded. It features modern street furniture and a more user-friendly space that can be used for events and concerts.

Morrison's and Aldi currently have stores in Tyldesley. The 2014 Retail and Leisure Study reported that there is additional capacity for convenience retail floorspace in the town centre which could be met by a third medium sized food store. The Leisure Study estimated that the Morrison's store was underperforming and in August 2015 Morrison's announced that the edge of centre Tyldesley store is one of 11 across the country that is earmarked for closure. It is likely that Leigh's strong provision of convenience retail floor space has attracted some retail expenditure away from Tyldesley, which may have contributed towards the store closure. At this stage it is not known whether the store (or the site) will continue in retail use following the Morrison's closure.

11.8. The Leisure study also reported that there is limited capacity for additional comparison retail floor space in the town centre.

12. Local and Neighbourhood Centres

12.1. The borough has a number of local centres that are designated in the Local Plan Core Strategy, which play a vital role in supporting their local communities, mainly providing a convenience shopping function. Building uses and vacancy levels are surveyed regularly by the council as part of an ongoing health check. The vast majority of these centres appear healthy and are well used. All of them provide some free on-street or off-street parking and most have benefitted from some environmental improvements in past years. This includes Shevington, which has an active Parish Council and local community that has supported a number of small scale environmental improvements.

12.2. However, the poor condition of Worsley Mesnes and Scholes centres is a matter of concern. Both centres have high vacancy rates, display signs of decay and have attracted incidents of anti-social behaviour. These centres require significant investment and remodelling or refurbishment to make them fit for purpose and attractive to customers.

12.3. A new tier of neighbourhood centres has been identified in the draft Allocations and Development Management Local Plan. These are smaller groups or parades of shops, generally serving a purely local area, but which are also a valuable local community resource. Typically, these will contain a convenience store and other small shops attracting a 'walk in' clientele. These centres are valued by their local communities and it is appropriate to offer them some protection through planning policy, similar to the designated local centres. 25 Neighbourhood Centres are identified on the Policies Map. The majority of these are newly identified centres, whilst existing Local Centres at Borsdane, Higher Folds, Norley Hall, Tyldesley (Sale Lane), Worsley Hall and Worsley Mesnes are re-designated as Neighbourhood Centres. This re-designation more accurately reflects their small scale and community function.

12.4. The existing boundaries of the local centres have also been assessed. Amendments have been made to the boundaries of Aspull, Borsdane, Higher Ince, Marsh Green, Swinley (Mesnes Road), and Winstanley centres to reflect the loss of retail premises over time, the changing functions of the centres, or to include adjacent community and health facilities. The revised boundaries are shown on the draft updated Policies Map.

13. Small shops and services

13.1. The NPPF requires planning applications for main town centre uses to be located in town centres, then in edge of centre locations and, only if suitable sites are not available, should out of centre sites be considered.

13.2. Nevertheless, small shops and services of less than 150 square metres gross floorspace outside of the designated town, local and neighbourhood centres are unlikely to have any adverse impacts beyond considerations of amenity, accessibility by foot and by cycle, and road safety. Therefore a policy requirement for planning applications for the smallest shops and services to pass the Sequential Test and demonstrate that there would be no impact on the vitality and viability of a centre, would be onerous and contrary to paragraph 20 of the NPPF, which states that investment in business should not be over-burdened by the combined requirements of planning policy expectations.

13.3. Larger shops of up to 500 square metres floor space, such as local convenience stores, can have a significant impact on local shopping patterns. They should be located within or on the edge of a designated centre wherever possible. Therefore, those proposed outside of a designated centre will be subject to the sequential test and assessed with regard to their impact on town centre investment, vitality and viability, in-line with the NPPF.

13.4. The draft Allocations Plan includes a policy to reflect the planning considerations discussed above for smaller shops and services.

14. Public houses

14.1. Public houses are an important part of the borough's culture and character. They encourage social interaction and are important meeting places for individuals and a range of groups and societies. Pubs are also an important part of the local economy, providing direct and indirect employment opportunities and by attracting visitors into the area.

14.2. In this respect, the NPPF is clear at paragraph 70 that public houses are valued community assets which, amongst other community facilities and services, should be planned for positively and guarded against their unnecessary loss.

14.3. In many cases, pubs are important landmark buildings with architectural merit that make a positive contribution to the local townscape. The council's emerging Supplementary Planning Document on Buildings of Local Interest is likely to identify a number of pubs across the borough as being of local architectural or historic interest.

14.4. Nationally, the Campaign For Real Ale estimate that 31 pubs close every week, leading to the loss of a valued resource (CAMRA Tool Kit for Local Authorities Plan Creation – November 2014). There are a number of factors which have influenced the level of pub closures nationally. These include rising costs faced by landlords, high rents, the availability of cheaper alcohol in supermarkets and changing lifestyles. However, it is widely felt that current planning powers and policies do not give local authorities sufficient power to ensure pubs are retained (Survey of 49 councils by LGiU – July 2014). This view is shared by the Campaign for Real Ale nationally and locally.

14.5. Since April 2011, planning permission has been granted for demolition or conversion to other uses of 26 pubs within the borough. The majority (58%) of these were for residential uses, with the remainder (42%) being for a range of retail and commercial uses. In addition, there have been a number of pub conversions to A1 retail use, for which planning consent is not required under existing planning regulations. Examples include the former Alexandra Hotel at Whelley and the former Golden Lion at Hindley Green.

14.6. Under the Localism Act 2011, local groups have the opportunity to nominate Assets of Community Value, which can include pubs. This gives local groups a chance to delay any sale of the property for 6 months, to allow them to prepare a bid to purchase the asset. Potentially, this creates an opportunity for a group to takeover and run a pub.

14.7. Within the borough, only one pub has been nominated as an Asset of Community Value, namely the Old Springs at Springs Road, Orrell. In January 2015, ministers announced that they will extend planning protection to all pubs listed as an Asset of Community Value. In this situation, planning consent would be required for the demolition or change of use of nominated pubs.

The loss of public houses can have a severe impact on local communities, particularly in smaller towns and settlements. In the case of Lower Ince, a number of recent closures have left only one pub remaining open within the area, the Rock Hotel. The closure of this last remaining pub would leave the area without such facility, affecting the viability of the local community.

14.8. Therefore the draft Allocations Plan includes a policy to restrict the loss of a public house to a different use or redevelopment unless it can be demonstrated that there is no current or likely future demand for the property as a public house and it is unviable for it to be made suitable to meet current or likely future demand.

15. Conclusion

15.1. This paper summarises the key pieces of evidence to support the retail and centres policies in the draft Allocations and Development Management Local Plan.

15.2. The policies deliver the Government's goal to maintain and enhance the vitality and viability of town, local and neighbourhood centres in the borough, and address the key issues that were identified in Core Strategy policy SP 2. The draft retail and centres policies deliver these aims by:

- Reviewing existing centre boundaries and principal shopping areas.
- Making it clear which uses will be permitted in these areas.
- Allocating a range of sites to meet development needs.
- Identifying sites or areas for a range of infrastructure and public realm improvements to make our centres more accessible, attractive and competitive.
- Setting out the tests that small shops and services need to meets where they are proposed outside of the borough's centres.
- Protecting public houses from change or redevelopment to other uses, where there is a demand for them because they valuable to the local community.

15.3. The policies are based upon a range of evidence including:

- A series of face to face 'In Street Surveys' to provide a broad understanding of retail and leisure patterns, perceptions and aspirations.
- Analysis of crime statistics for the town centres to examine if there any specific issues that need to be addressed as part of the plan.
- Up-to-date health check surveys on the borough's centres which report on vacancy levels, diversity of usage and an understanding of the physical condition of these centres.
- Proposed major road schemes and physical infrastructure works that are planned or underway, which will affect the role and potential of a number of centres; and
- The Retail and Leisure Study 2014 which identifies where there is additional capacity for retail floor space in the borough's town centres over the plan period, from 2011 to 2026.