

Creating Vibrant Main Town Centres

- 7.17 Main town centres are recognised as vital hubs for retail, leisure and community life. This policy seeks to support their sustainable growth, improved accessibility and safeguard their distinct identity whilst ensuring they are resilient and adaptable to change, where necessary.

Policy PR2 – Creating Vibrant Main Town centres

As the boroughs designated main town centres, these locations will continue their role in meeting the majority of everyday needs for residents. These centres will be maintained and enhanced to promote the long-term viability and vitality of Rochdale's central and preferred shopping and leisure destinations to maintain them as sustainable and thriving centres. The centres will be maintained as the key locations for retail, leisure, cultural, office, residential and other main town centre uses, as defined in national practice guidance.

1. General Development Requirements

The Council will support proposals for new development in main town centres having regard to the following:

- a. The development is of an appropriate scale and character for that centre and the catchment area it serves;
- b. Where the development proposes the change of use from retail (Class E(a)) to non-retail, this must not result in the over proliferation of any one type of use in that centre, with reference to hot-food takeaways, which may detract from the centre's vitality;
- c. All development should ensure an active shop frontage at ground floor level to maintain functionality and appeal of the centre;
- d. The potential to deliver public realm improvements and enhancements as part of the development;
- e. The creation of convenient, attractive and safe access within and around the town centre to transport interchanges and surrounding neighbourhoods; and
- f. The delivery of an improved evening economy offer for a range of mixed uses including restaurants, bars, cafes and leisure making these areas more vibrant, active and safe in the evening to encourage visitor stays to reinvent the night-time economy.

2. Priorities for Rochdale town centre

Rochdale town centre will serve as the primary hub for major developments, drawing significant footfall and investment. Proposals will be actively supported that enhance the town centre's vitality and viability. This includes developments in key sectors such as retail, leisure, culture, and office space. To do this we will:

- a. Encourage high-quality developments that contribute to the town centres appeal and functionality;
- b. Support the production of a masterplan for the town centre to identify opportunities and deliver regeneration;

- c. Support initiatives that improve accessibility, public spaces, and the overall visitor experience;
- d. Support improvements to the town centre including redeveloping key sites, upgrading buildings, and making public spaces more attractive, interactive and welcoming;
- e. Increase the number of new homes to provide sustainable living, increase vibrancy and boost housing delivery; and
- f. Build upon the restoration of the Grade I listed Rochdale Town Hall and its surrounding environs to establish a distinctive, heritage-led tourism offer. We will also celebrate the borough's rich history while enhancing its cultural appeal and visitor experience.

3. Priorities for Middleton town centre

Middleton will maintain its role in serving the primary needs of its local catchment, supporting sustainable growth and contributing to the wider spatial strategy for the region. It will continue to evolve with development shaped by its strategic location being the closest of the borough's town centres to Manchester City Centre. We will:

- a. Support the delivery of the Middleton Town Centre Spatial Masterplan, the proposed Middleton Mayoral Development Corporation and the proposed Middleton SPD, focusing on the regeneration and enhancement of the town centre and its public realm;
- b. Support the delivery of new homes within the town centre to increase vibrancy;
- c. Improve the design and appearance of Middleton town centre through the creative re-use of vacant buildings, enhancing public spaces, shopfront improvements and promoting high-quality development that respects the historic character of the area;
- d. Improve connections between the town centre and surrounding areas beyond the ring road, including Assheton Way, Oldham Road and Middleton Way. This will ensure these areas are better integrated with the town centre, creating a more cohesive and accessible urban environment;
- e. Encourage active travel routes and options for residents and visitors by focusing on improving pedestrian and cycle connectivity whilst efficiently managing traffic within the centre;
- f. Support the potential delivery of the TfGM expansion to the Metrolink through the town centre to enable enhanced connections to Manchester City Centre; and
- g. Redefine a modern town centre which reflects and builds on the historic form of Middleton's heritage.

4. Priorities for Heywood town centre

Heywood town centre will continue its offer of a diverse range of independent shops creating a niche retail experience. Proposals will be supported where they are well-connected and celebrate local culture. We will:

- a. Deliver new homes on existing brownfield sites;
- b. Support the transformation of Market Street and Lance Corporal Stephen Shaw MC Way which are to be reimagined as a bus transit-led corridor as well as various accompanied active travel routes within the town centre;

- c. Support applications which seek to improve the physical environment and any public realm improvements around Market Street; and
- d. Build on the transformation of Heywood Civic Centre and Peine Square creating a vibrant cultural and public space.

5. Priorities for Littleborough town centre

Littleborough town centre meets the primary needs of its residents with acknowledgement that wider shopping needs can be met in Rochdale. Littleborough will also be promoted as a Pennine Edge tourism centre which builds on the success of Hollingworth Lake Country Park. To do this we will:

- a. Promote accessible transport including footpaths and public bridleways. We will improve linkages to the centre and wider realm of the Rochdale Canal, Hollingworth Lake, Watergrove and the Ogden reservoirs to attract visitors;
- b. Continue to support independent convenience and comparison retailing to offer a unique shopping experience;
- c. Support the redevelopment of the Station Area through the Littleborough Station Area SPD and Masterplan, including the delivery of new homes on suitable sites;
- d. Support proposals that enhance connectivity to the canal, improve station gateways, and refurbish railway arches and properties along Victoria Street to increase footfall and strengthen the local economy; and
- e. Prioritise the delivery of additional parking provision, particularly at the station, in response to identified community demand.

6. Residential Development

We will continue to diversify our main town centre uses to enhance vitality, including further emphasis on increasing the residential offer to support town centre living, including bringing into use vacant and underused upper floor premises. Proposals for high quality and sustainable residential development (including specialist housing) with a diversity of tenure within the boundary of a designated centre will therefore be supported on appropriate sites that reflect the distinctive role and design of the town centre where it can be demonstrated that:

- a. The development is of an appropriate density, scale, character and design, with regards to Places for Everyone policy JP-H4: Density of New Housing;
- b. Does not result in the loss of an active ground floor frontage;
- c. Would not present any undue harm to local heritage assets; and
- d. The development is accessible and viable to residents via sustainable modes of transport, including walking, wheeling and cycling

Places for Everyone Links:

Policy JP-P4 New Retail and Leisure Uses in Town Centres

Reasoned Justification

- 7.18 Rochdale's centres serve local communities through the provision of a range of retail, community, employment, cultural and leisure facilities, as well as contributing to local identity and acting as a focal point for communities. The centres will continue in a co-ordinated approach to perform an important role in providing for weekly and day-to-day shopping requirements, employment, community facilities and leisure opportunities in easily accessible locations. They can minimise the need to travel, by providing the opportunity for 'linked trips' to shopping, employment and other frequently used services.
- 7.19 The delivery of new homes in the borough's town centres is encouraged to increase vibrancy and assist in meeting housing targets going forward. The provision of homes in our town centres will widen the housing offer as well as delivering new homes in a highly sustainable location.
- 7.20 All the town centres are distinct and deliver a varying range of services. These are summarised below.
- Rochdale
- 7.21 Rochdale is the largest and therefore principal town centre, recognised as a centre of sub-regional significance under PfE policy JP-Strat 12. It has maintained economic autonomy and undergone major regeneration in recent years, including the opening of the Riverside Retail and Leisure development, the restoration of the Grade I listed Rochdale Town Hall and its associated environs, the opening of the River Roch, and the recent completion of the Upperbanks residential towers and a hotel. With strong competition from Manchester City Centre and neighbouring districts which may host larger retail and leisure offers, this has led to a degree of retail leakage. However, Rochdale has seen significant transformation in recent years, boosting retail activity and economic spending and redefining the town centre as a hub for leisure, business, and residential living, encouraging residents to use the town centre for their shopping needs.
- 7.22 The centre offers a broad range of services to its residents including a good level of independent shops. A varied provision of retail and other financial services is also provided, mainly along Yorkshire Street. Rochdale has also seen significant growth in its leisure offer, mainly due to the Riverside leisure development, including restaurants, bars, cafes and a new cinema and arcade.
- 7.23 The vacant Wheatsheaf Shopping Centre provides a significant opportunity site within the town centre. Proposals for the re-purposing or redevelopment of this large site will be supported where it can be demonstrated that the regeneration would deliver benefits to the wider town centre through increasing vibrancy and vitality.
- 7.24 The town centre is served by major modern transport infrastructure including the bus Interchange and Metrolink with Rochdale railway station a short distance from the centre. Rochdale remains integral to Greater Manchester's Active Travel Mission, the Bee Network, with planned infrastructure to ensure connectivity.
- 7.25 The Council's Growth Plan places heritage at the centre of Rochdale's town centre revitalisation, recognising its unique cultural assets as catalysts for regeneration and enhancing resident and visitor experience. Central to this vision is the restoration of the

Grade I listed Rochdale Town Hall and its associated public square. Heritage Action Zone grants, and Conservation Area Appraisals also contribute to the centre's heritage-based offer. These projects contribute to Rochdale becoming a major heritage attraction which enhances public access and engagement.

Middleton

- 7.26 Middleton, the borough's second largest town centre, has seen substantial investment in recent years, including the refurbishment of the shopping centre, bus station, Middleton Arena, and a Tesco superstore. Its proximity to Manchester City Centre makes strong transport links essential, with many residents commuting for work. To ensure a resilient and sustainable future, the town must adapt to environmental, societal, and economic changes by enhancing green infrastructure, rebalancing street space, and improving the public realm. Planned travel infrastructure aims to reduce reliance on private vehicles, promoting active travel while taking the opportunity to redevelop vacant and underused buildings to revitalise the town centre.
- 7.27 In order for the town centre to benefit from the planned growth, it must redevelop in a way that builds on its potential. The existing masterplan, supported by the proposed MDC and SPD, will provide further guidance and assistance in the delivery of these ambitions.

Heywood

- 7.28 Heywood town centre is well-utilised by residents and has seen recent improvements enhancing its overall image. It offers a diverse range of independent shops, creating a niche retail experience for residents. Times Retail Park, located on the edge of the centre, features a large superstore and a comparison store. Planned growth initiatives aim to transform the town centre further, improving the physical environment for shoppers and visitors.
- 7.29 The Heywood Town Centre Masterplan envisions a vibrant, well-connected town centre that celebrates local culture, enterprise, and heritage with active travel and people at its core. Market Street and Lance Corporal Stephen Shaw MC Way are to be envisioned as a bus-transit led corridor and subsequently upgraded to a Streets for All with a people-centred approach to street planning, inclusive of pedestrians and cyclists. Hill Street will be formalised as a car park serving both businesses and shoppers, with added landscaping and enhanced public realm improvements around Market Street.
- 7.30 The masterplan considers current and future needs of its residents to ensure the town is resilient and adaptable to change and is both viable and sustainable. The masterplan will guide development in Heywood throughout the Local Plan period, supported by already secured and potential funding opportunities.

Littleborough

- 7.31 Littleborough is recognised as a thriving town centre that effectively serves its surrounding community. It meets day-to-day needs through a strong mix of national and independent retailers and benefits from excellent public transport links, particularly via Littleborough Train Station. The centre also presents a valuable opportunity to strengthen the borough's role as a leisure and recreation destination, building on the popularity of Hollingworth Lake Country Park.

- 7.32 The Littleborough Station Area Masterplan sets out a vision for sustainable development around the station, including improvements to Victoria Street, Hare Hill Road and the Village centre. The station square and its associated environs will benefit from improved transport links and the possibility for the revitalisation of the surrounding underutilised commercial buildings. The masterplan will be used in the determination of planning applications for Littleborough Town Centre to establish and build a case for investment, highlighting specific focus areas.