Oldham Local Plan

Local Plan Review: Issues and Options Our Centres Topic Paper

July 2021

Oldham Council

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 This Our Centres Topic Paper is one of a series that has been prepared as part of the process of evidence gathering to support the review and preparation of Oldham's Local Plan.

1.2 The full range of Topic Papers deal with the following:

- Housing
- Economy and Employment
- Our Centres (incorporating retail)
- Communities (incorporating community facilities, health and well-being, education, open space, sport and recreation provision and infrastructure etc).
- Open Land (incorporating Green Belt and Other Protected Open Land)
- Natural Environment (incorporating landscape, nature conservation designations and wider Green Infrastructure)
- Built Environment (incorporating design, heritage)
- Transport
- Climate Change, Energy and Flood Risk

1.3 The principal aim of the Topic Paper is to set out current key policies, plans and strategies relating this topic area that will form the basis for the development of the Local Plan. The Topic Papers will present a profile of the borough and highlight key issues and opportunities that the Local Plan should seek to address. Helping to shape and influence the direction and focus of the Local Plan's planning policies, designation and site allocations.

1.4 It is intended that the Topic Papers will be 'living' documents that can be updated as we progress through the preparation of the Local Plan, carry out further consultation and complete additional evidence.

1.5 Oldham covers an area of approximately 142 sq km and is home to 228,800 people, making it the seventh most populous borough in Greater Manchester. It is nine miles from Manchester city centre and 19 miles from Manchester Airport. There have been some significant changes to the composition of Oldham's economy, with a continued reduction in manufacturing employment over the last decade and growth in the health, business and professional services, logistics and education sectors as well as in creative industries and science and Research and Development (R & D). Manufacturing still remains one of the largest sectors in the economy, employing around 14% of the workforce.

1.6 Oldham is an area of great opportunity and significant need. The borough benefits from a diverse and vibrant community, a young, growing and entrepreneurial population, an improving educational offer and access to an extensive labour pool within the wider Greater Manchester area. However, the economy of Oldham reflects a number of longstanding issues, with relatively weak private sector growth and a dominance of low skill and low wage industries.

1.7 There has been significant financial investment in recent years in transport, housing, education, health care and in the town centre, demonstrating the council's commitment to transforming the borough and realising its full potential as an integral part of the wider city region. There is a need now for continued targeted intervention to ensure that Oldham is able to contribute positively to the growth of the region and play a key role in achieving Greater Manchester's growth and reform ambitions. There are a range of documents at a national level, a Greater Manchester level and an Oldham level that can provide guidance and advice on how Oldham might achieve this.

2 KEY POLICIES, PLANS AND STRATEGIES

National Context

National Planning Policy Framework (Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, 2019)

2.1 Paragraph 85 of National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) states that planning policies should support the role that town centres play at the heart of local communities, by taking a positive approach to their growth, management and adaptation. It goes on to say, in summary, that planning policies should:

a. define a network and hierarchy of town centres and promote their long-term vitality and viability;

b. define the extent of town centres and primary shopping areas, and make clear the range of uses permitted in such locations;

c. retain and enhance existing markets and, where appropriate, re-introduce or create new ones;
d. allocate a range of suitable sites in town centres to meet the scale and type of development likely to be needed, looking at least ten years ahead;
e. where suitable and viable town centre sites are not available for main town centre uses, allocate appropriate edge of centre sites that are well connected to the town centre; and
f. recognise that residential development often plays an important role in ensuring the vitality of centres and encourage residential development on appropriate sites.

2.2 NPPF also outlines, in paragraphs 86 – 90, how sequential tests and the impact assessments should be applied.

Planning Practice Guidance - Ensuring the vitality of town centres (Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, 2019)

2.3 Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) states that Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) can take a leading role in promoting a positive vision for these areas, bringing together stakeholders and supporting sustainable economic and employment growth. It says LPAs need to consider structural changes in the economy, in particular changes in shopping and leisure patterns and formats, the impact these are likely to have on individual town centres, and how the planning tools available to them can support necessary adaptation and change.

2.4 It goes on to say that a town centre strategy should be based on evidence of the current state of town centres and opportunities that exist to accommodate a range of suitable development and support their vitality and viability. It also lists indicators that should be used in determining the health of town centres.
In plan-making, the sequential approach requires a thorough assessment of the suitability, viability and availability of locations for main town centre uses. It requires clearly explained reasoning if more central opportunities to locate main town centre uses are rejected.

2.5 The PPG has a checklist which sets out the matters that should be considered when taking a sequential approach to plan-making. It says use of the sequential test should recognise that certain main town centre uses have particular market and locational requirements which mean that they may only be accommodated in specific locations. Robust justification will need to be provided where this is the case, and land ownership does not provide such a justification. It does go on to say that as promoting new development on town centre locations can be more expensive and complicated than building elsewhere, local planning authorities need to be realistic and flexible in applying the test.

Future High Streets Fund

2.6 The Government's Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government launched the competitive Future High Streets Fund in December 2018 to support plans to make England's high streets and town centres fit for purpose. In May 2021 it was announced that Oldham had successfully bid for £10.7 million to boost the ongoing regeneration of Oldham Town Centre.

2.7 The Future High Streets Fund award will support a number of exciting projects which are all set to transform Oldham for residents, visitors and workers and support our recovery from the coronavirus pandemic. They include Accessible Oldham – a scheme to make travel easier, safer and more enjoyable around the town centre especially for pedestrians and cyclists. A new public realm space will be created on Henshaw Street incorporating trees, seating, cycle parking and street art. There will also be better connectivity between Oldham bus station and Oldham Town Centre as the lower end of Lord Street and High Street will be pedestrianised.

2.8 The Future High Streets Fund will also bring to life Oldham Council's plans to launch a food hall in the Old Town Hall's Egyptian Room featuring six casual dining-style food and drink concessions and a central dining space. Catering for around 200 people, it will offer both indoor and outdoor seating including a large covered al-fresco dining area on Parliament Square.

2.9 And finally, funding will be allocated for the creation of a new business hub for digital start-ups in the town centre - boosting opportunities for entrepreneurs, creating jobs and paving the way for a future-focussed Oldham.

Towns Fund

2.10 Oldham is one of 101 towns selected to receive up to £25m for transformative capital projects via the Government's Towns Fund. The non-competitive fund is designed to drive economic growth with a focus on regeneration, skills and culture, improved transport and better broadband connectivity.

2.11 As a lead local authority for the Towns Fund, Oldham Council has established the Oldham Town Deal Board to progress the application for funding. The Oldham Town Deal Board is a sub-board of the Oldham Leadership Board, with an independent chairperson and members from the local community and the public and private sector.

2.12 Four ambitious projects have been earmarked to receive a proportion of funding:

a. A flexible performance space to be developed in Oldham town centre as part of the wider Cultural Quarter

b. Grade A office space in Oldham town centre
c. A town centre district heat network utilising energy from flooded coal mines to create an environmentally friendly power source
d. Key infrastructure and anchor features for the Northern Roots project, which is set to become the UK's largest urban farm and eco park

2.13 The Oldham Town Deal Board will submit a Town Investment Plan describing the projects in July 2020. A few months later, the Board can expect to receive a budget envelope with conditions attached and to agree Heads of Terms. It will then have a further 12 months in which to develop final business cases for the projects approved by the Government, in consultation with the local community. The Government will release the funding after reviewing and approving the final business cases. The funding awarded to Oldham will need to be committed contractually by 2026.

Regional Context

Places for Everyone

2.14 Places for Everyone: A Joint Development Plan Document of Nine Greater Manchester Districts is being jointly prepared, following Stockport's decision to withdraw in late 2020. The nine local Greater Manchester districts agreed that to address strategic matters such as housing need and economic growth as well as issues such as flood risk and strategic infrastructure, it would be best to work on a joint development plan - Places for Everyone. Once Places for Everyone is adopted, all nine Local Plans will be required to be in general conformity with it. As the proposed Places for Everyone evolves, strategic policies can be reflected in draft Local Plans.

2.15 In relation to centres, the key aspects Places for Everyone will cover which affect Oldham are:

- The setting out of the retail hierarchy; and
- The housing densities for centres.

2.16 For the purposes of this topic paper information on draft policies is as proposed in the GMSF Publication Plan Draft for Approval October 2020.

2.17 **Policy GM-Strat 12** 'Main Town Centres' states that the role of the main town centres as local economic drivers will continue to be developed and that they will provide the primary focus for office, retail, leisure and cultural activity for their surrounding areas. The policy goes on to say that opportunities will be taken to significantly increase resident populations within the main town centres. The policy concludes by saying that development will be managed to ensure the local distinctiveness of each town centre is retained and enhanced.

2.18 **Policy GM-H 4** 'Density of New Housing' later reaffirms the intention to increase population in the centres by stating that within designated town centres the minimum net residential density should be 120dph, sites within 400m 70dph and sites within 800m 50dph.

2.19 **Policy GM-E 4** sets out the retail hierarchy of Greater Manchester with the accompanying text in paragraph 9.18 outlining the challenges facing our town centres with the growth of online retailing forecast to continue rising.

2.20 **Policy GM-E 3 Cultural Facilities** states that Greater Manchester will proactively develop and support cultural businesses and attractions in our cities and towns through a range of measure.

Greater Manchester Local Industrial Strategy (Greater Manchester Combined Authority, the Greater Manchester Local Enterprise Partnership and the UK Government, 2019)

2.21 Greater Manchester's Local Industrial Strategy (LIS) is underpinned by a shared understanding of the place and its people and is designed to enable the city-region to go further and faster towards its ambitions than ever before, while meeting key national objectives. It states that key to the success of the LIS will be strengthening the city-region's foundations of productivity and ensuring that growth benefits all people and places. The Industrial Strategy is centred around two key aspects:

2.22 1. Five foundations of productivity

- Ideas
- People
- Infrastructure
- Business Environment
- Places

2.23 2. Four Grand Challenges

- Health Innovation
- Advanced Materials and Manufacturing
- Digital, Creative and Media
- Clean Growth

2.24 Oldham's largest sector is Health and Social Care (14.2% jobs), with Manufacturing being the 3rd largest sector (11.5%) which has potential to support the first two Grand Challenges. The growth in construction sector, linked to the new Oldham College Construction School will support the Clean Growth Grand Challenge.

2.25 The Greater Manchester LIS is a long-term plan which will aim to develop increased productivity and wealth creation across Greater Manchester. The strategy states that:

2.26 "By 2040, Greater Manchester will aim to have secured:

- increased productivity and pay across sectors, particularly where they are currently behind national averages, driven by businesses which are well led and managed, innovative and trading and investing globally;
- a greater number of high-quality manufacturing opportunities in strategic sites across the city-region, giving a more productive manufacturing base close to transport links and population centres;
- a fully integrated and digitalised health and care system, creating and adopting the latest in preventative and assistive health technology, and
- helping people stay in the labour market and stay productive for longer.

2.27 For the Digital, Creative and Media challenge one of the strategic priorities is to revitalise town centres and high streets by supporting creatives, digital entrepreneurs and innovators to start or scale a business, social or co-operative enterprise. And under the 'Places' foundation there is a section on 'Cultivating prosperous cities, towns and communities across the city-region' the GM LIS outlines how the town-centres are important hubs for employment, housing and transport and says a strategic priority is to 'Ensure a thriving and productive economy in all parts of Greater Manchester, by maximising national and international assets, city and town centres, strategic employment locations and neighbourhoods'.

Greater Manchester Mayor’s Town Centre Challenge

2.28 The Greater Manchester Mayor’s Town Centre Challenge is also an opportunity. The initiative introduced in 2017 reinforces the trend to support town centres through regeneration and is being undertaken in the context of increasing concern about the future of town centres across the whole of the country. The new drive to regenerate town centres across Greater Manchester is a response to their decline and the need to plan positively with new homes and non-retail offers. The initiative aims to regenerate smaller town centres across the city-region, so that they are cost-effective locations for businesses, housing and leisure. The initiative will be supported by new Mayoral powers to establish Mayoral Development Corporations, the use of Compulsory Purchase Orders (CPOs) and Mayoral grants to kick-start developments. Since the announcement of the initiative to date, nine town centres across Greater Manchester have been nominated including Royton district centre.

Local Context

The Corporate Plan (Oldham Council, 2017)

2.29 Oldham’s current Corporate Plan expired in December 2020. Work to refresh Oldham’s Corporate Plan was due to be completed by summer 2020, however, the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic meant that this was no longer viable. Instead, we are in the process of developing our Covid-19 Recovery Strategy which will act as an interim Corporate Plan until at least 2022.

Covid-19 Recovery Strategy (Oldham Council, on-going)

2.30 As a Co-operative Council, Oldham is committed to tackling the impact of COVID-19, protecting our most vulnerable residents and communities. The steps we are taking to tackle the pandemic and the subsequent recovery planning, aim to support people, especially those groups who are often most impacted.

2.31 Building on the learning so far and the anticipated events to come, we are developing a comprehensive Recovery Strategy, which will help shape our approach and vision for Oldham over the next eighteen months. We do this whilst we continue to respond to an ongoing critical incident where we are focused each day on saving the lives of Oldham’s residents.

2.32 Our objectives and approach to our Recovery Strategy are rooted in the Oldham Model, ensuring as we adapt to a changing world that we build Thriving Communities, an Inclusive Economy and work Co-operatively with each other. Our key objectives are:

1. **Driving equality:** Oldham has a rich history of people from different backgrounds and cultures living and working together. However, we know that there are groups of people that are marginalised, who are more likely to face inequality and discrimination than others. As we recover from the impact of COVID-19 it is critical

that we tackle inequality and discrimination head on. We will continue to identify and mitigate the equality impacts caused by the pandemic, informing our recovery planning through lived experience.

2. **Investing in quality housing:** Poor-quality housing has a profound impact on health. The condition of homes, insecure tenure, and wider neighbourhood characteristics all have a considerable effect on health and wellbeing. Groups in the population who are more likely to live in poor housing are often the same groups who are vulnerable to COVID-19 and other health conditions. To tackle this, we will improve housing quality, both in and outside of the home, while bringing forward significant investment in new and affordable homes.
3. **Championing a green recovery:** In Oldham, we want to respond to the impacts of coronavirus in a bold and ambitious way. We want to use this as an opportunity to stimulate a green recovery that accelerates our ambitions around reducing the boroughs carbon footprint and protecting our greenspace for residents to enjoy.
4. **Creating and protecting jobs and supporting businesses:** Many businesses, especially across hospitality and retail, have been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, with repeated forced closures due to national and local lockdowns. We will continue to create good jobs for our residents, while supporting local businesses to restart and recover from the effects of the pandemic.
5. **Prioritising education and skills:** The COVID-19 pandemic has had a huge impact on education and skills, with many young people needing support to 'catch up' in learning after several months of lockdown. We will work with schools and colleges to support children and young people to catch up and succeed in learning. We will also prioritise training for adults who have been made redundant, helping them retrain and secure employment.
6. **Promoting health and wellbeing and supporting the most vulnerable:** We will continue to promote and improve the health and wellbeing of our communities, contain the spread of COVID-19 locally and target action to protect our most vulnerable residents and communities.

2.33 Each of these focus areas will form a key plank of the COVID-19 Recovery Plan, with individual actions and performance metrics attached to each priority area. The Plan will reflect the difficult and challenging times ahead and the opportunities that are arising as we recover from the pandemic as Team Oldham. The Plan will also set out how we can embrace the 'new normal' to build a stronger local economy, increase community resilience and public participation, support our local health system, and support our most vulnerable residents.

Creating a Better Place (Oldham Council, 2020)

2.34 Creating a Better Place focuses on building more homes for our residents, creating new jobs through town centre regeneration, and ensuring Oldham is a great place to visit with lots of family friendly and accessible places to go.

2.35 This approach has the potential to deliver 2,500 new homes in the town centre designed for a range of different budgets and needs, 1,000 new jobs and 100 new opportunities for apprenticeships, and is in alignment with council priorities to be the Greenest Borough.

2.36 The report notes that quality of place is paramount to thriving communities. Quality design and attention to public realm are critical to Oldham's success as a place where people feel they belong, an exciting place where people can live, work and spend time.

Oldham hopes to create a better place by building quality homes, opportunities to grow local business and create jobs, by ensuring Oldham is the greenest borough and by embedding sustainability.

Oldham Town Centre Vision (Oldham Council, on-going)

2.37 Oldham town centre regeneration is a key priority for the council's Creating a Better Place agenda. The town centre should act as both a hub for our wider community and as a destination where people come to live, work and socialise. Through this work for the town centre, a number of key building blocks / priority areas were identified from which the council can set foundations. The Town Centre will become a place that thrives, where other council's ambition for housing can be the catalyst for change.

2.38 The vision can be defined as 'Our Town Centre: a place that thrives' ... by:

- building quality homes;
- providing opportunities to learn, develop new skills and gain employment;
- having a diverse culture, leisure and night time economy;
- attracting, retaining and growing businesses;
- ensuring a safer, healthier, and friendly environment; and
- ensuring it is green, clean and sustainable.

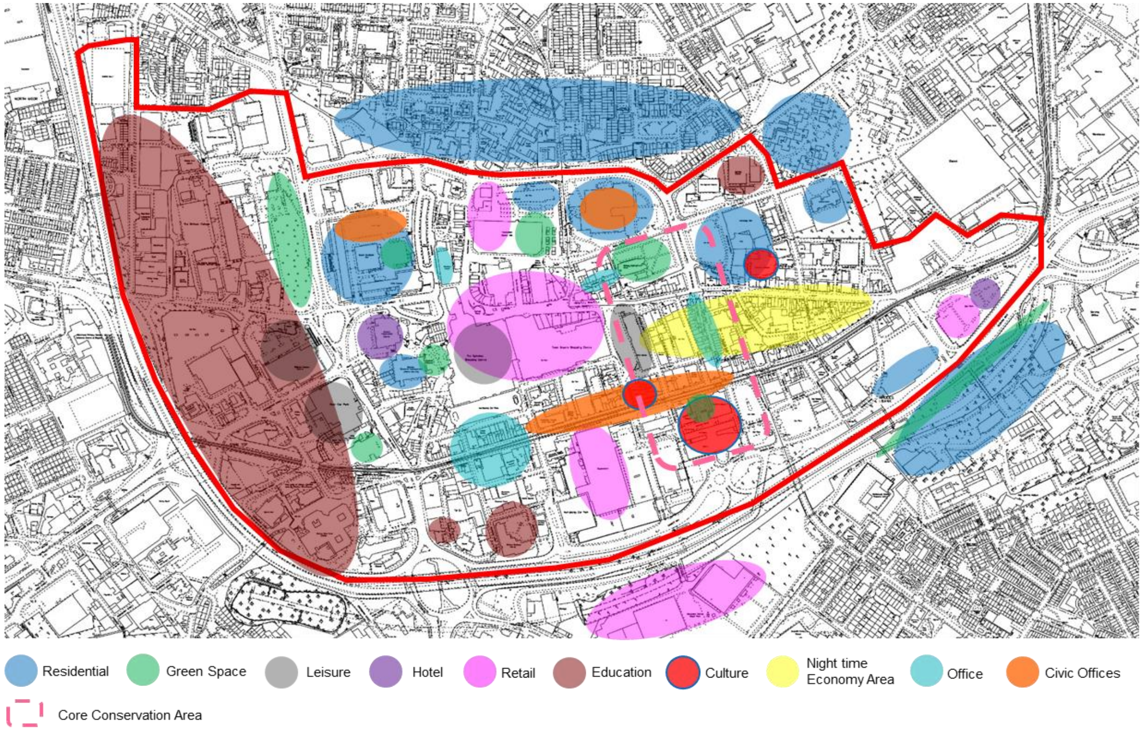
2.39 A number of Priority Areas with ambitions and outcomes have been set out. They can be seen in the table below.

Priority Areas with ambitions and outcomes

Priority Area	Ambition and outcomes
1 - a place that thrives by building quality homes	Quality town centre homes that: • increase the population living in the town centre • increase the footfall in the town centre • increase the number of young people staying in the borough • give a wider choice of residential options for all • support an increase in the town centre leisure offer • decrease anti-social behaviour
2 - a place that thrives by exploiting opportunities to learn, develop new skills and gain employment	A quality learning environment that: • increases footfall in the town centre • increases healthy opportunities for young people to access in the town centre
3 - a place that thrives by having a diverse cultural, leisure and night time economy	A diverse culture and leisure offer that: • increases the footfall in the town centre • increases dwell time by people visiting the town centre • supports an increase in tourism opportunities • gives a wider choice of activity for all residents and visitors

Priority Area	Ambition and outcomes
	• provides the opportunity to make the town centre a destination of choice • helps lead to an increase in job opportunities • showcases our heritage assets within the town centre
4 - a place that thrives by attracting, retaining and growing business	Thriving business growth and retail core that: • increases job opportunities and skills • offers a quality shopping experience accessible to all • includes a One Public Estate hub in the town centre • increases investment in creative and digital sectors • increases the office and service sector space • supports an increase in residents earning the living wage • decreases the number of voids in the town centre • increases the footfall in the town centre • increases the numbers of SME's and independent businesses
5 - a place that thrives by providing a safe, healthy and friendly environment	A safe, healthy and friendly town centre that: • ensures a fully accessible town centre that is easy to navigate • increases public perception and enhances image • decreases the opportunities for crime to take place • increases dwell time • increases footfall • fully enable inclusive initiatives and events • decreases road traffic • enables Active Streets • increases the opportunities for Get Oldham Growing
6 - a place that thrives by being green	A green town centre that: • increases the access to integrated public transport • increases purposeful green and open spaces • has low carbon / zero energy building and energy supply • increases dwell time • increases footfall • sets a high clean street standard

Oldham Town Centre Vision



2.40 As part of this Town Centre Vision work Simpson Haugh were commissioned to look at some concept frameworks for the Town Centre. The work highlighted the following challenges for Oldham Town Centre:

- Vehicle dominance in many areas
- Unattractive and unwelcoming arrival points
- Compromised pedestrian routes and connections
- Town centre core disconnected from surrounding neighbourhoods
- Poor connection to bus station
- Shopping centre forms barrier to south
- Lack of green space within town centre
- Low residential values
- Lack of quality evening activities
- Quality of retail offer needs improvement
- Low dwell time
- Many undeveloped sites
- Low residential population
- Safety and security

2.41 It next identified a number of opportunities the Town Centre has:

- Compact and walkable
- Town centre core pedestrianised
- Good transport links
- Good education facilities
- Cultural and leisure improvements are being made
- Potential for aspirational homes at a more affordable level than competitors
- History and heritage
- Fine listed buildings
- Civic pride, and well maintained public realm
- Elevated views and vistas
- Easy access to countryside
- Many undeveloped sites! Potential for transformational change
- Ambition

2.42 A key objective of the work is looking at 'Greening the Town Centre', with proposals for a Town Centre Park as a catalyst for transformational change being explored to help create a town centre people will want to live in. It also explores other ways to make the Town Centre a more desirable place to live including looking at what makes a great home. The report concludes with the following next steps:

- Review and Agree Public Realm Improvement Strategy Principles
- Develop Concept Designs For Park and Other Public Realm Improvements
- Agree Brief For Residential Sites (Number, Mix, Type, Parking etc)
- Develop Concepts For Development Sites
- Hold Design Workshops to Refine Proposals
- Develop Sustainability Strategy and Coordinate with District Heat Network Concept Designs
- Agree Final Outputs
- Develop Final Framework Strategy

Oldham Green New Deal Strategy (Oldham Council, 2020)

2.43 In July 2019 the council committed to becoming carbon neutral as an organisation by 2025, and to becoming the UK's first "Green New Deal Council", setting a target of 2030 for carbon neutrality for the borough as a whole. A new "Oldham Green New Deal Strategy" will be brought forward in spring 2021, and will include a wide-ranging programme of delivery focusing on tackling climate change and other environmental challenges whilst building the green business sector across Oldham and reducing energy bills for the public and private sectors and households. Themes will include deploying technology to create a local energy market, new business models for renewable energy and green infrastructure on new developments and regeneration schemes, social prescribing with green schemes to improve health and wellbeing for residents whilst cutting public sector costs, and transforming the reputation of the borough and boosting tourism.

2.44 The strategy is currently being prepared. The vision is to "Make Oldham a greener, smarter , more enterprising place".

2.45 The objectives include:

- Make Oldham a leading local authority area for environmental quality and play a leading role in meeting the Greater Manchester Mayor's Green City Region objectives.
- Deliver a sustainable economy, tackling fuel poverty and generating training and employment opportunities in the growing green business sector.
- Maintain a high quality local environment which delivers health and well being for residents, including food and recreation, reducing costs for public services.
- Generate inbound tourism for the borough by building on Oldham's reputation for being a green, attractive and forward thinking sustainable borough.
- Keep Oldham at the forefront of development and deployment if cutting edge environmental technologies, and ensure that the benefits are kept locally.
- Future-proof the regeneration of the borough by establishing Oldham as an exemplar Green City on energy, carbon, water and green infrastructure.

2.46 This work links closely to the work above in relation to the Government's Towns Fund, where the council's intention is, with the funding, to create a town centre district heat network utilising energy from flooded coal mines to create an environmentally friendly power source to provide yey infrastructure and anchor features for the Northern Roots project, which is set to become the UK's largest urban farm and eco park.

Oldham Town Centre Accessible Oldham (on-going)

2.47 The Oldham Town Centre Accessible Oldham Scheme, for which there is £6 million committed funding in Growth Deal 3 and more funding coming from other sources such as the Greater Manchester Mayor's Cycling and Walking Fund, includes a public realm scheme in the core of the town centre (Henshaw Street / Albion Street). As part of the design process for that element of the programme we have commissioned urban designers, Planit, to produce a public realm framework for the town centre as a whole (design principles and materials) and public realm design specifically for the Henshaw Street / Albion Street GD3 scheme.

Oldham Town Centre Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan Supplementary Planning Document (Oldham Council, 2019)

2.48 A Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan (CAAMP) Supplementary Planning Document has been adopted (August 2019) for Oldham Town Centre.

2.49 The CAAMP has been prepared to support existing plan policy on the historic environment, inform the Local Plan review and support regeneration plans for Oldham Town Centre. The CAAMP was seen as a high priority as Oldham Town Centre Conservation Area is identified on Historic England’s “At Risk” register. An up to date CAAMP was required in order to re-assess the designated area and evaluate and record its special interest.

2.50 The appraisal proposes four extensions to the existing Oldham Town Centre conservation area boundary. The extensions have been designated under section 69 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 and will be treated as a material planning consideration until formally adopted through the Local Plan review process.

Proposed boundary changes to Oldham Town Centre Conservation Area

2.51 The CAAMP SPD also identifies the following buildings that could be added to a local list, should we wish to establish one.

- Hilton Arcade;
- Greaves Arms;
- 3 Greaves Street;
- Victoria House, Greaves Street;
- The Old Bill, Greaves Street;

- 31 Queen Street; and
- The Old Museum (Former Friends Meeting House and Former Museum), Greaves Street.

2.52 The Management Plan has followed on from the appraisal of the conservation area. It sets out policies and recommendations around enhancement, regeneration and community engagement.

2.53 In relation to enhancement there are policies around securing the viable re-use of vacant heritage assets, such as allowing for short term temporary uses for vacant buildings and to consider some Article 4 directions on certain streets.

2.54 In relation to regeneration there are policies to ensure that only applications for development which reflect careful consideration of the character and appearance of the conservation area are approved. Policies include only allowing new development to be of a high quality and that proposals protect existing street patterns, open spaces, walls, railings and materials that are integral to the conservation area. There are also policies to protect the established and valued views of the surrounding area which contribute to the historic context and setting of Oldham Town Centre Conservation Area and policies regarding the public realm and wayfinding.

2.55 For community engagement policies included ones to help the conservation area have a clear identify by engaging the public to celebrate the heritage of Oldham, and to create a place that people find welcoming and which contributes to their sense of identity, local pride and well-being.

2.56 The CAAMP must be reflected in Local Plan review policy.

The Oldham Plan 2017 - 2022 (Oldham Council, 2017)

2.57 The Oldham Plan is a collective action statement for Oldham developed and agreed by the Oldham Partnership. It sets out how we can all best serve the place we love and help its people, districts and businesses thrive. The Plan's ambition is *'To be a productive and cooperative place with healthy, aspirational and sustainable communities'.*

2.58 The model to deliver this ambition is based around three fundamental shifts:

1. Inclusive Economy: Our vision is for Oldham to become Greater Manchester's Inclusive Economy capital by making significant progress in living standards, wages and skills for everyone.

2. Co-operative Services: Our vision is to collaborate, integrate and innovate to improve outcomes for residents and create the most effective and seamless services in Greater Manchester.

3. Thriving Communities: Our vision is for people and communities to have the power to be healthy, happy and able to make positive choice's and both offer and access insightful and responsive support when required.

Vibrant Centres Supplementary Planning Document (Oldham Council, 2013)

2.59 The Vibrant Centres Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) was produced in 2013 to support Policy 15 of the Joint DPD. The objectives of the Vibrant Centres SPD were to:

- Provide clear and consistent guidance for promoting and maintaining the vitality and viability of Oldham Town Centre and the borough's other Centres of Chadderton, Failsworth, Hill Stores, Lees, Royton, Shaw and Uppermill;
- Provide clear and consistent guidance for new proposals and for changes of use for food and drink uses including hot food takeaways;
- Manage the concentration and clustering of hot food takeaways;

- Manage the impact on the local environment or the amenity of neighbouring residents and business uses;
- Ensure all development contributes positively to the visual appearance of the area during opening and non-opening hours;
- Manage impacts on traffic generation or highway safety as a result of these developments;
- Contribute to community safety; and
- Provide guidance and advice on the design of shop fronts and business premises.

2.60 A number of these objectives will still be relevant going forward with the review of the Local Plan.

Joint Core Strategy and Development Management Policies DPD 'Joint DPD' (Oldham Council 2011)

2.61 The current Local Plan in Oldham was adopted in November 2011. Policy 15 'Centres' in the Joint DPD is the main policy in relation to retail and centres. It reiterates that Oldham Town Centre should be the main location for major retail and leisure development, with the focus being on the 'Central Shopping Core'. It identifies the borough's retail hierarchy as:

- Oldham Town Centre.
- the centres of Chadderton, Failsworth, Hill Stores, Lees, Royton, Shaw and Uppermill.
- local shopping parades.

2.62 In relation to Primary Shopping Frontages the policy states that the council will permit developments or changes of use within the primary shopping frontages only where 70% of the ground floor frontage subsequently remains in A1, A2 or A3 use.

2.63 The policy also discusses proposals for food and drink uses related to the night-time economy, such as hot food takeaways, restaurants, cafes, pubs, winebars, other drinking establishments and nightclubs and has a number of criteria that applicants must demonstrate.

2.64 Policy 16 'Local Services and Facilities' provides policy guidance on smaller scale local services. The policy says, "*The council will ensure the need for local shops, leisure facilities and offices are met by protecting existing premises and permitting new local services and facilities where appropriate within existing built up areas*." The policy states that the council will protect local shopping parades from development and change of use so that at least 75% of the frontage remains in retail use. It goes on to say that, "*where appropriate and within existing built up areas, the following uses will be permitted outside Oldham Town Centre and outside the centres of Chadderton, Failsworth, Hill Stores, Lees, Royton, Shaw and Uppermill provided they satisfy the requirements of national and local policies:*

i. local shops with a gross floorspace of 500 square metres or less.

ii. *leisure facilities with a gross floorspace of 1,000 square metres or less.*

iii. *office, business and industrial developments with a gross floorspace of 1,000 square metres or less*."

3 EVIDENCE BASE

Oldham Retail and Leisure Study (Santec, 2020)

3.1 A Retail and Leisure Study was completed in September 2020 by Santec. The report provided an assessment of retail and leisure needs in Oldham will help to inform new retail and town centres policies. The key elements of the work were:

1. To update the findings of the 2009 Retail and Leisure Study, having full regard to national planning guidance. This included:
    - Reviewing the existing retail and leisure offer in the borough;
    - Undertaking a retail capacity assessment and health checks of Oldham Town Centre and the borough's seven other centres;
    - Defining a hierarchy and a network of centres; and
    - Reviewing and amending as appropriate the boundaries of the town centres and the extent of their primary shopping areas and other areas.
2. To assess Oldham Town Centre and the borough's other centres and to provide recommendations regarding how to ensure their long-term sustainability and future vitality and viability, having regard to:
    - Ways to attract and retain residents and visitors to the town centres, including any unique selling points the centres may have;
    - The impact of online shopping and click and collect on town centres;
    - The role of and potential for increased residential development within town centres; and
    - Any other current trends or forecasts that may affect the future of town centres.
3. To provide advice on future town centre planning policy in the borough.

3.2 In relation to the health checks for each of the centres, a summary of the conclusions are set out below.

Oldham Town Centre

3.3 The health of Oldham Town Centre is mixed. In terms of positives, the town centre contains many national multiple retailers, including Boots, Debenhams, H&M, Next and Primark and there is strong representation across the various retail categories. The proportion of food and drink units is similar to the national average and there are 19 cafés and 10 restaurants within the town centre. The town centre is easily accessible by car and tram and there is good parking provision within Oldham Town Centre.

3.4 However, the health of the town centre has deteriorated since the 2009 Study. The proportion of vacant units in the town centre is almost double the current national average. The number of vacant units has increased by 39 units since 2009, which points to a lack of demand for floorspace within Oldham Town Centre. The town centre environment could be improved, particularly around the Spindles Shopping Centre and Tommyfield Market.

3.5 Whilst the town centre has managed to hold onto some national multiple retailers during the restructuring of the retail industry, it is clear that there is too much retail floorspace in the town centre. To prevent further decline in the health of the town centre, interventions will be required, such as those that can be achieved via initiatives such as the Future High Streets Fund, to enable parts of the town centre to move away from retail.

Shaw District Centre

3.6 On the whole, Shaw District Centre is not performing well and has declined in health since the 2009 Study. The proportion of vacant units has increased significantly and is well above the national average. The physical environment has experienced a gradual decline and no longer offers an attractive environment to shop in.

3.7 Notwithstanding the overall conclusion outlined above, the proportion of convenience goods and comparison goods retailers is similar to what would be expected for a centre of this size. The retail rents typically commanded by units within Shaw are above other similar-sized centres. Furthermore, Shaw is easily accessible by car, bus and tram.

Royton District Centre

3.8 The physical environment could be improved through the renovation of Market Square. Notwithstanding this, Royton District Centre is relatively healthy and performing well. The centre is anchored by two medium-sized foodstores. The vacancy rate is low and has remained below the national average since the 2009 Study. The centre has a good representation of retailers, a reasonable level of evening economy uses and a thriving market.

3.9 Commercial retail rents are comparable to other district centres in Oldham Borough and the centre is easily accessible by car.

Uppermill District Centre

3.10 Uppermill is performing very well and is a healthy centre. The centre is almost fully occupied, with there being just two vacant units present. Uppermill is attractive with a relatively high proportion of comparison goods retailers. The centre is covered by a conservation area and contains a high number of independent retailers. Uppermill also has a reasonable evening economy and a low crime rate.

Lees District Centre

3.11 Lees is also currently performing well. There are only five vacant units within the centre, and it is easily accessible by car whilst pedestrian footfall was high when surveyed. Lees is an attractive centre with low reported crimes. There are no national multiple retailers within the centre, and parking provision is limited, but that is not unusual for this size of centre.

Hill Stores District Centre

3.12 Hill Stores is reasonably healthy and is performing as expected for a small district centre. The centre is dominated by a Tesco Extra superstore, which draws trade from residents across a wide area. Hill Stores is accessible by car and tram and crime rates in and around the centre are low.

3.13 Hill Stores would be vulnerable if Tesco was to leave the centre. The centre has a high number of takeaways, which draws visitors to the centre but does not necessarily lead to linked trips to retail facilities with other businesses in Hill Stores. The physical environment could be improved by providing more pedestrian crossing points along the A62.

Chadderton District Centre

3.14 Chadderton is a small centre anchored by Asda, which is centred around Chadderton Precinct and is reasonably healthy. There are just three vacant units within the centre and Chadderton contains a high proportion of national multiple operators relative to its size. Parking is plentiful in the centre.

Failsworth District Centre

3.15 Failsworth is the smallest district centre within Oldham Borough and contains just eight units. The centre is anchored by Tesco Extra and contains a high proportion of national multiple operators. There are no vacant units within the centre. The centre is reasonably attractive and is easily accessible by car and tram. Failsworth is performing well and is a healthy centre.

3.16 The report concluded a number of further findings. Some of the key conclusions were:

- There is no 'need' for additional convenience retail provision over the life of the new Local Plan and therefore the Local Pan does not need to plan for any.
- There will be a small need over the plan period for comparison retail floorspace (2,381sqm) and it recommended this is focused in Oldham Town Centre.
- The existing retail hierarchy is still appropriate. That is:
    - Oldham Town Centre;
    - The centres of Chadderton, Failswoth, Hill Stores, Lees, Royton, Shaw and Uppermill; and
    - Local shopping parades.
- The recommendation of a reduced local impact floorspace threshold for assessing retail and leisure applications outside the borough's centres as opposed to the NPPF minimum of 2,500sqm was made of 1,500sqm for Oldham Town Centre and 300sqm for the other centres.
- Town Centre boundary amend was proposed for Lees Centre to incorporate the Co-op foodstore.

3.17 Specifically in relation to Oldham Town Centre key recommendations were:

- Oldham Town Centre should seek to strengthen its food and beverage potential to help improve the evening economy.

- Investment in cultural and entertainment should be encouraged to diversify the town centre offer and also improve the evening economy.
- There is a lack of competition in Oldham Town Centre in relation to foodstores, the town centre could benefit from more convenience stores, potentially as part of a residential-led mixed-use development.
- Further development opportunities should be identified on the edge of Oldham Town Centre to accommodate higher density mixed use development.
- Oldham Town Centre should have a tightly drawn primary shopping frontage to focus retail development and reduce vacancy rates elsewhere in the town centre.
- Successful high streets need to have a mix of independent shops, markets, retail chains, leisure and entertainment, community facilities and key services. When a large national chain vacates a unit it is unlikely they will return, those units should be considered for one of the other uses.

3.18 The Study also considered the potential impacts of COVID-19, stating that the short-term impacts of the global pandemic are already being felt with a number of national multiple retailers restructuring or entering administration, including Clarks, Debenhams, Oasis, Warehouse, Cath Kidston and Brighthouse. It went on to say that the longer-term impacts of the global pandemic on consumer spending a behaviour was more difficult to predict. It recognised throughout the pandemic that there had been a significant increase in online retailing, especially in the convenience goods sector and another trend they noted during the pandemic is the return of the ‘big shop’ in the convenience goods sector. The average spend per trip in supermarkets and superstores increased by £7 to £26.02. It was qualified though, in the sense that this could only be temporary, during 'lockdown'. They also noted that there is concern that the global pandemic may increase the rate at which pubs and restaurants are closing across the UK, with some estimating that up to 30,000 will remain permanently closed following lockdown.

Strategic Investment Framework (SIF) and SIF Refresh and Sector Requirements Review (Amion, 2016 and 2019)

3.19 The Strategic Investment Framework (SIF) was produced in 2016 by Amion and set out the council’s economic and investment ambitions, vision and objectives and priorities. The 2016 SIF highlighted that the challenge for Oldham is to ensure that jobs growth in the borough and wider city region translate into accessible opportunities for local residents. This involves improving the pathways to work and career advancement in order to support people into decent, secure and well-paid jobs, with a focus on tackling the barriers to both gaining employment and progression to higher wage occupations.

3.20 It went on to add that Oldham must seek to attract additional private sector investment. The challenge is to build on the areas where the borough does have a comprehensive advantage, such as high technology business sectors related to advanced manufacturing, while also diversifying its economic base in order to achieve a balanced local economy. The SIF also aimed to enable and support more people to start up their own businesses and for these businesses to succeed. The business programme set out an action to prepare sector specific growth plans for the sectors Oldham seeks to grow. The sectors that were identified as being key in 2016 were Manufacturing / high-tech industries, Logistics, Construction and property, Health and social care, Retail, leisure and hospitality and Professional and business support services.

3.21 As part of the Local Plan Review the need for a partial update of the SIF, in relation to the key sectors included, was identified. In addition to this refresh, a piece of work looking at the spatial requirements of those key sectors was also required. The refresh confirmed the key sectors for Oldham as listed below for the following reasons:

- Construction – significant contribution to employment and GVA; large future growth potential
- Health and social care - significant contribution to employment and GVA; large future growth potential; existing competitive advantage
- Digital industries – significant contribution to GVA; high value added; large future growth potential
- Business and professional services - significant contribution to employment and GVA; large future growth potential
- Manufacturing sub-sectors (textiles, machinery and motor vehicles, computers and electronic goods etc) – existing competitive advantage; high value added
- Logistics (warehousing and support) - significant contribution to employment and GVA; existing competitive advantage.

3.22 The report then went on to assess the boroughs Business and Employment Areas and Saddleworth Employment areas in relation to how attractive they are to the key sectors. For more information on this part of the report please see the Economy Topic Paper.

Oldham Town Centre Office Market Review (Cushman and Wakefield, 2018)

3.23 The Office Town Centre Market Review sought to provide an assessment to determine the office demand potential, if any, for new office development within Oldham Town Centre in the context of the proposed 2017 Masterplan and the Borough's strategic and economic aspirations. The analysis indicated the following key messages and implications for the future potential office space in Oldham Town Centre:

- Shift to major urban centres - Political and economic uncertainty, increasingly globalised businesses and shifting socio-economic trends has driven an office occupier demand shift to large town and city centre locations offering strategic accessibility, opportunities to cluster and supporting amenities for staff. As a result, there is now limited appeal for secondary town centre locations such as Oldham. However, the on-going regeneration of Oldham will serve to enhance its attractiveness as an office location to more local occupiers compared to that of the Oldham's more outlying office locations such as Hollinwood.
- Quality of space – Office occupiers are increasingly considering the welfare and working environment of their staff alongside the need to present a professional market perception and ensure operational cost efficiencies. This is particularly the case for higher value office occupiers within target growth sectors such as Professional and Business Support Services. The current supply of office space within Oldham is generally low grade second hand quality stock which is constraining achievable rental levels. The provision of some new better quality office provision would diversify the local offer within the Town Centre.

- Local market appeal - As a secondary town centre location lacking the strategic road and rail accessibility or scale and profile of demographic catchment for office employment, any demand for new office space within Oldham will be largely focused on either public sector organisations or smaller occupiers with strong local connections. This can be evidenced by the type of occupiers currently operating within the Town Centre and the average size of unit taken up in the Town Centre/across the Borough over recent years (3,000 square foot/280 square metres).
- Delivery challenge - Speculative office development is only occurring in major city centres with robust rental levels and constrained supply of high grade space, but even then often requires support from the public sector or innovative funding models. As such, delivery of new space will only occur where a significant pre-let is secured. Such occupiers are limited as most businesses will only consider waiting for a scheme to be built if they have a bespoke property or locational requirement and tend to be drawn to sites offering significant incentives, such as the competing Enterprise Zones.
- Unviable development - In light of the delivery challenges identified and the more local market appeal of Oldham as an office location, at circa £10 per square foot current rental levels will be insufficient to support the cost of viable development. Even with an uplift in values associated with the provision of a new higher quality offer, this will be insufficient to reach the £20-22 per square foot required to make office development viable.
- Pace of take-up – If new office space could be delivered within Oldham Town Centre, for example with support of the public sector, historic rates indicate that the pace of take up could be relatively slow. This represents a risk to a commercial developer owing to the cost associated with voids and empty rates. Any long term voids could also serve to blight the perception of the wider location.

3.24 The report recommended that the following be considered in terms of any future new office space provision within the Town Centre:

- Quality of space – must strike a balance between meeting the current gap in the Town Centre market for higher quality accommodation, whilst recognising that rental levels must conform with what local occupiers are willing and/or able to pay in this location.
- Appropriate scale – to appeal to local occupiers, office suites should be flexible where possible but most likely to be demanded within the 2,000 to 5,000 square foot range. As flexible working becomes increasingly popular, options for shared workspace could also be considered and may support local entrepreneurship.
- Spatial positioning – adjacent to the new Civic Hub would help to create the feel of an ‘office quarter’, enhancing market perceptions of the Town Centre as an office location and generating a more significant footfall which could support the wider amenity offer for staff demanded of modern office occupiers.
- Enhancing value for money – given the likely requirement for public sector investment to deliver new office floorspace, options to enhance value for money should be considered. This could include good quality refurbishment over new build or the inclusion of some commercial office space within the proposed Civic Hub. Should such space prove popular to the market and demand be forthcoming, the potential to then provide new build space could be investigated.
- Market testing – the marketing of an ‘office plot’ as a commercial Design and Build opportunity but with the potential for alternative use should demand not be

forthcoming could ensure that any such latent occupier demand is tested before the public sector is required to intervene.

- Phasing – given the small scale of the local office market, it will be vital to ensure that any new space is released to the market in phases so as not to flood the market with supply and restrict rental levels. A sensible approach would be to release and let a small volume of space, for example within the Civic Hub or refurbished Tower before releasing new build space. Another challenge of new build is likely to be that a single building will need to be of a scale that minimises the viability gap but could represent a significant total volume within the local market.
- Delivery – should target developers with interesting or innovative models of delivery, a track record of working with local authorities, or local developers with a passion and commitment to the Town.
- Marketing – effective marketing of both the strategic aspirations of for the Town Centre and the specific property opportunities should be effectively marketed to ensure both the profile of Oldham is raised within the market and to provide confidence of the council's commitment its future potential. All 'good news stories', including new lettings should also be reported where possible to continue positive momentum.

Greater Manchester Spatial Framework Town Centres Topic Paper (GMCA, 2016)

3.25 The purpose of this Topic Paper was to inform the GMSF (now Places for Everyone), in relation to:

- Providing an initial analysis of retail hierarchy across Greater Manchester and verify the main town centres that will sit below the Regional Centre;
- Summarising key strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats across districts and their main town centres, defining the issues and challenges facing Greater Manchester now and in the future;
- Identifying:
    - emerging opportunities within the individual districts and their main town centres; and
    - their future roles across Greater Manchester, drawing out those that are strategically significant and need to be addressed in the GMSF; and
    - Identify areas where further work may be needed to inform preparation of the GMSF.

3.26 The paper defines a town centre as being, 'the most important commercial or business area of a town, containing most of the shops, banks, restaurants etc'. It also lists from NPPF what the glossary describes as 'main town centre uses':

- Retail development (including warehouse clubs and factory outlet centres);

- Leisure, entertainment facilities, the more intensive sport and recreation uses (including cinemas, restaurants, drive-through restaurants, bars and pubs, night-clubs, casinos, health and fitness centres, indoor bowling centres, and bingo halls);
- Offices; and
- Arts, culture and tourism development (including theatres, museums, galleries and concert halls, hotels and conference facilities).

3.27 Section 3 looks at the retail hierarchy and core retail offer across Greater Manchester using the Javelin VenueScore which 'scores' retail locations. It looks at the main town centres and the tier of centres below.

3.28 The scoring concluded that:

- Only five out of the eight main town centres - Bolton, Bury, Oldham, Stockport and Wigan are classed as Regional;
- Altrincham, Ashton-under-Lyne and Rochdale town centres are classed as Sub-Regional;
- Of the main town centres, Bury has the highest score whilst Altrincham has the lowest.

3.29 It is important to recognise that the VenueScore data does not reflect the diverse nature of many of our town centres across Greater Manchester, and fails to take account of the independent and niche retailers (including markets) as well as the commercial, cultural, leisure and civic offer they provide. The data also fails to recognise future development that could change ranking.

3.30 The paper looked at employment within the town centres in 2014. Bolton had the highest level of employment followed by Stockport and Wigan. Altrincham, Ashton-under-Lyne, Rochdale and Oldham had much lower levels of people employment in the town centre (Oldham had 9,900 people). The greatest proportion of employment with town centres comes from public administration (45%), followed by retail (25%) and health (12%). The paper summarised the current and future development and investment proposals for each town centre. For Oldham it says, "*The focus is to consolidate the retail core and support for the development of independent businesses (retail and creative) through, for example, the Independent Quarter; as well as continuation of investment in education and skills to drive new business growth and provide appropriate technological skills*" (page 25). It goes on to outline the key projects and activities from the council's Strategic Investment Framework (SIF). The conclusion of this section was that the town centres remain an important source of employment.

3.31 The paper discusses that introducing more housing within the town centres is considered an important element of ensuring their long term sustainability and restructure in light of their contracting retail function and the need to create a mix to ensure their vitality and viability. There are a number of emerging programmes that could boost the role, and ability to deliver, housing within the town centres, these include:

- A new agreement with Network Rail and Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) to work with local councils to pilot development opportunities across England's railway stations for housing (and businesses). It is estimated the initiative could deliver up to 10,000 new properties.

- Introducing a package of reforms and initiatives to meet the Governments commitment to deliver more affordable homes for ownership, including £2.3 billion funding for a new Starter Home Land Fund to prepare more brownfield land for starter homes.

- In addition there are a number of other Greater Manchester programmes that may be part of a package of measures to support residential growth in town centres, including: Housing Investment Fund (HIF) and land development and disposal plans.

- From an indicative assessment of the existing housing land supply (2014-2035) available in the eight centres, Bolton has the greatest capacity, followed by Ashton-under-Lyne, Oldham and Wigan.

3.32 In relation to leisure and culture provision within the town centres the paper lists the assets of each of the eight town centres. For Oldham the list is: The Old Town Hall, Oldham Coliseum, Gallery Oldham, Oldham Leisure Centre, a growing independent quarter and a range of pubs, bars, cafes and restaurants.

3.33 The analysis section of the report outlines the retail hierarchy (as above) and provides a conclusion for each town centre. For Oldham the conclusion is, "*As the principle centre within the borough, Oldham Town Centre should continue to be the main focus for retail and leisure development. In terms of other centres within the borough, whilst these are significantly smaller than Oldham Town Centre, they generally serve an important role in meeting the day to day needs of the local population*" (page 39).

3.34 The Topic Paper outlines the main strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats in relation to Town Centres. These have been summarised below:

3.35 Strengths:

- Retain a retail role in terms of multiple retailers and well known brands, i.e. town centres are still the largest retail centres outside of Manchester City Centre and the Trafford Centre.

- Remain centres of employment, particularly for the surrounding district with a travel to work area strongly linked to immediate residential areas.

- Provide good connectivity into Manchester City Centre, with hubs for public transport.

- Strong identity locally and correspondingly high political priority attached to all town centres.

- All of the eight principal town centres has an agreed revitalisation plan and pipeline of schemes designed to broaden the economic base.

- Retail catchment of town centres tend to be discrete, with little overlaps between the catchment areas of most Greater Manchester centres.

- Further (and higher in Bolton and Oldham) education facilities are located in most town centres, helping to drive footfall.

- Most councils have concentrated their own workforce and service centres within the principal town centres, attracting footfall and potential spend.

3.36 Weaknesses:

- All town centres are still largely defined and measured by their retail offer, some of which have reduced or less certain, often offering smaller store formats than more modern out of town or city centre units.

- A general over-supply of small scale, sometimes multi-storey, traditional retail space which is seeking new uses.

- Limited independent retail and leisure offer, beyond the traditional market in most town centres.

- Small or weak commercial sector in most town centres, with limited high quality office space available and a larger amount of older/less attractive commercial space.

- Over reliance on public sector and retail employment base and investment, both of which are at risk of diminishing over period of GMSF.

- Limited evening offer in most centres.

- Varying degrees of supporting infrastructure in place, such as superfast broadband and wi-fi.

3.37 Opportunities:

- There are some unique and defining characteristics in several town centres, which helps to distinguish them from neighbouring areas and out of town centres. The emphasis should be on having a diverse offer that creates an experience for visitors.

- Most town centres have some complementary visitor attractions and a calendar of events that are starting to develop a wider than local reputation.

- In response to the weakness identified around the lack of family leisure and evening economy, several town centres have attracted, or are attracting, a new in-town cinema and associated food offer – i.e. Bury, Bolton, Oldham, Wigan and Stockport.

- New residential uses in all town centres, with a number starting to see conversion of former commercial space to residential taking place at a small scale.
- Two town centres, Bolton and Stockport, indicate potential as a focal point for commercial development to north and south of the city centre.
- ‘Click and collect’ is a growing market and provides an opportunity to attract more people into town centres and increase footfall, dwell time and spend.
- The creation of further Business Improvement Districts will enable town centres to develop sustainable funding streams for projects that support businesses, improve the town centre environment and promote the towns.

3.38 Threats:

- Decline of the traditional, high street, retail sector is likely to continue with greater e-commerce (although as recognised above this also presents an opportunity via Click and Collect to increase footfall, dwell time and spend) and new store formats more suited to large sites at out of town destination or at the city centre.
- Declining work based employment in all principal town centres over last the 4 years.
- Further reduction in public sector jobs and investment is likely to hit town centres more significantly, although this might have scope to be offset by further consolidation of public sector floorspace at town centre sites.
- Congestion and parking issues cited in many cases as an issue affecting access into and out of town centres.
- Continued competition from out of town retail centres, as well as a lack of reasonably charged parking provision.
- Cost of occupation, with business rates perceived as a barrier to development/attraction of occupiers in many town centres.

3.39 It goes on to say that the role of main town centres as local economic drivers should therefore continue to be developed and strengthened, providing the primary focus for office, retail, leisure and cultural activity. It also says that it will be essential that strategies and interventions look at what the main town centres can offer as a 'whole' and that increasing the number of people who live and work in the town centre will improve their vitality and vibrance.

3.40 The key conclusions and recommendations from the report are for the GMSF to:

- Provide strong stewardship and engagement with retail partners/businesses operating in the town centre.
- Define the hierarchy of city and main town centres;
- Define the unique offers of the main town centres;

- Define the boundary of the Regional Centre;
- Set out key elements of a town centre strategy that can be further developed by districts; and
- Re-emphasise key town centre policy positions where appropriate.

3.41 Finally, the paper goes on to say that at a local level Local Plans, masterplans, and strategic frameworks need to be developed, and kept up to date, to provide a more detailed strategy for each town centre and to define the hierarchy (as appropriate) below the main town centres.

4 CONSULTATION

4.1 To begin preparation of the Local Plan the council carried out a 'Regulation 18' notification between July and August 2017. To inform this work we asked what the local community and stakeholders thought:

a. the Local Plan should contain and what the key planning issues are for Oldham; and

b. what, in broad terms, should be the main aims of the Local Plan.

4.2 In addition we published our Integrated Assessment Scoping Report and invited the Environment Agency, Historic England and Natural England to comment on the scope of the Local Plan. This was also available for the local community and stakeholders to view and comment on if they wished.

4.3 The main comments regarding retail and town centres that came from the consultation are set out below.

Thematic comments

4.4 Comments received included:

- Research shows that the higher demand areas are those with substantial separate retail centres. The Local Plan should continue to invest in these smaller local centres and look to introduce new retail areas to support neighbourhoods where there is no retail provision. These actions will help attract future investment.
- Oldham Retail and Leisure Study (2009) stated it should be reviewed every three to four years. Oldham's Retail Study should be updated, including:
  - Population projection;
  - Local expenditure estimates;
  - Growth rate assumptions for expenditure per capita;
  - Forecast increases in turnover to floorspace efficiency;
  - The impact of potential increases in home and internet shopping;
  - Existing retail floorspace and average turnover to floorpsace densities; and
  - Implemented development within and around the borough.
- The vitality and viability of existing centres should be reviewed regularly, informed by a regular update of the survey of ground floor uses in the main centres and not just those defined in the Joint DPD. This will allow analysis of the mix and diversity of uses in the centres, vacancy levels, any deficiencies which may arise and the overall performance of centres over time. The review should inform the retail hierarchy.

- The Local Plan needs to ensure there are sufficient services, facilities and amenities to serve the borough and complement growth set out in GMSF. This will have an impact on the centre boundaries and retail allocations identified within the Oldham Local Plan.
- GMSF retail hierarchy only includes main town centres. The Local Plan will need to provide a more detailed strategy for Oldham Town Centre and define the hierarchy below the principal town centre.
- Need to consider a review of the retail hierarchy which is reflective of the role and functions of the different centres and bring the designations in line with NPPF. The retail hierarchy should include district and local centres.
- The following retail hierarchy is considered appropriate:
    - Oldham Town Centre;
    - District Centres;
    - Local Centres - including Hollins Road; and
    - Local Parades.

- Oldham Town Centre should continue to be the main focus for major retail and leisure development.
- The Local Plan will need to consider policies that make clear which uses will be permitted in the centres, local shopping parades and allocated sites. Consider main town centres uses appropriate within each of these areas.
- Culture and creative industries play a key role in developing vibrant town centres. Cultural and community facilities support the daily needs of local communities and help to promote wellbeing and quality of life. Arts and culture help to attract and retain residents and a skilled workforce.
- Cultural facilities include theatres, live music venues(including public houses), community spaces, museums, cinemas, libraries and other public and performance venues, and they are important for supporting the local, visitor and night time economy.
- New retail sites should not leave existing buildings empty and derelict. In addition traffic impacts should be taken into account.
- Innovative higher density housing should be focused around the town centres and green space incorporated into housing development.
- The provision of leisure and night time offer in the town centre should continue to be improved.
- Oldham Town Centre has space for further development and could be improved by reusing disused / vacant buildings for housing.

- There are too many fast food shops.

- Parking in some towns and villages is difficult. There is a need to look at how people will travel to and from these areas without using their cars – perhaps a park and ride for Saddleworth.

- The £60 million regeneration of Oldham Town Centre is moving in a very positive direction.This needs to follow along the lines of the independent sector and widely accepted retailers and not just the excessive introduction of takeaways, milkshake bars and E-cig shops.

- Support small businesses, providing parking and improving local transport so that residents can shop locally providing development opportunities for the high tech industries of the future and link these to other centres/ transport nodes by walking routes etc.

- The Theatres Trust suggested policy wording for Cultural and Community Facilities.

Spatial comments

- The role of Oldham Town Centre should be boosted to provide a mix of uses to ensure it remains viable.

- The proposals map will need to define the extent of the town centres and primary shopping areas based on clear definitions.

- The District Centre boundary for Chadderton should retain the ASDA store.

- Asda in Shaw are hoping to extend the offer at the store by providing fuel at the petrol station. Given the context of the site a new District Centre boundary for Shaw should be drawn which includes the Asda store.

- The Asda at Hill Stores forms part of a parade which includes a pharmacy, dental surgery, takeaway. This cluster of shops should be included within the Hill Stores District Centre.

- The centres of Chadderton, Failsworth, Shaw, Royton, Hill Stores, Uppermill and Lees perform a district wide role and function and should be defined as District Centres.

- The retail hierarchy should include Local Centres to ensure the vitality and viability of those centres which serve a local function.

- The retail hierarchy should recognise the important role of Hollins Road as a Local Centre as it includes an Asda Store, Post Office, pharmacy, opticians, butchers, several hairdressers etc.

- The Asda Living store at Elk Mill is part of an out of centre Retail Park. The Local Plan should provide for retail development outside of centres on suitable sites.

- Development in the Town Centre needs to continue (around Mumps and Rhodes Bank).

5 FUTURE EVIDENCE REQUIRED

5.1 Paragraph 23 of NPPF makes clear what Local Plans need to include in relation to any town centre policies.

5.2 The main piece of evidence in relation to vitality of our centres has been completed already in the Boroughwide Retail and Leisure Study.

5.3 Following on from the NPPF publication, a piece of work looking at a minimum density standards for our centres and transport hubs will also be required to ensure that we can meet our development needs and make the most efficient use of our available land.

5.4 As work progresses on the Oldham Town Centre Vision, the Local Plan will promote and support its delivery, and any other appropriate plans or projects that facilitate the development of the borough's centres.

6 KEY ISSUES

6.1 The key issues in relation to Oldham's Town Centres are:

- There are ambitious plans for Oldham Town Centre, the Local Plan will need to support and help facilitate these plans.
- The traditional role of town centres (the high street and retail sector) is expected to decline, with the rise of e-commerce, there is a need to diversify to promote vitality and vibrancy.
- There is a lack of high quality office space within Oldham Town Centre.
- There is a need to accommodate a level of residential development in the centres, with an appropriate density applied.
- The evening offer in Oldham Town Centre needs to continue to grow on the back of the cinema development.
- COVID-19 has already had and continues to have, a huge impact on high streets, with a number of national multiple retailers restructuring or entering administration, including Clarks, Debenhams, and Brighthouse. In addition to this the future of many pubs and restaurants also remains in doubt. It will be important to ensure the Local Plan has policies which can support our centres positively respond to and survive this pandemic.

7 PLAN OBJECTIVES

7.1 The following draft plan objectives are proposed as a result of the initial issues that have been identified in relation to this open land paper. These will be refined as further evidence and the Local Plan is progressed, taking into consideration feedback received.

7.2 PO4 Supporting thriving Town Centres by:

- promoting and supporting the delivery of Oldham Town Centre Framework, and any other appropriate plans or projects that facilitate the development of the borough's centres (Oldham Town Centre, Chadderton, Failsworth, Hill Stores, Lees, Royton, Shaw and Uppermill);
- raising the profile of Oldham Town Centre as visitor destinations, providing more compelling reasons to visit and stay longer;
- promoting the diversification of the borough's centres as places to live;
- incorporating multi functional, useable green infrastructure in our centres to make them attractive locations that people want to spend time in;
- ensuring our centres are places that thrive by having a diverse cultural, leisure and night time economies; and
- creating safe, healthy and friendly town centres that are accessible, enable active streets, and decreases the opportunities for crime to take place.

8 INTEGRATED ASSESSMENT

8.1 The Local Plan will be supported by an Integrated Assessment (IA). The IA will include the Sustainability Appraisal (SA) / Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), Equalities Impact Assessment (EqIA) and a Health Impact Assessment (HIA). The Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) will be a standalone document; however its findings will be integrated into the IA.

8.2 The role of an IA is to promote sustainable development through assessing the emerging Local Plan against economic, environmental and social objectives. It is a way of ensuring that the preferred approach in the Plan is the most appropriate when assessed against any reasonable alternatives. It also allows for any potential adverse effects to be identified and mitigated and for improvements to environmental, social and economic conditions to be made.

8.3 The Scoping Report is the first stage of the IA process (Stage A). It identifies the scope and level of detail to be included in the IA report. The IA identified the following issues to be addressed in the Local Plan in relation to town centres:

- There is a need to reinforce the role of Oldham Town Centre as a focus for office, retail, leisure and cultural activity and to support the vitality and viability of the borough's other centres.
- There is a need to promote sustainable tourism and recreation.

8.4 The IA proposed an Integrated Assessment approach and scoring system to the assessment of the emerging Local Plan.

8.5 Consultation on the Integrated Assessment Scoping Report took place between 10 July and 21 August 2017.

8.6 “The IA Scoping Report has been updated (Update 1) to support the Issues and Options consultation. The issues in relation to this topic paper have not changed.

8.7 The Integrated Assessment has appraised the vision, plan objectives and spatial options.

8.8 Plan Objective 4, which focuses on supporting thriving Town Centres scored a mixture of neutral, positives and significantly positive scores. The plan objective scored a uncertain as it has been screened in by the HRA and must be subject to further screening as the Local Plan is developed.

8.9 The IA will help to develop and refine the options of the Local Plan as work progresses and assess the effects of the Local Plan proposals and consider ways of mitigating adverse effects and maximising beneficial effects. An IA report will be published alongside each Draft Local Plan published for consultation before the final Publication stage.

9 EVIDENCE SOURCES

- National Planning Policy Framework (February, 2019)
- Planning Practice Guidance Town Centres and Retail (updated September, 2020) https://www.gov.uk/guidance/ensuring-the-vitality-of-town-centres
- Greater Manchester's Plan for Homes, Jobs and the Environment: - Greater Manchester Spatial Framework Publication Plan (GMCA, Draft for Approval, 2020) https://www.greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk/what-we-do/housing/gmsf2020/
- The Town Centre Challenge (November, 2017) New drive to regenerate town centres across Greater Manchester - Greater Manchester Combined Authority (greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk)
- Future High Streets Fund (August, 2019) Future High Streets Fund - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)
- Greater Manchester Local Industrial Strategy (June, 2019) Greater Manchester's Local Industrial Strategy - Greater Manchester Combined Authority (greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk)
- Greater Manchester Spatial Framework Town Centres Topic Paper (October, 2016) http://gmsf-consult.objective.co.uk/portal/2016consultation/supp_docs?pointId=1477648533266
- Joint Core Strategy and Development Management Policies DPD 'Joint DPD' (November, 2011) Development Plan Document - Joint Core Strategy and Development Management Policies | Oldham Council
- Oldham Town Centre Masterplan https://www.oldham.gov.uk/info/201088/regeneration/1817/town_centre_masterplan
- Creating a Better Place Vision (January, 2020) £306 million investment strategy set to be approved by Oldham Council | Oldham Council
- Oldham Town Centre Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan Supplementary Planning Document (August, 2019) Oldham Town Centre Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan (CAAMP) Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) | Oldham Council
- The Oldham Plan 2017-2022 (Oldham Council, 2017) https://committees.oldham.gov.uk/documents/s83732/Oldham%20Plan%202017-22.pdf
- Vibrant Centres Supplementary Planning Document (Oldham Council, July, 2013) www.oldham.gov.uk/downloads/download/570/draft_vibrant_centres_spd