

Wigan Metropolitan Borough Council

Threshold Policy for Retail and Leisure Use Impact Test

ON BEHALF OF WIGAN COUNCIL

December 2025

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 This report is prepared on behalf of Wigan Council by Nexus Planning to provide the evidence base and justification for introducing a locally set impact assessment threshold for retail and leisure uses within Wigan Borough.
- 1.2 The study responds to the guidance contained within the National Planning Policy Framework, which enables local planning authorities to set a proportionate, locally defined impact threshold for retail and leisure proposals below the national default of 2,500 sq.m gross floorspace. In this regard, paragraph 015 of the Town Centres Planning Practice Guidance states that a locally appropriate threshold can be set by the local planning authority.
- 1.3 Establishing an appropriate local threshold is important to ensure that proposed edge- or out-of-centre retail and leisure developments are properly assessed for their potential effects on the vitality, viability, and investment within Wigan's established centres.
- 1.4 The Council does not currently have an adopted local threshold in place. Consequently, the national default threshold of 2,500 sq.m gross applies when determining whether an impact assessment is required. However, as demonstrated by the evidence in this report, that national figure is disproportionately high relative to the scale, function, and vulnerability of Wigan's network of centres.
- 1.5 The purpose of this study is therefore to:
 - assess the composition, performance, and sensitivity of the Borough's retail centres;
 - evaluate the scale and characteristics of retail and leisure development occurring beyond these centres;
 - consider the implications for town centre vitality and viability; and
 - provide a robust, evidence-based recommendation for a locally appropriate impact threshold that can be incorporated into planning policy.
- 1.6 In doing so, this study ensures that Wigan's planning framework continues to support sustainable patterns of retail and leisure growth, while maintaining confidence in planned in-centre investment and regeneration.
- 1.7 The references in this report to the hierarchy of the centres is as per the currently adopted local plan. However, we note that within the emerging local plan, it is proposed to adjust the hierarchy under Policy TC1 and we therefore take this into account in providing our analysis and overarching policy recommendations in Section 5.

2. Context and Policy Background

- 2.1 This section provides an overview of the national, regional, and local planning policy framework relevant to retail and town centre development in Wigan Borough. It identifies the key provisions of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF, December 2024) and associated Planning Practice Guidance (PPG), together with the policies of the Wigan Local Plan Core Strategy (2013), the Initial Draft Wigan Borough Local Plan: Planning for the Future to 2040 (April 2025), the Wigan Town Centre Strategic Regeneration Framework (2019), and the Places for Everyone Plan.
- 2.2 Together, these documents provide the context and rationale for defining locally appropriate impact assessment thresholds for retail, leisure, and other main town centre uses. The policies collectively promote a town centre first approach, recognising that centres perform an essential economic, social, and community role and that they must adapt to significant structural changes in retailing, leisure, and service provision.

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (December 2024)

- 2.3 The NPPF (2024) sets out the Government's overarching planning policies for England and the framework for preparing local plans. Its approach to *ensuring the vitality of town centres* is contained within Chapter 7.
- 2.4 Paragraph 94 provides the statutory basis for setting local impact thresholds:
- 'When assessing applications for retail and leisure development outside town centres, which are not in accordance with an up-to-date plan, local planning authorities should require an impact assessment if the development is over a proportionate, locally set floorspace threshold (if there is no locally set threshold, the default threshold is 2,500 m² of gross floorspace). This should include assessment of:**
- a. the impact of the proposal on existing, committed and planned public and private investment in a centre or centres in the catchment area of the proposal; and**
 - b. the impact of the proposal on town centre vitality and viability, including local consumer choice and trade in the town centre and the wider retail catchment (as applicable to the scale and nature of the scheme).'**
- 2.5 The NPPF therefore recognises that the *default threshold* of 2,500 sq.m may not be appropriate in all circumstances, particularly where the hierarchy of centres includes smaller or more vulnerable locations. It enables local authorities to define a lower, proportionate threshold through evidence-based assessment, ensuring that potential effects on vitality, viability, and planned investment are properly considered.
- 2.6 The NPPF also emphasises the need for flexibility and adaptation within town centres. It encourages diversification, improved accessibility, and new formats of retail and leisure use that respond to evolving consumer behaviour, the growth of online retailing, and the need for centres to become multifunctional destinations.

Planning Practice Guidance

- 2.7 The Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) on *Ensuring the Vitality of Town Centres* provides detailed advice on how the NPPF's requirements should be applied. It confirms that:
- Local thresholds should be set based on evidence, reflecting the scale of existing centres, the size and nature of typical development proposals, and the extent of recent changes in retail and leisure provision.
 - Authorities should consider cumulative impacts, not just single proposals, when defining thresholds.

- The threshold should be proportionate, allowing for the assessment of development likely to have a material impact, while avoiding unnecessary burden for smaller-scale proposals.

2.8 The PPG also highlights the importance of considering the function of different types of centre within the hierarchy. Where smaller, service-based centres are common (as in Wigan), lower thresholds are typically justified because medium-sized out-of-centre stores (of 300 - 1,000 sq.m) can have a disproportionate effect on local trade and footfall.

Places for Everyone

2.9 Wigan Borough forms part of the Places for Everyone (PfE) Plan, the joint development plan for nine of Greater Manchester's authorities. The PfE provides a regional spatial framework that supports economic growth, housing delivery, and regeneration while promoting sustainable and inclusive development.

2.10 The PfE's strategic objectives for town centres are to:

- Reinforce the town centre first principle for new retail, leisure, and commercial development;
- Support diversification, particularly into leisure, culture, and residential uses;
- Strengthen smaller centres to ensure communities have access to day-to-day services; and
- Manage the scale and location of out-of-centre development to safeguard investment and employment in town centres.

2.11 Within this context, Wigan town centre is identified as a key strategic location for regeneration and housing growth within Greater Manchester. The PfE supports major investment in The Galleries redevelopment and other strategic regeneration projects, seeking to strengthen Wigan's sub-regional role while protecting the function of surrounding smaller centres such as Leigh and Ashton-in-Makerfield.

2.12 The PfE's policies therefore reinforce the rationale for setting locally derived impact thresholds, ensuring that new development contributes positively to the hierarchy of centres and does not undermine the significant regeneration being promoted within the Borough.

Wigan Local Plan Core Strategy

2.13 The Wigan Local Plan Core Strategy provides the adopted local planning policy framework for the Borough. Its strategic vision seeks to ensure that Wigan's town, district, and local centres are vibrant and accessible, providing a balanced range of shopping, leisure, and service facilities.

2.14 Policy CP6 (Retail and Leisure Development) currently establishes the Borough's retail hierarchy as follows:

- Principal Town Centre: Wigan
- Main Town Centres: Leigh and Ashton-in-Makerfield
- Town centres: Atherton, Golborne, Hindley, Pemberton, Platt Bridge, and Standish

2.15 The policy directs major retail, leisure, and office development to these centres, consistent with the sequential approach set out in national policy. It also seeks to resist proposals outside defined centres that would undermine their vitality and viability.

2.16 However, Policy CP6 does not specify a local impact assessment threshold, meaning that the default 2,500 sqm (gross) threshold from the NPPF currently applies. This gap in policy justification is one of the key reasons for

commissioning the present study. The findings will help ensure that future plan policy aligns with both the NPPF and the real-world structure of Wigan's centres.

Wigan Town Centre Strategic Regeneration Framework (2019)

2.17 The Wigan Town Centre Strategic Regeneration Framework (SRF) sets out a long-term vision for transforming Wigan town centre into a vibrant, mixed-use destination. The Framework identifies several spatial priorities:

- Diversifying uses by expanding the leisure, cultural, and residential offer;
- Reconfiguring the retail core to focus on higher-quality, smaller-scale retail and service provision;
- Delivering flagship redevelopment projects, most notably The Galleries redevelopment, which will create new market, leisure, food, and residential spaces; and
- Improving the public realm and accessibility to encourage active travel and enhance the centre's overall experience.

2.18 The SRF explicitly recognises that traditional comparison retailing has declined, and that the future success of Wigan town centre depends on broadening its function. The framework provides a clear strategic context for local plan policies and reinforces the need to manage out-of-centre development that might divert trade and investment away from the core.

2.19 The delivery of The Galleries redevelopment which is currently under construction is particularly significant. It represents a transformational opportunity to reposition Wigan as a modern, attractive town centre with a strong leisure and lifestyle role. Ensuring that new out-of-centre development does not compromise this investment is a key objective underpinning this study.

Emerging Wigan Borough Local Plan: Planning for the Future to 2040

2.20 The Wigan Borough Local Plan once adopted will replace the 2013 Core Strategy and establish the planning framework for the Borough to 2040. It updates the policy approach to retail and town centre uses, reflecting the shift towards more flexible, experience-led centres.

2.21 Policy TC1: Hierarchy of Town and Local Centres reaffirms the Borough's retail hierarchy and broadens the spatial extent of town centre boundaries to better reflect functional relationships between retail cores and surrounding mixed-use areas. The policy identifies the following hierarchy:

- Wigan as the main sub-regional town centre;
- Leigh as the main town centre; and
- Ashton, Atherton, Golborne, Hindley, Pemberton, Platt Bridge, Standish and Tyldesley as town centres.

2.22 The remainder of this Study therefore focuses on the impact threshold taking into account the above new hierarchy.

2.23 Core Areas are identified within each town centre boundary to guide the sequential approach:

- Core Area (first preference);
- Wider town centre boundary;
- Edge-of-centre (within 300m of Core Area); and
- Out-of-centre locations.

- 2.24 The policy requires that new retail and leisure development be of a scale appropriate to the role and function of the centre it serves and that proposals avoid significant adverse impact on vitality, viability, or planned investment.
- 2.25 Importantly, Policy TC1 introduces a proposed local impact assessment threshold of 900 sqm (gross internal area) for all town centre uses in edge-of-centre or out-of-centre locations. This threshold is substantially below the NPPF's national default of 2,500 sq.m and reflects a growing recognition of the need for more sensitive impact testing within the Borough.
- 2.26 Supporting text (paragraphs 7.8 - 7.14) emphasises that new development must:
- Support regeneration and diversification priorities for each centre;
 - Complement, rather than compete with, planned investment; and
 - Protect local consumer choice and centre functionality.
- 2.27 This evidence base report provides the technical justification for the proposed threshold, ensuring it is firmly grounded in quantitative and qualitative analysis of centre composition, floorspace structure, and vulnerability, and is consistent with national policy guidance.
- 2.28 Policy TC14 (Convenience Shops Outside of Designated Centres) addresses the provision of small-scale convenience retail outside designated town and local centres. It sets out a tiered approach to manage the scale and location of such development, ensuring accessibility, local amenity, and protection of established centres.
- 2.29 The policy permits the development or change of use to small convenience shops of less than 150 sq.m (gross internal area), including extensions, where they are suitably located for access by walking or wheeling and do not adversely affect the amenity of nearby residents or businesses, in accordance with Policy EN7.
- 2.30 For medium-sized units between 150–600 sq.m (GIA), proposals will be supported outside designated centres where the above criteria are met and:
- there are no suitable or available sites within or adjacent to a town or local centre that could serve a similar catchment; and
 - the proposal would not harm the vitality and viability of an existing local centre.
- 2.31 Larger convenience shops exceeding 600 sq.m (GIA), including extensions, located outside Core Areas of town centres or Local Centres, will be subject to the sequential approach and, where the proposal exceeds 900 sqm (GIA), an impact assessment in line with Policy TC1.
- 2.32 The policy also allocates land at the former petrol station site at the junction of A49 Wigan Lane and Walter Scott Avenue, Wigan, for a food-led convenience shop (or shops) of less than 600 sqm (GIA), subject to satisfactory design, access, and amenity considerations.

3. Methodology

- 3.1 This assessment uses a structured methodology to identify appropriate local impact thresholds for Wigan Borough's defined retail centres. The approach aligns with the principles set out in the NPPF and Town Centres PPG, combining quantitative data analysis with professional planning judgement.
- 3.2 The methodology brings together multiple strands of information about the Borough's centres to establish how they function, the extent of their trading strength, and how susceptible they may be to new development located outside designated boundaries. This evidence is then used to form reasoned recommendations on suitable thresholds for different levels within Wigan's retail hierarchy.
- 3.3 Wigan Borough contains a diverse network of centres which vary considerably in size, composition, and commercial role. Because of these differences, the same scale of new development could have very different implications in two centres of a similar status. For example, a proposal for a 500 sq.m convenience store might be well absorbed in one location without a material impact on the existing operators in a defined centre but could undermine trade or investment in another.
- 3.4 Accordingly, the assessment not only provides recommendations in respect of the level of the appropriate thresholds but also considers whether thresholds should be applied uniformly to all centres within a tier, or whether separate thresholds are needed to reflect local variation. While a consistent approach can provide simplicity and clarity, the evidence indicates that retail character and market strength differ significantly even within the same level of the hierarchy, particularly among the Borough's town centres.
- 3.5 The following information has been compiled and reviewed for each of the defined centres in the Borough:
 - Total floorspace for the main town centre use categories;
 - The size and distribution of individual units by use type;
 - Details of main town centre use planning permissions and applications determined within the last five years;
 - Available health check indicators and data on centre vitality and viability;
 - Any published regeneration or town centre strategies; and
 - Information on current and planned investment.
- 3.6 The analysis of floorspace provides a clear picture of the relative scale of each centre and the mix of activities that define its function. This is particularly important because some categories of use are more likely than others to generate impacts when located outside defined boundaries. In most cases, the types of development most likely to influence footfall and trade are convenience retail, comparison retail, and leisure uses.
- 3.7 Service-based uses, such as hair and beauty, small-scale financial services, or repair outlets, typically operate in smaller units and have limited potential to trade in large out-of-centre formats. Consequently, the focus of the analysis has been on those sectors most likely to compete with in-centre activity and affect overall centre performance. This approach reflects paragraph 94 of the NPPF, which requires impact assessments only for retail and leisure uses over a set threshold.
- 3.8 Data on the distribution of unit sizes across each centre has been used to understand their internal structure and the presence of larger anchor units which contribute to drawing footfall. By examining the proportion of units exceeding 200 sq.m, 400 sq.m, 600 sq.m and 1,000 sq.m, it is possible to gauge how much large-format retail and leisure space exists within each centre and to identify the scale of development that could reasonably compete with it in an alternative location.

- 3.9 Information on recent planning permissions and out-of-centre retail and leisure provision has been reviewed to assess the existing and emerging level of competition facing town centres. This includes well-established destinations such as Robin Retail Park in Wigan and Parsonage Shopping Park in Leigh, alongside permissions for new floorspace in other edge- or out-of-centre locations. Understanding these developments helps to identify where centres are most exposed to trade diversion or where cumulative impacts may already be material.
- 3.10 The assessment also draws on wider evidence about vitality and viability, including vacancy levels, diversity of offer, retailer representation, and environmental quality. These indicators provide an insight into each centre's underlying health and resilience. Information from key strategic documents, such as the Wigan Town Centre Strategic Regeneration Framework, and from known investment projects, such as The Galleries redevelopment, has been incorporated to account for planned change and improvement activity.
- 3.11 All datasets have been combined through a consistent analytical framework, allowing direct comparison of performance across the Borough's main sub-regional, main, and town centres. Each centre has been assessed in relation to:
- Its scale and diversity of uses;
 - The presence of large-format anchors;
 - The level of out-of-centre competition; and
 - Its overall capacity and resilience to further change.
- 3.12 This structured evaluation allows the assessment to identify which centres are more vulnerable to external competition and which have the strength to accommodate growth.
- 3.13 Drawing on this evidence, professional judgement has then been applied to determine at what scale of development an impact assessment should reasonably be required. This judgement reflects not only the physical characteristics of each centre, but also the policy objectives of safeguarding investment, maintaining vitality and viability, and ensuring that new retail and leisure development complements the Borough's spatial strategy.
- 3.14 The output of this process is a set of proportionate, locally defined impact thresholds which correspond to the different levels of Wigan's retail hierarchy. These thresholds are designed to be practical to apply, supported by a clear evidence base, and consistent with the requirements of paragraph 94 of the NPPF. They also provide a technical foundation for refining the retail and town centre policies of the emerging Wigan Borough Local Plan: Planning for the Future to 2040, ensuring alignment with national guidance and the Council's regeneration priorities.

4. Analysis of Wigan Borough's Centres

- 4.1 This chapter assesses the composition and performance of Wigan Borough's network of centres using the composition of the town centres based on evidence from the Council's Destin system extracted in April 2025. This is business rates information for all properties within the borough that can be extracted from GIS and shows type of use and floorspace of units.
- 4.2 The analysis covers the Main Sub-regional centre (Wigan), the Main Town Centre (Leigh), and the Town Centres (Ashton-in-Makerfield, Atherton, Golborne, Hindley, Pemberton, Platt Bridge, Standish and Tyldesley) within the defined boundaries as identified by emerging local plan policy TC1. Categories provided below follow the standard Goad classification.
- 4.3 Findings are presented as the proportion of units and floorspace in each main town centre use, with comparisons to national averages. The figures presented are from the town centres as a whole instead of the core area as also defined by the new local plan. The purpose is to understand each centre's role, diversity and resilience, as well as to highlight any structural vulnerabilities relevant to a locally proportionate impact assessment threshold.
- 4.4 Overall, the analysis confirms a tiered retail structure with sharp contrasts in both total scale and average unit size. These differences influence how future development may affect vitality and viability. The data provides a quantitative foundation for determining locally appropriate impact assessment thresholds, which are explored in chapter 5.

Centres Floorspace Analysis

- 4.5 Table 4.1 shows the total average floorspace in each tier of centre broken down into the different use categories (as categorised by 'Goad'); shown in both sq.m and as percentages. By way of a reminder, the new hierarchy within the emerging local plan is as follows:

- **Main sub-regional town centre:** Wigan
- **Main town centre:** Leigh
- **Town centres:** Ashton-in-Makerfield, Atherton, Golborne, Hindley, Pemberton, Platt Bridge, Standish and Tyldesley.

Table 4.1: Total proportion of retail units by Centre Tier and Use

	Main Sub-Regional Town Centre		Main Town Centre		Town Centres	
Category	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Comparison	188	23.0%	156	27.7%	271	25.2%
Convenience	37	4.5%	45	8.0%	91	8.5%
Financial & Business Services	71	8.7%	54	9.6%	103	9.6%
Leisure Services	146	17.9%	107	19.0%	294	27.3%
Retail Service	111	13.6%	90	16.0%	225	20.9%
Vacant	264	32.3%	111	19.7%	92	8.6%
Total	817	100.0%	563	100.0%	1,076	100.0%

- 4.6 Wigan town centre remains the Borough's largest and most established shopping and leisure destination. It accommodates a broad mix of national retailers such as Primark, Boots, and TK Maxx, alongside major leisure

operators including The Moon Under Water (JD Wetherspoon) and The Edge leisure complex. This combination reinforces Wigan's regional role, offering a strong retail core complemented by cafés, restaurants, and service uses. However, the presence of several larger vacant units reflects wider structural change within the retail sector and the ongoing reshaping of the town centre through regeneration and redevelopment activity.

- 4.7 In Leigh (the main town centre), the retail and leisure offer is more compact but diverse, serving both local residents and surrounding communities. The centre includes national operators such as Aldi, Tesco, and Home Bargains, supported by a range of smaller independents including cafés, hair and beauty salons, and local services. Leisure provision is growing, with venues such as The Spinners Arms and independent cafés adding to its day and evening economy. Vacancies remain moderate, and the overall mix of retail and leisure uses reinforces Leigh's role as an accessible and complementary destination to Wigan.
- 4.8 The smaller town centres, including Ashton-in-Makerfield, Hindley, and Tyldesley, perform a vital community role with a strong focus on day to day shopping and local services. Each accommodates a distinctive mix of convenience stores, independent traders, and leisure uses that support local identity and regular footfall. Examples include pubs and restaurants such as The Fleece Hotel, Bar 59, and The Red Lion Hotel in Ashton-in-Makerfield, and independent retailers. Vacancies remain low, reflecting the importance of smaller centres within the Borough's overall network of town centres.

Table 4.2: Total proportion of retail units by centre tier and floorspace tier

	Main sub-regional town centre		Main Town Centre		Town Centres	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
< 200 sq.m	615	75.3%	454	80.6%	938	87.3%
200-299 sq.m	53	6.5%	54	9.6%	57	5.3%
300-499 sq.m	64	7.8%	21	3.7%	48	4.5%
500-999 sq.m	52	6.4%	23	4.1%	20	1.9%
1000-1499 sq.m	12	1.5%	6	1.1%	6	0.6%
> 1500 sq.m	21	2.6%	5	0.9%	6	0.6%
Total	817	100.0%	563	100.0%	1,075	100.0%

- 4.9 The distribution of retail floorspace by unit size reflects the differing physical structures and commercial roles of the Borough's centres. Wigan is characterised by a concentration of large-format premises, shaped by the presence of major retail anchors and former department store units within areas such as the Grand Arcade. Smaller shop units are comparatively limited as compared to Leigh and the town centres, reflecting the centre's historic function as a focus for national multiple retailers and larger-format stores.
- 4.10 In contrast, Leigh and the smaller town centres display a much finer grain of retail provision. Both are dominated by smaller premises typically occupied by independent retailers, specialist traders, and service-based businesses. The high proportion of compact units gives these centres a more local and accessible character, while also limiting opportunities to accommodate larger national operators without significant redevelopment or consolidation.
- 4.11 Mid-sized units are present across all centres, accommodating a mix of supermarkets, gyms, and retail warehouse-style operators. Examples include foodstores such as Aldi and Tesco Express in Leigh and fitness operators in Wigan, which occupy units that bridge the scale between traditional high street shops and the larger anchor stores. These spaces provide an important balance within the overall retail hierarchy, supporting a variety of uses that complement the main shopping areas.

- 4.12 The availability of large-format retail space declines progressively down the hierarchy, from the major anchors in Wigan to a more limited presence in Leigh and the town centres. This pattern reflects the more constrained sites and finer-grained built form of the lower-tier centres, where local shops, independent traders, and service uses form the backbone of the retail offer. The distinct physical scale of each centre reinforces their complementary roles within the Borough's network and highlights the need for development that responds appropriately to each location's established character and capacity.

Table 4.3: Average overall floorspace by centre tier

Main sub-regional town centre	Main Town Centre	Town Centres
254.2 sq.m	187.4 sq.m	149.2 sq.m

- 4.13 The average size of retail units further reinforces the clear hierarchy between centres. Wigan accommodates generally larger premises, reflecting its capacity to accommodate national multiples and anchor stores, whereas Leigh and the town centres are characterised by more compact units suited to local traders, cafés, and independent operators.
- 4.14 This pattern demonstrates that the physical scale and commercial function of centres vary significantly across the Borough. A development of even moderate size in Wigan terms could represent a major intervention for Leigh or any of the smaller centres, given their finer grain and more limited spatial capacity.
- 4.15 In practical terms, this means that new proposals introducing several hundred square metres of additional retail or leisure floorspace could have a pronounced effect on the market balance and trading dynamics of smaller locations. The evidence therefore establishes a clear benchmark for considering appropriate development thresholds and their implications for vitality and viability across the hierarchy.
- 4.16 The following sections examine how retail, leisure, and service uses are distributed across the Borough, building on this spatial analysis to explore how the composition of activity within each tier contributes to overall resilience, diversity, and long-term performance.

Comparison Floorspace

Table 4.4: Proportion of comparison units by centre and floorspace tier

	Main sub-regional town centre		Main Town Centre		Town Centres	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
< 200 sq.m	124	66.0%	114	73.1%	229	84.5%
200-299 sq.m	17	9.0%	18	11.5%	17	6.3%
300-499 sq.m	19	10.1%	8	5.1%	17	6.3%
500-999 sq.m	16	8.5%	10	6.4%	7	2.6%
1000-1499 sq.m	3	1.6%	4	2.6%	1	0.4%
> 1500 sq.m	9	4.8%	2	1.3%	0	0.0%
Total	188	100.0%	156	100.0%	271	100.0%

- 4.17 The pattern of comparison retailing across the Borough highlights the contrasting roles and capacities of different centres. Wigan, as the main sub-regional town centre town, accommodates the majority of larger-format comparison floorspace. The presence of national retailers such as Primark, TK Maxx, and River Island within the Grand Arcade and along Standishgate reflects the town's established role as the Borough's main comparison

destination. The mix of large anchor stores supported by medium-sized units occupied by operators such as Sports Direct and New Look creates a retail environment that continues to draw visitors from across the wider sub-region.

- 4.18 In Leigh, the structure of comparison retailing is more balanced, with a mix of national multiples and independent traders occupying smaller and mid-sized units. The Spinning Gate Shopping Centre and Bradshawgate corridor accommodate retailers such as Peacocks, Home Bargains, and a range of local fashion and homeware shops, reflecting Leigh's sub-regional role and the centre's ability to cater to both everyday shopping needs. While larger-format units are present, they are fewer in number, and the overall scale of provision reinforces Leigh's position as a complementary alternative to Wigan.
- 4.19 The town centres, provide a more localised comparison offer, dominated by smaller independent traders and service-based retailers including hair and beauty salons, and small homeware stores that meet day-to-day needs within their immediate catchments. The limited number of larger units reflects the physical constraints and community-focused nature of these centres, where retailing is closely integrated with leisure and personal service uses.

Table 4.5: Average comparison floorspace by centre tier

Main sub-regional town centre	Main Town Centre	Town Centres
354.3 sq.m	225.3 sq.m	121.8 sq.m

- 4.20 The average size of comparison units reinforces the distinctive pattern of provision across the Borough's hierarchy. Wigan accommodates significantly larger comparison stores, consistent with its ability to host national multiples and major high street brands within purpose-built units. In Leigh, unit sizes are smaller and more varied, reflecting a blend of medium-sized retailers and independent traders, while the town centres are characterised by compact shops suited to local boutiques, service providers, and specialist independents. This distribution reflects both the physical scale of premises available and the differing commercial roles played by each tier of centre.
- 4.21 Overall, comparison retail activity in the Borough remains strongly concentrated in Wigan, where larger stores and anchor operators underpin its wider sub-regional role. Leigh provides a complementary offer, combining value and mid-sized retailers with independent shops that cater to local needs. The town centres perform a supporting function within the network, offering small-scale, community-focused retailing that serves day-to-day purchasing and contributes to local vitality and identity.

Convenience Floorspace

Table 4.6: Proportion of convenience units by centre and floorspace tier

	Main sub-regional town centre		Main Town Centre		Town Centres	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
< 200 sq.m	26	70.3%	36	80.0%	72	79.1%
200-299 sq.m	1	2.7%	4	8.9%	3	3.3%
300-499 sq.m	3	8.1%	0	0.0%	5	5.5%
500-999 sq.m	4	10.8%	2	4.4%	4	4.4%
1000-1499 sq.m	1	2.7%	2	4.4%	2	2.2%
> 1500 sq.m	2	5.4%	1	2.2%	5	5.5%
Total	37	100.0%	45	100.0%	91	100.0%

- 4.22 The distribution of convenience floorspace across the Borough illustrates the differing shopping roles of each centre. Wigan provides the largest and most diverse mix, with provision spread across both smaller independent shops and large supermarket operators. Leigh offers a strong mid-sized supermarket presence within a compact town centre environment, while the town centres are more dependent on single large-format stores that anchor their convenience offer and sustain regular local footfall.
- 4.23 In Wigan, convenience floorspace is distributed across a range of formats, from national supermarkets such as Tesco Extra and Iceland to local butchers, greengrocers, and market stalls within the Galleries Market Hall. This variety supports both main food shopping and top-up needs. The balance between large and small units ensures accessibility and consumer choice, reinforcing Wigan's position as the Borough's principal shopping destination.
- 4.24 Leigh accommodates a more balanced mix of small and medium-sized foodstores, including operators such as Aldi, Tesco, and Heron Foods, alongside a range of independent convenience shops and cafés around the Spinning Gate area. This combination creates an accessible and walkable food shopping environment that serves both the town's residents and surrounding neighbourhoods, underpinning Leigh's role as a local service hub.
- 4.25 The town centres, including Ashton-in-Makerfield, Hindley, and Tyldesley, display a strong reliance on anchor supermarkets, such as Asda and Co-op Food, which typically account for a significant proportion of overall convenience floorspace. These stores are supported by smaller local businesses, including bakeries, newsagents, and takeaway outlets, that provide everyday top-up shopping and contribute to each centre's community function and vitality.
- 4.26 Overall, the evidence highlights that convenience provision plays a vital role in sustaining the health and resilience of the Borough's centres. Large-format stores are key to maintaining regular footfall in smaller locations, while the mix of independent and multiple retailers in Wigan and Leigh ensures a diverse and complementary offer that supports both destination and local shopping patterns.

Table 4.7: Average convenience floorspace by centre tier

Main sub-regional town centre	Main Town Centre	Town Centres
319.8 sq.m	400.9 sq.m	349.1 sq.m

- 4.27 The pattern of average unit sizes further reinforces the distinctions within the retail hierarchy. The town centres accommodate the largest convenience stores, reflecting the prominence of standalone supermarkets that act as key anchors for day-to-day shopping. By contrast, Wigan and Leigh feature smaller-format stores that are more closely integrated with surrounding high street frontages, contributing to an accessible, walkable environment and a broader mix of retailers and services.
- 4.28 These patterns underline the essential role of convenience retail in maintaining vitality and supporting regular shopping trips, particularly within the town centres, where food shopping remains the principal source of footfall. The presence of large anchor stores helps sustain their stability and draw, while Wigan and Leigh benefit from a more varied blend of store formats and operators that together strengthen consumer choice and reinforce the overall resilience of the Borough's retail network.

Other Services

Leisure Services

Table 4.8: Proportion of leisure service units by centre and floorspace tier

	Main sub-regional town centre		Main Town Centre		Town Centres	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
< 200 sq.m	115	78.8%	87	81.3%	253	86.1%
200-299 sq.m	12	8.2%	10	9.3%	16	5.4%
300-499 sq.m	8	5.5%	6	5.6%	17	5.8%
500-999 sq.m	8	5.5%	4	3.7%	7	2.4%
1000-1499 sq.m	1	0.7%	0	0.0%	1	0.3%
> 1500 sq.m	2	1.4%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Total	146	100.0%	107	100.0%	294	100.0%

4.29 Wigan accommodates the largest share of leisure floorspace in the Borough, reflecting its established role as the principal destination for entertainment, food, and drink. The centre contains a number of large-format venues, including the Empire Cinema, major gyms, and restaurant clusters within the Grand Arcade and along King Street. This scale of provision underpins Wigan's regional draw and aligns with ongoing regeneration projects such as the Stack development in the former Debenhams building and the leisure-led Fettle's scheme. Alongside these anchors, a diverse mix of smaller cafés, bars, and takeaways including national chains and independents contributes to a vibrant day and evening economy.

4.30 In Leigh, leisure activity is more fine-grained, with smaller units typically accommodating independent cafés, bars, and hair and beauty operators. These are complemented by mid-sized premises, such as local gyms and community leisure spaces, which help broaden the centre's appeal and sustain regular visits. The combination of accessible, local-scale facilities and a growing independent food and drink scene enhances Leigh's role as a sub-regional leisure and service destination serving surrounding residential communities.

Table 4.9: Average leisure service floorspace by centre tier

Main sub-regional town centre	Main Town Centre	Town Centres
209.7 sq.m	119.4 sq.m	114.2 sq.m

4.31 The average unit sizes reinforces the differences observed across the Borough's leisure hierarchy. Wigan accommodates a balanced mix of larger and smaller venues, from multiplex cinemas and gyms to intimate bars and cafés that cluster around King Street and the town centre core. In contrast, Leigh and the town centres are characterised by compact premises typically occupied by independent food and drink outlets, salons, and community leisure uses, consistent with their service-based and neighbourhood-focused functions.

4.32 The data highlights the close relationship between scale and role within the Borough's leisure sector. Wigan operates as a Borough-wide destination for both daytime and evening activity, supported by ongoing investment in new facilities and regeneration projects that enhance its appeal. Leigh and the town centres, meanwhile, fulfil important local roles, where independent operators sustain vibrancy and diversity but can be more sensitive to wider market shifts or the introduction of large-format leisure uses elsewhere.

Table 4.10: Proportion of retail service units by centre and floorspace tier

	Main sub-regional town centre		Main Town Centre		Town Centres	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
< 200 sq.m	91	82.0%	79	87.8%	209	92.9%
200-299 sq.m	7	6.3%	11	12.2%	10	4.4%
300-499 sq.m	9	8.1%	0	0.0%	3	1.3%
500-999 sq.m	3	2.7%	0	0.0%	2	0.9%
1000-1499 sq.m	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	1	0.4%
> 1500 sq.m	1	0.9%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Total	111	100.0%	90	100.0%	225	100.0%

- 4.33 Retail service uses are predominantly accommodated in small-scale premises across all levels of the Borough's centre hierarchy. Wigan contains a concentration of smaller service units, with the majority occupied by independent hair and beauty salons, barbers, and specialist health and wellbeing operators, supported by a number of national chains such as Specsavers.
- 4.34 In Leigh, retail service floorspace is more limited in overall scale, dominated by small independent businesses. Personal care services, barbers, and nail salons are particularly prevalent, alongside local estate agents, opticians, and travel services. The compact unit sizes reflect the traditional high street form and reinforce the importance of these occupiers in maintaining regular activity and local identity within the town centre.
- 4.35 The town centres, display a similar composition, with service operators typically occupying small, flexible units that cater to day-to-day needs. Such services are integral to the community function of these centres, contributing to their social role as accessible neighbourhood destinations.

Table 4.11: Average retail service floorspace by centre tier

Main sub-regional town centre	Main Town Centre	Town Centres
160.6 sq.m	87.0 sq.m	91.9 sq.m

- 4.36 In Wigan, service operators typically occupy compact premises, reflecting a balance between independent traders and a limited number of national chains. Average unit sizes fall further in Leigh and the town centres, where hair and beauty salons, barbers, and specialist service providers operate from modest, flexible units suited to high street settings. This demonstrates that such activities are not generally associated with large-format development but instead form an integral part of the local retail fabric.
- 4.37 Overall, retail service provision makes an important contribution to the vitality and identity of each centre. These businesses support regular footfall and reinforce local distinctiveness, particularly where clustered around convenience and leisure anchors. However, their small scale and dependence on passing trade mean they can be more sensitive to changes in shopping patterns or the impact of larger out-of-centre developments.

Financial and Business Service

Table 4.12: Proportion of financial and business service units by centre and floorspace tier

	Main sub-regional town centre		Main Town Centre		Town Centres	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
< 200 sq.m	49	69.0%	40	74.1%	91	88.3%
200-299 sq.m	7	9.9%	7	13.0%	9	8.7%
300-499 sq.m	10	14.1%	4	7.4%	3	2.9%
500-999 sq.m	4	5.6%	2	3.7%	0	0.0%
1000-1499 sq.m	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
> 1500 sq.m	1	1.4%	1	1.9%	0	0.0%
Total	71	100.0%	54	100.0%	103	100.0%

4.38 Financial and business services are represented across all levels of the Borough's centre hierarchy, with floorspace largely concentrated in Wigan, followed by Leigh and the town Centres. Provision is predominantly accommodated within small and medium-sized units, reflecting the localised nature of these uses. Activity typically comprises financial advisors, and professional services such as solicitors and accountants, rather than large-scale corporate or regional office functions.

4.39 In Wigan, financial and business services display a broader range of unit sizes than elsewhere, reflecting the town's role as the Borough's principal administrative and commercial centre. Alongside smaller local agencies, Wigan accommodates larger-format premises occupied by organisations such as banks, civic offices, and corporate service providers. These uses are often clustered within the town centre core, contributing to weekday footfall and supporting a balanced mix of commercial activity.

4.40 In Leigh, provision is focused on traditional high street premises, where financial and professional service uses occupy small and mid-sized units within and around Bradshawgate and the Spinning Gate area. Typical occupiers include banks, building societies, and local professional practices offering accessible, community-oriented services. The scale and character of these units align closely with the town's overall retail and service structure.

4.41 The town centres are characterised by a highly localised pattern of provision, almost entirely comprising small-scale operators. These services perform an essential community role, supporting local residents and complementing nearby retail and leisure activities. The absence of larger premises reflects the modest commercial scale of these centres and their focus on meeting day-to-day needs rather than wider market demand.

Table 4.13: Average financial and business service floorspace by centre tier

Main sub-regional town centre	Main Town Centre	Town Centres
238.9 sq.m	184.3 sq.m	100.6 sq.m

4.42 The pattern of average unit sizes reinforces the functional hierarchy evident within the financial and business services sector. In Wigan, larger premises accommodate national banks and corporate administrative functions, while Leigh and the town centres are characterised by much smaller units occupied by local agencies and professional service providers. This variation reflects both the differing commercial roles of the centres and the scale of demand generated within their catchments.

- 4.43 The progressive reduction in average unit size down the hierarchy illustrates a clear transition from the broader corporate and civic functions concentrated in Wigan to the highly localised, community-facing services found within Leigh and the town centres. These operators play a vital role in supporting local accessibility and economic inclusion, though their small scale and dependence on proximity to other high street uses make them more vulnerable to market fluctuations or displacement pressures from higher-value commercial activities.

Vacancies

Table 4.14: Proportion of vacant units by centre and floorspace tier

	Main sub-regional town centre		Main Town Centre		Town Centres	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
< 200 sq.m	210	79.5%	98	88%	84	92%
200-299 sq.m	9	3.4%	4	4%	2	2%
300-499 sq.m	15	5.7%	3	3%	3	3%
500-999 sq.m	17	6.4%	5	5%	0	0%
1000-1499 sq.m	7	2.7%	0	0%	1	1%
> 1500 sq.m	6	2.3%	1	1%	1	1%
Total	264	100.0%	111	100.0%	91	100.0%

- 4.44 The pattern of vacant floorspace highlights the differing structural challenges across the Borough's centres. Wigan records the highest overall level of vacancy, much of which is concentrated within large-format units. A significant proportion of this space is associated with ongoing regeneration activity, including the Strategic Regeneration Framework and approved developments such as the redevelopment of The Galleries (ref: A/23/95235/MAJOR) and the conversion of the former Debenhams unit to a mixed-use leisure scheme (ref: A/24/96953/FULL). These projects are expected to substantially reconfigure the town centre's commercial composition and reduce long-term vacancy levels once complete.
- 4.45 In Leigh, vacant premises are more evenly distributed across small and medium-sized units, reflecting typical market churn rather than systemic vacancy. The majority of these spaces are located within traditional high street frontages and are generally reoccupied within a short period, indicating a resilient local market. This pattern suggests that while there is some turnover among independent retailers and service operators, vacancy does not currently represent a structural concern.
- 4.46 The town centres show a mixed pattern of vacancy, concentrated primarily within the smallest units and, to a lesser extent, occasional large-format premises. In most cases, the latter relates to the closure or transition of single anchor foodstores or retail warehouses, which can have a noticeable localised impact. However, vacancy levels across the smaller centres remain limited in absolute terms and continue to reflect their role as accessible destinations serving day-to-day community needs.

Table 4.15: Average vacancy floorspace by centre tier

Main sub-regional town centre	Main Town Centre	Town Centres
242.1 sq.m	107.6 sq.m	117.6 sq.m

- 4.47 The average size of vacant units varies notably across the hierarchy, reflecting the differing physical and market characteristics of each centre. In Wigan, vacant premises average around 242 sq.m, consistent with the presence of larger-format units awaiting redevelopment or reoccupation. By contrast, vacancies in Leigh and the town centres

are typically much smaller, averaging 108 sq.m and 118 sq.m respectively, and generally comprising former independent shops or service units within active frontages.

- 4.48 The lower vacancy rates in the main and town centres indicate a high level of overall occupancy and, consequently, a greater sensitivity to any new development that might divert trade and disrupt their fine balance. The type of vacancy is therefore as significant as the rate in assessing a centre's resilience and capacity to absorb change. Town centres operate within a delicate local system, where the loss of even a single key tenant can materially affect activity and perception.

Summary

- 4.49 The quantitative evidence demonstrates a clear gradation in both scale and structure across the Borough's defined centres. Key observations include:

- The concentration of large-format floorspace within Wigan town centre, compared with the smaller average unit sizes within the smaller centres.
- The predominance of convenience and leisure floorspace in lower-tier centres, reflecting their local service role.
- The continued presence of substantial vacancies in Wigan town centre, contrasting with lower vacancy and smaller-unit stock in the remainder of the hierarchy.

- 4.50 These differences underline the varied sensitivity of the centres to change. Wigan is characterised by opportunities for reoccupation of large units and mixed-use regeneration, while Leigh and the town centres are highly dependent on small-format activity and limited in their ability to accommodate major new floorspace.

- 4.51 This analysis provides the quantitative foundation for considering appropriate local thresholds for impact assessment. The following chapter draws upon this evidence, alongside policy and market context, to identify the scales of development at which proposals may begin to affect the vitality and viability of defined centres.

Vitality and Viability

- 4.52 The study was produced based on Council provided data which was collected in April 2025. We have provided a brief summary of the findings in the text below.

Main sub-regional town centre – Wigan

Table 4.16: Wigan Sub-Regional Centre

Category	Units			Floorspace		
	No	%	Nat Av (%)	Sq.m	%	Nat Av (%)
Comparison	188	23.0%	26.3%	66,617	32.1%	29.2%
Convenience	37	4.5%	9.3%	11,831	5.7%	15.6%
Financial & Business Services	71	8.7%	8.3%	16,965	8.2%	6.2%
Leisure Services	146	17.9%	25.8%	30,613	14.7%	26.7%
Retail Service	111	13.6%	16.0%	17,831	8.6%	7.4%
Vacant	264	32.3%	14.1%	63,913	30.8%	14.3%
Total	817	100.0%	100.0%	207,771	100.0%	100.0%

Source: Town centre composition based on town centre boundary as defined by Destin Data, April 2025 and UK Average from Experian Goad Report of May 2025.

- 4.53 Wigan town centre accommodates 817 retail, leisure and service units, providing a total of 207,771 sq.m of commercial floorspace. The composition reflects its role as the Borough's principal centre, characterised by a strong comparison shopping function but also a period of transition, with a high vacancy rate and an underrepresented leisure component.
- 4.54 Comparison goods retailing accounts for 66,617 sq.m (32.1%) across 188 units (23.0%). While the share of comparison floorspace exceeds the national average of 29.2%, the proportion of comparison units falls slightly below the national benchmark of 26.3%, indicating fewer but larger format comparison stores. This pattern aligns with Wigan's historic base of national multiples and anchor retailers and its wider subregional catchment.
- 4.55 Convenience provision totals 11,831 sq.m (5.7%) across 37 units (4.5%), both well below national averages of 15.6% floorspace and 9.3% units. This suggests that a significant share of main food shopping takes place in edge of centre or out of centre supermarkets, limiting Wigan's role in capturing regular day to day shopping trips.
- 4.56 Leisure services occupy 30,613 sq.m (14.7%) across 146 units (17.9%), which is considerably below national averages of 26.7% and 25.8% respectively. The data points to potential to broaden the leisure mix, particularly food, drink and family leisure uses, to strengthen dwell time and support the evening economy, complementing planned regeneration initiatives such as the Stack Wigan and Fettle's Yard schemes.
- 4.57 Retail services comprise 17,831 sq.m (8.6%) across 111 units (13.6%), which is broadly comparable to the national averages of 7.4% floorspace and 16.0% units. These uses, typically including hairdressers, beauty salons and repair services, enhance the functional mix but tend to generate limited destination footfall.
- 4.58 Financial and business services represent 16,965 sq.m (8.2%) across 71 units (8.7%), both slightly above the national averages of 6.2% floorspace and 8.3% units. This reflects Wigan's administrative, civic and professional role, supporting weekday employment and service activity within the town centre core.
- 4.59 Vacancy remains the most significant challenge, with 63,913 sq.m (30.8%) of floorspace and 264 units (32.3%) currently unoccupied, more than double the national averages of 14.3% and 14.1%. Much of this vacancy results from the redevelopment of The Galleries complex, now demolished to facilitate a major mixed use regeneration scheme, and the conversion of the former Debenhams unit (application ref. A/24/96953/FULL). The figures therefore reflect both structural adjustment from the loss of large comparison units and a temporary contraction in stock during construction.
- 4.60 In summary, Wigan town centre continues to perform a strong comparison role but maintains a weaker convenience and leisure offer relative to national norms. Exceptionally high vacancy rates currently constrain short term vitality but are expected to improve as regeneration progresses. The centre remains sensitive to additional trade diversion from large edge of centre or out of centre developments, and future investment should focus on formats that encourage diversification, reoccupation and the delivery of the town's regeneration strategy.

Main Town Centre

Leigh

Table 4.17: Leigh Town Centre Composition

Category	Units			Floorspace		
	No	%	Nat Av (%)	Sq.m	%	Nat Av (%)
Comparison	156	27.7%	26.3%	35,139	36.7%	29.2%
Convenience	45	8.0%	9.3%	18,039	18.9%	15.6%
Financial & Business Services	54	9.6%	8.3%	9,953	10.4%	6.2%
Leisure Services	107	19.0%	25.8%	12,777	13.4%	26.7%
Retail Service	90	16.0%	16.0%	7,831	8.2%	7.4%
Vacant	111	19.7%	14.1%	11,946	12.5%	14.3%
Total	563	100.0%	100.0%	95,684	100.0%	100.0%

Source: Town centre composition based on town centre boundary as defined by Destin Data, April 2025 and UK Average from Experian Goad Report of May 2025.

- 4.61 Leigh town centre accommodates 563 retail, leisure and service units, providing a total of 95,684 sq.m of commercial floorspace. The centre performs a strong secondary role within the Borough, sitting immediately below Wigan in the retail hierarchy. It supports a broad mix of national multiples and independent traders and functions as Wigan's principal secondary comparison destination.
- 4.62 Comparison goods retailing accounts for 35,139 sq.m (36.7%) across 156 units (27.7%). Both measures are above national averages of 29.2% and 26.3%, confirming Leigh's strong comparison function. The offer comprises a mix of mid-market multiples and independent stores that attract customers from a wide catchment area, reinforcing the town's role as the Borough's key comparison destination after Wigan.
- 4.63 Convenience provision totals 18,039 sq.m (18.9 percent of total floorspace) across 45 units (8.0 percent of all units). While the proportion of convenience floorspace is above the national average (15.6 percent), the proportion of units is below the national benchmark (9.3 percent). The offer is anchored by a small number of larger edge of centre stores, supported by smaller independent and specialist food retailers. There is still scope to broaden and strengthen this provision, particularly the number and range of units, to encourage more frequent shopping trips and reinforce the centres role in meeting day to day needs
- 4.64 Leisure services occupy 12,777 sq.m (13.4%) across 107 units (19.0%), which is below national averages of 26.7% and 25.8%. The current mix is dominated by cafés, pubs and takeaways, with limited representation from larger leisure or entertainment operators. This indicates potential to expand the evening economy through food, drink and family leisure uses that would improve dwell time and diversify the visitor experience.
- 4.65 Retail services comprise 7,831 sq.m (8.2%) across 90 units (16.0%), aligning closely with national averages of 7.4% floorspace and 16.0% units. These uses, including hairdressers, beauty salons and repair services, support local accessibility and contribute to regular footfall throughout the day.
- 4.66 Financial and business services total 9,953 sq.m (10.4%) across 54 units (9.6%), above national averages of 6.2% floorspace and 8.3% units. The strength of this sector highlights the town's continued role as a hub for banks, estate agents and professional offices, sustaining daytime activity and employment.

- 4.67 Vacant premises account for 11,946 sq.m (12.5%) and 111 units (19.7%). The vacancy rate by units is above the national average of 14.1%, though the proportion of vacant floorspace is slightly lower than the national benchmark of 14.3%. This pattern suggests that while smaller retail units are experiencing turnover and vacancy, larger premises remain relatively well occupied, indicating a stable overall position.
- 4.68 Overall, Leigh town centre performs strongly as a secondary comparison centre with a diverse retail base and a stable service function. Although the leisure and convenience sectors are underrepresented, the overall mix continues to support vitality and viability. The centre's resilience is moderate to strong, though larger edge of centre or out of centre proposals that replicate its core formats could gradually erode market share if not subject to appropriate impact assessment.

Town Centres

Ashton-in-Makerfield Table

Table 4.18: Asthon Town Centre Composition

Category	Units			Floorspace		
	No	%	Nat Av (%)	Sq.m	%	Nat Av (%)
Comparison	75	32.3%	26.3%	8,429	31.9%	29.2%
Convenience	13	5.6%	9.3%	3,865	14.6%	15.6%
Financial & Business Services	22	9.5%	8.3%	2,104	8.0%	6.2%
Leisure Services	58	25.0%	25.8%	6,476	24.5%	26.7%
Retail Service	51	22.0%	16.0%	3,652	13.8%	7.4%
Vacant	13	5.6%	14.1%	1,872	7.1%	14.3%
Total	232	100.0%	100.0%	26,399	100.0%	100.0%

Source: Town centre composition based on town centre boundary as defined by Destin Data, April 2025 and UK Average from Experian Goad Report of May 2025.

- 4.69 Ashton town centre accommodates 232 retail, leisure and service units, providing a total of 26,399 sq.m of commercial floorspace. The centre plays an important role within the Borough's network of town centres, serving a predominantly local catchment with a broad mix of independent traders, service operators and day-to-day retail provision.
- 4.70 Comparison goods retailing accounts for 8,429 sq.m (31.9%) across 75 units (32.3%), both slightly above national averages of 29.2% floorspace and 26.3% units. This reflects Ashton's traditional high street function, with a range of independent retailers, charity shops and smaller multiple operators providing for regular and occasional shopping trips.
- 4.71 Convenience provision totals 3,865 sq.m (14.6%) across 13 units (5.6%). While the share of units is below the national average of 9.3%, the floorspace proportion is broadly comparable to the national benchmark of 15.6%, reflecting the presence of a small number of larger-format supermarkets and foodstores that anchor the centre. These stores play a critical role in supporting linked trips and maintaining footfall throughout the week.
- 4.72 Leisure services occupy 6,476 sq.m (24.5%) across 58 units (25.0%), closely aligned with national averages of 26.7% floorspace and 25.8% units. The mix comprises cafés, pubs, takeaways and small gyms, which contribute to the centre's sociable and community-oriented character and provide a balanced offer between daytime and evening uses.

- 4.73 Retail services total 3,652 sq.m (13.8%) across 51 units (22.0%), above the national averages of 7.4% floorspace and 16.0% units. These uses, including hairdressers, beauty salons, nail bars and repair services, form a substantial component of Ashton's high street activity and support its convenience-led, service-oriented role.
- 4.74 Financial and business services comprise 2,104 sq.m (8.0%) across 22 units (9.5%), marginally above the national averages of 6.2% floorspace and 8.3% units. The sector includes banks, building societies, estate agents and small professional offices, contributing to the centre's functional mix and supporting weekday activity.
- 4.75 Vacancy levels remain low, with 1,872 sq.m (7.1%) of vacant floorspace across 13 units (5.6%), both well below the national averages of 14.3% and 14.1% respectively. This indicates a stable and resilient centre with high occupancy levels and steady demand for premises, supported by a loyal local customer base.
- 4.76 Overall, Ashton town centre performs well as a service-anchored, community-focused centre with a balanced retail and leisure offer and low vacancy. The mix of independent traders and small-scale national operators provides a sustainable base for ongoing vitality. However, continued investment in the public realm, parking and accessibility will be important to retain competitiveness and support long-term resilience within the Borough's network of smaller centres.

Atherton Town Centre

Table 4.19: Atherton Town Centre Composition

Category	Units			Floorspace		
	No	%	Nat Av (%)	Sq.m	%	Nat Av (%)
Comparison	33	18.0%	26.3%	2,551	10.9%	29.2%
Convenience	17	9.3%	9.3%	6,558	28.1%	15.6%
Financial & Business Services	15	8.2%	8.3%	1,633	7.0%	6.2%
Leisure Services	47	25.7%	25.8%	5,642	24.2%	26.7%
Retail Service	48	26.2%	16.0%	5,404	23.2%	7.4%
Vacant	23	12.6%	14.1%	1,538	6.6%	14.3%
Total	183	100.0%	100.0%	23,325	100.0%	100.0%

Source: Town centre composition based on town centre boundary as defined by Destin Data, April 2025 and UK Average from Experian Goad Report of May 2025.

- 4.77 Atherton town centre accommodates 183 retail, leisure and service units, providing 23,325 sq.m of commercial floorspace. The centre has a predominantly convenience and service-led role, meeting the day-to-day needs of the local community and displaying generally healthy occupancy levels.
- 4.78 Comparison goods retailing accounts for 2,551 sq.m of floorspace (10.9%) across 33 units (18.0%), both below national averages (29.2% and 26.3% respectively). This indicates a modest comparison role, reflecting a limited presence of non-food retailers and a focus on small independent shops serving local needs.
- 4.79 Convenience provision is a key strength, comprising 6,558 sq.m (28.1%) across 17 units (9.3%), compared with national averages of 15.6% and 9.3%. The centre benefits from a strong grocery anchor and several smaller food stores, which support frequent shopping trips and sustain overall vitality.
- 4.80 Leisure uses account for 5,642 sq.m (24.2%) and 47 units (25.7%), broadly in line with national averages (26.7% and 25.7%). The mix includes cafés, pubs, restaurants and takeaways, creating a balanced food and beverage offer that supports both daytime and early evening activity.

- 4.81 Retail services occupy 5,404 sq.m (23.2%) across 48 units (26.2%), significantly above national averages (7.4% and 16.0%). This strong representation of hairdressers, barbers, beauty salons and repair services underlines the centre's focus on personal and household services.
- 4.82 Financial and business services total 1,633 sq.m (7.0%) across 15 units (8.2%), consistent with national averages (6.2% and 8.3%). These uses add to the local service function and contribute to daytime activity.
- 4.83 Vacant premises account for 1,538 sq.m (6.6%) and 23 units (12.6%), both below national averages (14.3% and 14.1%). The low level of vacant floorspace indicates stable occupancy and positive overall health.
- 4.84 In summary, Atherton is a convenience and service-led centre anchored by a strong grocery presence and a broad range of personal service uses. It performs well in occupancy and maintains a clear local function. The centre is, however, likely to be sensitive to new out of centre convenience formats that could draw trade away from existing stores.
- 4.85 Atherton is a convenience and service-led centre with healthy occupancy. It is likely to be sensitive to new out-of-centre convenience formats.

Golborne Town Centre

Table 4.20: Golborne Town Centre Composition

Category	Units			Floorspace		
	No	%	Nat Av (%)	Sq.m	%	Nat Av (%)
Comparison	17	17.9%	26.3%	2,656	20.9%	29.2%
Convenience	8	8.4%	9.3%	3,170	25.0%	15.6%
Financial & Business Services	12	12.6%	8.3%	1,379	10.9%	6.2%
Leisure Services	21	22.1%	25.8%	2,562	20.2%	26.7%
Retail Service	27	28.4%	16.0%	2,268	17.9%	7.4%
Vacant	10	10.5%	14.1%	666	5.2%	14.3%
Total	95	100.0%	100.0%	12,700	100.0%	100.0%

Source: Town centre composition based on town centre boundary as defined by Destin Data, April 2025 and UK Average from Experian Goad Report of May 2025.

- 4.86 Golborne town centre accommodates 95 retail, leisure and service units, providing around 12,700 sq.m of commercial floorspace. The centre performs a localised role, with a strong convenience and service focus that supports day-to-day shopping and service needs for nearby residents.
- 4.87 Comparison goods retailing accounts for 2,656 sq.m of floorspace (20.9%) across 17 units (17.9%), both below the national averages (29.2% and 26.3% respectively). This reflects a modest comparison function characterised by small independent non-food retailers offering household goods, gifts and clothing.
- 4.88 Convenience provision forms an important component of the centre, comprising 3,170 sq.m (25.0%) across 8 units (8.4%). Both measures are above the national averages (15.6% and 9.3%), indicating a strong grocery and top-up shopping role. The offer is anchored by a supermarket supported by smaller convenience and specialist food stores, helping to attract regular local trips.

- 4.89 Leisure uses account for 2,562 sq.m (20.2%) and 21 units (22.1%), slightly below national averages (26.7% and 25.8%). The offer is focused on cafés, pubs, and takeaways, contributing to the town's social and evening economy, albeit at a modest scale.
- 4.90 Retail services total 2,268 sq.m (17.9%) across 27 units (28.4%), above the national averages (7.4% and 16.0%). This high representation of hairdressers, beauty salons and other personal services demonstrates Golborne's strong service-led role and contributes to consistent local activity.
- 4.91 Financial and business services account for 1,379 sq.m (10.9%) across 12 units (12.6%), above the national benchmarks (6.2% and 8.3% respectively). This provision includes banks, estate agents and professional offices, which support local economic activity and daytime use.
- 4.92 Vacant premises total 666 sq.m (5.2%) across 10 units (10.5%), both below national averages (14.3% and 14.1%). The low vacancy levels indicate a stable and well-occupied centre with good overall vitality.
- 4.93 In summary, Golborne is a well-functioning centre anchored by strong convenience provision and a high proportion of service uses. While comparison goods representation is modest, the centre maintains healthy occupancy and supports frequent day-to-day shopping and service trips from its local catchment.

Hindley Town Centre

Table 4.21: Hindley Town Centre Composition

Category	Units			Floorspace		
	No	%	Nat Av (%)	Sq.m	%	Nat Av (%)
Comparison	38	28.8%	26.3%	5,197	20.7%	29.2%
Convenience	13	9.8%	9.3%	10,456	41.7%	15.6%
Financial & Business Services	8	6.1%	8.3%	1,119	4.5%	6.2%
Leisure Services	37	28.0%	25.8%	5,267	21.0%	26.7%
Retail Service	30	22.7%	16.0%	2,164	8.6%	7.4%
Vacant	6	4.5%	14.1%	892	3.6%	14.3%
Total	132	100.0%	100.0%	25,096	100.0%	100.0%

Source: Town centre composition based on town centre boundary as defined by Destin Data, April 2025 and UK Average from Experian Goad Report of May 2025.

- 4.94 Comparison goods retailing accounts for 5,197 sq.m of floorspace (20.7%) across 38 units (28.8%). The unit share is broadly in line with the national average (26.3%), though floorspace is lower (29.2% nationally). This reflects a modest comparison function dominated by small independent shops offering clothing, gifts, and household items.
- 4.95 Convenience provision is particularly strong, comprising 10,456 sq.m (41.7%) across 13 units (9.8%), compared with national averages of 15.6% and 9.3%. This exceptional floorspace share highlights the importance of food retailing to the local economy, with one or more large grocery anchors supported by smaller convenience outlets that attract regular shopping trips and underpin overall vitality.
- 4.96 Leisure uses account for 5,267 sq.m (21.0%) and 37 units (28.0%), with the unit share above the national average (25.8%) though floorspace is below average (26.7%). The offer is largely food and beverage-led, comprising cafés, pubs, takeaways and restaurants that serve local residents and provide for evening activity.

- 4.97 Retail services occupy 2,158 sq.m (8.6%) across 30 units (22.7%), above the national averages (7.4% and 16.0%). This strong representation of hairdressers, beauty salons and repair services reinforces Hindley's role as a convenient and service-oriented centre.
- 4.98 Financial and business services total 1,119 sq.m (4.5%) across 8 units (6.1%), slightly below the national averages (6.2% and 8.3%). These uses contribute to local employment and daytime vitality but represent a small component of the overall mix.
- 4.99 Vacancy levels are very low, with just 892 sq.m (3.6%) of vacant floorspace across 6 units (4.5%), well below the national averages (14.3% and 14.1%). This indicates strong occupancy, a stable retail base, and limited short-term structural pressure.
- 4.100 In summary, Hindley is a well-occupied, convenience-anchored centre with a balanced mix of service and leisure uses. Its vitality and viability are high, but its strong reliance on food retailing means it would be acutely sensitive to new off-centre foodstore competition that could divert regular shopping trips and impact the core retail function.

Pemberton Town Centre

Table 4.22: Pemberton Town Centre Composition

Category	Units			Floorspace		
	No	%	Nat Av (%)	Sq.m	%	Nat Av (%)
Comparison	34	28.3%	26.3%	4,901	34.1%	29.2%
Convenience	11	9.2%	9.3%	1,328	9.2%	15.6%
Financial & Business Services	12	10.0%	8.3%	1,071	7.4%	6.2%
Leisure Services	43	35.8%	25.8%	4,684	32.6%	26.7%
Retail Service	13	10.8%	16.0%	2,020	14.1%	7.4%
Vacant	7	5.8%	14.1%	368	2.6%	14.3%
Total	120	100.0%	100.0%	14,372	100.0%	100.0%

Source: Town centre composition based on town centre boundary as defined by Destin Data, April 2025 and UK Average from Experian Goad Report of May 2025.

- 4.101 Pemberton town centre accommodates 120 retail, leisure and service units, providing 14,372 sq.m of commercial floorspace. The centre has a distinctive profile characterised by a strong leisure and comparison offer and very low vacancy levels, indicating good vitality and a stable local role.
- 4.102 Comparison goods retailing accounts for 4,901 sq.m of floorspace (34.1%) across 34 units (28.3%), both above the national averages (29.2% and 26.3% respectively). This highlights a comparatively strong non-food retail function for a centre of Pemberton's scale, with a mix of independent and small multiple retailers offering clothing, gifts and homeware.
- 4.103 Convenience provision is modest, comprising 1,328 sq.m (9.2%) across 11 units (9.2%), below the national floorspace benchmarks (15.6% and 9.3% respectively). The grocery role is limited to small foodstores and convenience shops, meaning most main food shopping trips are likely to occur elsewhere.
- 4.104 Leisure uses account for 4,684 sq.m (32.6%) and 43 units (35.8%), both above the national averages (26.7% and 25.8%). This confirms a particularly strong food and beverage focus, with cafés, pubs, takeaways and restaurants

contributing to an active daytime and evening economy. The concentration of leisure outlets forms a key part of Pemberton's identity and supports consistent local footfall.

- 4.105** Retail services total 2,020 sq.m (14.1%) across 13 units (10.8%), broadly in line with national averages (7.4% and 16.0%). These small-scale personal and household service businesses add to the diversity of the offer and support regular local trips.
- 4.106** Financial and business services occupy 1,071 sq.m (7.4%) across 12 units (10.0%), close to the national floorspace benchmark (6.2%) but slightly above the national share by units (8.3%). This indicates a healthy representation of local professional and business functions within the centre.
- 4.107** Vacancy levels are very low, with just 368 sq.m (2.6%) of vacant floorspace across 7 units (5.8%), well below national averages (14.3% and 14.1%). This points to strong demand and good levels of occupancy.
- 4.108** In summary, Pemberton has a vibrant and distinctive mix dominated by leisure and comparison uses and benefits from very low vacancy levels. The centre performs well in meeting local needs and supporting a lively social environment, though its strong leisure orientation means it may face competition from larger destinations offering similar food, drink and entertainment experiences.

Platt Bridge Town Centre

Table 4.23: Platt Bridge Town Centre Composition

Category	Units			Floorspace		
	No	%	Nat Av (%)	Sq.m	%	Nat Av (%)
Comparison	17	32.7%	26.3%	3,941	30.7%	29.2%
Convenience	7	13.5%	9.3%	1,630	12.7%	15.6%
Financial & Business Services	2	3.8%	8.3%	635	4.9%	6.2%
Leisure Services	9	17.3%	25.8%	876	6.8%	26.7%
Retail Service	12	23.1%	16.0%	2,160	16.8%	7.4%
Vacant	5	9.6%	14.1%	3,591	28.0%	14.3%
Total	52	100.0%	100.0%	12,832	100.0%	100.0%

Source: Town centre composition based on town centre boundary as defined by Destin Data, April 2025 and UK Average from Experian Goad Report of May 2025

- 4.109** Platt Bridge town centre accommodates 52 retail, leisure and service units, providing around 12,832 sq.m of commercial floorspace. The centre serves a localised role, offering a balanced mix of retail and service uses but is affected by a small number of large vacant premises that influence overall floorspace vacancy levels.
- 4.110** Comparison goods retailing accounts for 3,941 sq.m of floorspace (30.7%) across 17 units (32.7%), both above the national averages (29.2% and 26.3% respectively). This indicates a comparatively strong non-food presence for a centre of its scale, comprising a mix of independent shops providing clothing, household goods and gifts.
- 4.111** Convenience provision totals 1,630 sq.m (12.7%) across 7 units (13.5%), close to national averages for floorspace (15.6%) but higher in unit terms (9.3%). This suggests a good range of smaller grocery and top-up food stores that support frequent shopping trips and underpin the centre's day-to-day role.

- 4.112 Leisure uses account for 876 sq.m (6.8%) and 9 units (17.3%), below national averages (26.7% and 25.8%). While there is a reasonable number of leisure operators, floorspace provision is limited, indicating smaller café and takeaway premises rather than larger food and beverage venues.
- 4.113 Retail services comprise 2,160 sq.m (16.8%) across 12 units (23.1%), above national benchmarks (7.4% and 16.0%). This strong representation of personal and household services, such as hairdressers, barbers and beauty salons, supports the local catchment and contributes to consistent day-time footfall.
- 4.114 Financial and business services occupy 635 sq.m (4.9%) across 2 units (3.8%), below national averages (6.2% and 8.3%), indicating a limited professional service offer within the centre.
- 4.115 Vacant premises account for 3,591 sq.m (28.0%) across 5 units (9.6%), with the unit share below national averages (14.1%) but the floorspace share significantly above (14.3%). This disparity reflects the presence of a small number of large vacant units which distort the overall vacancy percentage.
- 4.116 In summary, Platt Bridge functions as a small centre with a balanced retail and service mix and a solid convenience base. However, its small overall stock and the influence of large vacant premises make it sensitive to additional edge or out of centre retail development that could further weaken its role.

Standish Town Centre

Table 4.24: Standish Town Centre Composition

Category	Units			Floorspace		
	No	%	Nat Av (%)	Sq.m	%	Nat Av (%)
Comparison	30	27.3%	26.3%	2,385	21.0%	29.2%
Convenience	6	5.5%	9.3%	3,048	26.8%	15.6%
Financial & Business Services	16	14.5%	8.3%	943	8.3%	6.2%
Leisure Services	36	32.7%	25.8%	3,169	27.8%	26.7%
Retail Service	16	14.5%	16.0%	1,399	12.3%	7.4%
Vacant	6	5.5%	14.1%	436	3.8%	14.3%
Total	110	100.0%	100.0%	11,381	100.0%	100.0%

Source: Town centre composition based on town centre boundary as defined by Destin Data, April 2025 and UK Average from Experian Goad Report of May 2025.

- 4.117 Standish town centre accommodates 110 retail, leisure and service units, providing around 11,381 sq.m of commercial floorspace. The centre performs a healthy local role, with a balanced mix of retail, service and leisure uses, strong representation from independent operators, and very low vacancy levels.
- 4.118 Comparison goods retailing accounts for 2,385 sq.m of floorspace (21.0%) across 30 units (27.3%). Both proportions are slightly below the national averages (29.2% and 26.3% respectively), indicating a modest but stable non-food retail function serving local day-to-day needs.
- 4.119 Convenience provision is a key component of the centre's offer, comprising 3,048 sq.m (26.8%) across 6 units (5.5%). While the number of food units is limited, they occupy significant floorspace, underlining the importance of a small number of anchor stores in driving local footfall and sustaining linked trips.

- 4.120 Leisure uses account for 3,169 sq.m (27.8%) and 36 units (32.7%), both close to national averages (26.7% and 25.8%) and indicative of a strong and vibrant food and beverage presence. Cafés, pubs, restaurants and takeaways contribute to Standish's lively atmosphere and support both daytime and evening activity.
- 4.121 Retail services total 1,399 sq.m (12.3%) across 16 units (14.5%), broadly consistent with national averages (7.4% and 16.0%). These include personal care, repair and household services that meet local needs and add to the centre's functional diversity.
- 4.122 Financial and business services occupy 943 sq.m (8.3%) across 16 units (14.5%), above national averages (6.2% and 8.3%) by units, reflecting a relatively strong professional and business services presence for a centre of this size.
- 4.123 Vacant premises account for just 436 sq.m (3.8%) across 6 units (5.5%), both well below national averages (14.3% and 14.1%). This demonstrates strong occupancy levels and positive perceptions of vitality and viability.
- 4.124 In summary, Standish is a healthy and mixed centre with strong leisure and service representation, anchored by a small number of significant convenience stores and supported by a low level of vacancy. While it performs well overall, its reliance on a limited number of large food retailers means it remains vulnerable to out of centre foodstore competition that could divert key convenience spending and weaken linked trips within the centre.

Tyldesley Town Centre

Table 4.25: Tyldesley Town Centre Composition

Category	Units			Floorspace		
	No	%	Nat Av (%)	Sq.m	%	Nat Av (%)
Comparison	27	17.8%	26.3%	2,936	19.3%	29.2%
Convenience	16	10.5%	9.3%	1,706	11.2%	15.6%
Financial & Business Services	16	10.5%	8.3%	1,434	9.4%	6.2%
Leisure Services	43	28.3%	25.8%	4,906	32.3%	26.7%
Retail Service	28	18.4%	16.0%	2,859	18.8%	7.4%
Vacant	22	14.5%	14.1%	1,370	9.0%	14.3%
Total	152	100%	100.0%	15,211	100%	100.0%

Source: Town centre composition based on town centre boundary as defined by Destin Data, April 2025 and UK Average from Experian Goad Report of May 2025.

- 4.125 Tyldesley town centre accommodates 152 retail, leisure and service units, providing a total of 15,211 sq.m of commercial floorspace. The centre performs a strong local service and leisure role, serving nearby residential neighbourhoods with a balanced mix of shops, food and drink outlets, and community services.
- 4.126 Comparison goods retailing accounts for 2,936 sq.m (19.3%) across 27 units (17.8%), both below the national averages of 29.2% floorspace and 26.3% units. The offer is primarily composed of small independent stores and local traders providing everyday goods, reflecting the centre's localised catchment and modest comparison function.
- 4.127 Convenience provision totals 1,706 sq.m (11%) across 16 units (11%), close to the national averages of 15.6% floorspace and 9.3% units. This includes a mix of small supermarkets, local foodstores, and independent grocers that anchor regular shopping trips and underpin consistent footfall throughout the week.

- 4.128 Leisure services represent the largest share of floorspace, totalling 4,906 sq.m (32.3%) across 43 units (28.3%), both above national averages of 26.7% floorspace and 25.8% units. The offer is focused on cafés, pubs, restaurants and takeaways, which create an active and sociable high street environment and contribute significantly to the centre's evening economy.
- 4.129 Retail services comprise 2,859 sq.m (18.8%) across 28 units (18.4%), exceeding the national averages of 7.4% floorspace and 16.0% units. These include hairdressers, nail salons, repair services and barbers, reflecting Tyldesley's role as a convenient and community-focused centre providing regular service-based trips.
- 4.130 Financial and business services occupy 1,434 sq.m (9.4%) across 16 units (10.5%), slightly above the national averages of 6.2% floorspace and 8.3% units. The offer includes banks, estate agents and small professional practices that add to the diversity of the daytime economy.
- 4.131 Vacant premises total 1,370 sq.m (9.0%) across 22 units (14.5%), both close to the national averages of 14.3% floorspace and 14.1% units. This reflects a relatively stable centre with ongoing occupation and turnover consistent with national trends.
- 4.132 Overall, Tyldesley performs well as a vibrant centre with a strong leisure presence and a broad range of independent service operators. The combination of food, drink and personal service uses supports regular activity and contributes to a lively high street character. Maintaining and enhancing its leisure and service offer will be important to sustaining vitality and ensuring long-term resilience within the Borough's network

Summary

- 4.133 A consistent pattern emerges across the hierarchy. Wigan town centre comprises the main comparison floorspace but exhibits very high vacancy and an under-weighted leisure sector. Leigh retains a robust secondary comparison role with moderate vacancy. The town centres are generally well occupied, strongly convenience and service based, and reliant on local food anchors.
- 4.134 The composition points to specific sensitivities around the centres and the propensity of these to be potentially impact on by edge and out of centre proposals. In the town centres, even modest convenience or value orientated proposals beyond the defined boundaries could have disproportionate effects on trade and footfall. In the main town centre, mid-box comparison or health and beauty formats outside the centre can incrementally erode market share. In Wigan, where vacancy is high, untested large out-of-centre proposals risk undermining planned investment and the rebalancing toward leisure.
- 4.135 These findings underline the importance of ensuring a proportionate impact assessment at a scale that reflects local characteristics. The evidence supports lower thresholds for smaller centres, a moderate threshold for main centres, and a carefully judged threshold for Wigan town centre that recognises both its scale and its present fragility.

5. Impact Threshold Analysis and Recommendations

- 5.1 As set out in Section 4, our analysis of town centre composition and floorspace distribution demonstrates clear variation across the hierarchy of centres within Wigan Borough.
- 5.2 Table 5.1 below summarises the average unit sizes, vacancy rates, and proportions of retail and leisure floorspace for each centre tier. The table also identifies the proportion of units exceeding 200 sq.m, 300 sq.m and 500 sq.m, which provides an important indication of existing trading formats and the relative scale of premises across the Borough.
- 5.3 We found the average size of units in each centre, as well as the proportion of floorspace in retail and leisure use. The retail use includes a combination of uses within the comparison and convenience uses. The table also includes the proportion of units above 200, 300 and 500 sqm, to help us determine an appropriate threshold.

Table 5.1: Summary of Centre Composition and Average Unit Sizes

Tier (as set out in the new Wigan Local Plan)	Centre	Average Unit Size sq.m	Vacancy Rate		Proportion in Retail Use (no.)	Proportion in Leisure Use (no.)	Total in Retail and Leisure Use (no.)	Proportion of units over 200 sq.m	Proportion of units over 300 sq.m	Proportion of units over 500 sq.m
			Units	Floorspace						
Main sub-regional town centre	Wigan	254	32.3%	30.8%	27.5%	17.9%	45.4%	24.7%	18.2%	10.4%
Main Town Centre	Leigh	170	19.7%	12.5%	35.7%	19.0%	54.7%	19.4%	9.8%	6.0%
Town Centres	Ashton	115	5.6%	7.1%	37.9%	25.0%	62.9%	11.6%	6.0%	3.0%
	Atherton	121	12.6%	6.6%	27.3%	25.7%	53.0%	10.4%	5.5%	2.7%
	Golborne	133	10.5%	5.2%	26.3%	22.1%	48.4%	10.5%	6.3%	2.1%
	Hindley	190	4.5%	3.6%	38.6%	28.0%	66.7%	13.6%	7.6%	3.0%
	Pemberton	120	5.8%	2.6%	37.5%	35.8%	73.3%	15.0%	8.3%	3.3%
	Platt Bridge	247	9.6%	28.0%	46.2%	17.3%	63.5%	28.8%	19.2%	9.6%
	Standish	103	5.5%	3.8%	32.7%	32.7%	65.5%	9.1%	4.5%	1.8%
	Tyldesley	100	14.5%	9.0%	28.3%	28.3%	56.6%	10.5%	5.3%	1.3%

- 5.4 The data shows that Wigan, as the Borough's main sub-regional town centre, accommodates an average unit size of 254 sq.m. The centre contains a notable proportion of larger units, with 10.4% over 500 sq.m, 18.2% over 300 sq.m, and 24.7% over 200 sq.m.
- 5.5 Retail and leisure uses together account for 45.4% of total units (27.5% retail and 17.9% leisure), reflecting a broad mix of commercial activity. However, Wigan also records the highest vacancy rate in terms of units (32.3%), much of which is concentrated in larger former department stores and prominent multiple- retailer units.

- 5.6 By contrast, the main town centre, Leigh, is characterised by more modest unit formats, with an average unit size of 170 sq.m. Retail uses account for 35.7% of total units, with leisure accounting for a further 19.0%, confirming the centre's role as a diverse but secondary shopping and service destination. Vacancy levels are above average at 19.7% of the total commercial units, and the centre is largely formed of smaller shop units: only 6.0% exceed 500 sq.m, 9.8% exceed 300 sq.m, and 19.4% exceed 200 sq.m.
- 5.7 The remaining town centres: Ashton, Atherton, Golborne, Hindley, Pemberton, Platt Bridge, Standish and Tyldesley, perform a more localised role. Average unit sizes range from 100 sq.m (Tyldesley) to 247 sq.m (Platt Bridge). These centres are typically comprised of smaller premises, with the majority of units below 200 sq.m; only a very small proportion of units exceed 500 sq.m (generally between 1.3% and 9.6%, with most centres below 3%).
- 5.8 This variation in scale and function reinforces the case for adopting a tiered approach to the application of the retail impact test, rather than a single Borough-wide threshold. A uniform threshold would fail to account for the differing sensitivities of smaller centres to new development. For example, while a proposal of 900 sq.m gross floorspace may represent a modest addition in Wigan, it could constitute a step-change relative to the scale and character of existing provision in the town centres, where typical units fall well below 200 sq.m.
- 5.9 Additionally, Table 5.2 below summarises recent and approved planning applications (in the last five years) for new retail floorspace across Wigan Borough. The data show that the majority of new or proposed convenience stores are below the national impact assessment threshold of 2,500 sq.m yet often fall within a range (circa 300 - 2,000 sq.m) that is large relative to the scale of centres such as Atherton, Golborne, or Hindley.

Table 5.2 Floorspace of Extant Convenience and Comparison Goods Commitments

Planning Application Reference	Centre	Implemented Convenience	Floorspace (sq.m)
A/20/89608/CU	Leigh	Small Convenience pub conversion independent	284
A/20/89753/MAJOR	Wigan	Lidl woodhouse Lane	1,834
A/20/90077/FULL	Leigh	Small Convenience	191
A/2293334/	Ashton	Aldi Bryn	1,804
A/21/92702/MAJOR	Ashton	Lidl Ashton	1,938
A/21/92804/FULL	Leigh	Medium convenience store Heron Foods	353
A/21/93043/MAJOR	Wigan	Worsley mesnes redevelopment convenience stores (Heron foods and Independent)	585
Planning Application Reference	Centre	Not determined/ in Abeyance	Floorspace (sq.m)
A/21/92399/MAJOR	Wigan Marus Bridge	Aldi Wigan Road	1,805
A/22/94886/MAJOR	Platt Bridge	Lidl Templeton Road	1,895
A/25/098464	Abbey Lakes Orrell	Aldi Orrell Road	1,805

Planning Application Reference	Centre	Implemented Convenience	Floorspace (sq.m)
A/21/92804/FULL	Standish	Supermarket 23-82 Preston Road (Proposals received for retail centre 2492 sq.m)	1,900
A/25/098610/FULL	Wigan	Winstanley Centre	183
A/25/099380/MAJOR	Wigan	Aldi Frith Street	1,353

- 5.10 Paragraph 94 of the NPPF is clear that the impact policy test should only apply to retail and leisure uses, and therefore the policy needs to be updated to reflect this definition.
- 5.11 Paragraph 94 of the NPPF also states that it is appropriate to identify thresholds for the scale of edge of centre and out of centre retail and leisure development that should be the subject of an impact assessment. Any such threshold policy applies only to the impact test (all planning applications for main town centre uses that are not in an existing centre and not in accordance with an up-to-date development plan will generally be the subject of the sequential test¹).
- 5.12 The purpose of applying an impact threshold within the development plan which deviates from the national threshold of 2,500 sq.m, is to allow the Council to retain appropriate control in respect of the potential for development to impact on the future health of defined centres within the authority area. By applying a lower threshold, applications for developments which could potentially have a harmful effect on the overall vitality and viability of a defined centre, will need to be supported by a proportionate impact assessment which sets out the potential trade diversion impact assumptions.
- 5.13 Paragraph 16 of the town centres PPG provides specific guidance in relation to floorspace thresholds and states:
- ‘The impact test only applies to proposals exceeding 2,500 square metres gross of floorspace unless a different locally appropriate threshold is set by the local planning authority. In setting a locally appropriate threshold it will be important to consider the:**
- scale of proposals relative to town centres
 - the existing viability and vitality of town centres
 - cumulative effects of recent developments
 - whether local town centres are vulnerable
 - likely effects of development on any town centre strategy
 - impact on any other planned investment.’
- 5.14 Using the above guidance and the analysis provided earlier in this report, we set out the justification to support our view that a lower threshold should be applied across the hierarchy of centres within the authority area. To note, the current adopted policy does not provide a locally set threshold for impact assessments.
- 5.15 In considering the setting of a local impact threshold, it is important to give consideration to the type of development (relating to convenience and comparison goods retail uses, and leisure uses) which would, in practice, provide space for key operators who could act to ‘anchor’ a centre. Should one of these anchor units or operators leave a centre, there will likely be the potential for a significant adverse impact to arise.

¹ With the exception (in accordance with paragraph 89 of the NPPF) of small scale rural office proposals and other small scale rural development.

- 5.16 As such, where there is genuine potential for an application proposal to divert a material level of expenditure away from a defined centre, or potentially remove a key tenant from that centre, there will likely be a requirement to consider the impacts arising from the proposal in detail.
- 5.17 In respect of lower order centres, the introduction of even a small convenience store nearby (of the type operated by Sainsbury's Local or Tesco Express) may have the potential to impact on the ongoing viability of key operators. Small convenience stores operated by national multiple grocers can generate a relatively substantial turnover. If this is diverted from existing retailers in defined centres, the impact on the overall vitality and viability through the loss of spend and footfall, could be of a significant adverse magnitude.
- 5.18 Therefore, in implementing a local threshold policy, it is considered more appropriate to apply a range of thresholds in accordance with the type of centre the proposed development is proximate to. The thresholds should not only apply to new floorspace, but also to changes of use and variations of condition to remove or amend restrictions on how units operate or trade in practice.
- 5.19 In terms of policy recommendations relating to the impact policy threshold, this relates to the defined centre, which for the purposes of retail development comprises the primary shopping area, and for all other main town centre uses comprise the wider town centre boundary

Recommended Approach

- 5.20 In this context, our initial recommendation is that the impact threshold of relevance to the main town centres (Wigan and Leigh as set out in draft Policy TC1) is set at 500 sq.m for both retail and leisure proposals. This threshold would effectively be the default to be applied authority wide.
- 5.21 The smaller town centres (Ashton, Atherton, Golborne, Hindley, Pemberton, Platt Bridge, Standish and Tyldesley) are generally anchored by one or two national multiple convenience stores. These operators underpin the function of these centres, drawing in custom and encouraging linked trips to the other parts of the centre. Should the viability of such stores be impacted, there is a real risk of the role of the wider centre being undermined. There are relatively few units substantially larger than 300 sq.m in any of the town centres and the level of retail floorspace is considerably less than within the town centres. As such, losing an occupier of this magnitude could have a significant adverse impact on the centre as a whole. Accordingly, in the local context, 300 sq.m constitutes a significant unit for the town centres.
- 5.22 The above recommendation is also reflective of the town centre vacancies and the potential for out-of-centre retail developments to become even stronger in the future at the expense of a centre's vitality and viability. The existing out-of-centre commercial destinations all offer a range of comparison goods, which traditionally would have been sold from centres.
- 5.23 The proposed thresholds at local centre level are considered to reflect the relatively small size of some of the centres at the lower end of the retail hierarchy and their consequent potential susceptibility to alternative 'out-of-centre' provision. In practice, it is envisaged that a proposal of just greater than 200 sq.m adjacent to a local centre would generally require an impact assessment of proportionate length (i.e. for development of such a scale, impact may on occasion be able to be dealt with as part of the covering letter accompanying the application).
- 5.24 Where an application proposal is above the respective stated impact threshold, we would recommend that the applicant discusses and agrees the scope of the retail impact assessment with the relevant Council prior to submission.

- 5.25 The lower threshold of 200 sq.m for local centres is considered appropriate due to potential for convenience stores of even a relatively small nature to substantially impact upon the performance of existing operators, due to the potential higher sales densities of such proposals. This would ensure that particular protection of these smaller centres is considered appropriately.
- 5.26 For the purpose of drafting future planning policy, it is important to qualify the area to which each local impact threshold will apply. We recommend that the threshold of relevance to the main town and other town centres (i.e. 300 sq.m) and local centres (i.e. 200 sq.m) would be applicable within 800 metres of the boundary of the relevant centre.
- 5.27 The distance of 800 metres is broadly commensurate with the potential walk-in catchments of smaller centres and is identified by Guidelines for Providing for Journeys on Foot ('Guidelines for Providing for Journeys on Foot' by The Institution of Highways & Transportation, 2000) as being the 'preferred maximum' acceptable walking distance to a centre.
- 5.28 For clarity, we consider it to be appropriate for the higher threshold of 500 sq.m to apply across Wigan when the centre-specific thresholds do not apply (i.e. beyond 800 metres of these centres), due to the lesser likelihood of significant adverse impacts arising from retail and leisure development. This general 500 sq.m threshold would therefore apply to proposals outside of the 800 metre boundary of the defined centres due to the lesser likelihood of the proposals having an impact.
- 5.29 It is important to emphasise that, whilst the locally set threshold would require the submission of an impact assessment for all edge-of-centre and out-of-centre developments exceeding the thresholds, national guidance states that the impact test should be undertaken in a proportionate and locally appropriate way, commensurate to the scale of development proposed. The level of detail would typically be agreed with planning officers during the pre-application process in order to avoid overly onerous requirements that may otherwise restrict and delay development opportunities from coming forward.
- 5.30 Based on the above, we are of the view that an impact assessment will be necessary to accompany proposals for retail and leisure uses (including those relating to mezzanine floorspace and the variation of restrictive conditions) which are not located within a defined centre where:
- the proposal provides a gross floorspace in excess of 500 sq.m gross; or
 - the proposal is located within 800 metres of either;
 - a town centre (not including Wigan or Leigh) and is in excess of 300 sq.m gross; or,
 - a local centre and is in excess of 200 sq.m gross.
- 5.31 In our experience, it will only generally be development of a scale greater than these thresholds which could lead to a 'significant adverse' impact, which could merit the refusal of an application for town centre uses in accordance with the provisions of paragraph 95 of the NPPF.
- 5.32 The setting of a 'tiered' threshold is consistently accepted by Inspectors at Local Plan Examination and, in our view, acts to appropriately ensure that only those proposals which could genuinely result in an unacceptable impact are the subject of an impact assessment.

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