



Jobs and the role of town and district centres



3 Jobs and the Roles of Town and District Centres

Stockport is fortunate to have a mix of businesses across growing sectors of the economy, and residents who can both create and support growth. Our plan is to create the conditions for, and harness the benefits of, a thriving local economy, while seeking to maintain the essential character of the borough.

The protection and delivery of jobs in Stockport are important if the borough is to develop as a sustainable area. More jobs for Stockport residents means fewer and shorter journeys to work. We need to establish whether we can deliver the range of jobs the people of Stockport need within the borough, or whether we should be allowing jobs to be located elsewhere and focus on becoming a dormitory town for the wider economic area. One way to help encourage a diverse and vibrant local economy is to ensure that entrepreneurs and small and medium enterprises have the space to develop and thrive. We also need to ensure that Stockport residents of all work ages, including those of post retirement age, have the right skills and options to access those jobs.

Jobs

Current context

3.1 Alongside sustainable environmental and social considerations, the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) is underpinned by a commitment to sustainable economic growth. Amongst other things the local authority needs to have: a clear vision and strategy; set criteria and identify sites to meet needs; support existing business and encourage new businesses into the area; and identify key areas for regeneration.

3.2 The NPPF requires a 'town centres' first approach to office, retail and indoor leisure proposals. The council already has policies to offer some protection for office and retail uses in town centre, district and local centres, which help with the overall health of those centres.

3.3 The NPPF supports the transition to a low carbon future and the sustainable growth and expansion of all types of business and enterprise in rural areas. The Local Plan offers an opportunity to look at how a low carbon economy can be supported across the borough.

3.4 The draft GMSF sets out that over the period 2015-2035, up to 90,000 square metres of new industrial and warehousing floor space will be provided in Bredbury, at the Bredbury Park Extension. The focus for office space over this period will be in Stockport town centre, with up to 140,000 square metres located there.

Planning for the future

3.5 The main issues relating to employment land are that the council should:

- ensure sufficient employment land of the right quality is provided in the right locations;
- provide appropriate policies to ensure that areas identified for employment purposes mean that appropriate economic development can take place and that other competing uses do not develop at the expense of the wider local economy; and
- ensure that those policies also provide flexibility to ensure that jobs are provided for within the borough, whilst allowing surplus employment land to be redeveloped for appropriate uses.

3.6 The current land use allocations and policies seek to protect allocated employment land and, where appropriate, employment sites outside those allocations. For employment sites outside allocations this is achieved primarily by putting the onus on developers to demonstrate that future employment uses are not viable.

3.7 There are employment areas in a variety of locations adjacent to the town centre and in the M60 Gateway area and beyond. These areas function in a variety of ways, with some having a greater prevalence of industrial uses, whilst others have a greater proportion of office uses.

3.8 The main areas of deprivation within the borough are also located close to the town centre and other centres for employment, so it is important to ensure that people have the right skills to be able to take advantage of the jobs on offer, as well as being able to travel to those jobs.

3.9 Stockport lags behind the rest of Greater Manchester in terms of the growth of small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs). This sector of businesses provides a large amount of employment growth and Stockport is not currently fulfilling its potential. Therefore it is important that SMEs in Stockport are encouraged to grow and develop within the borough to create more employment for the future. The Local Plan needs to acknowledge the opportunities offered by Social Enterprises and their specific needs, when considering land for employment and retail uses.

3.10 Falling worker productivity has become a barrier to economic growth internationally, nationally, regionally and locally. The Stockport Local Economic Strategy 2012-17 notes that there are low levels of educational attainment and skills in deprived neighbourhoods within Stockport. In order to attract employers to the borough and for people to access higher skilled jobs, the skills gap will need to be addressed, potentially through adult training facilities.

Figure 2 Travel to work patterns



Source: Nomisweb (2011 Census Data)

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3.11 Stockport is a net exporter of labour and the borough needs to be ambitious about growing its local economy by promoting local jobs for local people. Local information suggests that there is a shortage of marketable units in the borough over 15,000 square feet which is a barrier to existing firms wishing to expand and new firms wanting to relocate to Stockport.

3.12 Mills have historically been an important provider of employment floorspace, although they often have heritage issues which need addressing. They are not referred to in national guidance but existing local policy permits the refurbishment of mills for employment purposes. Some mills may provide an opportunity for live/work units and for small and medium enterprises.

3.13 The council's 'Employment Land Review' makes reference to the high vacancy rates in mills and the difficulty of retaining many mills in the longer term without large scale investment and significant changes to improve the format of the space. Many mills are located in difficult to access locations but represent potential employment floorspace which could be lost if they are not protected.

Centres

3.14 Stockport has a large number of centres of various sizes that perform different functions, from the town centre to the various district centres and to local shopping areas. Having access to the shops and services that all these centres contain is an important part of how we live our lives in Stockport. With changing demands on those centres, we need to consider their future and what they need to do to deliver what people need.

Stockport Town Centre

Current context

3.15 The NPPF requires the council to set out policies for the management and growth of centres over the plan period, to retain and enhance existing markets and ensure that markets remain attractive and competitive. We also need to set policies for the consideration of 'out-of-centre' proposals for main town centre uses.

3.16 In order to allocate a range of suitable sites to meet in full the scale and type of retail and main town centre uses needed in town centres, we need to adopt a 'sequential approach' including undertaking an assessment of the need to expand the town centre. This will mean defining the boundary of the town centre and frontages within it. We will also need to ensure we define the primary shopping area.

3.17 Policies need to be set that make clear which uses will be permitted within the town centre, within the primary shopping areas and within the defined frontages.

3.18 The NPPF also says that a positive vision or strategy for town centres should be set out in the local plan.

Planning for the future

3.19 The council and its partners are already undertaking and facilitating a range of projects and initiatives that contribute to inclusive growth through the council's 'Investing in Growth' programme. The council's ambition is reflected in a range of key initiatives which are now at various stages of delivery. These are:

- Stockport Exchange Phase 2 – new Grade A office and 115 room hotel in an iconic commercial development;
- Redrock – a flagship cinema and with food & beverage units;
- TCAP Phase 1&2 – c.£70m transport works to improve access to the town centre;
- Merseyway Acquisition – major commitment to safeguard and improve the future retail provision;
- Market & Underbanks – commitment to safeguard and awarded nearly £2m from Heritage Lottery Funding; and
- Business Improvement District – business-led scheme to improve the customer experience, market the town centre and make it easier to do business.

3.20 This is the start of the changes that need to be made to the town centre and further work needs to be done. The council's 'Investing in Growth' programme seeks to:

- Reconfigure and refurbish the Merseyway Shopping Centre and enable it to be better connected to Redrock and the rest of the town centre;
- Improve the town centre's office portfolio through developments such as Stockport Exchange;
- Improve the town centre's family leisure and food and drink offer through developments such as Redrock;
- Increase the number of residents in the town centre through developments such as Covent Garden Village; and
- Further enhance the range of independent, niche retailers and creative businesses that have clustered around the Market Place and Underbanks areas.

3.21 The town centre has a central shopping area defined, which we will need to review with a number of areas around that, including several mixed use areas which allow for a variety of uses. The existing policies protect certain frontages primarily for retail use and other frontages for a variety of other uses.

3.22 A retail study for Stockport, undertaken in 2014, has identified a number of issues with regard to retail in the town centre, including a need to redevelop and refurbish Merseyway Shopping Centre to retain and attract the optimum number and type of retailers. This will help to attract more people, more often, including those with higher disposable income and thus enhance the town centre's vitality and viability. Further work is required to assess the capacity of the existing central shopping area to accommodate the expected growth in retail spending in the town centre.

3.23 The way the town centre operates is not just down to one or two main uses, in order to function most effectively for people and businesses, a wide variety of factors need to be taken into account. The delivery of housing in the town centre will help to increase the number of people wanting and using its services. Similarly the development of leisure uses, such as at Redrock, will bring people into the town centre where they are likely to visit shops and other outlets. The development of an evening economy will be a draw for those living in the centre and will encourage those working in the town centre to visit. To support all of the activity and development the transport infrastructure needs to be in place, an example being the work undertaken to deliver the Town Centre Access Plan.

3.24 The environment of the town centre itself will be important to its success, so the design of the spaces that are created, including the provision of amenity and green space, will play a vital role in the development of a sustainable and successful town centre.

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3.25 There are currently seven mixed use areas across the town centre covered by existing policy and these are in need of review, with developments having taken place, and with masterplans in place for the College, the A6, the Railway Station and Bus Station. An opportunity exists to review the current position and future plans for the wider town centre area, revisiting the boundaries which are in the current plan and the policies which are attached to them. This includes the boundaries and policies concerning the Great Portwood Street Area, which adjoins the central shopping area.

3.26 The 'M60 Gateway' stretches from the Portwood roundabout to land alongside Didsbury Road. In a similar way to the town centre mixed use areas, their allocations and policies allow for a variety of uses, but these tend to be related directly to employment uses, such as offices, warehousing and car showrooms, rather than residential, retail or leisure uses. Through the local plan we need to consider these gateway areas and assess whether the current policies and allocations are the right ones to encourage the most suitable development in that area along the M60.

Other centres

Current context

3.27 The NPPF requires local authorities to set out policies for the management and growth of centres over the plan period. This includes defining the primary shopping area of the district centres and local centres, together with defining the primary and secondary frontages in those centres. The boundary of the district centres and local centres needs to be defined, along with the setting out of policies making clear which uses will be permitted within Stockport's district centres and local centres and their frontages.

3.28 Existing policies in the Core Strategy set out the network and hierarchy of centres and contain policies alongside saved policies of the UDP Review to support the viability and vitality of the borough's centres. Whilst the borough's district centres and local centres do not have a defined primary shopping area, existing local policies safeguard a high proportion of shop use at street level in the key frontages.

Planning for the future

3.29 The changes that are happening in the retail sector, along with other changes affecting how planning decisions can be made in respect of the loss of shops, are having an impact on the proportion of retail that it is realistic and appropriate to safeguard in the shopping frontages. Stockport has 8 district centres, and the most recent retail study for the borough found them in variable states as set out below:

- Very Healthy: Bramhall; Marple
- Healthy: Cheadle; Cheadle Hulme; Romiley
- Experiencing Some Difficulties: Hazel Grove
- Experiencing Substantial Difficulties: Edgeley; Houldsworth Square (Reddish)

3.30 In addition, out of Stockport's 25 Local Centres, 11 are experiencing difficulties. Consequently there may be a need to allow for more flexibility in terms of protecting frontages purely for retail use and allowing alternative uses that could also add to the long-term future of the

centres in those locations, to help the centres survive taking into account the effects on centres of out-of-centre food-stores.

Large scale retail outside centres

Current context

3.31 The NPPF advises local authorities to set policies for the consideration of proposals for main town centre uses which cannot be accommodated in or adjacent to town centres. It also sets certain tests for local authorities to use when assessing the likely effect of such developments.

3.32 There are four areas identified in existing local policy as large-scale 'out-of-centre' retail areas. There are at Brewery Street/Water Street at Portwood; Wilmslow Road/A34 at Cheadle Hulme; Stockport Road/Edgeley Road at Cheadle Heath; and Manchester Road at Lancashire Hill. In addition, there are large retail sites that are not allocated but appear likely to continue in that role at Earl Road at Stanley Green and Stockport Road, Bredbury.

Planning for the future

3.33 The 2014 retail study advised that the council should resist further large retail developments, where that development could have a damaging effect on retail centres in Stockport, increase traffic congestion and can be difficult to access for those without cars.

3.34 Over time, retail developments have grown in areas such as the Stanley Green and Bredbury areas, but which are not identified and other changes may have occurred elsewhere in the borough. We need to consider whether we should seek to identify such sites as allocations, or whether we should develop a policy against which all large-scale retail areas can be assessed.

Tourism

Current context

3.35 Tourism is extremely diverse and covers all activities of visitors. Local planning authorities (LPAs), where appropriate, should articulate a vision for tourism in the Local Plan, including identifying optimal locations for tourism. When planning for tourism, LPAs should:

- consider the specific needs of the tourist industry, including particular locational or operational requirements;
- engage with representatives of the tourism industry;
- examine the broader social, economic, and environmental impacts of tourism;
- analyse the opportunities for tourism to support local services, vibrancy and enhance the built environment; and
- have regard to non-planning guidance produced by other government departments.

3.36 The NPPF has a 'town centre first' approach to cultural and leisure uses.

3.37 The Core Strategy sets out the current approach to visitor accommodation and other tourism development. It seeks to focus hotel development in the town centre to meet identified need and to contribute to town centre vitality and viability. Hotel development that also provides conference or exhibition facilities is encouraged. Small scale visitor accommodation in Marple and Romiley District Centre is encouraged.

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Planning for the future

3.38 Policies also exist which seek to direct tourism and leisure facilities into the town centre. We are already starting to see the impacts of that with the development of 'Redrock' taking place at the moment. Although a cluster of cultural attractions exists in the town centre, such as the Market, the Air Raid Shelters, Staircase House, many are dispersed across a wider area such as Bramall Hall and the Avro Heritage Museum.

3.39 Further work is required to develop evidence as to the current level of hotel, tourism and cultural facilities to help understand where the focus for such development should be in Stockport.

Farm Diversification

Current context

3.40 The NPPF indicates that planning policies should support economic growth in rural areas by supporting sustainable growth and expansion of all types of business in the rural area, promoting diversification and supporting rural tourism and leisure.

Planning for the future

3.41 Nearly 9% of the borough's population reside in areas defined as 'rural' according to government designations. Maintenance of a healthy farming economy is an essential aspect of protecting the character and appearance of the countryside. It is therefore important that rural jobs are included as part of wider consideration of employment and commuting patterns across the borough.

Question 1

What type of town centre do you want to see in Stockport?

Question 2

What mix of shops and services would you like to see in your district and local centres?

Question 3

What types of jobs should there be in Stockport, where should they be and what should happen to the existing areas where people work?

Question 4

Do you have any other comments about jobs, shops and services in Stockport?