



The Heart of Oldham

A masterplan for
Oldham Town Centre



A report for...
Oldham Local Strategic Partnership and North West Development Agency
by...
URBED and S333
with Comedia, King Sturge and WSP

May 2004



Oldham
beyond

The Heart

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Oldham Town Centre

Of Oldham

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Introduction

This is the second masterplan in the family of reports that comprise *Oldham Beyond*, a vision for the borough of Oldham commissioned by the Oldham Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) and the North West Development Agency (NWDA), and produced by a team of consultants led by URBED. This masterplan covers the whole of Oldham Town Centre and the surrounding area. However, it is focused particularly on the Economic Development Zone (EDZ) area, which covers an arc taking in the southern fringes of the centre and running from Mumps in the east to Middleton Road in the west.



Three of these 'demonstrator plans' have been undertaken by the team to show the practical impact of the themes and principles that have emerged from the overall Vision for *Oldham Beyond*. There are two area-specific demonstrator plans, one for the Werneth/Freehold Housing Market Renewal area and this plan for Oldham Town Centre, while the Third Demonstrator masterplan '*The Oldham Net*' develops a series of smaller plans for different types of site across the borough, including one that looks at the smaller town centres.

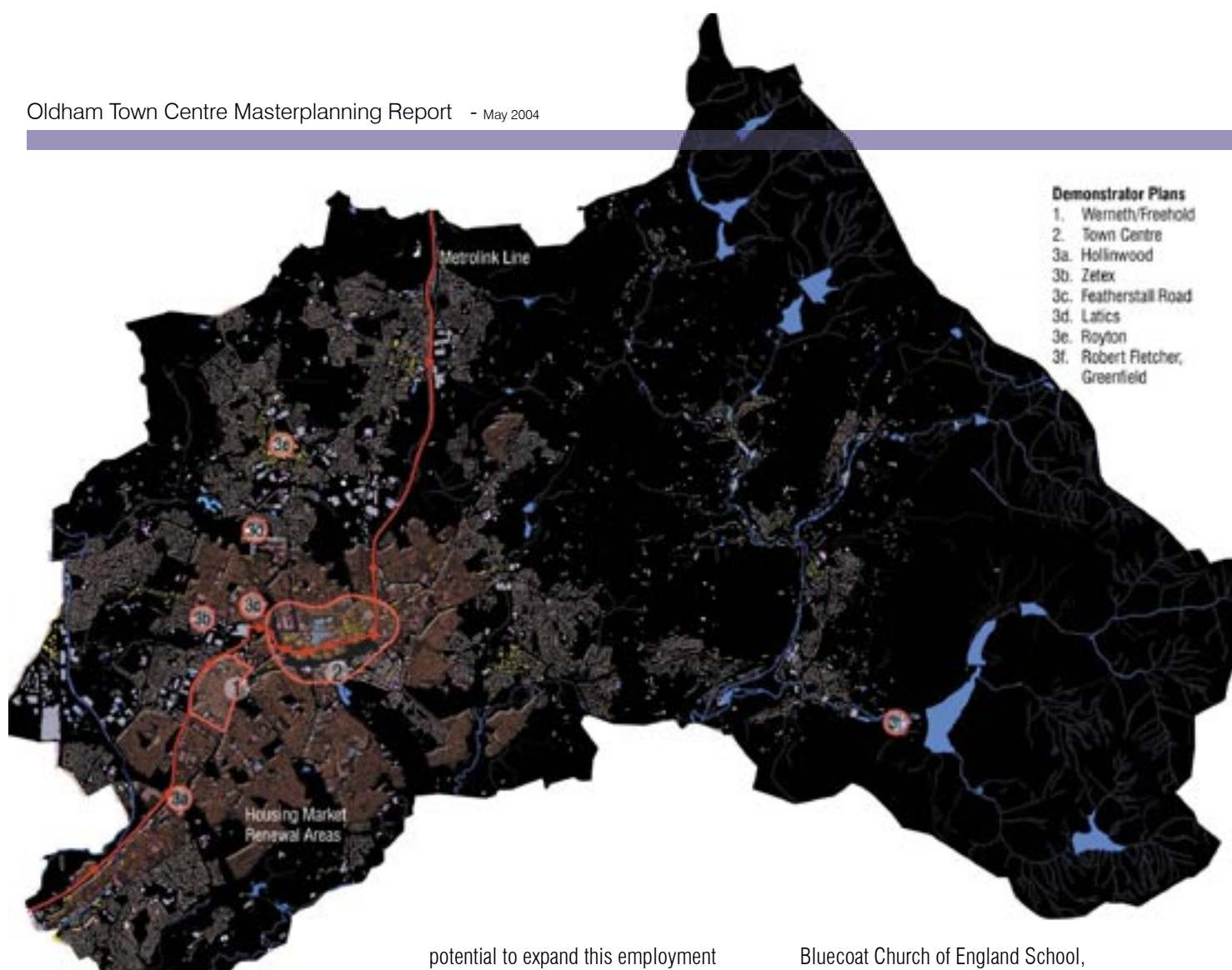


The importance of Oldham Town Centre

Oldham Town Centre is the largest concentration of retailing, cultural facilities and employment in the borough of Oldham. While we recognise that many people feel a close affinity to the smaller town centres within the borough, Oldham Town Centre is the only centre with the potential to fulfil a sub-regional role like Bolton or Stockport. Oldham has the potential to play this role. There is land available for expansion (some 24.5ha in the town centre), there are developers willing to invest and there are public agencies such as the European Union and the NWDA that have made it a priority for investment through the Economic Development Zone (EDZ). Yet much of our analysis, set out in this report, suggests that Oldham Town Centre is radically under-performing compared to this potential. The under-performance of the town centre has implications for the whole borough.

The *Oldham Beyond* strategy is based around five themes and in each of these the town centre has a vital role to play:

- **Wealth creation:** Oldham Town Centre is one of the main concentrations of employment in the borough. This includes public services, retailing, services, cultural industries and business. A successful town centre has the



Plan of the borough showing the demonstration masterplans including the areas covered by the 3rd Demonstrator plan

potential to expand this employment base and also to improve the overall attraction and image of the borough to employers.

- ▶ **Liveability:** Oldham Town Centre is a potential location for new housing within the borough. However, more importantly, it is the most important concentration of services and facilities for people in the borough. The quality of the town centre is an important factor in persuading people that Oldham is a good place to live.
- ▶ **A Learning community:** The town centre also has the largest concentration of educational facilities in the borough including Grange School and

Bluecoat Church of England School, the College, the Sixth Form College and the Business Management School. The success and expansion of these facilities and the provision of an attractive setting within the town centre is central to Oldham's future success.

- ▶ **Common Ground:** One of the themes of the vision is a strategy to improve the public realm of the borough as 'common ground' to unite the borough's communities. Oldham Town Centre is the most important element of this strategy and the hub for these public spaces across the borough.
- ▶ **New Oldham:** The final theme relates to the governance and image of the



Plan of the town centre showing the EDZ boundary

borough. The town centre is central to the governance theme because it is the seat of local government for the borough – symbolised by the Civic Centre tower. It is also the borough’s shop front. The image that people have of the borough is in large part the image that they have of Oldham Town Centre.

However, the importance of Oldham Town Centre stretches further than the borders of the borough. It has been recognised by the NWDA as having a wider role in developing a growth corridor across the North West by:

- ▶ Promoting a positive and forward-looking image that will help attract and retain private investment.
- ▶ Fostering innovation and new enterprise, including cultural industries, as well as providing a range of jobs and training opportunities.
- ▶ Acting as a growth point in the eastern part of Manchester to balance the

growth in the ‘southern crescent’ to the south of Manchester, and to overcome regional inequalities.

- ▶ Conserving scarce resources by reusing old buildings, saving energy and acting as a demonstrator for sustainable development.

Aims of this report

This report has therefore been prepared to set out a clear strategy and vision for Oldham Town Centre. This is practical, in that it sets out action that can be taken immediately to improve the centre, and address its weaknesses. It is also visionary in that it looks 20 years and beyond to show what Oldham Town Centre could be like and how it could fulfil its full potential.

The strategy is thus intended to guide investment in the town centre, to shape planning and regeneration policy and to give developers and other organisations concerned with the centre a sense of direction and clarity to allow them to

commit further resources.

Methodology

The preparation of this report has been informed by a range of research including:

- ▶ A renaissance audit undertaken by URBED that compared Oldham to a range of similar towns to assess its performance.
- ▶ A town centre health check undertaken by King Sturge looking at the economic performance of the centre.
- ▶ A transport assessment by WSP looking at access to the centre by car, public transport, foot and cycle as well as a review of parking provision.
- ▶ An urban design assessment of the centre undertaken by URBED with S333 that has assessed the quality of the built environment and the historical development of the town centre.



In addition to this we have undertaken a wide range of consultations and discussions about the town centre, including a Visioning workshop that took place in Gallery Oldham in December 2003 that was attended by 70 people (including people from Breeze Hill and Royton and Crompton schools, who had carried out town environmental audits) as well as a wide range of discussions with town centre stakeholders. The consultation as part of the wider *Oldham Beyond* study has also covered the town centre. The Oldham 'Satellite' visited the town centre on 19th November 2003 and sector workshops were held with people from the cultural, development, education and voluntary sectors and 8 focus groups. There have also been a number of briefing sessions and presentations to politicians, businesses, the LSP and the 'Sounding Board' set up by the LSP and the NWDA to guide the study. The proposals set out in this report have therefore emerged from extensive discussions and we are confident that they have widespread support.

The structure of the report

The report is set out in 6 sections:

- ▶ **Positioning Oldham:** Which outlines the results of the retail health check and the commercial, cultural and transport assessments undertaken as background to the Town Centre Masterplan.
- ▶ **Exploring Oldham:** This looks at the growth of Oldham, before undertaking an urban design assessment looking at urban form, land use, character and public realm.
- ▶ **Revealing Oldham:** Draws conclusions from this research and from the consultations undertaken as part of the study to look at the factors that are holding Oldham back and at what is special about Oldham.

- ▶ **Redefining Oldham:** We set out to re-define the role of Oldham Town Centre based on eight themes: a community hub, an integrated centre, a creative environment, a great place to shop, a centre for learning, a place to play, a place to come home to and a good place to do business.
- ▶ **Reshaping Oldham:** These themes are developed into a masterplanning framework based around three corridors: the Golden Road, the Green Walk and the Boulevard.
- ▶ **Rebuilding Oldham:** Detailed proposals and implementation plans are then set out for each of the quarters proposed as part of the masterplan.

This report has been produced by URBED and S333 with inputs from the wider team. We are grateful to everyone who has assisted with and commented on the emerging masterplan.

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Positioning Oldham

Our vision for Oldham Town Centre is based on five studies undertaken by companies within our team. These have examined the health of the shopping centre, the property market in Oldham, the cultural life of the centre, access to the centre and the quality of the built environment. The results of this work are described in this chapter. They paint a picture of a town centre with many assets and strengths which is nevertheless failing to reach its full potential.





Commercial assessment

The economic assessment undertaken by King Sturge has tested each of the market sectors that is likely to be interested in developing in Oldham Town Centre. This has looked at the potential for offices, commercial, leisure, housing and hotels. The assessment has been undertaken using King Sturge's agency staff and by talking to developers and operators in each of these markets. The retail element of this assessment is discussed in the town centre 'Retail health check' section, which follows.

Offices

Overwhelmingly, the main office users in the town centre are Oldham Metropolitan Borough Council and other public sector organisations such as the Law Courts, Business Link etc. There is a range of offices along Union Street. The main office development in the recent past has been the Southlink Business Park south of Oldham Way. This is accessed from a long cul-de-sac off the Lees Road and feels very

isolated from the town centre. Gladman have recently developed one building and there is space for a number of further schemes.

However, the review by King Sturge suggests there is very little demand either from developers or occupiers to develop in the town centre. The only market for offices in Oldham is likely to come from local professional companies such as solicitors, surveyors and accountants serving the local market and looking for

space for their own needs. The trend for such users is to purchase a freehold to enable the company to have an investment for their pension fund. Low interest rates and uncertainties in the equities market have made this approach popular. It is significant that Gladman are only offering leaseholds, which is not likely to cater to current market preferences.

It may, however, be possible to change these current market conditions by looking to the sub-regional market. The



completion of the M60 means that Oldham is almost as accessible as the buoyant South Manchester office market and Salford Quays, yet is able to offer considerably cheaper land. Planning restrictions on green field sites next to motorway junctions are also causing some developers to look at existing town centres where good accessibility can be combined with an attractive planned environment, plentiful parking and proximity to a range of town centre facilities. An excellent example of this new type of office development is Henry Square which is being developed as a town centre business park in Ashton by ASK developments. It would therefore be possible for Oldham to attract new office development if it were to create a high quality environment in a part of the town centre such as Mumps.

The other way in which office development could be encouraged in Oldham Town Centre would be to attract public sector users. This could include the consolidation or relocation of a council department. Bury Council have just gone to

the market with such a scheme to appoint a developer for a lease back arrangement to consolidate a range of council departments in one building. This could form an important pre-let to give a developer the confidence to start on a larger scheme.

The other possibility is the relocation of a government department. The Government is currently conducting a review of the feasibility of relocating government offices out of London. A report prepared by King Sturge for the Sir Michael Lyons review has graded different areas for their suitability and Oldham scores in the top quartile for 'back office' facilities such as administration and service centres. This again could form an important pre-let to pump-prime a wider commercial development.

Leisure

Oldham has a thriving bar and club culture which attracts significant numbers of young people into the town centre, particularly on Thursday, Friday and Saturday evenings.

This activity can clash with other existing uses and make it difficult to attract other uses to the centre. Recent measures by the Council with the Police and town centre businesses have begun to address the problems that this evening economy has created.

The town centre is not well provided with other forms of leisure. There is currently no demand from national cinema operators to locate in Oldham Town Centre and the recently opened multiplex in Ashton-under-Lyne will further undermine potential demand. The Ashton multiplex may indeed undermine Oldham's only remaining cinema, the independently run Roxy in Hollinwood. King Sturge has therefore been in discussion with the Roxy and they have expressed an interest in opening a cinema in the town centre. This would be greatly to the benefit of the town centre and would help the Roxy to consolidate its core market.

The alternative to the Roxy would be to look to a niche market such as a smaller multiplex within the expanded



Spindles/Town Square shopping centre. Many retail developers are prepared to provide multiplex accommodation as part of a package of measures within a planning application and take a 'hit' on the cinema element of the development. Cinema operators are generally happy to take an upper floor and the ideal size is 10 screens on 3,000m².

Other leisure facilities including bingo, bowling and gaming facilities (after the change in laws expected soon) usually locate with multiplexes. As the family leisure market expands it should also be possible to attract restaurants to serve a clientele attracted into the centre for other purposes such as the cinema, theatre, quality shopping and business. There is therefore value in combining leisure uses with cultural attractions and the expanded Oldham College and business uses.

Housing

The housing market in central Oldham is characterised by low values and a preponderance of Victorian terraced stock. This is being addressed through Housing Market Renewal that will see a proportion of the terraces redeveloped and the construction of a broader range of housing types, with particular emphasis on more aspirational housing.

There is a large amount of housing around Oldham Town Centre, the majority of which is social housing. The people living around the centre therefore tend to be non-family social housing tenants. Oldham has not yet seen any town centre private housing development and the aim of the market review has been to assess whether this is a possibility.

The town centre housing market has grown rapidly since 1990. Starting in

London and provincial cities, the market for 'loft apartments' and town centre flats has been the fastest-growing and most lucrative in the UK. Such has been the growth in the market that the residential population of Manchester has grown from a few thousand in 1990 to more than 20,000 today with many more schemes in the pipeline. Residential values in central Manchester have also more than doubled from around £1,500/sq m to over £3,000/sq m which is now reflected in land values and has served to price many people, including first time buyers, out of the market.

This is causing the city centre residential market to spread to other areas. Loft dwelling 'wannabes', unable to buy in central Manchester are looking to other parts of the city and to the towns in the wider conurbation. In response to this developers are bringing forward urban apartment schemes in many industrial towns



such as Bolton, Huddersfield, Wrexham, Stalybridge and Ashton-under-Lyne. There is a company active in North Manchester called 'Suburban Lofts'.

This market is partly based on a fashion for 'loft living' which in reality means apartments. However, it is also rooted in much deeper demographic trends – notably the growth of single person households. Of the 4 million or so additional households projected in the next 20 years more than 80% are non-family households (both young people and the retired, divorced etc...). It is this group that is driving the demand for middle-class urban housing.

This trend has yet to affect Oldham, other than a couple of mill conversions in Saddleworth. However, there is starting to be interest from residential developers in the mills of Oldham and we understand that one mill has recently been sold for residential development. We believe that there is the potential for town centre residential development in Oldham, an

opportunity that has been confirmed through discussion with a number of developers.

The main opportunity at present is the scheme to the north of the Leisure Centre where Gleeson Homes have been appointed as developers. The initial scheme was very suburban in form and we are delighted that the Council has taken the initiative to seek a redesign of this scheme. This has the potential to establish a high quality town centre housing market. We believe that in the future schemes could be viable throughout the town centre with a particular premium on sites that have views over the Cheshire Plain or Pennine Hills.

Hotels

There are currently two hotels associated with Oldham Town Centre, the Pennine Way and the Menzies Avant both on the approach from Manchester. There are also two new budget lodges that have opened near the M60. There are no 4 or 5 star national-branded hotels in the borough. Our review of demand from hotel operators suggests that interest in the development of new hotels would depend on new business development such as we are proposing at Hollinwood and Mumps or possibly a hotel associated with improvements to the Oldham Athletic Ground.





Retail health check

In the last section we considered demand for different uses in Oldham Town Centre. In this chapter we will look at the most important of these uses, retailing. The retail sector is the driving force of Oldham Town Centre and decisions on future retail provision will have a major influence on the health and vitality of the town centre. In this section we examine the health of the retail centre using the criteria set out in Planning Policy Guidance Note 6 and assess the capacity for expansion.

We have drawn on a range of existing studies, including the Oldham Town Centre Retail Appraisal 1997, Oldham Town Centre Health Check 1997, the Oldham Town Centre Retail Appraisal Review 1999 and agreed evidence to the inquiry on Tesco's proposed extension to their Oldham Way food store, as well as King Sturge's own research and market knowledge and information from discussions with key developers.

Retailing trends

Despite two recessions in the last 20 years, the retailing industry has experienced considerable growth. This has taken place in the context of changing demographics, increasingly restrictive planning policies and a technological revolution in Internet shopping. Perhaps because of these trends, there has been a recent slowing down in the retail sector. Latest Office of National Statistics figures show that the value of

retail sales for the month of December 2003 was up just 0.5% on 2002 and just 0.7% in volume terms. December data from the British Retail Consortium shows a decline of 0.2% on a like-for-like basis. For the second year running, the rate of retail growth has not exceeded general growth in consumer expenditure. The market believes that growth rates peaked at the end of 2001 and in the future retailers should expect positive but slow growth rates.

Within this macro-economic environment a number of trends are apparent which have implications for town centres:

- ▶ Shoppers are no longer content with quality goods but increasingly require a high-quality shopping environment.
- ▶ Opening hours are generally extending for both shops and pubs.
- ▶ This harms secondary retail frontages occupied by independents which do not trade on Sunday. The resulting lack of footfall affects those that do open.



- ▶ High Street comparison goods retailers are under pressure to improve financial performance by cutting costs and improving the range of goods. They are looking for larger units by relocating or expanding into storage space such as basements and first floors.
- ▶ The growth of e-tailing is having an impact, albeit small, on town centres.
- ▶ The major supermarkets are introducing smaller format stores to respond to the trend towards urban living and to serve office workers. Formats like Sainsbury's Local and Tesco Metro are usually no larger than 2,300 sq m.

Oldham Shopping Centre

Oldham's proximity to the national motorway network and good public transport links mean that the town centre has a catchment population of 190,000 within a 10 minute drive, 900,000 within 20 minutes and 1.3 million within 30 minutes. Its

Town	Low Rise Council, Council Flats, Victorian Low Status	Blue Collar Owners, Townhouses & Flats	High Income Families, Suburban Semis	Other
Oldham	44.6%	42 %	4.5%	9.7%
Bury	31.0%	37.9%	20.2%	10.9%
Bolton	44.2%	34.8%	6.8%	4.7%
Stockport	32.7%	27.3%	27.4%	14.6%
National Average	28.0%	23.2%	23.0%	25.8%

Source: Experian Goad (2003)

problem is not therefore access to population but the number of other centres that compete for the same catchment population including Manchester, Rochdale, Bolton, Bury, Stockport and the Trafford Centre. It is also true that Oldham's catchment population declined between 1991 to 2001 and is set to decline further in the period to 2007.

Using information that retailers use to help them understand the characteristics of the catchment population, we can compare Oldham to its neighbouring centres. Within a 10 minute drive time Oldham has a high proportion of people in the low income bracket and a very small proportion in the higher income brackets (above). This affects the type of shops

attracted to Oldham Town Centre. In fact the retail market research company PROMIS rated Oldham's catchments in 2002 as one of the least affluent of the 175 UK centres it assessed.

Using Experian Goad information on the national ranking of centres based on the number of retail outlets, floorspace and the number of key attractors, Oldham has the lowest ranking of the centres (below). However while the other centres have slipped down the rankings, Oldham has moved 10 places up the rankings.

Oldham has a total shopping area of 78,000 sq m. The largest space users within the centre are Debenhams, Littlewoods, Boots, TJ Hughes, Woolworths and JJB Sports. Sainsbury's is the only major

Town	2001 Ranking	2002 Ranking	Change 2002
Oldham	171	161	+10
Bury	72	83	-11
Bolton	45	58	-13
Rochdale	149	150	-1
Stockport	35	44	-9

Source: Experian Goad (2002)



supermarket within the town centre. The company has recently built a new 8,360 sq m store to replace their existing store at Bloom Street. The new store is on Union Street with access direct off the Oldham Way. A number of smaller outlets and independents exist within Oldham as well as a large number of market stalls at the Tommyfield indoor and outdoor markets.

As a measure of how the shopping centre is performing we have set out yields and Zone A rents for Oldham. These show that over the last couple of years yields have moved out, representing poor performance of retail property or a lack of investment and uncertainty in the shopping centre. This should change now that the shopping centre is under a new management who has plans for its improvement and expansion. Despite low yields, Zone A rents have increased by 45% showing strong retailer demand.

Shopping in Oldham is dominated by the two shopping centres: Town Square and the Spindles. These were brought in August 2003 by Catalyst Capital. The Town Square Centre was opened in 1981 with the Spindles in 1993. They consist of two levels of shopping with a central mall. The Town Square has a selling area of 17,651 sq m in 31 units. The main ten-

YEAR	Shopping Centre Yield%	Zone A Rents £ per sq ft
1998	6.75	75
1999	6.75	75
2000	6.75	75
2001	6.75	75
2002	7.5	80
2003	7.5	110

Source: Valuation Office

ants are Argos, Boots, WH Smiths and TJ Hughes. The Spindles Centre has 26,012 sq m of shopping with 55 units. The main tenants are Debenhams, Next, Superdrug and JJB Sports. The centres suffer from poor linkage, permeability and access with the surrounding town centre. These are all aspects that the new owners of the centres plan to address.

The table below shows the broad similarity between Oldham and the other nearby towns in terms of shopping centre floorspace and number of units. What it does not show is that there are a number of national multiples without representation in Oldham. These include BHS, Marks and Spencer, Waterstone's and fashion stores like Miss Selfridge, Oasis, Monsoon, Laura Ashley, Etam, Accessorize, Scholl and Ann Harvey.

Aside from the shopping centres and the Tommyfield Market, Oldham's shopping provision is concentrated on

Market Place, Curzon Street, High Street and Yorkshire Street. Yorkshire Street contains a large number of bars and fast food restaurants/take aways and is the location of much of Oldham's night time economy.

Oldham boasts one of the largest markets in the North West and it is an important component of the town centre. The indoor market hall has over 75 traders in 230 or so trading units and is open every day except Sunday. The outdoor market has 67 units off Albion Street and around the perimeter of the site, and 140 open market stalls and 25 area pitches. Markets operate every day except Tuesday and Thursday. There is a healthy demand for the indoor market pitches, however vacancy levels on the open market have steadily increased. There is a national trend towards the decline of outdoor markets due to the growth of discount food stores, low cost clothing stores like Matalan, the preference for covered shopping areas, the trend towards weekly food shopping trips by car to supermarkets and the rise in the use of credit cards. However open markets in nearby Ashton-under-Lyne and Bury have bucked this trend by improving the market environment, providing more protection from the weather and imaginative management policies.



Town	Shopping Centre	No.Units	Selling Area m ²	Total Shopping Centre Selling Area sq m
Oldham	SpindlesTown	55	26,012	43,663
	Square	31	17,651	
Rochdale	ExchangeWheat-sheaf	45	29,728	44,178
		41	14,450	
Bury	Millgate	136	31,493	31,493
Bolton	Market Place	30	28,613	45,335
	Crompton Place	55	16,722	

Source: Retail Directory of the UK (2003)

Health of The Centre

Planning Policy Guidance Note 6, 'Town Centres and Retail Developments' sets out a number of indicators by which local planning authorities should assess the health of their town centres. These include diversity of uses, retail representation, shopping rents, proportion of vacant street level property, commercial yields, pedestrian footfall, accessibility, customer views and behaviour, perceptions of safety and crime and environmental quality.

Drawing upon our knowledge of the centre, discussions with town centre operators and managers, and by referring to the Health Check of the centre carried out by Oldham Council in 1997 and 2000 and The Lockwood Survey 2002, we have highlighted the following issues:

- ▶ The lack of a Marks and Spencer store – Oldham is the largest town in the UK without their presence.
- ▶ A lack of medium to higher order fashion multiples and lifestyle stores.
- ▶ Limited floor space inhibiting the range of goods that some retailers can display.

- ▶ Oldham's good accessibility means that trade leaks to other stronger centres.
- ▶ The mass of and impermeability of the shopping centres creates a barrier to pedestrian movement.
- ▶ There is a lack of convenience stores within the core of the town centre, with the exception of the market.
- ▶ The night time economy is largely based on pubs and clubs and lacks non-alcohol entertainment, e.g. restaurants, cafés, bingo, bowling and a cinema.
- ▶ The outdoor market is in a peripheral location.
- ▶ Many of the bars and take aways on Yorkshire Street are closed during the day projecting a poor image. In the evening this area gives a perception of lack of safety.
- ▶ Access to the town centre core can be difficult at peak times.

Capacity for Expansion

It is not part of the masterplan to carry out detailed capacity studies of the Oldham retail market. Instead we have used previously prepared material and updated this where appropriate. These studies indicate:

- ▶ There is capacity for convenience shopping in the town. Oldham's market share is only 35% of the population within a five-minute drive time.
- ▶ There is capacity for increased comparison shopping – estimated at £95 million in 2006. This equates to capacity for approximately a further 32,515 sq m of net floorspace taking into account current approvals.

There is significant leakage of comparison goods expenditure from Oldham. If the centre can become more attractive in terms of range of shops, quality of environment, accessibility and car parking it should be possible for the centre to reclaim further market share. In retailing terms this would involve improving the quality of shopping facilities, i.e. by attracting fashion retailers, department stores and Marks and Spencer.



Current Proposals

Oldham is in the enviable position of having three retail developers pursuing new schemes within and around the town centre. These are briefly described below:

Town Square/Spindles Shopping Centre

Outstanding planning permissions already exist to enable the centres to redevelop the under-performing atrium and to extend the Town Square shopping centre out to the Old Town Hall. This would result in an additional 10,219 sq m of new retail floorspace. Catalyst Capital are however reassessing their options for the centres. Their initial plans are to better link the centres, branding them as one, improving access and making the building more permeable and transparent. Their plans include the extension of the centre across the existing bus station to the Old Town Hall. This would enable them to anchor the centre with another department store, improve access at the east of the centre and provide a covered access up from the Union Street Metro Station. They are also considering remodelling the Rotunda and extending the centre out to the west onto the site currently occupied by Manchester Chambers.

As part of the study we have met Marks and Spencer who say they may be interested in locating within the town

centre. We also understand that a number of department store operators and fashion retailers have also expressed an interest.

First Bus Garage, Mumps

A planning application is being considered by the Council for a convenience store of 7,896m². We are concerned about the potential negative impact that this development would have on other retail developments in the town centre.

Alexandra Retail Park:

To the south of Oldham Way the Alexandra Retail Park has an open A1 non-food planning permission. This 8,667 sq m retail park, owned by Legal and General, has been under-performing and there are only two tenants remaining; Topps Tiles and Matalan. An outstanding planning permission exists to remodel the retail park and increase the floorspace to 9,475 sq m, 4,645 sq m of which would be restricted to a 'club' warehouse, like Matalan or Costco. The owners have been talking to the Council about purchasing the land to the east to develop a larger retail park with greater visibility and direct access onto the Oldham Way.

Other centres

It is also important to consider development schemes in other centres as an indication of the competition Oldham will face in coming years. According to data

collected by PROMIS in February 2004 the schemes on the opposite page are proposed in centres close to Oldham.

This highlights the continuing strength of Manchester City Centre and the major expansion of Bury. In addition the opening of a new John Lewis store in the Trafford Centre, set for 2005, will increase still further the attraction of this centre.

Conclusions

With the potential decline of Oldham's catchment population and the expansion of its competitors, it is extremely important that Oldham improves its retail offer if it is to attract more of its catchment spend. It is fortunate in having a shopping centre owner that is planning a realistic and achievable expansion of the shopping centre. The broader range of retailers that this will attract will increase the retail offer of the town centre, attracting shoppers currently lost to other centres. It is important that the Council work closely with the owners to ensure that the centre contributes positively to the town centre as well as to give the owners confidence that their investment in Oldham will not be undermined. This is an important opportunity for Oldham and must not be lost.

The new Sainsbury's store off Union Street will attract shoppers to this location. Part of its floorspace will sell comparison goods and the scheme includes

Town	Scheme	Developer	Total floor-space 000sq ft	Net Add Retail floor-space	Stage	Comments
Ashton-under-Lyne	Ladysmith Centre	Tops Estates	158	22	FPPG	Redevelopment of part of car park to create larger unit for TJ Hughes
Bury	Westfield Shopping Centre	Westfield Shopping Towns		377	Pre-appl	Proposed 377k sq ft extension to shopping centre, no application yet
	The Rock Triangle	Morbaine, First PLC	326	284	Appl	Spec applic for 130k sq ft superstore, 154k sq ft RW, catering & leisure, alt to Thornfield scheme
	The Rock Triangle	Thornfield Properties	331	230	Appl	Major mixed scheme - retail incl bulky goods, residential, hotel, leisure, offices, alt to Morbaine scheme.
	Cecil Street/Market Street	Highcroft Estates	46	22	FPPG	Retail/leisure development in 2 storey building, edge of TC,
Manchester	Arndale North	Prudential	1,400	266	FPPG	Redevelopment of bus station and north part of Centre to give glass roofed mall, dept store (Next), MSUs, unit shops and new market hall
	Piccadilly Basin Phase 1	Town Centre Securities	119	97	FPPG	Retail park (opposite Central RP) and 22k sq ft leisure facilities
	Piccadilly Plaza, Phase B	Bruntwood Estates	424		FPPG	2nd phase of redevelopment/refurbishment of 1960s hotel, office and retail, to give 124k sq ft additional retail floorspace. 1st phase complete
	The Triangle	Blackstone Properties	150		U/C	Refurbishment/reconfiguration of shopping centre including internal 'sky bar'
	Royal Exchange	Consortium of private investors	70		Pre-appl	Plans to reconfigure centre.
	Spinningfields	Allied London Properties			Pre-appl	Possible large retail/leisure scheme on part of Spinningfields site (major office developments underway)
Stockport	Great Portwood Street/ Knightsbridge	Morbaine, Kirkland Developments	100	100	OPPG	Retail warehouse development with an element of leisure
	Great Portwood Street	Morbaine	75	75	FPPG	Non-food retail development
	Magistrates Court Site, Warren Street	Morrison Developments	65	60	U/C	Redevelopment of Magistrates Court for 6 units; pre-lets to TK Maxx and JD Sports

a further 1,858 sq m non-food retail unit. This could attract new shoppers to Oldham, alternatively it could attract trade out of the centre. It is important that strong links are developed between the store and the town centre to encourage linked shopping trips.

The other two proposals are even more peripheral to the centre. The Alexandra

Retail Park potentially will offer considerable non-food retail as, to a lesser extent will the Mumps store, if approved. We have concerns that this expansion of comparison shopping whilst broadly within the capacity of the centre, could undermine the confidence of investors in the heart of the town centre.

FPPG - Full planning permission granted
OPPG - Outline planning permission granted
Appl - Planning application being considered
Pre-appl - Pre application discussions
U/C - Under construction



Cultural assessment

As part of the Town Centre Masterplan Comedia have assessed the cultural uses and activities within the town centre. This has tied-in closely with their wider work on the *Oldham Beyond Vision*. Oldham Town Centre has an important role to play as a focus for the cultural life of the borough as well as using culture as part of the transformation of Oldham's image and a driver for its economic future.

Cultural Quarter

Oldham Council is midway through a process of renewal of its main cultural assets within the town centre. The town centre's cultural facilities range from the redundant, through the barely adequate, to the state-of-the-art. As part of this review the principal non-commercial cultural facilities in the town are deliberately being clustered

into one part of the town centre along Union Street through the designation of a Cultural Quarter. This is being undertaken through a four-phase programme described as 'the jewel in the Borough's cultural crown'.

The first phase was completed in February 2002 with the opening of Gallery Oldham, a £9 million facility with three new gallery spaces plus links via a

footbridge to existing galleries in the current library building. Gallery Oldham is prominently located with a striking design and a lively programme of exhibitions, events and educational activities. It has the potential to become the symbol of a new era in Oldham.

There are advanced plans to move the Central Library from its current site on Union Street to a new Lifelong Learning Centre on an adjacent site in the Cultural Quarter. This will be a £22 million Private Finance Initiative and Liverpool-based construction group Kier have been appointed to design and build it. Further phases of the Cultural Quarter will see the building vacated by the library converted into a heritage centre incorporating the museum, local history and archive services. Finally there is a proposal to accommodate the Theatre Workshop, the Lyceum and a new mid-scale venue in a centre for the performing arts.

Venues

The Council's main cultural venue in Oldham Town Centre is the 1500-seat Queen Elizabeth Hall. This was built as the borough's premier concert venue as part



of the Civic Centre development. It used to have a regional reputation as a venue for concerts as well as hosting a range of events and civic functions. The hall became a drain on resources because of rising maintenance costs and falling audiences, partly due to the opening of the Lowry Centre in Salford and the Bridgewater Hall in Central Manchester. The hall was therefore mothballed and future options are being considered by the council.

Nearby, on the Oldham College campus, lies the Grange Arts Centre. This was once a lively and well-known public venue. It remains well-used but this is now principally by students of the College's performing arts and media courses.

It has therefore been suggested as part of our consultations that there is a need for a flexible 500-600 seat venue in the town to cater for concerts and civic events. At present, the only place which can cater for this type of event is St. Mary's Church.

Theatre

The local authority is also responsible for both the Oldham Theatre Workshop and the Oldham Music Service. These are well

respected services providing a dynamic programme of education and training predominantly for young people. They are located in the Lyceum on Union Street.

Aside from Council provision, the main cultural facility in the town centre, and indeed the borough as a whole, is the Coliseum. This is a repertory theatre with a good reputation within the region for producing a lively and popular programme. A much-loved venue off Yorkshire Street is now approaching the end of its life and is proving an impediment to progress both technically and in audience development.

The Coliseum have therefore been exploring the feasibility of creating a new home for the theatre and we have been in discussion with the theatre and their consultants as part of this study. They commissioned an initial feasibility study in 2003 which looked at three sites in the town centre, the car park next to the Library in the Cultural Quarter, the Queen Elizabeth Hall and the Old Town Hall. The former was seen as poorly located for their audience and the Queen Elizabeth Hall was not suitable for a theatre. The theatre has therefore pursued

a scheme for the Old Town Hall and have appointed Allen Tod Architects to develop a feasibility study. This potentially conflicts with the plans of the shopping centre owners and as part of this strategy we have sought to resolve this situation. It is clear that a new home for the Coliseum is vital to the future of Oldham.

One other significant performance venue in the town centre is The Castle, a privately owned live music venue/pub on Union Street, with a good regional reputation and the recent beneficiary of an ERDF-supported refurbishment.

Creative business

There is limited presence of creative industries development activity in the town centre, though this has recently been addressed by the opening of a 17-place Creative Business Incubator within Oldham Business Management School and it is hoped that this will be a spur for further managed workspace development.

Creative activities

The town centre is used for outdoor cultural activity throughout the year, particularly in High Street and Market Place, but there is nowhere that is adequately designed, equipped or promoted as a space for large-scale public assembly. Popular annual events include the Festival Oldham and the Rickshaw Grand Prix. There is a feeling that the number and intensity of town centre cultural activity has declined from what it was a decade ago, although in 2003 for the first time Oldham played host to the national Urban Music Seminar. There is some use of sculpture, murals and other forms of public art in the town centre, but nothing that is very memorable, or that compares with towns that have used public art imaginatively.



Transport assessment

As part of the Town Centre Masterplan WSP have undertaken a review of access to the centre by car and public transport. This concentrates in particular on parking within the centre because of the importance of this to the success of a centre like Oldham.

Private Car

Oldham Town Centre is highly accessible by car, being close to M62 Junction 20 and M60 Junctions 21 and 22. Much of the traffic accesses the town centre from the A62 Oldham Way at its junctions at Manchester Street, King Street and the Mumps. These junctions cater for traffic approaching from the M62 via the A627 (M), from Manchester via the A62, from Ashton via the A627 and from Huddersfield and Ripponden via the A62 and A672. Only shorter distance traffic from origins in the north of the borough and to the south

of the M62 tends to access the town centre from St Mary's Way via routes such as the A671 Rochdale Road.

Bus

Oldham Town Centre is also well served by buses, with frequent services in the weekday am peak between the town centre and the adjoining local centres. Quality bus corridors have been introduced or are under construction between Oldham Town Centre, Royton, Rochdale, Lees and Austerlands. Bus routes through the town centre are shown on the map on the follow-

ing page. The new bus station is located immediately to the north west of the town centre adjacent to the Civic Centre and the Market Hall. The facility is well located and has proved to be short of capacity for the volume of services that wish to use it. As a result there are proposals to expand the bus station into West Street. The former bus station is still in use as a stopping point, and there is a further bus terminus at the eastern end of the town centre at Mumps. There are additional bus stops on St. Mary's Way, Lord Street, Yorkshire Street and Union Street. The ample provision of bus stop facilities throughout the town centre ensures that passengers are able to access services close to their desired destinations.



Rail/Metrolink

Oldham Town Centre is currently served by the Manchester - Oldham - Rochdale line (the loop line) with stations at Mumps and Werneth. The stations are somewhat remote from the town centre and are severed from it by Oldham Way. The proposal to convert the loop line to Metrolink and run the tram on-street through the town centre along Union Street will dramatically improve accessibility and encourage better use of its facilities at all times.

The Oldham and Rochdale line is one of three extensions to Metrolink included in the Phase 3 contract. GMPTE are currently considering tenders from two consortia who are bidding to design, build, operate and maintain the extended system. It is anticipated that a preferred bidder will be selected in the summer of this year. GMPTE expects that the construction period will be in the region of five to six years. However, it is not possible to foresee how the concessionaire will want to progress the construction of the works - either simultaneously or, in sequence, line

by line. Thus some lines may be finished sooner than others and the programme for the Oldham line within the overall construction period is not currently fixed.

Powers are in place to construct the line through the town centre and along the railway line. It is not clear if both on-street and the existing loop line will be used or just the on-street route. With the town centre route, the existing railway bridge, station and bus stops at Mumps would be replaced by a high quality, ground level bus and tram interchange. A new on-street station at Westwood would also replace the Werneth rail station. Between these two stations three additional on-street stations will be provided - Central, King Street and Manchester Street. The Central station is located on Union Street outside the new Sainsbury's superstore and will involve the closure of the street to all traffic except trams between Peter Street and Clegg Street.

The team evaluated a range of alternatives to the route down Union Street, and, for example, there would be benefits

from a route past the College and out to the hospital. However, as the Metrolink is fundamental to repositioning Oldham within the North West, we believe that it is important to implement the current proposals as rapidly as possible. If the tram were to continue to run along the other side of Oldham Way, it would be cut off not only from the expanding town centre shopping facilities, but also from new housing proposed to the North of the town centre, so that ridership would be reduced. It would also make it difficult to realise the development potential of the sites on either side of the railway line.

Car Parking

Good quality car parking provision is very important to the vitality and viability of Oldham Town Centre. The parking needs to be plentiful, accessible, secure, user-friendly, and reasonably priced if Oldham is to compete successfully with Bury, Rochdale, Manchester City Centre and the Trafford Centre. The location of off-street



and on-street parking provision in the town centre is shown on the plan and further details of capacities and charges are included on the accompanying schedule.

Shoppers' parking is reasonably well catered for in the Spindles and Town Square shopping centre car parks, but there is an issue with the volume of commuter parking and the level of supply. The Hobson Street multi-storey car park, which accommodates a large number of commuter pass-holders currently, has only 550 of its 700 spaces available for use due to the closure of its upper floors. Commuter parking also takes place on the Radcliffe Street car park adjacent to the Civic Centre.

Access to the car parks is gener-

ally good but signing could be improved. With the exception of Hobson Street the quality of the car parks is also generally good. The two shopping centre car parks are 'secured by design' and the town centre CCTV system covers a number of the off-street car parks. Reference has been made to the Lockwood Survey of 2002 to compare car access, quality of public transport and car parking provision in Oldham with Bury and Rochdale, the two closest other sub regional centres.

The measures of performance are scaled from -10 to +10 ranging from poor through to very good. Car access is based on a combined score taking into account access, parking information systems,

direction signing and space information. Quality of public transport is based on a combined score taking into account journey times, convenience to main shopping area, availability of evening/weekend services and coverage of rural areas. Short stay parking is based on a combined score taking into account number of spaces, level of maintenance, cleanliness and lighting, and conflict with commuter parking. Against these indicators Oldham is rated good/very good and overall rates better than Bury but worse than Rochdale.

More detailed information about car parking is also included in the survey, although results are only available for Bury. A star rating system is devised based on:



	Car Access	Quality of Public transport	Short Stay Parking (Quantity and Quality)
Oldham	7	8	8
Bury	5	10	7
Rochdale	10	10	9

- ▶ The number of convenient spaces available (within 5 minutes walk of principal shopping streets) compared with gross retail floorspace
- ▶ Convenient spaces as a percentage of total spaces used by shoppers
- ▶ Percentage of convenient parking which is Pay and Display controlled
- ▶ Percentage of convenient parking which is covered by CCTV or has a secured award

Based on our own research we estimate that Oldham scores 3 stars on the devised scale of nil to seven stars. This puts it in the medium range of performers.

The survey also concludes that for sub regional centres to attract consumer spending, 85% of shoppers' parking should be located within 5 minutes' walk of principal shopping streets and charges of up to £1.75 for 3 hours and £2.50 for 4 hours

are desirable. In Oldham the corresponding figures are 68%, £1.60 and £2.20, suggesting that whilst a greater number of convenient spaces would be desirable the existing charges are set at an appropriate level.

The Borough Council are currently out to tender and are seeking to enter into a contract with a Parking Plus partner by the middle of this year. One of the key reasons for this is the recognition that the parking service in Oldham will require significant capital investment to develop over the next ten years.

The specification for the Parking Plus contract is wide-ranging and many aspects could have significant impact on the revitalisation of the town centre. The requirements include:

- ▶ Extension of car parking stock
- ▶ Refurbishment and maintenance of current stock
- ▶ Review of pricing strategy
- ▶ Promotion of short stay usage
- ▶ Emphasis on quality and convenience

- ▶ Preparation of strategy for Park and Ride in conjunction with GMPTE
- ▶ Consideration of seamless ticketing with public transport services
- ▶ Promotion of security and safety initiatives
- ▶ Direction and variable message signing
- ▶ Upgrading and replacement of pedestrian signing
- ▶ Information points and branding at car parks.

The Council sees the partner becoming a key player in the economic regeneration of the borough over a prolonged period. While improving quality is important, a balance needs to be struck with making the car parking affordable enough to attract cost-conscious shoppers from passing by. The introduction of a Smart Card as part of proposals for 'seamless ticketing' would enable charges to be tailored to the ability to pay, and also would help to promote car park utilisation at off-peak times once other measures are introduced to upgrade the centre.

3

Exploring Oldham



In the previous section we looked at the functions of the town centre in terms of its economic and cultural life. In this section we explore the physical structure of the town. This is based on the urban design assessment undertaken by URBED which has included a review of the historic growth of the town, the urban structure today and its townscape quality.





The growth of Oldham

URBED have undertaken an urban design assessment of the town centre. This has included a review of the historic growth of the town, the urban structure today, townscape, and movement.

History of the town

URBED's approach to urban design starts with a rediscovery of the historic structure of the town. We have therefore dug back into the history of the town. As we describe in the *Oldham Beyond* Vision, before the Industrial Revolution Oldham was little more than a hamlet based around a junction on the Manchester to Huddersfield road. This is quite different to places like Bury and Rochdale which had been market towns since Roman times. Oldham was huddled around the medieval St. Mary's Church on a hill top next to the road. This was redeveloped in 1824 when Oldhamers rejected a scheme by Charles Barry in

favour of the church which stands today - designed by Richard Lane and built for £30,000 (when the original budget had been £5,000!).

Oldham remained small during the early years of the Industrial Revolution. However in the second half of the 19th century it grew into the preeminent mill town in the world. This it achieved through technological innovation and investment in education - the Blue Coat School, Mechanics Institute (the Lyceum) and the School of Art and Science. During this time Oldham's population increased from 12,000 in the 1830s to 53,000 in the 1850s and to almost 150,000 by World War One.

During this time the town centre

increased in size but not necessarily in grandeur. The merchants of the town did not willingly spend their great wealth on civic institutions and Oldham Town Centre always lacked the grandeur of towns like Bolton or Huddersfield. The map to the right shows Oldham at this time - at the height of its wealth and power.

The original route into the town (marked in red on the plan) curved its way up the hill to the Parish Church and beyond to Manchester. Yorkshire Street/High Street was built so as to accommodate the greater volume of traffic and remained the main road to Yorkshire until the completion of the Oldham Way. Union Street looks as if it should have been a bypass, but in fact



does not connect back into the Manchester Road. It was instead Oldham's great civic street and it accommodated most of the Victorian institutions shown in black on the plan.

A striking aspect of the 1890 plan is the series of public spaces along Yorkshire Street/High Street (numbered above). Each space is created by road junctions and they feature strongly in the life of the town as witnessed by historic photographs.

- ▶ **1:** The junction of Union Street and Yorkshire Street was one of the points of arrival to the town. It was marked by a grand lamp donated by the Oldham Cooperative Society.
- ▶ **2:** Town Square, outside the Old Town Hall, which was the main place of public assembly in the town and features in

many of the photographs of civic events and political meetings. In urban design terms Town Square is interesting because it is a rectangle with the opposite sides being parallel but it is set at an angle to the streets and on the side of a hill. The space still exists today but the character is lost by the 'look-out' tower of the bus station.

- ▶ **3:** Market Place at the junction of Manchester Road and High Street. This was the original commercial heart of the town and as its name suggests was the location of the Market. It was, however, also a major junction and became clogged with traffic such that through the 1960s it was 'improved' to the point where it was little more than a large traffic island that is remembered with little affection. It was pedestrian-

ised with the completion of Oldham Way but the construction of the Civic Centre and St. Peter's Precinct caused it to become a cold windswept place. This was resolved with the construction of the Spindles Shopping Centre which included the construction of the Rotunda over this public space. While this addressed the climate issues it effectively privatised one of the main public spaces of the town.

- ▶ **4:** The junction of King Street, Rochdale Road and Middleton Road was another arrival point to the town. Apart from the Dog and Duck Pub it is lost today under the traffic junction to the rear of the Magistrates Courts. As we describe later one of our proposals is to recreate this space.



Junction of Union Street and Yorkshire Street 1900



Town Square 1900



Town Square 1945 showing the statue of Platt. This area is now dominated by the bus station.

Victorian Oldham was therefore a lively, dense town if not quite as grand as some of its neighbours. However, the character of the town is really shaped by what happened in the 1960s and 1970s. For a period during this time Oldham was seen as one of the most forward thinking towns in the country. This was expressed in the ambitions for the town centre captured on the aerial photograph (right). This shows a series of major construction projects:

- ▶ The Ring Road which would take traffic out of the heart of the town.
- ▶ The St. Peter's Precinct which in its day was considered cutting edge but was demolished within 20 years.

- ▶ The St. Mary's estate in the top left hand corner of the picture which was much praised in its day.
- ▶ Out of shot to the left is the Civic Centre designed by Cecil Howitt & Partners slightly later, between 1974-8.

These developments together with other prominent buildings from the era, such as the College, the Hobson Street Car park and the Leisure Centre, have created a very different image for the town. For a while this was very positive - a town that championed the best of modern architecture. However the failure of St. Mary's and the St. Peter's Precinct dented this confidence. This is something that happened across

the country and led to a decade of building which lacked interest and ambition. However, with the completion of Gallery Oldham by Pringle Richards Sharratt, in 2001 there are signs that Oldham is once more seeking to innovate and to lead through quality design.

This history has, however, left Oldham with a mixed character. From within it retains much of the character of a traditional market town, from the west the College and Civic Centre retain a strong echo of 1960s confidence, while the experience of people passing on Oldham Way is of a series of unattractive modern buildings. This has left Oldham without a strong overall identity.



Market Place 1883



Market Place 1940 when it had already
become a road junction



King Street 1890



A figure ground plan of the town centre as it was in 1890



The urban form of the town

The two plans above are figure ground plans of the town from the 1890s (left) and today. These plans dramatically illustrate the changes that have taken place in the urban form and structure of the town over the last century.

A figure ground plan is a map, which shows just the buildings of the town and nothing else. It is a useful tool to illustrate the urban form of the town. In the case of Oldham it shows:

- ▶ Much of the core of the centre along Yorkshire Street and Union Street is still intact. These streets show up clearly on today's plan as does Town Square and routes linking the two streets. The space at the junction of Yorkshire Street and Union Street has, however, been lost.
- ▶ The town was cut off from Glodwick as early as the 1890s by the railway and sidings. It was, however, once much more integrated with the neighbourhoods to the north east and west.
- ▶ The neighbourhoods around the town centre have retained a fairly coherent urban form largely based on terraced housing. These neighbourhoods are relatively distinct from each other as well as being cut off from the centre.
- ▶ There is now a significant 'shatter zone' around the town centre. This shows up as white areas on the plan and follows the route of Oldham Way and to a lesser extent St. Mary's Way. This now cuts the centre off from all of the surrounding neighbourhoods.
- ▶ The topography is an important factor in shaping the town. The oldest part of the centre along High Street and Yorkshire Street has developed on the foot of Oldham Edge with land falling steeply away to the south and east.



Left: A figure ground plan of the town centre today

Below: The topography of the town centre

Furthermore the figure ground plan helps in dealing with three important issues:

The density of development

Most successful urban areas are built up densely, shown by the area of black on the plan. Large open areas sometimes relate to parks and public spaces, but more often relate to vacant sites or areas where the urban

form has been damaged by infrastructure such as major roads.

The two plans show a huge decrease in the density of the town centre since 1900. This is partly due to the clearance of some of the poorest courtyard housing. This has led to a significant reduction in the number of people living in and around the town centre. It also relates

to significant gaps in the built fabric particularly around the edge of the centre. This means that the centre became an island in a sea of ill-defined space.

Enclosure of space

Good urban spaces and streets are almost always framed by buildings so that they also show up on the figure ground plan. On the 1890 plan, virtually every street and square of the town can be picked out clearly. This is true only of Yorkshire Street, High Street and Union Street on the 2000 plan. In terms of urban form all of the streets to the west of the centre, such as King Street, Manchester Road and Middleton Road cannot be seen on the plan. The same is true of the Mumps area.

The grain and variety of buildings:

The intricacy of the plan is an indication of the variety and interest in the buildings of the town. In attractive urban areas there tends to be a rich variety of buildings built at different times by a range of developers and this shows up on the plan as a great variety and intricacy.

There is again a significant contrast between the two plans. The 1890 plan is an intricate web of thousands of buildings whereas today's plan is dominated by the large structures like the shopping centre, the College and the Civic Centre.



Right: A land use plan of the town centre showing the fine-grained uses in Yorkshire Street and Union Street but the poor mix of uses elsewhere in the centre.

Facing Page top: Character areas in the town centre

Facing Page bottom: The townscape and listed buildings of the town centre



Land uses and character

The previous pages have looked at the urban form of the centre. This, however means nothing without activity. We describe here the land uses of the town centre and the character of its different parts.

Land use

It is important to look at the uses as well as the form of the town centre. The land use plan above shows very starkly the land-use separation that has taken place in the centre. The core of the town from the shopping centres to Tommyfield is exclusively retailing, to the west of this is entirely administration and the college, and the surrounding areas are almost entirely housing. A mix of uses is important in a town centre because it leads to activity

throughout the day and a feeling of variety, interest and safety. It takes time for a mix of uses to develop and it is striking that the most mixed parts of the town are the oldest sections on Yorkshire Street and a small area on Manchester Road. The main uses missing from the centre are housing and restaurant and leisure uses.

Character areas

These land uses combine to create a series of character areas in the town centre as

shown on the plan above right and described below:

The High Street: Oldham's original High Street retains much of its character, and this whole area retains much of the feel of a traditional market town.

The shopping centre and the market:

The area between the shopping centres and Albion Street has a weaker character. It includes more recent buildings, from the concrete Yorkshire Bank to the glass-fronted Woolworths. Many of the recent buildings are conservative in design, built of red brick with traditional detailing. The effect is an area that is undistinctive. This has been improved by the recent public realm works on High Street and the public art of Albion Street.

Civic/education area: The area to the west of the town has lost all of its urban structure. The College buildings and Civic Centre are isolated by grass and highways. This area has fine views but does not feel part of the town centre.

Union Street: This was always the grandest street in Oldham with a series of institutional uses and offices. The street is straight and the buildings are larger which gives it a 'city feel'. The character of Union Street has just about survived, although there are gaps in the urban fabric. The Cultural Quarter, including Gallery Oldham, currently operates as a court off Union Street.

Southern Fringe: The area between Union Street and Oldham Way is a rag bag of buildings. There are some good recent buildings but the impression is of an area that presents its back to Oldham Way.

Northern Fringe: The northern part of the centre is also separated from its surroundings. The town centre turns its back on the surrounding housing, the Leisure Centre and the Market.

Mumps: Mumps once operated as a separate village and was later the 'posh' end of the shopping route through the town. The area is now dominated by the Mumps Roundabout and there is little character or form remaining. The exception to this is the former Bank building that creates a strong landmark in this part of town.

Built heritage

The plan to the right shows the built heritage of the town. This shows Oldham to have



relatively few listed buildings, most are concentrated in the area from the Parish Church to the Museum, which is also a conservation area. The main landmarks in the town are the tower of the Parish Church and the Civic Centre, although the chimneys that form such a striking part of the town centre in the panorama in Gallery Oldham no longer exist.

There are some very good street vistas in the town, shown with arrows on the plan: some of the routes between Yorkshire Street and Union Street are particularly fine. However the most striking aspect of the town centre are the views over the area to the south east and west. These are shown as the angles on the plan.

Right: A public realm plan of the centre contrasted to a similar plan of Guildford below (including arrows showing pedestrian flow).



Public realm

The previous two sections have looked at the buildings of the town centre. Equally important is the space between the buildings or the public realm of the town. This includes the streets and open spaces of the town centre.

Public Realm

The plan above is a public realm plan of the town centre. This is a plan that shows all of the area where the public have access. In a traditional urban area, like Guildford inset above, the public realm does two things. The first is that it creates a large number of routes for people to walk through the town (permeability). On the other hand it takes up only a small part of the land area. This means that the public realm is contained by the public 'fronts' of buildings, and the

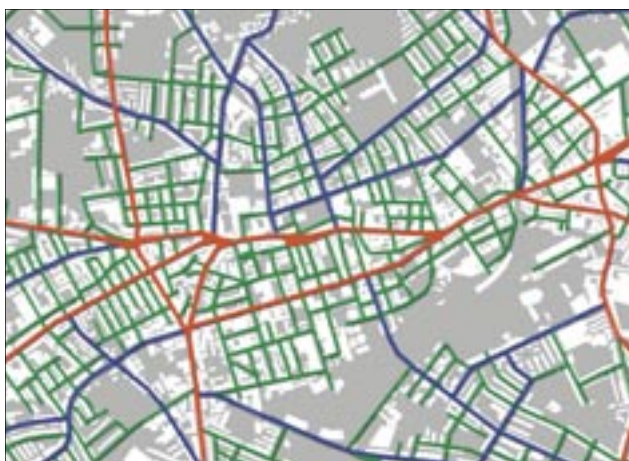
private 'backs' face into the courtyards. This makes for an attractive public realm because the backs of buildings are often unattractive. It also helps security because the backs also tend to be more vulnerable. We can contrast this to the main plan above which shows the public realm of Oldham. This shows that there are quite large parts of the town centre through Mumps and along Union Street where the public realm is largely intact, despite the damage that has occurred to the built stock. However, elsewhere in the centre,

particularly around the College, Civic Centre and along St. Mary's Way, the public realm covers much of the land area and is poorly defined. The plan also emphasises the large 'shatter zone' area along Oldham Way.

Street network

The second aspect to public realm is permeability. How easy it is to move around the town centre? The extent of the public realm, might be expected to lead to very good permeability. However, this is limited by highways and fences and it tends to be the more traditional places with smaller public realms that are easier and more pleasant to move around.

There are many aspects to



The streets of the town centre in 1890



The streets of the town centre today

movement. Movement by car is clearly very different to movement on foot and there has been a tendency for the last 30 years to limit car movement and to separate it from pedestrians. This has tended to make pedestrian movement less pleasant because it is pushed onto bridges and into underpasses. In general all but the most busy shopping streets tend to benefit from being used by both cars and pedestrians.

The two plans above show the street network of the town. The plan on the left shows the street network in 1890 and is coloured to indicate the hierarchy of streets from the main high streets through the secondary streets, to the local streets in green. While it highlights the disconnection of the centre from Glodwick, it shows how well connected the centre once was to the rest of the town.

The plan to the right shows the town centre today. The yellow streets are used by people and traffic, the brown streets are pedestrianised and the red routes are the malls within the shopping centre. If we compare the number of yellow routes connecting the town centre to those

on the 1890 plan we can see how disconnected the centre has become. This means that people walking in and around the centre tend to do so on pedestrian-only routes such as the Oldham Way underpasses that tend to feel unsafe.

Open space

The other aspect of the public realm of the town is open space, as illustrated on the plan below. This shows that there is very little open space in the town centre other than

St. Mary's churchyard. The area of greenery around the Leisure Centre is rarely used except for hot sunny days. There is some attractive landscaping to the west of the shopping centre and while this is well used in summer it is cut off by the blank wall of the shopping centre. The College also has no space for outdoor recreation. The most striking features of the plan, however, are Oldham Edge to the north and Alexandra Park to the south. These link the edges of the town to open countryside and are an under-exploited asset in the town centre.



Open space in the town centre

4 Revealing Oldham



In which we draw together the conclusions from the research described in the last section with the extensive consultations that we have undertaken as part of the study. We use these findings to assess what it is that is holding Oldham back, to look at its strengths and from these to set out the strategic themes that should underlie the town centre strategy.

Strengths and weaknesses



While there are problems that currently prevent the town centre from realising its full potential, the picture to emerge from our work is by no means all gloom – there are many positive features that form a firm foundation for regeneration which can be built on through this masterplan.

Retail

Oldham Town Centre is surrounded by a dense, if not particularly affluent catchment area, but it currently captures only about a third of the available spending power, with a considerable amount of spending leaking to other areas. There is therefore a significant opportunity to capture more of this spending to the benefit of the town centre and the borough.

The centre's strengths include:

- **Compact and bustling:** The heart of the shopping centre bustles with life particularly on High Street and Albion

Street. On a market day in particular there is a real buzz and bustle about this area. One of the aims of the masterplan should be to spread this area of vitality.

- **Dense Catchment area:** There are a large number of people living within easy reach of the town centre. Excellent road and bus connections make it easy for these people to reach the centre so that if the attractions are right, the number of people using the centre could be increased dramatically.
- **Pedestrianised Streets:** The recent environmental improvements on High

Street have been completed to a very high standard and create a shopping environment as good as any of the other Greater Manchester centres. There is scope to extend these improvements throughout the centre.

- **Tommyfield Indoor Market:** The indoor market in Oldham is a tremendous asset to the town centre and compares favourably with any market in the North West. This is one of the main pillars of the town centre and could increase its attractiveness with the revival of the outdoor market.



However, the town centre also has a number of weaknesses with regard to retailing:

- ▶ **Gaps in the retail offer:** A number of retailers are missing from the centre, the most notable being Marks and Spencer. It also lacks many of the fashion retailers that are to be found in similar centres across Greater Manchester.
- ▶ **Limited shopping area:** There were once a number of department stores at the Mumps end of Yorkshire Street. Now that these have gone the shopping offer is largely confined to Spindles and Town Square Shopping Centres and their immediate surroundings.

This means that much of the shopping activity is hidden away inside the two complexes, and retail activity dies off very quickly outside the small core area.

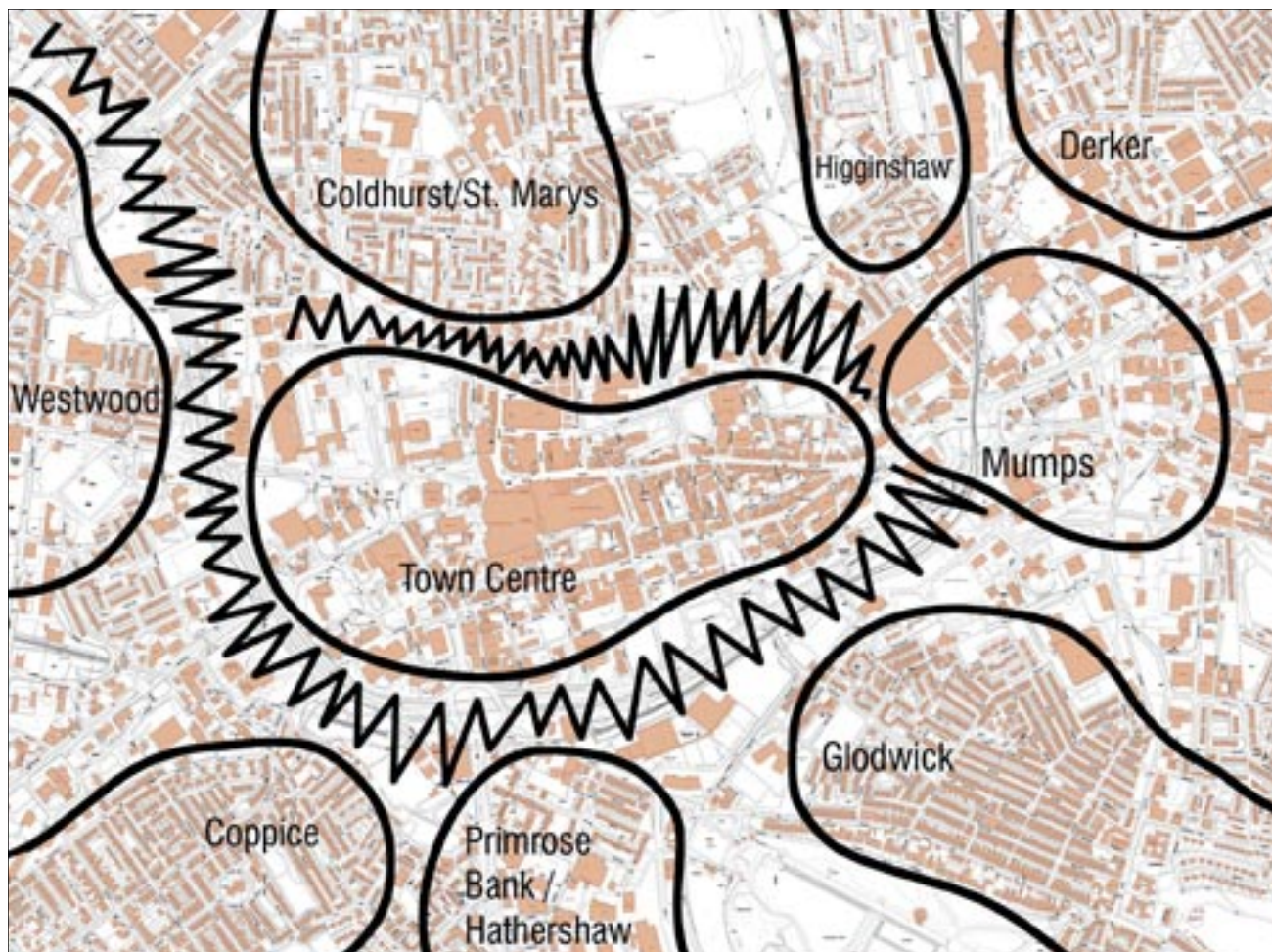
- ▶ **Lack of suitable accommodation:** A lack of retail demand means that rentals and values are low, which in turn has resulted in little new floor space being built. The lack of available space, particularly the larger units demanded by modern retailers, makes it difficult for them to find suitable space in the town centre.
- ▶ **Declining outdoor market:** In market towns the outdoor market plays an important role in attracting trade to

the town. Tommyfield market days are Monday, Friday and Saturday and while these are still busy, the outdoor market is not the attraction that it once was.

Access

The access audit shows that Oldham Town Centre is well connected by road and public transport. This is vital if it is to compete with the attractions of Manchester, or the free parking of the Trafford Centre. In this respect the strengths of the town centre are:

- ▶ **Road access:** Access by car to Oldham is easy. It is a matter of minutes off both the M62 and M60 and is therefore potentially easily accessible to a huge catchment population.



► **Parking:** WSP's work has shown there to be ample shoppers' parking around the town centre, particularly in the shopping centre car parks. There is a need to ensure that the number of shopper places is maintained and improved as part of the strategy, possibly by redesignating some of the commuter spaces.

► **Public transport:** More than a third of people coming into the centre arrive by bus. There is a large number of bus services and the bus station is conveniently located for the shopping area. The creation of a quality bus corridor will further improve these services.

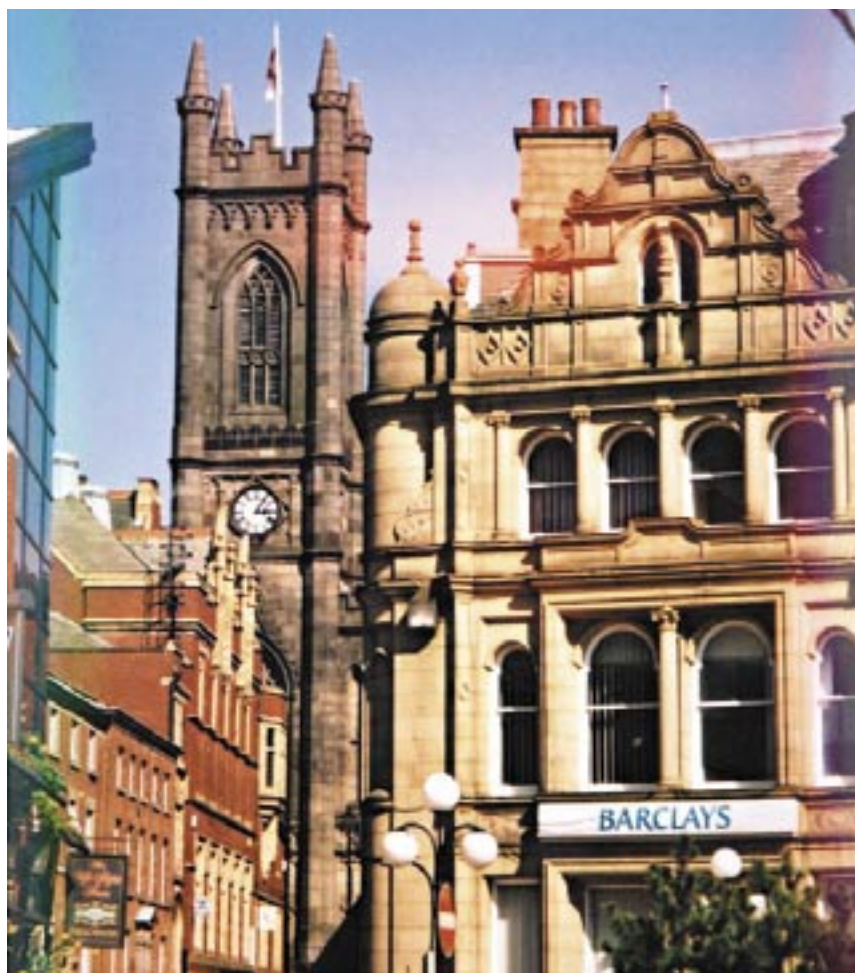
► **Train and tram:** The centre is served by train although the service is infrequent and Mumps station is isolated. The proposed Metrolink will benefit the heart of Oldham in these respects, particularly if the Union Street alignment is adopted, putting Oldham more firmly on the Greater Manchester transport map.

There are however weaknesses relating to access in the town centre:

► **Internal links:** The town centre has fractured into disconnected areas. Mumps was once an integral part of the centre and now feels isolated. The same is increasingly true of the College

and there is even a degree of disconnection between the centre and the Cultural Quarter. This means that the uses that exist in the town centre do not feed off and reinforce each other but operate in isolation.

► **External links:** The town centre is also isolated from the surrounding neighbourhoods, particularly to the south and west. The ring road and railway line create formidable barriers despite the excellent footbridges that have been created. This is compounded by dead space around much of the centre meaning that there is little walk-in trade from surrounding neighbourhoods.



- **Lack of activity:** This disconnection makes the retail activity within the shopping centres and the leisure activity on Yorkshire Street feel like islands of vitality. This causes parts of the centre to feel unsafe and unwelcoming which, in turn, discourages pedestrians, further heightening the feeling of insecurity.

Environment

The town centre retains the character of an attractive market town in places. The recent environmental works on High Street have brought great improvements to the shopping environment and the heart of the town

around the St. Mary's Church is very attractive. This, however, contrasts with the image that Oldham projects to people passing through on the Oldham Way. A combination of some unsympathetic modern buildings, surface car parks and vacant sites project a much less attractive image. The centre's environmental strengths are:

- **St. Mary's Church:** The town centre is dominated by the Parish Church, which stands above much of the town. The distinctive silhouette of the church tower is a prominent landmark and creates some of the best views in the centre.

- **High Street:** Both Yorkshire Street and Union Street have the potential to be important and attractive high streets through the town. Both streets retain a strong degree of spatial enclosure and have a number of attractive buildings. There is the potential to improve the public realm of Yorkshire Street.

- **Historic side streets:** There are some excellent minor streets particularly Church Lane, Church Terrace and Bow Street - which was the original route before Yorkshire Street was built. There is also a series of attractive streets between Yorkshire Street and Union Street, such as Queen Street.



► **Views:** Oldham is unique in having dramatic views from the town centre. This includes views over the Cheshire Plain to the south and west and eastwards towards the Pennines. This gives Oldham Town Centre a real sense of drama and connection to the moors.

► **Green links:** The town centre also benefits from links to Alexandra Park to the south and Oldham Edge to the north. It is possible to walk within 10 minutes from the heart of the town centre to these very different but dramatic open spaces, which makes it potentially an attractive place to live.

The environmental weaknesses of the town centre include:

► **Prominent vacant buildings:** The key building in this respect is the Old Town Hall, which was seen by many people

in our consultations as a blight on the town centre. Other important vacant historic buildings include the Bank in Mumps and the Park Road Warehouse on the fringe of the town centre.

► **Unwelcoming gateways:** The unwelcoming zone around the town centre creates poor quality gateways. The sense is of a wasteland area, cut through by Oldham Way and with views of the back of the town centre.

► **Unsympathetic modern buildings:** There is considerable debate about the value of the Civic Centre, which dominates the town centre. This is regarded by some as a fine example of civic architecture of the period but it is not well loved. More important when it comes to impressions of the town centre are buildings like the Pennine Way Hotel, Hobson Street car park, Mecca Bingo,

the Police Station and the Law Courts. These all combine to give the impression of a concrete, 1960s new town, which is at odds with the more historic character of the centre of the town.

► **Lack of focus:** There is currently no central civic square or focus other than the constrained space outside the Old Town Hall and the square in front of the Queen Elizabeth Hall, which has now been turned over to a car park.

Mix of uses

Modern town centres must be more than just shopping centres. They need to accommodate leisure uses, employment, services and housing if they are to be robust and to retain their vitality and viability. The main non-retail uses in Oldham include the Civic Centre, the College and the evening economy of Yorkshire Street



and the cultural facilities such as the Coliseum as well as the new gallery and cultural quarter:

- ▶ **Performance:** One of Oldham Town Centre's great strengths is performance. This includes the Theatre Workshop, The Castle Venue, Peskar productions, the Grange Arts Centre and the Oldham Coliseum. The Coliseum is a theatre with a regional reputation and standing as the most successful theatre in the UK at attracting a working class audience.
- ▶ **Gallery Oldham:** The newly completed gallery is an excellent facility. There is the potential to use this as part of the expanding Cultural Quarter to give Oldham a much higher cultural profile.
- ▶ **The Lyceum:** The Music Service's activity in the Lyceum is another im-

portant town centre asset with potential for development.

- ▶ **The Chronicle:** The Oldham Chronicle is one of the few remaining independent local papers and is an important institution within the town with the potential to play a wider cultural role.
- ▶ **Animation:** There has been a strong tradition of activities and festivals in the town centre as described in the cultural assessment. While there has been a recent lull in this activity there is the potential to develop and expand events.
- ▶ **Education:** One of the greatest strengths of the town centre is the number and vitality of educational institutions. These include the College, the Business Management School, the Sixth Form College, Bluecoat School and Grange School. The expansion

and development of these activities, especially with the University College is an important opportunity for the town centre.

- ▶ **Lively nightlife:** For people of a certain age, Oldham's great attraction is the vitality of its nightlife. This attracts up to 6,000 people to Yorkshire Street on a weekend evening and is an important part of the town centre economy.

However, the mix of uses in the town centre has a number of weaknesses:

- ▶ **Limited evening economy:** The evening economy is dominated by alcohol, which is successful at the expense of other activities such as restaurants, café-bars and family entertainment.
- ▶ **Few leisure uses:** There are few



leisure uses in the town centre. The Mecca Bingo and all of the town centre cinemas have closed down so that there is little to attract a broader range of people into the town.

- **Lack of cultural critical mass:** There are a range of excellent cultural attractions in the town centre including Gallery Oldham, the Coliseum, the Lyceum and the Grange Arts Centre. Yet they do not operate together to create a critical mass of attractions in the centre that could attract more visitors.

- **Employment:** Apart from the council there are few major employers in the town centre. An increase would posi-

tively impact on the number of people around at lunchtime and after work.

- **Housing:** There is no housing within the town centre and the housing around the centre is dominated by social housing. As a result there are very few people around in the centre outside shopping hours.

Image

The constraints outlined above have conspired to create a poor image for Oldham Town Centre, both among those who use the town centre and those who pass it by on Oldham Way. The dramatic views are countered by exposure to the wind and rain

which has led consultees to suggest more covered shopping space. It is also seen as rowdy, particularly on weekend evenings in Yorkshire Street. While this is being addressed by the council and the police it has caused many groups, including families, older people and ethnic minorities to stay away. This has in turn impacted on evening economy uses such as restaurants and family based leisure that are lacking in the town centre.

However, Oldham Town Centre's strength is that it is the genuine article, a working class town with a historic centre that remains a strong focus for the people of the town (if not the borough), and has the potential for significant revitalisation.

5 Redefining Oldham



The analysis in the previous section has shown that, while Oldham Town Centre has many problems and is under-performing with regard to its potential, the fundamentals are relatively strong. There is real potential to make Oldham, once more, one of the premier town centres in Greater Manchester.

In the following sections we set out a masterplan designed to achieve this. However, this needs to build on a clear understanding of the roles that the town centre will play and the vision for its future. We are proposing that this should be based on a series of themes described in the following pages:

1. A community hub
2. An integrated heart to the borough
3. A creative environment
4. A good place to shop
5. A centre of learning
6. A broad range of attractions
7. A place to come home to
8. A good place to do business



A community hub

The town centre will be a place where the communities of Oldham feel welcome and at ease, where they express their pride in the town and celebrate its success, where they shop, play, work and relax.

The difference between a town centre and a shopping centre is that the former is first and foremost a focus for the people of the town. It is the place where people meet, where they go to receive help relating to a council service, where they go for entertainment, as well as where they go to shop. It is also the place where the communal life of the town takes place, be it celebrating the success of the Latics, switching on the

Christmas lights or demonstrating against a war. This is potentially the great appeal of a town centre like Oldham – it is large enough to be a lively community hub but not so large as to be impersonal and intimidating.

This has a particular importance in Oldham because of the tensions that there have been within the town. As Comedia's work on *Oldham Beyond* has illustrated, the communities of Oldham want

interaction, rather than full integration. This will only happen if there is common ground, not 'owned' by any community, where this interaction can take place. As part of the vision we would hope that we can create a range of places in the borough where this interaction can take place. However the most important of these 'zones of exchange and understanding' will be the town centre.

► Public realm improvements:

It is important to create a safe, welcoming public network of streets and spaces through the town. This we have developed through the idea of three corridors: the 'Golden Road' running east-west from Featherstall Road to Mumps, the 'Green Walk' running north-south from Oldham Edge to Alexandra Park, and the 'Boulevard' along the ring road. Each of these is designed to reclaim public realm for the community.

► A place of assembly:

A newly configured place of public assembly, celebration and demonstration, where it always was in the past in front of the Old Town Hall. This could include the restoration of the statue of Platt in its original position and could be achieved as part of the development of the shopping centre.

► Celebratory events:

A vigorous programme of activities and events that animate and emphasise these public routes and spaces. These include existing activities such as the Rickshaw



Derby, the Mela, music festivals, street theatre, carnival etc. As part of the study there have been a range of meetings with cultural organisations willing to collaborate on these events. The need is for support and funding to allow these to flourish with the aim of having an event per month throughout the year.

► A concentration of public uses:

The strategy of making the town centre a community hub should influence the location of new facilities. Facilities serving the whole town (the borough is a different issue that is dealt with in the overall vision) should be located in the town centre. This includes private sector facilities such as the Roxy as well as public facilities such as the Leisure Centre and College. We also suggest that new youth facilities should be located in the centre where they can be accessed by all communities.

► Telling the history of the town:

An important way to make all people feel ownership and pride in the town centre is

to emphasise the history of the town and its people. The thirst for this is witnessed by the range of books on sale telling the story of Oldham. An important part of this will be the planned museum in the old Library building. There is, however, also scope for interpretation of the 'Oldham Story' in a more public venue such as the blank walls of the Hilton Arcade, as is currently being planned by the Council.

► Team building:

In order to achieve this it is important that the different interests in the town centre work together more effectively. This is happening through the Town Centre Partnership and the BIDs work and should be expanded under the guidance of the Town Centre Manager to bring together retailers, cultural organisations, employers and community representatives with an interest in the town centre to coordinate promotion and animation.

a. Town Square: VE Celebrations in Town Square when the space acted as the focus for the life of the town.

b. Street animation: Street theatre as part of the Streets Ahead festival which started life in Oldham.



An integrated heart

The town centre will be easy to access by public transport, car and on foot and will be a pleasure to walk around on clean, safe and lively streets and public spaces.

Traditional town centres like Oldham have lost trade to out-of-town retailing, largely because of accessibility. People may not necessarily like the soulless uniformity of a retail park but the attractions of being able to drive there and park for free, outweigh their dislikes. Traditional centres, like Oldham, will always struggle to compete on accessibility with these out-of-town facilities. They must instead emphasise their traditional character and the appeal of being a genuine 'rounded' place.

However, if this is going to work it is vital that access is made as easy as possible. In very successful centres like York and Chester, the attraction of the centre is such that measures can be implemented to dissuade car use, such as park-and-ride or even possibly road pricing in the future, without damaging the centre. In a centre like Oldham the same policies would have a disastrous result. Oldham therefore needs car access and parking to be made as easy and affordable as possible.

However, car access is only part of the story. Traditional centres are the main shopping option for the large proportion of people without a car, such as the young and the elderly. It is also the case that people in cars become pedestrians at some point in their journey. Oldham therefore needs to rationalise public transport routes and improve pedestrian linkages so that the town centre becomes a better place to work, shop and play.

► Gateways and bridges:

One aim of the masterplan is to bridge the gap between the town centre and the surrounding neighbourhoods. This is done by creating a series of 'urban bridges' and gateways to provide attractive routes into the town centre. This will encourage people to walk into the town centre as well as improving the walk from car parks.

► Permeable road network:

To the north of the centre the masterplan proposes to reinstate a network of streets to overcome the disconnection currently created by St. Mary's Way. This will create a seamless connection between the centre and the neighbourhoods to the north, particularly with the completion of the St. Mary's housing scheme.

► Boulevarading Oldham Way:

The masterplan proposes the boulevarding of the western and eastern sections of Oldham Way. This is a long term project that will become possible when the railway line is decommissioned with the arrival of Metrolink. It is important to break down the barriers between the town centre and the areas to the south and west but should be done without compromising the capacity of the road.

► Market Arcade:

Improvements to the route between the market and the bus station including environmental improvements, lighting and tree planting.

► Corridors:

Routes through the town centre will be strengthened through the corridors initiative by creating a Green Walk from Oldham Edge to Alexandra Park, and a Golden Road from Featherstall Road to Mumps, as well as the



Boulevard. These initiatives will make the town centre more pleasant to walk around and will reduce the feeling that the welcoming parts of town are isolated islands.

► Safer Streets:

There is a need to extend the area of the town centre that feels safe through lighting, environmental improvements and an extension of CCTV.

► Legible Town Initiative:

Linked to the identity areas described in the next section we are proposing a Legible Town initiative to replace all of the town centre signage and interpretation. This should include maps, finger posts, interpretation, car park signing etc... It should all be done with a distinctive graphic identity and colour scheme and will be an important means of tying the town centre together and projecting a new image.

► Rationalised bus stations:

The expansion of the shopping centre will require the closure of the Clegg Street bus station. Buses should also be taken off the lower section of Lord Street and High Street by reopening the junction of Rock Street by St. Mary's Way. It is also proposed that the



new road access to Sainsbury's be used to complete the bus ring around the town centre as described in WSP's transport paper.

► Metrolink:

The development of Metrolink is vital to the future Vision for Oldham. The impact of the tram on the public transport accessibility of the centre is not huge and the travel times to Manchester will be slightly greater than on the train at present. However, the trams are efficient and frequent and if running along Union Street, will collect and drop off passengers in the very heart of the town. The Metrolink will transform both the real and perceived connectedness of Oldham putting it on the Manchester equivalent of the London 'Tube map'.

► Quality car parks:

As part of the appointment of a managing agent for the town's car parks, there is planned to be a strategy for improving the quality of the town centre's parking. As part of the town centre masterplan around 550 places are lost to development. These however are more than replaced with a new 300 space car park by the market and a series of new car parks in the eastern part of the town centre.

a. Bristol Legible City Initiative: A scheme of signage, boards and interpretation with a common identity, colour scheme and graphic style.

b. Sheffield Tram: The integration of the tram into the centre transforms the feeling of accessibility.



A creative environment

The town centre will be a place which fizzles with creativity from the artists working away in Rhodes Bank to the changing light projections on the side of the Civic Centre. The town will have a regional reputation for challenging art and architecture.

One of the most important strands of the town centre vision is creativity. This builds upon real strengths that already exist in Oldham and is designed to prevent creativity and talent leaking away down the A62 to Manchester or beyond to London. Creativity

should be a theme running through the town centre masterplan from the promotion of the Cultural Quarter, to the encouragement of creative businesses, the animation of streets with events and celebrations, the promotion of theatre and music, the foster-

ing of creativity in the college and the commissioning of quality design and public art. This has huge potential to encourage economic development and change the image of Oldham as has been done through the Creative Town Initiative in Huddersfield.

► Cultural Quarter:

The completion of proposals for the Cultural Quarter including the library and museum. This will provide an important collection of cultural assets that need to be promoted as part of the town centre to encourage their wider use and to promote a more dynamic vision to the outside world.

► Rhodes Bank Creative Quarter:

In the area to the east of the Cultural Quarter we are proposing a district for small cultural producers be they artists, music producers or design companies. The first scheme will be the conversion of a building owned by the Chronicle for workspace. This will act as a spur for further developments similar to the creative quarter in St. Helens.

► New Coliseum:

At the heart of the vision for the town centre is a new home for the Coliseum and Peshkar Productions. The theatre has explored the conversion of the Old Town Hall. While this is an ideal location, we recognise the potential conflict with the desire to expand the shopping centre. We believe that a theatre developed as part of a shopping centre would not fulfil the potential of the Coliseum and Peshkar as a focus for the cultural life of the town. We therefore believe that the Old Town Hall could become part of an expanded shopping centre provided that provision is made for a new-build theatre elsewhere. This should be part of the agreement between



shopping centre owners and the council. This could be part of the Cultural Quarter or alternatively as part of a new family-based evening economy area in the west of the centre. It is the latter that we have illustrated in the masterplan.

► Celebration and events:

The creative town initiative needs to be emphasised and promoted through the monthly programme of celebrations and events described above.

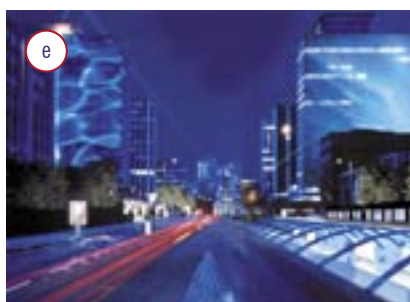
► Statements and gateways:

As part of the *Oldham Beyond* Vision we are proposing a 'regeneration web' of commissions in the heart of each township across the borough. These could include public art,

lighting and new buildings. These projects would be of such quality that they would attract people to Oldham as a form of urban sculpture trail. The town centre is at the heart of this web with the greatest number of projects based around the gateways into the town centre. All new buildings in the town centre should be treated as opportunities for expression and profile, with commissions being undertaken by competition or by using international architects. The masterplan suggests the idea of taller buildings in the centre to exploit views, to complement the Civic Centre and to create a strong image.

► Creative lighting:

In the short term a dramatic transformation can be undertaken with creative lighting and projections. Mills across the borough should be lit as part of a campaign to change the image of Oldham for people passing through the borough. The town centre should be at the heart of this programme with lighting schemes for St. Mary's Church, the Civic Centre tower, the college and other prominent buildings as was done in Croydon.



a. Groningen: A public toilet designed by the world renowned architect Rem Koolhaas in Holland.

b. Town Hall Square Sheffield: A new public space that has helped transform the image of the city.

c. The Centre in Bristol: A public space created along the former route of the ring road through Bristol

d. Warrington: High quality public art and public realm design has transformed the image of the town.

e. Croydon: Creative lighting has been used to transform the image of a 1960s environment.



A great place to shop

Oldham will be the shopping destination of choice for people in the borough and will attract shoppers from further afield because of its range of shops, thriving market and attractive environment.

Even as Oldham Town Centre diversifies, retailing will remain central to its future success. As the retail health check suggested, Oldham is currently not capturing as much of the spending power of its catchment population as it should. There is potential to improve and expand the shopping offer to claim back this spending and this in turn will help improve the image of the town.

King Sturge's research suggests that there is significant interest from retailers wishing to locate in Oldham and because of this the new owners of the shopping centres, Catalyst, have commissioned architects to draw up proposals for expansion. The new Sainsbury's supermarket is now complete and the owners of the Alexandra Retail Park are also exploring a redevelopment scheme. Unlike the Catalyst proposals, these peripheral schemes are less certain in their effect on the town

centre. On the one hand they will increase the retail floor space and pulling power of the town centre drawing more people in. However, they are all peripheral to the centre and based on access from the ring road. There is a danger that they could suck trade out of the centre and that car-borne shoppers will not make linked trips into the heart of the shopping area. This is something that the masterplan must address.

► Shopping centre:

We support the proposal to expand the shopping centres (although we have not seen the detail of a scheme). This is the best prospect for improving the retail centre and it is vital that the council continues to engage constructively with the developers to maximise its potential. The scheme should incorporate the following elements:

- Provision for a new location for the Coliseum so that it no longer needs space in a refurbished Old Town Hall.
- The expansion of the shopping centre eastwards into the Old Town Hall.
- The creation of an arcade on the line of Clegg Street, as in the Victoria Quarter in Leeds (see illustration). This should be a public 24 hour route that will form part of the Green Walk.
- The space in front of the Old Town Hall should be developed as a public square with the possible reinstatement of the Platt statue and the creation of a space for public assembly.
- The replacement of the Rotunda with a light, airy Winter Garden as in Sheffield. This would retain the weather protection provided by the Rotunda but should not be a privatised mall. The glazing should allow for east/west views through the town centre.



- The expansion of the shopping centre westwards onto the site currently occupied by Manchester Chambers. This will allow for an anchor store to be created in the western part of the centre.

► Tommyfield Market:

Tommyfield is an important part of Oldham's retail offer as can be seen from the extra footfall in the centre on market days. However, while the indoor market is successful, the outdoor market is declining. We have looked at a number of options for the outdoor market. One possibility would be to turn it into a street market. This has not, however, worked elsewhere and is likely to lead to the gradual scaling down of the market. We are proposing instead that the open market be redeveloped on the model of Bury Market – one of the few outdoor markets that is currently thriving. This is based on permanent, lock-up stalls with glass canopies over the aisles providing weather protection. The masterplan envisages this market being developed in a courtyard that would be closed on non-

market days, linked to a multi-storey car park and ground floor retailing. This would provide the critical mass needed to sustain and revive the market.

► Street Markets

The revived outdoor market should be combined with specialist street markets such as a Farmers Market. This could also include bric-a-brac, books, plants, and seasonal markets at Christmas, and would take place on Albion Street.

► First Bus Garage:

This site in Mumps is currently the subject of a planning application for a 8,000m² supermarket. This is a constrained site and the proposals are for the store to be built partly over the car park. If this site were to be occupied by one of the large supermarkets, with a range of comparison and convenience goods, it could harm the regeneration of the core of the town by diverting trade to the periphery. We therefore advise great caution with respect to this application.

► Green Walk:

The Green Walk described above has an important role to play in linking together three important retailing elements – Alexandra Retail Park, the new Sainsbury's and the expanded Spindles. There is a danger that the Sainsbury's could further cut off the retail park from the centre and we are suggesting that Clegg Street (which runs through the Sainsbury's car park) should be improved as part of the Green Walk.

- a. **The Victoria Quarter in Leeds:** A modern retail development that could be a model for the future of shopping centres.
- b. **The Winter Garden in Sheffield:** that provides a popular public space as part of a planned shopping scheme.



A Centre for Learning

The educational quarter of the town centre will be thronging with students drawn from the local area and further afield. Students from diverse backgrounds will gradually change the feeling of the centre and build an educated and skilled workforce.

The promotion of education and learning is a central part of the *Oldham Beyond* vision. The growth of post-16 education has brought substantial improvements to the town centre through the Sixth Form College, the College and the Business Management School. The University College plans envisage a further 2,000 students.

This is perhaps the most important initiative in the overall *Oldham Beyond* Vision because of its potential to raise skills and aspirations as well as economic competitiveness. It is also crucial to the regeneration of the town centre, as towns such as Huddersfield or Wolverhampton have shown. The expansion of the College

will benefit the town centre through the town centre-focused spending power of students, the expansion of a vibrant, diverse and demanding community of staff and students, and a transformation in the town's image (often expressed in the architecture of new buildings as at the University of East London in Newham).

Universities that are establishing their identity through striking new buildings:

a. Lincoln University: A recently established town centre university campus based on, the rebranding of the University of Lincolnshire and Humberside as the University of Lincoln.

b. The University of Huddersfield: Which has been working with Oldham College.

c. The University of East London: Recently opened in Newham in a new campus



► **University College:**

The development of the University College is not yet secure (although it looks likely). The *Oldham Beyond* Vision is very supportive of this and sees it as fundamental to the renaissance of the town and the town centre. It will continue the work done to expand the college and to establish the Sixth form College and Business Management School. While this is vital for the success of the borough it will also have a huge impact on the town centre. It will more than double the number of students in the town centre and lead to significant investment. This could be the spur to the transformation of the western part of the centre, as the injection of spending power through students and staff will support retail and leisure uses as well as making the centre feel much more lively. The Council and the NWDA should therefore continue to give the project their full support.

► **Learning Quarter:**

As part of the masterplan we have suggested an education quarter stretching in an arc around the western part of the town centre from Grange School to the Business Management School. This would be a town centre 'campus' in that it would be fully integrated with the rest of the town. It would however also develop its own distinctive identity through the commissioning of distinctive buildings as in the University of East London in Newham. It will also be

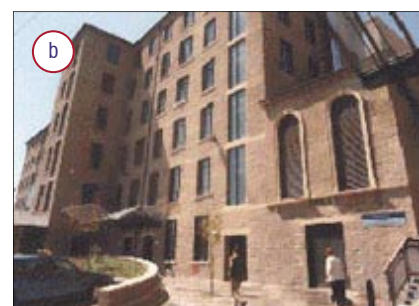
important to create a much clearer and more welcoming public realm in this part of town to encourage students to use the town centre. The identity of the campus should also be emphasised through the Legible City Initiative (described above). Maps, colours and a consistent approach to naming and signposting different areas would be used to convey the fact that all of the educational institutions are part of the same quarter. The next step is to commission a more detailed masterplan for this area taking account of the expansion plans of all of the institutions and engaging key land owners such as Sainsbury's and Mecca Bingo.

► **Grange School:**

It is important that Grange School be considered as part of the learning quarter. Links should be developed with the college and the school should be included in the Learning Quarter masterplan.

► **Coliseum teaching theatre:**

As part of the proposals for the Coliseum, described above, the theatre is interested in establishing the theatrical equivalent of a teaching hospital. The proposed location of the new theatre close to Oldham College and the Sixth Form College would facilitate this and would provide an important bridge between the college and the rest of the town centre. This would help to continue Oldham's tradition of producing successful actors.





A place to play

The town centre will come alive in the evenings with a range of places for entertainment, eating and drinking in a relaxed, friendly atmosphere.

A good town centre is much more than a place to shop, and needs to provide a diversity of attractions throughout the day, into the evenings and at weekends. Oldham's attractions include its shopping, cultural and educational institutions as described above, all of which will broaden its appeal. The other element of a successful town centre is its leisure and recreational role.

In terms of young people, at least from a certain section of the community, Yorkshire Street has long served the function of a place to let off steam and to enjoy yourself at the weekend. Other sections of the community have expressed concern about the boisterous nature of Yorkshire Street for almost as long, as witnessed by stories from the Chronicle going back to

the 19th century. It is important that the town centre strategy maintains the leisure role of Yorkshire Street but it has already been recognised that the negative effects of this drinking culture should not undermine efforts to regenerate the centre. The strategy must therefore seek to tame Yorkshire Street while broadening the range of town centre leisure attractions.



► **Yorkshire Street:**

We have been in discussion with the Council, the Police and licencees about a programme of measures to better manage the night-time economy of Yorkshire Street. A temporary scheme has been put in place which includes the closure of the street in the evenings, a greater police presence, the management of taxis and bus boarding and more cooperation between bars. This is having a positive effect and is to be extended. A package of permanent measures has been identified and is being implemented. Further initiatives should include better lighting, CCTV and physical improvements to the street as set out by WSP.

► **New West End:**

We are proposing to counterbalance Yorkshire Street with a new evening economy area around King Street. This would be based around the new Coliseum (if it decides to locate here), a relocated Roxy Cinema and associated restaurant and café uses. This would create an attractive link between the shopping core and the college and extend the town centre westwards.

► **The shopping centre:**

The expansion of the shopping centres has the potential to widen the attractions of the town centre. This should include the Winter Garden that we have proposed to replace the Rotunda, as described above. It could also include new restaurants and a food

court in the Egyptian Room of the Old Town Hall. An important part of the shopping centre proposals is the creation of Town Square as a new public space at the heart of the town. This would be the interface between the shopping core and the entertainment venues on Yorkshire Street.

► **Asian restaurant area:**

We believe that there is potential within Oldham to create an Asian restaurant area – the ‘Rusholme’ of Oldham. The two most likely locations for this are Union Street and Featherstall Road. We have opted for the latter because of the core of businesses that are already established in the area. This is being looked at as one of the masterplanning studies in the wider

Oldham Beyond vision. An important aspect of the town centre masterplan will be to link this area into the town centre. This is part of the Golden Road corridor proposed through the town centre.

► **Animation:**

The animation and events described above, along with the new public spaces, will also contribute to the breadth and variety of entertainment and leisure in the town centre.

a. Brighton: Which has used its evening economy and diversity (particularly the gay community) to transform its seedy image.

b. Wind Street in Swansea: Formerly the hard drinking road to the docks, now a lively mix of bars, pubs and restaurants.

c. Groningen: Civilising the street through outdoor tables with weather protection.





A place to come home to

Oldham will be an aspirational place to live for people wanting the convenience of a town centre, access to the city via Metrolink, while being within easy reach of the moors.

One of the roles increasingly being played by town centres is as a location for residential development, as described in King Sturge's economic audit. This is likely to be the main growth area in the future and has the potential to animate the town centre throughout the week as well as to create demand for buildings to repair the built fabric of the centre and to overcome the feeling of isolation. The strategy needs to establish a residential market in the town centre and this will initially need a develop-

ment that is sufficiently large to create its own environment.

In other places this has often been the conversion of a mill. However, there are no suitable buildings in central Oldham and a better prospect is the site on the edge of St. Mary's to the north of the leisure centre in what we have called the 'Top of the Town'. It is important that this is an aspirational development that can transform the image of town centre housing in Oldham and we fully endorse the initia-

tive by the council to seek the redesign of this scheme. Beyond this there are also opportunities on sites towards the edge of the town centre on the slopes looking southwestwards over Manchester to expand residential development. We also believe that in the future the Council housing areas up towards Coldhurst will need to be redeveloped. This provides the opportunity in the coming decades to expand residential development in the town centre outwards.



► **Top of the town:**

The development of new housing which is aspirational but affordable can go on the cleared land north of the town centre. This will become the 'poster scheme' for the new residential market in Oldham and so needs to be striking in appearance to attract young buyers who have been priced out of central Manchester.

► **Student accommodation:**

The College currently has no need for student accommodation because it draws students from the local population. This is likely to change as the University College expands and there will come a time when there is a need and demand for student accommodation. This should be explored as part of the learning quarter masterplan described above. We have suggested that it could be accommodated on the upper floors of development in the New West End.

► **Mixed use development:**

We do not see residential accommodation confined to the Top of the Town: there is scope to incorporate housing on upper floors throughout the town centre. Perhaps the best opportunity is in the Rhodes Bank



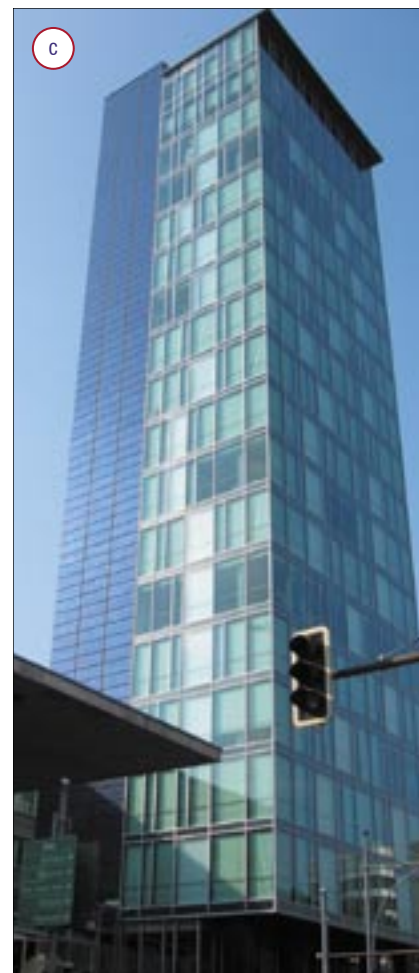
Creative Quarter where housing might include apartments and live/work accommodation for people working in the area.

► **Eco Homes:**

One of the ways of differentiating housing in Oldham Town Centre from anywhere else is to make it environmentally sustainable. This has largely been ignored by developers but there are signs of emerging interest. In a town that is wet and windy, Oldham can use the weather to develop more sustainable housing – for example, through technologies that convert wind into electricity. The opportunity to create distinctive eco-friendly housing could help draw attention to Oldham.



- a. **Freiburg, Germany:** Ecological courtyard housing in Freiburg, an industrial town that has turned itself around through sustainable development.
- b. **The Point in Bristol:** High quality urban housing in a former industrial area
- c/e. **Eco Tower blocks:** These towers are in German towns and incorporate solar panels on part of the facade.
- d. **Amsterdam:** New housing in Amsterdam docks: quite small scale interventions can have a striking impact.





A place to do business

Oldham will be known as a hotbed of talent and enterprise as well as a location where larger organisations can thrive and prosper in a supportive atmosphere.

The town centre is an important focus for the wealth creation activities set out in the *Oldham Beyond* vision. This includes incubators of new business linked to the Business Management School and in the Creative Quarter. It includes the economic activity associated with shopping and the market, as well as the existing employers located in and around the town centre. In

addition to this, as the demand assessment indicated, there is the opportunity to attract significant commercial development to Oldham Town Centre through an in-town business park. This has the potential to provide many of the advantages of an out-of-town development, such as parking and space but within easy reach of all the facilities of the town centre.

The main barrier is the lack of suitable floor space at present, and incentives are needed if the private sector is to have the necessary confidence to bring buildings forward. We are therefore proposing a range of projects that fall within the remit of the Economic Development Zone, but concentrated close enough together to have the necessary critical mass or cluster effect.

a. Depford High Street: Creative mixed-use development in London with flats over workspace and shop units - a possible model for Rhodes Bank.

b-e. Quality design: It is important that the development at Mumps creates a strong statement about confidence in the town. This can be done through striking architecture.

► The Creative Quarter

A series of workspace developments in the Rhodes Bank area could accommodate small creative businesses. These should include managed workspace, serviced units and live/work. The schemes should be basic in their specification and should project a creative image in terms of their design and marketing. The ground floor spaces should be public uses where possible, such as units to sell produce, cafes and galleries.

Early projects should include the music production centre proposed by the Chronicle and the New Roots Production Agency in the former YMCA building. The two other Chronicle Buildings in the area should subsequently be brought forward as creative managed workspace.

► Business School:

The Business School is an important potential source of new businesses in the town and the incubator space that has been created to nurture new business is an important step in encouraging these businesses to grow and stay in Oldham. The next step is to develop move-on accommodation so that these businesses can develop as part of the local economy.

► Mumps Enterprise Area:

The area around the Mumps roundabout should be assembled by the Council working with the NWDA to create the potential



for new business development. This should be developed as an in-town business park through the appointment of a development partner. Once this is done there will be a need to commission a masterplan for the area to create a distinctive identity and gateway to Mumps.

The Council should kick-start the process by moving a council department into the scheme as an initial pre-let. The council should also actively pursue the prospect of a government department relocating to the area.

In order to attract commercial development this area needs to establish a critical mass of activity and a strong public image. We believe that this development is an alternative to the Southlink Business Park, which has been slow in getting established. The plan therefore shows the southern part of Southlink turned over to open space with development concentrated around the Mumps station when this becomes redundant.

► Zones of Exchange:

The development of the Featherstall Road area as an area for Asian business with the conversion of Anchor Mill to a Bazaar and the promotion of retail and restaurant uses (see Third Demonstrator Plan, *The Oldham Net*).



6

Reshaping Oldham



In the previous section we outlined the potential roles that Oldham Town Centre could play in the future, and suggested a range of projects. We now need to put these into a physical masterplanning framework to show how they can shape the town centre and overcome some of the weaknesses described earlier in this report.

We have approached this task at three levels: the overall structure of the town centre; the development of three corridors to link the town centre together and into its surroundings, and a series of quarters to give identity to each part of the centre.

- a. Urban Structure:** A diagram from the Urban Task Force showing the arrangement of cities, towns and neighbourhoods
- b. North East Manchester:** The settlement pattern of North East Manchester which corresponds closely to this model
- c. Proposed Structure:** The proposed structure of Oldham town centre with links made between the centre and the surrounding neighbourhoods



Masterplan structure

The first task is to develop an overall structure for the town centre. One of the main issues is how to bridge the gap that exists around the town centre, which was identified in the 'Revealing Oldham' section above as one of the weaknesses of the town centre.

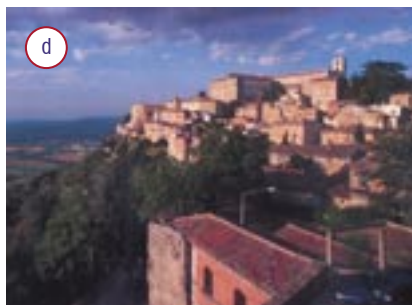
The traditional structure of towns and cities throughout the world is based on a series of routes that converge on the town centre. The density of the town increases towards the centre and around local neighbourhoods. This structure is described in the diagram from the Urban Task Force (a). In this, the main centre would be Manchester and the subsidiary centre (middle) would be Oldham surrounded by its neighbourhoods. The structure of Northeast Manchester (b) is very similar to this ideal. This structure implies

that the density of the town should increase towards the centre. However, as we have shown in the urban design analysis, this is not the case in Oldham which has a large gap around its town centre that disconnects it from its surroundings. This gap is sometimes called a 'shatter zone' and one of the roles of the town centre masterplan should be to either fill or bridge this gap.

In some places it is possible simply to fill the shatter zone with new development. This is what is happening

in some of the larger cities at present with high-density housing developments. The population that this attracts is an important factor in the recovery of these cities. This however is likely to take a considerable time in Oldham because the shatter zone is so large when compared to the limited demand for development. We have, therefore, explored ways of making sense of a situation where a gap around the centre is inevitable in the medium term:

- **Hill town:** One idea that has been tried elsewhere is based on the idea of an Italian hill town (d) which has a 'wall' of development around the edge of the centre and a green 'moat' which separates the centre from the surrounding neighbourhoods. The masterplan for Barnsley town centre is based on this idea and Oldham has an advantage over Barnsley in that it is actually built on a hill! This approach (e) would mean using new development to create a very clear edge to the town centre and then 'greening' the shatter zone.



- d. **Hill town:** A traditional Italian hill town with a clear edge and surrounding greenery.
- e/f. **Structuring options:** Options considered include the idea of creating a hill town.
- g. **Vienna:** The part that encircles the centre of Vienna is a possible model for the Boulevard.
- h. **San Gimignano:** Towers within a hill town can potentially create a dramatic image.



- **Edge Town:** Oldham town centre is in fact on a shelf rather than a hilltop. The land drops down from Oldham Edge to a narrow ledge where the town centre is built before falling away to the south and west. Illustration 'f' is therefore a variation on the Hill Town idea. This creates a strong edge to the south and west while integrating the neighbourhoods to the north.

UK, Harrogate has a similar structure with the 'Stray', a ring of open space around the town centre. The plan on the facing page sets out this structure. It includes the following elements:

- **Gateway town:** These are strong concepts and create a strong sense of arrival into the town - travelling out of the neighbourhoods, through a belt of greenery enclosed by a strong town centre edge. However, it could heighten the sense of disconnection felt by surrounding communities. We have therefore developed a hybrid model (c). This creates a series of 'urban bridges' from each of the surrounding neighbourhoods into the centre.

- **Urban bridges:** It can be unpleasant crossing open space, especially at night. The model therefore includes urban bridges linking to the surrounding neighbourhoods. These would be populated with activity such as housing, cafés and shops so that they feel supervised and safe to use.

- **Landmarks:** A series of landmarks at the points of arrival into the town



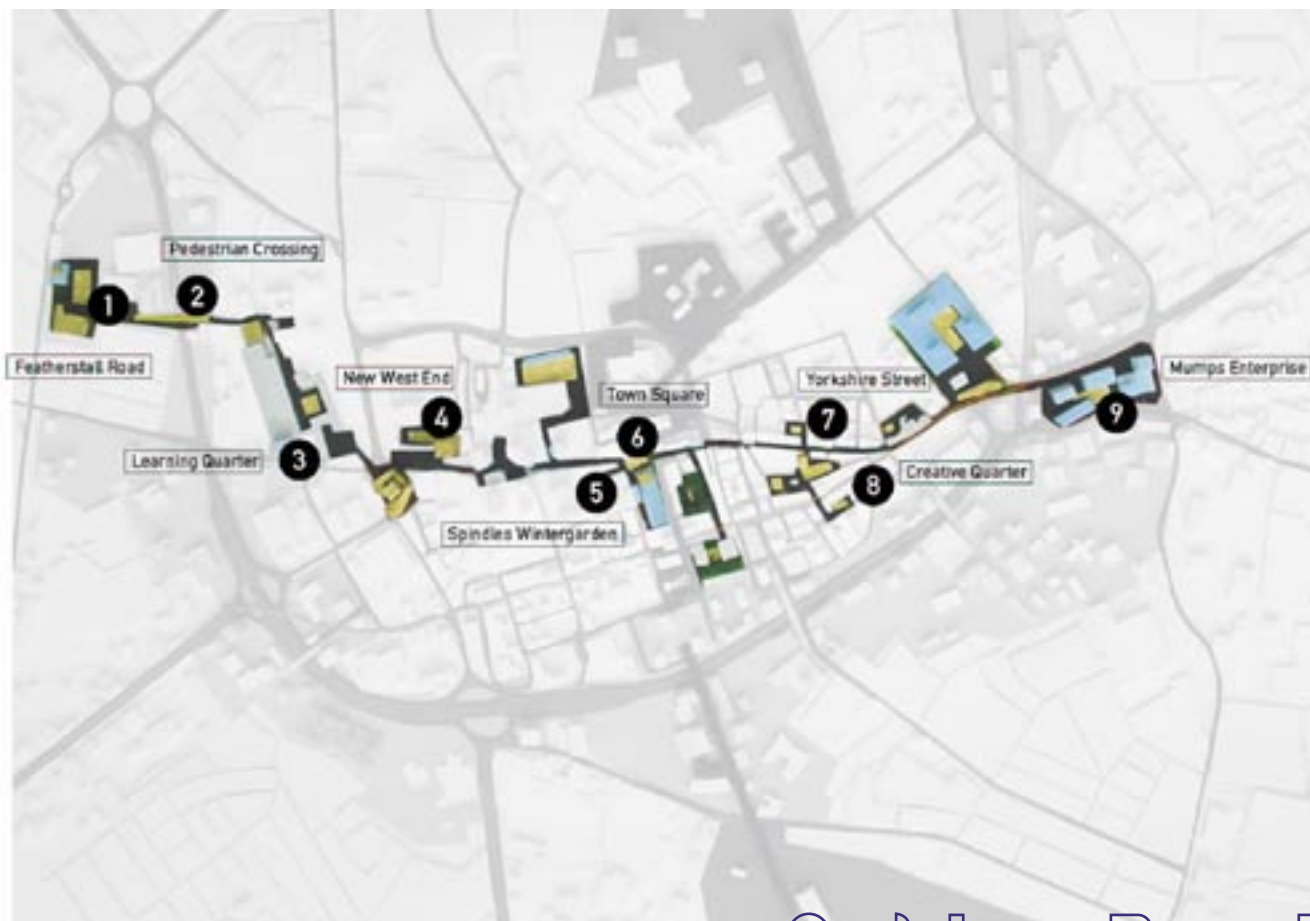
centre. These would include the new Coliseum (see page 56) and the Mumps business park as well as sculptures on the Oldham Way junctions.

- **Towers:** A series of towers in the heart of the town to complement the Civic Centre and Parish Church. These towers could be residential blocks exploiting the views over the Cheshire Plain (see p. 56 and 57).

- **Corridors of understanding:** Three corridors that link the bridges together and extend them outwards into the surrounding town. These are described on the following pages.



One model for this is Vienna where the centre is surrounded by parkland (g). In the



Golden Road

The first of the corridors runs east-west across the town centre. This is the route that connects most of the active uses within the town from Featherstall Road in the west to Mumps in the east.

The Golden Road is something that already exists in part along Yorkshire Street and High Street. This is the backbone of the town, and as we described in the urban design analysis was once the focus for activity and life in the town centre. However, because of the lack of activity either side of Yorkshire Street it can sometimes feel isolated. Worse still, the area to the west of the Rotunda feels like the edge of the town centre. The Golden Road is therefore

intended to link the heart of the town, the College and onwards to Featherstall Road. The first step is the improvements to High Street, just completed, and the proposed improvements to the management of Yorkshire Street. This will be extended eastwards with the improvements to the Mumps roundabout as part of Metrolink and the Enterprise area to the west of this. The development of the shopping centre and the replacement of the Rotunda with a

Winter Garden will allow the Golden Road to be extended westwards, opening up the New West End through the college and onwards across a new surface crossing to Featherstall Road. This will extend the offer of the town centre, drawing students and a wider range of people into the activities of the town.



01 Featherstall Road: The development of an Asian restaurant and leisure area including the development of a new mosque and the conversion of Anchor Mill. The Third Demonstrator Masterplan suggests this could become a cultural bazaar.

02 A new surface crossing: In order to link this to the town centre we are proposing a surface level crossing of the bypass as indicated on the plan.

03 : The Learning Quarter: The expansion and reconfiguration of the Learning Quarter as part of the proposed detailed masterplan described above. Public facilities such as the Grange Arts Centre, the College library and Student Union should be strung along the Golden Road.

04 New West End: The junction of King Street and Middleton Road will be the heart of a new West End evening entertainment quarter. This could include a new home for the Coliseum along with the Roxy Cinema relocated onto the Mecca site. We are also suggesting that the roof of the Civic Centre tower be developed as a 'Tower of Views' and a restaurant and viewing gallery, with interactive terminals for people to participate in the governance of the borough.



- a. Swansea:** Wind Street in Swansea which has been transformed into a lively, safe venue for bars and cafes.
- b. Bracknell:** A new water clock enlivening the centre of Bracknell



05 Spindles Winter Garden:

As proposed above, we are suggesting that the Rotunda be redeveloped so that it acts as a Winter Garden. This is a public space within a glass structure that links together the east and west of the Golden Road while retaining weather protection.

06 Town Square: At the heart of the town is the reconfigured Town Square. As part of the redevelopment of the shopping centre, buses will be taken out of this area and it will be set out as the public meeting space that it once was, with terraced levels up to the war memorial, a fountain and the reinstated sculpture of Platt. In order to achieve this the transport proposals suggest the rerouting of bus routes to remove the buses from this area.

07: Yorkshire Street

The Golden Road continues along past the bars and cafes of Yorkshire Street, which will remain a magnet for young people in the evening but with better management,



lighting and public realm improvements.

08: Creative Quarter

The junction of Yorkshire Street and Union Street will be the shop window for the Rhodes Bank Creative Quarter. This should include galleries, open studios, shops and cafes and will extend into the courtyard of Bow Lane (illustration).

09: Mumps Enterprise area:

The Golden Road will culminate in the Mumps Enterprise area, which is proposed around the Mumps roundabout as a major gateway to the town with striking office buildings and further light sculpture.



Green Walk

The best known Green Walk in the UK is in Nottingham. This was built by the Victorians to encourage the residents of the city's early suburbs to walk into the town centre. The Green Walk that we are proposing for Oldham has the same purpose.

The Green Walk will create an attractive link from Oldham Edge to Alexandra Park and also link together the main shopping developments in the town. It will run down Egerton Street from Oldham Edge, through a new space next to the Leisure Centre into the Church Yard and onwards to the improved Town Square. This is all achievable with relative ease. It involves public

realm works and particularly the creation of an avenue of trees. This could be achieved partly as part of the Gleeson's housing scheme.

South of the Town Square the route needs the cooperation of retail developers but is also vital to link these into the centre. The first part would be an arcade (not a mall) through the extended

shopping centre. This would link to a greened and tree-planted route down Clegg Street, which runs through the Sainsbury's car park to a new crossing over Oldham Way (see the Boulevard proposals). This would then continue through the redeveloped Alexandra Retail park and onwards to terminate in the refurbished Alexandra Park.



a. An urban motorway in Spain: A treatment for the Sainsbury's car park?

b. Dorchester: A Green walk into the town centre

c. Leicester: Green Walk was built in Leicester to encourage the residents of the town's suburbs to use the town centre

d. Birmingham: Victoria Square, a model for Town Square?



01 Alexandra park: The refurbishment of Alexandra Park is nearing completion. The next stage will be to animate the park so that it becomes a place that Oldham people use for excursions as they once did. This could include a park gallery and café, a beach in the park, activities on the lake such as boating, and skate and cycle parks etc...

02 Alexandra Retail Park: Planning consent has been granted for the redevelopment of the retail park. It is important that any development here is linked to the heart of the town centre so that it supports rather than undermines it. The developers should therefore be asked to create a new surface crossing over Oldham Way and to populate

this with public uses (see point 04 on the following page).

03 Blossom tree walk: While the Sainsbury's car park has been built over the line of Green Walk, Clegg Street remains as a public route. We believe that with lighting and imaginative planting (flowering cherries) this could be turned into an attractive route. This would be linked to the Cultural Quarter and the space in front of the Gallery that could become a sculpture court as a focus for the cultural buildings in this area.

04 Town Arcade: As described above we believe the shopping centre should expand eastwards, provided that this includes an arcade on the line of the Green Walk. This is in the interests of the shopping centre in that it will draw shoppers from Sainsbury's, the Metrolink stop, Gallery Oldham and the Lifelong Learning centre.

05 Town Square: At the intersection of Green Walk and the Golden Road Town Square will be restored to its former glory with the statue of Platt returned from



Alexandra Park to its original position.

06 Church Yard/Leisure Centre: The next stop on the Green Walk will be the churchyard and a newly formed space in front of a reconfigured leisure centre.

07 Urban green living quarter: The walk will continue through the new Top of the Town living quarter to be developed by Gleasons past the Bluecoat School in a tree-lined boulevard.

08 Oldham Edge: The walk continues to Oldham Edge which could be developed as a more active public space with wind sculpture, kite flying and housing.





Boulevard

The third corridor takes in the sweep of Oldham Way south of the centre. This is the area that the masterplan structure envisages as a green collar encircling the heart of the town centre with a strong edge to the north but also a series of pleasant urban bridges linking the neighbourhoods to the south to the town centre.

We recognise that the boulevarding of Oldham Way is a major project. This has been done elsewhere, notably Masshouse Circus in Birmingham. However, this type of project is generally funded by the development values of the sites created. This is not possible in Oldham at present

because the sites would have very little value. We do, however, believe that the boulevarding of the ring road is something that can take place gradually, indeed it has already started with the at-grade access being taken into the Sainsbury's site. We believe that there is the potential to create

at-grade pedestrian crossings on the line of the Golden Road and Green Walk as described above. Then when the Metrolink is completed, the rail line can be grubbed up which will provide the opportunity for a range of projects to take place along the Boulevard as described on the facing page.



01 Featherstall Road: The development of an Asian restaurant and leisure area as described in the Golden Road.

02 Urban Park: The area between Middleton Road and Ashton Road could be developed as an urban park once the railway is grubbed up. This would take in the fringes of the schools that back onto the Ring Road at present. The Urban Park could include: playgrounds, sportsfields (linked to the College), outdoor theatre in the park, urban forest and gateway sculptures including a landmark sculpture on each of the three junctions, including Solar Wings on Middleton Road, a Ring of light cylinders on Manchester Road and a Windmill gateway (pictured) on Ashton Road.

03 Green Walk: This is the point of intersection between the Green Walk and the Boulevard. It is also the link between the Alexandra Retail Park, Sainsbury's and the shopping centre. It is therefore proposed that there should be a pedestrian crossing here, linking to a greened route through the



Sainsbury's car park. This route should be animated with a cafe that is visible from the Ring Road but sustained by trade from the retail park (illustration above right).

04 Business node: This is the vital link to Waterloo Street which leads to Glodwick. The change in levels mean that it is not possible to achieve a pedestrian crossing. However, the removal of the railway bridge will mean that the route can be made much less intimidating. In the longer term, when the Rhodes Bank Creative Quarter is well established, we would envisage it spreading along this street and linking into the centre of Glodwick as a business node on the Boulevard.



05 Mumps Enterprise Area:

At the eastern end of the Boulevard is the Mumps Enterprise area, as described on previous pages. As this develops there is the opportunity for it to spread along and front onto the Boulevard to link to the Parkway Business Park.

06 Higginshaw/Derker: In each case there is the opportunity for the corridors to extend into the rest of the town, in this case up the Metrolink line to the Groundwork building and Derker.



Ways of combining traffic with greenery

a/b. Bordeaux: A boulevard and bus station within the city's green space network

c. Bristol: A landscaped car park.



7



Rebuilding Oldham



Oldham Town Centre comprises a number of distinct places or ‘character areas’, many with names that stretch back in time. Our urban design analysis suggests that the centre also now falls into a number of distinct areas or zones, that are not very well connected, with a kind of ‘moat’ or shatter zone of vacant and under-utilised land around it. The challenge is both stitching those zones back into the surrounding urban fabric, and improving the linkages between the different zones.



Rhodes Bank

This area could be regenerated as Oldham's Creative Quarter. There are two elements to this, the cultural facilities of Gallery Oldham, the Museum, the Lifelong Learning Centre, and a cultural production area accommodating artists, musicians and designers.

The Cultural Quarter is well established and plans are well advanced for the new Lifelong Learning Centre. To the east of this is a public pay-and-display car park that is well used. We propose retaining the northern section of this parking as part of a public square. The southern part of the car park is relocated to the rear of the Lifelong Learning Centre. This could create a site for residential development as part of the creation of an 'urban bridge' on Waterloo Street. The rest of this bridge is a longer term project triggered by the redundancy of

the railway line when Metrolink is completed and is part of the boulevarding of Oldham Way.

The Rhodes Bank area is tied together with a central pedestrian route that is a continuation of the space outside Gallery Oldham. This runs eastwards through the heart of the area and would be a focus for activity and movement. The key buildings in the quarter are likely to be the three properties owned by the Chronicle. They are interested in bringing these forward for creative workspace and have already agreed

to progress the former YMCA Buildings with the New Roots Development Agency for music production.

The working part of the area will be concentrated along this route but it is also envisaged that there will be a shop front where artists and makers can sell their work. This is envisaged at the junction of Yorkshire Street and Union Street extending into a new Arts Court on Bow Street (see illustration). The proposed conversion of the Old Bank in Mumps by an interior design company is an important start in



this respect. Throughout the Rhodes Bank area opportunities should be sought for residential development on the upper floors of buildings. Over time new buildings should be used to create a strong edge to Oldham Way. This is likely to include the redevelopment of the B&Q site as it becomes available. This is a very prominent site and should be retained for a high profile business/residential scheme, which will be possible when values in the area rise.

First steps:

- ▶ Development of the Lifelong Learning Centre
- ▶ Conversion of the Library to the Museum
- ▶ Support for the Chronicle in the conversion the former YMCA building to music based workspace with the New Roots Development Agency
- ▶ Public realm improvements of the central spine
- ▶ Marketing of the southern part of the Southgate Street Car Park to housing developers
- ▶ Legible city signage of the area including a quarter map.

▼ Indicative illustration of Yorkshire Street



The High Street is the heart of the town centre as the core of its retailing and evening economy offer. The main projects are the extension of the shopping centre, the redevelopment of the outdoor market, the creation of Town Square and improvements to Yorkshire Street and the redevelopment of the Leisure Centre.

High Street

As described above we are suggesting a strategy by which the Spindles and Town Square shopping centres are expanded east and west. The easterly extension will take in the Clegg Street bus depot and expand into the Old Town Hall. We have proposed a new public arcade running through the shopping centre alongside the Old Town Hall. This would form part of the Green Walk running north-south through the town. The extension to the shopping centre into the Old Town Hall would need to be linked to a package for the relocation of the Coliseum into a new building.

The other opportunity for the extension of the shopping centres is westwards into the site occupied by Manchester Chambers. We have suggested that this be linked by a new Winter Garden on the site of the Rotunda. This would be a glass structure

and a public route that creates a weather-protected meeting place and a link between elements of the shopping centre.

The extensions to the shopping centre would be a spur to the continued improvement of High Street/ Yorkshire Street. The first step is the creation of the Town Square that would happen as part of the shopping centre expansion made possible by the removal of buses from this area. Beyond this we have suggested improvements to Yorkshire Street to maintain traffic flows but increase the width of the pavements.

It is also important to consider north-south links. The most important of these is Green Walk that runs from Alexandra Park through the new shopping centre and Town Square and on to the Parish Church yard and the leisure centre before climbing the hill to Oldham Edge. This is particularly

important to link the Alexandra Retail Park and the new Sainsbury's into the shopping centre and it is vital that a route is created through the extended shopping centre. The other north-south link is the improvement of Peter Street from the Metrolink stop into the shopping centre.

The High Street area also includes the market. Here we are proposing the redevelopment of the outdoor market along the lines of Bury Market. This involves the creation of permanent lock-up stalls with weather protection for customers. This improves the experience for shoppers and stall holders. It is also important to manage the mix of stall holders on the outdoor market to maintain the breadth of its appeal even if this means stalls remaining vacant in the short term. The outdoor market will stand in a market square enclosed by new storage



buildings to the north and by a multi-storey car park to the west. This car park will include retail space on the ground floor.

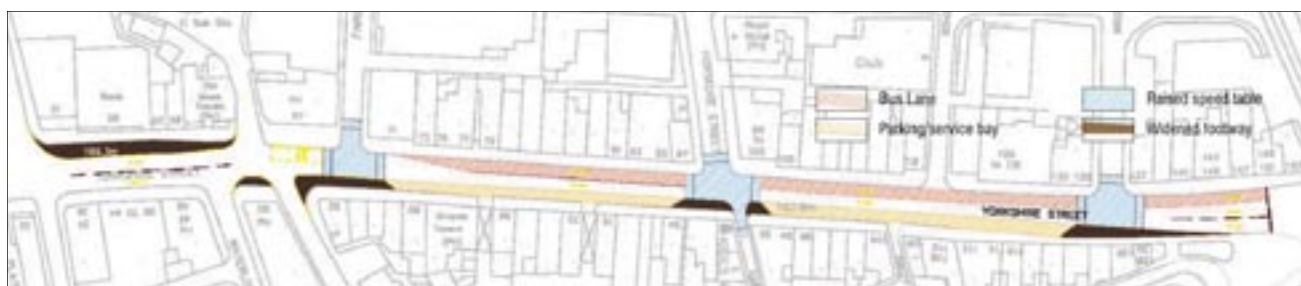
To the east of the market we are proposing the remodelling of the leisure centre. We understand that the leisure department are exploring the possibility of a new borough-wide facility outside the town centre. We believe that the centre is an important town centre use and needs to be preserved. However, it is a very inefficient use of land and we have proposed

the remodelling the building to create a new public space on the Green Walk along with housing development.

First Steps

- Discussions with the shopping centre owners to agree a way forward for the expansion of the centre
- Changes to the bus routes to take buses out of Town Square
- Interpretation boards describing the town's history in Hilton Arcade

- Public realm improvements to create Town Square
- Improvements to Yorkshire Street: traffic management and wider pavements
- Preparation of a development brief to secure a development partner for the market, car park, leisure centre and associated housing
- Direction signs and boards as part of the Legible City Initiative.





Mumps Enterprise Area

It is proposed to transform Mumps into a business location and a major inward investment opportunity. This will become a town centre business park and a major opportunity for inward investment.

The Mumps area was once separate from the rest of the town centre and later became the location of upmarket shops. It is now little more than a major traffic island dominated by the train viaduct. The arrival of Metrolink and the demolition of the viaduct provides a major opportunity to transform the area.

It is therefore proposed that the area be developed as an in-town business park. By this we mean a development that relates to the town centre, is urban in character

and walkable. However, the scheme should also provide the levels of accessibility and parking that one would associate with an out-of-town development. We have suggested that this could be achieved with a star shaped development, with blocks closely spaced around the roundabout with car parking to the rear.

The area proposed for the Enterprise area is currently occupied by a range of industrial and distribution uses. These do not provide a good gateway to the town

centre and we are suggesting that they be acquired and relocated elsewhere in the borough. The main space user in the area is the Post Office and we anticipate that this would be possible to relocate.

The development would then be brought forward with a development partner based on an initial pre-let to a council department. There is also the prospect of a government office relocation as part of the Lyons Review.

This proposal would supersede



plans for the Southlink Business Park. This is currently cut off from the town centre by the ring road and railway. We would suggest that this is not further developed but that development is concentrated around Mumps. The Southlink site could therefore become open space with some provision of parking for town centre uses.

The other element of the Mumps area is the First Bus Garage. This is still in use by First Bus, which has submitted a planning application for a supermarket. We

are concerned about the potential impact of development on other retail prospects in the town centre. We therefore believe that if the bus garage is relocated, the site should form part of the Mumps Enterprise Area.

First Steps

- ▶ To resist proposals for a supermarket on the First Bus Garage
- ▶ To investigate land ownerships in the

area affected by the development and undertake discussions about acquisition and relocation

- ▶ To appoint masterplanning consultants to prepare detailed proposals
- ▶ To prepare a development brief to appoint a development partner
- ▶ To explore the relocation of a council department.



New West End

Perhaps the most radical change that we are proposing is to the western part of the centre. Here we are proposing a new leisure quarter to the west of the shopping centres and encircled by a new education campus. This will include a new home of the Coliseum, a new Roxy Cinema, restaurants and cafes and new campus buildings associated with the University College.

This area was once an important part of the town centre but has declined in importance and today feels almost outside the centre. It will be opened up by the new Winter Garden as part of the shopping centre that will draw people through to the site of the New Coliseum. This is the flagship development in this area and is proposed on a new site created by the reengineering of the Middleton Road, Rochdale Road, King Street junction. This was once an important public space but has long since been lost.

We are proposing to recreate this space with the new Coliseum and new buildings for the University College. The New Coliseum would be a home for the theatre and Peskar Productions and would provide performance and rehearsal space. It would be funded in part by a contribution from the shopping centre developer together with Arts Council funding and a contribution from the College. Across King Street we have proposed that the Mecca Bingo site be redeveloped in part as a home for the

Roxy Cinema. This would be linked to a car park to the rear and adjacent blocks would include restaurant and cafes on the ground floor with student housing on the upper floors. Above this would be the Tower of Views, a viewing gallery and café on the top of the civic centre as a place for discussion and debate.

We have proposed that the main area of new building for the University College take place on the recently vacated Sainsbury's site. This would allow a link to

be made from the main college site to the Sixth Form College. We have suggested that this could be emphasised with a new pedestrian spine to tie the educational campus together. As part of this we have suggested the redevelopment of the hotel. This will depend on the operator but would create a larger building with parking and a better gateway to the town centre. To the north, Grange School would be improved and linked to the Learning Quarter.

The whole of the area is bounded to the west by the new Boulevard, which would be heavily planted. This would be transformed to create a series of gateways to the area. These would include the Urban Bridge from Featherstall Road, sculptures on the three major junctions including the Solar Wings at Middleton Road, the Ring of Light at Manchester Road and the Windmill Gateway at Ashton Road. The open space along the Boulevard could also be used as sports facilities for the campus.

First Steps

- ▶ Reach agreement with the shopping centre and commission work to assemble a funding package for the new theatre
- ▶ Develop a traffic scheme to reformat the Middleton Road Junction
- ▶ Commission a study into the relocation of the Roxy Cinema (the Roxy is agreeable to this)
- ▶ Once University College status is secured, commission a detailed masterplan for the campus area
- ▶ Allocate a budget for the first of the gateway sculptures and organise a design competition.





Top of the Town

The area to the north of the town centre has always been a residential neighbourhood and is characterised by a range of deck access housing and terraces.

We envisage the gradual replacement of this stock over time with new urban housing neighbourhoods starting with the cleared site of the St. Mary's estate.

The connectivity of the neighbourhoods to the north to the town centre is much better than those to the south because of topography and the smaller scale of St. Mary's Way compared to Oldham Way. There are therefore opportunities to introduce high quality urban housing into the area to the north to create a series of walkable neighbourhoods connected to the town centre. In order to achieve this we have suggested the downgrading of St. Mary's Way. This takes out the central reservation of the dual carriageway in order to turn it into a more traditional street without losing traffic capacity. We have also suggested the re-

moval of the great sweep of St. Mary's Way around the leisure centre, creating instead a traffic light-controlled 'T' junction. This is designed to remove the barrier currently created by the road and to make it suitable for frontage development. This allows us to grow the town centre in this direction.

This is an important opportunity to introduce green housing into Oldham. This should include excellent levels of thermal efficiency and might also explore renewable energy technology such as photovoltaic panels or wind power. This is an area that can attract subsidy and should be used as part of the marketing of the houses.

The proposed Green Walk route also passes through this area and crosses St. Mary's Way at the same 'T' junction. This then continues up Egerton Street, past Bluecoat Church of England School to Oldham Edge. We envisage this road becoming a tree-lined route.

The first opportunity for new development is the site of the former St. Mary's housing estate, which has been cleared. Gleeson's have been appointed as developers for this site and the council is working with them to ensure that the scheme is of a high quality. We have envisaged a series of courtyard blocks affording



protection from the wind around a central area of open space. We have also suggested that some of the new houses might rise to four storeys to create a series of small towers in order to give the scheme identity and to exploit the views out of the area.

This scheme is likely to be the first of a number of redevelopment opportunities in this area. Indeed in 20 years it is likely that much of the hillside will need to be redeveloped. It is, therefore, important to establish a framework now for the structured redevelopment of the area over time. We have shown the redevelopment of the uses to the south of Egerton

Walk where health facilities will become redundant with the opening of the LIFT Centre and where the housing is likely to require redevelopment. However, we could equally have looked at the housing areas to the west.

The Green Corridor will continue via Higginshaw Road up to Oldham Edge which should be seen as an open space facility linked to the town centre.

First steps

- ▶ The redesign of the Gleeson's Housing
- ▶ Scheme for St. Mary's to ensure that this produces a scheme that sets the standard for development in this area
- ▶ Public realm improvements to Egerton Street and St. Mary's Way including the removal of the dual carriageway
- ▶ A stock condition survey and strategy for the council housing in this area to assess, which blocks have a long term life
- ▶ A strategy for gradual replacement using the ALMO in partnership with a private developer.

8 Conclusions



Oldham Town Centre is currently 'punching beneath its weight', both in local economic terms, and also as a shop front for the rest of the borough, but it has the potential to become a significant sub regional centre and a revitalised place in which to shop, work, live, create, study or visit. It is important for the future of the whole borough that Oldham Town Centre fulfils this potential.



In setting out proposals to help Oldham Town Centre achieve its promise, this report aims to be imaginative and thought provoking, but it also offers achievable actions that can build incrementally towards a transformed town centre. Some of the actions can be taken immediately to address weaknesses and improve the centre; many of the ingredients are here already. The report is also visionary – looking ahead 20 years and beyond to show what Oldham

Town Centre could be like in the future – and offer direction and clarity to those who can invest further resources. Above all, it aims to give Oldham Town Centre a new sense of confidence for the future.

In developing these proposals we have been encouraged by the commitment and enthusiasm we have met for Oldham Town Centre. Not just from some of the retailers, who are full of ideas to make shopping here a brighter and livelier experience,

but from other local businesses and the arts, from students, council officers, local media, and many others. Like the borough as a whole, Oldham Town Centre has many potential champions whose energy will be needed to take forward these ideas.

The Council, and the Town Centre Partnership, will have a particularly important role to play, but all Oldhamers are now invited to help transform the Heart of Oldham.



Oldham Beyond has been commissioned by the Oldham Local Strategic Partnership in collaboration with the Northwest Development Agency.

