

I.
Introduction



I. INTRODUCTION

- I.1 Atherton is one of the major town centres within the Wigan borough and provides a focus for a range of commercial, leisure and civic activities. The area provides a valuable role acting as a district centre for local residents and also provides employment opportunities within its industrial, commercial, retail and leisure businesses.
- I.2 Along with other town centres, Atherton is subject to a number of threats to its long term commercial vitality and viability, partly through recent out of town developments such as Middlebrook, Horwich and through competing retail centres. Atherton Centreplan sets out a plan of action to improve and regenerate the town centre area which forms part of a strategic policy to ensure that town centres throughout the borough are attractive, thriving and successful areas which are accessible to all. The Centreplan provides a vision which is shared by all partners and users of the town centre.
- I.3 The Centreplan area extends beyond the town centre as defined within the Council's Unitary Development Plan. This is to ensure that unattractive 'Gateway' sites can be identified for improvement and also that the future of important local areas such as Central Park and the Victoria Mill complex, Bolton Old Road can be considered in detail.
- I.4 The plan takes full account of all relevant Government Guidance regarding town centres. In particular Planning Policy Guidance No.6 advises that town centre strategies and action plans should be prepared to encourage appropriate investment and to ensure that the centre meets the needs of all its users. In addition, Planning Policy Guidance No.13 stresses the need to reduce reliance on the private car and to ensure that a variety of uses are concentrated within town centre areas which are accessible to different modes of transport. The Greater Manchester Local Transport Plan 2001/02 - 2005/06 is also particularly relevant and a key element of this Strategy is to sustain the success of the regional centre and town centres and to regenerate these areas by making them more accessible.
- I.5 Within the local area, the Atherton Centreplan forms a more detailed strategy for regeneration. The plan sits within the umbrella of the borough's Community Plan which is aimed at promoting or improving the economic social and environmental wellbeing of the area and contributing to the achievement of sustainable development. Close to the town centre area, the Hag Fold Community Mapping Team and Community Partnership have produced their own Community Plan which outlines their aspirations for the future. The Hag Fold Community Action Plan identifies the communities own priorities for the area which include creating better, safer footpath links from the estate into the town centre.
- I.6 It is intended that the Centreplan be afforded the status of Supplementary Planning Guidance. Such guidance provides a more detailed basis for applying and interpreting the policies of the adopted Unitary Development Plan (UDP). This document lays down the Council's land use policies and proposals for the whole Borough and is currently under review. The Centreplan proposals will be taken into account as a material consideration when planning applications are being assessed by the local authority. Where necessary, detailed development briefs will be prepared for significant sites to ensure they are treated in a sympathetic manner.
- I.7 The Centreplan will provide a framework for investment by the Council, the Government and other public sector agencies, property owners and developers. In particular it will help to ensure that funding obtained from the Single Regeneration Budget Round 5 (Atherton Building Communities) is spent in the most appropriate way and provides the maximum benefit to the town centre.
- I.8 Whilst the plan deals primarily with land use and transportation issues and physical measures to improve the area it is also expected to provide a framework for future management of the town centre.
- I.9 The plan is based on a partnership approach and has been developed in its current draft form with input from a range of individuals and bodies who have a stake in the future of Atherton town centre. A partnership approach is vital in ensuring the successful regeneration of the town centre area. To be successful the Centreplan and its vision should be embraced by all partners.
- I.10 In summary, the plan seeks to counter the threats posed to Atherton town

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centre by surrounding larger shopping centres, out of town shopping, increased traffic congestion etc., by building on its strengths as an attractive, traditional market town very well placed to serve its local catchment. The plan proposals aim to provide a high quality environment where businesses can prosper and which residents can enjoy.

- I.11 Town centres are dynamic areas which are changing constantly and the plan will ensure that these changes are managed and controlled and that they provide real improvements for local residents and visitors to the town.