

Garforth Neighbourhood Plan

Town Centre and Retail – Topic Note

1. Introduction

This note is intended to provide an analysis of Garforth Town Centre and highlight opportunities for the Garforth Neighbourhood Plan to set out positive neighbourhood plan policies and identify other potential interventions that seek to achieve the Vision for Garforth and its sustainable development over the next 15-20 years. Well-functioning high streets and town centres play an important role in sustainable local communities and the intention of the Garforth Neighbourhood Forum is to positively support the development of Garforth town centre so that it can function in a way that accommodates ongoing and future changes.

Vision for Garforth

In 2033 Garforth will be a great place in which to live, work and play. There will be a strong sense of community. It will be a place with a unique small-town identity. Garforth will respond positively to the economic growth and expansion of the City of Leeds and will offer opportunities to residents of all ages and backgrounds.

Our town will be surrounded by protected and accessible countryside. We will benefit from excellent public transport links which meet the needs of local people and connect us with our neighbours.

Our town centre will be vibrant and re-invigorated, encouraging people to become actively involved in a flourishing community. There will be a broad range of retail, leisure, offices, arts and culture and residential opportunities. A variety of outdoor events and pop-ups will also add to the stimulating mix.

Away from the centre, the town's commercial and industrial areas will be thriving and offering a wide range of jobs.

There will be access to a range of well designed, sustainable homes that meet the needs of all its people at all stages of life. New developments will be in a high-quality setting with appropriate infrastructure such as parks, schools and leisure facilities designed to benefit the community as a whole.

At the centre of decision making about our town will be a concern with the health and well-being of everyone who lives and works in Garforth. This concern will go beyond mere tokenism and straplines and will aim to ensure that the potential impact on people's physical and mental health is considered when decisions are being taken about our town.

Given the ongoing global climate emergency, all decisions on development will take into account the need to achieve zero carbon in the UK by 2050, if not before.

Neighbourhood Plan Objectives

A) Housing and the Built Environment (HBE)

- To support the provision of an inclusive range of different types of homes and a greater range of affordable housing to meet the needs of all residents
- To support the provision of sufficient homes to enable young people and families to buy/rent their first and subsequent homes in the town, where children can play outside
- To encourage the successful integration of new homes into the town in a way that does not put excessive pressure on the existing physical infrastructure; to ensure specifically that all new developments address issues of drainage and flooding
- To help ensure all new build housing meets high standards of design and sustainability

B) Business Employment and Town Centre (BETC)

- To encourage new employment opportunities for local residents whilst protecting existing jobs
- To encourage job opportunities for school leavers and young people within Garforth
- To champion a more active and attractive town centre that will encourage local people to use the facilities thereby supporting local businesses and provide a hub for the town
- To help ensure new developments/businesses do not adversely affect traffic flow within the town centre area
- To help ensure car parking supports the viability of the town centre

C) Transport (T)

- To promote sustainable travel choices and improve existing cycle and pedestrian provision
- To support the management of the impact of traffic
- To help ensure new housing is connected to the town via good pedestrian, cycle and bus links

D) Green Space and the Rural Environment (GSRE)

- To protect the existing designated green spaces, maintaining the character and community value of the area.
- To increase the amount of leisure areas (green spaces) available for residents of Garforth

- To improve the quality of the designated green spaces
- To maintain access to Public Rights of Way (PROW) and wildlife corridors
- To protect and maintain access to the surrounding countryside around Garforth,
- To protect and increase tree and hedgerow cover to enhance biodiversity within green spaces and surrounding countryside

E) Community and Leisure (CL)

- To support, improve and maintain existing community facilities and services
- To support the provision of new sustainable community facilities

F) Education and Health (EH)

- To support the provision of sufficient primary and secondary school places for all those of school age living within the town
- To support the provision of well designed educational facilities
- To protect and enhance opportunities for outdoor education
- To promote health and wellbeing via opportunities for healthy lifestyle choices within a sustainable environment
- To support and encourage the provision of a comprehensive range of primary healthcare facilities within Garforth with equitable access to health services for all residents.

2. Neighbourhood Planning and the High Street

Neighbourhood planning gives local communities to set out locally distinctive planning policies and projects to help boost local sustainability. There is a big opportunity for neighbourhood planning groups to make positive interventions on high street issues which has yet to be explored fully in Leeds.

This topic note will give an overview of the changes that are occurring in town centres across the UK and how these changes are being experienced in Garforth. In addition, it will set out the existing policy context to assist the Forum in meeting the requirements of the Basic Conditions, identify evidence that exists to support any options that the Forum may wish to consider, and signpost to opportunities for further work or best practice examples.

In addition to the changes that have been taking place ‘on the ground’ on Britain’s high streets there have also been a number of legislative and policy changes in recent years that will have a significant effect on the scope for neighbourhood planning to shape high streets in the future. These key changes include the September 2020 changes to the Use Classes Order and extensions to Permitted Development Rights, which have severely impeded the ability for planning policy (in isolation) to control and

influence the changes taking place on the high street. These changes necessitate an innovative, strategic and holistic approach to generating strategies for the high street.

This note is not intended to provide all of the solutions, but seeks to assist the Neighbourhood Forum in defining what role Garforth Town Centre plays now, and consider what role it might play in the future.

3. The Role of the British High Street

It is well recognised that the high street and retail sector is facing a huge period of flux as pressures from local, national and global consumer trends are tending to have severe localised impacts on communities. 2017 saw the closure of over 5,800 retail stores and a new report from the Centre for Retail Research predicts that some 10,000 stores will have closed in 2018.¹ What is being deemed 'the Amazon effect', characterised as the growth of online shopping for food and clothing (17% of retail sales are online), has had a significant impact on how high streets in the UK function and the retail offer that they provide, meaning that there has been a huge shift away from 'traditional' retailing. Town centres no longer offer the same range of shops and services. Adding to this impact is the growth in rates and rents, price competition, lower levels of disposable income, and slow adaptability in the sector, particularly at a local level, to the pace at which the retail market continues to change. These factors have significantly changed the way that high streets function and the role that they play in communities.²

The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and resultant lockdown measures have had a profound impact on an already struggling bricks and mortar retail sector. Shops have been forced to close and many, though the absolute figures are still unknown, may not re-open. Whilst this has had a critical impact on the high street retail sector it has also forced retailers and other high street businesses to re-organise their business models, providing opportunities for a shift to online retail, including click and collect services, much quicker than previously anticipated. Whilst the impact of the pandemic has been severe on all towns and cities, it has also forced people to re-think the high street even further and to re-imagine what the high streets of the future might look like. For places like Garforth, the effects of the pandemic provide additional opportunities to capitalise on the increase in people working from home and using local high streets much more than in the past, with city centres seeing a slower uptake in footfall recovery than elsewhere.

It is now recognised that alternative approaches to managing the high street are needed to support their continued use. A re-thinking of the ways in which they function and what they offer could help to improve sustainability, and research shows that those that provide alternatives, or experiences, could be a model for the way in which the high street can be supported in the future. A recognition of this could be key to sustaining our high streets. Shopping / retail has become only a singular element of leisure outings rather than the sole purpose of visits to town centres. Organisations

¹ Which?, *Is This The End for the British High Street*, 2018, <https://www.which.co.uk/news/2018/06/is-this-the-end-for-the-british-high-street/>

² Centre for Retail Research, *Will Business Rates Destroy The High Street*, 2018, <http://www.retailresearch.org/businessrates.php>

such as the Association of Town and City Management are continuing to advocate for a holistic approach to town centre management, providing toolkits and guidance so that town centres can adapt to change and capitalise on the opportunities provided by the changing market rather than suffering the consequences of being too slow to adapt.³

4. An Integrated Approach

2011: The Portas Review

In 2011, Mary Portas was commissioned by the Coalition Government to undertake a review into the state of UK high streets and town centres.⁴ The report of the review sets out a series of recommendations to re-invigorate the high street through improvements to the economic and community life of high streets and town centres.

The recommendations are themed as follows:

- **Getting our town centres running like businesses:** installing a Town Team to provide strategic management, increasing the powers of Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) where they've been successful, giving landlords a greater investor stake in the management of high streets through their participation in BIDs, establishing a new National Market Day to give opportunities to budding shopkeepers, and relaxing the regulatory framework around becoming a market trader to improve access and take-up;
- **Getting the basics right to allow business to flourish:** making business rates better for small businesses and independent retailers, local authorities giving business rates concessions to new local businesses, reviewing the use of RPI within business rates with a view to re-calculating based on CPI, reviewing controlled parking schemes and introducing a parking league table (on the amount charged in each local authority area), Town Teams should focus on improving accessibility, attractiveness and safety, high street deregulation by Government, improving the Use Class system to enable easier changes of use of key properties, and putting betting shops into a use class;
- **Levelling the playing field:** make an explicit presumption in favour of town centre development (for retail) within the wording of the NPPF, introduce a Secretary of State sign off for new out of centre developments and require all new large developments to have an "affordable shops" quota, larger retailers should mentor local businesses and independent retailers, and retailers should report on their support of local high streets in their annual report.
- **Defining landlords' roles and responsibilities:** encouraging a contract of care between landlords and their tenants by promoting a leasing code and supporting the use of lease structures, especially for small businesses,

³ Association of Town and City Management, *Successful Town Centres*, 2013, <https://thegreatbritishhighstreet.co.uk/pdf/Successful-Town-Centres.pdf>

⁴ The Portas Review, *An Independent Review into the Future of our High Streets*, 2011, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/6292/2081646.pdf

exploring further disincentives to prevent landlords from leaving units vacant, banks that own property on high streets should administer these assets or be required to sell them, local authorities should make use of Compulsory Purchase powers to encourage the re-development of key retail space, enable local authorities to intervene where landlords are negligent with new “Empty Shop Management Orders”, and introduce a public register of high street landlords; and

- **Giving communities a greater say:** run a high profile campaign to get people involved in neighbourhood plans, promote the inclusion of the high street in neighbourhood plans, developers should make a financial contribution to ensure that the local community has a voice in the planning system, and support the imaginative community use of empty properties through Community Right to Buy, meanwhile use and a new “Community Right to Try”.

The report’s recommendations raise some of the key issues which could help high streets to become enjoyable, exciting places to be. It advocates for wholesale reforms to the management and planning of high streets to ensure that they can continue to play a role in our communities in the future with a view to re-imagining the high street as a civic space and shared resource. The report concludes that high streets should be multi-functional and social spaces that provide an experience unavailable elsewhere.

The Portas Review was accompanied by an analysis report by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills entitled *Understanding High Street Performance*.⁵ The report provides the data and analysis which supports the recommendations Portas makes. One of the key findings is that a ‘*key factor in many of the new visions and uses that are emerging is a different approach to valuing activity. Social value and the civic use of space are seen as key to populating places that have lost footfall and function as places of trade, increasing the value of social trade in comparison to monetary exchange.*’

High Streets and Town Centres in 2030, MHCLG 2019

A Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee inquiry to examine the future role of the high street opened in 2017, publishing its report in February 2019.⁶ The inquiry looked into how the high street will continue to contribute to the local economy, and the health, cohesion and cultural life of the local community, including the challenges faced amid a changing demographic, technological and other trends in recent decades. The reports sets out a bold vision for the future of the British

⁵ Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, *Understanding High Street Performance*, 2011, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/31823/11-1402-understanding-high-street-performance.pdf

⁶ Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, *High Streets and Town Centres in 2030*, 2019, <https://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/housing-communities-and-local-government-committee/inquiries/parliament-2017/high-streets-and-town-centres-in-2030-inquiry-17-19/>

high street based on locally-led strategies developed in partnership with local communities and businesses.

The core principle of the Committee's recommendations to central government is adaptability, and what can be done to support and improve the adaptability of the high street to ensure that it can survive, and thrive, to 2030 and beyond. Action is needed at all levels, by government and by retailers and landlords, to create the conditions for the high street to flourish. The report is clear that unless high streets and town centres find a way to adapt, they could be lost altogether.

The key recommendations of the report are:

Central Government Action:

- Central Government takes action on business tax to ensure that online retailers are paying their fair share, allowing the high street to compete on a level playing field.
- Central Government ensures that planning powers are fit for purpose, responsive and up-to-date, particularly around permitted development rights (PDRs), which could serve to undermine the strategic vision that a community has developed for its high street or town centre.
- To accompany the Future High Streets Fund, Government has announced the creation of a Task Force, this should provide expert support directly to local areas on town centre and high street transformation, collate and share best practice examples to produce guidance, and should not be limited to those areas that have accessed the Future High Streets Fund.

Local Action:

- Local communities should take action to create visionary strategies for high streets and town centres, to support local traders, facilitate parking and to develop the role of place partnerships.
 - Local Plans should be kept up to date and forward looking, anticipating future trends, supplemented by specific strategies covering high streets and town centres.
 - There is an opportunity for Business Improvement Districts (BIDs)⁷ to be replaced by community improvement districts, Government is encouraged to consider how this could be done legislatively, and in the interim community representatives could be appointed to BID panels to encourage a more balanced approach.

Retailers:

- In order to compete and be successful, high street retail needs to find a new purpose, focussing on providing “experience” and “convenience”.
 - Retailers have an opportunity to make an asset of their physical space and staff by creating opportunities to interact with customers that cannot be found online, including through ensuring high-quality stock, improved

⁷ Business Improvement Districts: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/business-improvement-districts>

services, better use of online marketing opportunities, and investment in training and the physical infrastructure of the store.

- Consideration should be given to the fact that store opening hours do not reflect the fact that many people shop after work. Research should be undertaken to establish whether or not they are meeting customer needs and make adjustments on a shop-by-shop basis.

Landlords:

- Landlords have an important role in the future of high streets, disparate property ownership and lack of landlord engagement are barrier's to high street and town centre transformation and high rents are affecting retailer profitability.
 - Landlords are encouraged to acknowledge how the retail property market has changed and to take an active approach by providing tenants with high quality properties on a flexible basis and investing in properties. They're encouraged to fully engage in local partnerships working on high street and town centre transformation and to consider the potential for further investment to help deliver on plans and strategies.
 - Government is encouraged to review laws that govern the landlord-tenant relationship, to provide the opportunity for a landlord-tenant relationship which is more appropriate for the current retail environment
 - Property-owner BIDs could play an important role in bringing landlords into local discussions about high street and town centre transformation. Government is encouraged to legislate for such a body.

Conclusions:

In order for high streets and town centres to have a more balanced future, there needs to be a shift from the retail-focussed activities to new uses and purposes that foster greater social interaction, community spirit and local identity/characteristics. Strategic interventions from the local authority, coupled with the backing of local stakeholders and a vision endorsed by the wider community, high streets can be redefined to ensure their long term sustainability.

Case Study

Bishopthorpe Road, York: <https://www.bishyroad.net/>

Bishopthorpe Road in York was at risk of becoming a British high street in decline. Instead, it is home to a range of independent shops and businesses, and the initiative to revive it came in 2010 after the economic impacts of the recession started to take hold, with a number of key retail outlets closing down leaving vacant units. The remaining retailers established a traders' association and as a group begun to explore opportunities to revive the high street through refocussing on the consumer experience and changing shopping trends. Additionally, there was a greater focus on events and activities, including the Tour de Yorkshire and street parties. The street is a mix of

cafes and restaurants and retail units which help maintain vibrancy and accommodate the changes in the way that people like to shop. The businesses have helped to build a *shop and eat local* atmosphere through the range and quality of the offer. As a result, Bishopthorpe Road has been recognised nationally as one of the most successful high streets in Britain.

5. Garforth Town Centre

Built Environment

Garforth Main Street, a linear street running north-south between Town End, Aberford Road and the former Council offices where Main Street becomes Lidgett Lane, is the main / high street in Garforth. It is a well-used retail centre with a range of shops and services. Retail frontages at ground level are modern and lack uniformity, and the street as a whole lacks style due to the pattern of development. To the southern end, a number of Victorian terraces have been converted to retail units and at first floor level, much of the original detailing has been retained. There are some instances where these details have been replicated. To the northern extent of the street the units are more modern, constructed in the 1970s. Whilst most of the ground floor is used for town centre uses, the second floor provides residential accommodation. Additionally, Main Street is surrounded by a number of residential streets, and accessibility to the town centre is one of its key strengths.

One of the key challenges for Main Street is traffic congestion and problems caused by on-street parking. This, combined with the fact that there is no central square, overall landscaping or public realm strategy, or outdoor meeting point on Main Street, mean that although the retail offer is good and Main Street remains relatively vibrant, there is a risk that if the town centre sees a shift towards being more community-focussed, the built environment on Main Street could act as a barrier to this change.

Town and Local Centres Programme & Inclusive Growth

The Council's Inclusive Growth Strategy recognises the role of town centres as economic, social and service homes and the need to continue to deliver improvements that promote enterprise and connect people to jobs and opportunities within them. Improvements to town centres will assist with delivery of the Best Council Plan ambitions to promote sustainable and inclusive economic growth.

On 15th November 2017, the Council's Executive Board agreed to establish a £5m capital fund to improve town and district centres across the city. In March 2018, Executive Board approved the first tranche of schemes submitted to the Local Centres Programme, including awarding £55,000 to Garforth Main Street to provide a new pay and display car park to meet the demand from shoppers and traders. As of November 2020, this programme is under review however the Garforth Town End car park remains a project within the programme.

Engagement

Retailer Survey

In summer 2016, Garforth Neighbourhood Forum undertook a survey of all of the retailers in the neighbourhood area. 79 of the 86 shops on Main Street responded to the survey which included a broad selection of businesses. A significant number of businesses have been operating in Garforth for sustained periods of time, and anticipate that they will continue to trade long into the future. This is a significant strength in Garforth as it signifies that there is confidence in the local economy.

Additionally, the businesses on Main Street employ a lot of people, including a number of local residents. When surveyed on the strengths and weaknesses of Garforth, respondents indicated that the geographical location, local customers, and transport links were the key strengths of Garforth, while affordability of rates, rents and car parking were the biggest weaknesses. This indicates again that there is strength in the “local” in Garforth, local businesses serving local customers and employing local people. This could be a significant factor in Garforth’s resilience in comparison to the wider retail trends seen nationally. The issues associated with rates and rents are part of the wider challenges facing the retail sector in the UK. The results of the survey show that the main issue facing Garforth, in the eyes of retailers, is the level of parking provision, whilst the responses also acknowledge public transport as a strength.

Of significance are the suggestions made on how to improve Garforth as follows:

- Increased parking
- Improvements to CCTV
- Local Business directory
- Markets
- Wifi
- Website

The suggestions made above and elsewhere in the survey present a number of opportunities for the Neighbourhood Forum to make a positive contribution to the vitality of Main Street, through neighbourhood plan policy but, significantly, through local initiatives and actions.

SWOT Analysis of the Town Centre

In the summer of 2018, Garforth Neighbourhood Forum undertook a survey of local residents and attendees at the annual Garforth Gala. The survey was designed to be akin to a SWOT analysis and as such has been combined with the SWOT analysis undertaken by the Garforth NP Forum, detailed at Appendix 1.

A summary of the SWOT analysis is as follows:

Strengths:

- Range of shops and services
- Independent and “local” feel
- Accessibility
- Convenience
- Family-friendly and domestic in scale

Weaknesses

- Over-representation of salons & hairdressers
- Parking and traffic congestion issues
- Lack of “destination”, main attraction or central square
- Limited opening hours
- Lack of promotion/advertising/marketing

Opportunities

- Creation of more community-focussed buildings & spaces (including healthcare)
- Demand and vitality boosted by anticipated growth in Garforth
- Expansion of range of independent retailers, including a “have a go” store or pop-up shop opportunities in vacant units
- Public realm improvements including greening and landscaping
- Events opportunities (Garforth ‘Feastival’ success and potential market)

Threats

- Unaffordability of rates and rents risking the viability of small businesses
- Out of centre retail (Thorpe Park) providing a more convenient alternative
- Continued loss of A1 retail
- Lack of identity, branding
- Lack of long-term strategy

See table 1 for full results.

Retailer Survey, 2018

In 2018, a survey was conducted among the 85 retailers on Main Street. The survey asked the questions:

What do you like about Main Street?

- Community feel
- Friendly people
- Variety of shops

What do you not like about Main Street?

- Charity shops
- Volume of traffic
- Roadside parking / difficulty parking

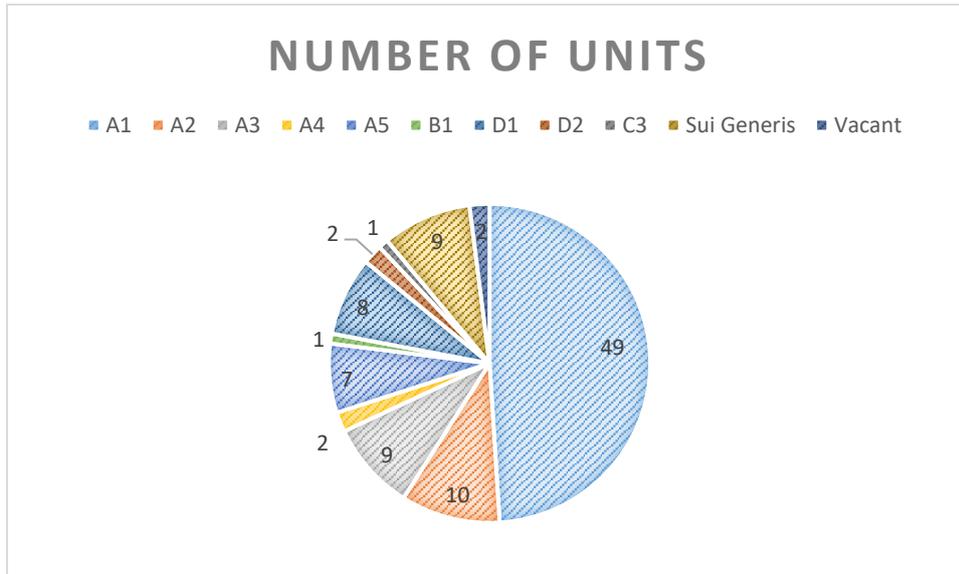
How would you like to see Main Street change in the next few years?

- More parking
- Variety of shops
- Pedestrianisation

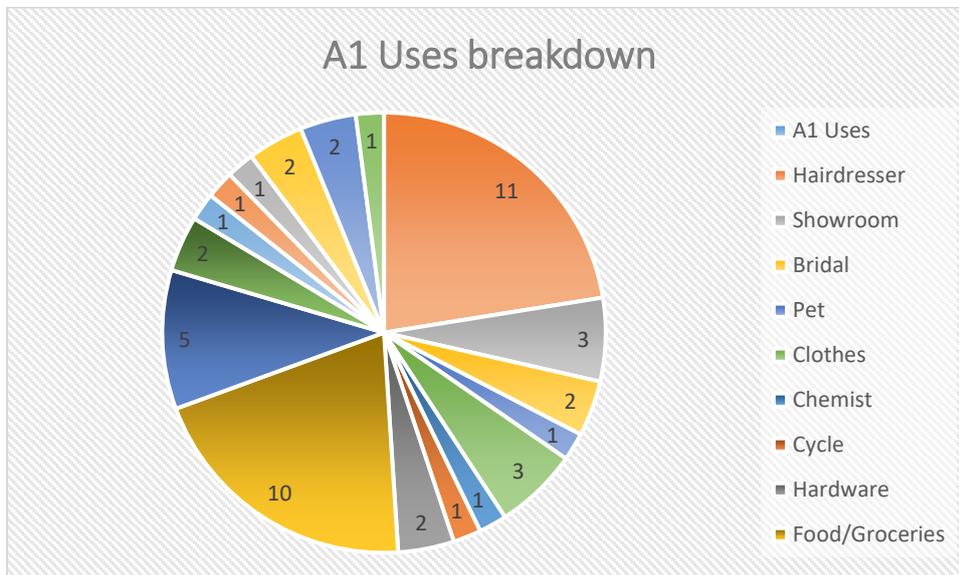
6. Evidence

Town Centre Uses

In July 2018 a survey of use classes was undertaken of Garforth Main Street. Of the 100 units along Main Street and in the immediate surrounding area, the predominant use is A1 retail.



Breakdown of A1 – A5 Uses:



On 9 October 2019, there were 7 empty frontages and 2 more to be built opposite the library. Recent closures (at this time) were a café, a greengrocers, an estate agent, a carpet shop, a bridal shop.

Strategic Evidence

The Leeds Town and Local Centres Study (Colliers 2011)⁸ identifies that Garforth Town Centre has always been constrained physically due to the proximity of development to back of Main Street. Residential development is identified as the main constraint, rising up to the rear of retail and service properties, having never provided for any significant redevelopment. The study identifies that the Garforth has a range of facilities which enable it to function as a service centre, but it is not the main shopping destination and its future place in the hierarchy [of centres] and the role it will be able to play, particularly taking into account potential growth in this area, may need reconsideration. The study recommends that (due to the constraints of Main St) edge-of-centre opportunities should be investigated in order for Main Street to maximise the benefits of anticipated future growth in Garforth.

7. Policy Framework

National Planning Policy Framework

Chapter 7 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) outlines how planning policies should support the role that town centres play at the heart of local communities, by taking a positive approach to their growth, management and adaptation. The NPPF supports the introduction of new markets and planning to meet anticipated needs for retail, leisure, office and other town centre uses, providing for residential development as a mechanism to boost growth and regeneration opportunities in town centres.

In addition the National Planning Policy Guidance (NPPG) also sets out guidance for town centres. For planning purposes town centres as defined in the National Planning Policy Framework comprise a range of locations where main town centre uses are concentrated, including city and town centres, district and local centres. The PPG sets out that a 'wide range of complementary uses can, if suitably located, help to support the vitality of town centres, including residential, employment, office, commercial, leisure/entertainment, healthcare and educational development. The same is true of temporary activities such as 'pop ups', which will often benefit from permitted development rights. Residential development in particular can play an important role in ensuring the vitality of town centres, giving communities easier access to a range of services.

2020 Planning Reforms

From the 1st September 2020 the Government made significant changes to the 1987 Use Class Order. The Regulations introduce three new use classes. The main changes which relate to the high street in particular are;

- The introduction of a new use Class E (Commercial, business and service) – including retail, restaurant, office, financial/professional services, indoor sports, medical and nursery uses along with “any other services which it is appropriate to provide in a commercial, business or service locality”, such as light industrial;

⁸ Leeds City Council, Town and Local Centres Study: <https://www.leeds.gov.uk/planning/planning-policy/evidence-and-monitoring/leeds-city-town-and-local-centre-study>

- Class F.1 (Learning and non-residential institutions) – including non-residential educational uses, and use as a museum, art gallery, library, public hall, religious institution or law court; and
- Class F.2 (Local community) – including use as a shop of no more than 280 sqm mostly selling essential goods, including food and at least 1km from another similar shop, and use as a community hall, area for outdoor sport, swimming pool or skating rink.

Parts A and D of the original Schedule to the Use Classes Order have been entirely deleted, with Use Classes A1, A2, A3, parts of D1 and D2 subsumed into new Use Class E along with Class B1.

Existing buildings that are already used for class A1, A2, A3, B1 and and certain D1 and D2 uses will fall within a new single class E and unless the permissions they operate under have specific controls, they will be able to change to other uses within the new class without the need for planning permission. The Government is seeking to use the use classes system to better reflect the diversity of uses on high streets and town centres to give businesses the flexibility to adapt and diversity to changing demands. The Use Classes Order also introduces the concept of part use, and for different uses to be used at different times of the day, allowing a change of use of part of the building, use or planning unit to an alternative class E use without permission. Such movement with the use class will no longer constitute development.

Certain types of work also do not need to apply for planning permission. These are called "permitted development rights". Permitted development rights have more recently been widened. Permitted development rights include A1/A2 (Shop/financial services to C3 (dwelling house) for development of a certain size. These changes sit alongside the recent additions to permitted development rights, forming part of the government's "Project Speed", with the aim to support high street revival and allow greater flexibility to change uses within town centres without the need for planning permission. These more recent changes include the demolition of buildings and the construction of new dwelling houses in their place provided meets certain. Generally in terms of permitted development a developer must apply for the Councils prior approval of certain matters such as transport and highways. The landscape of the high street is changing and there is much more flexibility for change to a wider range of uses.

A broad range of national permitted development rights support appropriate changes of use in town centres. These rights are set out in the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015, as amended. Many of these permitted development rights relate to uses defined in the Use Classes Order before it was amended on 1 September 2020. These rights will continue to apply in their current form until 31 July 2021.

2020 Planning White Paper 'Planning for the Future'

The Planning White Paper was published on 6th August for consultation until 29th October 2020, proposals include some important changes to the UK's planning system. Changes proposed to the planning system include the introduction of land use

zoning, renewal areas, speeding up of the process and a greater emphasis on design quality. The outcome of the consultation is awaited to understand the implications it may have on the high street.

Local Strategic Planning Policy

The Core Strategy establishes the broad principles for development within City Centre, Town and Local Centres, with the Site Allocations Plan providing further detail on the specific interpretation of centre boundaries. Garforth is identified as a Major Settlement in the Leeds Core Strategy Settlement Hierarchy, a criteria for identification as a Major Settlement is having a Town Centre. Development of Major Settlements will help to reinforce their role as a provider of services to residents and those immediately surrounding the settlement. Map 15 of the Core Strategy identifies Garforth Town Centre and this is designated by Policy P1. The Core Strategy clearly establishes a “centres first approach”, which directs town centre uses to those identified town and local centres in order to maintain the vitality of centres. The Core Strategy states that town centres are at the heart of communities in Leeds and contribute to local character and identity. **Leeds Core Strategy**

Policy P2 of the Core Strategy identifies acceptable uses in and on the edge of town centres:

- Shops, supermarkets and superstores,
- Non-retail services,
- Restaurants and cafes, drinking establishments and hot food takeaways,
- Intensive leisure and cultural uses including theatres, museums, concert halls, cinemas, leisure centres, gyms and hotels,
- Health care services,
- Civic functions and community facilities,
- Offices,
- Housing is encouraged in centres above ground floor in the primary and secondary shopping frontages, or outside the shopping frontages, providing it would not compromise the function of the town centre.

Policy P5 directs new food stores to town and local centres, or edge of centre sites where there are no available, viable or suitable sites within centres.

Policy P6 states that town centres are acceptable locations for comparison goods providing that they are of a compatible scale, again accommodating edge of centre sites where there are no suitable sites within centres.

Policy P9 directs community facilities and other services to be in locations that are accessible by foot, cycling, or by public transport, in the interests of sustainability and health and wellbeing. The policy states that facilities and services should not adversely impact on residential amenity and should be where possible be located in centres with other community uses.

Leeds Site Allocations Plan

The Site Allocations Plan (SAP) Section 2⁹ provides an overview of the Council's strategic vision for town centres in Leeds and builds on existing policy set out in the Core Strategy.

Policy RTC1 designates the extent of centre boundaries, primary shopping areas and protected shopping frontages for centres identified by Core Strategy Policy P1. The extent of Garforth Town Centre, primary shopping area and primary/secondary shopping frontages as designated in the SAP are available in Map 1.¹⁰

Policy RTC3 aims to ensure that Primary Shopping Frontages within Town and Local Centres continue to fulfil their essential primary role of providing convenient and accessible shopping facilities within reasonably compact areas, upon which the character of a shopping centre is based. The aim for Secondary Shopping Frontages is to safeguard the overall retailing character of shopping centres, whilst recognising that non-retail and specialist uses do provide an important service, and should be made available to the public as a secondary element of a shopping centre.

The policy does this by establishing that proposals for non-A1 retail uses in Primary Shopping Frontages will normally be resisted where the proposal would result in the proportion of A1 Retail frontage length falling below 70%, and resisting proposals for non-A1 Retail uses where this proportion is already below 70%. It is also established that that proposals within Secondary Shopping Frontages will be determined on their merit but will normally be resisted where they are judged to negatively impact on the vitality and viability of the frontage or the centre as a whole. Non-main town centre uses will not normally be permitted with identified uses. Guidance is provided for decision-making purposes for determining the proportions of frontage lengths.

Policy RTC4 aims to maintain the unique character of Leeds' shopping streets by ensuring that shop fronts are protected and where possible enhanced. On this basis, the policy requires that changes of use within protected shopping frontages must maintain a ground floor window display appropriate to the use, maintain or enhance the appearance of the frontage in design and materials in external alterations to the building façade, and maintain or establish access to the upper floors, where appropriate.

It is important to note that the SAP policies are set within national policy at the time of the plan being adopted, however since the adoption of the SAP, the 2020 planning reforms have made changes to the Use Classes Order take come into effect, which provide for significant flexibility in the high street. In particular, use class A no longer exists and many previous use classes have now been amalgamated into new use classes E and F1.

8. Main Street Aims and Objectives

⁹ Site Allocations Plan, Introduction and Overview (Sections 1 and 2)

<https://www.leeds.gov.uk/Local%20Plans/Site%20Allocations%20Plan/01%20SAP%20Adopted%20Plan-%20Introduction,%20Section%201%20and%202.pdf>

¹⁰ Site Allocations Plan for the Outer South East HMCA:

<https://www.leeds.gov.uk/Local%20Plans/Site%20Allocations%20Plan/10%20SAP%20Adopted%20Plan-%20Outer%20South%20East%20HMCA.pdf>

The Forum have considered the role of Main Street and objectives for supporting it in the neighbourhood plan. They would like to address the following issues:

- Preservation and rejuvenation of Main Street
- Maintaining a thriving and attractive commercial and social hub for Garforth to 2033 and beyond
- Aesthetics and sense of place
- Sense of community pride and ownership
- Health and wellbeing
- Environmental sustainability
- Economic viability and resilience

9. Policy Options

Based on the objectives, evidence and opportunities, the following policy options have been identified:

Provision of parking – a policy to support increased parking provision within / nearby the Town Centre.

Existing shop frontages – policy supporting the regeneration of existing shop frontages.

Temporary/meanwhile uses – policy will support flexibility for different uses to encourage potential traders to ‘try out’ Main Street for a short term period.

New shop frontages – policy shaping the design of new frontages.

Residential uses above frontages – policy to support the change of use of units above retail to residential use.

Resistance to A5 uses – policy resistant to any further A5 uses.

Edge of centre – policy supporting town centre uses on the edge of centre due to physical constraints of Main Street.

Connectivity – policy supporting improved pedestrian and cycle connectivity with Main Street.

These policy options will be explored further in the Pre-Submission Draft Neighbourhood Plan.

10. Non-Policy Options

Protects and Partnerships

There is already a local ‘town team’ in Garforth, a group of traders on Main Street who are seeking to identify opportunities to boost footfall along Main Street through events and local initiatives. A key priority for the Town Team is to improve parking provision in Main Street. There are opportunities for the Town Team to work with the

neighbourhood forum to implement some short term interventions which could help to boost activity and confidence on Main Street.

Identity

At the moment, the Town Centre is not benefitting from Garforth being one of the major settlements of Leeds, being served by two train stations in close proximity to the town centre. Opportunities exist to improve the identity of Garforth by introducing branding to the town centre, this could be through signage, mapping, or a new website / directory¹¹. The South Lanes Project in Colchester is seeking to achieve this at a comparable scale to main Street Garforth.¹²

Events

Consideration should be given to the re-introduction of the Garforth Festival or similar events to attract visitors to Garforth and also demonstrate value and competitiveness to local residents. The success of the Tour de Yorkshire in Garforth could be replicated.

Destination

The advent of 3 new bars in the town centre is beginning to change the face of Main Street. Action could be taken to further support building the town centre as a destination with a varied offer (including shopping). Further leisure opportunities could be a way of supporting the existing retail provision whilst mitigating against future decline (for the existing shops) rather than encouraging more retail for its own sake.

Parking

The Forum and Town Team should explore opportunities to address on-street parking issues on Main Street.

11. Good Practice

Lichfield Neighbourhood Plan:

<https://www.lichfielddc.gov.uk/downloads/file/460/lichfield-city-neighbourhood-plan-made-plan>

Mayfair Neighbourhood Plan <https://www.westminster.gov.uk/np-mayfair>

Uppingham Town Centre & Business Zones Plan (Non-Statutory)

<http://www.uppinghamneighbourhoodplan.info/media/other/28083/UTCBZPV21December2018.pdf>

Locality Regeneration and Neighbourhood Planning Guidance

<https://neighbourhoodplanning.org/wp-content/uploads/How-to-address-regeneration-issues-in-your-neighbourhood-plan.pdf>

¹¹ Independent Liverpool Directory: <https://independent-liverpool.co.uk/>

¹² Colchester South Lanes Project: <https://www.spacehive.com/the-south-lanes-project>

12. Conclusions

It is clear that the retail and town centre environment is changing at a national level, introducing risks to the sustainability and longevity of Main Street. This paper has explored some of the issues in Garforth Town Centre, set out the opportunities for policy and non-policy interventions to be explored further in the neighbourhood plan and identified strategic and local evidence that can be used to support the neighbourhood plan as it progresses.